

## Race Inequality in Education in Brazil and South Africa

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### Introduction

Brazil and South Africa share several similarities. Both are among the most unequal countries in the world as measured by the Gini coefficient (Leibbrandt and Finn 2012); education is often cited as the main vehicle for alleviating such pervasive inequality. While inequality has decreased sharply over the last decade in Brazil and has remained stable in South Africa, inequality remains high in both countries (Leibbrandt and Finn 2012). Importantly, despite markedly different racial and political histories, particularly with regard to slavery (Marx, 1998), Brazil and South Africa are among the largest multiracial societies in the world, with striking race inequalities in social and economic opportunities and outcomes (Lam 1999). South Africa experienced racial apartheid from 1940 to 1994, which has shaped much of the current race inequalities we find today. Brazil, on the other hand, sustained a myth of *racial democracy* for several decades, with studies suggesting that, differently from South Africa, the country has experienced *social apartheid* given its persistent levels of income inequality.

Education plays a key role in generating and alleviating income inequality. Brazil and South Africa have witnessed significant educational expansions in the last decades, with ever-large cohorts being incorporated into the educational system. Yet, despite overwhelming improvements in educational levels and opportunity during the past decades, it is unclear whether educational expansion has alleviated race inequalities in earnings for younger cohorts of Brazilians and South Africans. Importantly, both countries have also experienced significant changes on how race is understood and conceptualized in the last decades. The goal of this paper is to examine a series of educational outcomes by race at two very different points in time: the mid-1990s, at the end of Apartheid in South Africa, and the late 2010s, with Brazil facing a multitude of affirmative action policies.

### Race in Brazil

Brazil offers an attenuated race categorization in which black and white are two extremes of a continuum based on skin color, while *pardos*<sup>1</sup>—considered those of mixed race—constitute the middle category. The racial context of Brazil is complex and resembles a continuum of interactions based on skin color, which differs from dichotomous forms of racial stratification, such as the “one-drop rule” in the United States that generated a black-white split based on any trace of African ancestry (Bailey 2008; Telles 2004). This emphasis on skin color over racial identity is partly due to the multifaceted racial ancestry of most Brazilians. For much of the colonial period, white men outnumbered white women, yielding high levels of miscegenation between white men and nonwhite females (Telles 1994). A consequence of this emphasis on skin color is the high levels of racial group subjectivity. However, despite such a flexible racial system and a continuum, it has been well documented that whites have significant advantages over both *pardos* and blacks, particularly in educational and labor market outcomes (e.g., Hasenbalg 1979; Marteleto 2012; Silva 1985; Silva and Hasenbalg 1999). Blacks and *pardos* are disproportionately represented among the lower social classes: compared with whites, nonwhites experience less social mobility (Hasenbalg 1979), experience higher levels of racial segregation (Telles 1992, 2004), and have lower levels of education (Silva 1985; Silva and Hasenbalg 1999).

The recent debates about race, social stratification, and education in Brazil have revolved around policies of affirmative action in universities that have engaged the population at the national level (for reviews, see Bailey 2009; Telles 2004). Several Brazilian public universities have adopted race-targeted policies, and legislation is currently before the national congress to mandate that all federal universities implement racial quotas. Such debate has placed racial inequality at the forefront of social life in Brazil, a new development in a context in which racial democracy has been an enduring myth for decades.

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<sup>1</sup> *Pardo* is the official category used by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) to identify those who are a mixture of white, black, and native Indian. *Pardos* has been identified as *mulatto* or *moreno* (Telles and Lim 1998).

## **Race in South Africa**

South Africa is comprised primarily of three racial categories: Black, White, and a heterogeneous Coloured category. White South Africans are largely descended from Dutch and English settlers who began to colonize the area during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively. The policies of these colonizers towards Africans were at times inconsistent but racial segregation and oppression was largely present during this time, long before formal apartheid began. Efforts to ameliorate tensions between groups of European colonizers during the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century typically resulted in further oppression and mistreatment of Black South Africans (Marx, 1998). Gradually over this time the distinct ‘Coloured’ identity emerged. This group retained a position of greater privilege than Black South Africans, until the enactment of apartheid brought with it an increased discrimination for Coloured South Africans.

Nearly two decades after the end of apartheid, the racial context of South Africa continues to be impacted by the enduring effects of a long history of colonization by European settlers and the extreme policies of racial segregation and oppression of the apartheid era. (Marx, 1998; Anderson et al, 2001) One salient site of the enduring legacy of apartheid can be seen in the wage and labor market inequalities that exist among individuals who completed their schooling during apartheid. During apartheid, access to schooling and other educational resources was greatly limited for Blacks and Coloureds (Case and Deaton, 1999). This trend translates into extraordinarily high rates of unemployment among Black South Africans as well as large wage gaps between White and Black South Africans (Louw et al, 2007).

In the two decades since the end of apartheid the gaps in educational attainment between white and black South Africans have closed, but parity has not been reached. While white South Africans have average levels of educational attainment that are similar to other developed countries, rates of school completion among blacks and coloureds are much lower (Servaas Van der Berg, 2007). Additionally, it is unclear if the closing gaps in educational attainment have resulted in diminishing gaps in wages and unemployment rates (Lam, 1999).

## **Data and Analytical Sample**

We use large, nationally representative household surveys from each country. We use the 1995 and 2010 General Household Survey for South Africa, and the 1995 and 2009 *Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicilios* (PNAD) for Brazil. The General Household Survey includes data on 95,918 individuals and the PNAD includes data on 399,387 individuals. Both datasets are collected annually by each country’s Census Bureau and are largely comparable.

We use two analytic samples for each country. The first is composed of 14-17 year-old Brazilians and South Africans. This age range was selected because there is race variation in educational attainment starting at age 14 in both countries. Additionally, individuals 18 and older are often not living with their parents and thus constitute a qualitatively different group than the one in which we are primarily interested. Because we use household data, we are limited to an analytical sample of adolescents who live with parents or grandparents for whom we can therefore include family social origin in the analysis, an important determinant of educational opportunity. We examine males and females separately. We also examine each year point separately, as we are interested in change in the patterns of association between race and educational outcomes.

## **Methods**

We first examine patterns in educational attainment by race and year in each country. We are particularly interested in whether the disadvantages in educational attainment associated with being black have changed for younger cohorts of Brazilians and South Africans. Each country is examined independently and then we compare the race patterns of educational disadvantages associated across the countries and cohorts. We run pooled models to test for whether the changes in coefficients are statistically significant over time.

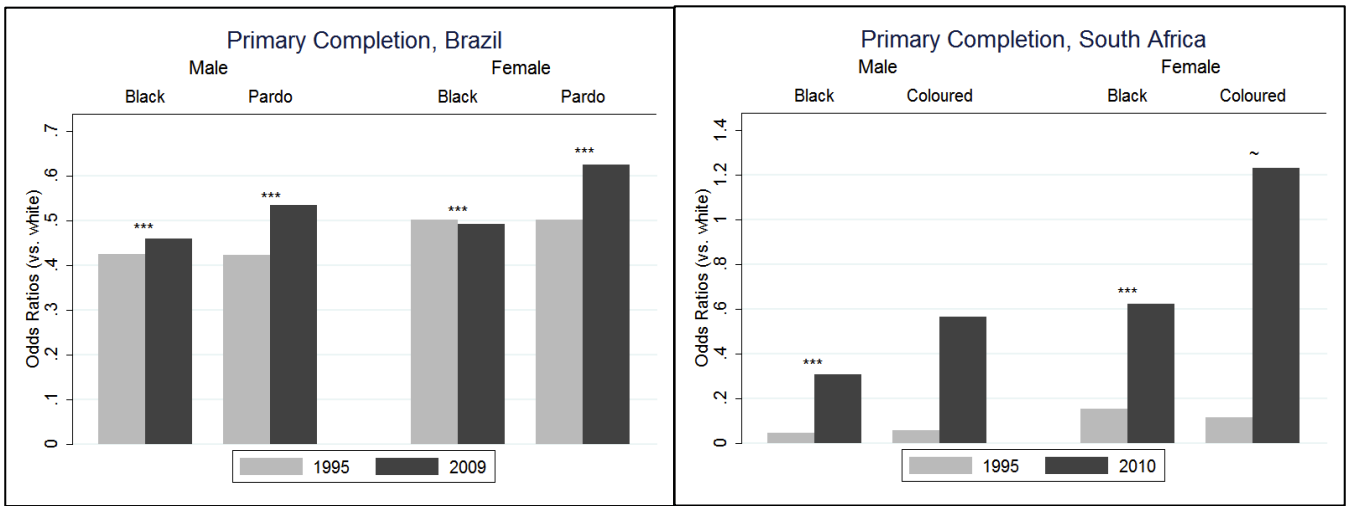
We have three main dependent variables: Primary school completion, secondary school completion, and complete years of schooling. Our main independent variable is race. Race is coded as two dummy variables

representing black, mixed-race (*pardo*) and white in Brazil. In South Africa, we classified race as black, coloured and white. While both countries present an intermediate category between blacks and whites, we by no means suggest that *pardos* and coloureds share similar histories and inequalities. White is coded as 0 in both countries. Other independent variables included in the models are: urban versus rural, where rural is the omitted category. We also control for region of residence—Brazil’s five main regions and South Africa’s 9 provinces.

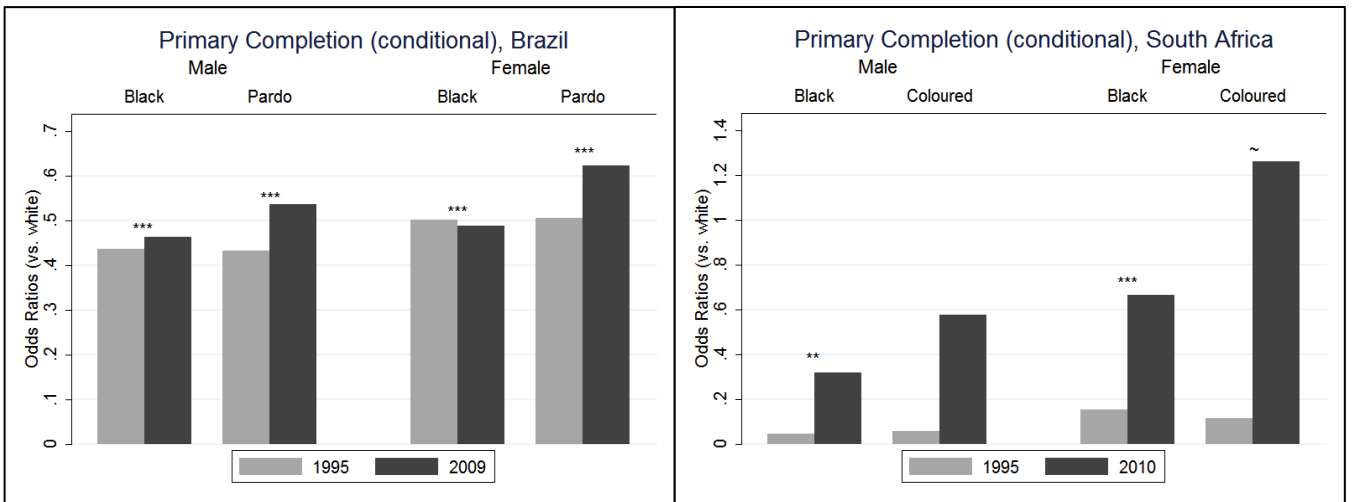
### **Preliminary Findings**

Brazil and South Africa are among the most unequal countries in the world and education is often cited as the main vehicle for alleviating such pervasive inequality. Race is another important mechanism producing inequality in both countries, despite their very different historical trajectories. The goal of this paper was to examine the recent gains in education by younger cohorts have been translated into declining race inequality in education.

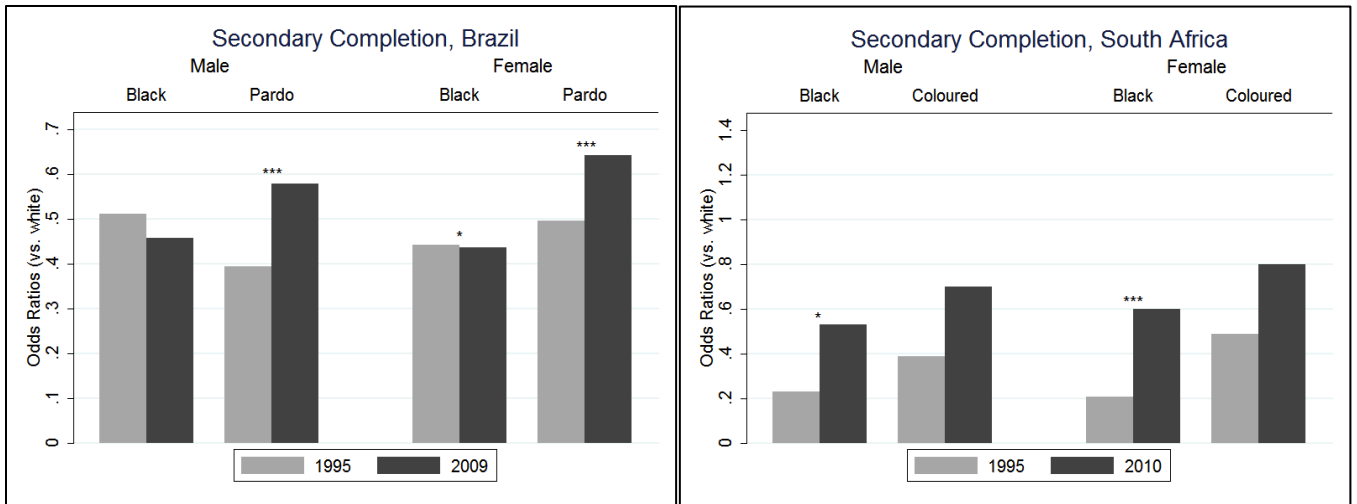
**Figure 1: Odds Ratios of Primary Completion, Brazil and South Africa, adolescents age 15-18**



**Figure 2: Odds Ratios of Primary Completion (conditional), Brazil and South Africa, adolescents age 15-18**



**Figure 3: Odds Ratios of Secondary Completion, Brazil and South Africa, adolescents age 18-19**



**Figure 4: Odds Ratios of Secondary Completion (conditional), Brazil and South Africa, adolescents age 18-19**

