

Educational disadvantages associated with race still persist in Brazil despite improvements

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Despite notable improvements in educational levels and opportunity during the past three decades, disadvantages associated with race still persist in Brazil, according to new research at The University of Texas at Austin.

Although educational advantages for white over black and pardo (mixed-race) adolescents declined considerably in Brazil, the gap is still significant, with whites completing nearly one year more of [education](#).

[Sociologist](#) and Population Research Center affiliate Leticia Marteleto investigated educational inequalities using the nationally representative data from Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios from 1982 to 2007. Her findings will be published in the February issue of the journal [Demography](#).

"Although the educational advantage of whites has persisted over this period, I found that the significance of race as it relates to education has changed in important ways," Marteleto said.

By 2007, adolescents who identified themselves as blacks and pardos became more similar in their education levels, whereas in the past blacks had greater disadvantages, according to the study. Marteleto tested two possible explanations for this shift: structural changes in income levels and parents' education, and shifts in racial classification.

Her findings suggest the educational gap has closed in part because of the large gains in family resources among black adolescents and a shift in racial labeling.

In 1982 only 13.2 percent of [adolescents](#) who identified themselves as black had finished primary school by ages 17 and 18, compared with 21.5 percent of their pardo peers. In 2007, the gap for primary school completion had disappeared.

The second potential explanation for the closing educational gap between pardo and black Brazilians is a shift in racial identity. Children of college-educated black fathers and mothers have a greater probability of being identified by their family as black in 2007, while in 1982 these associations were still considered negative. This seems to explain — at least in part — some of the increases in the educational attainment of those identified as black in relation to pardo, since highly educated Brazilians now have a disproportionately higher likelihood of identifying their children as black rather than either white or pardo.

Marteletto said the current debate about recent race-based affirmative action policies being implemented in Brazilian universities has engaged its population at a national level and can offer valuable insights to the literatures of educational opportunity and race everywhere.

"My research shows that educational disadvantages have recently assumed a dichotomous nature based on black and white in Brazil," Marteletto said. "While in the United States the growth in racial and ethnic diversity has led researchers to speculate that the black-white dichotomy is losing its salience for social inequalities — and that the country will soon resemble Brazil as a result of racial mixing — [Brazil](#) seems to be headed in the opposite direction, at least in regard to racial inequalities in education."

Provided by University of Texas at Austin

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