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Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara, USA

Today, most Latin American countries have begun to recognize ethnoracial distinctions, disadvantages and discrimination and they have begun to collect ethnoracial data, in what has been called the multicultural turn. Without such data, activists have claimed, governments could easily turn a blind eye to racial inequality and stick to a national mestizaje narrative of non-discrimination, racial harmony and equality.

As of 2014, 8 of the 19 Latin American countries collect ethnoracial data in their most recent census, for both their indigenous and Afrodescendant populations: Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Another seven countries collect such data only for the indigenous population: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Venezuela. Cuba has census information for its Afrodescendants but not for its indigenous people (del Popolo 2008). Both Uruguay and Peru have collected information on both groups in national household surveys and each plans to collect such data in its next census. The Dominican Republic has not collected official data on race since 1960 but is considering it for its next census (Republica Dominicana 2012). Besides Brazil, only Cuba has collected data on its black population in most of its censuses since the late-nineteenth century. Meanwhile several countries have long collected indigenous data, beginning with Bolivia in 1850 (del Popolo 2008; Loveman 2014). Despite these important beginnings, we see at least two major barriers to further efforts at data collection: making race/ethnicity a regular part of census taking and deciding how race and ethnicity are to be measured.

Aside from language data, each census has only one ethnoracial census question except in the case where blacks and indigenous are collected separately. The experiences of the Latin American censuses show that there is no consensus or standard way of measuring race and ethnicity in the region. Rather, politics and tradition seems to mostly determine how ethnoracial census taking is carried out (Ferrández and Kandolfer 2012; Loveman 2014). There is wide variation in how ethnoracial questions are worded and in the

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CONTACT Edward E. Telles ✉ etelles@soc.ucsb.edu

response categories used. In the 12-person multinational team known as the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA) we found that the questions and categories used in the census affected a country's ethnoracial composition and the extent of ethnoracial inequality (Telles and PERLA 2014; Telles, Flores, and Urrea-Giraldo 2015). We also recognized that particular classification methods might be equipped to explain some social phenomena better than others. As we came to see that there was no one-size-fits-all approach, we set out to explore alternatives using the PERLA surveys multiple measures of race and ethnicity.

In preparation for national surveys, PERLA team members discussed the particular way ethnoracial classifications were made in their own country; by comparing experiences across countries, we came to realize that we should test these alternatives against each other in the same questionnaire. We discussed the "polysemy" of categories such as indigenous and mestizo, in which the core of the concept is the same but with wide variations in meanings, often depending on the situation but in our case, often depending on the way the question was asked. We were motivated by the idea that race/ ethnic classification is fluid or in the region; we also knew about researchers' frustrating experiences with changing ethnoracial questions in subsequent censuses and surveys, as occurred in Colombia, Mexico and Peru. We challenged the idea that race/ethnicity is static or one-dimensional and came to agree that it could not be fully understood with a single census question.

Among the ethnoracial questions of Latin American censuses, there was wide variation in how questions were asked and in the response categories. For example, the 1993 Colombian census asked individuals if they identified as belonging to a black community; this question resulted in an official estimate of blacks as 1.5 per cent of the Colombian population. However, the 2005 census found 10.6 per cent of the Colombian population was black or mulatto, mostly it seems by changing the wording of the questionnaire; it asked respondents if they were black or mulatto based on their "culture or physical features". Thus the earlier census seems to have missed a large majority of Afro-Colombians by not asking about their physical features. A similar change occurred in Costa Rica: because of a comparable change in wording, the black and mulatto population grew from 2.0 to 7.8 per cent between the 2000 and 2011 censuses.

On the indigenous population, the Colombian and Brazilian censuses simply used the category "indigenous" and Mexico asks if they belong to the Nahuatl, Maya, Zapotec or similar indigenous groups; meanwhile countries like Bolivia and Guatemala provide various response categories for indigenous groups, including Aymara, Quechua, Kaqchikel and Kiche. Argentina and Uruguay asked respondents if they are of indigenous or African *descent*. In the PERLA survey, we also used the traditional census question of whether a person speaks an indigenous language.

Another issue was asking respondents whether they consider themselves to be white or mestizo. Brazil is exemplary in that the ethnoracial question in the Brazilian census asks whether one's race or colour is white, pardo (brown), black, indigenous or Asian. Ecuador includes the categories of white and mestizo in addition to indigenous and black. However, the Population Division of the UN's Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean (CELADE) exhorts countries to only ask respondents whether they are a minority group member, such as indigenous or black, since including the other categories draws persons away from the more stigmatized black and indigenous categories (del Popolo and Schkolnik 2012). Indeed, most countries do not include a mestizo or white category. Colombia offers only the minority categories and in Mexico, the census asks only about the indigenous population but in two ways: whether respondents identify as indigenous or whether they speak an indigenous language.

In the questionnaire that PERLA designed, we were thus interested in the effect of alternative questions in the same survey. We thus asked several questions on ethnoracial classification (Telles and PERLA 2014) that varied question wording and the response categories. We found, as we suspected, wide variation in who is classified as indigenous and black. For example, we found that using a question on "traditions and customs" and response categories that includes indigenous categories like Quechua and Aymara, that about 23 per cent of Peruvians are indigenous but when we asked how people consider themselves and use the single category "indigenous" that less than 5 per cent of the Peruvian population would be indigenous (Sulmont and Callirgos 2014). In another example, when we asked Brazilians to identify their (Silva and Paixão 2014) "colour or race" in an open-ended format 6 per cent identified as black using the "negro" category while interviewers classified nearly 60 per cent using the census's categories of *preto* and *pardo*. In their analysis of eight countries, Telles, Flores, and Urrea-Giraldo (2015) find that estimates of educational inequality based on skin colour revealed a clear racial hierarchy while self-identification using the census ethnoracial questions and categories often failed to do so. For example, mulatos in the Dominican Republic tended to have the highest levels of schooling among all ethnoracial groups but this seemed to reflect selectivity of highly educated persons choosing the increasingly used but traditionally stigmatized mulato category rather than the normative category of "indio".

Self-identification vs. other classification

Self-identification has become the standard method for collecting racial and ethnic data around the world (Morning 2008), which follows from a rights perspective that considers that all people have the right to identify themselves as they want. CELADE follows the mandate set by the International Labor Organization's Convention 169: self-identification is the primary criterion for

counting indigenous people. It seeks to extend this approach for counting Afrodescendants (del Popolo and Schkolnik 2012), though it seems to violate the right of all people to self-identify by limiting it to only the clearly disadvantaged ethnoracial groups.

Certainly, the practices that census interviewers used in the past to classify respondents were distasteful: they often disregarded the respondents' identities and people rightly viewed them as state efforts to categorize them (Nobles 2000). However, ironically, one could argue that states often violate the right to self-identification by imposing particular census questions and ethnoracial categories and forcing people to identify with—or reject—them. Moreover, the rule of self-identification is rarely followed, even where it is mandated. Censuses tend to rely on responses by a single person in the household who responds for the other household members—so most ethnoracial classification in censuses is actually based on classification by others (Telles 2004). Finally, census-takers are known to avoid asking the ethnoracial question because of time constraints, or out of politeness; instead they classify the respondent themselves (Telles 2004).

Self-identification is especially useful for understanding phenomena such as identity, willingness to join ethnic social movements and other social phenomena that tend to involve ethnoracial self-understanding. However, self-identification is less adequate for understanding social phenomena like discrimination, where others do the classifying, in ways that may be independent of how the person facing discrimination self-identifies. Since Latin America's system of ethnoracial classification is quite fluid (de la Cadena 2000; Telles and PERLA 2014), self-identification also allows individuals to escape from stigmatized cultural and phenotypic categories and identify with the dominant group. Thus it may hide or underestimate the actual disadvantages of indigenous and Afrodescendant peoples and those whose looks are especially typical of indigenous people, Afrodescendants and other nonwhites (according to social stereotypes), as others have found (Telles and Lim 1998; Bailey, Loveman, and Muniz 2013; Telles, Flores, and Urrea-Giraldo 2015).

How then do we monitor racial inequality and discrimination, a goal of modern ethnoracial statistics gathering (Morning 2008; del Popolo and Schkolnik 2012)? After all, isn't the appropriate monitoring of racial inequality and discrimination also a right? That is why we also examined external classifications as made by interviewers: ethnicity may be self-identified but it is also regularly defined by others. Race and ethnicity are not simply a matter of identity or consciousness. They also involve the gaze of the other.

The slippery (but important) measure of skin colour

Although ethnoracial classifications in Latin America tend to be more fluid than in other world regions, we contend that Latin Americans ordinarily

create cognitive social boundaries between themselves and others based on colour, phenotype and language. The visible manifestation of "colour" is particularly important in Latin America but it involves a continuum of difference rather than the usual categories associated with race and ethnicity. Early scholars on Brazil observed that Latin Americans often make colour distinctions on a continuum rather than the racial distinctions commonly made in the United States. Nogueira (1955) famously claimed that race in the United States refers to origin or ancestry while in Brazil it refers to colour or appearance.

We found that actual skin colour was a fundamental stratifying variable in Latin America and that social disadvantages were correlated with successively darker skin tones. In particular, since we believed that Latin Americans often use skin colour to assign greater worth to lighter-toned persons and lesser value to progressively darker persons. Ultimately, our analysis of skin colour proved us right: we found both that skin colour tended to be a better predictor of ethnoracial inequality than the traditional ethnoracial categories and that it was closely related to self-reported discrimination.

We understand colour as a race variable, but not one that is categorical as in most racial analysis, but rather continuous. Moreover, colour is a clearly visible characteristic that may discriminate among people who identify in the same race category but are actually of slightly different colours. In countries like Mexico and Ecuador, where mestizos constitute the large majority of the population, we found that skin colour differences among mestizos provided a further breakdown of the racial hierarchy (Telles and PERLA 2014).

There are various ways to measure skin colour. One could simply ask respondents to identify on the basis of colour, as the Brazilian and Cuban census have long done (Nobles 2000; Telles 2004; Loveman 2014) or one could have the interviewer evaluate colour as was done in a survey of Mexico (Villarreal 2010). However, we could further reduce the subjectivity and endogeneity in classification by providing actual colour samples to match to each respondent's colour. In PERLA, we thus created a colour palette, which interviewers used to rate the facial skin tone of respondents.

Another approach to measuring skin colour is the use of reflectance spectrophotometers or spectrometers. Spectrometers assess skin colour by measuring the amount of light reflected by the area of skin being evaluated. Dixon and Telles (2017) discuss further methodological issues including where on the body skin colour can be measured or other potential biases in measurement. Given the pros and cons associated with each measure of skin colour, it appears that sociological approaches to skin colour measurement will most benefit from taking a "multidimensional approach" to colour (Sen and Wasow 2014; Roth 2016). The appearance of skin colour is both contextual and variable; good social scientific measures should thus reflect the complexity of the world.

Conclusion

We have long known that race and ethnicity are particularly fluid in Latin America. At the same time, the manner in which censuses throughout the region design ethnoracial questions and use response categories vary widely. PERLA found that a country's particular design of the census ethnoracial item is highly consequential for measuring a nation's composition and the extent of its ethnoracial inequality. No one way to ask is necessarily better than the other but they may measure distinct dimensions of race and ethnicity. Therefore, social scientists should consider using multiple measures of race to capture this fluidity, including measures of skin colour.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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