

A LOST DECADE? LÁSZLÓ RADVÁNYI AND THE ORIGINS OF PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH IN MEXICO, 1941–1952

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ABSTRACT

This article documents public opinion research activities in Mexico in the 1940s and the role played by Hungarian professor László Radványi, who immigrated to that country at the height of World War II. Our research relies on several of Radványi's publications archived in different countries, as well as on interviews with family, acquaintances, and experts on the work of his wife, the German poet Anna Seghers. During his years in Mexico, Radványi founded the Scientific Institute of Mexican Public Opinion, in 1941, and the *International Journal of Opinion and Attitude Research*, in 1947—a forefather of today's IJPOR. He was also a founding member of WAPOR. His early “sample surveys” raised important methodological issues and recorded opinion results that reflect the vibrant times of war and policy making in a modernizing country. However, Radványi's contribution to the profession has been virtually forgotten. Until now, accounts about how public opinion research began in Mexico either ignored Radványi's works or reduced his ten years of survey research to a single footnote. This article is an attempt to fill this enormous omission and highlight some of Radványi's contributions to these early stages of survey research.

The seed of public opinion research was planted in Mexico in the 1940s. From 1941 to 1952, public opinion polling was conducted intensely, and its results were regularly disseminated in both media and academic publications. The attitudes, beliefs, and habits of Mexicans on topics as diverse as World War II, industrialization, and comic strip readership were first measured during this decade. Those were “golden” years of a vital polling activity that,

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nonetheless, vanished for the next three and a half decades. Mexico's one-party rule, or the "perfect dictatorship", as novelist Mario Vargas Llosa once called it, did not have public polls in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Public opinion polling returned to the political arena until the 1980s, and consolidated its presence in the media in the 1990s. The return of polls reflected a profound process of political change and transition to a multiparty system, flourishing in a more democratic soil.

A prominent figure in the development of polling in Mexico during the 1940s was the Hungarian sociologist, economist, and philosopher László Radványi, who emigrated to Mexico at the height of World War II with his wife, the German poet Anna Seghers, and their children, Peter and Ruth. In this article, we reconstruct the origins of polling in Mexico and relate them to Radványi's years in that country. As a professor at the *Universidad Nacional de México* (National University of Mexico), Radványi founded the Scientific Institute of Mexican Public Opinion, in 1941, and also the *International Journal of Opinion and Attitude Research* (IJOAR) in 1947—a forefather of IJPOR. Radványi's contribution to the polling industry not only in Mexico, but at the international level as well, is enormous, yet he has been virtually forgotten in the country where he lived in his prime. Until now, Mexican accounts about how public opinion research began in the country either ignored Radványi's time in Mexico (see Alduncin, 1986; Camp, 1996), or reduced his 10 years of survey research to a single footnote (see Basáñez, 1995). In addition, as we were gathering documents for this research, we became aware that "no authoritative or entirely accurate comprehensive chronology of Radványi's life has been published (or perhaps even compiled) to date" (Helen Fehervary, personal interview, February 27, 2007). This article is an attempt to fill this gap in the history of modern polling.

As a brief note on our method, we rely on several interviews, as well as on documents and books about Radványi or by him. We contacted some of Radványi's relatives and acquaintances, who generously helped us to understand the intertwined stories of his life and the development of polls in Mexico. Amongst them are Pierre Radványi, the professors' son, Félix Espejel Ontiveros, Radványi's research assistant at the National University of Mexico, Dieter Klein, Radványi's research assistant at the Humboldt University in Berlin, Lucía Guzmán and Martín Luis Guzmán, relatives of the late Martín Luis Guzmán, editor of *Tiempo* newsmagazine, Helen Fehervary, a literary critique who has extensively worked on Anna Seghers' work, and Christiane Zehl Romero, Anna Seghers' biographer. Zehl Romero's book (2003) was very helpful to visualize the changing contexts in which Radványi lived. In addition to our interviews, we were able to gather a significant number of Radványi's works and books that were archived at various libraries in different countries. Our documental analysis and eventual use of anecdotes

illustrate the context in which Radványi worked and how he conducted survey research. Whenever appropriate, we discuss the methodological issues, questions, and polling results of those days, many of them very much alive in ours. Finally, we speculate about the timing of Radványi's departure in 1952, when he joined Berlin's Humboldt University in the German Democratic Republic, and the "suppression" of public polls in Mexico during the next three decades.

As practitioners of opinion polling, we believe that our historical account may contribute to a better understanding of the origins of polls and surveys and their relationship to democratic government, in general, and to document a generally ignored episode of the polling profession in Mexico, in particular. We also believe that the timing for a reflection on Radványi's work is greatly due, as WAPOR, of which he was a founding member, celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2007, and three decades after Radványi's passed away, in 1978. We are aware that there are still several historical and analytical gaps in this story, but we hope that this is just the beginning of a broader search into the origins of the polling profession in Mexico.

UNBIASED QUESTIONS AND MEANINGFUL SAMPLES: RADVÁNYI IN MEXICO

László Radványi, also known as Johann Lorenz Schmidt, was born into a Jewish family in Hungary, on December 13, 1900. At a young age, he joined the Budapest Sunday Circle, led by Georg Lukács, where he shared a taste for literature, philosophy, and Marxist thought. Radványi studied philosophy at Heidelberg University, in Germany, where he obtained his doctorate in 1923. Directed by Karl Jaspers, his thesis on Chiliasm (see Radványi, 1985) was *summa cum laude* (Fehervary, 2001). While at Heidelberg, Radványi met the poet Anna Seghers, who was born Netty Reiling in Mainz, on November 19, 1900. Radványi and Seghers married in 1925 and had two children, Pierre (b. 1926), and Ruth (b. 1928).

After finishing their studies at Heidelberg, Radványi and Seghers moved to Berlin, where László directed the *Marxistische Arbeiterschule* (Marxist Workers School), also known as MASCH, from 1925 to 1933. In this position, Radványi was quite successful, as he was able to gather faculty members such as Georg Lukács and Bertolt Brecht, and eventual speakers such as Albert Einstein, who in 1931 offered a conference titled "What a worker must know about the Theory of Relativity" (Fehervary, 2001, pp. 93–94). Anna Seghers was also taking off as a successful writer, and she was awarded the Kleist Prize in 1928, among other things, for her novel *Revolt of the Fishermen of St. Barbara*, which was made into a film in the Soviet Union a few years later. Seghers also joined the German Communist Party in 1928. But despite the

couple's success in their own professional activities, and their shared interest for the proletarian cause, László revealed certain personal dissatisfaction in his letters late in 1926, when he mentioned the impossibility of obtaining a job as philosophy professor because of his "Hungarianess and Jewishness" (Fehervary, 2001, pp. 93–95). When the German government closed MASCH in 1933, Radványi left for Paris as an exile. We do not have the exact date of the closing, but it is likely that it happened sometime after January 30, when Hitler came to power, or right after the fire at the German Reichstag in Berlin, on February 28, which seemed like a good excuse for the Nazis to justify their persecution of communists and social democrats.¹ Inspired by his MASCH experiences in Berlin, Radványi founded and directed the *Freie Deutsche Hochschule* (Free German University) in the French capital (Fehervary, 2001, p. 153).

The German invasion of Paris forced Radványi to abandon his new endeavor. In 1940, the Meudon police detained him arguing that he was a citizen of a country allied with Germany. According to his son's memories, the police let him pack for half an hour and then took him to the Roland Garros stadium, "where we could take clothes, food, and some books to him" (Radványi, 2006, p. 38). By late May, Radványi was transferred to the internment camp of Le Vernet, in the department of Ariège, at the Pyrenees foothills. Built originally in 1918 for Austrian prisoners during the First World War, Le Vernet had become the site for "undesired" foreigners, Spanish Republicans, and citizens from countries that were at war with France. After Radványi was transferred there, Anna Seghers moved to the south of France with her children in a "long journey until they reached the surroundings of Le Vernet", where she tried to arrange for her husband's release (Radványi, 2006, p. 59). In his memories, Pierre Radványi reports that there were active committees in the U.S. and Mexico, including the League of American Writers, overseeing the release of interns in that particular camp and funding their travel overseas (Radványi, 2006). Also, Anna Seghers learned that the Mexican consulate in Marseilles, in charge of Gilberto Bosques, had specific instructions from President Cárdenas to arrange the release and emigration to Mexico of Spanish and French citizens, as well as Jews and other political refugees. In December 1940, Seghers obtained a visa for her, her husband, and their children with the help of Karl Mannheim, "who appealed from London to President Cárdenas on their behalf" (Fehervary, 2001, p. 237). However, they did not leave France until March, when they got a transit visa from the U.S. They embarked on a ship towards New York on March 24, 1941—the list of passengers also included the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and surrealist writer André Breton

¹ We thank an anonymous reviewer for this observation and factual information.

(Radványi, 2006, p. 59)—and then towards the port of Veracruz, in the Gulf of Mexico.

Radványi and his family arrived in Mexico on June 30, 1941. “My parents would have preferred to stay in the United States, but Mexico offered us a new territory, another history, another culture. And to my mother undoubtedly an enrichment”, Pierre remembered six decades later (Radványi, 2006, p. 82). Once in Mexico City, the family had an audience in the National Palace with the new President, General Manuel Ávila Camacho. The 15-year-old Pierre “memorized some words in Spanish that were given [to the president] along with a bouquet of roses: ‘*señor presidente, en este pergamino está la prueba de nuestra gratitud*’ (Mr. President, in this parchment there is a proof of our gratitude)” (Radványi, 2006, p. 83).

Pierre Radványi wrote that his father got a job at a local press, and the family was financially supported by committees and associations until the fall of 1942. The Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, whom Anna Seghers had met in Spain, happened to be the general consul of Chile in Mexico when the Radványis arrived. This relationship probably led Radványi to Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the principal leader of the labor movement, who asked him to join the recently created Universidad Obrera (Mexico’s Workers University) and teach Marxist history and economics (Radványi, 2006, pp. 90–91). That appointment, however, did not last long. In 1944, Radványi took a position at the National University of Mexico, the largest and most important institution of higher education in the country. By then, he had already started an operation of public opinion research.

Radványi’s interest in public opinion topics probably began during his time in Paris, in the 1930s (C. Zehl Romero, personal interview, June 2007). At that time, studying public opinion had a lot to do with propaganda and the rise of the Nazis in Germany. Also, a report in *Tiempo* magazine, in Mexico City, in August 1942, refers to some research conducted by Radványi through the institute that he directed in Paris. However, his main model for the practice of public opinion polling was on the other side of the Atlantic, in Princeton, New Jersey, where George Gallup had founded the American Institute of Public Opinion in 1935. The Gallup influence on Radványi’s efforts was recorded in his son’s memories: “I remember very well when, in about 1944, my father, very interested in the Gallup polls started, on a modest scale, such investigations and polls in Mexico City” (Pierre Radványi, personal interview by e-mail, June 2007). Radványi had actually begun his polling practices in 1941, the very year when he arrived in Mexico (Radványi, 1952a, p. 6). In a book published in Mexico City in 1952, Radványi lists about 86 surveys that he conducted during the decade, from 1941 to 1951 (Radványi, 1952a). During much of this time, he dealt with important methodological issues in public opinion research, as confided to his son: “He explained

to me”, Pierre recalls, “the two main difficulties: formulate the questions in an unbiased manner, and establish meaningful samples” (Pierre Radványi, personal interview by e-mail, June 2007).

REFLECTIONS OF A YOUNG INDUSTRY

The 1940s were a prolific decade for public opinion research in Mexico. The weekly magazine *Tiempo*, inspired by *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines in the United States, published its first poll in May 1942. The group that organized *Tiempo*’s polls was called Institute of Public Opinion, or IOP (*Tiempo*, July 10, 1942), perhaps inspired by Gallup’s own Institute in Princeton (Belden, 1944, p. 105). Also in 1942, Radványi had founded the Scientific Institute of Mexican Public Opinion (ICOPM, for its Spanish acronym). Although *Tiempo*’s publication did not mention any association with Radványi in its first poll, the magazine’s editors were in close contact with him. In July 1942, the magazine organized a series of conferences with Dr. Radványi at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, or Fine Arts Palace, in downtown Mexico City. The title of the conference series was “The New Science of Public Opinion”, which, based on the weekly reports in *Tiempo*, addressed theoretical, methodological, political, and practical issues alike. The topics covered in the conferences series correspond to the table of contents of a book about public opinion measurement that Radványi published three years later (Radványi, 1945).

During his first conference in Bellas Artes, on July 2, 1942, Radványi addressed the relationship between public opinion and democracy, a common topic in the 1930s among American early pollsters (Converse, 1987). Radványi asked “whether democracy is a necessary precondition for the existence of public opinion, concluding that although democratic forms of State are not absolutely necessary for public opinion to exist, they certainly constitute a necessary condition for its free expression” (*Tiempo*, July 10, 1942, p. 31). That is why, he said, the first manifestations of public opinion emerged in the democratic city-states of ancient Greece, and later in the Roman republic. As Habermas (1962) illustrated with detail almost twenty years later, Radványi also had identified the origins of the modern concept of public opinion in England and France in the 17th and 18th centuries, and the early tasks of the empirical “science of public opinion” in Germany and England in the second decade of the 20th century. Other topics that Radványi addressed in the conferences included methodological issues of opinion polls, from question wording to the proper number of questions and their order, as well as the “very interesting results” of the Gallup polls, and other similar methods employed by *Fortune* magazine and the *Literary Digest* (*Tiempo*, July 24, 1942, p. 33). He also delved into public opinion formation and propaganda, a concern raised by Walter Lippmann 20 years earlier (Lippmann, 1922).

Evidently, Radványi was well informed not only about the ongoing debates of the young polling industry, but also about the companion historical and philosophical discussions about the concept of public opinion, many of them described in later works (see Price, 1992). In his concluding conference, he called for a task that is, perhaps, still due in the public opinion profession: the need for a new branch of historical science, the history of public opinion (*Tiempo*, August, 1942, p. 27).

Tiempo's editor, Martín Luis Guzmán, was a versatile intellectual, writer, and politician remembered, among other things, for his novels about the Mexican Revolution, *La Sombra del Caudillo* amongst them, but he is rarely remembered for his interest in public opinion polls. However, *Tiempo*'s ongoing publications of poll data took place during his first years as editor, and he obviously contributed to the development of media polls at this early time. Joe Belden, an American public opinion researcher, described the regular polling activity in *Tiempo* in an article published by the *Public Opinion Quarterly* in 1944. The following paragraph illustrates the kind of work conducted at the magazine:

A regularly-recurring poll, the first candid and realistic attempt originating within the country to measure public opinion, is being sponsored by the weekly newsmagazine, *Tiempo*. Results of the surveys have appeared an average of once every five to six weeks since the establishment of the *revista* in 1942. Statistically or from the standpoint of technique, the poll cannot compare with the Gallups or the Ropers of North America. But the survey is important because it acknowledges the need for opinion analysis in one more democratic country, because it is the initial step in its field in Mexico, and because it is apparently unbiased—a *rara avis* on the Mexican, Central or South American political scene. (Belden, 1944, p. 104).

Some of *Tiempo*'s polls reflected, as the name suggests, the nature of the times. On May 13, 1942, a Mexican oil tanker, *Potrero del Llano*, was sunk by Axis submarines near Florida. One week later, another Mexican ship, *Faja de Oro*, was also sunk. Two more ships followed their fate a few days later. Previously neutral, Mexico was now in a state of war, and *Tiempo*'s questions, asked in Mexico City and published in the magazine, addressed the issue: "Do you think Mexico should go to war?" The magazine published that 40.7 percent of respondents were in favor, and 59.3 percent, against, considering a total of 11,464 "votes" (*Tiempo*, May 24, 1942, p. 2). As a way to present the views of significant sectors of the population, not to mention partisan orientations, the results were also cross-tabulated by the following categories: "the man of the street", "groups from the left", "PRM and unions" (Party of the Mexican Revolution), "State workers", and "bureaucrats". The readers' reactions that were published in the magazine welcomed the new practice of "voting" and "plebiscites" that the weekly publication had offered them: "It is clear that the Mexican nation", one reader wrote, "is conscious of its rights

and knows how to freely express its opinions" (*Tiempo*, June 5, 1942, p. 2). "The voting tallies that you organized", read another letter, "demonstrates that Mexico is an enemy of war and that it repudiates violent methods for dealing with international matters" (*Tiempo*, June 5, 1942, p. 2). Such optimism was also balanced by the practical difficulties of polling. In a letter published on June 12, 1942, Mexico City's chief of police pledged to *Tiempo* an investigation regarding "the recent transitory detention of those young men responsible for gathering the votes for the Institute of Public Opinion" (*Tiempo*, June 12, 1942, p. 2).

Despite the relevance of its questions, and the common comparisons to the Gallup polls, *Tiempo*'s polling efforts were still far from using solid sampling methods, not to mention proper question wording in regards to some issues. The methodology, extensively described in the first poll publication, stated that "a group of automobiles, with signs perfectly explanatory, traveled around and all over the city carrying ballots, ballot boxes, and personnel capable of perfectly explaining how to conduct the voting. As they stopped, various people of all social classes rushed to ask for a ballot to cast their vote in the poll" (*Tiempo*, June 12, 1942). In addition to the main question, participants had the option to answer some other questions regarding their sex, age, marital status, occupation, and income (Belden, 1944, p. 107). By the way, Belden points out an interesting political factor in the samples: "The surveys have for the first time made Mexican women audible. Woman suffrage has never been granted in the country. Although the sample does not contain votes proportionate to population by sexes, each poll contains opinions from women in substantial numbers" (Belden, 1944, p. 107). Women's suffrage in Mexico was enacted in 1953.

In regards to question wording, there are a few examples that Belden (1944), in his review of *Tiempo*'s polls, describes either as poorly worded or using unnecessary framing. One good example is the following: "Do you believe it is patriotic to support the policy that the President of the Republic has adopted for the defense of the national interest and honor?" Not surprisingly, the results to this one-sided question were 81.65 percent yes, and 18.35 percent no. Belden's methodological concerns with the question are perfectly valid, but it is also likely that this particular question wording may have reflected political pressures rather than just methodological mishaps. Unlike Belden's qualification of Mexico's political system as democratic, very few would believe today that Mexico was a democracy at the time. Reviewing the original publication, we also found a report on President Ávila Camacho's public speech in which he declared, around the same time the poll was taken, that "Mexico is at war. The government has made a decision that the country's honor demands" (*Tiempo*, June 12, 1942). Although this is only a speculation, it is not difficult to imagine that the poll question could have been

“suggested” by a government office. In fact, the original poll where *Tiempo* asked “Do you think Mexico should go to war?” was interrupted, and that question was replaced with the new item about patriotism. After the question was changed, positions in favor of the war shifted from being a minority to a large majority.

The weekly magazine would only conduct and publish polls for a limited time. Martín Luis Guzmán led this editorial project until his death in 1976, but polls were only published in the early 1940s. During that time, polls were not only part of the news, but, as Kathleen Frankovic says, they were the news (Frankovic, 1998). The magazine’s early efforts resembled those observed and initiated in the United States in the preceding decade, and its polls or “voting” methods were gradually extended to other cities. The review published in *Public Opinion Quarterly* concluded that “[t]he establishment of *Tiempo*’s poll has ushered something of a *Literary Digest* era in Mexican opinion measurement; regardless of its shortcomings, it is a step taken” (Belden, 1944, p. 109). Unlike the democratic and more politically competitive environment in which the Gallup and Roper polls flourished, the reach and impact of *Tiempo*’s polls were more limited under Mexico’s one-party rule. “No polls paralleling political elections have been taken, and, considering the questionable nature of Mexican vote-counting, it would seem foolish to do so”, Belden also noted (1944, p. 109). Aside from the unfavorable political soil in which they were trying to grow, *Tiempo*’s early polls were a reflection of a young industry, the one that developed not in Mexico but in its northern neighbor. Despite Radványi’s contact with *Tiempo*’s editor, Martín Luis Guzmán, we did not find any convincing evidence that the Hungarian professor was responsible for the magazine’s polls and voting methods. On the contrary, we believe that he was not involved in them, as his efforts and interests laid elsewhere.

THE SCIENCE OF PUBLIC OPINION: RADVÁNYI’S ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

On the basis of the works he published and the journalist reports about his conferences, it is clear that László Radványi devoted much attention to how to best measure public opinion and how to use it to assist public policy. In this section, we will focus on the first of these two topics, and the second is addressed in the following one. Nonetheless, he certainly saw the two of them closely intertwined.

Perhaps the most important methodological description that Radványi made about public opinion research was his *Public Opinion Measurement: A Survey*, published in 1945, a book we found at the Library of the American Embassy, in Mexico City. By then, he was not only director of the Scientific

Institute of Mexican Public Opinion, but he had also founded the Institute for Studies in Social Psychology and Public Opinion. As the edition points out, this book was part of a series of monographs edited by Radványi identified as “Problems and Results of Public Opinion Research”. Another volume in the same series was Harry Field’s *Midiendo la Opinión Pública* (Measuring Public Opinion), published in 1946. According to a recent WAPOR’s newsletter (first quarter of 2007), Harry Field, who was the founder and director of the National Opinion Research Center, was able to gather 73 researchers in Colorado, including László Radványi, in what is regarded as the first WAPOR meeting, in July 1946.

Returning to Radványi’s book, the first two lines could have been written and published 60 years later, during Mexico’s second major encounter with public opinion polling, and still be adequate: “The role of public opinion measurement in economic, social and political life has increased significantly in the last years. In a period not much greater than ten years, which is extremely short in the development of a science, it has changed from a method used only by some specialists and businessmen and regarded with a curiosity mixed with some disdain, to a science widely known in many countries and whose results are now seriously taken into account by governments, science, and journalism” (Radványi, 1945, p. 5).

The book’s main concern had to do precisely with perceptions about the scientific bases of public opinion research, especially at a time when polls were under severe attack. As the professor pointed out, “[W]ith the development of the role of public opinion measurement, the doubts and the criticism have also increased” (Radványi, 1945, p. 5). “For that reason”, Radványi explained in his introduction, “we decided to make an attempt to establish the exact state of opinion of the social scientists, journalists and other professionally interested persons, concerning public opinion measurement, in those countries where Institutes of Public Opinion exist” (Radványi, 1945, p. 6). The core of *Public Opinion Measurement* is a questionnaire that Radványi sent by mail to a number of social scientists, journalists, and “other persons” (including government officials, legislators, heads of cultural and social organizations, experts in market research, etc.) in several countries. Arguing that he was still receiving responses and did not want to delay the publication, the book only shows the results based on social scientists and journalists from the United States. Names listed in the quotation part of the book, which means that they responded to Radványi’s inquiries both in quantifiable and qualitative terms, included Hadley Cantril (Director of Public Opinion Research at Princeton University), Harry H. Field (Director of the National Opinion Research Center, based at the University of Denver in those days), and Elmo Roper (Director of the Fortune Survey of Public Opinion), along with several professor of economics, political science, and sociology from different

universities, and journalists working for the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, *Harper's* magazine, the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Time* and *Fortune* magazines, among others.

Radványi reported that about 56.1 percent, of respondents considered public opinion polling as a scientific method; 70.9 percent thought it was an important factor in social science research; and 61.5 percent said that public opinion measurements played a constructive role in democratic society. Also, 70.0 percent expressed that public opinion measurement may influence public opinion; with 18.8 percent saying that such influence would be harmful. Radványi reported in the book summary that "income, sex, age, religion, occupation and enlightenment are considered as the most important factors in the formation of public opinion. Following these, in the order of importance given to them, are: geographic location, urban or rural residence, race, political affiliation" (Radványi, 1945, p. 39). Finally, Radványi also noticed that 61.5 percent of his respondents considered that "integrity and scientific capacity of the personnel of Institutes of Public Opinion are the best guarantee for the scientific character of the results of public opinion measurements" (Radványi, 1945, p. 39).

Public Opinion Measurement was originally published in Mexico City in English, not in Spanish. Radványi was particularly interested in communicating his work done in Mexico to the international academic community, and to contribute to the identification and recognition of Latin American social sciences. It is likely that he distributed the book among those who responded the survey, and few copies remained in Mexico. One good example of Radványi's interest in the international community is the special journal edition *The Social Sciences in Mexico and News About the Social Sciences in South and Central America* (Radványi, 1947), where he collected a series of essays written in English about the state of social sciences in the Latin American region. "The social sciences in Mexico and other Latin American countries," he mentioned in the introduction, "have achieved a significant development in recent decades. Unfortunately, these accomplishments are little known abroad" (Radványi, 1947, p. 6). The effort was apparently supported by the Mexican government, as indicated by the fact that the ministers of Foreign Relations and Economy, Jaime Torres Bodet and Antonio Ruiz Galindo, respectively, along with the National University's president, Salvador Zubirán, wrote opening statements for the edition. The articles included works about Mexico by renowned Mexican intellectuals, such Alfonso Caso, Jesus Silva Herzog, and Victor Urquidi, among others; but, surprisingly, none of the 13 articles published made any reference to public opinion research, not even Radványi's introduction as editor. This was obviously more a reflection of his work as a researcher in the Economics Department at the National University of Mexico than of his interests as survey researcher.

The Social Sciences in Mexico was not the only academic journal that Radványi began in 1947. Much more significant for the public opinion community, that same year he edited a specialized journal on public opinion research: the *International Journal of Opinion and Attitude Research* (IJOAR). The journal's first issue published articles by researchers from Harvard, MIT, and Cornell University, and it attracted some attention. Reviews about the new editorial project were published in the *American Journal of Sociology*, the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, and the *Journal of Marketing*. In the latter, A. B. Blankenship wrote: "A history of major contributions to the field of sampling surveys might well include the newspapers' straw votes, originating in the early nineteenth century; [...] the establishment of the first commercial research department in 1911; the book 'Straw Votes' in the early 1930's [...] but the history would be incomplete without a record of the founding of this journal which is being reviewed" (Blankenship, 1948, pp. 417–419).

In 1949, the new public opinion journal offered an excellent venue for discussion of the polls in the 1948 U.S. presidential election, when the polling profession got under attack for its wrong election forecast. A symposium of several articles was published in consecutive issues, and the IJOAR continued publishing articles on election polls and their methodology. The symposium on election polls included articles by Elmo Roper (1949) and George Gallup (1949), and, later, election poll-related articles were also written by Angus Campbell (1950) and Archibald M. Crossley (1951), among others. Leo P. Crespi published regularly in the journal, which also had pieces by Helen M. Crossley and Raymond Fink (1951), Radványi himself (1951a, 1951–52), and various research news notes by Joe Belden.

In each of its numbers but the last one, *The International Journal of Opinion and Attitude Research* had the following legend: "Official Journal of the World Association for Public Opinion Research". As mentioned earlier, Radványi was one of the founding members of WAPOR, and he attended the first two meetings held in Colorado and Massachusetts, the former under the name SICPOR, Second International Conference on Public Opinion Research (see WAPOR's Newsletter, First Quarter 2007). Radványi was intimately linked with the international public opinion community, and in 1948, he published an *International Directory of Public Opinion and Attitude Research*. Radványi was not able to attend the third conference of the recently created WAPOR, held in Eagles Mere, Pennsylvania, in 1948. The U.S. government denied a visa to the Hungarian professor, and although we have not yet documented the reasons, it is likely that his political affiliation in the past may have played a role. Despite his absence, Radványi was named council member at WAPOR, as chair of the publications committee, and IJOAR was considered the association's official publication until 1951, one issue before

Radványi stopped its publication. Radványi left Mexico in 1952, and no one continued editing the journal, either in Mexico or abroad. Blankenship (1948) noticed in his review of the new journal that the editorial work was done completely by the professor and his editorial assistant, Lena Jaeck, and that it did not have an editorial board. In addition, the journal had no successors after Radványi's departure.

THE USE OF PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH: RADVÁNYI'S POLICY CONTRIBUTIONS

Our story about László Radványi has hitherto developed an underlying argument about his significant contribution to public opinion research. Ironically, we found during our research that Dr. Radványi considered public opinion polls not only as a marginal activity but also an occupation of lower quality, of sample surveying, as he called it. This is another reason to believe that he had little to do with *Tiempo's* polls. In a book published in 1952, where Radványi described the surveys that he conducted in Mexico throughout the previous decade, he established a series of principles that guided his work. In the first of such principles, he wrote the following: "Both the general public and some specialists on the subject consider public opinion polls as the most important and significant aspect of sample surveys. However, in this author's opinion, as they are generally practiced, public opinion polls constitute only one of numerous activities conducted in the extensive field of sample surveys, and they are precisely the ones that are more questionable on the basis of their methods and their scientific value" (Radványi, 1952a, p. 7). In a country like Mexico, where a single party dominated elections that were neither free nor fair, Radványi had no reason to develop election polls. In addition, it seems that any attempt to measure political opinions had a hard time remaining independent, as we saw with *Tiempo's* example. However, Radványi's confession about his view of public opinion polls may not only reflect a lack of propitious conditions for independent public opinion polling in Mexico at the time; it also makes the reader wonder what his underlying interest in survey research was, after all.

What is survey research for? What is its ultimate goal? In trying to look for an answer from Radványi's view, this is where we find a bridge between the young László and the older professor who left Mexico and returned to Germany. His main interest was a two-fold task: generating solid scientific knowledge, on one hand, and use it to assist significant public policy, on the other. Giving voice to the people through public opinion polls was only a secondary goal. He had a strong confidence in survey methodology, but he also had his eyes in science and policy, not just opinions. In his view, "sample surveys [...] constitute one of the basic methods for social science research;

and, in many aspects, they are the only expedite way to obtain reliable data for economic, sociological, socio-psychological, and anthropological studies” (Radványi, 1952a, p. 7). *Ten Years of Sample Surveying in Mexico* (Radványi, 1951–1952), and its Spanish companion for the Mexican public (Radványi, 1952a), is a publication where this view dominates from beginning to end. The first two lines show his enthusiasm about surveys, but they also reveal the ultimate interest beyond the methodologies that he applied: “Undoubtedly, one of the most important events in the history of social science methodology during the last decades is the development of research based on sample survey. This procedure makes it possible to obtain precise data about the economic, social, and cultural characteristics of numerous populations, studying only a much reduced sample of such populations chosen according to well-determined scientific principles” (Radványi, 1952a, p. 7).

What type of surveys did Radványi conduct in this area? *Ten Years of Sample Surveying* lists 86 studies, all of which are impossible to address properly in this article. However, we have selected a few of them that called our attention and that allow us to discuss their goals, main features, and possible impact on policy making. Among the numerous economic surveys listed in *Ten Years*, Radványi inquired, among other things, about the multiple occupations held by heads of household in Mexico. “Because of insufficient income from their main occupation”, the report says, “many heads of household have two, three and even four jobs. For example, our surveys showed cases in which one head of household that works as a federal employee in the morning, also works in his electronics repair workshop during the afternoon, teaches classes at night school, and still works as a journalist and sales agent” (Radványi, 1952a, p. 25). Other economic surveys with policy implications involved the production and price of bread, on one hand, and the situation of the metal industry, on the other. The survey of *panaderías* (bread stores) was commended to Radványi by the Secretary of Economy after the producers’ request to either increase the price of *bolillos* (a standard bread roll) or reduce their size, and help make the proper decisions about the industry’s profit and loss. An interesting feature of this project, and the one about the metal industry, was Radványi’s use of stratified samples of the industries under study (see Radványi, 1952a, pp. 33–34). The bread stores, for example, were stratified according to size.

Some other surveys tapped ordinary citizens’ topics such as the following:

- (a) Why many Mexicans keep their savings at home instead of depositing them in a bank or a savings institution. In 1948, Radványi conducted a survey about savings in Mexico City to support the National Campaign for Savings that the government had just launched. In Radványi’s words, that survey was the National University’s contribution to the government’s efforts, and, as in many other projects, interviewers were

Radványi's students at the Seminar on Sample Measurements at the National University.

- (b) What the hopes and expectations of the Mexican youth are. The survey about the youth's hopes was conducted in 1950 as part of a ten-country project coordinated by the Department of Social Relations at Harvard University.
- (c) What the economic, social, and cultural lifestyles of the Mexico City middle-class are. The surveys about economic, social, and cultural life of Mexico City's middle class were apparently ongoing cross-sections in different moments and including different aspects in each questionnaire. The report does not specify how many samples and the exact time span of these surveys, or how it determined the middle class.
- (d) What kind of contact Mexico City migrants maintain with their town of origin.
- (e) What types of associations and organizations Mexicans belong to and how they participate in them.
- (f) What reading habits Mexicans have, why comic strips is what they read the most, and what influence they have. *La Metrópoli* (Radványi, 1950) is a survey report that deals with comic strip or *paquines* readership. Rather than just presenting the results of the survey, Radványi expressed a lot of his personal and ideological views about those publications, in a way that we did not perceive in other works. "It is sad", he said in the second paragraph, "that among the numerous influences that shape the youth's thoughts today, the one exercised by comic strips (*historietas*) is one of the strongest and most continuous" (1950, p. 3), and he concluded, in the last paragraph, that "these magazines exercise an influence in the populations' thoughts and attitudes that can be considered negative, an obstacle to the country's cultural development" (1950, p. 12). This is one of the few remarks where Radványi's Marxist thought is evident in his reading of poll results.

Other studies also covered more abstract topics, such as the functioning and problems of monopolies and the semantic meaning of words such as "democracy", "culture", "nation", "industrialization", and "cooperation". The international survey on monopolies started in 1945; Radványi sent questionnaires that inquired about the nature and consequences of monopolies to about 1,000 professors of economics in North America and Europe, of which he obtained 300 completed ones. The semantic surveys were also an ongoing project that started in 1947. Among other findings, Radványi reported that the word "solidaridad", or solidarity, wrongly meant "to be alone" to many Mexicans, as in the Spanish word "solo" (alone). Radványi also mentioned that these semantic surveys supported education campaigns by the government.

Another survey measured the efficiency of basic education in rural Mexico. Radványi seemed particularly proud of this survey conducted in Valle de Santiago, Nayarit, a rural area in Western Mexico, which had the goal of measuring the efficiency of UNESCO's Pilot Program on Basic Education, with a sponsorship from the Ministry of Public Education. This survey on basic education deserves further consideration. The study was a complicated panel design of 248 families in a rural town, with a first wave of interviews conducted in 1949, and a second wave in 1950. The original design considered five yearly waves of interviews, but funding was, in the author's words, insufficient. Radványi reports that, to his knowledge, this was the first periodic survey (meaning a panel design) conducted in Latin America, in a rural population and using probability sampling methods. Indeed, the UNESCO panel survey conducted by Radványi took place not long after Paul Lazarsfeld and his associates conducted panel surveys to study opinion formation and opinion change in the U.S. (see Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954), and almost contemporary to the University of Michigan panel surveys of 1948 and the 1950s, upon which much of the Michigan paradigm of voting behavior was developed (see Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Converse, 1964).

A detailed report of Radványi's panel survey was published in 1951 (see Radványi, 1951a, 1951b), where he discusses different approaches for interviewing rural, indigenous populations, and contrasts them to direct observation methods commonly used by anthropologists. The book is rich in methodological considerations, from sampling methods that accurately reflected the population of interest, to proper question wording and questionnaire design, as well as how to deal with panel design problems, such as attrition rates (as not to bias the original sample in the second round of interviews) and contamination effects (for example, avoiding that interviewed families talked to other families about the questions before they were interviewed). A whole section on interviewer training also offers an opportunity to see how Radványi dealt with a "population of peasants" that left their homes before sunrise and returned to them after sunset, a situation only aggravated by the fact that interviews lasted between 4 and 5 hours.

The report offers a great deal of methodological discussion, a few policy conclusions, and findings that were very well ahead of their time in Latin American survey research. Radványi reported, for example, that "changes produced by educational measures are often very slow; economic changes are generally a little faster than cultural ones" (Radványi, 1951b, p. 28). Also, Radványi diagnosed that "all the studies that we have conducted in urban and rural regions of Mexico during the last ten years indicate that an increasing level of culture is related to more preoccupation for health and less preoccupation for money" (Radványi, 1951–1952, p. 30). Although less

grounded, the resemblance of these findings to Ronald Inglehart's materialist/postmaterialist values thesis is striking (Inglehart 1971, 1997). Radványi found some evidence of the relationship between economic development and value priorities, and, not surprisingly, interpreted it following the Marxist premise that the former tend to influence the latter.

Another topic of great relevance in Radványi's interests was industrialization. It is no accident that we left this topic to the end of our review. After Radványi left Mexico, in 1952, his main work focused on the industrialization of underdeveloped countries (or infradeveloped, as he called them), not only from an analytical view, but also, as many other works from that time, from an ideological one. When he joined Humboldt University in East Berlin, Radványi's main academic interest focused on topics related to imperialism and Latin America (C. Zehl Romero, personal interview, June 2007). We were able to gather four books on industrialization that have Radványi as an author or as a collaborator (Radványi 1951c, 1952b, 1952c; De la Peña, Reyes-Heroles, Radványi, Lavín, & Crowley, 1951). A brief extract from his book *How Mexico should industrialize* illustrates his views on this topic: "The establishment in an economically infradeveloped country of industrial companies controlled by foreign capitals is generally not favorable for national industrialization, because such companies' greater economic potential obstruct and even prevent the later establishment of national companies and often weaken the existing ones" (Radványi, 1951c:86). It is likely that Radványi was in disagreement with Mexico's closed and authoritarian politics, but he was indeed in tune with the country's inward-looking import-substitution industrialization model at the time.

DISCUSSION: THE PROFESSOR'S DEPARTURE AND A LOST LEGACY

Lászlo Radványi developed a prolific survey research agenda during his time in Mexico, from 1941 to 1952. He left the country in 1952, following his wife, Anna Seghers, who had returned to Germany in 1947. The reasons for his departure are unexplained in the documents and interviews that we collected, but we learned in our search that Anna Seghers, who was living in East Berlin, had used her influence to get her husband a visa in 1950 (C. Zehl Romero, personal interview, June 2007). Radványi's letters to his wife since the late 1940s continuously promised her that he would soon return to Germany with her. Anna Seghers's early departure is perhaps related to her husbands' personal relationship with his research assistant, Lena Jaeck, whom he thanks in every of his publications from 1944 to 1952. We know little about Radványi's lifestyle in Mexico and about the circles of acquaintances that he frequented, but they were most likely ideological resemblances of his Budapest

Sunday Circle. In our search for documents, we found pictures of him with Mexican and Latin American left-wing icons of the time, such as labor movement leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the painter Diego Rivera, and the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda.

We do not pretend that we have exhausted such an interesting and early episode of survey research in Mexico with this brief account of Radványi's decade in the country, not to mention his personal and professional life. We have, however, uncovered an almost totally ignored decade of polling and methodological issues that remain relevant in our time. Because Mexico developed its current public opinion polling industry much later than many other countries, we believe that Radványi was well ahead of his time in the country, and that some of his works should be recovered for the study of public opinion in Mexico, as well as in other settings where polls have only recently developed. We knew, because of Miguel Basáñez's footnote (1995) and other unpublished references, that there was something hidden in the history of the 1940s that was relevant to our profession as survey researchers, but we did not imagine how much this exploration would unveil. Each of Radványi's works on survey research deserves a greater and more detailed review than what we have offered here. As we were preparing this article, a book that inquired about public opinion polling in Mexico in the 1940s was published (Ortiz-Garza, 2007). The author argues that it was Harald J. Corson, an American trained by Hadley Cantril, who first conducted a scientific poll in the country, a few months before Radványi's arrival. It is interesting that the book only makes a single reference to Radványi, also in a footnote, "whose history and political activities and propaganda call desperately for an author to document" (Ortiz-Garza, 2007, p. 116).

Radványi left Mexico in 1952, around the time when polls and surveys virtually disappeared from the public eye. The limited and mostly academic survey research activities of the 1950s and 1960s are documented elsewhere (Alduncin, 1986; Basáñez, 1995), but we can confidently say the "vigorous infant", as the American academy referred to the nascent polling industry in the United States, died very young in Mexico. Its rebirth required not only a transformation of the political system and the media, but also the rise of new professionals who were, by the way, totally unrelated to their Hungarian predecessor. In his publications, Radványi often thanks his students at the Economics Department at the National University, who conducted the interviews for his surveys and most likely coded and processed the information. Nonetheless, none of Radványi's students continued with the professor's work. The National University, and especially the Economics Department, was a natural place of recruitment for Mexico's government. Few had incentives to work in a field with so many difficulties for funding, publication, and independence. Radványi's departure from Mexico also

coincides with the end of IJOAR, at least until it was edited anew as IJPOR in the late 1980s. Both his surveys and his editorial work for the journal seemed like a two-person job during the decade, his, and Lena's, his assistant, who also followed him back to the Democratic Republic of Germany. Lena Jaeck apparently was an American citizen of German descent (C. Zehl Romero, personal interview, June 2007). No school, no followers, no legacy remained in the country he left behind.

When he returned to East Berlin, where he had had his first experiences as a professional, Radványi found, nonetheless, a "foreign culture" (Dieter Klein, personal interview, June 2007). The German Democratic Republic had a very "dogmatic discipline" that the professor did not take with ease. Known as "Old Joe" at Humboldt University, the corresponding authorities required him to provide them with his lectures in written form, "but he rarely did" (Dieter Klein, personal interview, June 2007). Having lived in the West made him a natural object of suspicion, "but he was cautious not to get into trouble" (Dieter Klein, personal interview, June 2007). Research agendas were under strict control, and, although he felt comfortable and knowledgeable about Latin America and the problems of "imperialism", there was no place for public opinion anymore.

Johann Lorenz Schmidt, or László Radványi, as we have referred to him throughout this article, lived the rest of his days unable to talk about the public, its opinions, or their role in democratic government. In 1955, Radványi and his family moved to Volkswohlstraße 81 (later Anna-Seghers-Straße), in East Berlin. He lived under the shadow of the Iron Curtain, and, perhaps, also under his wife's. High party members used to attend Anna Seghers' birthday gatherings, but not his (Dieter Klein, personal interview, June 2007). In 1952, she became president of the Writers' Federation of the GDR. She kept that job and distinction until 1978, the year her husband died. In 2007, Professor Radványi's archives were deposited, though not organized, at Humboldt University in Berlin. Surely, those archives will tell us more about his life following his 10-year Mexican experience. Meanwhile, we hope that this recollection and analysis of his work on public opinion polling illustrates much better a whole decade of survey research activities that so far had been reduced to a single footnote. Those years were not, after all, a lost decade.

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