

# A DECADE OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN BRAZIL: LESSONS FOR THE GLOBAL DEBATE

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## ABSTRACT

*Just over a decade after the first universities in Brazil adopted quotas for Afro-Brazilians and other disadvantaged groups, the country has implemented the most sweeping affirmative action policies in the Western Hemisphere. The surrounding controversy has inspired a large number of studies, which seek to evaluate the impact and scope of the policies, in terms of racial and social inequality, as well as to gauge perceptions within the public at large. This paper reviews some of the most significant findings of those studies, which have important implications for the global debate over affirmative action in higher education.*

**Keywords:** Brazil; affirmative action; higher education; racial inequality

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Just over a decade ago, the state of Rio de Janeiro made history by adopting Brazil's first affirmative action policies governing university admissions. A set of laws enacted between 2000 and 2001 required the two state-run universities to reserve 50% of their spots for graduates of public high schools and 40% for Afro-Brazilians, groups traditionally underrepresented in Brazilian higher education (one candidate could qualify for both quotas). The measures, first implemented during the 2003 admissions process, sparked fierce opposition and a raft of legal battles over the constitutionality of the racial quotas. Critics also questioned the viability of determining who is white and who is black in Brazil, given the country's long tradition of racial intermixing. Although Brazil was the last country in the hemisphere to abolish slavery, in 1888, the country never implemented racial segregation policies such as those adopted by the United States or South Africa. Supporters of affirmative action, including Afro-Brazilian activists and numerous scholars, however, insisted that the country was a long way from overcoming its slave legacy (Htun, 2004). They cited glaring inequalities between blacks and whites in terms of income, education levels and most other human development indicators in arguing the need for compensatory measures in university admissions and in government hiring (Heringer, 2002).

On the most recent census in 2010, Brazil's 191 million people were asked to state their race or skin color: 91 million self-declared as whites, 82 million as *pardos* (a term which roughly translates as light black), 15 million as *pretos* (Portuguese for dark black), 2 million as *amarelos* (of Asian descent), and 817,000 as belonging to indigenous groups (6.6 million did not declare any race or color, Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE], 2011). While Afro-Brazilians comprise 51% of the population, they are grossly underrepresented among higher income levels and in positions of power (Heringer, 2002; Reiter & Mitchell, 2010). In 2010, the average earnings for whites (\$875 by that year's exchange rate) and Asians (\$900) were roughly twice that of *pretos* (\$475) and *pardos* (\$480) or indigenous people (\$420) (Lamarca & Vettore, 2012). Income disparities were even more extreme in large urban areas, where whites earned several times that of Afro-Brazilians. There were also strong regional differences, with the largest proportion of blacks in the impoverished north and northeast, while the more prosperous south was predominantly white (IBGE, 2011).

Supporters of affirmative action policies hope the measures will help combat both race-based and socioeconomic inequalities in Brazil, by giving members of disadvantaged groups access to a university education – and, ostensibly, higher paying jobs. Since 2003, hundreds of public and private

universities have followed Rio's lead, unleashing momentum that culminated with the passage of the federal Quota Law in 2012. The law requires the country's 63 federal universities to reserve 50% of seats for Afro-Brazilians and graduates of public high schools by 2016 (Lloyd, 2014). Together, the measures constitute the most sweeping affirmative action policies in higher education in the Western Hemisphere. These have inspired a wealth of studies that evaluate the scope and impact of the measures on individual institutions and on the country's higher education system as a whole (e.g., Feres, Daflon, Barbabela, & Ramos, 2013; Feres, Daflon, Ramos, & Miguel, 2013; Francis & Tannuri-Pianto, 2012a, 2012b; Santos & Queiroz, 2010).

In this paper, I provide a critical review of some of the most relevant studies, a decade after the adoption of the first affirmative action policies at the state universities in Rio de Janeiro and at a moment in which the measures are being institutionalized on a national scale. While there are also a growing number of qualitative studies of affirmative action policies in Brazil, in this paper I focus on the quantitative studies and the macroanalysis of the policies in order to take stock of their impact on a broader scale.

My analysis is divided into five parts. The first section discusses the context and justification for Brazil's ambitious affirmative action policies in university admissions, as well as the ensuing controversy. The next section provides an overview of the Brazilian higher education system, and the ways in which it differs from other countries in Latin America. I then present figures illustrating the changes that have occurred in terms of demographics and higher education enrollment over the past decade, both as a result of affirmative action policies and of government investment in the public universities in general. The fourth section presents the results of some key studies that seek to demystify the main questions surrounding the policies. Finally, I suggest some directions for future research on affirmative action in Brazil and elsewhere.

Brazil's experience offers important lessons for discussions about affirmative action in countries with long histories of such policies, such as the United States, South Africa, India, and Malaysia, and others, such as Colombia and Uruguay, where the measures are more recent. In all those countries, there is fierce debate over the pertinence and effectiveness of adopting affirmative action to combat historic inequalities or to achieve diversity. In the United States, for example, the Supreme Court has made it increasingly difficult for universities to take race into consideration as part of the admissions process. In *Fisher v. University of Texas* (2013), the justices urged the lower courts to apply "strict scrutiny" when evaluating the

use of race in university admissions policies. Then, in 2014, the Supreme Court upheld a voter-approved ban in Michigan on the use of race as a consideration in government hiring and admissions to state universities. Both rulings are likely to push American universities to focus on socioeconomic factors instead of race in selecting students, in what many view as a setback for efforts to increase the number of students from underrepresented minorities (Schmitt, 2014). In contrast, affirmative action policies in Brazil have incorporated both racial and socioeconomic factors as proxies for inclusion, an approach that has important implications for the debate at the international level.

### AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN BRAZIL

The legal justification for affirmative action in Brazil has its roots in the 1988 Constitution, enacted following twenty-one years of military rule in 1985. The Constitution established quotas for disabled persons in public-sector jobs, and paved the way for the use of quotas in higher education. The measures were largely the result of pressure by Afro-Brazilian activists, who seized on the country's newfound democracy to question its long-held self-image as a "racial democracy" (Freyre, 1959). Advocates of the policies cited government census data from 2000 to show that Afro-Brazilians were disproportionately represented among the lowest income brackets, on average they underwent two fewer years of schooling, and earned three-fifths as much as whites with the same level of education. Afro-Brazilians were also half as likely to attend university (The Economist, 2013).

In 2001, President Henrique Cardoso adopted the country's first affirmative action policies in government hiring. The Brazilian Ministry of Agrarian Development was ordered to set aside 20% of new jobs for Afro-Brazilians, which included self-declared *pretos* and *pardos* (those of mixed African and European descent). However, it was during the eight-year tenure of President Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva, a former labor leader and progressive, that the policies gained widespread support. Soon after taking office in January 2003, Lula created the Special Secretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality. In 2003, the Rio state universities adopted quotas. Then, in 2005, Lula created the University for All Program (ProUni), which introduced affirmative action policies in the private sector. Lula justified the measures as long overdue compensation for past injustices against African slaves, the repercussions of which are still being felt today

in the form of widespread discrimination against Afro-Brazilians. “We’re not doing any favors. We are merely paying a debt going back 500 years,” Lula said during a ceremony inaugurating ProUni (Folha de Sao Paulo, 2005). Lula also sought to gain passage of a quota law for the federal universities, which finally made it through the congress under his hand-picked successor, President Dilma Rousseff.

Affirmative action policies are a part of broader trends in higher education policy worldwide. Some trends include the massification of tertiary enrollment, the rise of for-profit institutions, the use of international university rankings to influence policy, a growing accountability culture, among other tendencies (Balseguí & Fuguet Smith, 2006; Ordorika & Lloyd, 2013, 2014b; Power, 1997). In that context, institutions and governments face pressure to respond to often competing demands on the part of the government and industry such as: creating a globalized workforce that can compete in the knowledge economy and social demands for higher education as a mechanism for upward mobility (Ordorika & Lloyd, 2014a).

Affirmative action policies seek to respond to the second of those demands, by democratizing access to higher education as a means for achieving broader goals of social equality. However, the capacity of such policies to effect the desired changes, in the absence of other measures that improve access to quality education at the primary and secondary levels, is the subject of heated debate. One of the most frequent arguments against affirmative action in Brazil is that the students entering college under the policies are poorly equipped to compete in a competitive academic environment (Dutra, 2004). Critics also warn that the quotas will spark racial tensions where none previously existed (Fry, 2005; Grisa, 2013; Maggie, 2005).

Those arguments have inspired numerous studies which attempt to evaluate the impact and scope of the affirmative action policies. The Multidisciplinary Studies Group on Affirmative Action (GEMAA) at the State University of Rio de Janeiro identified significant disparities among regions and types of institutions in terms of the scope of their affirmative action policies and the methods employed (Feres et al., 2013; Feres, Daflon, Ramos, & Miguel, 2013). There are also numerous case studies of individual institutions, which evaluate the academic performance and drop-out rate of the students admitted under the quota system (Francis & Tannuri-Pianto, 2012a, 2012b; Guimaraes, da Costa, Almeida-Filho, & Newman, 2010; Santos & Queiroz, 2010), as well as surveys of attitudes toward affirmative action among different groups (Folha de Sao Paulo, 1995; Santos & Queiroz, 2010; Smith, 2010). These studies have yielded some counterintuitive and surprising results, which I will discuss later in

this paper. They also offer insight into the difficulties involved in adopting such sweeping measures in a relatively short time, and within a higher education system that was considered among the most polarized and elitist in the region.

## HIGHER EDUCATION IN BRAZIL: TWO SYSTEMS IN ONE

The Brazilian higher education system represents an anomaly for Latin America, both in terms of its late origins and in the relatively small share of enrollment in the public sector. Until recently, only a tiny minority of the population – primarily the white elite – could aspire to a university education. That fact may have contributed to glaring income inequalities in Brazil; the country ranks near the bottom of the international Gini index, which measures wealth distribution within countries. The elite characteristic of Brazilian public higher education has also influenced the debate over affirmative action, increasing pressure on the public sector, in particular, to expand access to traditionally underrepresented groups.

The first universities in the Spanish Americas were founded in the 16th century – in Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Peru – and by the 19th century, the number of institutions had reached 32 (González, 2010). In contrast, the first universities in Brazil were created in the early 20th century, a delay historians attribute to differences in the colonial policies of Spain and Portugal (Favero, 2006; Lampert, 2005). In the case of Brazil, the Portuguese crown sought to control its most important colony by keeping it dependent on Lisbon. Even after independence in the 19th century, when Brazil became a constitutional monarchy, members of the elite had to travel to Portugal to obtain a university degree. Their education level contrasted strongly with that of African slaves and the rest of the population, most of whom had little access to formal schooling (Favero, 2006).

The late emergence of universities in Brazil also had an impact on higher education policy. By the time the country's first university was created in Rio de Janeiro in 1920, the Napoleonic model of higher education, with its emphasis on training professional cadres, had given way to the research-centered German model (Lloyd, 2013). The new emphasis was particularly evident in the debate over the creation of the University of Sao Paulo – today the country's, and the region's, top-ranked institution of higher education – which was founded in 1934 with the primary mission of “promoting, through investigation, the progress of science” (Decreto Núm.

6,283, 1934). The public universities that followed were also largely elitist in character, although few rivaled Sao Paulo in terms of research production. Starting in the 1960s, however, the military government opened the way for the proliferation of private institutions, as a low-cost means of meeting rising demand for higher education.

Today, Brazil has one of the highest shares of private college enrollment in the region: 77% in 2012 (Mercadante, 2012), compared to the regional average of 49% (Levy, 2011). In addition, two-thirds of the private sector consists of for-profit institutions, which were first permitted under the federal education law of 1996, and which provide education of often questionable quality (Pedrosa, 2010; Schwartzman, 2003). Meanwhile, public institutions, which are the most prestigious and conduct a majority of research, account for just 23% of enrollments. Prior to the adoption of affirmative action, the system was also highly regressive, since the public universities – which are free – were filled with the white graduates of private high schools, whose families could afford to pay the expensive college preparatory exams (Schwartzman, 2003).

That panorama is beginning to change under affirmative action, and as a result of major investments in the public universities, and the federal universities in particular, over the past decade. In 2012, Brazil had 7.26 million students enrolled in 2,416 institutions, of which 2,112 were private and 304 public (Mercadante, 2012). That same year, there were 193 universities, of which 59 were federal (now 63), 38 state, 11 municipal, and 85 private. As we will see in the following section, the system has experienced enormous growth over the past decade, particularly in the federal and private sectors.

## **DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS IN BRAZILIAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

After a period of stagnation in the 1980s and 1990s, Brazilian higher education embarked on a period of massive growth starting around 2000. The number of students enrolled in non-distance tertiary education grew from 2.7 million in 2000 to 5.5 million in 2010 (Semesp, 2012), the last year for which data is available. It is interesting to note that between 2000 and 2010 enrollment in federal institutions grew 122%, compared with 64% in the private sector, largely due to the expansion and creation of 14 new federal universities between 2003 and 2012; another four federal universities were created in 2013, bringing the total to 63 (Fig. 1).

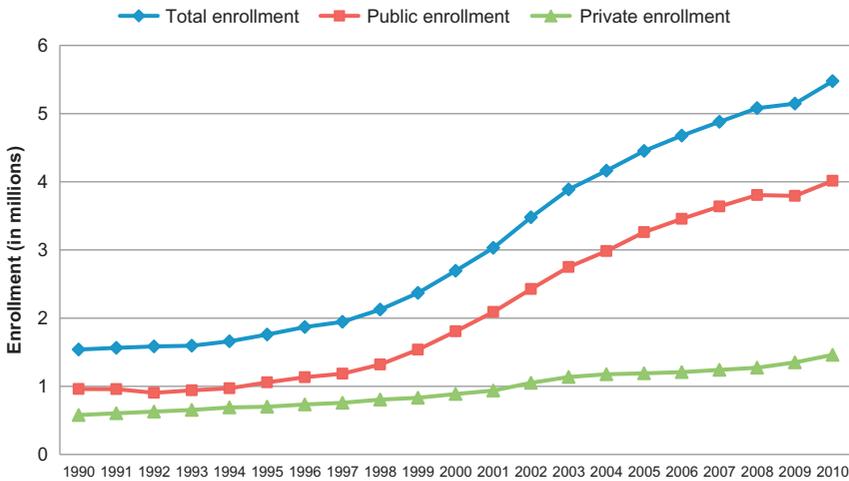


Fig. 1. Enrollment in Brazilian Higher Education (Excluding Distance Education) 1990–2010. Source: Own elaboration using data from Semesp (2012).

However, that pattern changes if we take into account the massive growth in distance education, which accounted for almost one million additional students in 2010, primarily in the private sector. Total tertiary enrollment for that year was 6.4 million (Semesp, 2012).

Similarly, between 2002 and 2012, the number of degrees awarded grew 91.9%, with the largest gains in the federal institutions (124.5%) and the private institutions (100.3%). However, there were significant differences in college enrollment rates among the different racial groups and geographic regions. In 2011, 33% of Asian-Brazilians and 26% of whites aged 18–24 were either attending or had completed college, compared with 11.1% of *pardos*, 9.6% of indigenous people, and 9% of *pretos*. In terms of regional differences, 24.1% of the age group was enrolled in the Centerwestern region, 22.5% in the South, 20.3% in the Southeast, and 12% in the North and the Northeast. The most striking difference, however, was in the share of age-group enrollment according to family income; just 5% of the lowest 20% income bracket was attending college, compared with 44% of top 20% income bracket (Mercadante, 2012).

Those differences have persisted, despite the increase over the past decade in the number of self-declared *pretos* and *pardos* undergoing tertiary studies. Between 1997 and 2011, the share of Afro-Brazilians of college age that were enrolled grew from 4% to 20% in 2011 (Forum, 2012).

However, the number of quota beneficiaries remains relatively small compared to the overall number of students enrolled in higher education in Brazil. There are also considerable variations in the types of policies implemented, as well as among institutions and regions. In the following section, we will review the scope of affirmative action in Brazil, and as well as providing some of the statistics relating to the number of students benefitting from such policies.

### **BRAZILIAN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN NUMBERS**

As mentioned, the state universities were pioneers in adopting affirmative action policies in Brazil, but the federal universities quickly followed suit. As of 2013, a total of 32 of the 38 state universities and 40 of the 59 federal universities had implemented the measures in some form (Feres, Daflon, Barbabela, & Ramos, 2013). In the case of the state universities, 30 had adopted the use of quotas for Afro-Brazilians or graduates of public high schools. Of those, two institutions also set aside extra seats for members of disadvantaged groups. However, the country's two top-ranked institutions, the University of Sao Paulo and the State University of Campinas, have opted instead for a bonus system, which awards extra points on the entrance exam for graduates of public high schools. Interestingly, in half of the institutions that have adopted affirmative action, the measures were implemented via state laws, while in the other half the universities themselves took the initiative (Feres, Daflon, Barbabela, & Ramos, 2013).

In the case of the federal institutions, the adoption of affirmative action led to an increase between 2003 and 2010 in the share of self-declared *pretos* from 5.9% to 8.7%, and *pardos* from 28.3% to 32%. The number of federal institutions implementing such policies increased dramatically after 2007, when the federal government launched its Restructuring and Expansion of Federal Universities program (REUNI). The program conditioned funding on the adoption of affirmative action policies by the institutions (Feres, Daflon, Ramos, & Miguel, 2013).

However, the scope of those programs varied significantly by region, ranging from 16.7% of seats in the Southeast region and 40.2% in the Northeast. There were also differences in the types of quota beneficiaries by region. The Northern region, for instance, reserved 2.7% of seats for Afro-Brazilians and indigenous students (referred to as PPI, for the

Portuguese acronym for *pretos*, *pardos*, and *indígenas*), and 22.9% in the form of so-called “social quotas” (graduates of public high schools and students from low-income families). Meanwhile, universities in the Southern region reserved 4.1% for PPIs and 24.2% in the form of social quotas (Feres, Daflon, Ramos, & Miguel, 2013).

The 2012 federal Quota Law seeks to unify criteria for affirmative action policies, as well as address some of the main criticisms of existing policies – in particular, the lack of socioeconomic filters for the quota recipients at many universities. Under the rules of the Quota Law, half the seats in federal universities will be reserved for graduates of public high schools, and half of those, in turn, must come from families with a per capita income of 1.5 times the minimum wage. In addition, the share of race-based quotas should conform to the racial composition of each state. For example, if a state has a 25% Afro-Brazilian population, then 25% of the quotas – or 12.5% of the total seats at the university – must be reserved for those students. However, the universities can decide to apply larger quotas for PPI students. The law also seeks to dramatically increase the number of students benefitting from affirmative action policies. In addition to the federal universities, it applies to the 38 federal Institutes of Education, Science, and Technology, which are under rapid expansion, with plans to double enrollment between 2011 and 2014 through the creation of 208 new affiliated centers (Portal Brasil, 2011).

Since 2005, the Brazilian government has also subsidized affirmative action policies in hundreds of private higher education institutions through its ProUni. The program, which was the first federal affirmative action policy affecting higher education, extends tax breaks to non-profit and for-profit institutions that provide full and partial scholarships to a proportion of their students: the quotas range from about 8.5% to 20% of the student body, depending on the type of institutions and the size of the scholarships. Eligible candidates must have attended their entire high school in the public sector or have received full scholarships in private high schools. In addition, they must prove a per capita family income of up to 1.5 times the minimum wage (approximately \$460) in order to receive full scholarships and up to three times the minimum wage (\$920) in the case of half or quarter scholarships.

The program initially came under fire from critics, who objected to the government subsidizing the private sector instead of further expanding access to the free, public sector. Higher education specialists also warned that without substantial financial and academic support, many of the students would end up abandoning their studies:

Prouni promotes a public policy of access to higher education that worries little about the permanence of the students, a factor that is fundamental in achieving democratization. It is oriented by the concept of social assistance, offering benefits instead of rights to the scholarship recipients. The courses offered by the private and philanthropic institutions are, in the vast majority of cases, of questionable quality and oriented toward meeting the immediate demands of the market. (Catani, Hey, & Gilioli, 2006, p. 126, my translation)

Lula and his first education minister, Tarso Genro, however, defended the program, arguing that only by incorporating the giant private sector could the government hope to expand higher education enrollment for disadvantaged groups on a significant scale. At a ceremony following the passage of the Law 11,096, which created ProUni, Tarso dismissed critics as elitists: “Those who are against it either already have a degree, didn’t study in a public school or are rich” (Folha de Sao Paulo, 2005). Nonetheless, the government has taken measures to increase the financial support for ProUni students, in the form of monthly allowances for food, transportation, and books. By January 2014, the government reported that the program had benefitted 1.25 million students in the form of full and partial scholarships (Presidencia de Brasil, 2014).

## **CASE STUDIES IN BRAZILIAN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION**

A series of studies over the past decade seeks to evaluate the impact of Brazil’s affirmative action policies, in terms of expanding access to underprivileged groups, and in the ability of those students to compete in often competitive university environments (Childs & Stromquist, 2015; Lozzi, 2012; Silva, Silva, & Rosa, 2009; Velloso, 2009). Researchers have also sought to gauge perceptions – and possible changes over time – regarding the policies among students and the general population in Brazil (Folha de Sao Paulo, 1995; Santos & Queiroz, 2010; Smith, 2010). In the following section, I sum up the results of some of the most important of these studies, which provide interesting lessons for the debate on affirmative action.

The first group is comprised of quantitative studies of individual universities. They rely on data such as grade-point averages and drop-out rates to evaluate the academic performance of the quota students. In general, the results show no significant differences between the quota recipients and regular pool on either of those indicators, calling into question one of the main arguments against the quotas, namely that they would lower the

academic standards of the universities. However, the studies do show differences over time and among academic majors. Those findings have important implications for the debate over the predictive nature of the selection exam and what constitutes merit in higher education, as well in other debates related to affirmative action (Childs & Stromquist, 2015).

Most of the studies focus on universities that were pioneers in applying affirmative action, in particular, the University of Brasilia (UnB), which in 2004 became the first federal higher education institution in Brazil to adopt quotas for Afro-Brazilians. Smaller-scale studies conducted at other universities have shown similar results, suggesting that the experiences of UnB and the Federal University of Bahia, which was the second federal university to apply quotas, are representative of trends nationwide.

In August 2014, the UnB council voted to grant an additional 5% to quotas for Afro-Brazilians, on top of the 50% quotas for public-school graduates required under the federal Quota Law. In voting to continue the racial quotas, council members argued the need to persist in combatting racial discrimination through affirmative action (Tokarnia, 2014). The decision reflected growing perceptions among administrators and researchers that the policies are working, based largely on studies showing that the academic performance of the quota students is not significantly below that of the non-quota students. Childs and Stromquist (2015) argue that a 15% difference in grade-point averages among the two groups is “acceptable in social efforts to gain greater inclusion of marginalised groups” (2014, p. 8). In general, the differences are smaller, if they exist at all.

For example, at UnB, Francis and Tannuri-Pianto (2012a, 2012b) compared the scores of different racial groups from 2004 to 2006 on the highly competitive entrance exam, known as the *vestibular* in Brazil. They found that the Afro-Brazilians on average scored significantly lower than the regular pool on the exam (Francis & Tannuri-Pianto, 2012a; 2012b). However, those differences did not necessarily translate into gaps in future academic performance. Silva et al. (2009) found that the grade-point averages of quota students in the first cohorts were only slightly lower than those of non-quota students: 3.57 compared with 3.79, on a scale of 1 to 5. Those results were in spite of the fact that a much larger share of the quota students had parents who were either illiterate or who had only completed first grade: 15.3%, compared with 6% of the non-quota students. Silva et al. (2009) reported, “The experience of affirmative action in UnB demonstrates that the quotas do not bring about a loss in the quality of the higher education of the institution, as some critics of the program have posited” (p. 274).

Nonetheless, there were differences in performance among academic fields. [Velloso \(2009\)](#), in a study of the 2004–2006 cohorts at the university, found that while quota students had lower grade-point averages in competitive fields such as architecture, economics and the sciences, they outperformed non-quota students by as much as 10% points in subjects such as history. In fact, in at least two-thirds of majors, there were no significant differences in the average grades of the two groups, or the quota students performed better. According to [Velloso \(2009\)](#), the only field where there was a significant difference between the two groups was in civil engineering, where the non-quota students had scores 164% higher than the non-quota students (p. 633). Similarly, [Cunha \(2006\)](#) found that the academic performance of the quota students was slightly below non-quota students in the fields of human and health studies, while [Cardoso \(2008\)](#) found little difference between the two groups in studying the 2006 cohort, with the exception of the sciences.

Interestingly, [Cardoso \(2008\)](#) also found that quota students in the 2004 cohort were less likely to switch departments or drop out, particularly in the case of demanding programs. He postulates that the quota students have a stronger motivation to succeed. However, he found that in general quota, students were more likely to choose less demanding majors than non-quota students, and that, not surprisingly, those who worked while studying tended to earn lower grades. He and other researchers suggested the need for more academic support for students enrolled in the sciences, as well as more generous financial aid programs, to enable the quota students to devote more time to schoolwork.

More recent studies at UnB have reached similar conclusions. [Lozzi \(2012\)](#), in a study of academic performance of the 2009–2011 cohorts, found only a marginal difference in grade-point averages for quota and non-quota students: 2.91 and 3.12, respectively. That difference was far less significant than the gap between graduates of public and private high schools – 2.30 versus 3.16 – respectively. Furthermore, she found, the differences in academic performance between the quota and non-quota students nearly disappeared after several years of studies, suggesting that the students were able to overcome initial gaps in college preparedness.

Studies at the Federal University of Bahia have yielded slightly different results. Bahia, in Brazil's impoverished Northeast region, is the state with the highest proportion of Afro-Brazilians, which comprise 75% of the state population. The university began in 2004 by reserving 43% of seats for graduates of public high schools, of which 85% are reserved for *pretos* or *pardos*; 4% for indigenous students, and the rest for

public-school graduates of any race. The goal of the policies was to increase dramatically the proportion of poorer Afro-Brazilians students, since previously the vast majority had come from private high schools. The result was an increase in the percentage of Afro-Brazilians from 61% to 79% and of public-school graduates, from 38% to 51% in 2005 (Guimarães et al., 2010).

Guimarães et al. (2010) found significant differences in the *vestibular* scores of quota and non-quota students. However, Santos and Queiroz (2010) found that the quota students later did relatively well in most areas. The biggest gap was in architecture, where the grade-point average between the quota and non-quota groups was 4.9 to 6.7; in contrast, in civil engineering, the gap was 5.2 to 5.8. In most fields, the differences were less than the 15% that Childs and Stromquist (2015) propose as reasonable in terms of pursuing social inclusion. Furthermore, a larger number of quota students scored above 5 (on a scale of 1–10) than non-quota students in the most competitive fields (Childs & Stromquist, 2015).

In terms of drop-out rates, both Guimarães' and Santos' groups of researchers found virtually the same rates of conclusion and transfer, as well as in dismissals and drop-outs between the two groups. For example, in 2005, 16.1% of quota students dropped out, compared to 15.7% of the non-quota group (Guimarães et al., 2010, p. 24). The researchers credit both university policies geared at improving retention, such as grants, increases in student housing, and other programs, and the greater motivation level of the quota students.

## PERCEPTIONS OF THE QUOTAS

Another line of research focuses on public opinion regarding the quotas, both over time and among different sectors of society. In 1995, the Instituto Datafolha, a private polling company affiliated with *Folha de Sao Paulo* newspaper, conducted a survey of attitudes toward hypothetical quotas in education and the labor market. The results found that 49% of those polled disagreed, and 48% supported the measures. However, the level of disapproval varied by the race and gender of those surveyed: while 47% of black males disagreed, 53% of white males did so. More striking, 40% of black women, 46% of *pardos*, and 58% of white women disagreed (Folha de Sao Paulo, 1995).

In 2006, the polling agency repeated the exercise, this time with affirmative action already in place. The study surveyed 6,264 people aged 16 and over regarding their views on the quotas for Afro-Brazilians in universities. It found that 65% of the population supported the measures, but that support grew to 87% in the case of quotas for poor people (Santos & Queiroz, 2010). That is, the level of support for such measures had grown by more than 20% points in a decade. However, there were also differences according to family income and – more significantly – the level of schooling. Surprisingly, race did not appear to be a decisive factor. The highest levels of disapproval were found among college graduates who self-identified as *preto* and *pardo*, 68% and 75%, respectively, followed by white college graduates, with 67%. Those with higher income levels were also more likely to disagree. Among those who earned salaries of more than \$2,000 a month, 50% of *pretos* were opposed to the quotas, 60% of *pardos*, and 58% of whites. In sum, while support for the quota system grew significantly between 1995 and 2006, among those who reject the measures, 55% have college degrees and 57% have a combined family income of at least 10 times the minimum wage (Santos & Queiroz, 2010).

A poll conducted by Smith (2010) for the *Barómetro de las Américas* gauged opinions specifically regarding the racial quotas. Smith surveyed 2,482 Brazilians and asked them to rate their levels of approval from 1 to 7, with 7 being strong approval. More than 70% expressed neutral or positive views of the measures, and educational levels were the most significant factor determining opinions. However, Smith also found a strong correlation between the respondents' race and level of support. With the two factors combined, average levels of support declined from 5.4 among nonwhite respondents with a maximum of a primary level education to 3.1 for whites with a college degree. Those results differed from those of the Datafolha poll in 2006, possibly because Smith's survey only asked about the racial quotas, and not the quota system in general.

Interestingly, Smith (2010) also found no correlation between respondents' political views or affiliations and their perceptions of the racial quotas – in marked contrast to findings in the United States. That result runs contrary to the idea that supporters of the left-leaning Partido de Trabalho, or Workers Party (PT), of which former President Lula and his successor, President Rousseff, are members, would have a more positive view of the quotas. In general, she concluded that while many respondents took a broad view of the policies, they tended to respond according to their

own self-interest – that is, the likelihood that they or someone they know might benefit from the policies (2010, p. 6).

Smith also noted that the fact that 18% of those surveyed expressed strong disapproval of the racial quotas, opposition that, in turn, may have important implications for the future of the policies:

A powerful minority is firmly opposed to affirmative action, and Brazilians with the greatest wealth and education levels are concentrated in this group. These are the citizens who are the most capable of writing letters to the director, pressuring federal deputies and participating in marches. Therefore, the voices of this powerful minority of opponents can be stronger than the majority that is in favor of affirmative action. (p. 6)

So far, the opposition has mostly manifested itself in the form of newspaper columns and law suits. One of the most recent cases of legal action involves roughly 60 quota students at the State University of Rio de Janeiro, who are being investigated by state prosecutors for allegedly committing fraud in the application process, either in terms of falsely declaring their race or their family income. The cases emerged after the courts received anonymous reports of students with blond hair and blue eyes who had entered under the racial quotas – the system allows students to self-declare their race – or who did not appear sufficiently poor. The university itself, in general, has chosen not to take action against the students, arguing that it is not its role to assign racial categories (Oliveira & Haidar, 2014).

## FUTURE RESEARCH

Many of the recent studies on affirmative action in Brazil suggest that the beneficiaries are doing better than many predicted, at least in numeric terms. Those findings are important, considering that one of the main arguments against the quotas has been the supposed negative impact on the quality of the public universities, as well as the assumption that the quota students would not be able to compete. However, there is also a need for more research into the qualitative experiences of these students, which represents a key area for future research. For instance, to what degree do the quota students feel integrated within the university communities? Do they suffer from discrimination on the part of non-quota students, professors, or administrators? Are they receiving adequate support on the part of the institutions, in terms of financial aid, tutoring, or other services? If they did suffer from discrimination, how might they have persevered? And

which assets within the university communities were most helpful in combatting discrimination, and which might be replicated in other institutions?

Fortunately, there are a growing number of studies that attempt to address such issues (e.g., [Grisa, 2013](#); [Pinho, 2006](#); [Resende, Queiroz, & Faria, 2012](#)). However, most are confined to studying the perceptions of the quota students or professors, while paying little attention to the interaction among different groups. There is also a need for more structural analysis that would locate the tensions and conflicts over the affirmative action policies within the contexts of both government and institutional priorities. For example, the Brazilian government has implemented ambitious policies that seek to increase the scale and quality of the country's scientific research production. Initiatives include the Brazilian Scientific Mobility Program, which seeks to send 200,000 Brazilian students in the STEM fields to study in top universities around the world by 2018. However, those policies often conflict with the goals of equality and democratization.

[Santos \(2006\)](#) addresses the issue from a theoretical standpoint in his analysis of the conflicts over affirmative action at the State University of Rio de Janeiro. He argues that the affirmative action policies require the "restructuring of social pacts" (p. 39) on a national scale, while provoking conflicts within universities over conflicting priorities. Nonetheless, it would be interesting to link the various levels of analysis and look at how those structural conflicts impact on the experiences of the students and other members of the university community.

There is also a relative shortage of studies comparing policies at different institutions. One exception is the recent study cited previously by [Childs and Stromquist \(2015\)](#) at the Federal University of Bahia, the UnB and the State University of Campinas. The authors examine the motivations behind the different affirmative action policies in place at the three institutions, and look at differences in academic performance among quota and non-quota recipients in each case. However, their quantitative analysis could be complimented by qualitative research into the effects of the different policies on the students themselves.

Affirmative action in Brazil is characterized by its large scale, as well as by the diversity in policies and in the groups they seek to benefit. Thus, there is a need for more comparative studies that could identify best practices and lessons for the broader international debate on affirmative action. Now that the first generations of quota students are graduating from college, there are also opportunities to study their insertion into the labor market – an important measure of the success of the policies – as well as their insertion in other social and economic spheres. More research is also

needed to determine to what degree their careers and lifestyles after college are related to their experiences as quota students.

The goals of affirmative action in Brazil are twofold: to combat racial discrimination and to level the playing field through expanding access to higher education for traditionally disadvantaged groups. Those goals form part of broader efforts to reduce glaring income and racial inequalities in Brazil, which has long figured among the countries with the most unequal distributions of wealth. While the long-term effects of the policies remain to be seen, they are vastly increasing access for disadvantaged groups in the country's most competitive universities, with important implications for efforts to democratize higher education in countries around the world.

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