



# The Legitimization of the Juntas in the Independence Process of Latin American Countries

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**Abstract.** This article explores the legitimacy of the Junta during the independence process in Latin America. It begins with a description of the historical evolution of the Junta and the concept of independence in the region. The first section of the text focuses on analyzing the sources of legitimacy of the Junta, using three approaches derived from Max Weber's theory of authority: legal-rational, charismatic, and traditional. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the political and social challenges faced by the new states after breaking away from colonial rule.

**Keywords:** Latin America; Legitimacy; Violence; Junta

## 1 Introduction

The Junta was a military leadership organization during the Latin American independence process. This paper primarily studies the sources of legitimacy of the Junta during the independence. This is of significant importance for understanding the ongoing violence in contemporary Latin America. The article begins by defining the concepts of the Junta and Latin American independence and provides a brief overview of the evolution of the Junta. In the second part, the article analyzes the legitimization process of the Junta based on Max Weber's theory of legitimacy from three perspectives: legal-rational, charismatic, and traditional. In conclusion, this study helps to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of the Latin American independence process and provides new insights into the ongoing violence in contemporary Latin America.

## 2 Definition of Concepts and Research Frameworks

### 2.1 The Junta and Latin American Independence

The term 'Junta' designates an emergency entity that spontaneously emerged from the population in a state of anarchy and a power vacuum, aiming to preserve civil rights and social order [1]. In Latin America, the colonial Juntas, headed by local Creole elites in a context of metropolitan sovereign vacuum, erected structures of violent resistance, such as the Junta of Cartagena de Indias and the Supreme Junta of Caracas. These Juntas

achieved local autonomy through processes that varied between elections and self-appointments [2], consolidating as counterpower institutions with the ultimate goal of independence from the Spanish crown. Characterized by power hierarchies rooted in national identities, an anti-colonial nature, and a violent approach, these Juntas marked the dynamics of the Latin American independence movement. This movement culminated with the victory of the patriot army led by General Sucre in the Battle of Ayacucho in December 1824 [3], forcing Spain to withdraw its forces from the American continent.

## 2.2 Evolution of the Juntas

Initially, in 1808, the Juntas in Spanish America emerged to preserve the legitimacy of King Ferdinand VII against Napoleonic occupation, defending Spain's national sovereignty [4]. Over time, these Juntas began performing governmental functions, splitting into autonomists and independentists. The autonomists, loyal to Ferdinand VII, sought regional autonomy for Latin American people, while the independentists advocated for complete independence from the metropolis. The restoration of absolutism by Ferdinand VII forced the autonomists to evolve into independence movements. The Juntas' leaders, mainly Creole elites and descendants of Spanish colonizers, were divided by class differences, influencing their views on colonization. Despite these differences, they united under a common identity as legitimate heirs of America [5], significantly contributing to the Latin American independence movement, which ultimately eliminated Spanish sovereignty. The Juntas were central to political and social debates on representation and popular sovereignty, laying the groundwork for national states in Latin America. However, internal contradictions within the Juntas also led to post-independence violence, highlighting inequalities between Creole elites and indigenous people and the legacy of structural racism.

## 3 Sources of Legitimacy of the Juntas

According to Max Weber, governmental legitimacy constitutes "the basis of all authority systems and, consequently, all obedience dispositions, grounded in the belief that those exercising authority possess a certain prestige" [6]. Weber identifies three types of authority: rational-legal, charismatic, and traditional. This article argues that the Junta's legitimacy is derived from a combination of these types, where the disintegration of the Spanish monarchy and the Constitution of Cádiz represent rational-legal authority; the Creole military leaders, charismatic authority; and the continuation of the Spanish colonial model by the Junta, traditional authority. This combination confers a rebellious but legitimate character to the Junta.

### 3.1 Disintegration of the Spanish Monarchy and the Constitution of Cádiz (Rational-Legal Type)

The Napoleonic invasion and the abdication of Ferdinand VII in 1808 undermined the Spanish monarchy, creating a power vacuum in Latin America. The Council of Regency, established in 1810, issued decrees that delegitimized viceregal powers and encouraged independence movements [7]. On February 14, 1810, the Council's *Instrucción para las Elecciones por América y Asia* granted Americans of Spanish origin the same rights as those in Spain, allowing them to elect representatives and form governments. This dismantled the absolutist monarchy and colonial power structure, fostering new political organizations. Resistance movements, like Hidalgo's 1810 Guanajuato uprising and Bolívar's 1812 Cartagena Manifesto, emerged [8].

Amid Spain's ideological conflicts, the 1812 Constitution of Cádiz emphasized national sovereignty and division of powers, inspiring Latin Americans under colonial rule to seek democratic governance [9]. The Council of Regency split into two factions, absolutist and liberalist, with the liberal party intending to establish a transatlantic national state. They proclaimed in the constitution that the Spanish nation "is composed of Spaniards from both hemispheres" and attempted to break the old division between the metropolis and its colonies. This situation established a more equitable relationship between the center and the locals under the colonial system, providing a legal basis that allowed Creoles in Latin America to fight for their economic independence and political position while creating new national structures in the region and developing regulations, procedures, and systems that rejected the old absolutist monarchical regime. The constitution's idea of national sovereignty provided a legal basis for Juntas to seek autonomy, resisting Ferdinand VII's reconquest. Post-independence, the constitution influenced new political systems. For example, in Mexico, leaders swore "loyalty to the Spanish constitution until the Mexican state constitution was completed" [10]. In summary, the disintegration of the Spanish monarchy and the Constitution of Cádiz set the stage for the emergence of Juntas in Latin America.

### 3.2 The Crucial Role of Military Leaders (Charismatic Type)

According to Weber's theory of charismatic authority, a leader's legitimacy arises from followers' perception of their exceptional qualities [11]. During the Latin American wars of independence, charismatic leaders played crucial roles, significantly impacting the modernization and decolonization of post-independence countries. A key figure is Simón Bolívar, the Liberator of Latin America, who inspired his followers through his vision and sensitivity to their needs.

Simón Bolívar was born into a Creole family in Venezuela and was originally commissioned by the Caracas Junta (now Venezuela) in the United Kingdom. After returning to Latin America and joining the army in 1811, he fought against the Spanish monarchy for more than two decades, leading armies that achieved the independence of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela [12]. Bolívar was renowned for his exceptional charisma, which included his visionary leadership and military skills. He actively participated in battles, such as leading a small group of troops from the Táchira

border to Caracas between February and May 1818, beginning the liberation of Venezuela in May, known as the Admirable Campaign; thus, he was deeply revered by the Venezuelan people, who called him the Liberator [13]. Additionally, Bolívar used his excellent oratory skills to present a vision of a united and free South America from Spanish control, which included Creoles, indigenous people, and even slaves. This inclusive and powerful vision gathered a diverse group of followers, awakening a shared sense of destiny and urgency among the population, which was crucial for motivating the troops and supporters.

Similarly, San Martín, the father of the Argentine nation, was revered for his military leadership and prioritization of Argentina's sovereignty. Despite political differences with Bolívar, both leaders inspired regional identity and independence. Their extraordinary skills and inspiring visions garnered widespread support for the fight for Latin American independence [14]. Likewise, in the Juntas, opinion leaders from various regions and levels of power also proclaimed a noble vision of popular liberation, thus providing the capacity for mobilization based on regional identity and gaining the local population's identification, which gave them legitimacy for their continued regimes of violence.

### **3.3 Heritage and Development of the Imperial Government System (Traditional Type)**

According to Weber, traditional authority is rooted in the "sanctity of ordinances and inherited powers from ancient times," accepted due to reverence for its antiquity [15]. The Junta, while rebellious, adopted existing authority patterns during the transition. The Creole aristocracy within the Junta sought to preserve the extractivist model. In pre-independence Latin American colonies, power was divided among Iberian colonizers, local Creoles, and subjugated indigenous peoples [16]. Post-independence, Creoles aimed to maintain their privileged status and self-determination, opposing Spanish rule but consolidating inherited governance patterns to monopolize resources [17]. The Creoles developed a national narrative, *indigenismo*. By aligning themselves with the valorisation of indigenous cultures and peoples, *Criollos* sought to create a distinct national identity separate from their colonial Spanish heritage. Additionally, they used their unique identity as descendants of Spaniards born in America to emphasize their natural right to govern, positioning themselves as intellectual leaders and proponents of a more just and efficient government [18]. These narratives significantly advanced the legitimization of their government. On the other hand, the Creoles, who were at the top of the indigenous social hierarchy in the colonial system, controlled lands and regional trade, and any reform threatening these interests faced strong resistance, incentivizing the preservation of the traditional power pattern.

From a bottom-up political support perspective, the Creoles were always at a higher level of local power hierarchy during the colonial period, representing the political identity of the indigenous people and having some self-determination capacity over the lower social classes. Therefore, they naturally saw themselves as figures with legitimate authority. During the independence movement, the Creoles attracted indigenous groups

with common goals, such as ending colonial oppression and overthrowing Spanish authorities. With the backing of traditional leadership authority, the subordinate class naturally supported the anti-colonial alliance led by the Creoles. In the case of independence movements led by Bolívar, although many Afro-descendant soldiers joined the patriotic ranks motivated by promises of equality and freedom, figures like Manuel Piar and Admiral José Prudencio Padilla, both of Afro-descendant ancestry who contributed to the war, ultimately faced execution because the Creoles feared losing control over these emerging leaders. Despite the disappointments, many continued fighting, holding on to the hope that their loyalty would eventually compel the Creole leaders to fulfill their promises.

## 4 Conclusion

This article explored the legitimization of the Junta during Latin American independence using Max Weber's theory of authority. The analysis highlighted how legal-rational, charismatic, and traditional authority established the Junta's legitimacy. Firstly, the dissolution of the Spanish monarchy and the Constitution of Cádiz provided a legal basis for the Junta's emergence. Charismatic leaders like Simón Bolívar and San Martín mobilized the masses, crucial for the independence movement. Despite rebelling against Spanish authority, Creole elites sought to inherit and reinforce traditional power structures to maintain their societal privileges. This study helps analyze the complexity of the independence process and the roots of ongoing violence in Latin America. However, it lacks primary material and data analysis, and the reliance on Weber's theory of authority seems limited. Future studies should incorporate more legitimacy theories to comprehensively analyze power dynamics and social structural changes during the Junta's construction.

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