

# MESTIZAJE AND PUBLIC OPINION IN LATIN AMERICA

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*Abstract: Latin American elites authored and disseminated ideologies of mestizaje or race mixture, but does the general population value them today? Using the 2010 Americas Barometer, we examined public opinion about mestizaje in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru using survey questions that modeled mestizaje both as a principle of national development and as tolerance for intermarriage with black or indigenous people. We found that most Latin Americans support mestizaje, although support varies by country and ethnicity. Across countries, we find partial evidence that the strength of earlier nation-making mestizaje ideas is related to support for mestizaje today, and that strong multicultural policies may have actually strengthened such support. Ethnoracial minorities showed particular support for the national principle of mestizaje. Finally, we discovered that the national principle of mestizaje is associated with more tolerant attitudes about intermarriage, especially in countries with large Afro-descendant populations.*

Ideas of *mestizaje*, or race mixture, are central to the formation of many Latin American nations and are assumed to predominate in much of the region today (Hale 2006; Holt 2003; Telles 2004; Wade 1993). Concepts of *mestizaje* stress racial fusion and the inclusion of diverse racial elements as essential to the nation; hence *mestizos*, or mixed-race people, are considered the prototypical citizens. Although racial hierarchies characterize Latin American socioeconomic structures (Telles, Flores, and Urrea-Giraldo 2010), ideas of *mestizaje* have stood in contrast to ideas of white racial purity and anti-miscegenation historically held in the United States (Bost 2003; Holt 2003; Sollors 2000). While ideas of *mestizaje* emerged as Latin American state projects in the early twentieth century, they are often hailed as widely shared ideologies that are central to Latin Americans' understanding of race and race relations (Knight 1990; Mallon 1996; Whitten 2003).

Despite Latin America's diverse racial composition and the fact that an estimated 133 million Afro-descendant and 34 million indigenous people reside there, according to recent data—numbers far higher than in the United States (Telles, forthcoming)—racial attitudes in Latin America have, surprisingly, been understudied. Despite clues from ethnographic research, we lack nationally representative evidence on the general population's feelings about *mestizaje*. In this article, we examine support for *mestizaje* and its variations across nation and

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ethnicity in eight Latin American countries with large nonwhite populations: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru. These countries represent more than 70 percent of Latin America's population and are home to the vast majority of both Afro-descendants and indigenous people in the region. We focused on two dimensions of the mestizaje ideology: as a national development principle and an individual intermarriage principle. The first, which is closely related to the national narratives developed by elites during nation making, maintains that race mixture is good for the nation. The second addresses tolerance for intermarriage in one's family—often considered the ultimate marker of racial and ethnic integration (Alba and Nee 2003; Gordon 1964).

Our examination of eight Latin American countries provides new contexts for thinking about racial attitudes, beyond the large literature that is dominated by the case of the United States. Since racial meanings are context dependent, the study of Latin America may complicate social science understandings of racial attitudes more generally. As Krysan (2000, 161) wrote, "This complexity forces those who have developed their theories in an American context to take care not to rely too heavily on uniquely American values, principles, politics, and racial histories." Latin America differs from the United States in that nothing like mestizaje ideology exists in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, understanding racial attitudes is important because they may guide behaviors, even though attitudes are often more liberal than actual behaviors (Schuman et al. 1997). In particular, the degree to which the public embraces mestizaje may be important for understanding whether the ideology has implications for racial and national identity and democratic politics in Latin America, including whether the population would support or resist measures to combat racial discrimination and inequality.

This article also sheds light on whether elite-led ideologies influence public opinion. Although some scholars question whether ideologies influence action (Swidler 2001) and the degree to which nationalist ideas "from above" correspond to those "from below" (Brubaker et al. 2006), others maintain that cultural resources guide action (Vaisey 2009). For example, scholars argue that official state actions set templates for race relations (Marx 1998) and that national ideologies serve as symbolic resources that facilitate minority incorporation (Bloemraad 2006). The literature on racial attitudes has also explored how political ideologies and group interests are the sources of racial attitudes (Bobo 2000; Sears, Henry, and Kosterman 2000; Sniderman, Crosby, and Howell 2000). In the United States, evidence for the effect of principles on racial attitudes has been mixed (Krysan 2000). In Latin America, representative data on racial attitudes have been available only for Brazil. In that case, Bailey (2002) found that survey items representing racial democracy, arguably the Brazilian version of mestizaje, were associated with more tolerant attitudes. Our data allow us to see the degree to which Latin American mestizaje ideologies are valued among the population, to see how support for the national principle is related to personal preferences, and to make

1. While assimilation in the United States, like mestizaje, was also a modernizing ideology about ethnic inclusion, it rarely mentions indigenous and black people, while mestizaje has explicitly sought their inclusion (albeit more for the indigenous).

cross-national comparisons, helping us to understand how each nation's particular sociohistory is associated with contemporary racial attitudes.

#### MESTIZAJE IN LATIN AMERICA

Despite their nineteenth-century roots, ideas of mestizaje clearly emerged as Latin American state projects in the early twentieth century, when nation-building elites sought narratives to create homogenous national populations by stressing strong national identities while downplaying racial and ethnic identities (Knight 1990; Mallon 1996; Skidmore 1974; Whitten 2003). Through these ideas, elites sought to transform whitening ideologies, which were prevalent in the nineteenth century, when science claimed that nonwhites were biologically inferior. Under whitening, elites held concerns that their countries' large black, indigenous, and mixed-race populations would impede national development; in response, several countries encouraged European immigration and further race mixture to whiten the population (Skidmore 1974; Stepan 1991). However, as science increasingly discredited white supremacy, other elites began to develop ideas about mestizaje that would put a positive spin on mixture as the essence of Latin American nationhood (Stepan 1991; Telles 2004). In contrast to formally racist countries like the United States, these new ideologies were promoted as a moral high road for Latin America, even though elements of whitening often remained (Andrews 2004; Telles 2004; Wade 1993).

Mestizaje has both inclusionary and exclusionary aspects (Wade 1993). On the inclusionary side, scholars claim that mestizaje, manifested in more intermarriage and racial fluidity, has led to milder forms of racism in Brazil than in the United States (Byrne et al. 1995; Harris et al. 1993). They contend that mestizaje leads to commonsense expectations and behavioral goals that give Latin American countries an advantage over the United States in combating racism (Bailey 2002; DaMatta 1997; Fry 2000). On the exclusionary side, mestizaje beliefs may have led to the deeply entrenched conviction that Latin America's racial system is superior and does not need reform. By blurring racial divisions and denying racism, mestizaje ideologies undermine the formation of black and indigenous identities that are needed to sustain effective social movements for combating persistent social and cultural exclusion (Hanchard 1994; Telles 2004; Yashar 2005). In countries such as Brazil and Guatemala, some sectors of society resist race-specific interventions such as affirmative action or the recognition of cultural rights, in part because centuries of mestizaje are thought to have smoothed over racial boundaries (Hale 2006; Telles 2004). Others have contended that the intent behind promoting mestizaje is to eliminate black and indigenous peoples from the nation (Bonfil Batalla 1996; Nascimento 1979).

Despite their origin as nation-building projects in the early twentieth century, mestizaje ideologies have continued significance in much of Latin America. Indeed, the presence of mixed-race categories and large numbers of people classifying themselves as such has been seen as evidence of that significance (Duany 2006; Telles 2004; Telles and Flores, forthcoming). Mestizaje is also apparent in family and friendship networks (Wade 2005) and in cultural forms such as re-

ligion (Andrews 2010; Hill 2010; Telles 2004), music (Sansone 2003; Wade 2005), and literary expression (Bost 2003; Martínez-Echazábal 1998; Miller 2004). Using ethnographic evidence from Colombia's Pacific Coast, Wade (1993, 19) contended that mestizaje ideologies are often embodied in social practices that "are guided by and themselves reproduce those sets of ideas and values." Studies of other areas also suggest that mestizaje ideas influence people's everyday lives and beliefs about racism (Moreno Figueroa 2010; Sue 2009; Wade 2005).

During the past two decades, racial politics in Latin America have changed as official multiculturalism has begun to recognize ethnoracial difference and the rights of minorities. With the exception of the Dominican Republic, all the countries in our sample, as of this writing, have constitutionally declared themselves multicultural and implemented some multicultural citizenship reforms for the indigenous, as have Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Guatemala for Afro-descendants (Hooker 2005). Brazil and Colombia have even instituted affirmative action, which we consider a particularly strong version of multiculturalism. We argue that multiculturalism and strong ethnoracial policies may have strengthened the positive or inclusive values of mestizaje, although there is debate on this point. Despite the turn to multiculturalism, scholars continue to emphasize the deep roots of mestizaje thinking in popular sentiments about race (Beck, Mijeski, and Stark 2011; Warren and Sue 2011).

#### MESTIZAJE IDEOLOGIES BY COUNTRY

Although the literature shows variation in the impact and nature of mestizaje ideologies throughout Latin America (Miller 2004) comparisons among Latin American countries have been few. All of the eight countries chosen for this analysis have had some version of mestizaje, whether strong or muted.<sup>2</sup> Some scholars have suggested that the national variation of these ideologies depended on the country's racial composition, the state's capacity to support a nation-building project, and elites' perception of the need for such a project (Larson 2004; Mallon 1992; Wade 2009). Mestizaje ideologies also varied in the extent to which whitening was woven into them and in their exclusion or disregard of black populations, often touting indigenous and European mixture while downplaying or ignoring African admixture (Telles and Flores, forthcoming; Wade 1993). At the same time that elites across Latin America borrowed mestizaje and other ideas from each other, they also responded to their country's particular historical conditions to create their own national narratives. Taking account of these differences and similarities, we now present a brief cross-national comparison of the development of mestizaje ideas in these countries.

Nation-building elites promoted particularly strong mestizaje ideologies in Brazil and Mexico, where mixed-race people became the country's prototypical citizens and there were concerted efforts to supersede whitening (Knight 1990; Telles 2004). By comparison, such ideas had relatively little support in the

2. There is a considerable literature about race, ethnicity, and mestizaje in each of these countries, but we cite only a small sample, although we believe that we present a consensus argument.

so-called white nations of the Southern Cone (Argentina, Uruguay, and to some extent Chile) and Costa Rica (Andrews 2004; Telles and Flores 2013), which continued to value whitening despite the turn to *mestizaje* in the rest of Latin America. Compared with the other countries in this study, Brazil and Mexico had not only more developed narratives of *mestizaje* but also stronger state capacities to promote them through the educational system, the arts, and communications infrastructure.

Brazil's "racial democracy" ideology was consolidated in the 1930s with Gilberto Freyre's *Casa grande e senzala* (*The Masters and the Slaves*), which created a founding narrative that claimed that Brazil was unique among Western societies for its smooth blending of African, indigenous, and European peoples and cultures. Brazilian racial democracy, along with the narrative's depiction of an especially benign system of slavery and a denial of modern-day racial discrimination, became central to its national identity and mythology (Skidmore 1974; Telles 2004). The extensive research on race in Brazil has stressed the importance of racial democracy thinking to understanding race-based behaviors and attitudes in that country (see for example Bailey 2009; Telles 2004).

The Mexican version of *mestizaje* also became central to its postrevolutionary national project in the 1920s. Although there are other accounts, *La raza cósmica*, penned by Mexico's secretary of education José Vasconcelos, famously claimed that centuries of miscegenation had completely blurred the divisions found in the colony, that the *mestizo* was superior to purebloods, and that Mexico was free of racist beliefs and practices (Knight 1990, Sue 2012). This narrative, which existed as a distinct entity alongside a revolutionary *indigenismo* (that is, a project to revalorize indigenous people), portrayed the Indians as a glorious part of Mexico's past and held that they would be successfully incorporated as *mestizos*, just as *mestizos* would be Indianized (Knight 1990). At the same time, the Mexican version nearly ignored African ancestry, despite the fact that at least 200,000 enslaved Africans had arrived in that country (Sue 2012).

Andean countries (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru) were more likely to stress bipolar racialized distinctions; to the extent that *mestizaje* ideologies existed, they were clearly weaker and introduced later than in Mexico, to which these countries are sometimes compared (de la Cadena 2000; Mallon 1992). Larson (2004) suggested that Andean elites favored an indigenous-Spanish distinction instead of *mestizaje* as a strategy to control indigenous labor and to prevent mass rural upheavals. Mallon (1992) argued that Bolivia and Peru were never able to develop nation-making *mestizaje* projects or to use state power to unite indigenous groups. These countries used *mestizaje* to index biological mixing and cultural assimilation rather than as a national ideology (Larson 2004). Unlike Mexico, both Bolivia and Peru failed to establish *mestizo* hegemonic projects in their 1952 and 1968 revolutions. However, the two countries differ in that the idea of *mestizaje* was later used in Bolivia for building coalitional politics formed around Indianness, while in Peru it continued to represent authoritarian and racist politics until the 1980s (Mallon 1992; Sulmont and Callirgos, forthcoming).

Larson (2004, 17) contends that, among the Andean republics, only Colombia entertained a nation-building project of *mestizaje*, although other scholars claim

that such an ideology also developed in Ecuador and Peru (Beck, Mijeski, and Stark 2011; Clark 1998; Miller 2004; Sulmont and Callirgos, forthcoming; Whitten 2003). All three Andean countries seemed to have clear biases in favor of whiteness as a superior element in their mestizaje ideologies, especially when compared to Brazil and Mexico. In addition, all the Andean countries generally stressed racial fusion with indigenous people while ignoring blacks (Miller 2004; Paschel 2010; Sulmont and Callirgos, forthcoming; Wade 1993). As in Mexico, mestizaje and indigenismo often clashed, where some viewed the homogenizing aspects of mestizaje as negating indigenous cultural autonomy.

Although Guatemalan elites seem to have eschewed mestizaje in favor of separate Maya and ladino identities and nations, a new narrative in that country now promotes mestizaje (Hale 2006; Smith 2005; Taracena Arriola 2005).<sup>3</sup> Unlike other Central American countries, Guatemala retained the colonial ladino-indigenous distinction until recently because of the regional isolation of its indigenous communities and the ethnic division of labor in coffee plantations (Smith 1990). Recently, mestizaje has emerged as a potential strategy to unify the country, although, as Hale (1999) has argued, ladinos have appropriated the idea to dismiss indigenous demands for cultural rights.

In the Dominican Republic, ideas of mestizaje were part of the nation-building project but took on a distinct anti-Haitian and anti-black flavor as Dominican elites lauded the country's Hispanic and indigenous heritage (Candelario 2007; Duany 2006). The popular story *Enriquillo* locates the origins of the Dominican nation with Spaniards and the native Taínos, who are bound to each other through love and respect. Slavery and blackness are erased or ignored throughout this novel and elevated to official history by dictator Trujillo, despite the predominance of Africans in the country's history (Candelario 2007; Sommer 1991).

#### CONSTRUCTING HYPOTHESES

Based on the previous discussion, we present the following hypotheses, which guided our analysis.

Hypothesis 1. There is overall strong support for mestizaje throughout Latin America, where mestizaje is defined both as a principle of national development (i.e., the idea that race mixture is good for the country) and as intermarriage in one's family (i.e., support for a child's marriage to a black or indigenous person).

Hypothesis 2. Support for the national principle of mestizaje is roughly similar to that for mestizaje in one's family.

Studies of racial attitudes in the United States have found that respondents give less liberal responses to questions about intermarriage, which tap into intimate or personal preferences, than to more abstract questions of race, such as laws banning intermarriage (Schuman et al. 1997). Similarly, there may be widespread support for mestizaje as an abstract national principle in Latin America but relative

3. Ladinos are nonindigenous Guatemalans who identify with the country's Spanish heritage (Hale 2006).

intolerance when it comes to marriage partners for members of one's family. On the other hand, given the clearly higher rates of intermarriage in Latin America, and as evidence from Brazil suggests (Telles 2004), there may be less inconsistency between abstract principles and personal preferences in Latin American than in the United States.

Hypothesis 3. Support for the national principle of *mestizaje* is positively related to more tolerant attitudes about intermarriage.

Hypothesis 4. Support for *mestizaje* varies significantly across the eight countries based largely on differences in elite national narratives. Support is greatest in Brazil and Mexico, the countries that developed the strongest mixed-race ideologies during the nation-building period.

Hypothesis 5. There is greater support for *mestizaje* in countries where there are stronger multicultural policies.

Although some view multiculturalism as a challenge to *mestizaje* (Paschel 2010), we argue that by raising awareness of racial and ethnic inequalities, multicultural policies may increase the salience of *mestizaje* as an ideal for improved race relations.

Hypothesis 6. Support for both dimensions of *mestizaje* is stronger in countries where it is seen as regarding mixture with indigenous people rather than with Afro-descendants.

While *mestizaje* ideologies often have exclusionary implications for both indigenous and black people, most countries (Brazil excepted) tend to privilege past indigenous contributions to the nation over those of Africans in their nation-building narratives. As a result, indigenous people occupy a more central place in the historically based national imagination. Nevertheless, some see contemporary indigenous people as an "other" and as a major impediment to economic development (Hale 2006; Hooker 2005; Wade 2009; Yashar 2005), while some see blacks as largely assimilated, although second-class, citizens.

Hypothesis 7. Black, indigenous, and mixed-race people are most likely to support the national principle of *mestizaje*, while whites are the least likely to support it. Similarly, *mestizos* are more supportive of intermarriage than whites.

The literature on racial attitudes has emphasized dominant-minority relations, based on the US case, where minorities are more likely to have more liberal attitudes (Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Sidanius and Pratto 1999). For Latin America, we expect that black and indigenous people, the two major minorities, will be more likely to support *mestizaje* ideologies if they sense that they are included in its racially unifying message; they will be less supportive if they see *mestizaje* as denying racism or their distinctiveness. Unlike in the United States, the large mixed-race populations of many Latin American countries arguably have been part of the dominant group because of *mestizaje* ideology. Because they are, by definition, the progeny of race mixture, we expect *mestizos* and *mulattos* to be especially supportive of *mestizaje*. In contrast, white support will be lower since the ideology offers less to whites' status, except perhaps a greater sense of national unity with nonwhites. Moreover, while people who self-identify as white may be

products of mixture as well (Telles and Flores, forthcoming), their choice to identify as white may reflect a weaker embrace of mestizaje.

#### DATA AND METHODS

We tested these hypotheses using nationally representative surveys from the 2010 Americas Barometer, which were collected by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP). The sample in most countries consisted of approximately 1,500 randomly selected respondents. In Brazil, Bolivia, and Ecuador, the sample was larger at 2,000–3,000. Nationally representative data enable generalizing findings to the populations of these countries; the exception is Guatemala regarding intermarriage, which we explain below.

In collaboration with the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA) at Princeton University, the 2010 Americas Barometer included items indexing the two dimensions of mestizaje that constitute our dependent variables. The national principle of mestizaje was presented this way: “The mixing of the races is good for [country]. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?” The principle of intermarriage was presented this way: “You would agree to one of your daughters or sons marrying a(n) indigenous/black/darker-colored person. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?”<sup>4</sup> PERLA and LAPOP investigators limited the attitudinal questions to only one ethnic group in each country. The intermarriage question referred to *negros* in Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador, and to the indigenous (*indígena*) in Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru. In the Dominican Republic, the question referred to a darker-colored person (*persona de color más obscuro*), since *negro* is often reserved for Haitians.<sup>5</sup> Responses to both questions were measured using a 1–7 scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree).

We used linear regression to examine the effect of sociodemographic and country variables on the two dimensions of mestizaje, adjusting for clustering at the level of the primary sampling unit.<sup>6</sup> Specifically, the variables denoting national mestizaje and intermarriage were regressed on ethnoracial identity, age, education at three levels (primary, secondary, and college), sex, and residence in an urban area; in the model for intermarriage, we added support for the national principle of mestizaje. For the regression analyses predicting support for intermarriage, we excluded from our sample respondents who identified as members of each country’s target minority, since they were asked about their support for marrying someone from their own group. The target minorities were blacks in

4. The survey items in Spanish are “La mezcla de razas es buena para [país]. ¿Hasta qué punto está de acuerdo o en desacuerdo con esta afirmación?” and “Estaría de acuerdo que una hija o hijo suyo se casara con una persona indígena/negra/de color más obscuro. ¿Hasta qué punto está de acuerdo o en desacuerdo con esta afirmación?”

5. *Negro* is translated into English literally as “black” and is understood by some as referring to those at the darkest end of the color spectrum, although others may also understand it as referring to blacks and mulattos.

6. Clustered sampling designs can downwardly bias the standard errors. Adjusting for this inflates the standard errors, making the model’s significance tests more conservative.



Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic; and indigenous people in Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru. In the regression analyses, we treated the ethnoracial groups as a set of dummy variables with *mestizo* as the reference group in countries with that category; *ladino* was the reference group in Guatemala and *mestizo/indio* in the Dominican Republic.

For most of the countries, ethnoracial identity was based on the question: "Do you consider yourself white, mestizo, indigenous, black, mulatto or other?"<sup>7</sup> Response categories were different for Guatemala, Brazil, and the Dominican Republic. The categories besides *other* were *ladino* and *indigenous* in Guatemala; in Brazil, they were *white*, *pardo* (brown), and *preto* (black). In the Dominican Republic, *mestizo/indio* was used instead of *mestizo* alone.

Consistent with common practice in several Latin American censuses (Schkolnik and Del Popolo 2005), we used self-identification and language variables to construct an indigenous variable.<sup>8</sup> Indigenous people were defined as those who self-identified as indigenous in the ethnoracial question described earlier, who identified as belonging to a particular indigenous group (e.g., Aymara, Nahuatl, Maya, Quechua, etc.), or who reported that their mother tongue is an indigenous language. Despite a growing social movement to count as indigenous only those who self-identify as indigenous (Fondo Indígena 2011), Latin American censuses have continued to use additional criteria like language because the indigenous category is still highly stigmatized. Many who might consider themselves indigenous in some situations, or are considered indigenous by others, may prefer to self-identify as *mestizo*, a phenomenon that may be particularly true in Peru (de la Cadena 2000; Schkolnik and Del Popolo 2005, Sulmont and Callirgos, forthcoming).

We controlled for education because we expected that more-educated people would have more tolerant racial attitudes due to their greater knowledge of the history of colonization and slavery. This positive relation between education and tolerance may also result from greater awareness of racial norms and social desirability (Schuman et al. 1997). We controlled for urban residence because it shapes access to educational systems and media, which influence racial attitudes.

We excluded Guatemala from the intermarriage analysis because 76 percent of that sample answered "Do not know" or refused to answer the question. This high nonresponse rate may indicate that intermarriage is so highly stigmatized as to be taboo in Guatemala.<sup>9</sup> A logistic regression analysis showed that individuals with higher levels of support for national *mestizaje* were more likely to answer

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

8. We used additional indicators of indigenous ethnicity only in countries where the indigenous are the primary minority (e.g., Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru). The item on indigenous group membership was not available in some of the other countries. In Guatemala and Bolivia, all respondents were asked the indigenous group question, regardless of how they self-identified; in Mexico and Peru, only those who self-identified as indigenous were subsequently asked about specific group membership.

9. In all other countries, nonresponse rates for the intermarriage question were below 8 percent, with the highest (7.7 percent) in Bolivia. Nonresponse rates for the national principle of *mestizaje* ranged from 2.1 percent in Brazil to 8.6 percent in Guatemala.

the intermarriage question, suggesting that those answering the question on intermarriage are more tolerant than the general population.

#### FINDINGS

Table 1, with the ethnoracial group distribution for each national sample, shows the predominance of Afro-descendants (mulattos/pardos and blacks) in Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and Ecuador, and the predominance of indigenous peoples in Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru. These groups thus become the designated target ethnic groups in our analysis. Despite their importance in each country, the size of these groups varied from country to country: mulattos/pardos and blacks were the majority in Brazil (57.5 percent), while in Ecuador they amounted only to 4.9 percent; indigenous ranged from 73.2 percent in Bolivia to 7.4 percent in Mexico. In terms of absolute numbers (data not shown), Afro-Brazilians represent most of the Afro-descendants in Latin America. Mexico had the largest national indigenous population in the region, even though the Mexican indigenous population represented the smallest percentage of the four countries where the indigenous were the target minority.

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics regarding support for the national development principle of mestizaje, by country and ethnoracial category. The final column shows that while the mean for most countries lies in the tight band of 5.3 to 5.5 out of 7, indicating moderate support for mestizaje, Brazil stands out with the strongest support at 6.3, with Colombia next at 5.9. In contrast, support for mestizaje in the Dominican Republic was only 3.8, indicating neutrality.

Table 2 also shows ethnoracial differences in mean support for mestizaje. Brazilians of all colors and black Ecuadorians showed the greatest support for mestizaje, while the mestizo/indio and "other" population of the Dominican Republic and the "other" population in Bolivia showed the lowest support. All ethnoracial categories in Brazil showed averages greater than 6, and in Colombia, all of them showed averages of 5.9 or 6. Ethnoracial contrast in support for mestizaje was greatest in Ecuador and Bolivia, where the mean scores for whites were 5.5 and 4.8 compared to 6.3 for *negros* and 5.5 for indigenous people, respectively.

Table 3 shows the mean level of support for intermarriage with a *negro* or indigenous person, by country; these minorities were excluded from our sample for this analysis, as discussed previously. Most countries' respondents reported moderate tolerance for intermarriage, with mean support ranging from 5.1 to 5.8. As with support for the national principle of mestizaje, mean tolerance for intermarriage was especially high in Brazil (6.4) and lowest in Bolivia (4.3). Looking at ethnoracial categories, Brazilians of all colors and mulattos in Colombia showed the most tolerance for intermarriage. Except for the others category, whites in all countries were consistently less tolerant of intermarriage than mestizos and mulattos.

Bolivians were most opposed to intermarriage. Whites and others in Bolivia expressed the lowest mean levels of support for intermarriage (3.6); they also showed the greatest variation in support for intermarriage, as evidenced by the largest standard errors for the total means and means for the two dominant

Table 1 Frequency distribution and percentage of ethnorracial categories by country

Target minority and country	White		Mestizo		Mulatto/ Pardo		Negro		Indigenous		Other		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
<i>Negro</i>													
Brazil	847	36.81	— <sup>a</sup>		1,217	47.48	231	9.98	—		147	5.73	2,442
Colombia	470	32.30	766	52.65	52	3.57	100	6.87	—		67	4.60	1,455
Dom. Rep.	142	9.58	1,003	67.63	164	11.06	153	10.32	— <sup>b</sup>		21	1.42	1,483
Ecuador	305	10.53	2,439	82.47	59	2.31	68	2.57	—		97	2.12	2,968
<i>Indigenous</i>													
Bolivia	118	3.83	830	22.18	—		—		1,994	73.23	24	.75	2,966
Guatemala	— <sup>c</sup>		890	61.08	— <sup>c</sup>		— <sup>c</sup>		529	36.31	38	2.61	1,457
Mexico	244	16.70	1,045	71.53	—		—		108	7.39	64	4.38	1,461
Peru	173	11.79	1,005	68.51	—		—		233	15.88	56	3.82	1,467

Note: Percentages for Bolivia, Brazil, and Ecuador are weighted to account for complex sampling design. The number of cases is not weighted. We use (—) to denote instances in which we placed minority groups with fewer than fifty observations into the other ethnorracial category.

<sup>a</sup>Brazil does not use the category *mestizo*.

<sup>b</sup>The Dominican Republic uses the category *mestizo/indio* and does not use *indigenous*.

<sup>c</sup>Guatemala uses *ladino* instead of *mestizo* and does not use *white*, *mulatto*, and *negro*.

Table 2 Mean with standard errors of support for the national development principle of *mestizaje* by country and ethnoracial category

Target minority and country	White		Mestizo		Mulatto/ Pardo		Negro		Indigenous		Other		Total	
	mean	s.e.	mean	s.e.	mean	s.e.	mean	s.e.	mean	s.e.	mean	s.e.	mean	s.e.
	<i>Negro</i>													
Brazil	6.28	(.08)	— <sup>a</sup>		6.29	(.08)	6.27	(.12)	—		6.32	(.11)	6.28	(.06)
Colombia	5.90	(.07)	5.89	(.05)	5.90	(.18)	5.99	(.13)	—		5.89	(.20)	5.90	(.04)
Dom. Rep.	4.08	(.18)	3.66	(.07)	3.95	(.18)	4.32	(.19)	— <sup>b</sup>		3.55	(.56)	3.80	(.06)
Ecuador	5.46	(.14)	5.49	(.07)	6.06	(.21)	6.33	(.15)	—		5.68	(.33)	5.53	(.07)
<i>Indigenous</i>														
Bolivia	4.84	(.23)	5.11	(.10)	—		—		5.47	(.06)	3.74	(.64)	5.33	(.07)
Guatemala	— <sup>c</sup>		5.57	(.06)	— <sup>c</sup>		— <sup>c</sup>		5.37	(.08)	5.08	(.31)	5.48	(.05)
Mexico	5.34	(.12)	5.34	(.05)	—		—		5.62	(.15)	5.77	(.20)	5.38	(.05)
Peru	5.46	(.13)	5.57	(.05)	—		—		5.30	(.11)	5.76	(.19)	5.53	(.04)

Note: The means for Bolivia, Brazil, and Ecuador are weighted to account for complex sampling design. Support for the national development principle of *mestizaje* refers to the extent to which respondents agree that the mixing of races has been good for the development of their country, along a scale of 1 to 7 (1 = strong disagreement, 7 = strong agreement).

<sup>a, b, c</sup> See notes to table 1.

Table 3 Mean with standard errors of support for intermarriage of a child to a negro or indigenous person (1–7 scale) by country and ethnorracial category

Target minority and country	White		Mestizo		Mulatto/ Pardo		Negro		Indigenous		Other		Total <sup>d</sup>	
	mean	s.e.	mean	s.e.	mean	s.e.	mean	s.e.	mean	s.e.	mean	s.e.	mean	s.e.
<i>Negro</i>														
Brazil	6.33	(.09)	— <sup>a</sup>		6.47	(.06)	— <sup>c</sup>		6.53	(.12)	6.42	(.06)		
Colombia	5.65	(.08)	5.80	(.06)	6.29	(.16)	— <sup>c</sup>		5.60	(.25)	5.76	(.05)		
Dom. Rep.	4.66	(.20)	4.71	(.07)	5.22	(.16)	— <sup>c</sup>		5.33	(.45)	4.78	(.06)		
Ecuador	5.13	(.17)	5.38	(.07)	5.73	(.34)	— <sup>c</sup>		4.42	(.34)	5.34	(.07)		
<i>Indigenous</i>														
Bolivia	3.62	(.22)	4.40	(.12)	—		— <sup>c</sup>		3.62	(.70)	4.27	(.12)		
Mexico	5.26	(.14)	5.61	(.06)	—		— <sup>c</sup>		5.19	(.26)	5.53	(.05)		
Peru	4.99	(.14)	5.15	(.06)	—		— <sup>c</sup>		5.29	(.24)	5.14	(.05)		

Note: The means for Bolivia, Brazil, and Ecuador are weighted to account for complex sampling design.

<sup>a</sup>See notes to table 1.

<sup>b</sup>Negros and indigenous people were omitted in countries where they are the target group, as they would have been asked if they supported marriage to their own category.

<sup>c</sup>The total mean support for intermarriage excludes target groups.

(white and mestizo) categories. In an additional analysis (not shown), 39.8 percent of white and 26.6 percent of mestizo Bolivians opposed intermarriage (rating of 1 to 3), with 22.7 percent of whites and 10.8 percent of mestizos registering the strongest opposition (rating of 1). This is consistent with a study of the same set of countries that finds that Bolivians were the only national group that believed that the subordinate group is treated the same as whites (Telles and Bailey 2013).

Table 4 shows the results of linear regression analyses for a pooled sample from the eight countries with one model predicting mestizaje as a national development principle and two models predicting tolerance of intermarriage with a member of the target minority. In the second model for intermarriage, we added belief in national mestizaje to test our hypothesis that support for the national principle frames individual attitudes about intermarriage. As the first column of table 4 indicates, we controlled for a range of sociodemographic variables and for each of the countries.

Coefficients for the first model in table 4 show that support for the principle of mestizaje was strongest among black and indigenous peoples (.340 and .312), followed by mulattos (.165). Whites, mestizos (the reference category), and others least supported the national principle of mestizaje. Across countries, support was strongest in Brazil (.759), followed by Colombia (.480), and then Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, and Mexico (the reference category) in the moderate range. Support was lower in Bolivia (-.379) and by far the lowest in the Dominican Republic (-1.591).

Model 2 in table 4 shows that whites (-.159) were less tolerant of intermarriage than mestizos, the reference category. In a separate analysis (found at [www.perla.princeton.edu](http://www.perla.princeton.edu)) we discovered that these differences were significant only in Bolivia and Mexico. Mulattos and others were not significantly different from mestizos, except in Colombia and Ecuador, respectively.<sup>10</sup> Regarding national differences, we found that Brazilians were, by far, most accepting of intermarriage (.809), distantly followed by Colombians (.209), then Mexicans and Ecuadorians in the moderate range, while the least supportive were Peruvians (-.480), Dominicans (-.752), and least of all Bolivians (-1.547).<sup>11</sup>

Finally, model 3 in table 4 shows that belief in the national principle of mestizaje was strongly correlated with support for intermarriage with black or indigenous people and greatly increased the model's explanatory power ( $R^2$  increased from .128 to .321). This suggests that support for the mestizaje principle frames individual attitudes about intermarriage, although the direction of influence is uncertain since both attitudes were measured simultaneously. Introducing the abstract mestizaje variable reduced most of the national differences, especially for Brazil, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic, countries where Afro-descendants are

10. We included the target minority groups in another analysis and found that they were more likely to support their child's marriage to a person of their own group than mestizos (data found at [www.perla.princeton.edu](http://www.perla.princeton.edu)).

11. We also added interaction terms to the models to explore if the effects of the mestizaje ideology on support for intermarriage vary by country. Results showed that mestizaje had a stronger effect on tolerance for intermarriage in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Peru than in Mexico and the Dominican Republic (data found at [www.perla.princeton.edu](http://www.perla.princeton.edu)).

Table 4 Results of OLS regressions predicting support for the national development principle of mestizaje and intermarriage in the pooled sample of eight Latin American countries

Predictors	Support for national mestizaje	Support for intermarriage <sup>a</sup>	
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Ethnoracial category <sup>b</sup>			
White	.066 (.045)	-.159 (.056)**	-.187 (.050)***
Mulatto	.165 (.075)*	.094 (.080)	.021 (.071)
Black	.340 (.073)***	—	—
Indigenous	.312 (.105)**	—	—
Other	.123 (.075)	-.193 (.101)	-.258 (.093)**
Educational level <sup>c</sup>			
Secondary	.203 (.037)***	.271 (.061)***	.185 (.052)***
College	.217 (.043)***	.324 (.060)***	.221 (.056)***
Age	-.003 (.001)**	-.008 (.001)***	-.005 (.001)***
Female	-.004 (.026)	.012 (.032)	.031 (.029)
Urban	.162 (.038)***	.226 (.061)***	.107 (.048)*
Support for mestizaje	—	—	.524 (.015)***
Country <sup>d</sup>			
Brazil	.759 (.098)***	.809 (.115)***	.380 (.093)***
Colombia	.480 (.083)***	.209 (.097)*	-.062 (.079)
Dominican Republic	-1.591 (.101)***	-.752 (.114)***	.040 (.097)
Ecuador	.185 (.095)	-.189 (.110)	-.268 (.086)**
Bolivia	-.379 (.085)***	-1.547 (.113)***	-1.238 (.091)***
Guatemala	.107 (.088)	—	—
Peru	.087 (.087)	-.480 (.101)***	-.573 (.088)***
Constant	5.210 (.088)***	5.504 (.112)***	2.735 (.122)***
R <sup>2</sup>	.144	.128	.321
N	14,954	10,864	10,607

\*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001

<sup>a</sup>The sample for the regressions predicting support for intermarriage excludes the target minorities: (1) blacks in Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and Ecuador; and (2) indigenous people in Bolivia, Mexico, and Peru. We excluded Guatemala from the regressions predicting intermarriage because of a low response rate to this item.

<sup>b</sup>Mestizo is the reference category.

<sup>c</sup>Less than a secondary education is the reference category.

<sup>d</sup>Mexico is the reference country.

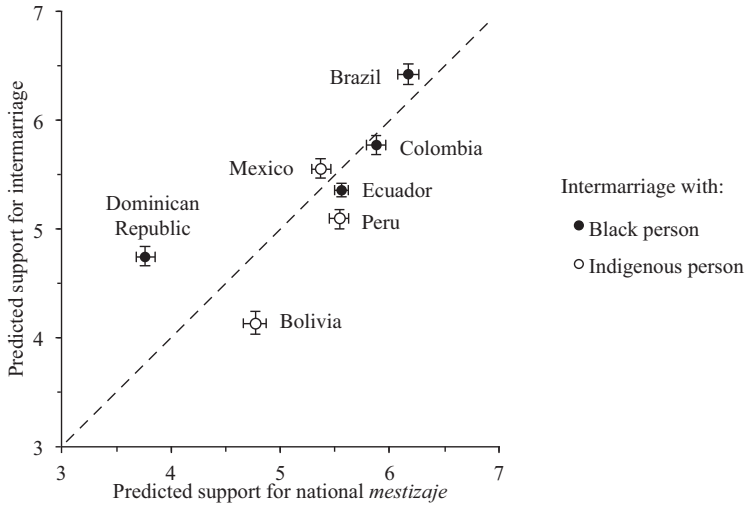


Figure 1 Predicted support for intermarriage with a negro or indigenous person by predicted support for the national development principle of mestizaje in each country. Support for mestizaje and intermarriage ranges on a 1–7 scale (1 = strong disagreement, 7 = strong agreement). We derived predicted values for intermarriage from model 3 in table 4 holding all individual variables at their means and excluding target groups from our analysis. Error bars show the 95 percent confidence interval. Guatemala is excluded from this figure because of a low response rate to the intermarriage question.

the target group.<sup>12</sup> In other words, opposition to intermarriage with blacks would be greater if not for the national principle of mestizaje.

To illustrate the relationship between belief in mestizaje and tolerance for intermarriage by country, we turn to figure 1, a scatterplot of predicted support for intermarriage by predicted support for national mestizaje.<sup>13</sup> Predicted values were calculated for the two dimensions of mestizaje in each country, holding all of the other variables in table 4 constant at their means. Black circles indicate countries where respondents were asked if they supported their child's marriage to a black person, while a white circle represents countries in which respondents were asked about marriage to an indigenous person. Error bars representing the 95 percent confidence intervals for our estimates indicate where the actual means for the population should fall. The dotted diagonal line represents values at which support for the national principle of mestizaje and intermarriage are equal.

12. This effect was particularly striking in the Dominican Republic, where the regression coefficient, previously a significant negative predictor of intermarriage, changed after adjusting for belief in mestizaje.

13. We use figure 1 instead of the model with interaction terms because it is better suited to test the hypothesis that support for mestizaje is stronger in relation to mixture with indigenous peoples than with blacks. While interaction terms showed us whether the ideology of mestizaje has different effects by country, figure 1 allows us to compare the predicted support for intermarriage among citizens of countries where indigenous and black people were the target minorities.



Guatemala was omitted because a representative response on the intermarriage dimension was unobtainable.

We found similar support for the principle of *mestizaje* and for intermarriage in Colombia, Mexico, Ecuador, and Brazil. There was actually greater support for intermarriage than for *mestizaje* in the Dominican Republic.<sup>14</sup> There were no consistent black-indigenous national differences; the national principle found more support than intermarriage in two indigenous countries (Peru and Bolivia) and intermarriage found more support in a black country (Dominican Republic).

In terms of the sociodemographic variables, table 4 shows that urban and more educated people were more supportive of *mestizaje* and intermarriage. This may reflect their greater knowledge of Latin America's history of racial exclusion, though this result may be affected by a greater concern with social desirability among such people (Schuman et al. 1997). Gender had no effect. Finally, we found that the age coefficients were negative and statistically significant, indicating that young people were more supportive of *mestizaje* both as a national development principle and as intermarriage. The effect was very small, suggesting little attitudinal change among Latin American age cohorts over time. When we converted age coefficients to predicted values (data not shown), we found that eighteen- and fifty-year-olds showed similar mean levels of predicted support for the national principle at 5.5 and 5.4 and for intermarriage at 5.4 and 5.3, respectively.

#### DISCUSSION

While scholars have often pointed to *mestizaje* ideology as critical for understanding the distinctiveness of race in Latin America (Telles 2004; Wade 1993), this is the first study to analyze public opinion on *mestizaje* across Latin America. Using nationally representative samples for eight countries, this study found considerable support for *mestizaje* as a principle of national development and as tolerance for intermarriage among the general population, consistent with our first hypothesis. Levels of support for *mestizaje* as a national principle and for intermarriage were roughly similar, supporting our second hypothesis. Moreover, people that supported national *mestizaje* were also likely to be tolerant of intermarriage, consistent with our third hypothesis that *mestizaje* is a major factor in racial attitudes in Latin America.

We expected that support for *mestizaje* would be highest in Brazil and Mexico, the countries with the strongest national narratives of racial mixture (hypothesis 4); in fact, Brazilians were most supportive of both dimensions of *mestizaje*, followed by Colombia. We found midlevel support for *mestizaje* in Mexico (and in Ecuador and Peru). We suspect that lower levels of support for *mestizaje* in Mexico, compared to Brazil and Colombia, might relate to the absence of strong policies promoting minorities, as we proposed in hypothesis 5. Brazil has pursued the most aggressive ethnoracial promotion policies, particularly affirmative

14. Because the question on support for national *mestizaje* did not specify the participating racial categories, Dominicans may have interpreted *mestizaje* as involving mixture with Haitians, lowering their support for this principle. By contrast, the question on intermarriage asked Dominicans about marriage to a darker-colored person to avoid associations with Haitians.

action in higher education, and Brazilian society has a relatively high level of popular awareness and discussion of minority disadvantage (Telles 2004). In contrast, Mexican policies in support of minorities are relatively weak, and public discussion of ethnoracial discrimination is incipient (Sue 2009). Also, our findings for age showed that younger people are more supportive of mestizaje than older people (although the differences are small), further suggesting that support may be increasing rather than declining. Thus, mestizaje and multiculturalism are not incompatible; rather, strong policies of multiculturalism seem to be associated with mestizaje principles of greater racial inclusion in Brazil and Colombia.

Bolivia, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic had lower levels of support for mestizaje. Bolivians showed the least support for intermarriage and moderate support for the national principle of mestizaje. These findings seem to diverge from hypothesis 5, since Bolivia has recently turned sharply to official multiculturalism and elected an indigenous president. However, this turn has been particularly conflict ridden and has raised ethnic tensions, with whites now accusing the indigenous of reverse racism (Gustafson and Fabricant 2011; Telles and Bailey 2013), which probably accounts for the country's low support for mestizaje. Similarly, Guatemala's turn to mestizaje as a unifying discourse since the civil war has been fraught with tensions (Hale 1999), perhaps contributing to most Guatemalans' refusal to respond to the intermarriage question. However, Guatemalans did answer the question on the national principle of mestizaje, which received only moderate support, as in Bolivia. Thus, Bolivia and Guatemala, the countries with the largest indigenous populations, may both have particularly low support for intermarriage and only moderate support for mestizaje as a national principle.

Dominicans' support for mestizaje as a national principle was clearly the lowest. This is understandable: the Dominican national project of mestizaje was explicit about its Spanish and indigenous origins while ignoring blacks, even though it received a relatively large number of African slaves (Voyages Database 2009). At the same time, the Dominican Republic is unusual among the countries in our study for having almost no multicultural or racial consciousness movements, no official recognition of multiculturalism and no race or ethnicity questions in national censuses since 1960.<sup>15</sup> Thus, ethnoracial issues, whether as mestizaje or as multiculturalism, seem to have little salience in that country, which is consistent with hypothesis 5.

We found no support for hypothesis 6, that mestizaje receives greater support in countries where it is seen as mixture with indigenous people rather than blacks. Although clear patterns were lacking, we actually found the opposite at the extremes. In particular, we found the strongest support for mestizaje in Brazil, where mestizaje is clearly understood as mixture with Afro-descendants, and the lowest support in both the Dominican Republic and Bolivia, the latter where mestizaje refers to mixture with the indigenous.

15. One might suspect that this finding for the Dominican Republic is connected with high rates of immigration to the United States, but such high rates are also found in Guatemala and Mexico. Moreover, in a separate analysis, we found that Dominicans who had relatives in the United States were more likely to support mestizaje.

Results for hypothesis 7, regarding ethnoracial differences in support for mestizaje, were mixed. Such differences tended to be small and significant in only a few countries. We found that the black or indigenous minority was most supportive of the principle of mestizaje, suggesting that they value its rhetorical/inclusionary side, which promotes their contributions to the nation. There were no white–mestizo differences in support for the national principle of mestizaje, but self-identified whites had the lowest levels of tolerance regarding intermarriage. This finding for whites, an exception in our general findings, is consistent with US-based research indicating that individuals give less tolerant answers to questions involving a personal commitment to racial change than to abstract principles (Schuman et al. 1997). In this case, support for a child's marriage to a black or indigenous person might be seen as a threat to the social status of whites.

#### CONCLUSION

Our study contributes to the literature on racial attitudes by examining multiple countries in the Americas and nation-making ideas of mestizaje as well as by shedding light on the relationship between abstract principles and public opinion. Our finding that the Latin American ideology of mestizaje is a major source of racial attitudes in the region contrasts with attitudes in the United States, where evidence for the relationship between principles and racial attitudes has been mixed. Two factors in each region can help us understand these differences: the nature of national principles and of racial/ethnic boundaries. In the United States, the focus has been on the role of seemingly race-neutral principles like egalitarianism and individualism in shaping racial attitudes (Bailey 2009; Krysan 2000; Telles and Bailey 2013). In Latin America, mestizaje ideologies are explicitly about race, which may facilitate their use as frameworks for racial attitudes and behaviors. In addition, group boundaries are sharper in the United States, where racial attitudes have been historically polarized between whites and blacks, although US whites have consistently become more tolerant over recent decades (Schuman et al. 1997). On the other hand, in Latin America, where racial boundaries are more fluid, we find small differences in opinion between the dominant and minority groups. Thus, low levels of identification with ethnic categories may prevent the division of public opinion along racial lines, contributing to more tolerant racial attitudes.

Overall, this study has shown the importance of extending the study of racial attitudes beyond the United States and into the many countries of the racially diverse Latin American region. In general, we have found that national ideologies of mestizaje are associated with more inclusive attitudes toward minorities, although they may also be exclusionary by legitimizing the status quo and impeding the work of ethnic-based social movements seeking social justice. While mestizaje ideologies continue to be embraced in many Latin American countries, public opinion is not homogenous in the region. Support for mestizaje ranges from highly supportive in Brazil to moderately supportive in the Dominican Republic, Bolivia, and perhaps Guatemala. The particular social and historical conditions of each country have nurtured different versions of mestizaje and different levels of support for these ideologies. Local racial politics are almost certain to continue

to reshape racial attitudes in each country, contributing to regional variation. Comparative research that explores the conditions that influence how ideologies and principles matter can only enrich our understanding of the sources of racial attitudes.

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