Racial democracy myth and the (non) support for race-targeted policies in Brazil: evidences from a survey list-experiment

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Abstract

This paper aims at understanding the strength of the main arguments of the racial democracy myth and its application on shaping Brazilian college students’ opinions on the adoption of affirmative actions on public universities. Through an experiment embedded in a survey, we look at the attitudes towards racial and social quotas expressed by college students from the University of Brasília and the Federal University of Minas Gerais, both public institutions in Brazil. The list-experiment technique guarantees the necessary privacy for the respondents to feel free to give honest answers, avoiding the social desirability effect. Empirical data support our hypothesis: the racial democracy myth depreciates racial attributes as explanatory factors to inequalities in Brazil, leaving them only to class and income features. Thus, the opposition to racial quotas is always higher than to social quotas, and social desirability effects affect both quotas systems.

Keywords: affirmative actions, Brazil, list-experiment, public opinion, racial attitudes, racial democracy myth
Introduction

The adoption of racial or social quotas for admission in Brazilian public universities has had its first experience in 2002, when the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) has introduced the reserve of spots to black, brown and indigenous self-declared candidates. This system reserved 20% of the available positions for racial quotas, 20% for social quotas, 5% for people with disabilities and the remaining spots for broad competition.

From 2001 to 2013, affirmative action policies have been extended to other public education institutions, through the Quotas Bill (12.711/2012) sanctioned in 2012, which destines 50% of federal universities spots to students entirely originated from the public education system. The appliance of the Quotas Bill considers the minimum State percentage of blacks, browns and indigenous, according to the National Census (IBGE, 2010).

In late 90’s, Brazil has put in the public agenda the discussion on race-targeted policies or affirmative actions (Guimarães, 1999). Traditionally, these policies have been seen by specialists as ways to correct educational and labor inequalities that affect poor population (mainly composed by black people). As race-targeted policies such as racial quotas get stronger in Brazilian public agenda, we can notice that the debate about them also flourishes, engendering favorable and counter opinions.

In the academic environment the affirmative actions have received some attention during the last years, but little has been said about how Brazilians reason and what they think about affirmative action policies. In spite of the lack of research on racial relations in Brazil from the perspective of political attitudes (Telles 2003; Bailey 2009), we analyze how reminiscences of the racial democracy myth are observed in the opinions towards racial or social quotas in public universities.

Bailey (2009) states that even though the persistency of the racial democracy myth has been a trace of Brazilian political culture, Brazilian Political Science has not dedicated itself to investigate the political effects of this discourse, and this is one of our guiding motivations to this paper. The ways in which this ideology is translated into concepts and attitudes among Brazilian public opinion continue to be largely unknown.

The research that originates this paper is justified by this: our central goal is to investigate the strength of the racial democracy myth arguments and its unfoldings on the shaping of Brazilian college students’ attitudes on racial relations and, mostly, on the adoption of affirmative actions on public universities. Our main hypothesis (H1) is that, due to the predominance of a point of view in which Brazilian social inequalities are concentrated on income and social class asymmetries, the adhesion to social quotas (reserve of available spots to poor candidates, no matter their color)
is higher than the adhesion to racial quotas. Second, we should expect that social desirability affects the answers about both types of quotas with stronger effects for the racial quotas (H2), since Brazilian social norms state that any race-targeted policy would be a formal discrimination, thus the preference for social quotas will always be higher than to racial quotas (H3).

Among individuals that prefer social quotas to racial quotas, we should presume that explanations that deflate the relevance of racial criteria are dominant, according to the presumptions of the so-called ‘racial democracy myth’. By using the ‘myth’ as a racial belief system, we seek to explore one of the dimensions of the current racial dynamics in Brazil, to which correspond some specific attitudes.

**Racial Public Opinion and the Racial Democracy Myth**

Considering our main hypotheses, we should investigate which are the main legacies of the so-called ‘racial democracy myth’ to the interpretation of public opinion on racial relations in Brazil. We have in mind that racial attitudes – specifically, attitudes towards affirmative actions in Brazil - might be due to different elements (color and race features, racial beliefs, political positions etc.), just like Kinder and Sanders (1996) show us. Here, we treat opposition to affirmative actions as a multidimensional system, composed by different factors, that refer to the interaction and processing of racial issues and race-targeted policies.

The research on racial relations is seen as fundamental to Brazilian social dynamics: this discussion has been the target of different reviews as time went by. According to Telles (2003), the ‘racial democracy myth’ expression has been coined by the Negro Movement in the 60’s, to express the assumed fallacious character of freyrean approaches on racial relations in Brazil. We are going to use this expression in this paper, because it denotes an argument that is dear to us, that refers to antiracialist explanations on social inequalities in Brazil, that remain in vogue until nowadays. We should note that this ‘myth’ has basically two dimensions: (i) the appreciation of miscegenation as a genuine Brazilian product and the perception that there is no split between races in the country; and (ii) the predominance of arguments that deflate racial criteria in its influence on labor, educational and income inequalities in Brazil, such as the denial over racism in Brazil. This paper focuses on the second dimension.

However, despite the frequent reviews, the so-called racial democracy myth remains strong. The original formulation of this concept can be found in Gilberto Freyre’s work (1900-1987). He discussed the rise of Brazilian society focusing on the interaction between different racial matrixes, mainly European and African. Freyre establishes a change in framing the Brazilian racial studies, centering culture instead of biological-racial determinants. Freyre states that the interaction
of specific cultural forms in the colonial environment has yielded asymmetrical racial relations, though they were seen as soft. The relative fluidness of miscegenation would be visible, therefore, in the absence of institutionalized racism (as in the US) and in the possibility of social mobility.

While in the US the ‘one-drop rule’ is used, in Brazil racial ambiguity is celebrated. Much of this racial ambiguity in Brazil, according to Telles (2004), lies with nonwhite individuals: light, dark, brown, darkened, mulatto and black, are the various ‘degrees’ of Brazilian miscegenation. However, people may identify themselves as white, even when displaying black features, stating that color imputation in Brazil is a dynamic process (Muniz 2012). The miscegenation idea in Brazil holds that whites, blacks and Indians socialize, live and mingle biologically to the point that racial distinctions become meaningless.

Although it is not ignored by Freyre, social inequality originated from the maintenance of manorial relations between whites and blacks in colonial environment is not sufficiently treated in his writings, and this is one of the reasons why Freyre is commonly known as an antiracialist writer. Here, we understand antiracialist approaches as the discourses known for not using the “race” category as a variable or explanatory condition of the asymmetric distribution of resources between whites and nonwhites, deviating the focus of some debates to concepts such as social class. In fact, many reviews of the ‘racial democracy myth’ have stated that one of the consequences of this racial belief system is the persistence of antiracialist approaches.

The racial democracy is the “myth” that denies the existence of any kind of racism and it is endorsed by both whites and blacks, serving as a way to delay the possibility of collective action based on specific social groups (Bailey 2004). Denying that racial discrimination causes disadvantages to blacks is a central feature of the myth, which impacts attitudes towards racial policies. This belief would serve as an ideology of denial of racism in Brazilian society, influencing Brazilian social relations by creating a set of beliefs that blacks occupy subordinate positions, while whites were born to higher social positions (Bailey 2004).

In this paper, we test the interaction between race, class and views towards racial dynamics in Brazil in order to shed some light in the discursive differences in reinforcing or denying racial views between racial and class groups. Besides, we aim at clarifying linkages between color and socioeconomic status to understand racial public opinion patterns.

25 The “one-drop rule” is a norm of racial classification (formal or not), historically important in countries such as the United States. It states that people with at least one African ancestor are classified as black.
26 40% of Brazilians in the 2000 census identified itself as “mixed race”, meanwhile in the US the number is less than 3%.
Data and Method

The measurement of issues such as the support for affirmative actions is difficult, because it is a socially sensitive issue, that is, it represents the expression of preferences on issues that are not socially consensual. Commonly related to this topic are racial, sexual orientation, drug use and gender issues. Generally, people do not want to answer or publicly disclose their social preferences when faced with a traditional survey (Berinsky 2002; Krysan and Couper 2003), making the answers of respondents suffer an effect of “social desirability”, that is, the answer goes towards what is socially accepted and desired by the social norms.

The effect of social desirability is the propensity of the respondents to answer questions in a way that is well regarded by the others. Since people always want to make a good impression and they care about what others think about them, there is a strong motivational component (Berinsky 2002). This effect may end up overestimating “good attitudes” or underestimating “bad attitudes” according to the social norms. This trend represents a problem for conducting behavioral research with self-reported surveys.

Despite these difficulties, measuring attitudes about socially sensitive issues is possible due to advances in research methods, especially in survey research. Thus, we use a technique known as list-experiment and often used in political science (e.g. Kuklinski et al 1997a; Kuklinski et al 1997b; Sniderman e Carmines 1997) for this type of measurement, because it allows to indirectly question the respondents, ensuring greater sincerity in their answers.

In the list-experiment as originally conceived by Kuklinski et al. (1997b), the control group respondents (T_i = 0) receive a list of items (J) and should tell the interviewer how many of the listed items they agree with, without specifying which ones. Respondents from the treatment group (T_i = 1) receive the same instructions and the same list of items from the control group, however, the list contains one item more (J+1) that measures the issue of interest.

Between October 2012 and January 2013, an online survey was designed. In April 2013 the survey was applied to all undergraduate students at the University of Brasilia (UnB), and in June 2013 for all undergraduate students at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) to measure attitudes students on the quotas system, contacted by e-mail to answer voluntarily. Due to similar university profiles, the students’ data were treated aggregately.

Students took part in three different studies on student quotas: quotas for students from public schools, quotas for low-income students and racial quotas. In total, 4,121 students answered the racial quotas survey and 4,197 students answered the social quotas survey. Each specific survey had a number between 17 and 18 questions, differing only on the question list control, treated list or a third group with a direct question.
Among the 3,416 racial quotas and 3,535 social quotas surveys completed, 1,354 (racial quotas) and 1,401 (social quotas) received the standard question, 1,367 (racial quotas) and 1,369 (social quotas) received the control list, 1,320 (racial quotas) and 1,347 (social quotas) received the treated list.

The experiment randomly assigned respondents in the control group, treated group or the baseline group. Respondents in the control group were asked a first question on quotas (Appendix 1) and the order of items on both lists (control and treated) are always randomized to minimize the effects of items order. Respondents in the treated group were also asked with the same list, however, with the addition of a sensitive item (Appendix 2).

Bear in mind that all items relate to the access to Brazilians public universities (Appendix 1), which makes it less suspicious and more difficult to the participants identify the research issue. These items were chosen according to the recommendations of how best to build a list from Glynn (2010). Moreover, the items were chosen in order to avoid any ceiling effect. Kuklinski et al (1997b) notes that a ceiling effect can occur when a respondent honestly answered yes to all non-sensitive items. When this occurs with a respondent in the treated group, he/she has no longer enough protection to honestly report his/her response to the sensitive item and therefore he/she may underreport his/her true response. Kuklinski et al (1997b) shows an example: in their research, a large part of the control group agreed to all non-sensitive items, and due to the consequent ceiling effect, the results were a negative ratio of the sensitive item.

To avoid this, Glynn (2010: 6) recommends the use of a negative correlation between items, which is, among the items (1) and (4) of our list, because someone who believes the ENEM should be adopted as the means of entry to all federal universities should never agree to a free admission system in the universities.

It is from the difference of the means (treated and control groups) that we estimate the racial attitudes, in this case the percentage (just multiplying by 100) of respondents opposed the racial quotas or social quotas. The baseline group received instead of the list-experiment a conventional and direct question about the racial quotas or social policy (Appendix 3).

This third group was created to test how the attitudes and opinions of respondents change when confronted directly with the socially sensitive issue, because the simple embarrassment to admit an antipathy towards another group like blacks, gays, foreigners or women will be sufficient to mask and distort the true answers.

Therefore, false attitudes and opinions not only mean a measurement error, but also mean systematically wrong analysis: wrong estimators, inverted signals and variables without explanatory
power (Corstange 2008). This all makes the fake answers not only an epistemological problem, but “an epistemological problem with teeth” (Corstange 2008: 2). The self-declaration is chosen as the race criteria classification, because it involves the internal process of rejection or acceptance of symbols, traditions and lifestyle associated with certain groups (Telles 2004: 89).

However, the gain on the disposal of social desirability bias and privacy for respondents costs the loss of efficiency because there is the loss of information due to the fact that responses are aggregated (sum of items selected). Notstandingwith, Blair and Imai (2012) and Imai (2012) developed new estimators of maximum likelihood (ML) that enable the realization of multivariate regression analyses to the list of experiments in different research designs. This method helps to estimate values for the different model parameters and thus efficiently explore the individual characteristics of the respondents and the likelihood to agree to the sensitive item, enabling to estimate who is more (or less) likely to agree with the sensitive item.

The key advantage of the regression methodology proposed by Blair and Imai (2012) is its greater statistical efficiency as it allows to recover the loss of information resulting from the aggregation of responses from the list of experiments. However, the validity of the method depends on some assumptions.

A first assumption is the no design effect. A design effect can arise when individuals evaluate the items relative to each list to the other. It is assumed that the addition of the sensitive item does not change the sum of the positive responses to the other items control. The presence of a “design effect” would cause the evaluation of the respondent would depend on control items sensitive item, leading to different propensities to agree to control items between the control and treatment groups (Blair and Imai, 2012).

The second assumption is that respondents give truthful answers to the sensitive item, that is, there are no liars. Under the assumptions 1 and 2, the addition of sensitive items does not alter responses to control items (no design effect) and that the response to each item is true (no liars). Thus, the proposed method allows researchers to conduct multivariate statistical analyses to the results of the list-experiment.

Results

The first step is to confirm that the experimental groups were comparable. Thus, means-in-differences tests between groups were performed and there were no statistically significant differences between the groups in terms of sex, race, income, and political knowledge. Therefore, the random selection was successful. Random selection ensures the basis to assume that the control group behaves like the treated group would behave if it had not received the treatment
(and vice versa). When comparing the average results in the treated group with the average score in the control group, the average treatment effect can be estimated. Therefore, these statistical tests are essential to clarify if the differences between groups occurred simply by chance (sample variance) or if they are results of the experimental treatment (Druckman et al., 2011).

Table 1 shows the results for the no design effect test. Here we want to fail to reject the null hypothesis for both quotas. The alpha of both lists reach the limit (.05 and .05) and therefore we cannot reject the null hypothesis of no design effect, thus both lists are good. No zero or negative values were found, hence no floor or ceiling effects were found.

Table 1: Global estimated average support for racial quotas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>y value</th>
<th>Racial Quotas</th>
<th>Social Quotas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>π₀, 0 s.e.</td>
<td>π₁, 1 s.e.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>13.4%, .01</td>
<td>3.8%, .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>24.7%, .01</td>
<td>17.1%, .02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.2%, .01</td>
<td>15.5%, .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.7%, .01</td>
<td>5.6%, .009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.5%, .006</td>
<td>2.1%, .004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.

Note. The table shows the estimated proportion for each experimental group (π₀, 2) characterized by the total number of affirmative responses to control items (y) and the true answer to the sensitive (1 is affirmative and 0 is negative). Standard errors are also provided for each estimated proportion.

Table 2 shows the average number of items that the respondents agree with, both for control and treatment lists. The difference-in-means (multiplied by 100) indicates the estimated proportion of students (43.8%) who agreed with the sensitive item and thus truly support racial and social quotas at the University of Brasilia and the Federal University of Minas Gerais. This result can be compared to the one obtained from the benchmark group, who answered the direct question with no privacy.

The benchmark group showed a 54.6% average support for the racial quotas. The difference between this group and the result from the list experiment (54.6% - 43.8%) indicates an overestimation of the real preferences on racial quotas. Thus, opposition to racial quotas among students is generally underestimated by almost 11% in conventional surveys, and this percentage represents the social desirability effect. Table 2 also shows the estimated percentage of students who agreed with the sensitive item (multiplied by 100) which was 65.9% and thus truly support
social quotas in both universities. If we compare with the direct question from the benchmark group, a support of 73.4%, we have that the true preferences are overestimated by 7.5% (73.4% - 65.9%).

Table 2: Global estimated average support for racial quotas and social quotas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Treatment Group</th>
<th>Difference-in-means in %</th>
<th>Benchmark Group in %</th>
<th>B – A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RACIAL QUOTAS</td>
<td>2.38 (.027)</td>
<td>2.82 (.034)</td>
<td>43.8* (.043)</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>1243</td>
<td>1215</td>
<td></td>
<td>1246</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL QUOTAS</td>
<td>2.37 (.028)</td>
<td>3.03 (.032)</td>
<td>65.9* (.043)</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>1264</td>
<td>1245</td>
<td></td>
<td>1302</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ own elaboration. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. *p<.05

Table 3 presents the results of white students’ support to the racial quotas and social quotas to the list experiment. As we can see, the support for the social quotas is larger than for the racial quotas. While only 33.3% of the white respondents agreed with the racial quotas, 60.9% of the white respondents agreed with the social quotas item.

Table 3: Estimated average support for racial and social quotas by white students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Treatment Group</th>
<th>Difference-in-means (in %)</th>
<th>Benchmark Group in %</th>
<th>B - A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RACIAL QUOTAS</td>
<td>2.34 (.037)</td>
<td>2.68 (.047)</td>
<td>33.3* (.059)</td>
<td>48.62</td>
<td>16.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>621</td>
<td></td>
<td>582</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL QUOTAS</td>
<td>2.35 (.039)</td>
<td>2.96 (.044)</td>
<td>60.9* (.059)</td>
<td>67.89</td>
<td>6.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>677</td>
<td></td>
<td>626</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ own elaboration. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. *p<.05

Table 4 presents the estimated average support for racial and social quotas by family income. Income groups were classified into tertiles: the first tertile was composed by individuals with family income up to R$ 3,500, the second tertile was composed by family income of R$ 3,501
to R $ 8,000 and finally the third tertile is composed by individuals of family income upper than R$ 8,001. As shown in Table 4, along with the increase in family income a decrease happens on the support for racial quotas. The higher the income, the lower the support for racial quotas.

Table 4: Estimated average support for racial and social quotas by family income

| Income Level | Racial Quotas | | Social Quotas | |
|--------------|---------------|------------------|------------------|
|               | Control Group | Treatment Group | Difference-in-means (in %) | Control Group | Treatment Group | Difference-in-means (in %) |
| 1º Tertil     | 2.43 (0.044)  | 2.97 (0.056)    | 53.9*             | 2.42 (0.048)  | 3.12 (0.051)    | 69.8*             |
| n             | 466           | 479              |                  | 504           | 486              |                  |
| 2º Tertil     | 2.33 (0.049)  | 2.78 (0.062)    | 44.7*             | 2.39 (0.052)  | 2.96 (0.059)    | 56.8*             |
| n             | 356           | 334              |                  | 359           | 359              |                  |
| 3º Tertil     | 2.36 (0.047)  | 2.66 (0.059)    | 30.5*             | 2.29 (0.048)  | 2.99 (0.059)    | 69.5*             |
| n             | 421           | 402              |                  | 401           | 400              |                  |

Source: Authors' own elaboration. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. *p < .05

However, the results for the social quotas the same trend does not follow. The support of high income students is as high as the support of low income students, while middle family income students show less support to the social quotas. Yet, these results are only by the economic feature.

While the simple means-in-different test is informative, those first results do not allow us to explore which characteristics are associated with this rejection. Table 5 presents the results for the multivariate analysis. The values of interest are in the column 'sensitive item', which presents the estimates of individuals to the sensitive item of the list-experiment according to each independent variable. Our model includes the control variables, political knowledge and the racial democracy myth attitude coded as dummy.

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27 The item in the survey stated: “There is no Racism in Brazil”. Answers were in a likert scale: “Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree”.
Table 5: Multivariate analysis for racial and social quotas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RACIAL QUOTAS</th>
<th>Sensitive item</th>
<th>Control items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Est. s.e.</td>
<td>Est. s.e.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intercept</strong></td>
<td>.535 .16</td>
<td>1.545 .10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-.17* .09</td>
<td>-.09 .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (women)</td>
<td>.12 .09</td>
<td>-.17 .06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.02 .01</td>
<td>.001 .006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
<td>.04 .03</td>
<td>-.002 .02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Democracy Myth</td>
<td>-.21* .08</td>
<td>-.06 .05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIAL QUOTAS</th>
<th>Sensitive item</th>
<th>Control items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Est. s.e.</td>
<td>Est. s.e.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intercept</strong></td>
<td>.816 .16</td>
<td>1.508 .11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-.14* .09</td>
<td>-.005 .06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (women)</td>
<td>.01 .09</td>
<td>-.09 .06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.006 .01</td>
<td>-.005 .007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
<td>.0005 .03</td>
<td>-.009 .02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Democracy Myth</td>
<td>-.13** .08</td>
<td>-.05 .05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ own elaboration. * p<.05  ** p<.01  *** p<.001

In order to catch any effects of the myth in the opinions, we have tested the effects of denying of the existence of racism in Brazil, which we have treated as an example of an antiracialist point of view, in the opposition for social and racial quotas. The results show that the denial of racism in Brazil decreases the support to both quotas. In both models, being white diminishes the likelihood to support any type of quotas (p < .05). While income fails to reach any statistical significance, gender and political knowledge show positive estimates, thus, higher political knowledge and being a woman increase the support for the quotas.

The positive estimates for political knowledge show that it plays an important role on the adoption of democratic norms and political tolerance and the reduction of prejudice and in this sense, would lead to greater support for the quotas (Robinson, 2015). Detailed knowledge on specific policy causes the respondents to take different decisions they would take if they had no such knowledge (Gilens 2001).

**Discussion**

According to the data, the social desirability effects remain in both racial and social quotas (H2) and may be identified by several measures of adhesion. However, when we isolate social desirability effects, we can notice that, in an aggregate level, the adhesion to social quotas is clearly
higher than racial quotas. Table 2 brings an information that corroborates, a priori, our main hypothesis (H1): the support for social quotas for the admissions in Brazilian public universities is higher than the support for racial quotas, even when we control the social desirability effect by the comparison between treatment and benchmark groups. The net preference for social quotas exceeds the preference for racial quotas in 22%, and it may sign to us that the higher support for social quotas instead of racial quotas is an example of an antiracialist remaining approach, one of the main features of the ‘racial democracy myth’. Yet, it is necessary to discuss if these differences may be due to the core myth definitions.

Table 3 shows that the support to the social quotas is almost twice as higher as to the racial quotas between the self-declared white students. We understand, therefore, that the opposition of racial quotas in Brazil is mostly due to one of the most important traits of the racial democracy myth: the antiracialist discourse, that is, the argument based on the idea that social inequalities in Brazil are not caused by racial asymmetries. In short, the persistence of an antiracialist approach states that race, per se, might not produce social injustices in Brazil. Thus, from this point of view, there is no need for racial quotas.

The social desirability effect is clear: in contents in which the interviewed individuals feel more exposed, they tend to choose answers close to the socially desirable, answers that do not cause awkwardness in the interviewer nor take to bad judgements about the respondent. Our results support H2: racial quotas have a bigger social desirability effect (3.3% more) than social quotas, and when we look to whites only this difference grows bigger (9.59% more).

The data also show that social quotas are always preferred over racial quotas (H3), and this trend seems to transcend methodological discussions. About this, Guimarães (1999) postulates that one of the main trends in Brazilians’ racial behavior is the fact that, very often, racial discrimination treats itself as antiracism, and treats any other evaluation of racial attributes (taken as explanatory variables) as manifestations of racism. Therefore, in a nutshell, it is socially desirable to prefer social quotas than racial quotas, once the difference between candidates by race would be, itself, an expression of racism.

Thus, even though social desirability cannot be ignored, it is not the only possible explanation. When we disaggregate data in terms of racial classification and income, we can see that even so the preference for social quotas trespasses racial quotas before and afterwards the demise of the social desirability effect, which provides more evidence to our hypothesis (H3).

Another result that deserves proper attention is that, in the regression models, income is not statistically significant to determine the (non) support for either racial or social quotas, while race shows a high and statistically significant coefficient. These results could also be explained by
the self-interest perspective\(^{28}\): according to former contributions (Bobo, 2003), self and group interests could be interpreted as explanatory factors of a possible relevance of income in the evaluation of race-targeted policies. Once the admission in Brazilian public universities has a flavor of competition and thus affirmative actions would do good \textit{a priori} only to the black and brown population that has been traditionally excluded from higher education, from the views of white students these actions would not benefit them in a straightforward logic, since there is no way how to extract personal benefits from these initiatives. This hypothesis is also developed by Kinder and Sanders (1996) and Sears \textit{et al} (2000) in their discussion on the approval of affirmative actions in American universities.

According to this thought, we should expect that, on the other side, blacks and browns would declare themselves more favorable to racial quotas than to social quotas, exactly because they would have more profit from these policies. However, from the multivariate models, we can see that blacks and browns support both type of quotas. Turning to whites’ preferences, as shown in Vidigal (2015), the experimental results shown that self-interest theory also has no effect on the support of racial quotas between whites. High income whites are strongly against the racial quotas, while low income whites support it.

As shown in Table 4, the higher the respondents’ income, the support to racial quotas gets lower, in consonance with Vidigal (2015). As regards social quotas, we notice a different trend: the support expressed by low and high income students are similar. This data, \textit{prima facie}, indicates that the richest students recognize the existence of inequalities and the need of quotas, but do not link them to racial attributes, thus they support the social quotas and rebuff the racial quotas.

The downward support to social quotas among medium income students may indicate a point identified by Kinder and Sanders (1996): when asked about their support to focused public policies, individuals that occupy intermediate income categories tend to be more conservative. In this case, being conservative means to think that the State is not the responsible to protect minorities and correct inequalities, adopting a ‘non-interventionist’ perspective.

These results also show us that, in contrast with the endurance of the racial democracy myth and the antiracialist approaches, Brazil is not exactly a \textit{color blind society} as commonly thought, once race in our results is way stronger than class in order to explain the opposition to racial and social quotas. Later studies in the social stratification field, such as Osorio (2008), give space to racial criteria as explanatory variables in other ways: racial discrimination and racial resentment. According to these studies, not only inequalities of exposition and access to goods and material,

\(^{28}\) However, we should highlight that, in this paper, we are focusing on the attitudes professed by college students, that already had to face selection processes to apply to college. The perception of self and group interests might vary according to the individual and collective context, such as competition for a spot in public universities.
educational and cultural services produce social asymmetries, but also racial discrimination to which most of the afro Brazilian people are exposed in Brazil.

Thus, disadvantages in fields such as labor market entrance and permanence in higher education would be linked not only to the absence/insufficiency of resources, but also to the expression of prejudice and discrimination. As regards this, it is important to verify that, by preferring to the social quotas instead of the racial quotas, Brazilian college students surveyed do not recognize, yet, racial discrimination as a producer of social asymmetries, especially in social status.

According to Guimarães (1999), one of the remarkable tensions in Brazilian citizens’ racial attitudes research would be caused by the interchanging between egalitarian and traditionalist presumptions. There would be, according to him, a trend of using some sort of upside-down egalitarianism – different from the egalitarianism approached by Kinder & Sanders (1996) – which postulates that the differences among people by racial criteria would be itself a formal discrimination, even though this differentiation aims at selecting individuals to take part in public policies that, at least theoretically, have been designed to correct social inequalities. According to this trend, being favorable to social quotas would be a way to strengthen egalitarian principles.

Antiracialist discourses represented by the famous expression “We are one” devalues the potential of race attributes and assumes that social differences observed among Brazilians are not due to race. Once color/race itself is not taken into account to the discussion of inequalities and social asymmetries, it is not considered on the formation of identities and personal marks that, beyond self-interest, also shape mental structures in which political and social attitudes are processed either.

**Concluding remarks**

Our goal in this paper was to investigate how the racial democracy myth can be used as a resource for the interpretation of public opinion on racial issues in Brazil. Research on social stratification in Brazil from the 70’s on have indicated that racial attributes, once they were intrinsically linked to marginalization and educational segregation conditions experienced by the poor in Brazil should also be considered as explanatory variables as regards social inequalities in Brazil.

The list-experiment could catch important differences as regards the approval to the quotas. Also important differences appear in the support of the quotas as the measuring method changes, the social desirability effect takes place in both quotas: when the respondent feels more
unconstrained to his/her interlocutors’ judgements, he/she tends to express his/her opinions more truly.

According to Guimarães (1999), Telles (2003) and Bailey (2009), the racial democracy myth is considered a belief system, that unites considerations and attitudes about social stratification and inequalities, that constrains universal access to education, social space, labor market and income in the country. The racial democracy myth could, thus, be considered as a repository of explanations that have entered in such a strong way in Brazilian social thought that citizens very often appeal to it to formulate their attitudes and opinions on racial issues, directly or not.

We claim that the pertinence of the racial democracy myth on the white students’ preferences on affirmative attitudes is a belief system that, by dismissing the racial criteria on social life, deflates racial attributes as explanatory factors to social asymmetries. Even though the Brazilian social stratification has been formed according to racial criteria, the social thought built from there did not link to race the function of hierarchizing social relations component, and, naturally, explanatory as regards social inequalities.

Therefore, the presumptions of the racial democracy myth are linked to the support to the social quotas over the racial quotas. We follow this thought: the racial democracy myth depreciates racial attributes as explanatory factors as regards inequalities in Brazil. Once the affirmative actions in Brazilian public universities are a way of correcting educational and labor inequalities, these actions should not be planned due to racial criteria, but due only to criteria that emphasize class and income differences.

The social thought contaminated by the racial democracy myth credits the existence of these asymmetries to class and status attributes, even though the research on stratification have highlighted that marginalization and social segregation originated from social inequalities have affected mostly afro Brazilian population.

In this paper, we have relied on empirical data to test and develop our hypothesis, that establishes that the presumptions of the racial democracy myth may be useful to explain at least partially the higher levels of support to social quotas as compared to racial quotas. We have seen that, in fact, antiracialist theses are fruitful to understand Brazilian college students’ attitudes on affirmative actions, but in spite of that, according to Guimarães, “the idea of race in Brazil remains unique in its critical potential” (Guimarães, 1999). Although this is an agenda to be continued in further inquiry, we can also point out Hasenbalg and Silva’s assumption that, as economic inequalities and disadvantages suffered by afro Brazilian population rise to public agenda, we can expect a context in which racial relation become a field of social competition (Hasenbalg and Silva 1988).
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Access to Brazilian public universities

“Now let’s talk about the ways to entry in the Brazilian federal universities. From the following list of items, how many you agree? We do not want to know with which you agree, we are interested only in the number of items which you agree”. (random order every time)

1) All universities should adopt the ENEM;
2) The increase of vacancies facilitated the entry of low-skilled students;
3) All universities should adopt a free admission system;
4) The Vestibular is not a good test to select the best students;

The first item refers to the National Secondary Education Examination (ENEM), which is a test conducted by the Ministry of Education of Brazil (MEC). It is used to evaluate the quality of secondary education and its result also serves as access to higher education in Brazilian public universities through the Unified Selection System (SiSU). Enem is the largest exam in Brazil and for some it is a fairer way of admission to a system that is limited and usually requires the students to travel to the location of the desired university to do a specific exam from that institution.

The second item concerns the recent increase in the number of vacancies in the federal universities in the last decade by the government of President Lula, which has broaden almost a third of the number of spots in Brazilian higher education institutions and some believe that this allowed the entry of poorly-qualified students. The third item suggests that universities should abandon the entrance tests in the universities and adopt another form of selection. The fourth item measures attitudes about the traditional exam in Brazilian universities, the Vestibular. The fifth and final item, socially sensitive, measures the attitude of the students against the use of vague reservation system for blacks, which secures a number of places for these candidates.

Appendix 2 – Access to Brazilian public universities, including a sensitive item

5) The reservation system for blacks (racial quotas policy) is an important policy.

Appendix 3 – (Non) support for racial quotas in Brazilian public universities

Do you believe that the vacancies reservation policy for blacks in the Brazilian federal universities entrance exam (racial quotas policy) is an important policy?
1. Yes
2. No