

AmericasBarometer: Topical Brief – November 18, 2013

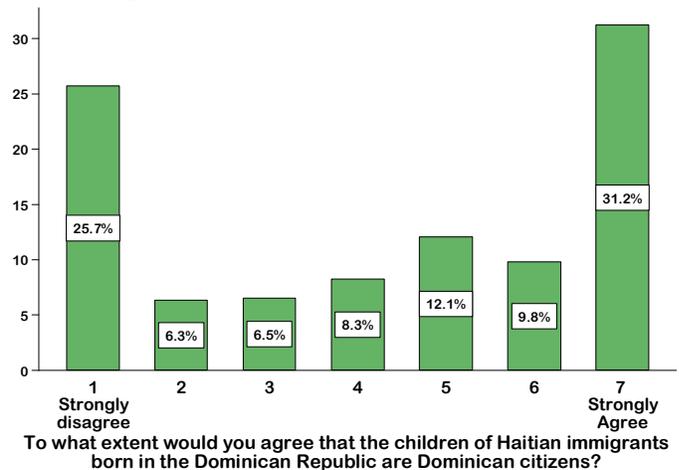
Dominicans or Not? Support for Citizenship of Dominican-born Children of Haitian Immigrants

By Diana Orcés, Vanderbilt University

The Dominican Republic has recently experienced a profound immigration reform that affects thousands of individuals residing in Dominican soil. The backdrop to this policy shift is a long history of Haitian migrants providing the bulk of the Dominican Republic's seasonal agricultural labor force. Today more than 200,000 Dominicans of Haitian origins (among which many are children) live in the Dominican Republic and identify as Dominicans. Thus, while debate continues in the U.S. over immigration reforms targeted toward migrant workers and their children, in the Dominican Republic new legislation revokes citizenship rights and possibilities for many immigrants and their families.

On September 23, 2013, the Dominican Republic's Constitutional Court ruled that children of undocumented Haitian migrants (including those born in the Dominican Republic) will no longer be entitled to citizenship. Moreover, the court has ordered an audit of all birth records dating back to June 1929, in order to identify individuals who no longer qualify for citizenship. Currently, many adults and children find themselves in a citizenship "limbo" (Archibold, 2013). Until the situation is solved, a short-term fix to the problem by government migration officials is the granting of temporary residency to these individuals, but stripping them of all the benefits of citizenship including the right to vote, access to public health insurance, and low-cost college tuition (Archibold, 2013; Vargas Llosa, 2013).

Figure 1. Dominicans' Support for Citizenship of Haitian Immigrants' Children Born on Dominican soil



Source: © AmericasBarometer by LAPOP

How do Dominicans view the issue of migrant status for Dominican-born children of Haitian immigrants? In this *Topical Brief*¹ I explore public opinion on the question of citizenship status for the children of Haitian immigrants that are born in the Dominican Republic, in an effort to understand if the nation's

¹ Funding for the 2012 round mainly came from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Important sources of support were also the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and Vanderbilt University. This *Topical Brief* report is solely produced by LAPOP and the opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the point of view of the United States Agency for International Development, or any other supporting agency.

Constitutional Court ruling echoes the opinions of the general Dominican public.

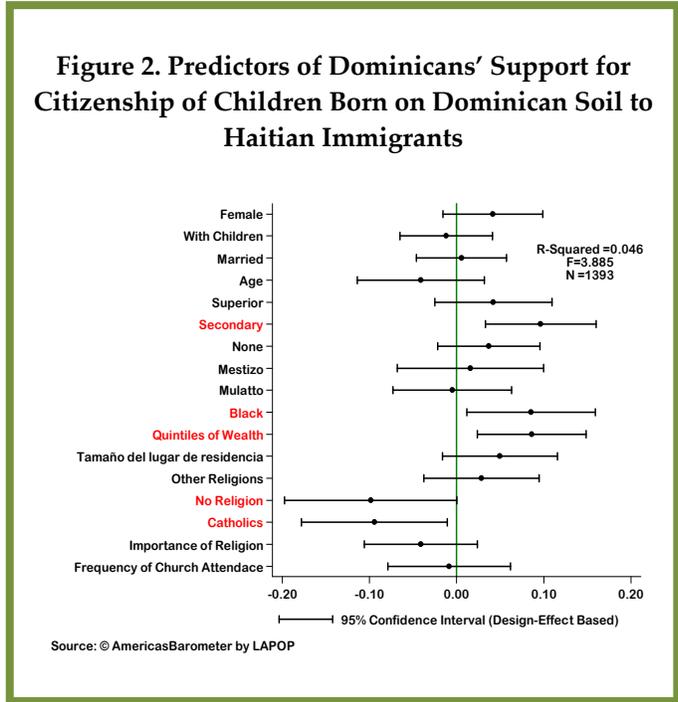
As part of the 2012 round of the AmericasBarometer, in which a nationally representative sample of 1,512 of voting age Dominicans were interviewed, respondents were asked the following question:

DOMHAI1. To what extent would you agree that the children of Haitian immigrants born in the Dominican Republic are Dominican citizens?²

Figure 1 shows the percentages of responses that fall into each category within the 1-7 scale, where 1 represents strongly disagree and 7 represents strongly agree. Responses in the middle represent more moderate positions. Immediately apparent from these results is that the Dominican public is highly polarized over this issue. The majority of Dominicans selected one of the two extreme response options on the seven point scale, with a third of the population strongly agreeing that the children of Haitian immigrants born in the country are Dominican citizens and a fourth of the Dominican population strongly disagreeing with the statement. Given this striking public opinion divide, it seems unlikely that the Constitutional Court ruling represents the final resolution of this issue for Dominican society.

In order to better understand the contours of this opinion divide, I turn to an analysis of the socio-economic characteristics of those who support and oppose citizenship rights for the children of Haitian immigrants who were born in the Dominican Republic. Figure 2 shows a graphical representation of a linear regression model that identifies those socio-economic factors that help explain one's position on this

issue.³ In the figure, the dot represents the standardized regression coefficient. If the dot falls to the right of the green axis (0.0), that variable is positively related to support for immigrant rights; when it falls to the left, it is negatively related to this support. The horizontal lines surrounding each dot represent 95% confidence interval for the estimate. When the confidence intervals do not overlap the green axis, we can be 95% confident that the variable is a statistically significant predictor of opinions regarding whether Haitian immigrants' children born in the Dominican Republic are Dominican citizens.



The results in Figure 2 indicate that only a few of the many variables included in the model emerge as statistically significant (see those variables identified with red font in the figure). Dominicans who are educated, wealthy, and identify as black report higher levels of support for citizenship rights for migrants' children when compared to respondents who are less

² Prior issues in the *Insights* series can be found at: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights.php>. The data on which they are based can be found at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-data.php>.

³ The original variable was recoded onto a 0-100 scale where higher values represent "strongly agree" with the statement that Haitian immigrants' children born in the Dominican Republic are Dominican citizens and lower values represent "strongly disagree".

educated, poorer, and identify as white. Those respondents who identify as Catholics, as well as those who do not have a religion but believe in a higher being show lower levels of this support compared to Evangelicals (the comparison category for the analysis).

The relevance of education and religious affiliation for attitudes on this issue is illustrated in Figure 3, which was created based on the raw survey data. The figure shows that Dominicans with secondary and higher education show average levels of 59.8 and 59.2 points, respectively, on a 0-100 scale in contrast to Dominicans with primary education, who exhibit significantly lower levels of support by more than 10 points on that same scale (47.9 points). Those with no education also present lower levels of support on average, though the confidence interval around this estimate does not allow us to conclude that this difference is statistically significant.

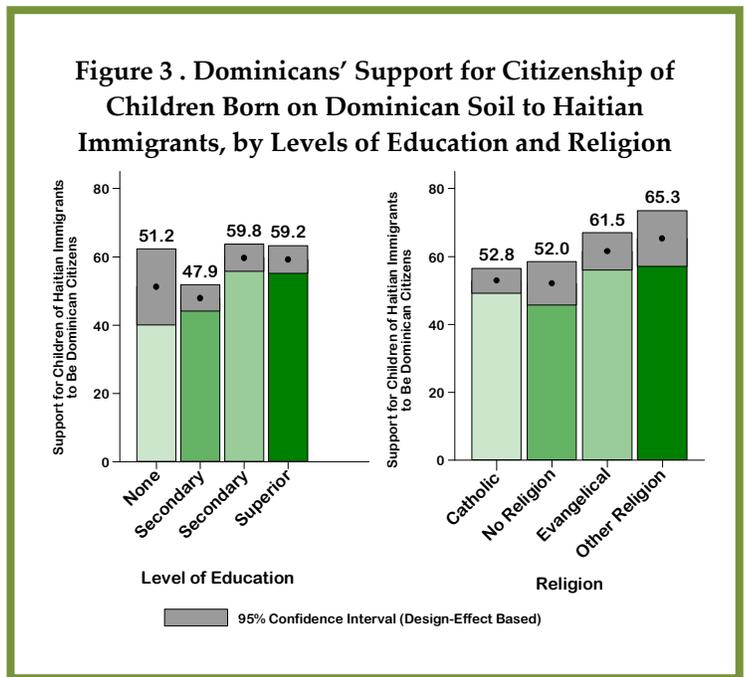
In considering religion, Figure 3 shows that Dominicans who identify as Evangelicals and who belong to other religions show significantly higher levels of support for migrant rights compared to Catholics and those with no religious affiliation. This divide between Catholics and other religious adherents is consistent with recent messages sent to parishioners by Church elites. For example, one of the most influential figures within the country, the archbishop of Santo Domingo, Cardinal Nicolás de Jesús López Rodríguez, recently spoke in support of the Court's ruling and against foreign pressure on the issue:

“International organizations don’t rule here...I don’t accept anybody coming here to decree anything. No country, not the United States, not France, nobody. Here, we are in charge” (Archibold, 2013, p.2).

It remains to be seen how the Constitutional ruling proceeds in a country where more than 200,000 individuals of Haitian origins have

been put in a state of uncertainty with respect to their citizenship rights and possibilities (Archibold, 2013). As Mario Vargas Llosa stated in a recent opinion article in the Spanish newspaper *El País*:

“If such legal fallacy prevails, tens of thousands of Dominicans families of Haitian origin (near or remote) would be turned into zombies, not to people, beings unable to get a legal job, enroll in a school or public university, receive health insurance, retirement, leave the country, and therefore potential victims of all abuse and assaults”⁴.



Many of the benefits that come with citizenship have been temporarily put on hold while government officials identify which individuals do no longer qualify for citizenship. This ruling has a paradoxical quality in a country where approximately 13 percent of its population currently lives abroad, with a majority residing in the United States (OECD 2009), and where the public is clearly divided between two extreme views on the issue, with neither side holding a clear majority. As debate over

⁴ Author’s translation

immigration reform continues in the U.S., we can also expect debate over a similar set of issues, alongside the new legislation, to be debated for years to come in the Dominican Republic.

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Full results of the 2012 AmericasBarometer - survey
and the AmericasBarometer 2012 comparative study
can be consulted on-line at www.LapopSurveys.org.
The full data set is available for on-line analysis or
download (in SPSS and Stata formats) at no cost.