

Bicentenary and Auditing Democracy Surveys: A Radiograph of Contrasts

It is important to consider that perception surveys are not a first-class input for designing or proposing public policies. A subject that deserves to be deeply analyzed is if those surveys greatly differ from reality, as well as the difference between the assessment of the personal situation and that of the society.

Public opinion, expressed through the dissemination of opinion polls, is increasingly frequent in our society. In the last weeks, the results of two prestigious opinion studies were submitted: the Bicentenary UC-Adimark Survey (*Encuesta Nacional Bicentenario UC-Adimark*) and the Auditing Democracy survey (*Auditoría a la Democracia*) of the UNDP and the Think Tank Consortium of which Libertad & Desarrollo is a member.

It is important to take into account that they are perception surveys, so if they differ from reality they compel us to think and formulate hypothesis. The gap between perceptions and reality, and between the assessment of the personal situation and that of the society, are some of the issues that are interesting to analyze.

Preliminary Deliberations Concerning Public Opinion

There are multiple definitions and theoretical discussions regarding the concept of public opinion. V. O. Keyⁱ, expert in this matter, understands the concept as those opinions – which may be blind or prejudiced, reasoned or informed- maintained by private persons whom the governments estimate convenient to listen to or ignore. From another perspective, Walter Lippmanⁱⁱ indicates that public opinion is built on “images” of the reality that individuals form in their minds through the information of the pseudo environment provided by communication media. For the renowned sociologist Jürgen Habermasⁱⁱⁱ, public opinion is found in the sphere of public space and deals with the task of criticism and the control exerted by the citizenship before the state authority. Finally, Pierre Bourdieu sets forth a completely skeptical position with regard to public opinion by declaring

that “it does not exist”^{iv}. The author argues that the construction of public opinion introduces assumptions that are difficult to accept as valid: (1) all individuals have an opinion concerning all subjects and (2) there is an agreement in relation to the questions that are worthwhile asking, indicating that one of the most pernicious issues of opinion polls is that they induce people to answer questions that they have not necessarily ask themselves.

With regard to the results yielded by opinion polls, and concerning the systems of beliefs and attitudes that the interviewees reveal in them, Philip Converse^v puts forth that the individuals’ opinions are not altogether consistent or steady over time and they can neither be clearly associated with a well-defined ideological system. Stanley Feldman^{vi} offers a different view and maintains that it is possible to state that the systems of beliefs and basic perceptions are strongly related to political positions, performance evaluations of political leaders and candidate evaluation. Finally, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann^{vii} maintains that, in perception matters, people will tend to the consensus on what constitutes the morally correct or socially accepted answer. This happens because certain opinion spheres that are able to impose themselves are generated and drive individuals towards opinions that otherwise they would not give by fear of isolation from the community.

Main Results of the Bicentenary and Auditing Democracy Surveys

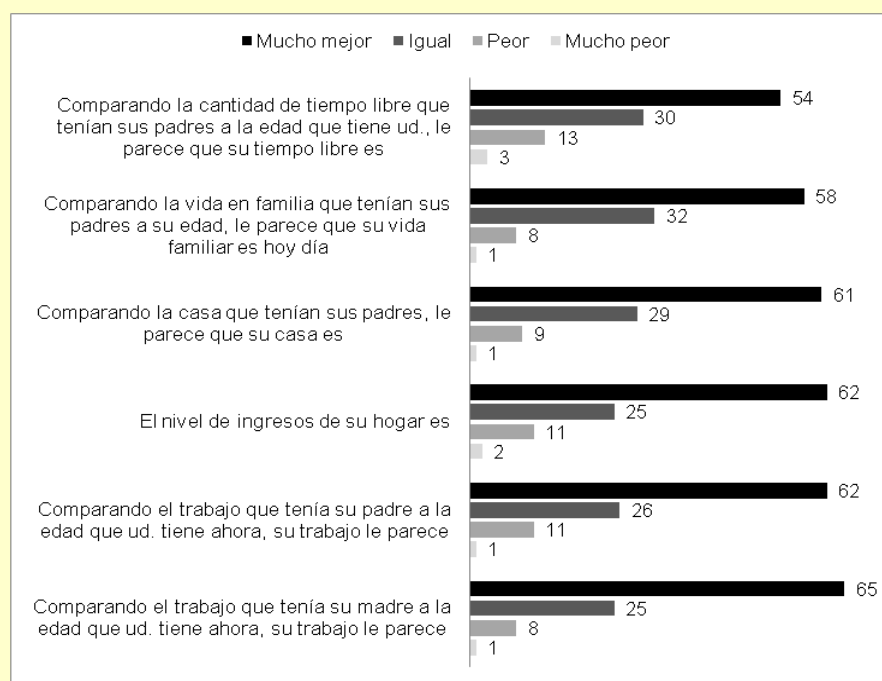
The National Bicentenary Survey has been carried out by the Universidad Católica de Chile and Adimark for six consecutive years^{viii}, and its results are divided in different areas. In relation to the analysis of the society in general, and in comparison to the same question in 2010, results are quite more pessimistic. It shows a drop in the percentage of those who believe that in 10 years our country will be a developed country, the problem of quality education is going to be solved, poverty will be uprooted, and Chile will succeed to be a reconciled country with less income inequality.

In the same society module, but in relation to the interviewee’s current perception, 65% thinks his job is much better than that of his mother at the same age, and 62% believes the same in relation to his father. Furthermore, 62% thinks his household’s income level is much better than that of his parents, 58% has the same opinion about family life and even that they have more free time now.

When analyzing future expectations, they also believe that their children’s jobs will be much better (88%) at the same age they have now, and the education level will also improve (87%), higher incomes (84%) and even more free time (64%).

Chart 1

IN RELATION TO THE SITUATION OF YOUR PARENTS AND WHEN COMPARING YOURSELF WITH THEM AT YOUR AGE



Source: Encuesta Bicentenario UC-Adimark

However, continuing with the society subjects, but emphasizing social mobility, the result is contrary to the expectations. Those who believe that any worker will probably buy his own home within a reasonable time decrease by four percentage points; by nine points those who believe there is a high probability that an intelligent young person but lacking resources will enter the university; and by five points the probability that a middle class person will achieve a very good economic condition.

In terms of well-being and the role of the State, those who believe that each person should worry and be responsible for his own well-being account for 40%, two percentage points more than the previous measurement. In turn, those with more Pro-State ideas reach only 29%, almost the same as in 2011. In this same line, 43% prefers the option indicating that the State's aid should be focused on the poorest and vulnerable ones, instead of 30% who prefers the option that all citizens should receive the same aid from the State.

Concerning the question What do you think is the equality level that the country should reach?, results show that 44% think that everybody can

develop their projects, no matter what distances there are between them, 30% chooses the option that there should not be a great distance between them, and only 26% prefer that all people should have the same.

As for institutional confidence, there is a clear drop in relation to 2006 regarding the Catholic Church, the government, political parties and parliament members, although it is not systematic as we think. The Armed Forces have recovered confidence in the last years, while the communication media and Evangelical Churches have maintained it. The strong fall in the confidence in the Catholic Church has moderated its reduction rhythm. Political parties and the Parliament continue to have very low levels of approval.

The second survey that we are going to analyze is Auditing Democracy.^{ix} Among its results, we observe an increase of 19 percentage points, compared with 2008; 64% indicates that democracy is preferable to any other way of government-

Meanwhile, most institutions lose ground in the confidence factor in relation to 2010, reaching similar levels as in 2008. With regard to political parties, those who prefer that political parties choose their candidates through primaries grow by 19 percentage points, from 42% to 61%.

In questions about decentralization, 72% of the interviewees believe that the State should allocate more resources to the operation of regional and communal institutions, and 66% thinks that regional and local governments should have greater financial autonomy.

In terms of political identification, it is quite concerning that in the survey taken a day after the municipal election, 50% declares to be not at all interested in it, eight percentage points more than in the 2010 measurement. In opposition, 19% declare to be very or quite interested and 31% is somewhat interested.

In issues concerning electoral system and political participation, only 18% of the interviewees know that the binominal electoral system is used for the election of senators and deputies, and the support to the voluntary vote dropped by 20 points; instead, those who prefer compulsory voting increase from 22% in 2010 to 41% in 2012. On the other hand, 72% agrees that "the way one casts its vote does have an influence on what happens in the country".

Analysis of the Results and Conclusions

Since Chileans in general are optimistic regarding their condition compared with their parents and also towards the future, it is strange that they are so pessimistic in social terms. This could be explained by what experts in public opinion call sociotropic evaluations versus egocentric evaluations of

the interviewees; sociotropic evaluations consider the situation of the overall society, while egocentric evaluations privilege an individual perspective of the events.^x

Still at a hypothetical level, we can explain the gap in the pessimism at society level, because people believe that their children will be better off, but they do not think that we will be better as a country. In recent years, the Chilean society has undergone a questioning phase to all type of authorities, both in the political and public information sphere, and also in the economic-productive sphere and even in that of moral authority. We can explain this phenomenon as part of a trend towards the disintermediation of institutions that have traditionally played the role of people's "representatives" in the society.

We should note, in both surveys, that the systematic drop in the confidence in institutions in our country, especially the one related to the political world, is a matter of concern. The leadership factor also has an influence on this situation. In Chile, politics is much superior to the Latin American standard; there is evidence in compared terms that single out our National Congress in the regional context through a series of indicators such as qualifications, experience, effectiveness, and legislative productivity, among others.^{xi}

However, once again the political scandal is more striking to public opinion and, consequently, politicians doing a serious and silent work are not those who mainly concentrate the attention of the media, because as Sartori indicated, today the sovereign people "expresses its opinion" about everything depending on how the media, and specifically television, induces it to think.^{xii}

In brief, in this context the final dilemma arising from the society's pessimism is the question regarding our leaderships. A possible answer is that we need new intermediation structures that complement the role of public activity and communication media when it comes to exert leadership, what in the social science literature is known as social capital. Inasmuch as the formation of opinion and the construction of guiding and appraisal towards public activity get closer to the actual local conditions, in the decentralized and participative logic from the organized civil society, a greater cohesion could grow spontaneously between the personal experience sphere and that of the experiences as a society. The political challenge of the future will probably point in this direction.

In brief...

- According to the National Bicentenary Survey, Chileans have not expressed more Pro-State ideas during these years of uneasiness. The proportion who believes that the State should be responsible for people's well-being has maintained relatively low and shows no variations. Most people think that the State's efforts should focus on the poorest.
- Chileans seek equal opportunities, more than the moderation or elimination of social inequalities. In the idea of a fair society, the criterion of equal opportunities predominates over the equality criterion in the distribution of well-being.
- In turn, the Auditing Democracy Survey strongly favors the decentralizing measures, such as relying on more resources, in addition to giving great support to primary election for defining candidates.
- Both surveys show a low approval of institutions, which means an important challenge in social capital issues.

ⁱ Key, V. O Jr. 1961. *Public Opinion and American Democracy*, Knopf.

ⁱⁱ Lippmann, Walter. 2007 *Public Opinion*. Filiquarian Publishing LLC.

ⁱⁱⁱ Habermas, Jürgen. 1981. *Historia y crítica de la opinión pública*. GG Mass media.

^{iv} Bourdieu, Pierre. 2000. *Cuestiones de Sociología*, Itsmo, Spain.

^v Converse, Philip. 1964. The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics. In David Apter, ed. *Ideology and Discontent*. New York: Free Press.

^{vi} Felman, Stanley. 1988. Structure and Consistency in Public Opinion: the Role of Core Beliefs and Values. In *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 32. N° 2, p. 416-440.

^{vii} Noëlle-Neumann, Elisabeth. 1995. *La espiral del silencio. Opinión pública: nuestra piel social*. Paidós. Barcelona.

^{viii} In a face-to-face survey with a total sample of 2,010 people and a margin of error of +/- 2.2%.

^{ix} Face-to-face survey taken after the last municipal elections, with a total sampling of 1,506 people and a margin of error of +/- 3%.

^x Killian, Mitchell, Ryan Schoen, and Aaron Dusso. 2008. "Keeping Up with the Joneses: The Interplay of Personal and Collective Evaluations in Voter Turnout." In *Political Behavior*, N° 30 (September), p. 323-340.

^{xi} Saiegh, Sebastián. 2010. "¿Jugadores activos o apéndices del ejecutivo? Una evaluación del papel de los legisladores latinoamericanos en la toma de decisiones". In *Política y Gobierno*, Vol.17, N°1, p.3-24.

^{xii} Sartori, Giovanni. 1998. *Homo Videns: La Sociedad Teledirigida*. Editorial Taurus.