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## Explaining Support for Interethnic Marriage in Four Countries

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**Executive Summary.** This *Insights* report addresses questions of ethnic inequality in the Americas. Using data from four countries in the Americas, this *Insights* report finds evidence suggesting that political tolerance and ideology are associated with support for marriage to indigenous persons. Similarly, a respondent's self-identified ethnicity is strongly linked to support for marriage to indigenous persons, with indigenous respondents being the most likely to support such a union, and self-identified white individuals being the least likely. Surprisingly, demographic variables such as wealth, education and sex have no statistical impact on support for interethnic marriage.

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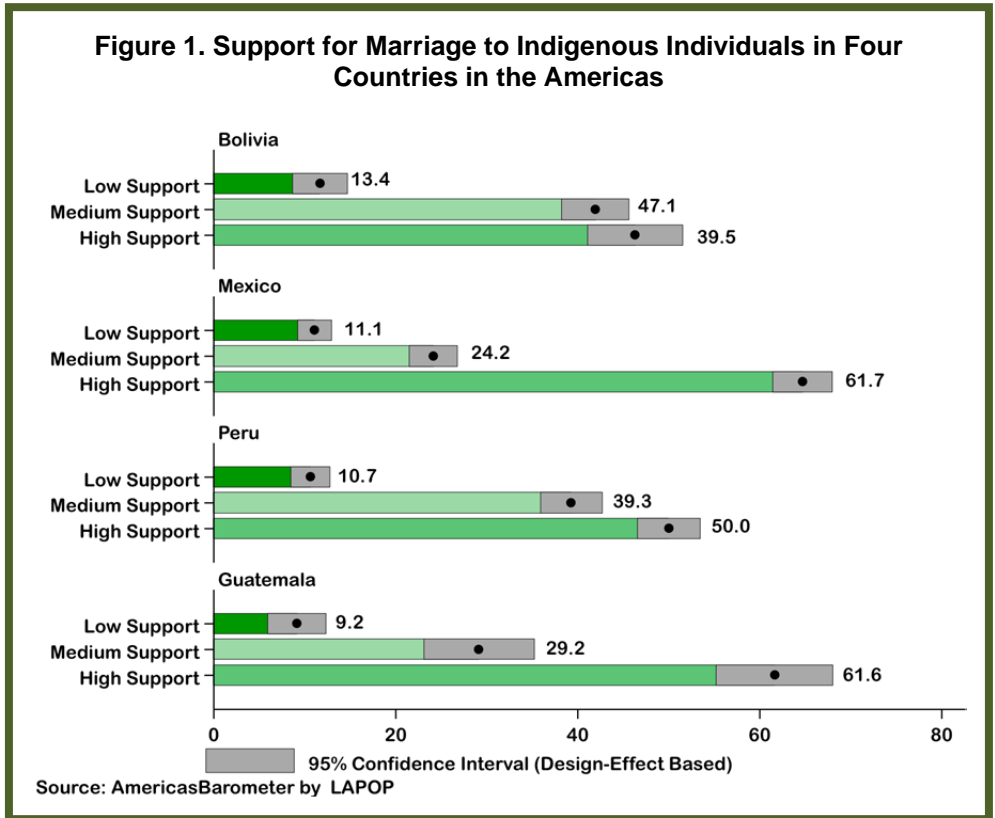
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Racial and ethnic discrimination exists within a number of different domains across the Americas (see, for example Patrinos 2000).<sup>1</sup> Although efforts have been made in recent years to decrease the effects that generations of discrimination have had on members of indigenous and black minorities in the Americas, prejudicial attitudes likely persist.

This *Insights* report explores attitudes towards indigenous minorities in four countries with substantial indigenous populations: Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru. The 2010 AmericasBarometer<sup>2</sup> survey in these countries included the following question<sup>3</sup>:

**RAC3B.** To what extent would you approve if one of your children were to marry an indigenous person?

Respondents were asked to rate their approval on a 1 to 7 scale, with 1 signifying strong



disapproval and 7 signifying strong support for the child’s marriage.<sup>4</sup> Figure 1 shows the distribution of responses to this question in each of the four countries where this question was asked.<sup>5,6</sup> The figure reveals interesting variation in respondents’ support for a child’s marriage to an indigenous person in these countries.

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Professor Edward Telles for very helpful feedback on a previous draft.

<sup>2</sup> Funding for the 2010 round mainly came from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Important sources of support were also the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and Vanderbilt University. Prior issues in the *Insights* series can be found at:

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights.php>. The data on which they are based can be found at

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-data.php>.

<sup>3</sup> A similar, but not exactly comparable, question was asked about marriage to “blacks” or “darker colored people” in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic. Although it is possible that some of the correlates of discrimination towards black and indigenous individuals are similar, the countries listed in this footnote are not included in the current report because of the comparability problem.

<sup>4</sup>The non-response rate for this item was 19.5%. Non-response in Guatemala was particularly high, with 76.06% of those surveyed not providing an answer. In the other three countries, non-response rates were much lower: 2.5% in Mexico, 7.7% in Bolivia, and 4.2% in Peru. These high rates of non-response in Guatemala must be kept in mind as they limit the extent to which we can confidently assert that the findings reported here are representative of the population at large; instead, the results presented in this report should be considered representative only of those who selected to respond to this sensitive question. The high rates of non-response, especially for the case of Guatemala, merit additional analysis and consideration, but that lies outside the scope of this report.

<sup>5</sup> All analyses presented here were conducted using STATA v11.1.

<sup>6</sup> Responses of 1 or 2 were recoded for this analysis as “low support” for a child’s marriage to an indigenous person, values of 3, 4, or 5 were grouped together as “medium support”, and responses of 6 or 7 were labeled “high support.”

Although the plurality of respondents place themselves in the “high support” category, a substantial proportion of respondents reported middling and low levels of support, particularly in Bolivia and Peru.

Individuals’ attitudes about a child’s hypothetical marriage to a member of a socially disadvantaged and often stigmatized group have been studied in the United States context largely as relates to black-white marriage. Since the 1920s, surveys conducted in the United States have asked white parents how much they would support their child’s hypothetical decision to marry a member of a racial minority; the item is typically inserted within a series of questions on social distance between racial groups (Bogardus 1967; Parrillo and Donoghue 2005). Scholarship using this item over time has found that, in comparison to other questions about acceptance of racial minorities, responses to the marriage question were slow to change over time, with respondents continuing to express resistance to interracial marriage even as they accepted greater black-white socialization in a variety of other realms (Erskine 1973; St. Jean 1998; Weaver 2008). Thus, inter-ethnic marriage remains a sore point in the U.S.

Figure 1 indicates that on average respondents in Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru express moderate levels of support for their children marrying indigenous individuals. Responses are not uniformly positive, however. What accounts for individual level differences in attitudes towards indigenous persons in these countries?

This *Insights* report attempts to answer this question in two ways: first, I explore socioeconomic and demographic factors that might affect support for interethnic marriage. Second, when this approach proves insufficient, I draw from value theory, arguing that individuals who possess more egalitarian values and a more open worldview are more likely to support interethnic marriage. Support is found for this second perspective, suggesting that one’s life experiences, one’s predispositions

towards openness, and one’s values all work together to predict support for interethnic marriage.

## Who Approves of Interethnic Marriage?

Who holds positive versus negative views of a child marrying a member of an ethnic minority? Scholarship focused on the United States suggests that a number of demographic variables predict these attitudes. A respondent’s age is an important explanatory factor in the U.S., with those who came of age before the civil rights movement expressing less support for interracial marriage than members of younger cohorts (Erskine 1973; Johnson and Jacobson 2005). A similar pattern could be expected to emerge in Latin America, with members of older age cohorts holding less accepting views of ethnic minorities than members of younger age cohorts.

Education has also been found to affect individuals’ approval of interracial socialization, with more educated individuals tending to intermarry more and to express more support for interracial marriages (Schoen, Wooldredge and Thomas 1989; Jacobson and Johnson 2006). There are two reasons to expect this relationship between education and support for interracial marriage: increased education involves increasing exposure to egalitarian values; and, increased education generates exposure to more varied kinds of people, thus altering individuals’ preconceptions about different ethnic and racial groups (Johnson and Jacobson 2005).

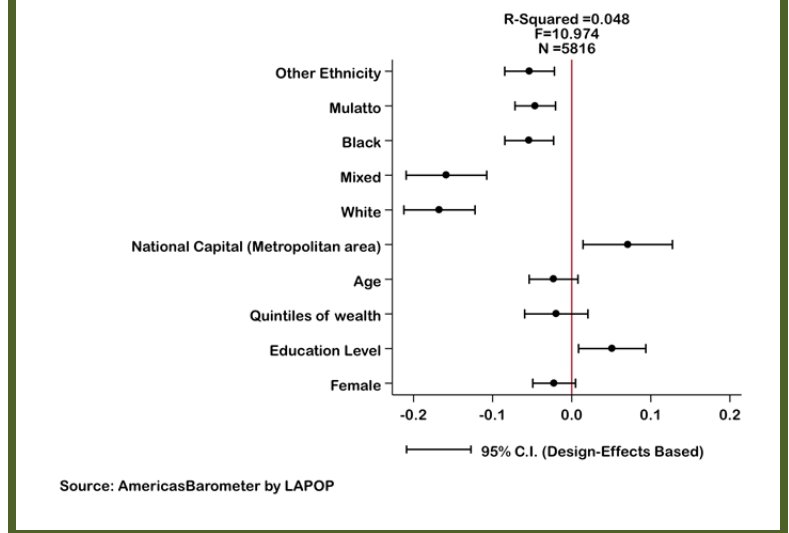
The respondent’s self-identified ethnicity should matter as well. I expect higher levels of support for marriage to indigenous individuals from members of less privileged ethnic groups (particularly among self-identified indigenous people) than from members of socially privileged ethnic groups (particularly self-

identified “white” individuals).<sup>7</sup> This expectation follows from U.S. research suggesting that social privilege affects individual responses to questions about interracial marriage (Dunleavy 2004; Jacobson and Johnson 2006).

I use regression analysis to test the extent to which socioeconomic and demographic variables predict support for interethnic marriage by one’s child. In the model, age is coded from 1 to 6 with 1 representing younger cohorts and 6 representing the oldest cohort.<sup>8</sup> Educational level is measured from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating that an individual has no education, 2 indicating primary schooling, 3 indicating secondary schooling, and 4 indicating that an individual has some amount of higher education. I also include measures of an individual’s self-reported race/ethnicity, using indigenous as the comparison category. As controls, I include a measure of the individual’s size of place of residence,<sup>9</sup> and a measure of wealth in quintiles.<sup>10</sup> Gender is also controlled for in the model (coded 1 for female, 0 for male).

Figure 2 displays the results of an analysis predicting support for interethnic marriage with the above-mentioned variables.<sup>11</sup> Country-level

**Figure 2: A Socioeconomic and Demographic Model of Support for Marriage to Indigenous Persons**



dummy variables are included in the regression model but not shown here to save space. The results displayed in Figure 2 are normalized regression coefficients.

Each dot in Figure 2 represents the estimated relationship between a given independent variable and the dependent variable, support for marriage to an indigenous person. The horizontal bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals around these point estimates. If a dot falls to the right of the vertical line at 0, its estimated effect on the dependent variable is positive; if a dot falls to the left of the line, the estimated effect for that variable is negative. If the horizontal bar does not cross the vertical line, the relationship is significant with at least 95 percent confidence; if the bar crosses the vertical line, the relationship in the data does not meet standard thresholds of statistical significance.

Surprisingly, few of the demographic indicators have a statistically significant effect on support for a child’s hypothetical marriage to an indigenous person. While age does have the expected negative relationship to the dependent

indicating that Guatemala is not driving the findings presented here.

<sup>7</sup> As a robustness check, all models were run excluding self-identified indigenous individuals from the analysis. Results were substantively similar to those reported here.

<sup>8</sup> Age cohorts are grouped as follows: cohort 1(16-25); cohort 2 (26-35); cohort 3 (36-45); cohort 4 (46-55); cohort 5 (56-65); and cohort 6 (66+).

<sup>9</sup> Size of respondent’s city or town of residence is coded as a five-category variable with 1 indicating a rural area, 2 signifying a small city, 3 indicating a medium sized city, 4 meaning a large city, and 5 meaning the national capital or metropolitan area. These categories were defined according to the definition in each country’s census.

<sup>10</sup> See Abby Córdova, 2009, “Methodological Note: Measuring Relative Wealth using Household Asset Indicators” for a description of the construction of the wealth index:

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/I0806en.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Due to high levels of non-response in Guatemala, and because non-response seemed to vary along ethnic lines, all analyses were conducted excluding Guatemala as a robustness check. The results were substantively similar,

variable, there is no statistically significant relationship between the dependent variable and age, wealth, or gender.<sup>12</sup> Education, on the other hand, as predicted, has a positive and significant effect on support for interethnic marriage. Similarly, size of place of residence has a positive and significant effect on support for interethnic marriage, with individuals living in national metropolitan areas reporting greater support for a child's marriage to an indigenous person than those living in rural areas, all else equal.<sup>13</sup> This suggests that something about living in an urban center, perhaps higher levels of education or greater exposure to ethnic diversity, has an impact on individuals' opinions about interethnic marriage.

Finally, as expected, respondents' self-identified ethnicity matters in predicting support for interethnic marriage. Compared to the baseline category (self-identified indigenous individuals) respondents of all other ethnic groups are less supportive of a child's hypothetical interethnic marriage<sup>14</sup>. Self-identified blacks and mulattos, as well as those who place themselves in the "other" category, express less approval of marriage to an indigenous person than those in the baseline category, and these results are significant with 95% confidence. More dramatic are the responses from whites and mestizos, who on average express even lower levels of support for interethnic marriage than members of non-indigenous but still potentially marginalized ethnic groups.

This analysis is interesting but incomplete. What else besides the ethnic identity of the respondent affects support for interethnic marriage? To attempt to answer this question, I now turn to a discussion of value theory.

## Value Theory and Support for Interethnic Marriage

The analysis presented in Figure 2 shows that socioeconomic and demographic variables are marginally useful in explaining variation in responses to the interethnic marriage question. What else might matter? One hypothesis, which I test here, stems from value theory.

Value theory suggests that individuals hold certain value-based attitudes, which affect their perceptions of social out-groups (see, for example, Kinder and Sears 1981; McConahay and Hough 1976). Dunleavy (2004) indicates that a conservative set of values (specifically religious and political conservatism) increases opposition to interracial marriage, whereas egalitarian values and openness to change increase acceptance of interracial marriage.

I provide a preliminary test of this hypothesis in Figure 3. Egalitarian values are proxied using a political tolerance scale.<sup>15</sup> I further control for individual level personality traits, which some scholars (e.g., Sagiv and Schwartz 1995) have suggested affect openness to intergroup contact, using a question tapping an individual's openness to new experiences.<sup>16</sup> Finally, I include

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<sup>12</sup> For all categorical variables, dummies representing each category were used to check for non-linear relationships. No non-linear relationships were found for age or education.

<sup>13</sup> Non-linear effects were accounted for regarding size of town of residence. Residence in a metropolitan area was the only statistically relevant category compared to the baseline of "rural residence", where most of the indigenous population in these countries is located. Other size of location dummies are included in the regression but not shown here to conserve space.

<sup>14</sup> As a robustness check, respondent's native language was used as a measure of ethnic identity, rather than self-identified ethnicity. The results, not reported here, were substantively similar.

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<sup>15</sup> D1-3: "There are people who only say bad things about the (country's) form of government, not just the incumbent government but the system of government. How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people's right to vote/ to conduct peaceful demonstrations/ to run for public office/ to make speeches?" Item D4 asked about support for homosexuals' rights to run for public office, and D5 asked about support for same-sex marriage. Respondents were asked to rate their approval from 1 to 10, with 10 indicating complete support and 1 indicating total disapproval.

<sup>16</sup> PER5B asked respondents to rate their agreement on a 1 to 7 scale that they were "open to new experiences and intellectual person," with 7 indicating complete agreement with the characterization of their personality.

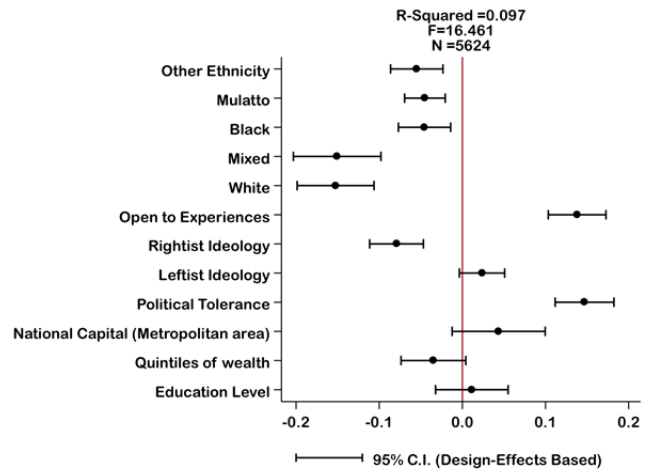


a measure of left-right ideology to see whether political orientation is a significant predictor of ethnic tolerance.<sup>17</sup> Figure 3 presents the normalized regression coefficients from a regression analysis that includes all the variables from the prior analysis, plus these new indicators.<sup>18</sup>

Notably, the effects of an individual's ethnic identification have not been attenuated—indigenous respondents are more supportive of marriage to indigenous persons than mulattos and blacks, and whites and mestizos are substantially less supportive of interethnic marriage than these groups. The effect of size of place disappears, however, with individuals living in metropolitan areas reporting similar levels of support for indigenous marriage as individuals from rural areas.<sup>19</sup>

Ideology is of mixed significance in the model, although it consistently works in the expected direction. Those reporting more rightist ideology are less supportive of intermarriage than those reporting centrist ideology, all else equal. The coefficient for leftist ideology is positive, suggesting that those who lean left politically are more supportive of interethnic marriage, although this coefficient is not

**Figure 3. Values and Support for Marriage to Indigenous Persons**



Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP

statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Consistent with value theory, political tolerance is also statistically significant in the model, with those reporting higher levels of political tolerance reporting greater support for marriage to indigenous individuals, even when controlling for the personality trait of openness. In fact, openness to experience and tolerance are now two of the most powerful predictors in the model, as determined by the sizes of their coefficients.

Interestingly, the inclusion of personality and tolerance variables attenuates the effect of education seen in Figure 2: here, the effect of education is no longer statistically significant. This indicates collinearity between education and tolerance/individual openness; assessing the precise causal link, if any, among education, tolerance and openness is beyond the scope of this report. But, assuming that personality precedes both political ideology and education, it is fair to say that personality is a key factor in determining attitudes toward interethnic marriage in these four countries. On the basis of this outcome and the fact that size of place of residence also becomes statistically insignificant

<sup>17</sup> L1: "On this card there is a 1-10 scale that goes from left to right. One means left and 10 means right. Nowadays, when we speak of political leanings, we talk of those leftists and those rightists. In other words, some people sympathize more with the left and others with the right. According to the meaning that the terms "left" and "right" have for you, and thinking of your own political leanings, where would you place yourself on this scale?" Using responses to this question, I created a three-category variable, with response values of 1-3 coded as "Leftist Ideology", 4-7 as "Centrist Ideology" (the baseline here), and 8-10 as "Rightist Ideology." Missing values were included in the baseline category, "Centrist Ideology"; the results reported here are robust to changes in the coding of missing values as their own category, and to their exclusion from the analysis.

<sup>18</sup> In order to conserve space, the coefficients for gender and country dummies, are not shown here, although these variables were included in the regression.

<sup>19</sup> As before, dummy variables for size of town were included in the regression, but are not shown here. None were significantly different from the baseline, rural areas, in this analysis.

in this model, we can infer that one's values are at least partially shaped by one's life experiences, at least with respect to level of education and place of residence.

## Discussion

What can be done to decrease negative feelings towards members of other ethnic groups at the individual level in Latin America? Education is not significant in the final model; however, political tolerance, which can be learned, is. This result suggests that efforts to increase political tolerance, through civic education or public awareness campaigns, might lead to greater levels of tolerance with respect to interethnic marriage.

Finally, it is important to consider national level variations in trends regarding support for interethnic marriage. While general trends reported here hold at the country level, there are important national differences. In analyses not report here, I examined the model presented in

Figure 3 for each country separately. Ideology is overwhelmingly important in Mexico and Bolivia, while in Peru and Guatemala its effect on support for interethnic marriage is negligible. Tolerance is more important in Mexico and Peru than in Guatemala and Bolivia for predicting support for interethnic marriage, and the effect of size of place, while not significant in the pooled sample, maintains significance in Peru. Finally, a respondent's ethnic identification is highly significant in Mexico and Bolivia, but only marginally relevant in Guatemala (where the category "white" was not offered to respondents, since only the terms "ladino" and "indígena" are used in that country), and does not achieve statistical significance in Peru.

Thus, while the individual level differences noted in this *Insights* report matter on average across these four countries, contextual differences in relations among ethnic groups might be responsible for a substantial part of the variation in attitudes towards interethnic marriage.

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Appendix. Figures 2 and 3. Socioeconomic, Demographic, and Value Explanations for Support for Interethnic Marriage

	Coefficient (Figure 2)	Standard Error (Figure 2)	Coefficient (Figure 3)	Standard Error (Figure 3)
Female	-0.022	0.014	-0.013	0.014
Age	-0.024	0.016	-0.001	0.015
Metropolitan Area	0.071*	0.029	0.044	0.028
Years of Education	0.047*	0.022	0.007	0.022
Quintiles of Wealth	-0.018	0.021	-0.033	0.020
White +	-0.182*	0.024	-0.166*	0.024
Mestizo	-0.16*	-0.024	0.152*	0.025
Black	-0.061*	0.017	-0.052*	0.018
Mulatto	-0.049*	0.014	-0.048*	0.014
Other Ethnicity	-0.049*	0.014	-0.051*	0.014
Political Tolerance			0.149*	0.018
Leftist Ideology ++			0.025	0.014
Rightist Ideology			-0.080*	0.016
Openness to Experience			0.136*	0.017
Guatemala +++	-0.034	-0.018	-0.029	0.017
Bolivia	-0.193*	0.034	-0.177*	0.033
Peru	-0.115*	0.020	-0.100*	0.021
Constant	0.054*	0.031	0.046*	0.030
<i>R-Squared</i>	0.043		0.093	
<i>Number of Observations</i>	5816		5578	

+ The reference category is indigenous.

++ The reference category is centrist ideology.

+++ The reference country is Mexico.