

## **Racial Problems in Ecuador**

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### **Resumen**

Ecuador a pesar de ser un país pequeño es un país lleno de diversidad, donde existen todos los colores de piel. El Ecuador esta dividido en diferentes regiones y en cada uno se encontraran culturas diferentes, comida diferentes y acentos diferentes; creando como resultado grandes contraste de una región a otra lo cual ha sido una razón para que se cree ideales raciales. Este artículo estudia algunas de las razones del racismo en el Ecuador tales como falta de conciencia, y división regional como problemas culturales.

**palabras claves:** Racismo, Problema Cultural, Ecuador, Diversidad

### **Abstract**

Ecuador is a country that in spite of being a small country, it is a country full of diversity, where all skin colors exist. Ecuador is divided into different regions and in each one you will find different cultures, different foods and different accents; creating as a result great contrast from one region to another which has been a reason for creating racial ideals. This article studies some of the reasons for racism in Ecuador such as lack of awareness, and regional division as cultural problems.

**Keywords:** Racism, Cultural Issue, Ecuador, Diversity

## Introduction

Ecuador is home to people of every skin color that can be found in the world. Despite this racial diversity, racism is a prevalent problem in the country. This problem is so deeply rooted in society that many Ecuadorians are unaware of it. The purpose of this paper is to explain the reasons that racism is still present in Ecuador, to show that there is a lack of awareness about this issue, and to demonstrate how different regions are dividing the country into separate races.

### Basic Definition

In order to analyze the problem of racism in Ecuador, it is important to understand the meaning of racism, both historically and at the present time. In "The End of Racism" Souza explains the concept that the Europeans had of the meaning of black before they had any interaction with the Africans. At this time the Oxford English Dictionary defined blackness as "deeply stained with dirt, soiled, dirty, foul, malignant, deadly, baneful, disastrous, sinister, iniquitous, atrocious, horrible and wicked" (Souza 1996, 60). Even though hundreds of years have passed since this definition was widely accepted in Europe, the idea that people with black skin embody the aforementioned characteristics lives on in the minds of many Ecuadorians.

The current definition of racism, according to the Webster's New World Dictionary, is a "doctrine or teaching... that claims to find racial differences in character and intelligence, that asserts the superiority of one race over another, that seeks to maintain the supposed purity of a race" (Souza 1996, 8).

### Reasons for Racism in Ecuador

Out of all of these ethnic groups in Ecuador, whites and mestizos are seen as the preferred and dominant races. According to the CIA facts, 65% of the population is Mestizo, 25% are Indian, 7% are European, and 3% are Black. However, for many years the Whites and Mestizos have oppressed the Blacks and Indians. According to De la Torre, "the discriminatory actions of white and mestizo Ecuadoreans clearly illustrate how they have constructed their racial selves. Given that only a few Ecuadoreans can be certain of their European descent, each act of aggression against the Indian and black 'Other' is a form of denial and hatred of the mestizo self" (De la Torre 1999, 93).

There has never been a segregation law in Ecuador, but "because Indians are seen as 'inferior', they have to go to the back of the bus in order not to inconvenience their white and mestizo 'superiors'" (Bourdieu 1977, 20). Racist thoughts and attitudes are reinforced through actions such as this, which make these experiences seem so common and natural that Ecuadorians do not recognize them as products of racism. Bourdieu continues by saying that "the dominant and the sub-altern sectors have been habituated in the use of racially structured spaces, so much so that they reproduce existing racial structures almost subconsciously in their day-to-day interactions" (Bourdieu 1977, 20).

A significant racial issue in Ecuador society is the desire to become whiter or to improve the race. De la Torre explains that one of the main concerns for a family when a baby is born is what

his or her skin color will be. “An interviewee recounts that when he went to visit the light-skinned baby of a cousin married to a mestizo, one of his political relatives commented: ‘It is great, the race has been improved’” (De la Torre 1999, 107). This is not only an issue for the Indian and Black population. The general consensus in Ecuador is that “the Indian wants to be a mestizo, the mestizo wishes to be white, and the white yearns to be a gringo” (De la Torre 1999, 108). There is a social issue in the minds of Ecuadorians in which each person desires to be at least a little bit whiter.

### **Lack of awareness**

In the country’s early years, the Ecuadorian government decided to impose a mestizo ideology, with the motto of “Todos somos mestizos.” Since 1930 and especially in the government of Guillermo Rodríguez Lara the ideology that “we all are mestizo” was imposed in the country. During the national census at this time, no questions were asked about racial or ethnic identity. It was not until the 2001 census that questions regarding racial and ethnicity background were incorporated into the census (Beck 2011, 108). These many years of ideology of “we all are mestizo” has caused a lack of awareness of these real issues even though in the mind of each Ecuadorian they have always known that they existed.

A study showed that in "countries like Mexico, Colombia or Ecuador, mixed-race identity has become normative because of early 20th century elite-led national ideologies of mestizaje that sought to homogenize the population as mestizo and proclaim them the nation’s essence" (Knight, 1990; Stutzman, 1981; Wade, 1993).

One of the reasons that racism still affects Ecuador is due to a lack of awareness of the problem. Table 2 shows Beck’s research, which indicates that 49.6% of the 8,682 people included in his study did not know what racism was, and an even lower percentage knew the meanings of discrimination and prejudice (Beck 2011). A lack of awareness of the problem in the country has led to a lack of discussion about it, which is the cause for these low numbers. This general ignorance about these concepts is a major stumbling block to eradicating the problem in the country.

Table 2 Summary of Cross-Tabulation Results between Ethnic Self-Identification and "Knowledge" Variables (n = 8,682)

| Ethnic ID          | Sabe Racismo?  |                | Sabe Discriminación? |                | Sabe Prejuicio? |                |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
|                    | Freq (%)       | No Freq (%)    | Freq (%)             | No Freq (%)    | Freq (%)        | No Freq (%)    |
| Mestizo (M)        | 3812<br>(53.8) | 3279<br>(46.2) | 2786<br>(39.3)       | 4305<br>(60.7) | 2298<br>(32.4)  | 4793<br>(67.6) |
| Indian (I)         | 151<br>(23.0)  | 506<br>(77.0)  | 95<br>(14.5)         | 562<br>(85.5)  | 62<br>(9.4)     | 595<br>(90.6)  |
| White (W)          | 312<br>(54.5)  | 261<br>(45.5)  | 233<br>(40.7)        | 340<br>(59.3)  | 196<br>(34.2)   | 377<br>(65.8)  |
| Afro-Ec (A)        | 185<br>(51.2)  | 176<br>(48.8)  | 115<br>(31.9)        | 246<br>(68.1)  | 98<br>(27.1)    | 263<br>(72.9)  |
| <i>Odds ratios</i> |                |                |                      |                |                 |                |
| M – I              | 3.9            |                | 3.8                  |                | 4.6             |                |
| M – W              | .97            |                | .94                  |                | .92             |                |
| M – A              | 1.1            |                | 1.4                  |                | 1.3             |                |

Source Beck p. 115

### Regional division

This racial problem has become a cause of division in the country. De la Torre mentions that “whites and mestizos avoid contact with Indians because they are afraid of their ‘bad odor’” (De la Torre 1999, 100). This also applies to the Black population.

The mestizo population is located all around the country, with a big population in Guayaquil. Even though they comprise the largest ethnic group in Ecuador, they often report having the feeling of not belonging “De la Torre 1999).

The black population is mainly located in the north coast of Ecuador in a province call Esmeralda and in the Valle del Chota. Beck shows that “There may be real cultural differences between, say, Afro-Ecuadorians who live in rural areas of the province of Esmeraldas and those in major cities such as Quito or Guayaquil. But despite any differences, Afro-Ecuadorians are aware that they are treated differently because of what they and others understand as race” (Beck 2011, 121).

Meanwhile the Indians are located in the Highlands Provinces such as Quito and in the Amazon. Indians in these regions are often addressed with the paternalistic terms of *hijito*(little son) and *hijita* (little daughter). These terms “transform adults into children who needed the protection and care of the patriarchal authority” of their fair-skinned counterparts (De la Torre 1999, 101).

### Social Problems

Some studies has shown that problem with color can affect a person ability to find a job. People follow stereotypes especially for person with darker skin. (Gil-White, 1999; Gravlee, 2005).

It also creates a different behavior base on the color of the skin or creating a hierarchy in which white people is at the top (Maddox, 2004; Telles, 2004). In many occasions a person can move in this hierarchy, or in other words can become whiter.

Tellesa, Floresb, & Urrea-Giraldo explain that "some-times shapes ethnoracial identification as in "moneywhitening," where upward mobility may provoke re-classification into whiter categories, potentially affecting estimates of ethnoracial inequality" (2005 p. 42).

Weber (2017) been show "that "race" and racism, which facilitates the generation of categories of worker for particular occupations, reproduces cultural "distinctions" and divisions among labouring classes and "justifies" unequal economic rewards" (p. 290).

### **Conclusion**

Racism is a big issue in Ecuadorian society. Unfortunately, until it is recognized as an issue, little can be done to change the way that people of each ethnic groups see and treat each other and themselves. This racism has so deeply permeated society that it unofficially dictates where people can live, and those with darker skin who stray outside of these regions face even more prejudice. The first step to addressing this problem is to educate people of all ethnic groups about racism and its consequences, and then to take action to erase these divisions between the regions so that any person of any skin color can feel comfortable and have the opportunity to succeed in any city or province in the country.

In order to improve as persons, and as a nation we need to understand that we are different, accept diversity and embrace "the other". Indigenous and dark-skinned color people suffer more discrimination than others. It is time to shine a light into this issue thus we can open our eyes to reality.

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