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## Conditional cash transfers for primary education: Which children are left out?

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### ABSTRACT

Conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs to increase primary-school enrollment and attendance among low-income households have been shown to benefit children and households, but to date little is known about who joins such programs. We test three hypotheses about predictors of CCT program participation in indigenous societies in Bolivia, focusing on attributes of the household (ethnicity), parents (modern human capital), and children (age, sex). We model whether children receive a transfer from Bolivia's CCT program (*Bono Juancito Pinto*), using data from 811 school-age children and nine ethnic groups. Children from the group least exposed to Westerners (Tsimane') are 18–22 percentage points less likely to participate in the program than children from other lowland ethnic groups. Parental modern human capital and child sex do not predict participation. We discuss possible mechanisms underlying the findings and conclude that the Tsimane's current lower returns to schooling are the most likely explanation.

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### 1. Introduction

Since their first implementation in Brazil and Mexico in 1997, conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs to increase primary school enrollment and attendance among children from low-income households have spread widely in Latin America (Behrman, Parker, & Todd, 2011; Handa & Davis, 2006; Lomeli, 2008; Nagels, 2016) and beyond (Behrman, 2010; Fiszbein & Schady, 2009; Saavedra & García, 2013). In most CCT programs, parents or children receive cash payments if the child attends school for a minimum of about 80–85% of school days (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009, p. 86). Evaluations of CCT programs show that they have met their goals of increasing school enrollment and attendance (Baird, Ferreira, Özler, & Woolcock, 2014; Behrman, Sengupta, & Todd, 2005; Benedetti, Ibararán, & McEwan, 2016; Fiszbein & Schady, 2009; Ganimian & Murnane, 2016; Schultz, 2004; Todd & Wolpin, 2006), but also show that their effects on

academic and cognitive skills remain unclear (Baird, McIntosh, & Özler, 2011; Ganimian & Murnane, 2016; McEwan, 2015).

Despite the voluminous literature on the impacts of CCT programs in Latin America, little is known about their impacts among indigenous peoples, who are among the poorest in the continent (Hall & Patrinos, 2012; Van de gaer, Vandenbossche, & Figueroa, 2013). The few published impact evaluations of CCT programs among indigenous peoples come from Mexico's CCT programs, and show that the programs increased primary-school enrollment and attendance (López-Calva & Patrinos, 2015) and some cognitive skills (Figueroa, 2014), but failed to improve school drop-out (Álvarez, Devoto, & Winters, 2008).

Even less is known about predictors of indigenous peoples' participation in CCT programs. Collateral evidence from evaluations of such programs among disadvantaged groups suggests that children from low-income households find it hard to access the programs owing to the costs of compliance and transport to school, parental misperceptions about the program, and low parental modern human capital (i.e., literacy) (Cecchini & Madariaga, 2011; de Janvry & Sadoulet, 2006; Lomeli, 2008; McGuire, 2013).

Indigenous peoples in Latin America on average underperform in comparison with their non-indigenous peers in educational

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attainment (Arteaga & Glewwe, 2014; Gigler, 2015; Hall & Patrinos, 2012; Reimão & Taş, 2017; Valenzuela, 2004). In Bolivia, McEwan (2004) estimates that primary school students from all indigenous groups perform 0.3–0.5 standard deviations (SD) worse on standardized tests of mathematics and Spanish than their non-indigenous peers. Reimão and Taş (2017) used 2012 Bolivian census data to estimate the gap in school achievement between non-indigenous adults and adults from minority indigenous groups (i.e. not Quechua and Aymara, the two largest indigenous groups in Bolivia). They found that women and men from minority indigenous groups completed 3.3 and 2.9 fewer grades of schooling than their peers from non-indigenous groups. These trends hold in our sample: children between seven and 16 years of age from the most isolated groups (Tsimane') completed 2.5 fewer years of schooling than children from less isolated groups.

Since CCT programs to encourage primary-school enrollment and attendance can produce both lasting effects on children and spillover effects within the household (Behrman & Parker, 2013; Behrman et al., 2011), and as indigenous peoples underperform in educational attainment and are among the most marginalized groups in Latin America, identifying the predictors of program participation matters when designing better ways of reaching marginalized indigenous peoples.

This article has three aims: (1) to characterize inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic variation in participation in a CCT program for primary-school enrollment and attendance in several native Amazonian societies of Bolivia, (2) to test hypotheses about household, parental, and child characteristics associated with participation in such a program, and (3) to explore mechanisms that explain differences in participation. Like many other Latin American countries, Bolivia started a CCT program to encourage primary-school attendance. Known as *Bono Juancito Pinto*, the program since its inception in 2006 has paid annually US\$28 per child attending grades 1–5, provided the child attends a public school and misses no more than 20% of school days in the academic year. Children (or their households) are eligible to receive transfers irrespective of household income, with payments made at the end of the school year for qualifying children (McGuire, 2013). Since its beginning, the program has expanded to cover up to the sixth (2007), eighth (2008), ninth (2012), and twelfth (2014) grades (McGuire, 2013).

Unlike some other educational CCT programs, Bolivia's CCT program has not been evaluated with a randomized controlled trial. National statistics suggest that the program's impacts are mixed. On the one hand, as the number of beneficiaries of the program increased from 1.1 million in 2006 to 2.2 million in 2016 (Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas Públicas, 2016), national enrollment rates have decreased. According to the latest data from the Institute for Statistics of UNESCO, the net primary-school enrollment rate in Bolivia declined every year from 96% when the program started in 2006 to 89% in 2015, the last year for which information was available (UNESCO, 2016). Aguilar Pacajes (2014) shows that the decline in primary-school enrollment was sharper in rural areas and in public schools than in cities or than in private schools (the CCT program does not cover children enrolled in private schools). On the other hand, rates of primary-school graduation have been increasing. The share of children completing primary school has increased from 80% in 2006 to 97% in 2014, and the proportion of children enrolled in the last year of primary school who transition to secondary school has increased from 93% in 2006 to 97% in 2014 (UNESCO, 2016). The share of children in primary schools who continue their education has also increased in rural areas, with girls outperforming boys, although rural areas continue to lag behind urban areas (Aguilar Pacajes, 2014). To date, little is known about how Bolivia's CCT program for school enrollment and attendance works among indigenous peoples.

We analyze cross-sectional data on 811 children from multiple ethnic groups in a rural area of lowland Bolivia and find that children from the more-isolated, less-acculturated group (Tsimane') are less likely to receive a payment from the CCT program, and that child age has a non-linear relation with the likelihood of receiving the CCT payment. Children of about 11 years of age are most likely to take part in the program. On the other hand, parental characteristics, child sex, and school characteristics are not associated with the likelihood that a child receives a payment. We examine several possible explanations for the findings and conclude that the main mechanism at work is the lower returns to modern schooling for Tsimane' households.

## 2. Hypotheses

The analysis centers on testing three hypotheses about predictors of CCT program participation among indigenous people in the Bolivian Amazon. The hypotheses focus on attributes of the household (ethnicity), parents (modern human capital), and children (age, sex) in grades  $\leq 8$ .

**H1** (*Ethnic attributes*). *After controlling for household, child, and school attributes, children from less-acculturated ethnic groups are less likely to participate in the CCT program for primary-school attendance than children from more-acculturated ethnic groups.*

We use the term acculturation as a synonym for degree of incorporation into Western national society. Bolivian native Amazonian societies vary in their mode of incorporation into national society, from groups that historically avoided contact with outsiders to groups that engaged with Westerners and Catholic missions as early as the sixteenth century (Godoy et al. 2015; 2005). Our sample (described later) captures that range; it contains native Amazonian societies with centuries of close contact with Jesuit missions and ranchers (Moxeños), to cosmopolitan indigenous people originally from the highlands, to groups like the Tsimane' who have kept arm's-length relations with Westerners. 83% of the 24 villages studied included individuals of more than one ethnic group. Since our sample is mostly composed of ethnically-mixed villages, we can test whether people from different ethnic groups sharing the same village school and having the same access to market towns vary in their propensity to take part in the educational CCT program.

**H2** (*Parental modern human capital*). *Children from households in which parents have higher levels of modern human capital are more likely to enroll in the CCT program.*

We equate modern human capital with school attainment and with Spanish-speaking fluency. We expect to see a positive correlation between (i) parental modern human capital and (ii) the probability that children receive CCT payments. A national identification card makes it easier for children to receive the transfer, since without it children would need two persons from the community vouching for their identity to receive the transfer (McGuire, 2013). Since obtaining a national identification card entails transaction costs (e.g., trips to towns) and the ability to deal in Spanish with governmental officials, the requirement may act as a filter for selecting children from households with more-schooled, Spanish-speaking parents. The hypothesis also builds on findings from other studies in Latin America that show that some eligible households lack the resources to obtain the documentation to access educational CCT programs (Feitosa de Britto, 2004) and from studies in Bolivia showing that adult Spanish-speaking fluency

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