

INTRODUCTION

Antonio María HERNÁNDEZ
Daniel ZOVATTO

This book by the Asociación Argentina de Derecho Constitucional (AADC) and International IDEA about the culture surrounding the Constitution in Argentina focuses on analyzing the Argentine society's attitudes, perceptions and values with regard to fundamental law and legality. It is the result of the combined efforts of doctoral Professor Antonio María Hernández, representing the AADC; Doctor Daniel Zovatto, regional director for Latin America with International IDEA; and Manuel Mora y Araujo, representing Ipsos-Mora y Araujo.

The survey method was based on a similar survey made in Mexico by specialists at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, which we adapted to our reality. In the preface of the book *Cultura de la Constitución en México* (by Concha Cantú, Fix-Fierro, Flores and Valadés, Mexico, UNAM, 2004), which served as a reference for this book, mention was made of the high value that respondents placed on the Constitution, public ignorance about it, the lack of credibility and trust in institutions, public protest over the problems of public safety and violence, etcetera. In this sense, despite important differences, Argentina presents a problematic situation similar to the one observed in Mexico regarding the conflictive relations between law and society.

The work we are presenting in this book is interdisciplinary—legal, political and sociological—and was written based on a national opinion poll unprecedented in Argentina. Its immediate objective is to ponder one of the most serious problems in our country, i.e., infringement of the laws and the Constitution, and to invite in-depth reflection and discussion to seek full enforcement of the constitutional and democratic rule of law. There is also a subsequent objective, which is to analyze this matter in Latin America comparatively, inasmuch as this will form part of other similar studies to be conducted in the future.

As with the Mexican report, this study aims to reveal how much Argentine people know about their Constitution, specifically, and about law in general. In this sense, *a*) it explores citizens' rights and their observance, the people who pass them on and the areas in which they are reproduced; *b*) it pinpoints the opinions, values and beliefs that frame the legal culture and its relationship with the political culture; *c*) it analyzes attitudes toward democracy and its values, as well as perceptions of power, types of representation and institutional performance as elements of the political system; and *d*) it studies the main factors contributing to the Argentine people's perceptions, attitudes, and values regarding their Constitution.

The contents of the book are organized in three sections. The first is a general overview, containing preliminary, theoretical, and methodological considerations and the profile of the population polled. The second section contains four chapters analyzing the opinion poll with regard to: *a*) perceptions of the model of society, rights, and values; *b*) perceptions of democracy and its values, regulations, representation, and power; *c*) extent of knowledge about institutions, and *d*) attitudes, opinions, and perceptions about the Constitution. The third section presents conclusions and proposals, adding suggestions for promoting change

in the current state of affairs in this aspect in the country. The CD accompanying this book includes further statistics with all the documentation relevant to the poll.

This study is intended for experts on constitutional matters, for people with legislative and public-policy decision-making power, for judges, for civilians, the media, and the general public. For precisely this reason, and to facilitate easy reading and distribution, we have chosen a straightforward, simple style of writing.

On behalf of the Asociación Argentina de Derecho Constitucional and International IDEA, we express our belief that this book will help raise the level of our political and legal culture and consolidate the values of rule of law and constitutional democracy. We see it as a springboard, an ongoing project to be expanded upon and updated regularly so that it retains validity, and we sincerely hope that it triggers discussion and more in-depth study of such a crucial subject.

The authors wish to thank Doctor Diego Valadés, director of the UNAM's Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas [Juridical Research Institute], and his team, for the valuable support ever since this project began. Also, Luciana Grandi, of Ipsos-Mora y Araujo, for coordinating the poll that served as a database for this book; and Ileana Aguilar for her dedicated editing of this study.