

## **Behind Statistical Associations: Types of Rationalities as Causal Mechanism in Public Opinion Research**

Rodolfo Sarsfield  
CIDE, Mexico City  
rodolfo.sarsfield@cide.edu

### OBJETIVO/S:

A good portion of public opinion research has focused on the search of "causal effect" (e.g. Bennet and George 1997, Bennet 1997) and it has not considered the exploration of "causal mechanism" (e.g. Boudon 1998, Gambetta 1998). The standard explanation of an important part of public opinion studies lies on an argument based on causal effects, and take the typical form of "the change in the probability and/or value of the dependent variable when an explanatory variable changes its value in a unit, and the effects of other variable are controlled" (Sarsfield 2007: 16). This kind of explanation is typical of the variable centred causal approach (Hedström and Swedberg 1998), and has induced that "statistical association between variables has largely replaced meaningful connection between events as the basic tool of description and analysis" (Coleman 1986: 1327-8). If we assume that causal effects and causal mechanism are, both, the bases for causal inference (Bennet and George 1997), the widespread use and knowledge of survey analysis and the statistical techniques needed for analyzing such data have a fundamental lack for a good explanation.

### METODOLOGÍA:

In this paper, I compare advantages and disadvantages of a standard "regression approach" and a new "ideal types" approach for explain different attitudes to law and justice in Mexico. In this way, I propose that the existence of different types of rationalities should be considered as causal mechanisms in survey studies. I use data from Programa de Estudios sobre la Seguridad Pública y el Estado de Derecho (PESED), CIDE, Mexico City.

### RESULTADOS ALCANZADOS:

I show that the introduction of this theoretical argument improve the empirical explanations based only on causal effects.

### CONCLUSIONES:

IDEM