

Affirmative Action Expansion in Brazil: Effects on Access to Public Higher Education

Renato Schwambach Vieira, Mary Arends-Kuenning

Background

Between 2004 and 2012, 33 out of 48 major Brazilian Federal Universities implemented affirmative action to facilitate the access of lower socioeconomic background students to their undergraduate programs. In most cases, students were eligible for these policies if they had studied on public secondary schools, a characteristic commonly associated with lower socioeconomic conditions in Brazil. However, some policies also included a racial component in their eligibility criteria.

Research Questions

Were affirmative action policies effective in improving the enrollment of disadvantaged students in Brazilian Federal Universities? How many students benefited from these policies? Were all academic programs equally affected? Was there any difference in the outcomes of Race-Blind and Race-Conscious policies?

Identification Strategy

Universities implemented affirmative action in different years, and many did not introduce any policy at all during that period. So, we estimate the policy effects using a difference-in-differences design that compares the changes in the profile of students in universities that introduced affirmative action with the changes observed in a control group composed by universities without any policy.

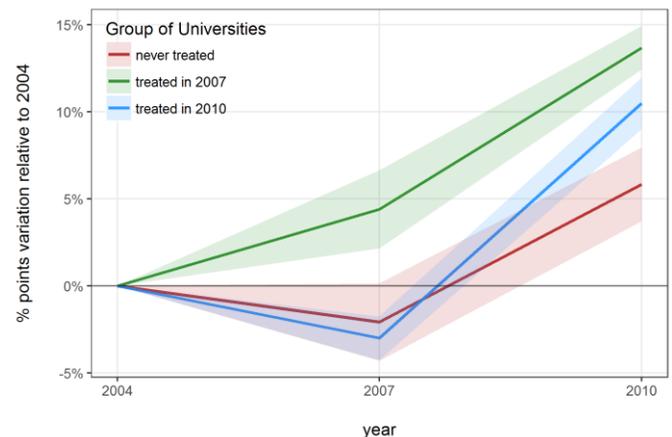
Data

Information about students enrolled in each university was obtained from ENADE, a national exam mandatory for freshmen students in Brazilian Federal Universities between 2004 and 2010. We use information from the socioeconomic questionnaire of the exam to get the average profile of individuals enrolled in each academic program every year.

Results

Our results indicate that affirmative action policies were effective in increasing the shares of racial minorities and public high-school students in treated universities. However, results were limited for the enrollment of student from extremely low-income households. The impact of policies was larger on competitive and prestigious academic programs, but it was mostly negligible in the less competitive ones. Race-Blind policies had no impact on increasing the participation of racial minorities in federal colleges; meanwhile, Race-Conscious policies did increase the enrollment of students from historically discriminated racial groups.

Figure 1: Changes in the Share of Students from Disadvantaged Backgrounds in Brazilian Federal Universities by Treatment Status* - Academic Programs Selected for ENADE in 2004, 2007 and 2010



* Treatment is defined in terms of having affirmative action policies implemented in a particular year.

Next Steps

- Complete the literature summary
- Compare and discuss results with the literature
- Calculate a back-of-the envelope estimation for the policy implications of the results