

More Than Brown: How Race and Skin Tone Matter for Latino Group Identity

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Abstract: The 2020 U.S. Census showed that the number of Latinos responding as some other race continues to increase. How can we more accurately measure racial identity among Latinos? Do Latinos' self-described race and/or skin color influence feelings of closeness with racial rather than ethnic groups? This article seeks to challenge the notion of Latinos as racially homogenous, what we call the *browning effect*, or as a racial category rather than an ethnic category to examine how racial identity and skin color may play a role in self-identification and group closeness. Using a survey of Puerto Ricans living in the United States conducted in 2020 by the Center for American Progress, we examine both racial self-identification and skin color arguing for new racial categories that include mixed race options. We employ a transnational method of measurement that recognizes the role of migration by offering an expanded set of racial categories that are relevant in Latin America and the Caribbean, and therefore more relevant to Latinos. For Latino group closeness, we find that respondents who identify as *trigueño* (a mixed race category similar to *mestizo* in Puerto Rico) are more likely to feel closer to other Latinos as are respondents who have medium (rather than darker or lighter) skin tones. We also find that respondents who identify as Black and those with darker skin tones are more likely to say they have linked fate with Black people and are less likely to feel closeness to Latinos as a group.

Despite the racial diversity of Latinos in the United States, the ethnic group is commonly referred to in the media, scholarship, and their own communities as “brown” (E. Telles 2018). The notion of brownness carries considerable implications, primarily the homogenization of a racially diverse group who both self-identify and are racialized as white and Black in addition to brown. Racial identity among Latinos can be difficult to pinpoint, sometimes too fluid to even self-identify definitively. As a growing number of Latinos mark “some other race” on the U.S. Census, scholars are left with uncertainty about how Latinos perceive themselves racially, and how their racial group may affect socioeconomic outcomes and political behavior (I. H. Lopez 2005). Consequently, racial analysis is often left out of studies of Latino political identity, instead treating Latinos as a racial group into itself. *How can we begin to understand racial differences among an ethnic group whose characterization is rooted in a multiracial identity? We create a new framework for how we study Latino identity by not only centering racial difference, but creating an expansive, transnational method of measurement that recognizes the role of migration.*

We make methodological interventions to analyze the various racial categories that Latinos fit into in order to better explain their experiences, politics and solidarities. The process of marking race on surveys is fraught with confusion among many Latino respondents, particularly because although Latinos’ brownness represents multiraciality, Black and white are often respondents’ two principal choices. Thus, Latinos that see themselves in a position between Black and white or between indigenous and white, tend to choose “some other race”. Moreover, the categories in the U.S. Census do not align with the ways in which race is categorized in Latin America - the foundation of the multiracial frameworks that first and even later generations use. Some would argue that Latinos placing themselves in the “other” category highlights the inability of racial categories to capture Latino realities, as most are mixed race and subscribe to narratives of racial mixing, or *mestizaje* (Frank, Akresh, and Lu 2010; E. Telles 2018). Masuoka notes that there is “unresolved tension between racial and ethnic identification” (Masuoka 2017, 181) allowing Latinos in the United States to have greater choice in how they choose to identify. We argue that the racialization of Latinos remains central to their identities and experiences. We make the case for multidimensional *measures* that expand racial categories to include those found on Latin American Censuses, and use skin color to examine the relationship between color, racial categorization, and racialization among Latinos living in the United States. As a result of adding

more racial categories, we achieve greater accuracy in measuring racial identity by reducing the number of respondents that identify as “other” and providing respondents with more relevant racial categories for the ways that Latinos self-identify.

Our measures also call for scholars to employ transnational notions of identity to reflect realities beyond the borders of the United States. Much of the scholarship on Latino racial identity has not examined how racial self-identification among Latinos stems from existing categories and classifications in Latin America and the Caribbean, which travel in the process of migration (Roth 2012). Knowledge of racial categorization in Latin America is central to the conceptualization of racial identity among Latinos. The “in-between” categories that many Latinos place themselves in are recognized as separate categories in Latin America. The omission of these categories may lead Latinos to mark “other”. Thus, scholars are faced with the conundrum of what it means to be in the other category. This becomes even more complicated when we think about how people look phenotypically and how they might identify given more relevant choices. We expanded racial categories with Latin American relevance, and skin color to capture a more accurate measure of race that we argue is necessary for studying Latino identity.¹ To our knowledge, this original data is the first U.S.-based survey that uses these expanded racial categories.

The treatment of Latinos as either racially homogenous, what we call the *browning effect*, or as a racial category rather than an ethnic category also prevents us from understanding ethnoracial solidarities. Not only does skin color influence Latinos’ experiences and socioeconomic outcomes, but it can also influence group identity and how these identities are politicized. One such way this is measured is through the use of linked fate. Several studies have identified the problems with Latino linked fate with inconclusive findings and inconsistencies across groups and demographics (G. Sanchez, Masuoka, and Abrams 2019b; G. R. Sanchez and Masuoka 2010; G. R. Sanchez and Vargas 2016; McClain et al. 2006). We reexamine linked fate with Black Americans, centering racial group and skin color. If Latinos are racialized in different ways according to skin color, then naturally we need to pay attention to the role that skin tone may have in terms of group linked fate.

¹ Surveys in Latin America more recently have adopted both racial categorization and skin color to address the challenges in racial self-identification in the region where citizens are either not accustomed to marking race or choose categories that do not match with how they may be racialized by others (E. Telles 2014).

This paper examines Latino feelings of linked fate with Blacks as well as group closeness with Latinos². We explore how racial identity and phenotype can affect in-group acceptance (via closeness to Latinos) and Black linked fate, finding that those with darker skin tones are associated with higher levels of Black linked fate and feelings of closeness to Latinos. However, respondents who identify racially as Black are associated with lower levels of Latino group closeness. In this way, the paper identifies notions of Black linked fate across ethnicity and highlights how Blackness can affect Latino identities. By centering skin tone and race in our analyses of Latino group closeness with more appropriate measures, we provide more clarity about who may express solidarity with their racial and/or ethnic group.

The need to include race in the study of Latino political behavior is also based on higher levels of discrimination and marginalization for Black Latinos compared to non-Black Latinos. Several datasets, including the US Census, demonstrate that self-identified Black Latinos are lower on socioeconomic indicators, homeownership, and poverty levels than the rest of the Latino population (Holder and Aja 2021; Aja et al. 2019; Ortiz and Telles 2012; Martinez and Aja 2021) despite higher levels of high school and college graduation rates (Aja et al. 2019). Darker skinned Latinos have also been found to experience higher levels of discrimination at the workplace (Espino and Franz 2002) and in general by fellow Latinos as well as other groups (Noe-Bustamante et al. 2021). Anti-Black attitudes among Latinos can have an effect on perceptions of identity and group closeness as well as Black linked fate. If Black Latinos experience exclusion from their ethnic counterparts this can affect how they view ethnic and racial solidarities (Aja 2016; Benson and Clealand 2021). Given these racial disparities among Latinos, experiences and access to social privileges are different depending on racial group membership and skin color. If darker skinned Latinos have disparate experiences, it would follow that they also hold different political attitudes (Ostfeld and Yadon 2021) and feel closer to other Black people that have similar experiences. Blackness, regardless of ethnicity, continues to determine access and opportunity in the United States and thus cannot be ignored when examining the politics of Latino communities.

² Ideally we would have liked to examine linked fate with Blacks and linked fate with Latinos but Latino linked fate was not asked on this survey.

In this paper, we examine one segment of the Latino population in the United States, Puerto Ricans, as a way to help us understand how race and skin tone influence Latino identity and feelings of group solidarity. Puerto Ricans are the second largest Latino ethnic group in the United States, making up 9.6% of the Latino population³. Puerto Rico also has a larger Afro-Latino population relative to Mexican Americans, allowing for a deeper analysis of the role of Blackness within the population. Although Puerto Rico is part of the United States, we argue that racial identity and the ways that Puerto Ricans are placed into ethnoracial categories here in the United States do not differ from other Latinos because of the association with the United States (Roth 2012). Access to a U.S. passport does not change how Puerto Ricans are racialized by their peers, by outgroups or by institutions. Data show that Puerto Ricans are similar to other Latinos in their views of identity as well as socioeconomic indicators (López and Patten 2015). This paper allows us to examine how Puerto Ricans identify as a way to understand Latino identity, but it also centers the U.S. racial hierarchy acknowledging that an identity such as Blackness produces similar outcomes across ethnicity and national origin.

Racial Identification and Skin Color Among Latinos

The necessity of recognizing racial difference among Latinos, does not mean that it is without challenges. The concepts of race, skin color and group identification are all mutually reinforcing and together help us understand how Latinos identify, and view their identity. U.S.-based surveys have examined skin color and racial category (Fraga et al. 2006), but have not used racial categories that correspond to Latino/Latin American notions of race. These two steps: expanding racial categories and comparing these categories with skin color are necessary interventions regarding Latino self-identification and can mitigate the large percentages of respondents who identify as some other race. Thus, it is not that Latinos are so uncertain about their racial identity, they are uncertain where they fit within the U.S. set of racial categories. Finally, our analysis of group closeness, allows for a richer understanding of how racial identity and skin color can influence how much one feels like they are a part of Latinos as a group.

³<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=B03001%3A%20HISPANIC%20OR%20LATINO%20ORIGIN%20BY%20SPECIFIC%20ORIGIN&g=&lastDisplayedRow=30&table=B03001&tid=ACSDT1Y2018.B03001&hidePreview=true>

During the 2020 U.S. Census, the number of Latinos responding as some other race increased to 42.2% from 36.7% in 2010. Those that identified as two or more races, jumped from 6% in 2010 to 32.7% in 2020. Past research has also found that Blacks and Latinos are the two groups most likely to identify as multiracial (Masuoka 2011). Among mainland Puerto Ricans, the number of people identifying as some other race was 30.8% in 2010 and 25.5% in 2020. The shifts in racial identification are partly attributable to the treatment and status of Latinos in the United States. Scholars have rightly noted that the United States is organized by an ethnoracial hierarchy (Kim 1999; Masuoka and Junn 2013) that often places Latinos of varying skin colors in a disadvantaged position relative to whites. The hesitance then, for some Latinos to identify as white, even if they may be white phenotypically, is part of this hierarchy. The use of skin color brings more clarity to the racial category question in that we can compare skin color and self-identification. The comparison brings us closer to measuring 1) Latino racialization and 2) motivations for racial self-identification.

Data on Afro-Latinos varies and is difficult to compare due to a lack of respondents self-identifying as Black (Stokes-Brown 2012; Haywood 2017; Golash-Boza and Darity 2008). The devaluation of Blackness within Latino communities certainly affects how people identify and who they feel aligned with (or conversely which group they may distance themselves from). While the U.S. Census finds that 1.9% of the Latino population identified as Black in the 2020 Census, and a Pew Research study found that 2% of Latinos self-identify as Black, Pew also found that 24% consider themselves Afro-Latino (M. H. Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrera, and Ardití 2021). There are several reasons that point to the undercount of Black Latinos on the census and other surveys: 1) the racial category, Black or African American, is often interpreted by Latinos as a category for African Americans or those with ancestry in the United States, rather than Latin America and the Caribbean and 2) Latin American narratives of race that dilute Blackness and support anti-Black norms often discourage identification with the Black category (Contreras 2016; Mitchell 2018; Cruz-Janzen 2007). Previous studies found that while darker skinned Latinos may not identify racially as Black, they do mark their skin color more accurately on surveys (E. E. Telles 2017; Fraga et al. 2006). Including more categories that capture darker skinned Latinos of mixed race and more familiar terms help address the problem of Black Latinos being undercounted.

We ask more questions about how Black Latinos position themselves relative to other Black groups, and challenge the notion that darker Latinos are distancing themselves from Blackness. The discrimination that Black Latinos face not only from Anglo-whites but from lighter skinned Latinos may produce evaluations of group identity that align more closely with Black Americans and other Black immigrant groups, rather than Latinos. Moreover, we can analyze how Latinos in the “middle categories” identify and how this might impact their politicized identity when compared to those that identify as white or Black. We posit that because some darker skinned Latinos are perceived distinctly from phenotypically lighter Latinos and are racialized as Black, they experience identity differently from other Latinos.

How do skin color and racial identification differ and how do they complement each other? The current choices that are given on most official forms in the United States often list Latino as a race, making it difficult to disaggregate Latino outcomes based on racial category. When Latinos fill out the U.S. Census, they are presented with a different set of ethnic and racial choices than they may not be accustomed to. While a Latino may be phenotypically white, they may not choose this category because they identify only as Latino and/or may also be racialized as such. If we include skin color in our set of identity questions, we can gauge how light or dark a respondent is and come closer to understanding 1) how phenotype and racial categorization may contradict or complement each other, 2) how phenotype matters for identity outcomes, and 3) how whiteness, Blackness and brownness affect notions of racial and group identity. For example, there may be a respondent that is darkest on the skin color scale and identifies with a mixed race category (e.g. mulatto or *moreno*) instead of Black because they do not identify as African American. Despite the chosen racial category, they may not be distancing from Blackness. The different modes of measurement allow us to have a broader understanding of afro-descendants in our sample and understand that racial category means something different to Latinos than to white and Black Americans. Thus, the use of multiple measures adds much needed richness to the ways that we measure ethnoracial identity among Latinos. Indeed, the US Census Bureau has acknowledged data on Latinos needs to be improved because of the popular choice of some other race that leaves us without an accurate picture of race among Latinos (Mathews et al. 2015).

We find that expanded racial categories mitigate the number of respondents that mark some other race. Latin American racial categories use what would be classified as a racial continuum rather than the one-drop rule that continues to characterize U.S. practices of racial classification (Cleland 2017; Madrid 2012; E. Telles and Paschel 2014). The categories “in between” Black and white or indigenous and white vary by country, but include *mestizo*, *mulato*, *indio*, *pardo*, *trigueño*, *jabao*, and *moreno*. While racial categories in Latin America and the Caribbean differ in number and construction from the United States, the racial hierarchies are the same (Cleland 2017). Whiteness in both regions is valued whereas darker skin, indigeneity, and Blackness are devalued and underrepresented in countries’ political systems and upper socioeconomic quintiles. Nonetheless, the differences in categorization coupled with the racialization of Latinos in the United States contribute to the confusion. The tendency to describe Latinos as 1) a racial group and 2) a racially homogeneous group that focuses on *mestizaje* or mixed race creates erroneous conceptions of Latinos and erases racial difference among Latino communities. While many Latinos do indeed fall into mixed race categories that cannot be found in the U.S. Census, there are significant numbers of Latinos that would be categorized as Black or white according to U.S. racial constructions. This means that Latinos experience racial discrimination and privilege in vastly distinct ways and we argue that this matters for self-identity and political attitudes.

Racial Identification Among Puerto Ricans

Puerto Rico, although a territory⁴ of the United States, categorizes race in similar ways to Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. In particular, Puerto Rico’s intermediate racial category is termed *trigueño* or wheat-colored, to classify those that fall between the Black and white categories. As part of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, Puerto Rico also uses similar racial narratives to Latin America. National denials of structural racism in exchange of an image of *mestizaje*, or racial mixing, fluidity and harmony, have dominated racial rhetoric in Puerto Rico. The ideology that negates the role of racism in shaping opportunity and experience is prevalent throughout Latin America and Puerto Rico is no exception. Puerto Rico specifically uses a racial triad theory to emphasize *mestizaje* through the joining of African, European and Indigenous (Taíno) ancestry. Consequently, the emphasis on multiracial identities then blurs the lines of racial

⁴ Puerto Rico’s relationship with the United States is a colonial one despite the island’s official term as a Free Associated State or Commonwealth of the United States.

categories and encourages silence on the issue of racism and racial identification. This raceless narrative also serves to conceal anti-Blackness and the experiences of racial discrimination that darker skinned Puerto Ricans endure (Rivera-Rideau 2015; Rodríguez-Silva 2012). The many colloquial racial terms mark Blackness as well as closeness to whiteness, but the consequences of these differences are often left unexamined.

Without the practice of officially categorizing race on U.S.-based forms in the same ways that it is used colloquially, there is some confusion or unfamiliarity with the category of race particularly regarding the Census. Nonetheless, as in many Latin American countries, the existence of more fluid racial boundaries or more categories does not suggest that racial hierarchies and barred access to those of darker skin are also less prevalent in Puerto Rico (Godreau 2015). Anti-Blackness significantly affects Black Puerto Ricans and as they migrate to the United States, it is necessary to understand how racial conceptualizations on the island are negotiated in the mainland.

Some of the uncertainty in the U.S. Census among Latinos can be explained through the census results in Puerto Rico and subsequent studies. As part of the United States, Puerto Rico uses the U.S. Census and consequently, residents of the island are asked to choose a U.S. racial category when filling out the form rather than more relevant mixed race categories. Racial categories have only been included in Puerto Rico's version of the Census since 2000 (the category was purposefully omitted for the previous fifty years) so that the practice is relatively new to recent generations. In the first iteration in 2000, the majority of residents (80.5%) chose white as a racial category with 8% choosing Black.⁵ This mischaracterization of Puerto Rico, where a much larger number in the population are nonwhite, inspired many discussions about race in Puerto Rico, the colonial imposition of racial categories and the valuation of whiteness (Duany 2005; Godreau, Lloréns, and Vargas-Ramos 2010). If categories that are used colloquially in Puerto Rico, specifically the inclusion of *trigueño*, were also used on the Census we would likely see different results (ie. less respondents marking white as their racial category) (Vargas-Ramos 2005). Finally, in the last Census in 2020, Puerto Rico showed that they may begin to adopt the trend among Latinos in the United States, where increasing numbers chose more than one race:

⁵ In 2010, there were more residents that chose Black (12%) on the Census, but the high number of residents that chose white remained (78%).

while only 17% identified as white, and 7% as Black, 59% marked themselves as two or more races. The Puerto Rican case is instructive in examining why Latinos and particularly Puerto Ricans on the mainland tend to choose some other race in such large numbers. The absence of expanded racial categories that represent respondents that do not identify as white or Black leads to the movement toward the “Other” category. Expanding the Black/white binary allows us to measure race far more accurately than the U.S. Census and other forms and surveys that use categories that are not always relevant to these communities.

Measuring Race and Skin Color

This article seeks to better understand, through the lens of Puerto Ricans, group identity and how race and skin color may play a role in self-identification and connections to Latinos and Blacks. Using a survey of Puerto Ricans living in the United States conducted in 2020 by the Center for American Progress, we are able to examine two important questions about Latino identity. We find that when presented with expanded, more familiar racial categories, only 10% of respondents (n=99) chose “other”. This suggests that Latinos don’t select other because race is fluid or difficult to pin down, but that those who self-identify using these Latin American mixed race categories are not provided relevant, intermediary categories.

The second objective is to understand how racial classification and skin tone may influence a sense of group identity. By measuring racial identification and skin color in the survey, we are able to better understand the nuances of color and race among Puerto Ricans’ conceptualizations of Latino group identity. Scholars have found that Latinos live a racialized existence in the U.S. in which skin color plays a large role (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008; Portes and Rumbaut 2005), and it is important that this aspect is not overlooked. Measuring skin tone allows us to examine notions of color and racial self-identification together and understand not only who identifies in which category, but how these choices correspond to one another. Moreover, what does this mean about their sense of Latino group identity? What connections do dark-skinned Puerto Ricans make to Black Americans? While most studies have analyzed levels of Black group consciousness to Latinos as a group, we look at group identity by race and skin color. By using the case of Puerto Ricans in the United States, this paper will help us better understand the nuances of racial identification and politicized identity among a single, but diverse national origin group.

We expect that respondents who identify as *trigueño* or other are more likely to feel closer to other Latinos, because they have what can be described as a racialized “brown” identity. By this we mean that those in middle categories, who are neither Black nor white are racialized as Latino. Furthermore, we expect that individuals who have dark complexions will also be more likely to feel closer to other Latinos due to their more racialized experiences in the United States. Respondents who identify racially as Black are more likely to report feeling less close to Latinos because they view themselves in a different position in the racial hierarchy. Finally, when looking at linked fate with Black people, we expect that our Black-identifying respondents will have higher levels of Black linked fate than the rest of our sample.

Closeness to Latinos and Black Linked Fate

We measure feelings of closeness to other Latinos to examine how our Puerto Rican respondents of different skin tones and racial backgrounds feel about their connections to other Latinos. We also examine linked fate with Black people to examine if Puerto Ricans with darker skin tones are more likely to feel linked fate with Blacks relative to those with lighter skin tones. The term linked fate is a utility heuristic in the study of Black politics that uses what is best for the group as a substitute for what is best for the individual (Dawson 1995). This measure is typically asked, “do you think that what happens to Black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life.” There have been a number of studies that have examined Latino linked fate, most of these studies look at linked fate with other Latinos regardless of racial category (G. R. Sanchez and Masuoka 2010; G. Sanchez, Masuoka, and Abrams 2019a). Some have questioned whether we should use linked fate for other racial and ethnic groups and if we can draw conclusions about Latino or Asian linked fate because of their different lived experiences and understandings of the concept (McClain et al. 2006; Gay, Hochschild, and White 2016; Rogers and Kim 2021; G. R. Sanchez and Masuoka 2010). We contend that if we analyze this concept without regard for the race and/or skin color of the respondent, we are making an incomplete comparison. We examine Latino linked fate with Black people, with the expectation that the results will differ based on differences in racial identification among Latinos. This approach can provide insight on racial solidarity among two different minority groups, as well as elucidate how Afro-Latinos view

themselves in relation to both Blacks and Latinos. We expect that darker respondents will be more likely to have linked fate to Black people relative to those who are light skinned.

Data and Methods

Our data comes from a survey commissioned by The Center for American Progress of 1,000 Puerto Rican respondents living in the United States. The survey was conducted from September 4th-11th of 2020. This survey also includes an oversample of respondents living in the state of Pennsylvania where there is a growing Puerto Rican population. Survey respondents participated either by phone or online, and were able to choose whether they wished to take the survey in English or Spanish.

Our models focus on how responses differ by race by using racial identification as an independent variable. We include variables for Black, *moreno*, other, and *trigueño* in our regressions, using white, the most common category among our respondents, as the reference group. While *trigueño* is the most common racial category for mixed race Puerto Ricans, we also used the category, *moreno*, which refers to darker skinned complexions but can sometimes serve as another term for Black. As racial categories are complex and never in stasis, *moreno* is sometimes used as a term for Blackness when one is avoiding the word, Black. It serves as a way to mark Blackness and distance oneself from a Black or African American identity at the same time. For this reason, we did not see the use of Black and *moreno* in our survey categories as redundant and in fact, expect those that chose *moreno* to display different notions of group identity than those that chose to self-identify as Black.

We found that many respondents did select these middle categories rather than choosing “other”. As shown in Figure 1, 8% of respondents identified as Black, 11% as *moreno*, 10% as other, 25% as *trigueño* and 45% identified as white. A full 35% of respondents used the alternative identifiers of *trigueño* and *moreno*. If we compare these results with the Census, there are far less respondents that chose “other” in our survey, indicating that a change in the racial categories would produce

more accurate results. Our survey finds slightly higher Black identification than the American Community Survey⁶, but the results are similar to Puerto Ricans on the 2019 ACS.

To ensure that the expanded racial categories were used beyond first generation respondents, we also examine racial identification categories by generation. These results are in Table 1. We find that 34% of first generation respondents identified as *trigueño*, 7% as other, 11% as *moreno*, 6% as Black, and 42% white. The number of respondents identifying as *moreno* does not decrease among second or third generation respondents. We do see a decrease in the percent of second and third generation respondents identifying as *trigueño*, but there is still a rather sizable share that chooses this category. Among second generation respondents 22% identify as *trigueño*, whereas 8% of third generation respondents selected *trigueño*. We find that among second and third generation respondents, they are somewhat more likely to identify as white. While 42% of first generation respondents identified as white, 46% of second generation respondents, and 58% of third generation respondents selected white as their racial identification. However, the fact that we still see respondents picking *trigueño* and *moreno* in these later generations indicates that categories found in the home country are still relevant for the Puerto Rican Latino population in the United States, and can help better capture respondents who might otherwise identify as “other”.

Figure 1: Racial Identification Among Full Sample

⁶ In the 2019 American Community Survey, 6.8% of Puerto Ricans identified as Black.

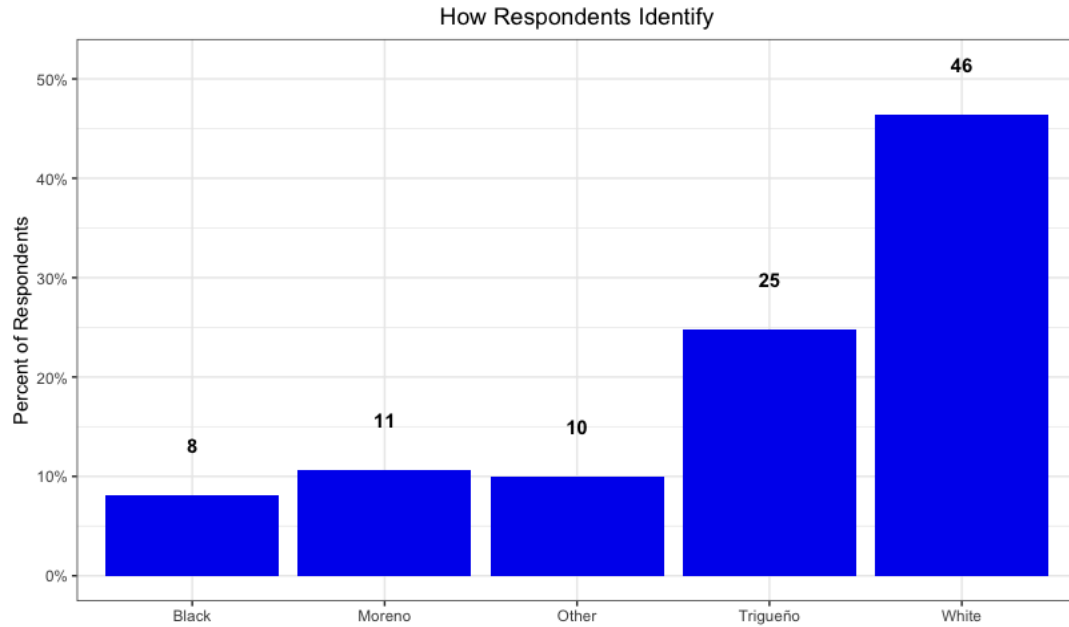


Table 1. Racial identification by generation (each column sums to 100)

	1st Gen	Second Gen	Third Gen +
White	42	46	58
Black	6	8	13
Moreno	11	11	10
Other	7	13	11
Trigueño	34	22	8

To capture skin tone, respondents in the online sample were shown the 10 point skin color scale (Figure 2). For respondents who participated via telephone (n=303), they were asked to rate their

skin tone from 1-10 with 1 being the lightest and 10 being the darkest. We rescaled skin tone into three categories- 1 light (1-3) 2 medium (4-6) and 3 dark (7-10).

Figure 2: Skin Tone scale



The results for skin tone are shown below in Figure 3. When separated into light, medium, and dark categories, 33% of respondents chose lighter skin tones, 49% chose medium skin tones and 17% chose dark skin tones. In our models skin tone is treated as a continuous variable ranging from 1-3⁷.

Figure 3. **Skin Tone Among Full Sample**

⁷ We also run our models using skin tone as a categorical variable. These results can be found in the appendix.

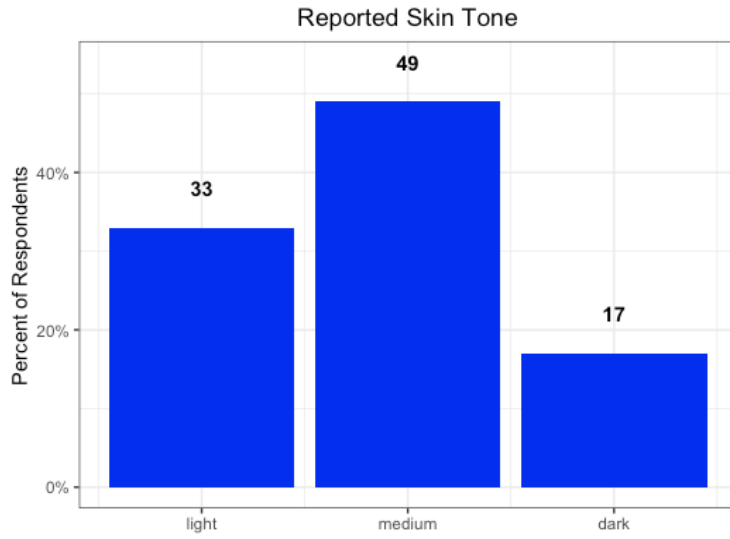


Figure 4: Racial identification by skin tone category

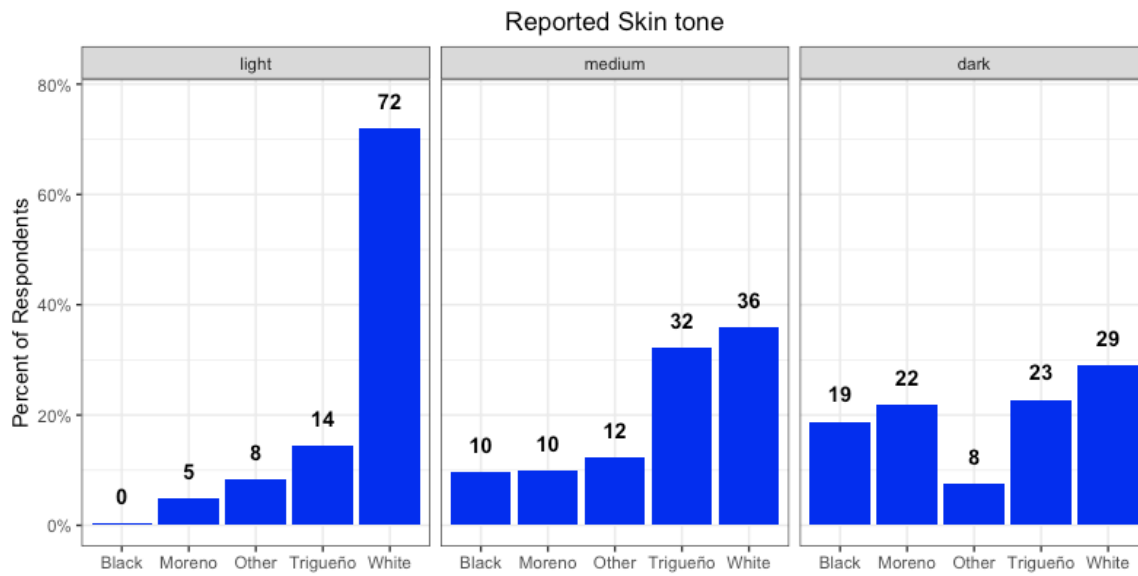


Figure 4 shows how respondents of different skin tones identify racially. Unsurprisingly, respondents who are light in complexion overwhelmingly identify as white (72%). Trigueños, our middle “brown” category, make up 14% of those who report a lighter skin tone. We see fewer *moreno* and Black respondents making up the light category, but *morenos* still make up 5% of respondents who report a lighter skin tone. The ways in which identification and skin tone don’t align with common assumptions are also important to understand.

There is greater variation and less congruence between racial identification and skin tone when looking at the medium and dark categories. We find that whites make up the largest share (36%) of the medium category, followed by *trigueños* (32%). *Moreno* and Black respondents also make up 10% of the medium category respectively. Given that whites make up 46% of the total sample this is not surprising. While the relationship between racial identification and skin tone is messier when compared to the light category, it is important to remember that nearly half of the sample falls into the medium category, leading to greater heterogeneity in the medium group. We find that Black respondents make up 19% of the dark category while *morenos* make up 22%. But there are still large shares of *trigueño* and white respondents who are in the dark skin tone category. This only further justifies the need to examine both race and skin tone when evaluating group identity.

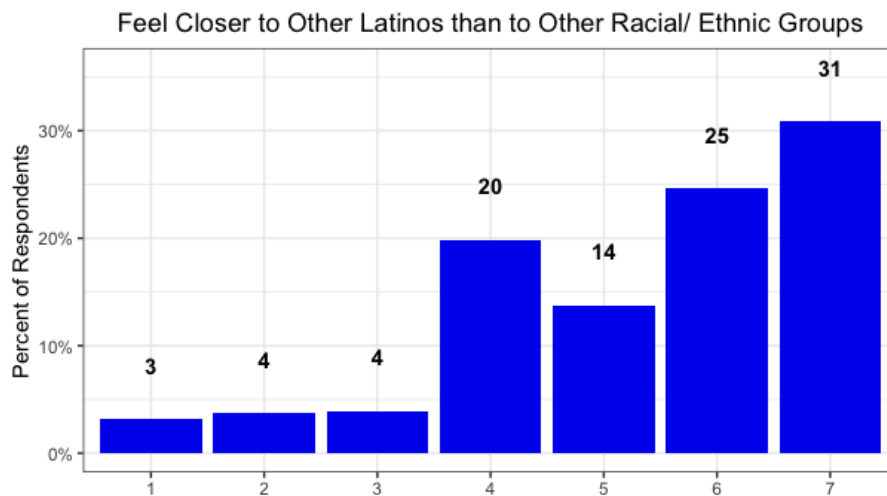
Skin tone and racial identification do not have a clear one to one relationship that some may expect. This happens for a number of reasons; first, narratives of racial fluidity in Latin American and the Caribbean often allow for different ways to self-identify, especially for those who are in the medium tone category. For example, two respondents with similar medium tones may identify (and be racialized) as white or as Black depending on parentage, hair texture or other facial characteristics. Second, there can also be some distancing from the white and Black categories by respondents that may deny their Blackness or conversely, identify as a category other than white because of experiences with discrimination as a Puerto Rican. Finally, racial categorization, as opposed to skin tone, can often be a politicized choice. While we do acknowledge there is some distancing from Blackness among Latinos, the choice of Black can also be a political statement that both reinforces solidarity with that group and reflects experiences with racialization. Likewise, the choice of *trigueño* can be a political statement made by lighter-skinned Latinos. While we can’t explore the motivations of our respondents, we think this is an area of future qualitative research that scholars need to think about when looking at racial identification among Latinos.

Dependent Variables: Group Closeness and Linked Fate

We use feelings of Latino group closeness and Black linked fate as our dependent variables. Latino group closeness is a measure that asks if respondents feel closer to other Latinos than to other racial and ethnic groups. This item is measured on a 7-point scale that ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The distribution of the closeness measure can be found in Figure 5. We find that more respondents are on the higher end of the scale with only 11% of the sample marking 3 or below. 34% are firmly in the middle of the scale, at 4 or 5, and a full 56% of respondents indicated either a 6 or a 7 on the closeness scale. Who are the respondents that are in the middle and lower end of the closeness measure and how might race and skin tone factor into closeness to other group members?

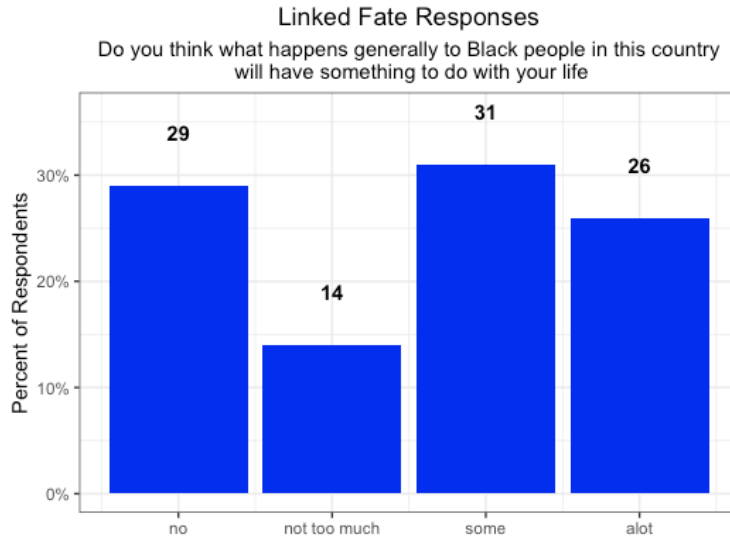
Figure 5: Closeness to other Latinos Among Full CAP Sample



Our second variable of interest is linked fate with Black communities. This question is worded, “do you think what happens generally to Black people in this country will have something to do with your life?”. Responses range from 0-3 with 0 indicating no, to 3 yes, a lot and are shown in Figure 6. The histogram shows that 29% of respondents say they have no linked fate with Black people, while 14% responded not too much, 31% of respondents say they have some linked fate,

and 26% responded that they have a lot of linked fate with Black people in the United States. For both of our dependent variables we model our results using OLS regression.

Figure 6: **Linked Fate Responses Among Full Sample**



Controls

When examining closeness to other Latinos, we also included the strength of respondents' Puerto Rican identity as an independent variable. The question reads, "How much is being Puerto Rican an important part of how you see yourself?". We do this so that closeness with other Latinos does more than capture the relationship with people of the same national origin group⁸. We control for a number of demographic measures such as income, education, age, and gender as well as dummy variables for states with larger Puerto Rican populations to see if there are any geographic differences. These states are Florida, New York, and Pennsylvania, with Puerto Ricans living in other parts of the U.S. as our reference group. Similarly, we also control for the respondent's generation (second and third+), with first generation respondents serving as our reference category. We define first generation respondents as someone who was born on the island of Puerto Rico. We also control for the language respondents took the survey in, with Spanish language coded as 1 and English coded as 0, and control for the mode of survey responses.

⁸ When we take out this measure our color scale and racial identification variables have a larger effect.

Group Closeness and Linked Fate Results

When examining the dimension of closeness, we find that respondents who identify as Black are less likely to say they feel closer to other Latinos than other racial groups relative to respondents who identify as white. This is in line with our expectations, since respondents who present more phenotypically Black are more likely to have different racialized experiences. Moreover, anti-Blackness within Latino communities can marginalize Black Latinos from the larger ethnic group. Skin tone is positive and statistically significant, with darker skinned individuals being less likely to say that they feel closer to other Latinos. Holding a strong sense of Puerto Rican identity, higher income individuals, respondents who took the survey in Spanish, and being younger are also all positively associated with Latino group closeness.

Examining our regression results for linked fate with Black people, we find that having darker skin tone is associated with higher levels of Black linked fate. Interestingly, identifying as Black is not statistically significant, though we do find that the association is positive. Relative to whites, Black respondents' linked fate response is associated with a .281 increase. Additionally a one unit change in skin tone is associated with a .216 increase in linked fate responses. We also find that respondents with greater levels of education are associated with an increase in their linked fate responses. Third generation respondents are also more likely to have higher levels of linked fate relative to first generation respondents. Finally, increases in age are negatively associated with linked fate. This may point to a greater tendency for younger, higher generation Puerto Ricans to see their politics in line with Black Americans.

Table 2. CAP Data: Latino Group Closeness and Linked Fate Regressions

	I feel closer to other Latinos	Linked fate with Blacks
Black	-0.496* (0.193)	0.281 (0.144)
Moreno	0.096 (0.176)	0.042 (0.132)
Other	-0.192 (0.169)	-0.030 (0.127)
Trigueño	0.234 (0.127)	0.154 (0.095)
Skin tone	0.164* (0.079)	0.216*** (0.059)
Puerto Rican Identity	0.458*** (0.061)	
Income	0.108*** (0.031)	-0.027 (0.024)
Education	0.008 (0.052)	0.097* (0.039)
FL	-0.063 (0.133)	-0.206* (0.100)
NY	-0.231. (0.134)	-0.220* (0.101)
PA	-0.151 (0.184)	-0.068 (0.138)
2nd Gen	0.009 (0.117)	0.021 (0.087)
3rd Gen +	0.235 (0.147)	0.277* (0.110)
Spanish survey	0.636*** (0.141)	-0.108 (0.106)

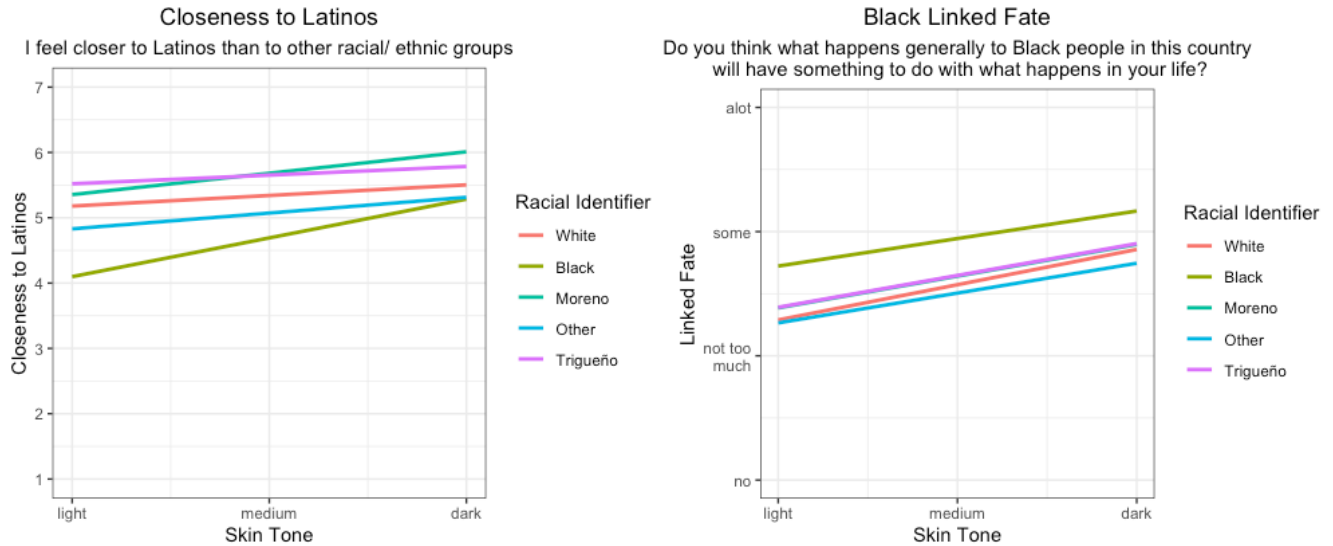
Phone survey	0.213 (0.150)	0.162 (0.112)
Age	-0.012*** (0.003)	-0.008** (0.002)
Female	0.003 (0.099)	-0.078 (0.075)
Constant	3.378*** (0.345)	2.268*** (0.219)
Observations	989	989
R2	0.143	0.079
Adjusted R2	0.128	0.064

Note:

$p < 0.05$; $p < 0.01$; $p < 0.001$

Figure 7 displays the estimated increase in closeness to Latinos and Black linked fate by racial identification and skin tone. Examining the panel on the left, the predicted values for Black respondents are generally lower when compared to the other racial and ethnic groups. *Moreno* respondents are similar to *trigueños* and both groups have higher predicted levels of Latino group closeness out of all of the racial groups. Finally, there is a modest uptick as skin tones become darker for all categories.

Figure 7: Predicted values by racial identification and skin tone



In Figure 7, the panel on the right displays the predicted values for Black linked fate. While not statistically significant, respondents who identify racially as Black hold stronger feelings of Black linked fate. The rest of the racial groups strongly cluster together, but again, going from light to dark on the skin tone scale is associated with an increase in Black linked fate.

Discussion

Our findings indicate that our measures give us more accurate data regarding racial group membership among Latinos. Racial categories that correspond to Latin American and Caribbean notions of race are more relevant to Latinos and decrease uncertainty around racial self-identification. By offering more options for racial identification, we find that the “other” category is smaller compared to other surveys, and may more accurately reflect those who truly identify as “other”. Intermediate racial categories represent the “brownness” that Latinos have long been associated with in the literature. Those that identify with these categories that are not racialized as white, but are also not racialized as Black have experiences that are distinctly Latino and this shows up in the data. For them, the *browning effect* makes sense for their racial identities: *trigueños* are more likely to display feelings of closeness with other Latinos.

The 2020 CMPS has a national sample of 1,000 Afro-Latino respondents who were asked how they identified on the Census and were also asked to choose how they would identify with an expanded racial category. Examining the Afro-Latino sample, 15 percent of the respondents stated that they marked “some other race” on the 2020 Census. When we provide these respondents more

options⁹ we find that a full 75% of people who marked “other” chose one of these intermediary categories. Furthermore, in the CMPS, Afro-Latinos with medium skin tones are most likely to identify as “other” in the Census. The data from the CMPS show that the results we find among Puerto Ricans are relevant for Latinos of various national origin. We argue that all Latino surveys asking about racial identification require more relevant categories to choose from. Those that are not in the intermediate categories and instead may be racialized as white or Black, have different attachments to the group and different experiences than those that are “brown”.

Racial identification and skin tone both play an important role in how Latinos position themselves relative to both Latinos and Black people. Future work on Latino group identity and linked fate should include race and skin color in order to employ a comprehensive understanding of the effect of race and racialization on Latino identity. Although we find that skin tone and racial identification do not always fit as we may expect, overall, there is substantial congruence between skin tones and the corresponding racial categories. Some of the “messiness” or variations from expected alignments serve as an important explanation for some of the uncertainty with racial categories. These are the same challenges that face Latin American racial scholars (Cleland 2022). Overall, most with medium or brown skin tones identify with a mixed race category and most darker skinned respondents identify with a Black or mixed race category. But these categories mean different things for different generations and different skin tones. Moreover, while darker skinned Latinos may identify as Black, *moreno* or *trigueño*, they are more likely to identify with others that have similar phenotypes. The inclusion of skin tone allows us to provide detail about how respondents of varying skin colors identify, which categories are most relevant to certain phenotypes and how tone, race and group closeness are all related.

By examining group closeness with a racial framing, we are able to make more sense of how this concept applies to Latinos. A strong sense of Puerto Rican identity was important for Latino group identity, likely because our respondents’ Latino identity stems from their Puerto Rican identity. Our data also show that when asked if being Puerto Rican is an important part of seeing yourself, self-identified Black and *moreno* respondents viewed Puerto Rican identity as less important

⁹ In the CMPS the choices were brown-skinned, *indio*, *moreno*, *mulato/mestizo*, *trigueño* in addition to Black, white, and other

compared to the other racial groups. This result coupled with the fact that Black respondents had lower levels of Latino group identity relative to whites indicates that Black Puerto Ricans in the United States may feel closer to Black people overall, and less connected to both Puerto Ricans and Latinos as a whole. It also demonstrates that Black Puerto Ricans and Black Latinos are not necessarily distancing themselves from Blackness as previous scholarship and the Census results would suggest. Rather, we argue that not all identify with a Black/African American racial category but do recognize their Blackness and positionality in the U.S., creating feelings of solidarity with other Black people. Previous research suggests that Black Puerto Ricans have high levels of Puerto Rican pride (Sawyer, Peña, and Sidanius 2004) on the island and we believe this may also be true among those on the mainland. Irrespective of feelings of pride, our data show that Blackness and/or darker skin tones matter for notions of identity among Puerto Ricans. Considering the data that identify racial disparities among Latinos as well as intra-Latino, anti-Black racism (Araujo-Dawson 2015; Benson and Clealand 2021; Haywood 2017; Holder and Aja 2021; Lavariega Monforti and Sanchez 2010; Rosado 2019), our results for Black Latinos make sense and argue for a Black experience across ethnicities. With this in mind, it is crucial that we take race into account when talking about Latinos as a group so that we develop methodologically sound data on identity.

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Appendix

Table 1: OLS regression models with skin tone as a categorical variable

	Latino closeness	Black Linked Fate
Black	-0.496* (0.193)	0.289* (0.145)
Moreno	0.096 (0.176)	0.045 (0.132)
Other	-0.191 (0.170)	-0.013 (0.128)
Trigueño	0.234. (0.129)	0.178. (0.097)
Medium tone	0.161 (0.120)	0.129 (0.090)
Dark tone	0.329* (0.160)	0.455*** (0.119)
Puerto Rican ID	0.458*** (0.061)	
Income	0.108*** (0.032)	-0.027 (0.024)
Education	0.008 (0.052)	0.097* (0.039)
FL	-0.063 (0.133)	-0.209* (0.100)
NY	-0.231. (0.134)	-0.223* (0.101)
PA	-0.151 (0.184)	-0.082 (0.138)
2nd Gen	0.009 (0.117)	0.028 (0.087)

3rd Gen +	0.235 (0.147)	0.282* (0.110)
age	-0.012*** (0.003)	-0.008** (0.002)
female	0.003 (0.100)	-0.069 (0.075)
Spanish interview	0.635*** (0.142)	-0.122 (0.106)
Phone interview	0.213 (0.150)	0.175 (0.112)
Constant	3.544*** (0.330)	2.522*** (0.198)
Observations	989	989
R2	0.143	0.080
Adjusted R2	0.127	0.064
Residual Std. Error	1.353 (df = 970)	1.016 (df = 971)
F Statistic	8.987*** (df = 18; 970)	4.992*** (df = 17; 971)

Note: $p < 0.1$; $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.01$

Figure 1: 2020 CMPS: Afro-Latino Self-Identification on Census

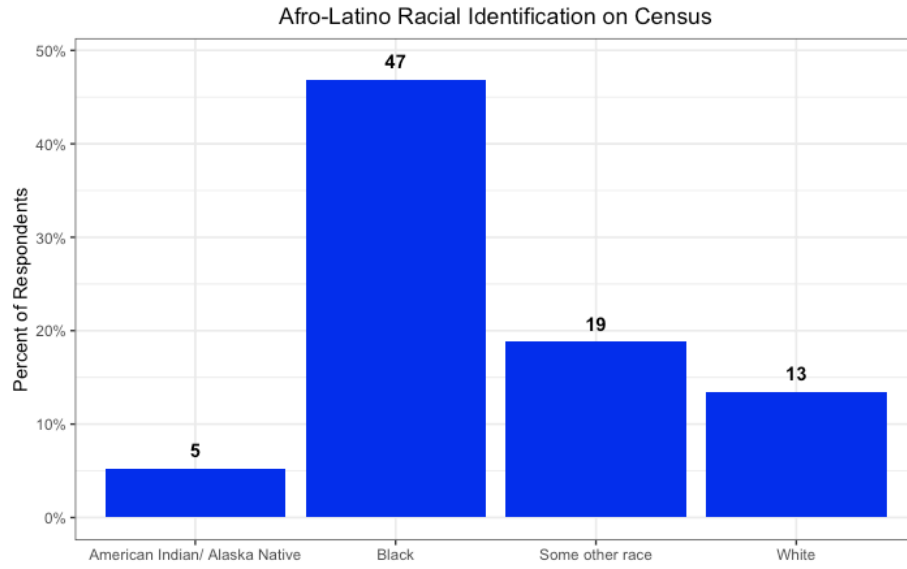


Figure 1: 2020 CMPS: Afro-Latino Skin tone

