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978-0-521-73420-2 - The Legitimacy Puzzle in Latin America: Political Support and Democracy in Eight Nations

John A. Booth and Mitchell A. Seligson

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## The Legitimacy Puzzle in Latin America

### *Political Support and Democracy in Eight Nations*

Political scientists for more than two decades have worried about declining levels of citizens' support for their regimes (legitimacy) but have failed to empirically link this decline to the survival or breakdown of democracy. This apparent paradox is the "legitimacy puzzle," which this book addresses by examining political legitimacy's structure, sources, and effects. With exhaustive empirical analysis of high-quality survey data from eight Latin American nations, it confirms that legitimacy exists as multiple, distinct dimensions. It finds that one's position in society, education, knowledge, information, and experiences shape legitimacy norms. Contrary to expectations, however, citizens who are unhappy with their government's performance do not drop out of politics or resort mainly to destabilizing protest. Rather, the disaffected citizens of these Latin American democracies participate at high rates in conventional politics and in such alternative arenas as communal improvement and civil society. And despite regime performance problems, citizen support for democracy remains high. These findings resolve the puzzle – citizen actions and values, even among the disaffected, likely strengthen rather than weaken democratic governments.

**John A. Booth** is Regents Professor of Political Science at the University of North Texas. In addition to his four coedited volumes and fourteen articles and chapters with this study's coauthor, Mitchell A. Seligson, he is the author of *Understanding Central America: Global Forces, Rebellion, and Change* (fourth edition 2006, coauthored with Christine J. Wade and Thomas W. Walker); *Costa Rica: Quest for Democracy* (1998); and *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution* (second edition 1985). He has published articles in a wide array of scholarly journals in the United States and Latin America, was an associate editor of *International Studies Quarterly* (2003–2008), and serves on the editorial board of *Latin American Politics and Society*.

**Mitchell A. Seligson** is the Centennial Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University and a Fellow of the Vanderbilt Center for Nashville Studies. He founded and directs the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), which conducts the AmericasBarometer surveys that currently cover 23 countries in the Americas. He has been a Fulbright Fellow and been awarded grants from the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and others and has published more than 140 articles, 14 books, and dozens of monographs. His most recent book is *Development and Underdevelopment: The Politics of Global Inequality* (fourth edition 2008, with John Passé Smith). He serves on the editorial board of the *European Political Science Review*.

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*For our grandchildren,*

*Andrew Cruz Lara*

*and*

*Maya Rahel, Dalia Ella, and Tamar Marta Levanon*

*May they grow up in a world of peace and democracy*

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# The Legitimacy Puzzle in Latin America

## *Political Support and Democracy in Eight Nations*

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## Preface

In democracies, public opinion matters. Political scientists have for several decades pored over the results of public opinion surveys attempting to determine which attitudes and behaviors may be critical for the emergence and maintenance of stable democracy. In the 1970s, however, almost all of Latin America was caught in the grip of dictatorial rule, and carrying out public opinion surveys was dangerous for interviewers and respondents alike. At that time, one of the few places in the region where surveys of public opinion could be carried out openly and safely was Costa Rica, a country that had been democratic since the early 1950s and that had enjoyed a democratic tradition for most of the twentieth century.

It was in Costa Rica that the authors of this volume first began their collaboration, a relationship that has continued and prospered for more than thirty-five years. As graduate students studying at different universities, we had been drawn independently to Costa Rica to write our dissertations. Mitchell Seligson had served there in the Peace Corps and returned to conduct a survey of the political attitudes and behaviors of the peasantry funded by the Social Science Research Council. John Booth went to Costa Rica under the auspices of the Latin American Teaching Fellowship program to conduct a survey for Costa Rica's community development agency (Dirección Nacional de Desarrollo Comunal). During our shared time in Costa Rica, we developed the foundation of a lasting personal and intellectual friendship. We talked shop at length about the challenges of carrying out surveys in a developing country, one that at the time had a poorly developed road system and a telephone system largely limited to urban areas. We shared ideas about the science and art of measuring attitudes and behaviors, sampling, questionnaire wording

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and design, verification, survey team management, coding, and data management. The learning curve was steep, but this “baptism by fire” has served the two of us ever since, giving us the self-confidence to undertake survey research under challenging conditions. It also set us on a path of sharing our ideas and our datasets, resulting in fourteen coauthored articles and chapters and four coedited volumes. This work is our first book-length collaboration. It is an attempt to solve for us (and hopefully for our readership) what we call “the legitimacy puzzle.”

#### THE LATIN AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION PROJECT

This book was a long time in the making and involved considerable collaborative enterprise along the way. Beginning in 1976, from a base in the Political Science Department at the University of Arizona, Mitchell Seligson, often in collaboration with Edward N. Muller of the Arizona department and always in collaboration with Miguel Gómez Barrantes of the Universidad de Costa Rica, began a systematic program of carrying out surveys of democratic values in Costa Rica. That program produced a series of surveys, but because dictators governed most of the other countries in Latin America at that time, the environment for extending the democracy survey program to other countries did not exist. By the early 1990s, however, democracy had spread in the Latin American region, and Mitchell Seligson had moved to the University of Pittsburgh. With grants from the Mellon Foundation, Tinker Foundation, North-South Center, Heinz Foundation, University of North Texas, and University of Pittsburgh, and in collaboration with several highly regarded research organizations in Central America and with John Booth, surveys were carried out in the capitals of all six Spanish-speaking Central American countries. Seligson’s graduate students at the University of Pittsburgh collaborated on survey design and led the fieldwork. Several of the students involved produced articles and dissertations based on that dataset, and many of them have built successful professional careers based in part on their experiences with this early effort. From this collaborative initiative, the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) began to take shape.

A new phase in LAPOP’s development began in 1993, when the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Guatemala commissioned a larger study of that country, allowing LAPOP for the first time to work in languages other than Spanish – in that case five major Mayan

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languages. The 1993 study was followed by surveys in 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2006, and 2008. In the late 1990s other countries began to tap into LAPOP's expertise. As a result, studies were carried out in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Ecuador. The studies in Bolivia and Ecuador also involved working in indigenous languages as well as Spanish. In addition, the project began rendering assistance to some African studies, especially Mozambique, and later Madagascar. Studies began to include corruption victimization and its impact, with projects in Nicaragua, Honduras, and Albania. Important additional funding came from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the World Bank, and USAID.

LAPOP's scope broadened further with surveys on war-induced migration (supported by the RAND Corporation) and research on crime victimization and its impact on the economy and the development of democracy. In 2004 the project again expanded with significant new funding from USAID for LAPOP to carry out studies in eight countries simultaneously: Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and Colombia. A network of collaborating universities and research centers was established covering each of those countries. In 2004 Mitchell Seligson moved to Vanderbilt as the Centennial Professor of Political Science where his research for this book began and where the LAPOP project is now housed. At Vanderbilt, the project received major new support from the Center for the Americas and the Department of Political Science, as well as a substantial boost in funding from USAID, with additional support coming from the UNDP and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB). The establishment of periodic surveys in a wider range of countries made it appropriate for the data series to take on a formal name, and from 2004 on, the series became the AmericasBarometer (in Spanish, El Barómetro de las Américas). This book is based on the 2004 AmericasBarometer survey of the LAPOP project.

## BACKGROUND TO THE 2004 SURVEY

Public opinion surveys have become very popular in the democratizing world in general and in Latin America in particular in recent years. Unfortunately, far too few of those surveys follow the rigorous scientific procedures that have become accepted as the norm in academic public opinion research in the United States and Europe. Such studies often suffer from poorly designed questionnaires, unrepresentative and nonrandom samples, poor fieldwork supervision, careless data entry, and data analysis

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that rarely goes beyond univariate presentation of percentages.<sup>1</sup> As a result, such studies can provide grossly misleading results.

The LAPOP project has attempted, we would argue with considerable success, to produce quality survey data that match the highest standards of academic research in the United States and Europe. Because they were envisioned from the outset to allow for reliable cross-national comparisons, the surveys upon which the present study relies were carried out with special rigor and attention to methodological detail, as described in this preface and in the chapters and appendixes that follow. Rather than wrongly assuming that surveys are all “scientific” and would easily provide the “correct” answers, LAPOP researchers recognized from the outset that all survey research, by its very nature, is prone to error (derived from many sources, including sampling, interviewer and respondent inattention, coding mistakes, and data entry failures). The goal was to reduce to the absolute minimum each of those sources of errors. We outline here the steps that we followed to develop the data used in this book.

Our study began with a pilot project carried out in collaboration with Miguel Gómez Barrantes of the University of Costa Rica. As we explain in Chapter 1, even though we had carried out many prior surveys in which one or more dimensions of legitimacy were included, we had not previously taken a comprehensive look at the problem. We therefore embarked on that single-country study in 2002 in hopes of “getting the bugs out” of our instrument and enabling us to see which of our initial hypotheses had empirical support. With that work behind us, we embarked on the multi-country effort that provided the dataset that is the foundation for much of the research presented here.

Teams of scholars from each of the eight countries in which surveys were to be carried out were selected. In order to develop a common sample and questionnaire, the researchers met in Panama City in January 2004, hosted by our Panamanian colleague Marco Gandásegui, Jr., of the University of Panama. To help ensure comparability, a common sample design was crucial for the success of the effort. Each team worked from guidelines for the construction of a multistage, stratified area probability sample with a target *N* of 1,500 respondents. In Panama, each team met with Dr. Polibio Córdova, president of CEDATOS/Gallup, Ecuador, a region-wide expert in sample design who trained under the University of Michigan’s

<sup>1</sup> A detailed recounting of the problems encountered in those surveys can be found in Seligson (2005c).

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Leslie Kish, the father of modern survey sampling. Refinements in the sample designs were made at that meeting and later reviewed by Dr. Córdova. Detailed descriptions of the sample are found in Chapter 2.

At the conclusion of that meeting, the teams fanned out to their respective countries and engaged in extensive pretests. Problems that were detected in the pretests produced refinements in the instrument (a total of twenty-three distinct drafts were tested before the common instrument was finalized). At that point, translations were made into the major indigenous languages of Guatemala and into English (for the residents of the Bay Islands in Honduras) and the fieldwork was carried out. A sample of questionnaires from each country was drawn and audited and in some cases datasets needed to be corrected or reverified. The country datasets then were merged into a single file, and we began our analysis. This book is a product of that effort.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The 2004 opinion surveys upon which this study is based were made possible by the generous support of USAID. Margaret Sarles, Bruce Kay, and Eric Kite in the Office of Democracy and Governance of USAID, supported by María Barrón in the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, secured the funding and made possible the entire project thanks to their unceasing support. Todd Amani, USAID/Guatemala, assumed the role of coordinating the project at the USAID end. The University of North Texas College of Arts and Sciences and the UNT Development Leave Program freed coauthor John Booth from teaching responsibilities to allow him to dedicate time to the completion of this study.

Critical to the project's success was the cooperation of the many individuals and institutions that worked tirelessly to meet deadlines that at times seemed impossible. These include, for Mexico, Jorge Buendía and Alejandro Moreno, Departamento de Ciencia Política, Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM); for Guatemala, Dinorah Azpuru and Juan Pablo Pira, Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales (ASIES); for El Salvador and Honduras, Ricardo Córdova, Fundación Dr. Guillermo Manuel Ungo (FUNDAUNGO), José Miguel Cruz, Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública (IUDOP) de la Universidad Centroamericana (UCA), and Siddhartha Baviskar, University of Pittsburgh; for Nicaragua, Luís Serra and Pedro López Ruíz, Universidad Centroamericana (UCA); for Costa Rica, Luís Rosero-Bixby, Universidad

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de Costa Rica, and Jorge Vargas, Programa Estado de la Nación; for Panamá, Marco A. Gandásegui hijo, Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos (CELA), and Orlando J. Pérez, Central Michigan University; for Colombia, Carlos Lemoine, Centro Nacional de Consultoría (CNC), and Juan Carlos Rodríguez-Raga, Universidad de los Andes. Polibio Córdova of Ecuador supervised sample design throughout. A team of graduate assistants worked arduously in numerous aspects of the study: Miguel García (Colombia), Daniel Moreno (Bolivia), Sawa Omori (Japan), and Rosario Queirolo (Uruguay). Miguel Gómez Barrantes, of the Universidad de Costa Rica, provided excellent advice on the questionnaire design. We are profoundly grateful to all of these fine people for their excellent work on this study. Most importantly, we sincerely thank the 12,401 individuals in the eight study countries who took time from their busy lives to answer our questions. Without their cooperation, this study would not have been possible.

Finally, we wish to recognize the roles of our spouses. John Booth thanks his wife and frequent coauthor, Patricia Bayer Richard, for her invaluable support, patience, and excellent counsel throughout this project's gestation. Mitchell Seligson thanks his wife, Susan Berk-Seligson, for making the writing of this book, and all other things, worth doing.

Portions of Chapter 1 and Chapter 5 draw from articles we have published in the *Latin American Research Review* (Seligson 2002a), in *Opinião Pública* (Seligson, Booth, and Gómez Barrantes 2006), and in *Political Research Quarterly* (Booth and Seligson 2005).