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Las Vidas Negras Importan: Centering Blackness and Racial Politics in Latin American Research

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Abstract

Racial disparities in Latin America exist in poverty levels, income, education, infant mortality, political representation, access to social services, and other key indicators. However, researchers in comparative politics face an uphill challenge to prioritize racial politics in studies of democratization, democratic consolidation, representation, and even social movements and inequality, despite racial hierarchies being quite harmful to democracy in Latin America. This article argues for the centering of Black politics and racial hierarchies in Latin American politics and highlights recent literature to map just how that can be done. More than adding race as a variable or a control, we must understand racial identification and anti-Black racism in Latin America: how they operate, and how they influence, complicate, motivate, affirm, and inspire politics. In this article, I address (a) why we should center racial politics in Latin American politics, (b) how comparative racial scholars have centered Black politics, (c) the methodologies necessary to accurately measure racial identification, and (d) recent research that examines the interplay between racial self-identification, Black group consciousness, and voting behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The Black Lives Matter protests for Black humanity against police brutality were part of a global movement in 2020. South of the United States, Black people also asserted, *Las Vidas Negras Importan*. These protests were not solely in solidarity with the movement in the United States but were primarily reactions to Black lives lost in each country at the hands of police. In Colombia, people gathered to protest the killing of Anderson Arboleda, who was accused of breaking quarantine and died of police brutality 3 days before George Floyd. In Brazil, people united in response to the death of a 14-year-old, João Pedro Matos Pinto, who was killed during a police operation in Rio de Janeiro. In Puerto Rico, organizers within the antiracist movement held protests and vigils in June 2020 to underscore the message that Black Puerto Rican lives matter (Abadía-Rexach 2020). Much like protests in the United States, these protests may have been inspired by one or more specific tragedies but were rooted in generational anger and grief from a history of violence against Black communities. In response to similar histories, protests occurred in Indonesia, France, South Africa, England, and throughout the world to support racially marginalized populations who are targeted by the police at comparatively higher rates than dominant racial groups. Examining Black politics through a global lens reveals the similarities in experience and racial positioning that come with the entrenched racial hierarchies and inequalities that exist throughout the African Diaspora, disadvantaging Black folks. In Latin America and the Caribbean in particular, Black activists communicated about and protested systemic racism long before Black Lives Matter became a movement. Scholarship on racial identification, racial inequality, voting behavior, racial ideology, and racial representation in the region responds to these realities and allows us to compare Black politics hemispherically in critical and meaningful ways.

Within the field of political science, the United States has long been the center of the study of racial politics. Comparative politics, as a field, has treated race as a nearly insignificant variable with the exception of the United States and South Africa.¹ Nonetheless, racial inequality is prevalent throughout the world, and anti-Black racism in particular is institutionally embedded throughout the Western Hemisphere (Villarreal 2010, Telles 2014). Per capita incomes for White Brazilians, for example, are more than double those of Afro-descendants, and 23% of *mestizos* live below the poverty line in Peru, compared to 34% of Afro-descendants (Morrison 2015). Similarly, 66.6% of Black women aged 25–65 in Latin America live below the median income compared to 41.1% of White women, and in Ecuador, the maternal mortality rate for Black women is nearly four times that of the national total (ECLAC/OHCHR 2020). Disparities between Afro-descendants and non-Afro-descendant populations (excluding Indigenous and Asian populations) exist in poverty levels, income, education (particularly at the university level), infant mortality, political representation, access to social services, and other key indicators (ECLAC/OHCHR 2020). For this reason, I argue that in no region is the near absence of ethnoracial analysis by comparativists more critical than in Latin America where being Black or Indigenous matters for economic, social, and political outcomes. In a recent review, Faletti (2021) highlights the absence of Indigenous politics in political science, but she also notes that most of the existing scholarship has been done in Latin America, and consequently, the subject has received attention among Latin Americanists. Black politics remains primarily a consideration among scholars of American politics; thus, anti-Black racism in Latin America is the domain of those who focus on

¹ See Hanchard (2018) for an extensive examination of the omission of race in comparative politics and Thompson (2013) for a discussion of the transnationalism of race in comparative politics and international relations. Additionally, Blatt (2018) has written about the marginalization of the study of race in political science and our discipline's racist origins.

comparative racial politics specifically. Although this was a small field for many years, newer work has led to an expansion of the study of Afro-Latin American politics. This article argues for the centering of Black politics and racial hierarchies in Latin American politics and highlights recent literature to map just how that can be done. More than adding race as a variable or a control, we must understand racial identification and anti-Black racism in Latin America: how they operate, and how they influence, complicate, motivate, affirm, and inspire politics.

African descendants represent approximately 30% of the region's population, with Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic holding the largest Afro-descendant populations (Johnson 2013). Questions abound: How is race salient in Latin America? How do national narratives of racial harmony silence realities regarding structural racism and racial hierarchies? Does the absence of formal segregation and White supremacist organizations that enact racial violence suggest that racial hierarchies and institutional racism are less entrenched in the region than in the United States or South Africa? How do Afro-descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean identify, and how can researchers accurately account for people of African descent who may not self-identify as Black? How does racial identification factor into notions of Black group consciousness and political attitudes? Can we make connections between race, group consciousness, and voting behavior? What are the factors that affect Black political representation in the region?

Although all these questions cannot be fully answered in this review, I outline the recent literature that attends to many of these subjects. Moreover, these questions and the increase in racial activism demonstrate how much work is still to be done as well as the centrality of race in Latin American politics (Hutchings & Valentino 2004). In this article, I address (a) why we should center racial politics in Latin American politics, (b) how comparative racial scholars have centered Black politics, (c) the methodologies necessary to accurately measure racial identification, and (d) recent research that examines the interplay between racial self-identification, Black group consciousness, and voting behavior.

National and regional narratives of racial harmony, often termed the ideology of racial democracy, have dominated commonsense notions of race and racism in Latin America and the Caribbean. The institutions of slavery in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies were often framed from the inside as less harsh than those imposed by the Dutch and the English and sometimes even relatively benign. Higher numbers of freed Black and mulatto men and women contributed to this justification (Hernández 2012). Scholars have argued that these characterizations not only were false but also served the persistence of the slave trade and of slavery itself, as many Latin American and Caribbean countries were last in the hemisphere to abolish both (Ferrer 1999, Helg 1995, Marx 1998). The ideology of racial democracy gained more traction after slavery was abolished in the region and became cemented during the early half of the 1900s by scholars, writers, and elites. Members of this community, often working in tandem transnationally to deny the existence of racism, foster national unity, and laud the status quo, were quite successful in creating the illusion that race did not affect opportunity and was not meaningful in determining social relations (e.g., Blanco 1985, Freyre 1986, Vasconcelos 1997).

Nations have yet to grapple with the true scope of racism and racial inequality, and it bears emphasizing that the ideologies used to create a narrative of democracy and inclusion are well-packaged ideologies of exclusion. Despite the growth of Black movements, organizations, and antiracist work in various countries, the racial democracy narrative remains powerful and pervasive. These state strategies to exclude, by not considering racial inequality or structural racism, create White hegemonic notions of democracy that disguise the centrality of race to notions of citizenship. Governments are then able to openly engage in state violence, repression,

Table 1 Articles published in top journals in political science and comparative politics on the politics of Afro-descendants outside of the United States^a

Journal	Comparative Black politics	Black politics in Latin America	Comparative Black politics articles since 2000
<i>American Political Science Review</i>	1	1	1
<i>American Journal of Political Science</i>	1	1	1
<i>Journal of Politics</i>	5	2	5
<i>Comparative Politics</i>	4	1	2
<i>Comparative Political Studies</i>	7	3	5
<i>World Politics</i>	7	4	6

^aSearch terms included race, racism, ethnoracial, afro, and racial inequality, among others. The first two columns represent publications since the first digitized issue of the journal. The data do not include book reviews.

and marginalization against non-Whites without ever talking about racism, and as a result, there is no racial analysis regarding the quality of democracies.

We see the same patterns in political science scholarship (Hanchard 2018). Definitions of democracy rarely include racial inequality as a central component that can determine and/or influence access, outcomes, and representation. In comparative politics in particular, we face an uphill challenge to prioritize racial politics in studies of democratization, democratic consolidation, representation, and even social movements and inequality, despite racial hierarchies being quite harmful to democracy in Latin America (Morgan & Kelly 2021). Inequality is still primarily being studied in terms of class, leaving glaring omissions in the literature where structural racism and the relationships between racial group membership and access are seldom explored. **Table 1** demonstrates the frequency with which top journals in the discipline (*American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, and *Journal of Politics*) and in the field of comparative politics (*Comparative Politics*, *Comparative Political Studies*, and *World Politics*) have published on the politics of Afro-descendants outside of the United States and in Latin America in particular.² While comparative politics journals have published slightly more than the top journals in the discipline, there is a dearth of articles on comparative Black politics in general. The table includes a column for works published in the last two decades to demonstrate that much of the research on this topic has been recent. *World Politics*, for example, stands out as a journal that has started to publish new research on Black politics in Latin America; however, before the last few years, only one article on the subject had ever appeared in the journal's history. Other journals shown in **Table 1** have similar histories. Journals' recognition of the importance of comparative racial politics as a field is paramount, but this is, of course, tied to the need for scholars in comparative politics to view this work as necessary to study larger problems of politics in both democratic and nondemocratic regimes. If the status quo remains, then as scholars analyze the quality of democracy and voting behavior throughout the world and in Latin America in particular, they are not only reproducing the states' strategies but also reinforcing them.

²Impact Factor, reputation, citations, and other factors have produced varying lists of top journals in political science and the subfields (Giles & Garand 2007). The top journals chosen here are those that are widely accepted as such in the field and subfield. Teele & Thelen (2017) adopt a similar approach in their study of the gender gap in political science journals throughout all the subfields, and this table uses the same journals.

RACIAL DEMOCRACY AND “INFORMAL” SYSTEMIC RACISM

In Latin America and the Caribbean, racial harmony narratives were constructed in order to create a stable racial order without racial divisions, while still supporting the racial status quo of inequality (Blanco 1985, Freyre 1986, Hooker 2017, Vasconcelos 1997). Non-Whites, in many cases, remained excluded from opportunity, employment, and rights, while rhetoric of racial equality served to hide these realities. These national narratives constructed an ideology of racial harmony based on racial mixture. They asserted that (a) racial identity is not a relevant social cleavage and is deemphasized through a unifying national identity; (b) racial hierarchies are absent, such that race is not connected to life chances or socioeconomic status; (c) individual prejudice may still exist but is expressed only as isolated incidents; and (d) racism and discrimination are foreign problems, primarily within the United States (Cleland 2013). Within these descriptions of racial democracy, Blackness or Africanness is seen largely as a cultural contribution, rather than a lived experience. National descriptions of countries' cultural richness describe African drums, musical traditions, rhythms, and folklore, relegating Blackness to a musical past. Outside of culture, Blackness is seen as a contribution to a larger race; this meta race is conceived through nationality and *mestizaje* (racial mixing), thus erasing or diluting the unique experience of Afro-Latin Americans and the ways in which systemic racism supports a racial hierarchy that privileges Whiteness. *Mestizaje* serves as evidence of racial harmony/democracy and the absence of hierarchies based on racial group membership.

Scholars have challenged the ideology of racial democracy alongside claims of racial inequality and anti-Black racism throughout the region (Godreau 2015, Hanchard 1994, Hooker 2005, Jiménez Román 1996, Nascimento 2007). Laws and practices developed differently in each country, yet varied modes of exclusion carried the same intention: the marginalization of Black citizenship. The differences in each country in terms of racial identification, national narratives, and history of racial politics do necessitate nuance when doing comparative work. The Mexican and Argentine governments, for instance, have hidden their Black populations, through lack of recognition on the Census and within national racial narratives. Conversely, Brazil and Cuba have a history of Black movements (Covin 2015) and Black political parties and have included Blackness, albeit superficially, as part of their national identities.

The hesitancy to center the effects of racial hierarchies in Latin American politics as we may in American politics often comes from the lack of state-sponsored segregation in Latin America and Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries. Cleavages are presumed to be based more on class than race because these regions did not implement the Jim Crow policies of the US South—yet, racial hierarchies were cemented in less explicit but no less systematic ways. Informal racial segregation and exclusion existed in universities, social clubs, parks, neighborhoods, and places of employment (Hernández 2012). Moreover, whitening campaigns throughout Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean sought to displace Black employees and limit Black citizens' opportunity in general. These campaigns served to whiten countries by financing European immigration, which enabled White immigrants to gain access to jobs and housing that Black nationals occupied or sought to occupy (Dos Santos 2002, Helg 1990).

Racial disparities as legacies of the institution of slavery and White supremacy ensured that anti-Black racism and Black marginalization continued through to the present despite national denials. In many ways, elite strategies to simultaneously deny and cement racial hierarchies are similar to what we see in the United States today. Racial scholars of the contemporary United States know well that state-sponsored segregation is not necessary to uphold systematic racism. Indeed, the subtler ways that we maintain racism today in the United States resemble the ways in which Latin American governments have maintained racial inequality for decades (Bonilla-Silva

2002). Most often, the ideology bolsters a powerful frame that relegates racism to an individual phenomenon, allowing the government to escape accountability and avoid enacting racial policies or acknowledging institutional racism.

Racial democracy's staying power cannot hide the presence of racism from Black folks who experience it. Earlier scholarship on Black politics in Latin America argued that hiding the roots and effects of racism and denying its reach could be attributed to lower levels of racial activism in Latin America (Marx 1998). Without formal segregation and state-sponsored exclusion, racial group membership was less emphasized and thus took on less definitive meanings in Latin America than in the United States. More recently, there has been a rise in Black activism coupled with the adoption of affirmative action policies in Brazil (Heringer et al. 2016) and Colombia. The continued presence of systemic racism in the region has created transnational linkages that make it more difficult for states to deny the role of racial hierarchies and deemphasize racial group identity (Paschel & Sawyer 2008). For this reason, the study of politicized racial identities in Latin America and the Caribbean has garnered much attention in recent work, complicating the assumption that racial identification is weaker in the region.

The increase in racial activism in Latin America is partly a recognition of structural racism in each country, bolstered by increased documentation of racial disparities (often through the inclusion of racial categories in the Census and other regional data sets) that can no longer be considered informal or rooted in individual prejudice (Telles et al. 2015). New evidence and data sets show racial gaps in income, education, graduation rates, and university enrollment, as well as anti-Black racism in the labor market and criminal justice systems (Pixão & Rossetto 2019, Villarreal 2010). Across Latin America, Afro-descendant workers have worse performances in the labor market than Whites; in Colombia, Uruguay, Brazil, and Ecuador, ethnoracial disparities are high in the areas of unemployment, educational attainment, participation in the informal economy, and labor force participation (Pixão & Rossetto 2019). Prior to the adoption of affirmative action in Brazil, Afro-descendent Brazilians made up 2% of the university's student population, yet they constitute the majority (51%) of the country's population according to the 2010 Census. Representation in government has also lagged in many Latin American countries where Black people are woefully underrepresented compared to their proportion of the population (de la Torre & Sánchez 2019, Janusz 2018, Johnson 1998). Countries where these data are not collected officially, such as Cuba and the Dominican Republic, have low Black representation in higher income quintiles as well as in government, media, and positions of high esteem, but more data are needed to further quantify these inequalities (Adams 2004, Clealand 2017, Mayes 2019). In Puerto Rico, Black representation is far lower in government than in the population, even the undercounted population reflected by a Census that does not include a category for those of mixed race.³ Those who marked "Black" on the 2010 Census in Puerto Rico are overrepresented among those living in poverty and those with lower graduation and education rates, as well as lower income levels (Clealand 2021).

Racial democracy as a myth has largely been confirmed, although much of the backlash against racial policy and activism continues to emphasize the presence of racial harmony and absence of racism. The national denial of racism has far-reaching effects on Black people's perceptions of their social position, their set of opportunities, their connection to and commonality with others in their racial group, and levels of solidarity and political action based on race. For White elites, racial

³The use of the US Census in Puerto Rico means the racial categories mirror those of the United States but do not correspond to racial realities in Puerto Rico. As a result, without the mixed-race category, *trigueño*, we do not know the percentage of Afro-descendants on the island, as many in this middle category chose White on the 2010 Census.

democracy serves as a justification for either the absence or dismantling of racial policies, the omission of race on the Census and other official forms and surveys, and the lack of government accountability for racial inequalities. Scholarship now must focus on the effects of false racial democracy narratives and how they are deployed to produce and maintain a racist status quo. These narratives affect not only public opinion and perception but racial self-identification as well.

RACIAL IDENTIFICATION AND METHODS OF MEASUREMENT

One of the major challenges to the production of scholarship on racial identity and racism is the complexity of racial self-identification among non-Whites in particular. Latin America's racial schemas differ across countries, but most employ a higher number of racial categories than a Black/White dichotomy that does not separate those of mixed race. At the same time, race is argued to be more fluid in the region than in the United States, with phenotype rather than ancestry determining racial category. The addition of mixed-race categories such as *mulato*, *trigueño*, *mestizo*, *pardo*, and *moreno* creates more ways to identify, yet the presence of more categories does not necessarily connote fluidity, because these choices continue to be firmly based on the same racial hierarchies as in the United States. Indeed, in the US Census, the presence of multiple racial categories for non-Whites in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (e.g., the term *mulatto* was used between 1850 and 1920, except for the 1900 Census) represented a more elaborate way of marking Blackness or, conversely, one's distance from Whiteness. In both contexts, racial hierarchies are similar (where Whiteness is valued and Blackness is devalued or even erased), and individuals of mixed race occupy varying middle positions according to skin color and other phenotypic markers such as hair and facial features. As Nobles (2000) and Thompson (2016) argue, Census Bureaus are not politically neutral institutions, and therefore, the racial categories that are listed on the Census correspond to the national narrative that a government wishes to promote. This applies not only to categories listed on the Census but to the omissions as well: Many countries in Latin America have chosen to leave race out of the Census to support racial democracy claims or leave Black categories out to render these communities invisible.

National racial ideologies that characterize countries as racially harmonious use racial fluidity to bolster these narratives. High numbers of mixed-race citizens and fairly harmonious social relations are presented as supporting evidence, which has been critiqued by various authors (Cleland 2017, Fernández 2010, Hordge-Freeman 2015). The notion of racial fluidity is often questioned but not necessarily theorized. How do arguments of racial fluidity gain credence if racial hierarchies are so entrenched? Furthermore, if we are examining colloquial or everyday understandings of racial fluidity, one must consider the ubiquity of anti-Blackness. Notions that Blackness is inferior both aesthetically and generally are present in Latin American practices, language, media, and humor and are the basis of exclusionary treatment (Caldwell 2007, Sue & Golash-Boza 2013).

Anti-Blackness can lead to a reluctance to identify as Black and a choice to self-identify in a lighter category, particularly when ideas of racial fluidity create fuzzy racial boundaries. It becomes advantageous for someone of mixed race to identify up the hierarchy, while in other cases, identifying as Black can represent a political stance or familial connectedness and teachings about Blackness. Many activist organizations in Panama, Ecuador, Puerto Rico, and other countries have encouraged Afro-descendants to identify as Black in the wake of the Census and also as an act against anti-Blackness. In Puerto Rico, for example, Black self-identification on the Census increased by 4% from 2000 to 2010 alongside campaigns and workshops by Black activist organizations encouraging Black Puerto Ricans to embrace their racial identity and mark "Black" on the Census.

With this in mind, scholars of Black politics in Latin America have employed various methods to identify Afro-descendants and have presented differing results regarding how skin color or racial identification corresponds with one's political views and levels of group consciousness. Our ways of measuring also differ depending on the country. Moreover, self-identification may differ from how a person is racialized by others, or by the state. This is highly dependent on the country, the history of activism, and state practices. In the case of Cuba, for example, I argue that the use of racial categories on state identification cards and the Census leads to high levels of correlation between self and interviewer identification and less blurry lines regarding racial identification among Cuban citizens. Nonetheless, there is agreement among many scholars and activists that the government is whitening the population when assigning racial categories (Clealand 2017). Studies in the Dominican Republic, by contrast, show fewer Black citizens identifying as such, supported by the classification of *indio* or Indian on their state identification cards. The correlation between dark skin and Indigeneity is part of the national narrative that names Blackness as Haitian, rather than part of the Dominican Republic's own racial history (Contreras 2016, Mayes 2019).

The presence of racial categories on official identification does create a particular "knowledge" (albeit rooted in anti-Black, colonial practices) regarding race, such that the problems with self-identification are argued to be part of a lack of awareness about racial group (Loveman 2014) when these categories are left out. Racial naming, however, is part of everyday conversation throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. While one may not mark race on an official form, when presented with categories that correspond with colloquial terms, there is a high correlation between skin color and racial self-identification, which leads to more accurate measurement (Clealand 2021, Pixão & Rossetto 2019, Telles 2014, Vargas Ramos 2005). These categories may not be communicated as "race," but people are accustomed to thinking about racial terms (such as black, white, *moreno*, *mestizo*) as they relate to self-identification in their everyday lives. Mitchell-Walthour (2018) argues that self-identification in Brazil has less ambiguity if open-ended questions are asked, such as, "What is your race?" She also argues that those with an experience of discrimination are more likely to claim a *negro* identification; age differences and feelings of linked fate can all influence identification with Blackness. Finally, Johnson (2020b) finds that in Panama, varied choices rather than dichotomous terms for racial identification cause Afro-descendants to identify differently. Scholarship on identification thus far has shown that asking about racial identification in numerous ways provides the most accurate assessment of whether someone is Black or Brown and how they identify.

The process of accurately measuring race (or measuring it at all) in Latin America and the Caribbean is crucial for all scholars doing work in the region and necessitates creativity. Questions of inequality, representation, citizenship, access to the state, education, and democracy all require that we take account of racial identity and racism. This process, however, is not as easy as creating a survey question that lists White, Black, mixed race, Asian, etc. While scholars group Latin American and Caribbean countries together regionally, no country asks the racial categorization question in the same way, with the same categories (Loveman 2014). The ways that people conceive of race and the varying historical processes show that country differences must be considered. The PERLA (Project on Race and Ethnicity in Latin America) survey, for example, introduced an ethnoracial module to the Americas Barometer in 2010 that used a color palette to determine how respondents identify (Telles 2014). This attention to skin color and racial categorization is new, as the Americas Barometer did not mark skin color in this way previously. The use of a color palette can circumvent inaccurate self-identifications where respondents may self-whiten. For instance, those of mixed race or lighter brown skin may mark themselves as White, while those of darker skin may mark themselves as *mulato* or *pardo*, rather than *negro*. In other words, matching one's skin color on a palette or number line can avoid confusion with categories such as Black and *mestizo* or

hesitancy with characterizing oneself as Black. There are also scholars who ask about racial identification in multiple ways to capture interviewer-identified race, skin color, self-identification via racial category (different from skin color palettes), open-ended questions regarding race, and how one may be identified by others on the street (López et al. 2018, Telles 2017). Mitchell-Walthour (2018) uses the categories provided by government-issued surveys to ask about race in her surveys in Brazil, but she also argues that when asking about identification with Blackness, one must also ask about experiences with racism, as there are outside variables that affect self-identification beyond just skin color or parentage.

In Puerto Rico, Panama, Ecuador, Mexico, and elsewhere, governments have historically left racial identity (or the Black category) out of official forms. The omission of race questions is part of the dominant narrative that denies the salience of racial group membership. What results is a lack of data to mark racial inequalities and racial demographics. Many countries have only recently begun to ask the racial question on the Census, and many of these changes were due to collective action among Black Latin Americans and transnational exchanges among activists (Paschel 2013). The shift from *mestizaje* (racial mixing) to multiculturalism is also shown as one of the reasons governments began to recognize racial and ethnic difference—governments began to make constitutional amendments to recognize this diversity. However, this apparent shift may be overstated or merely symbolic. While states may have begun to recognize Black and Indigenous populations in the Census and recognize national diversity constitutionally, the recognition of national diversity has not been accompanied by civil rights measures to lessen racial inequality. An exception is in Brazil, where the increase in data on racial disparities following democratization gave evidence that activists and journalists needed to quantify racial inequality and justify arguments toward affirmative action. In most countries, affirmative action has not been implemented, nor has there been widespread recognition of systematic racism in Latin American and Caribbean countries. Brazil offers the example that data regarding racial inequality are prerequisites to making demands of the state and taking account of how race affects opportunity and institutions.

GROUP CONSCIOUSNESS

Much of the literature on racial consciousness, voting behavior, and linked fate is based on racial politics in the United States. For this reason, concepts that have been applied to Black and other underrepresented populations in the United States are tested in Latin America to see if they are conceptually useful (e.g., Dawson 1994). The concept of linked fate has been used to test racial consciousness based on a shared experience of anti-Black racism in Latin America. When we shift the context from the United States to Latin America and the Caribbean, these concepts must be adapted to racial realities that are unlike those in the United States and consequently, have mixed results. Within societies where racism is often denied, not only within the public sphere but by citizens in private as well, the work of racism in determining opportunity and producing marginalizing experiences can be masked, and racial identity is not always well defined. Scholarship that examines linked fate and group consciousness among US Latinos, for example, has questioned whether this concept applies in the same ways that it does for Black Americans (Sánchez et al. 2019).

Nonetheless, there has been some important work on Black group consciousness in the region, where, despite the dominance of the racial democracy ideology, Afro-descendants display feelings of racial consciousness that are based on an experience distinct from Whites' (Hanchard 1994, Sawyer 2006). There is in fact evidence of linked fate among Afro-Brazilians that in turn affects their likelihood to identify as Black (Mitchell-Walthour 2017). Work on Cuba has also found evidence of Black group consciousness that is linked to experiences of racial discrimination and perceptions of racism (Cleland 2013, 2017). Evidence of politicized Black identities in

other countries in the region would facilitate the identification of transnational patterns of racial consciousness born out of the racial hierarchies created throughout the Western Hemisphere following and deriving from the institutions of slavery.

Group consciousness among marginalized communities is often connected to experiences with racism and racial discrimination such as job discrimination, anti-Black language and humor, racial profiling by the police, and racial prejudice within intimate and social relationships. Experience and observed inequalities contribute to the politicization of Blackness for many individuals. The direct contradiction that racism lays bare in people's everyday lives when compared with dominant narratives demonstrates the fallacies of racial harmony ideologies. Nonetheless, politicized racial consciousness or Black solidarity does not exist among all Black citizens nor does it show up in individuals' ideas about Blackness in the same ways. Although experience is key in shaping attitudes, the framing of racism as prejudice contributes to the ongoing challenge of measuring group consciousness in the Latin American context. Moreover, we are still exploring whether there is one way to measure the concept across the region. Several authors have employed a multidimensional concept of group consciousness, finding that while some dimensions are consistent across cases—such as feelings of Black pride, recognition of racism, and feelings of solidarity—other concepts, such as linked fate, are less consistent (Clealand 2017, De Micheli 2021, Johnson 2020b, Mitchell-Walthour 2018). While racial group consciousness is still developing in many areas across Latin America, we can say with confidence that those who do possess a politicized Black identity or strong notions of Black solidarity are more likely to talk about and challenge racism and racial inequalities. They are more likely to support a Black candidate (Mitchell-Walthour 2018), they are more likely to be part of Black social movements (Hanchard 1994, Paschel 2016), and they are more likely to understand their reality through the lens of race.

Emerging scholarship also examines whether lighter or darker skin color among Afro-descendants is correlated with different levels of group consciousness. Darker-skinned Panamanians, for example, exhibit a stronger belief that racial discrimination is a problem, showing some evidence of the role of experience, while lighter-skinned Panamanians of mixed race show a stronger belief in the efficacy of Black collective motivation (Johnson 2020b). Differences in skin color and experience with anti-Black racism are expected, but unanticipated results, such as the latter, suggest that more research is necessary to parse out political attitudes and skin color. Johnson and others find that when researchers use different measures of group consciousness, results are mixed so that we cannot identify one collective Black politicized identity, but Black social movement activity has increased in the past two decades, making collective Black solidarity a continued focus of study and theorization (Laó Montes 2017). What many scholars have indeed found is that among many non-Whites there is a clear awareness of anti-Black racism. De Micheli (2021) finds that increases in education have led to more racialized political identities, particularly due to exposure to information networks, social media, and the labor market, which reveals racial inequalities and discrimination.

The study of Black consciousness is intimately connected to the study of Black social movements and racial organization and activism. The Black Lives Matter protests that gained momentum after the murder of George Floyd made it stunningly clear that the movement is transnational and that Black people throughout the hemisphere suffer from and are willing to act against state-sanctioned murders of Black folks. Racial democracy narratives often used and continue to use the United States as the prime example of racism as a contrast to the more harmonious societies south of the United States. This narrative, however, becomes less powerful when mass demonstrations show there is a hemispheric Black experience that, though nuanced, continuously devalues Black life. Conversely, US Black movements, Black pride, and Black expression

(primarily hip-hop) have had an influence on the development of Black political movements in Latin America and the Caribbean for decades (Hanchard 1999, Morrison 2012, Saunders 2015).

Coordinated Black activism and movements have generated many of the policy changes and new attention to Black rights in Latin America and the Caribbean, most notably affirmative action policies in Brazil and Colombia. The power of racial democracy narratives places Black movements in a position of continuous challenge against both the denial of racism and the invisibility of Blackness. While countries such as Brazil, and to a lesser extent Colombia, have adopted affirmative action policies as a result of grassroots efforts, other movements have focused on issues of racial recognition and consciousness building. Thus, Black movements in Latin America are at different stages of the struggle against anti-Black racism and have adopted disparate strategies as well. Each movement had its own goals to achieve racial progress, including recognition on the Census, racial policy reforms, curriculums that reflect Black contributions and histories, creation of state institutions that addressed issues of racism, and antidiscrimination legislation. Comparing Colombia and Brazil, Paschel (2016) shows that while Black rights were articulated in Colombia through multicultural frames using language of cultural difference, Black Brazilian activists emphasized racial inequality and the need for laws and affirmative action policies to secure rights. State limits on Black representation, recognition, and progress can both inspire and respond to grassroots strategies.

RACE, VOTING BEHAVIOR, AND REPRESENTATION

If political scientists acknowledge that racial activism and Black group consciousness are continuously growing, we must ask how racialized political identities affect voting behavior. There are mixed results on whether, when, and how much race affects voting choices. Scholarship on Brazil shows clear differences between group consciousness and vote choice among mixed-race and Black voters, where darker skin accounts for a higher likelihood to vote for Black candidates (Mitchell 2010). Among those of mixed race, or those identified as Brown in Brazil, there is little evidence of race influencing vote choice (Aguilar et al. 2015, Mitchell 2010). Aguilar et al. (2015), for example, find that a candidate's race often matters to Black Brazilian voters but less so to White and Brown Brazilians. However, Contreras (2016) finds that Black Dominicans do not choose Black candidates based on race, but rather have a slight preference for White candidates. He argues that Dominicans distance themselves from their Black identity rather than exhibit the kind of racial consciousness that would lead to racially motivated voting behavior due to the marginalization of Blackness in the Dominican Republic. While Dominican elites have a particular history of promoting a White or Hispanic national image, the results of the study are important for the larger discussion of the effects of deracialization and racial democracy's narratives in the region. The Dominican Republic, like many other Latin American and Caribbean countries, also maintains spaces of Black activism and affirmation (Mayes 2019, Simmons 2009) such that more research can help to illuminate differences in identity formation and explain why Black identities may matter politically for some and be eschewed by others. As Sawyer et al.'s (2004) findings suggest, Black people in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean see themselves as equal participants in the national project, despite the presence of racial inequality. It is also critical to recognize that feelings of Black pride or solidarity may not translate to relationships between race and partisanship or higher likelihood to support Black candidates. Survey research in Puerto Rico finds that while Black consciousness and awareness of anti-Black racism exist among many Afro-descendants, respondents do not significantly demonstrate a linkage between Black consciousness and voting behavior or candidate preference (Cleland 2021).

Acknowledging these inconsistencies in racial identification, candidate choice, and partisanship, Johnson (2020a) suggests that Black identity politics is more likely to be found outside of electoral politics. He highlights the relationship between race and class in Latin America to argue that analyses of electoral politics are incomplete without the recognition that socioeconomic stratification marginalizes Black voters. In this vein, he finds a relationship between skin color and vote buying in countries with large Black and Indigenous populations, where voters with darker skin are more likely to be targeted. Darker-skinned voters are more likely to be poor, and this is one of the criteria used to target potential clients for vote buying. The study highlights the need to improve analyses that only attend to class by considering the intimate and long-established connection between class and race in the region. Political attitudes may also be connected to racial group membership in ways that do not show up with candidate preference or partisanship directly. Morgan & Kelly (2017) find that Black and Indigenous Latin Americans are more likely than dominant racial groups to support redistribution programs, particularly when there are deep socioeconomic divides between ethnoracial groups. They find that Black respondents are consistently in favor of policies that target poor populations regardless of the level of racially based income inequality. The research from Johnson (2020a) and Morgan & Kelly (2017) suggests that the consideration of race-based inequality paints a far more accurate picture of political attitudes and modes of access among Latin Americans than previous literature examining income inequalities alone.

The way in which Afro-descendants vote depends highly on the candidates' message and whether Black candidates are able to successfully and consistently appear on the ballots. Black underrepresentation in government has been documented throughout the region. Data regarding race and population numbers affect how accurately we can assess descriptive representation, particularly in countries like Cuba where Census numbers are tabulated by the state. Nonetheless, in Brazil there is some debate regarding why a majority-non-White country has such a low percentage of Black and Brown elected officials. Johnson (1998) first chronicled the levels of racial representation in Brazil, noting that Afro-Brazilians were severely underrepresented in Congress, ranging from 0% to 3% from 1983 to 1999 despite their majority share of the population. Underrepresentation is particularly relevant to Black communities as there is some evidence that Black Brazilian legislators promote Black causes over party loyalty (Mitchell et al. 2017). Since these studies, researchers have tried to identify the factors that contribute to the overrepresentation of White elected officials. Bueno & Dunning (2017) find that the 25% share of Black and Brown elected officials, compared to their 50% share of the population, is not necessarily explained by racial bias or discrimination by voters. Rather, they argue that resources drive the connection between Whiteness and electoral success where campaign contributions are more likely made to richer and White candidates. Conversely, Janusz (2020), using newly available election data with candidate racial self-identification, finds that while resources are certainly a part of White electoral success, racial discrimination contributes significantly to Black political underrepresentation. These findings are comparable to the study by Contreras (2016) because they also include majority Black districts, which suggests that some Black voters in Brazil may also be more likely to vote for White candidates.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of democracy or degrees of democracy has included a number of variables and conditions. What I see as the major flaw in our conceptualization of democracy is our lack of attention to White supremacy. White supremacy, anti-Blackness, and the resultant racial hierarchies have remained intact throughout history and have survived numerous regime changes. Regardless of

the political system, White supremacy continues to dominate and reinforce racial disparities, and although the contours of state-sanctioned racism have changed over time, Black citizenship continues to be a second-class citizenship. In Latin America and the Caribbean in particular, if we do not examine racism, racial inequalities, hierarchies, and exclusion, then we cannot accurately assess the quality of democracy. Increasing racial activism, organization, and demands for inclusion in Latin America show us a democratic deficit in Latin America that stems from racial hierarchies and racial marginalization. There is an urgency for (a) recognition that Black and Indigenous lives must be examined to understand democracy and inequality in the region and (b) more research taking account of racial inequality and how Black folks navigate it politically.

There is a vast space of unanswered questions in Latin America and the Caribbean—questions of Black group consciousness, voting behavior, and racialized identities, activism, etc.—such that research continues to grow, contradicting and responding to ever-changing notions of identity. Comparative work on Black politics is still growing in order to understand where country and other contextual differences are too great to generalize across regions and where similarities allow for hemispheric or continental notions of Black racial identity, consciousness, and experience (Hooker 2017). There is a need for more examination of Black group consciousness across country cases and of how the experience of racism produces politicized identities amid narratives of racial harmony. It may be that while high levels of Black solidarity exist, these feelings do not often translate into support of Black candidates, and more research is necessary to understand why and how Black identity and activism arise. Scholarship has shown that country differences can be vast where historical processes and the scope of racial inequality produce varied perspectives and racial attitudes. Nonetheless, the period of activism that was inspired by the murder of George Floyd provides a clear example of how Black people throughout the hemisphere feel connected to each other through experience with police brutality and White supremacy. This transnational movement will undoubtedly be reflected in scholarship to come and provides exciting possibilities for political science research on the Black Diaspora and the development of Black and Brown antiracist political organizations.

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