

## Not Just Color: Whiteness, Nation, and Status in Latin America

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In the growing academic literature on race and ethnicity in Latin America, the primary focus of research has been on the marginalized: usually Afro-descendants (blacks and mulattoes) or indigenous people, and sometimes mestizos or mixed-race persons. While ideas of whiteness and white privilege are often implicit in this work, whiteness has rarely been directly studied, even though white persons are presumed to be at the top of the region's racial pigmentocracy. Instead, this study turns the analytic mirror directly onto the dominant white group rather than any of the subordinate groups. Since the early colonial period, whites have been the dominant status group and whiteness has represented power, wealth, privilege, and beauty in virtually every part of Spanish and Portuguese America, while Afro-descendants and indigenous persons have been at the bottom of the social structure. In the Spanish colonial system of *castas* and ever since, whiteness has been an asset in many areas of social life, though it is not as regulated or as rigidly defined today. In social interactions today as in the past, persons deemed white have been bestowed with formal and informal privileges, social deference, and positive attributes.

As in the United States and in many parts of the Western world, whiteness has long represented modernity and progress for many Latin American nations. For individual Latin Americans, it is used as a form of social capital that symbolizes and often entitles its bearers to privilege and status. In her ethnographic study in Rio de Janeiro, Robin E. Sheriff finds that local whites seek to preserve their whiteness through practices such as prohibiting children from

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intimate interaction with dark-skinned persons and staying out of the sun.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, she finds that although the extent to which her middle-class white subjects consciously construct and maintain their whiteness may be particularly Latin American or Brazilian, they often revealed a “transnational and deeply racialized notion of . . . whiteness” shared with the white populations of North America and Europe.<sup>2</sup> She observed that some middle-class white Brazilians resented the possibility that North Americans and Europeans could lump them together with their darker conationals, thus implicitly challenging their claims to a transnational whiteness.

Studies of racial classification in Latin America have usually stressed its ambiguity or flexibility and its phenotypic or appearance-based quality, especially in relation to the historically more rigid and ancestry-based concept of race in the United States.<sup>3</sup> The literature usually points to the ambiguity of classification among blacks, indigenous people, and mulattoes in particular but says little about whites except that some nonwhites, with enough status, may become white. An exception is Harry Hoetink, who argues that there is an idea of a “somatic norm” about who is white that varies by context, particularly between the Spanish Caribbean and those regions colonized by the French, Dutch, and English.<sup>4</sup>

Ambiguity thus allows for some movement across racial categories in Latin America. However, there seems to be some preference for lighter categories, as in the classification of children. For example, among intermarried Brazilian couples involving white and mixed-race spouses, a slight majority of their progeny are classified as white.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, there also is evidence that racial clas-

1. Robin E. Sheriff, *Dreaming Equality: Color, Race, and Racism in Urban Brazil* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2001).

2. *Ibid.*, 156.

3. Marvin Harris, “Referential Ambiguity in the Calculus of Brazilian Racial Identity,” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 26, no. 1 (1970): 1–14; Edward E. Telles, “Racial Ambiguity among the Brazilian Population,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25, no. 3 (2002): 415–41; Clarence C. Gravlee, “Ethnic Classification in Southeastern Puerto Rico: The Cultural Model of ‘Color,’” *Social Forces* 83, no. 3 (2005): 949–70. However, more recent authors find little racial ambiguity in Latin America: see Sheriff, *Dreaming Equality*; Tanya Golash-Boza, “Does Whitening Happen? Distinguishing between Race and Color Labels in an African-Descended Community in Peru,” *Social Problems* 57, no. 1 (2010): 138–56.

4. Harry Hoetink, *The Two Variants in Caribbean Race Relations: A Contribution to the Sociology of Segmented Societies*, trans. Eva M. Hooykaas (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967).

5. Edward E. Telles, *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004); Luisa Farah Schwartzman, “Does Money Whiten? Intergenerational Changes in Racial Classification in Brazil,” *American Sociological Review* 72, no. 6 (2007): 940–63.

sification may be affected by the bearer's social status.<sup>6</sup> This flexibility in racial classification permits us to examine identification as white as a sociological outcome that may vary according to social context rather than as a relatively fixed outcome.

National censuses have existed since the early nineteenth century in many Latin American countries and, in a few cases, before then. Many of these countries have sought to count their populations by race for political ends and, in the process, to shape experiences and meanings of citizenship.<sup>7</sup> In a historical and cross-national study of whiteness in Latin America, Mara Loveman analyzed the region's 45 racial censuses from 1850 to 1950, a period when race was based on enumerator observations.<sup>8</sup> She found through census documentation in several countries that racial divisions were treated as "self-evident" and solid, stable, and enduring.<sup>9</sup> Whites were assumed to be easily identifiable, as instructions for how to identify white respondents were conspicuously absent from enumerator manuals and other census documentation. Furthermore, all but one census listed *white* as the first available response choice, suggesting, along with other evidence in the census documentation, its nearly universal acceptance as the most valued category.<sup>10</sup> The one exception, the 1921 Mexican census, may prove the rule, as it came on the heels of the Mexican Revolution and the elevation of the *mestizo* as central to a new official national ideology. Since about the 1950s, racial classification in national censuses in Latin America<sup>11</sup> and throughout the world<sup>12</sup>

6. Marvin Harris, "Race Relations in Minas Velhas, a Community in the Mountain Region of Central Brazil," in *Race and Class in Rural Brazil*, ed. Charles Wagley, 2nd ed. (1952; New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1963), 62–81; Peter Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1993); Edward E. Telles and Nelson Lim, "Does It Matter Who Answers the Race Question? Racial Classification and Income Inequality in Brazil," *Demography* 35, no. 4 (1998): 465–74.

7. Melissa Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000); Mara Loveman, "Whiteness in Latin America: Measurement and Meaning in National Censuses (1850–1950)," *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* 95, no. 2 (2009): 207–34 (we also draw from an unpublished and expanded 2009 version of this article, "Whiteness in Latin America as Seen through Official Statistics, 1870–1930").

8. Loveman, "Whiteness in Latin America: Measurement and Meaning."

9. *Ibid.*, 226.

10. Nearly all censuses in the period included the category of *white* except for Guatemala and the 1950 censuses of Honduras and Bolivia. Correspondence with Loveman.

11. Loveman, "Whiteness in Latin America: Measurement and Meaning."

12. Ann Morning, "Ethnic Classification in Global Perspective: A Cross-National Survey of the 2000 Census Round," *Population Research and Policy Review* 27, no. 2 (2008): 239–72.

has become based on self-identity, revealing a shift from “race as a concept defined by a clearly bounded set of physical traits open to observation to race as an expression of subjective personal identity.”<sup>13</sup>

In the 2000s, largely as a result of international pressure and growing concern about minority rights, most Latin American countries began to collect race and ethnicity data, often for the first time in decades. However, among the 17 countries including race or ethnicity in the 2000 round of censuses, only 4—Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, and El Salvador—included a white category.<sup>14</sup> Among these 17 countries, all but Cuba and the Dominican Republic asked about indigenous identification, and 8 queried about black, mulatto, or Afro-descendant identification.<sup>15</sup> The small number of countries asking about identification as white may be due to the fact that whites are not supposed to exist according to some national ideologies (e.g., *mestizaje* in Mexico), or perhaps it is further evidence that whiteness is simply not problematized as it is for non-whites. As Loveman found for the historical censuses, *white* is listed first in three of the four contemporary cases where *white* is a response category (except Ecuador).<sup>16</sup>

The boundaries of whiteness are thought to be flexible even in the United States,<sup>17</sup> which is often characterized as having more rigid racial boundaries than Latin America, particularly because of the United States’ one-drop rule.<sup>18</sup> Scholarship by historians including David Roediger and Matthew Frye Jacobson has inspired whiteness studies in the United States by showing that European immigrants were not considered fully white at the time of their mass immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>19</sup> Rather, through a

13. Taeku Lee, “Between Social Theory and Social Science Practice: Toward a New Approach to the Survey Measurement of ‘Race,’” in *Measuring Identity: A Guide for Social Scientists*, ed. Rawi Abdelal et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 116.

14. Fabiana Del Popolo, *Los pueblos indígenas y afrodescendientes en las fuentes de datos: Experiencias en América Latina* (Santiago de Chile: Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe, 2008).

15. Neither the Dominican Republic nor Uruguay asked about race and ethnicity in their censuses, although Uruguay collected such data in their official national household surveys. *Ibid.*

16. Loveman, “Whiteness in Latin America: Measurement and Meaning.”

17. Hoetink, *Two Variants in Caribbean Race Relations*.

18. F. James Davis, *Who is Black? One Nation’s Definition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1991).

19. David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1999); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998).

historical process that included national mobilizations in two world wars, an unprecedented expansion of the American economy, and the distancing of these ethnic groups from African Americans, descendants of Central and Eastern European immigrants were able to become fully white by the 1970s.

Scholars have also found the boundaries of whiteness to be flexible in Latin America. Elite strategies of whitening have become an important topic for historians of Latin America.<sup>20</sup> Another study using a series of national censuses in Brazil shows that while the boundaries of whiteness were mostly stable for the population from 1940 to 1990, they appear to have contracted in later years as Brazilians increasingly identified in nonwhite categories.<sup>21</sup> Finally, Mara Loveman and Jeronimo O. Muniz's analysis of the 1910 and 1920 censuses of Puerto Rico found that the boundaries of whiteness expanded in the 1910s.<sup>22</sup>

### The Historical Importance of Whitening in Latin America

#### The Colonial Caste System

Historians have documented the long and often complicated history of race in Latin America, including the importance of whiteness as an aspiration for the nation and for individuals. In much of Spanish America, the Spanish authorities established a caste system based on the proportion of Spanish blood among its population, though phenotype or skin color was more often used since genealogies were generally unavailable except in the most elite families. Spaniards and their "pure-blooded" descendants were clearly aware of their privileged status as they were given full legal and social rights, which granted them access to elite jobs, schools, occupations, and various economic opportunities. Whiteness also bestowed pure-blooded Spaniards with honor and pride, as even lower-class whites treasured their racial purity as their "most precious and inalienable asset, an inheritance which entitled them to unquestioned legal superiority over nonwhites."<sup>23</sup> Whiteness also became a valued property in the marriage market

20. See Richard Graham, ed., *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1990); Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt, eds., *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2003).

21. José Alberto Magno de Carvalho, Charles H. Wood, and Flávia Cristina Drummond Andrade, "Estimating the Stability of Census-Based Racial/Ethnic Classifications: The Case of Brazil," *Population Studies* 58, no. 3 (2004): 331–43.

22. Mara Loveman and Jeronimo O. Muniz, "How Puerto Rico Became White: Boundary Dynamics and Intercensus Racial Reclassification," *American Sociological Review* 72, no. 6 (2007): 915–39.

23. George Reid Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires, 1800–1900* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 18.

for both whites and nonwhites, allowing the former to maintain high status for their children and permitting the latter to gain higher status for themselves and especially their children.<sup>24</sup>

The marriage market, though, was largely constrained by the highly uneven sex ratio among Spanish and Portuguese colonists, as their immigration to the Americas was largely male. The paucity of white women in the colonial period led to high rates of mixture among nonwhite women and white men, especially lower-class white men whose status reduced their marital prospects. Overall, racial mixture (*mestizaje*) was apparently greater in Latin America than in the United States, where a more balanced sex ratio among whites emerged from a more family-based immigration in the colonial period.<sup>25</sup> Some racially mixed persons were occasionally reclassified in lighter categories. Those with means purchased “*gracias al sacar*” certificates, which removed some of the legal obstacles associated with being considered nonwhite.<sup>26</sup> Eventually, Spaniards began to deploy the term *raza* instead of caste, especially in reference to persons of full or partial African ancestry.<sup>27</sup> As caste laws and colonial hierarchies disappeared and all became formally equal before the law, as generations of race mixture made castes unsustainable, and as mercantile capitalism expanded, ideas of lineage were gradually substituted with informal discourses of physical appearance.<sup>28</sup>

24. María de los Ángeles Acuña León and Doriam Chavarría López, “El mestizaje: La sociedad multirracial en la ciudad de Cartago, 1738–1821” (bachelor’s thesis, Universidad de Costa Rica, 1991); Jeffrey M. Shumway, “‘The Purity of My Blood Cannot Put Food on My Table’: Changing Attitudes towards Interracial Marriage in Nineteenth-Century Buenos Aires,” *The Americas* 58, no. 2 (2001): 201–20; Verena Martínez-Alier, *Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1989).

25. Telles, *Race in Another America*; Martínez-Alier, *Marriage, Class and Colour*; Lowell Gudmundson, “Black into White in Nineteenth-Century Spanish America: Afro-American Assimilation in Argentina and Costa Rica,” *Slavery and Abolition* 5, no. 1 (1984): 34–49.

26. Sarah C. Chambers, *From Subjects to Citizens: Honor, Gender, and Politics in Arequipa, Peru, 1780–1854* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1999); Gudmundson, “Black into White”; Mauricio Meléndez Obando, “Presencia de Africa en las familias costarricenses,” *La Nación Digital*, [http://www.nacion.com/In\\_ee/ESPECIALES/raices/preafric.html](http://www.nacion.com/In_ee/ESPECIALES/raices/preafric.html).

27. María Elena Martínez, “The Language, Genealogy, and Classification of ‘Race’ in Colonial Mexico,” in *Race and Classification: The Case of Mexican America*, ed. Iona Katzew and Susan Deans-Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2009), 25–42.

28. *Ibid.*; Meléndez Obando, “Presencia de Africa”; Alan Knight, “Racism, Revolution, and *Indigenismo*: Mexico, 1910–1940,” in Graham, *Idea of Race in Latin America*, 71–113.

## Nation Making and Whiteness

The early formation of many Latin American nations coincided with the period of scientific racism in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the concern for protecting racial purity increased during this period, as elites in these countries were more and more worried that the presence of significant black, indigenous, and mixed-race populations would limit their development.<sup>30</sup> In response, national elites, inspired by the growing field of eugenics, often sought to whiten local populations by promoting European immigration<sup>31</sup> and discouraging Asian and African immigrant flows.<sup>32</sup> Brazilian elites were particularly concerned, as a large majority of their population was nonwhite, and they went as far as subsidizing ship passages and providing land to entice European immigrants to settle in their country.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, Latin American and especially Brazilian elites, due to a belief in neo-Lamarckian genetics and constructive miscegenation, also encouraged intermarriage between whites and nonwhites in the optimistic belief that this would produce a whiter population, if not eventually a white population. Eugenicians believed this was possible because they thought both that white genes were stronger and could overcome the deficiencies of inferior black and indigenous

29. Nancy Leys Stepan, *"The Hour of Eugenics": Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991).

30. Ramón A. Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500–1846* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1991); Ann Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999); Martínez-Alier, *Marriage, Class and Colour*.

31. See Jose C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850–1930* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1998), 442, for extensive references on the promotion of European immigration to various countries in Latin America. The Costa Rican elite may have been exceptions in that they did not promote European immigration but rather an internal migration. See also Ronald Soto Quirós and David Díaz Arias, *Mestizaje, indígenas e identidad nacional en Centroamérica: De la colonia a las repúblicas liberales* (San José, Costa Rica: FLACSO, 2006).

32. Stepan, *"Hour of Eugenics"*; Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974); Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2001); Lara Elizabeth Putnam, "Ideología racial, práctica social y Estado Liberal en Costa Rica," *Revista de Historia* (San José), no. 39 (1999): 139–86.

33. Stepan, *"Hour of Eugenics"*; Skidmore, *Black into White*; Thomas H. Holloway, *Immigrants on the Land: Coffee and Society in São Paulo, 1886–1934* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1980).



genes and that whites were more fecund.<sup>34</sup> In countries like Brazil, El Salvador, and Bolivia, elites paid close attention to national censuses, often touting whitening and deblackening trends.<sup>35</sup>

#### Mestizaje Ideologies

However, with the demise of scientifically endorsed ideas of white supremacy in the 1930s, ideas of whitening would often be turned on their head and replaced with ideologies of mestizaje, or race mixing. Rather than see their histories of race mixture as harmful, several fledgling Latin American nations, realizing that they had large black, indigenous, and mixed-race populations and perceiving a need to create national homogeneity to prevent racial divisions, would develop new narratives that showcased racial mixture, intermarriage, mixed-race persons, and, sometimes, indigenous symbols.<sup>36</sup> These would be used to promote the idea that these countries were racially tolerant and thus morally superior to their segregated neighbor to the north, the United States.<sup>37</sup> Although these countries had promoted the status of mixed-race categories, the value and desire for whiteness continued to be strong, even in countries like Mexico and Brazil.<sup>38</sup> A perusal of the white (and often blonde) actors and actresses used in soap operas and advertisements for luxury items produced in countries such as Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela reveals the high value that is still given to whiteness today.<sup>39</sup>

34. On such genes discourse, see Skidmore, *Black into White*; Thomas M. Stephens, *Dictionary of Latin American Racial and Ethnic Terminology*, 2nd ed. (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 1999).

35. Skidmore, *Black into White*; Telles, *Race in Another America*; Loveman, "Whiteness in Latin America: Measurement and Meaning."

36. Knight, "Racism, Revolution, and *Indigenismo*"; Soto Quirós and Díaz Arias, *Mestizaje, indígenas e identidad nacional*; John Lynch, *Simón Bolívar: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2006).

37. Skidmore, *Black into White*; Knight, "Racism, Revolution, and *Indigenismo*"; Suzanne Bost, *Mulattas and Mestizas: Representing Mixed Identities in the Americas, 1850–2000* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2003).

38. Knight, "Racism, Revolution, and *Indigenismo*"; Skidmore, *Black into White*; Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship*.

39. Amelia Simpson, *Xuxa: The Mega-Marketing of Gender, Race, and Modernity* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1993).



### Social Status Effects on Racial Classification

Before his classic study about ambiguity in Brazilian racial classification,<sup>40</sup> Marvin Harris claimed that, based on his earlier study of a central Brazilian town, the category of whiteness included mulattoes of average or above-average wealth as well as wealthy blacks.<sup>41</sup> In Mexico, Porfirio Díaz, president of the country for 35 years before the Mexican Revolution, was described as “probably all white” by one contemporary observer, while at least one historian claims that he was “an almost pure Mixtec’ Indian.”<sup>42</sup> These ideas or observations reflect a common saying that “money whitens,” though the research literature is mixed about the truth of this saying. It is not clear if this money-whitening effect refers to actual changes in one’s racial classification or if it simply refers to improvements in social treatment. It is similarly unclear if there are limits based on race or color to changes in classification or treatment with higher status or if these changes are limited to only a few places or historical periods.

Several studies have found that whitening by status is limited or non-existent. Charles Wagley, the editor of the book that included the already cited studies by Harris and Harry W. Hutchinson,<sup>43</sup> contended that status gains just made nonwhites more acceptable to whites rather than actually allowing their reclassification as white. He also suggested that observations like those by Harris and Hutchinson were based on “naked eye’ judgments” that were affected by particular “social and cultural experience.”<sup>44</sup> Octavio Ianni’s study of middle-class blacks and mulattoes in Brazil finds that whitening is an ideology that permeates and guides their behaviors and aspirations as they seek to socially integrate with whites and distance themselves from black stereotypes, but that actual reclassification is rare.<sup>45</sup>

In her study of a Peruvian region with a predominance of Afro-descendants, Tanya Golash-Boza could not find a single person who became white because of

40. Harris, “Referential Ambiguity.”

41. Harris, “Race Relations in Minas Velhas.” For similar findings, see also Harry W. Hutchinson, “Race Relations in a Rural Community of the Bahian Recôncavo,” in Wagley, *Race and Class in Rural Brazil*, 16–46.

42. Knight, “Racism, Revolution, and *Indigenismo*,” 73.

43. Harris, “Race Relations in Minas Velhas”; Hutchinson, “Race Relations in a Rural Community.”

44. Charles Wagley, “Introduction,” in Wagley, *Race and Class in Rural Brazil*, 14.

45. Octavio Ianni, *Raças e Classes Sociais no Brasil* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1970).

wealth or status. According to her, no amount of status could whiten a person.<sup>46</sup> Residents rarely used intermediate categories and claimed that only an actual skin color transformation could whiten, as in the case of Michael Jackson.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Sheriff finds that residents of Rio de Janeiro made fairly clear black-white racial distinctions while intermediate categories were secondary, used merely in descriptions of skin color variations.<sup>48</sup>

Peter Wade argued that racial reclassification may occur only for persons near the boundary of racial categories, at least in the case of Colombia.<sup>49</sup> Analysts of Brazilian censuses and surveys have also shown that reclassification in lighter categories due to status is more likely to occur from black to mixed-race categories, while the white-nonwhite boundary is clearly more rigid.<sup>50</sup> Marisol de la Cadena similarly finds that indigenous migrants involved in commercial activity are more likely to identify as mestizo in Peru than those remaining to work in agriculture.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, researchers have found that in Mexico and Ecuador indigenous identities may be emphasized, often through “authentic” dress, where they offer strategic advantages in selling ethnic products or in making special claims to authorities.<sup>52</sup>

The measurement of whitening by status is variable across studies, and this may affect findings. Whitening measured in a particular way is not necessarily replicated when measured another way. That money or status whitens has been found when examining high-status appearance in relation to a person’s social class;<sup>53</sup> the effect of education on interviewer ratings in comparison to self-identity, or vice versa;<sup>54</sup> and the effect of parents’ education on their racial classification of their children.<sup>55</sup>

46. Golash-Boza, “Does Whitening Happen?”

47. *Ibid.*, 148.

48. Sheriff, *Dreaming Equality*.

49. Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture*.

50. Telles, “Racial Ambiguity”; Carvalho, Wood, and Andrade, “Estimating the Stability”; Loveman, “Whiteness in Latin America: Measurement and Meaning.”

51. Marisol de la Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos: The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, Peru, 1919–1991* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2000).

52. Lynn Stephen, “The Creation and Re-creation of Ethnicity: Lessons from the Zapotec and Mixtec of Oaxaca,” *Latin American Perspectives* 23, no. 2 (1996): 17–37; David Kyle, “The Otavalo Trade Diaspora: Social Capital and Transnational Entrepreneurship,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 2 (1999): 422–46.

53. Harris, “Race Relations in Minas Velhas”; Hutchinson, “Race Relations in a Rural Community.”

54. Telles, “Racial Ambiguity.”

55. Schwartzman, “Does Money Whiten?”

In contrast, the new era of multiculturalism may have changed the direction in which status affects classification or identity. In Brazil, a greater opportunity for attending college is made possible in universities with racial quotas, which have been shown to increase identification as *negro*.<sup>56</sup> For the Dominican Republic, David Howard contends that some dark-skinned persons, particularly those of the middle and upper classes with secure socioeconomic standings, have begun to explore their non-European roots and to take on mulatto rather than the more ambiguous *indio* identity.<sup>57</sup>

### Recent Changes in White Identity? Possible Age Effects

As Latin American countries recognize racism and develop new narratives about multiculturalism, at the same time their populations are increasingly exposed to other countries through immigration, popular culture, and media. With these changes, nonwhite identities may be increasingly used. Deborah Yashar and Charles Hale argue that in response to neoliberalism, the 1990s was a decade of strong indigenous mobilization and pro-Indian legislative initiatives, which led to a reevaluation of indigenous identities.<sup>58</sup> Institutional and political initiatives about indigenous ethnicity in Colombia in the 1990s, such as Law 70, also led to the emergence of black identities.<sup>59</sup> Also important may be the role of nonwhites as purveyors of popular culture (sometimes in a negative way, but often in positive roles), which may raise the value of black or mulatto identity and thus diminish the incentives to identify as white.<sup>60</sup>

Further evidence on growing nonwhite, and therefore contracting white, identities comes in the way of shifts in the racial composition of Brazil, where

56. Andrew M. Francis and Maria Tannuri-Pianto, "Endogenous Race in Brazil: Affirmative Action and the Construction of Racial Identity among Young Adults," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 61, no. 4 (2013): 731–53.

57. David Howard, *Coloring the Nation: Race and Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic* (Oxford: Signal Books, 2001).

58. Deborah J. Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005); Charles R. Hale, *Más que un Indio (More than an Indian): Racial Ambivalence and Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Guatemala* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2006).

59. Arturo Escobar, *Territories of Difference: Place, Movements, Life*, Redes (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2008).

60. Mark Q. Sawyer, "Du Bois's Double Consciousness versus Latin American Exceptionalism: Joe Arroyo, Salsa, and Négritude," in *Transnational Blackness: Navigating the Global Color Line*, ed. Manning Marable and Vanessa Agard-Jones (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 135–48.

the 2000 census and subsequent population estimates based on national surveys reveal that the white proportion of the national population is diminishing while the nonwhite proportion has increased. This is likely attributable, at least in part, to changing racial politics, including affirmative action.<sup>61</sup>

### National Differences and White Identity

The extent to which people identify as white may depend on their national context. Hoetink found that a “somatic norm,” which he defines as the complex of physical characteristics accepted by a group as its norm and ideal, varies between the Spanish-speaking Caribbean (basically, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico) and the Caribbean colonized by the Dutch, French, and English.<sup>62</sup> Although he limited himself to the greater Caribbean region and he considered his comparisons as limited to countries with almost no indigenous populations, Hoetink suggests that these societies developed three-tier social and racial structures (white, mulatto, and black) in response to economic needs, in particular national contexts. Because of this, “one and the same person may be considered white in the Dominican Republic or Puerto Rico, and ‘coloured’ in Jamaica, Martinique, or Curaçao,” or “called a ‘Negro’” in the US South.<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately, Hoetink did not explore differences among a range of Latin American countries, but he rejected the idea that whiteness and blackness were generalizable notions, proposing instead that differences in national economies and histories may shape racial classification.

Thomas Stephens’s *Dictionary of Latin American Racial and Ethnic Terminology* provides 16 distinct usages of the Spanish term *blanco* that range from the commonly cited “person with white skin color,” a “mestizo” in Ecuador, a “person whose skin color appears less Indian than white” in Peru, to a “white or non-white person considered important, wealthy or dictatorial” in Colombia, Panama, and Peru.<sup>64</sup> There are also eight definitions for the Portuguese word *branco* with similar variation. In addition, there are more than 100 variants of both terms in which *white* is used with adjectives or the word is altered, such as *blanco retinto* (“white person with dark skin color” in Cuba), *blanquito* (“Indian person with somewhat white skin color” in Ecuador), or *blanco de la tierra* (“Dominican, no

61. Telles, *Race in Another America*; Francis and Tannuri-Pianto, “Endogenous Race in Brazil.”

62. Hoetink, *Two Variants in Caribbean Race Relations*.

63. *Ibid.*, xii.

64. Stephens, *Dictionary of Latin American*.

matter what race or color”). All these and other definitions of whiteness seem to be based on skin color, though they also reveal differences that suggest that national variations could be meaningful. However, the frequency or manner in which these connotations of the term *white* are shared nationally or regionally is not known, from this or any other source. With this study, we expect to show national differences in the term’s use today. To understand patterns in national differences, we draw on historical and social science evidence. We follow this with hypotheses based on that research.

Though the United States may be considered extreme, the comparison of Mexican Americans with Mexican nationals illustrates how national contexts shaped the identity of the same population as either white or non-white. In the mid-twentieth century, Mexican American political leaders fought discrimination in the US Southwest by seeking acceptance as white.<sup>65</sup> This occurred at the same time that mestizos and mestizaje were glorified in Mexico, perhaps to showcase Mexico’s moral superiority to its northern neighbor, whose racism was shown by its treatment of people of Mexican origin.<sup>66</sup> Thus, classification of the Mexican-origin population as white was considered an important political and individual strategy in the US context, whereas Mexican American mestizos were often considered at least officially white.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, incentives to classify as white rather than mestizo in Mexico were reversed because mestizophilia had raised the value of mixed-racedness by challenging the notion of white purity and the idea that miscegenation was an impediment to progress.<sup>68</sup> In the United States, *mestizo* was seen as a low- or intermediate-status category, while mestizos in Mexico were considered part, if not most, of the dominant group, along with whites. By the time of the Chicano movement in the 1960s, however, Chicano lead-

65. This was in contrast to the strategy of African Americans (who did not have that choice) and the next generation of Mexican Americans, who combated discrimination by arguing that the Constitution protected all, regardless of race. See Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997).

66. José Vasconcelos, the author of *La raza cósmica* (1925) and Mexico’s minister of education, had resided in Texas himself and experienced anti-Mexican discrimination. See Knight, “Racism, Revolution, and *Indigenismo*.”

67. Foley, *White Scourge*; Ian F. Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1996).

68. Alexandra Minna Stern, “Eugenics and Racial Classification in Modern Mexican America,” in Katzew and Deans-Smith, *Race and Classification*, 151–73.

ers would seek out mestizo identities in order to reclaim and affirm nonwhite or indigenous identities. Ironically, mestizo identities in Mexico, from the presumed perspective of the indigenous minorities, could be seen as denying indigenous identities.<sup>69</sup>

#### Whitening versus Mestizaje

Argentina and Costa Rica may be similar to the United States, with its historical emphasis on whiteness well into the twentieth century. According to Lowell Gudmundson, Argentina and Costa Rica were exceptions to the mestizaje turn in most Latin American nations. Instead, these two countries would continue to have “Social Darwinist national ideolog[ies] of whiteness and superiority,” mostly rejecting ideas of mestizaje.<sup>70</sup> Argentina had a relatively large slave population in the mid-nineteenth century, but Afro-Argentines disproportionately died from disease and war, and their numbers would be swamped through massive European immigration. Moreover, intermarriage with the much-larger European population in successive generations reduced the Afro-descendant population through a multigenerational process of race mixture from black to mulatto and eventually to *trigueño* and then fully white.<sup>71</sup> Eventually, Argentine elites were able to achieve their goal of national whitening.<sup>72</sup> In Costa Rica, elites and the popular classes proclaimed themselves all part of the same “great national white family,” even though there was racial mixture among them.<sup>73</sup>

#### Indigenous versus Black

Political scientist Juliet Hooker claims that, in social policies throughout the region, Afro-descendants and mixtures involving African ancestry were given lower status and less consideration than indigenous persons and mixtures involving them,<sup>74</sup> which is consistent with ideas held throughout the Spanish

69. Rafael Pérez-Torres, *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Culture* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2006); Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization*, trans. Philip A. Dennis (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1996).

70. Gudmundson, “Black into White,” 34.

71. *Ibid.*; Andrews, *Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires*.

72. Andrews, *Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires*; Shumway, “‘Purity of My Blood.’”

73. Putnam, “Ideología racial, práctica social,” 144.

74. Juliet Hooker, “Indigenous Inclusion / Black Exclusion: Race, Ethnicity and Multicultural Citizenship in Latin America,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37, no. 2 (2005): 285–310.

colonial empire.<sup>75</sup> This is also consistent with an apparent preference overall for the indigenous in the colonial period. Josep Fradera, like other historians, argues that an old Spanish aversion to and distrust of nonwhites was directed above all at Africans and their descendants, possibly because of a fear of “infection from Islam.”<sup>76</sup> In social interactions in the Americas, mixture with indigenous blood seemed less problematic. Magnus Mörner quotes several travelers who argued that many times mestizos could not be distinguished from whites. One proclaimed that “there are no other differences in their facial features, body shape, way of talking nor in their way of pronouncing.” Mörner also cites the Spanish travelers Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa, who in a letter to the Spanish king recognized that it was easy to confuse mestizos with Spaniards because mestizos sometimes “seemed more Spanish than those who actually were.”<sup>77</sup> Countries like Mexico, El Salvador, and Honduras often glorified an indigenous past by elevating heroes like Cuauhtémoc (in Mexico), Atlacatl (in El Salvador), or Lempira (in Honduras), though they had previously labeled indigenous peoples as barbaric and their treatment of contemporary indigenous people left much to be desired.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, the goals of homogenizing its national identity as white or mixed were never consolidated in Guatemala, where ladino and indigenous/Mayan identities were often more important than a national identity.<sup>79</sup>

Hence, we expect that the extent to which people identify as white will likely depend upon their national contexts. The interplay of factors such as national ideologies, local histories, actions of the elites, and population makeup

75. Josep M. Fradera, “Does Caste become Class in Spanish America? Continuity and Change in Social Distinctions” (paper presented at “Inventing Race in the Americas,” University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, 16. Apr. 2010); Luis Lira Montt, “El estatuto de limpieza de sangre en Indias,” *Hidalguía: La revista de genealogía, nobleza y armas*, no. 278 (2000): 177–202; Martínez, “Language, Genealogy, and Classification of ‘Race.’”

76. Fradera, “Does Caste become Class,” 19–22. On this point, see also Lira Montt, “El estatuto de limpieza”; and Martínez, “Language, Genealogy, and Classification of ‘Race.’”

77. Magnus Mörner, “La inmigración Europea y la formación de las sociedades Ibéricas,” in *Historia general de América Latina*, vol. 3, *Consolidación del orden colonial*, ed. Alfredo Castillero Calvo and Allan J. Kuethe (Paris: Éditions UNESCO, 1999), 415–28.

78. Knight, “Racism, Revolution, and *Indigenismo*”; Soto Quirós and Díaz Arias, *Mestizaje, indígenas e identidad nacional*; Darío A. Euraque, “La construcción del mestizaje y los movimientos políticos en Honduras: Los casos de los generales Manuel Bonilla, Gregorio Ferrera y Tiburcio Carías Andino,” in *Estado, poder, nacionalidad y raza en la historia de Honduras: Ensayos* (Tegucigalpa, Honduras: Ediciones Subirana, 1996), 69–89.

79. Peter Fleer, “El factor étnico en la formación de las naciones centroamericanas,” *Iberoamericana* 2, no. 8 (2002): 30; Hale, *Más que un Indio*.



could increase or reduce the appeal of whiteness as a coveted social category in each Latin American country.

#### Multiculturalism and the New Racial Politics

Today, multiculturalism seems to be replacing older ideas of *mestizaje* in many Latin American nations, as the case of Brazil shows, though the changes vary from being merely inscribed in law or in reformed constitutions to involving political actions that threaten white privilege. This is especially apparent in Bolivia—where Evo Morales, of Aymara heritage, has become president and the name of the country is now the Plurinational State of Bolivia—and in Brazil, where prodiversity racial quotas have been initiated in several leading universities. Whereas *mestizaje* sought to homogenize or downplay racial and ethnic diversity throughout the region, this new period of multiculturalism has witnessed the emergence of indigenous and Afro-descendant identities, allowing ethnic minorities, to varying degrees, to make claims on the state.<sup>80</sup>

#### White Identity and Relational Interaction

Besides looking at larger macro contexts, a part of the literature has explored the ways in which racial categories are deployed at the level of personal interaction. Just as whether one is considered white may vary if one is in Argentina or Brazil, one's racial identity may also vary depending on whom one is interacting with. For example, a person might be more likely to assert a white identity when surrounded by lighter- or darker-skinned people compared to when he or she is around persons of similar color. Thus, racial identity may be relational to the others around an individual. In the context of a survey, one interacts with the interviewer, who tends to be the only other person in the survey situation. Even though interviewers are trained to dress well, be objective, and not emit opinions, respondents probably cannot help but notice their color, especially when they are asked about their own racial identity. This is often referred to as “interviewer bias” in the US sociological literature, and “interviewer race” is known to often affect responses to sensitive questions, as when respondents conceal their true political or race-based beliefs in the presence of an interviewer of another race. We know little about the effect of such interviewer bias on racial identity.

80. Hooker, “Indigenous Inclusion / Black Exclusion”; Mark Q. Sawyer and Tianna S. Paschel, “‘We Didn’t Cross the Color Line, the Color Line Crossed Us’: Blackness and Immigration in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and the United States,” *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 4, no. 2 (2007): 303–15.

**Hypotheses**

We have shown a growing literature that provides a wealth of theories about how racial identity is formed in Latin America. These theories may appear contradictory, but this may be because they are supported by only partial evidence, often focusing on a particular nation, social class, or some other characteristic. Moreover, evidence is rarely systematic enough to allow an examination of entire populations rather than population subgroups. Even more uncommon, perhaps nonexistent, is systematic population evidence that examines the entire Latin American region. In this article we pay particular attention to self-identification as white, based on population evidence for nearly all of Latin America. We believe that there is variation in who identifies as white and, moreover, that this self-identification varies in nonrandom ways. We present six hypotheses about patterns for who identifies as white that we will test in the remainder of this paper. They are based on our review of the literature, beginning with the idea, on which there is near consensus, that race is significantly ambiguous in the region, especially when compared to the United States.

Hypothesis 1 (ambiguity): Identity as white is ambiguous and cannot be determined solely on the basis of color.

Hypothesis 2 (status effects): Higher-status persons are more likely than low-status persons to identify as white.

Hypothesis 3 (age effects): Younger persons are less likely to identify as white.

Hypothesis 4 (national effects: whitening versus *mestizaje*): The likelihood of identifying as white among similarly colored persons is greater in countries with strong and persistent whitening ideologies, such as Argentina, Costa Rica, and Uruguay.

Hypothesis 5 (national effects: indigenous versus black): The likelihood of identifying as white or racially mixed is greater where a mixture with black/African peoples is more common than a mixture with indigenous peoples.

Hypothesis 6 (relational interaction): The likelihood of identifying as white will depend on the skin color of the survey taker.

**Data**

In this study, we examine how color, sociodemographic factors, and national contexts influence who identifies as white throughout Latin America through a series of nationally representative surveys from the 2010 AmericasBarometer,

which were collected by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) based at Vanderbilt University.<sup>81</sup> The 2010 AmericasBarometer conducted nationally representative face-to-face surveys of adults in 24 countries of the Western Hemisphere. The sample size for each country usually consists of approximately 1,500 randomly selected respondents in each country, though the sample size is 2,000–3,000 for Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, and Ecuador. Nationally representative household survey data permit conclusions for the general populations of nearly all the countries in the Latin American region and allow us to assess the relative magnitude of national and sociodemographic effects on whitening.

Using an ethnicity module developed for the 2010 AmericasBarometer, we are able to analyze who considers themselves white in several Latin American countries for the first time. We use self-identity in this study rather than categorization by others because it has become the international standard for racial or any other kind of classification in national censuses.<sup>82</sup> Though acts like discrimination depend on classification by others, topics like political mobilization and self-esteem depend more on self-identity. Clearly the two are related, as social behaviors based on self-identity are often in response to treatment by others. Self-identification is a reflective process involving one's own experiences, including not only how one is categorized by others but also how one would like to be known.<sup>83</sup>

Unlike the censuses, the AmericasBarometer directly asks each respondent

81. We thank LAPOP, its director, Mitchell Seligson, and his hardworking staff, especially Dominique Zephyr and Abbie Córdova. We also thank its major supporters (the United States Agency for International Development, the United Nations Development Program, the Inter-American Development Bank, and Vanderbilt University) for making the data available and for including an ethnicity module designed by the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA) at Princeton University, which was funded by the Ford Foundation and Princeton University.

82. Morning, "Ethnic Classification in Global Perspective"; Lee, "Between Social Theory." In reality, though, census race questions continue to be determined mostly by others. First of all, generally only one person in each household answers the decennial census, and that person determines the race of all household members. Also, evidence for Brazil shows that interviewers continue to determine the racial or color classification of respondents, even though they are instructed to ask respondents to classify themselves and household members. See Fulvia Rosemberg et al., "A Classificação de Cor no Brasil" (unpublished manuscript, 1993); Telles, *Race in Another America*. In this study, however, all respondents were each asked to self-identify.

83. Richard Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations* (1997; London: SAGE Publications, 1998); Telles, *Race in Another America*.

how they consider themselves in color/racial/ethnic terms. We examine 17 of the 19 Latin American countries. We do not include Guatemala because that survey does not include the white response option. Instead, it uses only the categories *indígena* and *ladino*, with the latter basically referring to all nonindigenous (or non-Mayan) persons.<sup>84</sup> We also do not include Cuba, where LAPOP was not permitted to conduct a representative survey except under supervision, which would have arguably altered the responses.

For most of the countries, our dependent variable, identification as white, was based on the question: “Do you consider yourself white, mestizo, indigenous, black, mulatto, or other?”<sup>85</sup> In all countries, the first part of the question (how do you consider yourself?) is the same, but the response categories differ in a minority of the national cases. In all but Guatemala, the white response option is used. However, the response options varied from the standard question in Venezuela, Brazil, and the Dominican Republic.

In Venezuela, the category *moreno* is merely added to the common list. In the Dominican Republic, though they have never had a racial census, the AmericasBarometer uses the locally recognized categories of *blanca*, *India*, *negra*, *mulata*, and *indígena*.<sup>86</sup> In Brazil, the response options are like those of its national census and are in Portuguese: *branca* (white), *preta* (black), *parda* (brown or mixed race), *amarela* (Asian), and *indígena* (indigenous).

Skin color ratings are common in many surveys about racial discrimination and racial attitudes in the United States but have rarely been used in Latin America. The availability of a variable denoting skin color as observed by the

84. The AmericasBarometer field staff in Guatemala, as well as the literature we examined, suggest that very few Guatemalans would identify as white. Unlike any other Latin American country, Guatemalan censuses have regularly used the *ladino*/indigenous classification since 1897, when it fused the white and mestizo categories. See Loveman, “Whiteness in Latin America: Measurement and Meaning.” A similar *ladino*/indigenous categorization was used in the 1950 Honduran census, and the 1950 Bolivian census used an indigenous/nonindigenous scheme. See Loveman, “Whiteness in Latin America: Measurement and Meaning”; Euraque, “La construcción del mestizaje.”

85. The question in Spanish is “¿Usted se considera una persona blanca, mestiza, indígena, negra, mulata u otra?”

86. The common racial categories in the Dominican Republic are unlike those of most other Latin American countries and have to do with the country’s distinct history, especially its complicated history with neighboring Haiti and Haitians, who are considered black in contrast to Dominicans. See Ginetta E. B. Candelario, *Black behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2007); Ernesto Sagás, “The 2004 Presidential Election in the Dominican Republic,” *Electoral Studies* 24, no. 1 (2005): 156–60.

interviewer allows us to reasonably fix actual skin tone, which, by definition, would seem to be the primary factor accounting for identification as white. Interviewers in the AmericasBarometer rated the skin color of each respondent according to a skin color palette comprised of 11 skin tones, numbered from 1 to 11 based on increasing darkness of skin tone.<sup>87</sup> Interviewers were advised that we were interested in rating skin color because social science evidence has shown that ordinary people commonly evaluate the skin color of others in everyday interactions and often treat them according to ideas based on color and race. Moreover, interviewers were trained to familiarize themselves with the palette and to rate the color of the respondent's face according to the most proximate color on the palette without showing it to the respondent. The palette itself was extensively pretested and created using a wide range of skin colors found in Internet photographs.

Though such skin color evaluations by interviewers are not perfect by any means, we believe they closely capture respondents' actual color, as we will illustrate by highlighting their high correlation with ethnoracial identity in table 1 and figure 1. Certainly, other phenotypic characteristics, such as facial features and hair, might also affect racial classification, but data on these are not available. However, we expect that they are likely to be closely correlated with skin color.

#### Individual-Level Variables

We expect that skin color will, of course, be closely related to self-identification as white, but in addition we also hypothesize that white identity may be influenced by education, age, gender, and rural residence. Given the attention paid to the effects of status on racial classification, we test whether levels of education contribute to classification as white. Education is based on three groups: primary education and less, junior high school and high school, and some college and above. By regressing identification as white on completed years of schooling, we thus assess the independent effect of educational level on identifying as white, while holding skin color, age, gender, and rural residence, along with country of residence, constant. Our hypothesis is that persons of higher social strata are more likely to identify as white, which is consistent with a "money (or status) whitens" hypothesis. There have been no systematic cross-national comparisons of this phenomenon, as far as we know.

87. The actual color palette can be viewed at <http://perla.princeton.edu/perla-color-palette>.

We also test the statistical effects of age, gender, and rural residence on racial self-identification. While these factors are known to affect many social, economic, and political behaviors, little is known about their effect on racial identity. Age is a continuous variable, gender is a dichotomous variable (women/men) in which we present the coefficient for women in the model, and type of residence is also a dichotomous variable (rural/urban) in which we present the coefficient for rural residence.

Regarding age, Simon Schwartzman found in a national 1998 survey that younger persons in Brazil are less likely to identify as white and more likely to classify themselves in the nonwhite categories,<sup>88</sup> apparently because the latter have become less stigmatized and blackness has become an integral part of Brazilian youth culture.<sup>89</sup> We would expect that young persons or those with recent college experience would be especially likely to identify as nonwhite in Brazil because of affirmative action.

We could not find any research on how gender and rural residence affect white racial identity, though there is some evidence about the effect of gender on indigenous and black identity. Ethnographic studies have shown that women are especially likely to “perform” indigeneity or to make their indigenous identities more visible,<sup>90</sup> suggesting a heightened indigenous identity and a desire to draw clear ethnic distinctions from others. Edward Telles finds that dark-skinned women in Brazil are less likely to be classified in the *preto* (black) category than men because it is considered particularly offensive when applied to women, but this did not seem to affect identity as white.<sup>91</sup> Finally, rural residence might represent characteristics that affect racial identity such as ties to land and indigeneity, more conservative values, and distance from modern influences, and it might be an important control regarding the amount of exposure to sun, which we discuss later.

88. Simon Schwartzman, “Fora de foco: Diversidade e identidades étnicas no Brasil,” *Novos Estudos CEBRAP* 55 (1999): 83–96.

89. Livio Sansone, *Blackness without Ethnicity: Constructing Race in Brazil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

90. De la Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos*; Sarah D. Warren, “How Will We Recognize Each Other as Mapuche? Gender and Ethnic Identity Performances in Argentina,” *Gender and Society* 23, no. 6 (2009): 768–89.

91. Telles, “Racial Ambiguity.”

### National Variation

A major innovation in this essay is to examine whether identification as white varies by country. Racial identification seems to have been subject to national strategies and constructions of race. Given the lack of cross-national studies of classification in Latin America, the influence of national strategies on individual classification has been missed (as far as we know), though historical research provides many clues. For example, it remains a question whether countries like Mexico and Brazil, where ideas of race mixture replaced ideas of whitening, have a greater tendency for individuals to identify as mestizo or mixed race than countries like Argentina and Costa Rica, where mestizaje ideologies did not take hold.

### Findings

According to the censuses and national surveys, the white population varies widely across Latin America. The second column of table 1 shows the percentage of the population identifying as white among the 17 countries in this study, while the fifth column shows the mean skin color rating for each country. The white percentage is based on the 2000 round of censuses in the countries where they are available (Brazil, Ecuador, and El Salvador) and on the Americas-Barometer/LAPOP data in the remaining 14 countries. The percentage of the population that self-identifies as white ranges from 73 percent in Argentina to 7 percent in Bolivia. Other countries with majority white populations are, by order of white proportion, Uruguay, Chile, Brazil, and Costa Rica. Countries with less than 15 percent white population also include the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, and Peru.

Note that the numbers from the surveys, though random or nationally representative, do not document the exact racial composition, or any other variable, as would be documented by the census. Rather, for a random survey of 1,500 persons, these numbers are estimates that lie within a margin of error of plus or minus 2.5 percentage points at most. According to statistical theory, that margin is based on a 95 percent degree of confidence. Thus a finding of a 10 percent white population in the Dominican Republic means that if a census with 100 percent national coverage were conducted at the same time using the exact same question and response categories, we can be fairly confident that the actual proportion would be somewhere in the range of 7 to 13 percent, 95 percent of the time.

Table 1 also shows the mean and standard deviation of skin color ratings



Table 1. Percentage of national populations that identify as white and summary statistics of their skin color and that of the national population for 17 Latin American countries in 2010

Country	Population identifying as white (%)	Skin color for whites		Skin color for national population	
		Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Argentina	73	3.0	1.1	3.2	1.3
Bolivia	7	3.3	1.6	5.0	1.5
Brazil	53.7	3.0	1.3	4.5	2.0
Chile	63	3.0	1.3	3.4	1.3
Colombia	32	3.0	1.1	4.1	1.4
Costa Rica	52	3.7	1.1	4.5	1.4
Dominican Republic	10	3.2	1.2	5.0	1.8
Ecuador	10.4	2.9	1.2	4.1	1.4
El Salvador	12.7	3.4	1.2	4.4	1.4
Honduras	28	3.2	0.8	4.7	1.8
Mexico	17	2.9	1.3	4.1	1.5
Nicaragua	18	3.8	0.9	4.8	1.4
Panama	32	3.1	1.0	5.0	2.0
Paraguay	31	3.7	1.2	4.6	1.4
Peru	13	3.1	1.2	4.2	1.4
Uruguay	72	3.0	1.2	3.5	1.5
Venezuela	34	2.9	1.2	4.4	1.7

Source: 2010 AmericasBarometer for most figures; the percentages for white identity in Brazil, Ecuador, and El Salvador are based on most recent census estimates.

for whites and for each national population, according to the LAPOP surveys. For the mean skin color rating of whites, most of the countries fall tightly near 3 (a pinkish-brown category), specifically between 2.9 and 3.2. The standard deviations range from 0.8 in Honduras and 0.9 in Nicaragua to 1.6 in Bolivia, which is illustrated in the shapes of the white distributions in figure 1. Table 1 suggests that the color mean of whiteness is somewhat consistent across the region, falling between 2.9 and 3.8, with those scoring higher than 3.1 being only relatively small countries. Indeed, the average falls in the narrow range between 2.9 and 3.1 in the seven largest countries in Latin America (Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, and Chile), although there is variation in the range around the means. Thus for the region as a whole and for

all the large countries, whiteness seems to have a fairly common meaning and practice, at least in terms of skin tone, and would thus seem to function as a recognizable transnational category. One would not necessarily have expected this, given the literature's emphasis on the malleability of racial identities in different contexts. However, the multivariate analysis suggests greater national variation once the relevant variables are controlled.

The last two columns of table 1 reveal the mean skin color rating of the national population and its standard deviation, which illustrates the extent of color diversity in each country. The skin color mean and standard deviation of the Argentine population in general is similar to that for whites, reflecting the fact that the large majority of that country's population identifies as white and that there is relatively little deviation from that somatic norm. Chile is close to Argentina in the amount of somatic lightness among the population. Uruguay is also in the 3s in average skin tone, though the mean is a bit darker due to a small Afro-descendant population; for this reason, there is somewhat more dispersal around the mean than in Argentina and Chile.<sup>92</sup> In contrast, Bolivians, Dominicans, and Panamanians have the darkest mean skin tones at about 5 (a light medium-brown color). This reflects the largest nonwhite populations in Latin America in the first two countries and the proportionately largest self-identified black population, at 15 percent, in Panama. All other countries have skin tone means which fall in the 4s. With a standard deviation of 2.0, Brazil and Panama have the greatest color diversity in the region.

We present the distribution of ethnoracial identity along the 11 tones of the color palette with a series of line graphs for each country in figure 1. We present the distributions for persons identifying as white, mestizo, indigenous, mulatto/pardo, or black if persons identifying as such numbered at least 3 percent, which is about 50 persons in most countries. To the mulatto distributions we added morenos in the Venezuelan case and indios in the Dominican case. The individual graphs generally show normal or bell-shaped distributions for each ethnoracial category along the skin color ratings, reflecting the fact that race and ethnicity are related to color. The width of the distributions reflects the color diversity of each group.

Furthermore, the ethnoracial distributions overlap significantly on the skin color continuum, revealing porousness or ambiguity among the categories. However, persons identifying as white are clearly in the lightest range, almost always falling within the 1 to 4 rating. Figure 1 shows, however, that a

92. George Reid Andrews, *Blackness in the White Nation: A History of Afro-Uruguay* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2010).

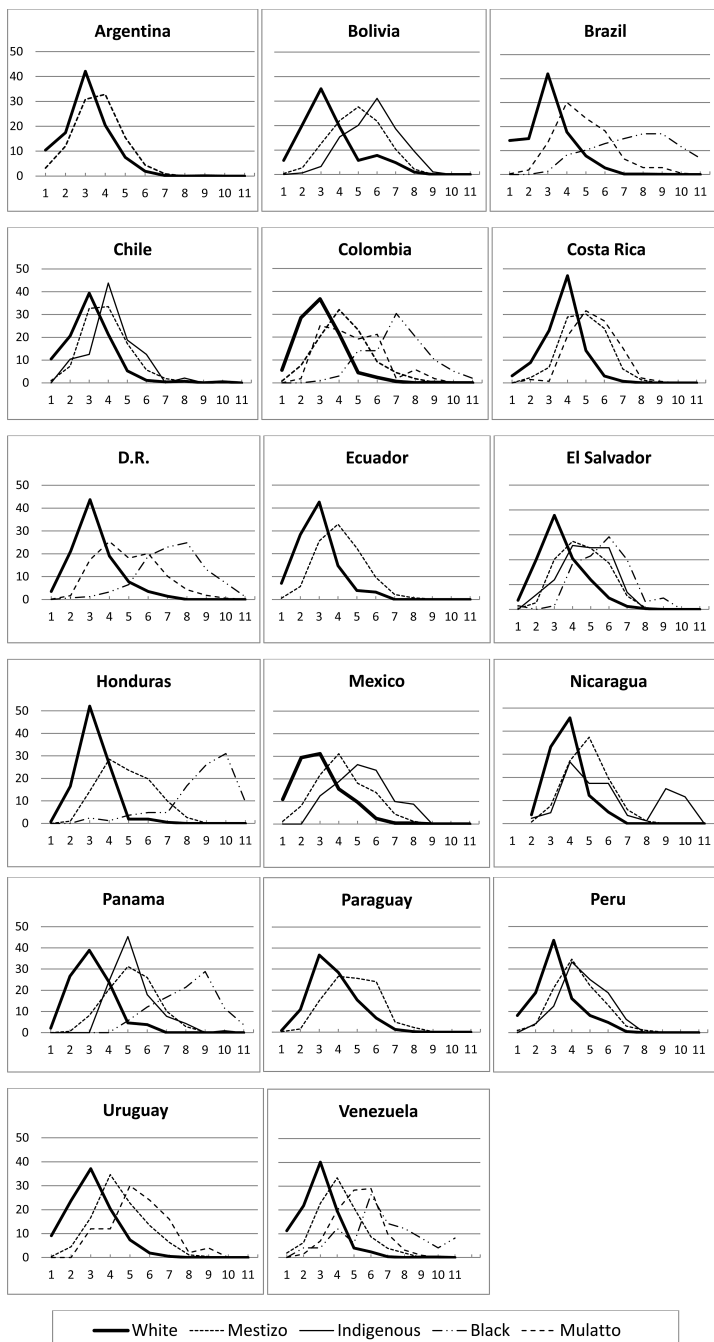


Figure 1. Distribution of ethnoracial groups by skin color rating. The mulatto category includes morenos in Venezuela and mestizos/indios in the Dominican Republic.

considerable number (10 percent or more) of darker persons in the sample also identified as white in Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Bolivia, and the Dominican Republic. As expected, the mestizo category was generally the middle category in actual color, although it largely overlapped with the indigenous and mulatto categories but showed relatively little overlap with the black category. Although persons with a rating of 1–3 were nearly always white, many persons with a skin color rating of 4 identified as white, but often they identified as mestizo or even indigenous.

So far, we have described ethnoracial distributions across a series of countries. We now proceed to examine how these ethnoracial identities are distributed among segments of the population from the 17 Latin American countries, represented in table 2. We utilize a multivariate statistical method known as logit regression, which enables us to analyze how a set of individual and national variables is or is not related to classification as white. Our model in table 2 pools data from all the countries and regresses whether one identifies as white on individual demographic characteristics (color, sex, age, education, and rural residence) as well as country of residence.

The regression model in table 2 reveals that across the region, four individual-level variables—color, age, education, and the skin color of the interviewer—are significantly correlated with identification as white. Color is negatively correlated with identification as white at very high levels of statistical significance, as expected. This strongly suggests that being light skinned is a strong predictor of whether one identifies as white in Latin America and supports the findings from figures 1 and 2. However, it is not the only variable that affects self-identification as white. Age is positively correlated and education is negatively correlated with identification as white at statistically significant levels. Thus older persons are more likely to identify as white, suggesting that there is a tendency for younger people to identify in nonwhite categories. Persons with relatively high levels of education are less likely to identify as white than persons of low education, which runs counter to a “money (or status) whitens” hypothesis. In addition, the color of the interviewer was positively correlated with self-identification as white, meaning that respondents were more likely to identify as white in the presence of darker interviewers. However, the statistical effect of interviewer color is less than one-tenth the size of the effect of the respondent’s color, suggesting that it makes some difference but nowhere near the difference that the respondent’s color does. In contrast to these variables that patterned white self-identity, gender and rural residence had no effect. The summary Wald and Pseudo- $R^2$  tests reveal that our model strongly predicts the pattern of white identity in the data.

Table 2. Logit regression results: 2010 LAPOP

Variable	Model 1	
	Coefficient	Standard error
<i>Education</i>		
<i>(reference=Elementary School)</i>		
Junior High / High School	-.027	0.043
Some College and up	-.144**	0.052
<i>Women</i>	.025	0.033
<i>Age</i>	.003***	0.001
<i>Urban</i>	-.007	0.041
<i>Respondent Skin Color</i>	-.971***	0.017
<i>Survey Taker Skin Color</i>	.126***	0.013
<i>Countries</i>		
<i>(reference=Brazil)</i>		
Argentina	1.064***	0.091
Bolivia	-1.946***	0.110
Chile	.637***	0.085
Colombia	-.695***	0.087
Costa Rica	.904***	0.081
Dominican Republic	-1.785***	0.111
Ecuador	-2.022***	0.091
El Salvador	-.883***	0.090
Honduras	-.312***	0.081
Mexico	-1.625***	0.096
Nicaragua	-.764***	0.093
Panama	.011	0.083
Paraguay	-.117	0.086
Peru	-1.719***	0.101
Uruguay	1.200***	0.085
Venezuela	-.165*	0.081
Intercept	2.747	0.116
N	29936	
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.333	
Wald Chi Square Test		5335.05***

Source: 2010 AmericasBarometer.

\* p<0.05 \*\* p<0.01 \*\*\*p<0.001

Moreover, table 2 shows wide national variation in the tendency to identify as white, while statistically controlling for the individual-level characteristics. That is, identification as white varies across national contexts for persons of the same color, education, age, and other demographic characteristics. The positive or negative coefficients associated with each country are in comparison to Bra-

zil, which is the omitted or reference category in the regression model. Bolivia, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Mexico, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Colombia, and Venezuela are negative and statistically significant, revealing that their citizens are less likely than Brazilians to identify as white, controlling for all other variables in the regression. Paraguay and Panama are not statistically significant, so they are roughly the same as Brazil. In Chile, Costa Rica, Uruguay, and Argentina, though, identification as white is positive and thus more likely than in Brazil. Among those countries, there are several levels in the extent to which they identify as white. Using predicted probabilities, we illustrate country differences in figure 2.

For figures 2 to 4, we calculate the probability that a person whose skin color is rated 4 (a light brown color) would identify as white overall in each country (figure 2), for persons with low levels of schooling compared to high levels (figure 3), and for young persons compared to older persons (figure 4). We base these calculations on regression models like the one in table 2 but run these regressions separately for each country. We calculate the probabilities for persons whose skin color is rated 4 since it is the color point where the distribution of persons identifying as white is most likely to overlap with persons identifying as mestizo, as the illustrations in figure 1 demonstrated. We control the other variables by using the mean values of the pooled sample to calculate the predicted probabilities.

The bar chart in figure 2 shows a strikingly large variation across countries. Most Argentines, Uruguayans, Costa Ricans, and Chileans with a skin color rating of 4 identified as white. Indeed, nearly 70 percent of Argentines and Uruguayans of this skin color identified as white. This contrasts with only about 10 percent or less of similarly skin-toned Mexicans, Peruvians, Dominicans, Ecuadorians, and Bolivians. The first group is from countries of mostly European origin, while the latter group is from countries of mostly European and indigenous mixture, except for the Dominican Republic. The remaining countries are intermediate, with nearly 40 percent of such Brazilians identifying as white compared to about 20 percent of Salvadorans, Nicaraguans, and Hondurans. With the exception of the Dominican Republic, this generally supports the pattern that the populations of places with indigenous/white mixture are the least likely to identify as white, while those residing in countries with large white populations are the most likely. Colombia, Venezuela, Paraguay, Panama, and Brazil all lie in the 25 to 40 percent range.

We assume that the general Latin American pattern of the statistical effects of sociodemographic factors like age and education on racial self-identification

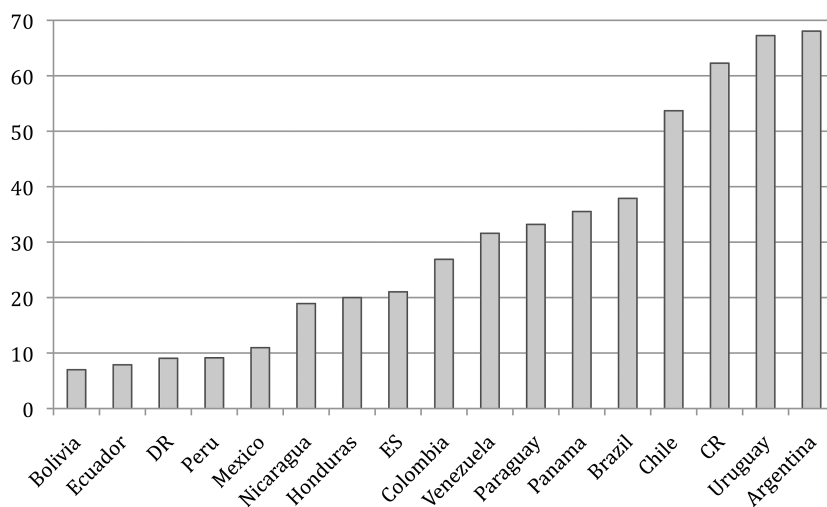


Figure 2. Percentage of persons with light brown skin color (#4) who identify as white in 17 Latin American countries. Based on regressions for each country with data from 2010 AmericasBarometer.

may be distinct in particular countries. To better understand how identification as white might differ across countries, we ran similar logit regression analyses for each country. We do not show these regressions for all 17 countries for reasons of space, but we summarize the results through predicted probabilities of the two significant variables: age and education. Based on those regressions, we predict the probability that a person whose skin color is rated 4 identifies as white by age (figure 4) and by education (figure 3). For age, we compare 25 and 50 year olds. For education, we compare those respondents with at least one year of college education and up (13 years of education and up) with those who have elementary school education or less (0 to 6 years).

Our regression results for individual countries (not shown) revealed that the individual-level variables often, but not always, mirror the overall pattern as shown in table 2, where age and education were correlated with who identifies as white. Education was significant in 12 of the 17 countries, although the direction of the association was mixed. Age was also significant in five countries, where persons of older age were more likely to self-identify as white. Gender and rural residence are mostly statistically insignificant, as the Latin America regionwide model in table 2 showed. They are significantly correlated with



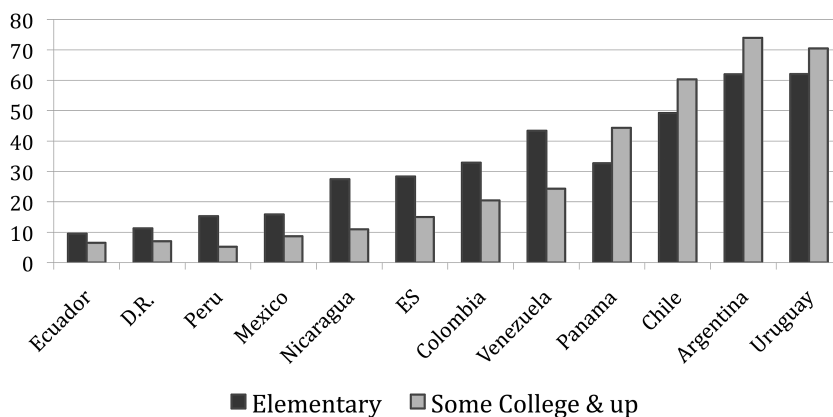


Figure 3. Percentages of persons with light brown skin color (#4) who identify as white at elementary and college levels of education. Based on regressions for each country with data from 2010 AmericasBarometer.

white identity in only three or four countries, and their direction is mixed for those cases.

We find that educational level is a strong predictor in 12 countries. Figure 3 shows that highly educated persons with skin color rated as 4 or more are likely to self-identify as white in Panama, Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina. On the other hand, highly educated respondents with similar skin tones in Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Mexico, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Colombia, and Venezuela are less likely to identify as white, with varying differences. Lower-educated Peruvians and Nicaraguans are at least twice as likely to identify as white as their higher-educated conationals. Overall, a status-darkening effect appears in Mesoamerica, the Andes, and the Dominican Republic, while a status-whitening effect is consistently found in the countries of the Southern Cone and Panama.

Figure 4, which summarizes regression results for age, shows that older persons are more likely to identify as white in Costa Rica, Uruguay, Chile, and Brazil but less likely to identify as white in Peru. For Brazil, this further confirms a well-documented tendency away from white identity and toward nonwhite identities in that country. In Chile, Uruguay, and Costa Rica, the age effect suggests a shift away from the strongly held white identities of these countries. On the other hand, Peru, where younger persons are more likely to identify as white, seems to be an anomaly.

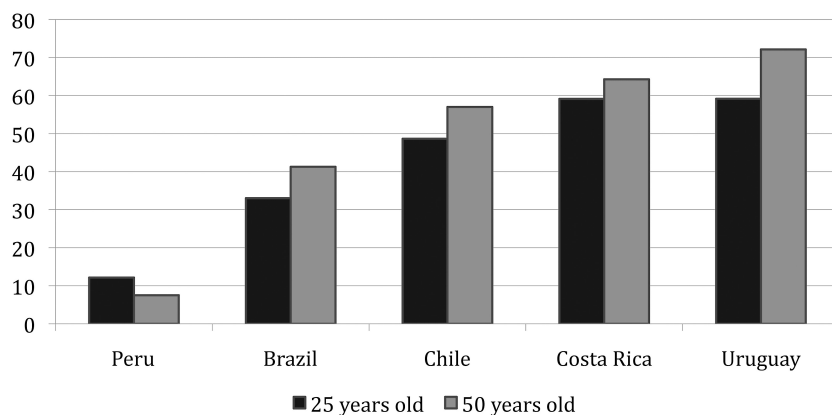


Figure 4. Percentages of persons with light brown skin color (#4) who identify as white among 25 and 50 year olds. Based on regressions for each country with data from 2010 AmericasBarometer.

## Discussion

This study has shown that identifying as white, although constrained by skin color, is also shaped by age, education, and national context, as well as by the color of those one is interacting with. We treat identification as white as a social outcome, subject to physical and social influences, rather than as a fixed and self-evident determinant of social status or behavior, the way it is commonly used in the statistical and status-attainment literatures. We show that who is white is not self-evident, as has often been assumed in the past, but that it is subject to social and historical forces. Moreover, our findings have revealed the wide diversity in the region regarding who identifies as white. Racial classification based on the experience of a town, a province, or even an entire country cannot be generalized to all of Latin America. Explanations that work for one country may not work for another. We believe that our findings are robust, as they are based on the systematic analysis of nationally representative data for 17 of the 19 Latin American countries.

### Nation

Our findings show that the white composition in Latin American countries is not merely a reflection of the population's actual skin color but that it also depends on the propensity of similarly skin-toned persons to identify as white,

which varies widely by country. Thus whiteness is not self-evident; rather, it seems to be largely shaped by the nation and its history, racial ideologies, racial composition, and norms of behavior.

Specifically, our findings show that whiteness is a particularly capacious concept in the mostly white nations of Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, and Costa Rica, where white identity occurs among many light brown persons who would identify as mestizo in the rest of Latin America. Certainly, the population of those countries tends to have more people of light skin color, but our findings suggest that the ideologies of these countries, whose elites have imagined their nations as white in contrast to other countries of the region, have also led to a more common identification as white, adjusting for actual color differences. These ideologies seem to have made white a normative social classification among persons having a relatively wide range of skin colors.<sup>93</sup> In addition to the apparent successes in attracting large numbers of European immigrants, the relatively large size of the white population of these countries, as measured by censuses or surveys, also reflects a greater propensity for light brown persons to identify as white.

We hypothesized that light or light brown persons would be least likely to identify as white in countries with strong mestizaje ideologies, like Mexico and Brazil, compared to countries where mestizaje ideologies were not widely promoted, like Argentina. Our data support this contention to some extent when comparing those three countries. Mexico probably had the strongest mestizaje ideology, and the likelihood of classification as mestizo (rather than white) is greatest in that country. However, we do not have a good sense of the relative strength of these ideologies across the full range of countries in Latin America. The type of mestizaje, whether involving mostly indigenous or mostly black people, may make a difference. Identification as white appears to be stronger in countries where there is more mixture with Afro-descendants, such as Brazil and Panama, than in countries with significant indigenous populations and mixture with the indigenous population, such as Bolivia, Peru, and Mexico. This might seem to run contrary to an expectation that predominant mixture with the indigenous (commonly called mestizos) would be more acceptable as white than would mixture with African origin (*mulatos*). However, one could argue that a greater tendency to identify as white in largely Afro-descendant countries may reflect a greater distancing from the more stigmatized black other compared to the indigenous other. In other words, the greater propensity

93. This is consistent with Mauricio Meléndez Obando's claim that Costa Ricans will be especially likely to identify as white. See Meléndez Obando, "Presencia de Africa."

to identify as white in Brazil may be because not doing so usually means being mulatto, the other side of the white/nonwhite boundary, whereas in Mexico, the white/nonwhite boundary is usually a white/mestizo boundary, making the choice arguably less consequential.

A reading of the historical literature, though, demonstrates that national ideologies of race were largely developed in relation to racial composition and the extent of indigenous or African admixture, so that explanations based on *mestizaje* probably overlap with those based on relational classification and mixture, which we have discussed. For example, perhaps national elites found it more acceptable to emphasize hybrid (or nonwhite) identities when the mixture was mostly with the indigenous, as a mestizo identity may have been preferable to a mulatto identity as the foundation of the country's imagined heritage. Also, elites often recognized the historical and cultural contributions of the indigenous while rarely extending such recognition to Africans (though Brazil may be an exception). Mixture with indigenous people may have led to emphasizing *mestizaje*, but mixture with Africans may have led to a greater emphasis on whiteness among those people that could physically claim whiteness. In contrast, the propensity to identify as white is particularly strong in Costa Rica and Argentina, where elites were often opposed to *mestizaje*.

The Dominican Republic, with its large African population but low likelihood of a white identity, might seem to be an exception. However, it is actually consistent in the sense that the national narrative promoted by Dominican elites actually embraced an indigenous past as its sole nonwhite heritage, despite the large presence of Afro-descendants. Rather, blackness was relegated to its historical adversary and neighbor, Haiti. Only Haitians and their descendants could be considered black in the Dominican Republic, while the majority of Dominicans were racially considered *indio*.

### Age

Our findings for age show that younger Latin Americans tend to be less likely to identify as white compared to their older conationals. This may reflect the beginnings of the societal shift toward multiculturalism and the globalization of popular culture, though it could also be a function of promoting oneself as white for better success in the labor market. Although the value of whiteness continues to be great throughout the region, persons who are on the margins of a white skin color but who might have some attachment to black, indigenous, or mixed-race identities may feel more comfortable today about identifying as nonwhite because of the influence of multiculturalism and popular culture in

valuing these categories. This may be particularly true for younger persons, who have more exposure to the Internet, television, and new technologies and live in an age when identities are more flexible and in the process of consolidation. Although they probably understand the privileges that come with white identity, they may also believe it is less important to identify that way than it was for their parents' generation.

This age trend is especially apparent in Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, and Costa Rica, suggesting that the capacious boundaries we found for whiteness in the white nations seem to be contracting. Younger people in these countries who are light brown in color are more likely to identify as mestizo or pardo (or even as indigenous in Chile) than their older counterparts. In other words, the especially strong normative incentives to identify as white in these countries appear to be weakening for the younger cohorts, whose major period of identity formation has occurred roughly 20 years after the older cohort. The finding for Brazil may also be related to the national trend of darkening, especially by younger persons who are entering the university or the labor market, where affirmative action may be available.

The lack of a whitening effect by age in other countries may suggest that multiculturalism has not had much of a racial indentification effect in those countries, but compared to the Southern Cone countries, identity as nonwhite for persons near the white/nonwhite boundary was already more common. A positive correlation between age and white identity occurred only in Peru, and we might venture an explanation for this. As has been documented by Deborah Yashar as well as Nancy Grey Postero and Leon Zamosc, Peru is the one country with a significant indigenous population where strong mobilization as indigenous peoples did not occur in recent decades.<sup>94</sup> The lack of a strong indigenous movement promoting indigenous or even mestizo identities may have also permitted the expansion of white identification among the younger generation of Peruvians.

#### Education

When taken as a whole, college-educated persons in Latin America today are less likely to identify as white compared to those with only a primary school education. This runs counter to the popular "money (or status) whitens" claim.

94. Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America*; Nancy Grey Postero and Leon Zamosc, eds., *The Struggle for Indigenous Rights in Latin America* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2004).

However, when we examine countries separately, we find status darkening in 8 of the 17 countries and status whitening in 4, while we failed to find a relation between educational status and white identity in the remaining 5. George Reid Andrews argues that within Latin America there is more resistance to non-whites in middle-class occupations, which may suggest that higher-educated persons have more incentives to identify as white than their less-educated counterparts.<sup>95</sup> Also, Andrews's claim may be based largely on the countries he studied, particularly Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. Indeed, we found that money or status whitens only in the white nations of Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile, as well as in Panama. However, we found no class effect in Brazil, which may have changed since affirmative action began a decade ago, and we found a money-whitening effect in Argentina and Uruguay.

The status-darkening effect that we find in about half of the countries makes sense if we think of whiteness as symbolic capital. For the low-educated or poor, the whiteness or near-whiteness of light skin-colored persons may be the only such capital they own, and thus they give it greater value, especially in contrast to a middle-class person whose light skin color is certainly important but of less relative value. Reports of a money-whitening effect also tend to be based on evidence such as respondent accounts or popular sayings. Systematic data on this relation are rare.<sup>96</sup>

95. George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800–2000* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), 179–82.

96. Another potential explanation is that persons with low educational status are more likely to work outdoors and thus are more exposed to the sun, which would make them darker. Thus, their identification as white would be more consistent with reporting their “real color.” But we think this explanation does not hold up to closer inspection. (This concern was raised by a comment made by a respondent in a pretest of the questionnaire when the interviewer asked her to rate her own color. She noted that this is not her real color under her clothes, as the sun had darkened her.) One would expect that persons with rural residence would be most exposed to working and living in sunlight, so that their “real color” would be whiter, but our results showed that there was no relation between rural residence and identification as white. It is important to also note that even a tanned color generally would be the color by which such individuals are generally seen by the rest of society. Although it is not clear whether identification as white would be based on that color or on their real color—which they know but most others do not—we suspect that their facial color, which we captured, is at least as important as their “real color.” We were also concerned that a money-whitening finding might be the result of greater mixture among the working classes and poor, and thus higher-status persons may have whitened more simply because of a whiter and especially non-African phenotype based on features other than color, like hair texture. However, the results often ran in the opposite direction, suggesting a robust result. Moreover, we show that socioeconomic

Finally, assertions of a money-whitening effect tend to date from earlier historical periods, leading us to hypothesize that recent shifts to the new multiculturalism and racial politics in the region may have weakened or even reversed the incentives to whiten. Instead of whitening being associated with higher class status, we now find evidence of racial darkening at higher status levels, especially among the young. The case of Brazil, where the new racial politics seems most entrenched, is illustrative. There, higher-educated persons on the physical border between white and nonwhite may be increasingly likely to identify as nonwhite, especially since they may be more attuned to racial politics than the less educated. And if we factor in the possible incentives offered by affirmative action policies in university admissions and white-collar employment, motives for identifying as nonwhite at higher status levels become even more compelling.<sup>97</sup>

Finally, the pooled regressions suggested that respondents are more likely to identify as white in the presence of darker-skinned interviewers. We do not compare countries on this variable in separate regressions or predicted probabilities mostly for reasons of space, but suffice it to say that the positive correlation held up in most countries. As for educational status, this finding also suggests a relational effect. Persons on the border of white and mestizo categories are more likely to identify as white when the other person better fits the mestizo or other nonwhite category.

## Conclusions

Virtually all Latin American nations have significant white populations, despite mestizaje ideologies that may suggest otherwise. However, whiteness is not the same across nations or in different age or educational strata, just as it probably has not been the same across historical periods. We do not have direct historical data, but we show cross-national differences that help explain historical change as well as age differences, which help to illuminate more recent changes. Many of our findings seem to reflect the transition from mestizaje to multiculturalism,

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status is strongly correlated with color for office workers, who we assume work indoors. Edward E. Telles, "A Test That Sun Exposure Does Not Affect Latin America's 'Pigmentocracy' as Measured by the PERLA Color Palette," *PERLA* (blog), 23 May 2012, <http://perla.princeton.edu/palettetest/>.

97. Francis and Tannuri-Pianto, "Endogenous Race in Brazil."



the nature of which varies widely across Latin American nations. The historical shift to multiculturalism throughout the region appears to be creating new incentives and disincentives to identify as white. Although it always has been at the top of the region's racial hierarchy, the category of *white* is likely to have expanded and contracted within and across historical periods. Strong whitening ideologies are likely to have expanded the white category, while ideologies of *mestizaje* are likely to have contracted it. Overall, it seems that the new context of multiculturalism may also be initiating a period of white contraction and nonwhite expansion as a result of changing incentives, norms, and behaviors regarding racial identity and classification.

Although our findings are empirically limited to the present, we believe that our findings and the type of analysis we utilize may offer some insights for historians and other students of race in Latin America. These are:

1. Whiteness as a racial category and an identity has not received enough attention in the historical literature. Greater attention has been paid to Afro-descendant, indigenous, and mixed-raced peoples, even though white elites have been largely responsible for the identification of people by race and the creation of racial hierarchies in the region.
2. Identification as white is ambiguous in Latin America, but probably less so than some social scientists had believed. Though there is ambiguity in white identification, there is also remarkable consistency across countries. Average skin color of self-identified whites is similar across countries, but there is sizeable variation in the span and characteristics of who is included in the white category.
3. Racial identification is affected by one's relation to others. In other words, to understand racial identification in Latin America, which is fluid and contextual, we need to understand the microlevel interactions that shape it. This is likely to also occur in classification by others, including designations in official records. The particular color or status of the designator may have affected the racial classification of the designated.
4. Class or social status shapes white identification, though, at least in the current period, class differences are not as great in influencing racial identification as often suspected and, more often than not, run in the opposite direction to the idea that money or status whitens. In about half of the countries, higher-educated people are less likely to identify as white, though this may be affected by the recent turn to

multiculturalism, in which nonwhite identities may have become less stigmatized. In the past, social status is likely to have affected racial designations, though we cannot be sure as to in which direction, even if we have accepted the idea that higher social status is likely to have lightened one's classification.

5. There are differences in white identification across national contexts. The white category is particularly capacious in the "white" nations, which is consistent with some historical evidence. National histories and ideologies, as well as racial composition, seem to strongly affect it. The general focus by historians and other analysts on a single country limits their ability to make such comparisons. The evidence in this article will hopefully provide a more comparative framework for such studies.
6. Our evidence based on age suggests that who identifies as white changes over time as the relative valorization of white and nonwhite categories changes. Evidence for the region as a whole and for several countries in particular reveal that younger persons are increasingly eschewing a white identity and increasingly accepting nonwhite identities, especially in Brazil. There may have been similar shifts in previous periods, as when strong whitening ideologies probably encouraged more people to identify in the lightest category that they could.
7. Multivariate methods reveal patterns in racial classification that are often not apparent in bivariate analysis. Certainly, statistical analysis of this sort may be limited to recent years, when large data sets are available, but perhaps an understanding of the ways that multiple variables, independently or in interaction with each other, shape outcomes such as white identity may be valuable for understanding social processes in the past.
8. Research based on nationally representative (random) samples provides an understanding of how people in all segments of society understand racial identification and other social phenomena. We have sought to explain the national differences we found largely by drawing on the historical literature, but there seems to be some disconnect between our findings and that literature. Some of this might be explained by recent changes, but we suspect that much of it might be due to differences between historical and sociological sources of data. While historians must make do with partial and fragmentary evidence of

racial identities in the past,<sup>98</sup> present-day social scientists can talk directly and interactively with their objects of study. While there may not be much we can do about this, historians and contemporary social analysts should be sensitive to these differences. An understanding of such disconnects today may help us to understand comparable disconnects between racial practices in the past and present.

9. Nevertheless, this study makes clear that historical research is necessary for understanding contemporary analysis of the kind we provide here. Without it, we are unable to comprehend many of our findings. Indeed, we need more of it to make sense of many of the comparative national findings, particularly in the small countries about which we know little. Integrating historical research and research of the present remains a major challenge.

98. An important exception by a historian proves our point. Douglas Cope convincingly argues that official or elite accounts did not reflect understandings of race among ordinary people in colonial Mexico City. See R. Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660–1720* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

