

PROFILE OF THE POPULATION POLLED

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For the purposes of this survey, we took a sample of 1,000 cases of Argentines over the age of 18 in the country's largest cities (covering 46% of the national population). The sample included 480 cases in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, 120 in Rosario, 120 in Córdoba, 100 in San Miguel de Tucumán, 100 in Mendoza and 80 in the city of Mar del Plata.

We also used a probability sampling in the second, third and fourth selections stages, as well as multistage selection, using vis-à-vis methodology. To obtain a balanced sample, we resorted to age and gender quotas.

Of the 1,000 people polled, 50% were men and 50% women. As for age, we followed the actual age distribution obtained from the 2001 census. 27% were between 18 and 29 years old, 28% between 30 and 44, 27% between 45 and 59 and 18% over 60.

The sample covers the Argentine population residing in the country's principal urban areas—cities of more than 500,000 inhabitants—. Strictly speaking, this sample represents about half of the national population. Going by routine projections in samples of the Argentine people, fully verified in numerous investigations, the results can be generalized to the urban population, including residents in cities with a population of more than 100,000. The results cannot be generalized to the population of smaller locations (which represent a third of the total population). However, it is plausible to assume that a sampling with greater coverage would not produce substantially different results from the ones presented here.

The social-economic level in Argentina is shown through a set of questions combining material household possessions with variables of education and occupation of a household's main provider. The social-economic index level seeks to be an empiric and quantitative reflection of the population's distribution in a unique underlying dimension of social status. That underlying dimension represents a continuum that encompasses power, prestige and material opportunities.

This set of questions to define which level a household belongs to was designed in 1996 by the Asociación Argentina de Marketing,³³ and is currently being discussed and redefined by marketing researchers and public opinion.

The socioeconomic index level in Argentina includes: *a*) education level of a household's main breadwinner (hereinafter called PSH); *b*) A PSH's occupational level, and *c*) material possessions in the home.

The education level measures the highest educational degree achieved by the PSH in terms of formal education cycles: primary, secondary, high school, preparatory school, university, graduate.

The occupational level measures the standing in terms of job position hierarchy. Types of occupation are divided into two large groups: self-employed, and employees. The first category covers autonomous workers and employers of personnel in very small firms, while

³³ Asociación Argentina de Marketing, *Índice de nivel socioeconómico argentino* [Argentine socioeconomic index level], 1996, Buenos Aires, 1998.

the second covers every job, from domestic employment all the way up to managing directors, both in the public sector and private enterprise. The index assigns points directly related with a PSH's job type ranking.

Material possessions consist of an index that includes the following items: remote-control TV, refrigerator with freezer, automatic washing machine, clothes dryer, video equipment, independent freezer, air conditioning, telephone, personal computer, PSH's credit card and automobile. The index assigns a point count for every item, except automobile, and a separate point count for possession of an automobile.

Each variable in the index has a different point range assigned to it. The normal sum of these points is 100, and for every home the index is the sum of the points the PSH obtains for each variable. Once the total point count is calculated, the corresponding divisions are made. Homes that obtained between 1 and 13 points rank as the absolute bottom on the index (E) (in our terminology, which would be the "low-low" level). Between 14 and 26 points, the household is classified as "inferior low" (D2) (in our terminology, "low level"), and between 27 and 34 points as "upper low" (D1) (in our terminology, "middle low.") The C3 households are those of the "low middle" class (in our terminology, "middle") covering between 35 and 47 points, while the "typical middle class" (C2) (in our terminology, "high") ranges from 48 to 62 points. Finally, the highest levels—C1 and AB—apply to point ranges of 63 to 92 and 93 to 100, respectively.

In the sample used, 11% belong to the "high" socioeconomic level (AB/C1), 46% to the socioeconomic "middle-class" (C2/C3) and 43% to the "low" socioeconomic level (D/E).

A dynamic picture of this structure records two processes of change evolving in recent years:

An increase in the size of the low segment as a result of the dropping mobility of the lower middle classes, and

A growing trend towards heterogeneity within the middle class.

Little remains of the middle-class Argentina of the past who accounted for 75% of the population, and whose differences in income or education used not to be enough to produce major inequalities in lifestyles and opportunities.

Argentina is closer to the more fragmented model of society, in which opportunities to access modern resources and more competitive labor markets are becoming increasingly disparate.