Public Opinion on Nonwhite Underrepresentation and Racial Identity Politics in Brazil

Stanley R. Bailey

ABSTRACT

Brazil has an “African-origin” population that is proportionally more than four times larger than that of African Americans in the United States, but white Brazilians mostly dominate electoral politics. How do ordinary citizens explain this phenomenon? Drawing on a large-sample survey of public opinion in the state of Rio de Janeiro, this article explores perceived explanations for nonwhite underrepresentation in the political arena. It also examines attitudes toward a particular black candidate, Benedita da Silva, to discern the state of negro identity politics. Most Brazilians in Rio de Janeiro cite racial prejudice to explain nonwhite exclusion, although whites do this less than nonwhites. Indicators of a racial undercurrent in political preferences suggest the importance of allegiances based on perceived common racial origins. Class is robustly associated with voting preferences, suggesting that, in contrast to the United States, class differences among nonwhites in Brazil could attenuate the success of negro identity politics.

Electoral politics in Brazil is mostly the domain of white people. Although nonwhite Brazilians, those who classified themselves as preto or pardo in the 2000 national census, make up close to 50 percent of the population, Johnson (2001) reports that between 1995 and 1999, only 15 of the 513 members of the national Chamber of Deputies, or about 3 percent, were so defined.¹ This underrepresentation is dramatic, perhaps even more so for a country that was traditionally reported to value the notion of a “racial democracy” as central to its national imagination. How can we explain this political dilemma that so contradicts the idea or dream of Brazil as a true racial democracy?

Researchers suggest several avenues for exploring this issue. Fiola (1990) proposes that the problem of underrepresentation in Brazil resides in the nonwhite population’s lack of resources and in the reticence of political parties to tackle racial issues. She also makes the important remark that “blacks often do not vote for black candidates” (42). Other scholars suggest weak racial subjectivity or a denial of racial discrimination as behind nonwhite underrepresentation (Castro 1993; Hanchard 1994). In their quest to address this dilemma, researchers have used a variety of approaches (e.g., Lamounier 1968; Fontaine 1985;
Hanchard 1994; Johnson 2001); historically, however, they have given little attention to the opinion of the masses about the intersection of skin color and electoral politics, as expressed in large-sample surveys. In fact, according to prominent social scientists Carlos Hasenbalg and Nelson do Valle Silva (1999, 165), there has been an “absolute lacuna” of public opinion research on racial issues in general in Brazil. Although the opinions of the masses about the intersection of race and electoral politics do not provide a complete answer to the question of underrepresentation, they do add a nearly absent piece to the puzzle, and therefore can contribute to our understanding of racial identity politics in Brazil.

Moreover, significant changes are afoot in contemporary Brazil. Andrews (2004, 187), for example, posits a recent “paradigm shift” in how Brazilians think about race. He and others (Htun 2004; Telles 2004; Bailey 2008) locate the impetus behind this shift in two principal spheres. First, with Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s presidency (1995–2003) and that of his successor, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–present), the Brazilian state dramatically changed course and embraced race-centered discourse and race-targeted policies. Second, the Brazilian negro movement gained significant visibility and legitimacy during that same period, resulting largely from its preparation for and participation in the 2001 United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance. Both developments may have heralded a new context for Brazilian racial dynamics, most visibly evidenced through the recent and ongoing institutionalization of affirmative action for nonwhites in various social spheres throughout the country (Bailey 2004, 2008; Htun 2004).

At this significant juncture, then, this study approaches the question of political underrepresentation by turning to an underused data source, the public opinion survey, and focusing on two important dimensions regarding nonwhites in the electoral realm. First, it examines how Brazilians themselves explain the difficulty a nonwhite individual has in becoming a viable candidate, and second, it explores the state of racial identity politics in Brazil by exploring attitudes toward a nonwhite politician. To address these two dimensions, this study analyzes novel data from a 2000 probability survey of racial attitudes in the state of Rio de Janeiro. The survey included various questions concerning nonwhites in the political arena, ranging from why Brazilians feel that there are so few of that population in politics to the role color played in the success of Benedita da Silva, a nonwhite woman elected to several political posts. In examining these questions, this research endeavors to understand Brazilian attitudes toward nonwhite underrepresentation and how these attitudes are structured by key contextual variables, such as color, education, and beliefs about racial stratification.
Might Brazilians, then, be reevaluating nonwhite underrepresentation with a novel perspective? Although longitudinal data are lacking to evidence a shift, this research finds, for example, a keen indictment of racial prejudice on the part of most Brazilians, as well as indications of a racial current in terms of nonwhite voting behavior. This information should advance our knowledge of public opinion on racial dynamics in Brazil at one point in contemporary Brazil, the turn of the third millennium, and perhaps aid in the practical task of strategizing a more diverse political democracy.

BRAZILIAN RACIAL IDENTITY POLITICS

Identity politics refers broadly to “political allegiances formed on the basis of some demographic similarity” (Plutzer and Zipp 1996). Applied to racial demographics, identity politics uses the notion of a perceived common racial origin for political leverage, including the election of individuals of politicized racial identifications.4 If we categorize indigenous identification as racial, the examples of racially specific identity politics in Latin America are numerous (e.g., Wade 1997).5 Racial identity politics more narrowly defined as “all-black political organization[s] based on a racial agenda” (de la Fuente 1998, 58), however, has not been commonplace in Latin America on a national level (Sansone 2003; Andrews 2004). Notable exceptions include the Partido Independiente de Color (PIC, 1908–12) in Cuba, the Frente Negra Brasileira (FNB, 1931–37) in Brazil, and the Partido Autóctono Negro (PAN, 1936–44) in Uruguay, none of which was ever actually successful in the realm of electoral politics.6

In contemporary Brazil, as Bacelar (1999, 97) illustrates, “attempts have been made in the political field, but all candidates who based their campaigns on racial issues have failed.” Considering, then, the high percentage of nonwhites in the Brazilian population, why have the tools of racial identity politics produced unsuccessful results in that context?

Although Brazil has a significant historical record of mobilization and conflict involving racialized issues (Mitchell 1977; Andrews 2000), this exploration of the contemporary relationship between skin color and political representation begins with the so-called abertura democrática (democratic opening), or the waning of military authoritarianism in Brazil in the late 1970s and early 1980s.7 During that time, many diverse sectors began to struggle for political space, including negro social movements (Andrews 1991; Hanchard 1994). The most significant of these was the Unified Negro Movement to Combat Racial Discrimination (MNU), founded in 1978.

The MNU was organized with what Andrews calls an “explicitly political orientation” (1991, 193), and according to Guimarães (2001a), it possessed a radically different profile from that of its predecessors.
Politically, it aligned with the revolutionary left; ideologically, it adopted, for the first time in the country’s history, a “radical racialism” (132), or white-versus-negro, race-centered focus. The immediate goal of the organization was to raise consciousness about racial discrimination. The MNU also claimed a larger goal of the eradication of capitalism from Brazil, viewing racism as an inevitable consequence of capitalist development. In its quest to build a true racial democracy, the MNU viewed socialism as the more adequate milieu (Andrews 1991).

Although the MNU soon abandoned its dream of a noncapitalist context in which to forge a racial democracy with the waning of revolutionary socialism in Brazil, it was indeed successful on many other fronts. For example, the MNU quickly convinced most of the major political parties that the problem of racial discrimination deserved the national spotlight (Johnson 2001; Reichmann 1999). As a testament to this influence, all but the government party (Democratic Social Party) included antiracism in their platforms during the general elections of 1982 and 1986 (Soares and Silva 1985; Andrews 1991). Of special note in the 1982 gubernatorial elections was the victory of Leonel Brizola in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Although he was not a nonwhite politician, the fourth element of his party’s platform emphasized “a commitment to the negra population” (Soares and Silva 1985, 256–57) and christened the party’s ideology as socialismo moreno (Reichmann 1999, 15).

As measured through the election of nonwhite candidates, however, both elections were failures for the MNU, and constituted “a severe blow to the hopes of the black activists” (Andrews 1991, 195). These losses led some negro activists to question the efficacy of integration into the national party system (Reichmann 1999). This uncertainty was discarded, however, in favor of further lobbying the major parties by promising strong political capital. The success of the negro movement would rest on its ability to mobilize the nonwhite electorate in favor of these parties (Oliveira 1999; Silva 1999).

The example of the 1992 elections for city council in Salvador, Bahia, appeared to indicate a growing acceptance of nonwhite political candidates. Salvador is the third-largest Brazilian city, with a population of 2.2 million, 80 percent of which is composed of Afro-Brazilians (Oliveira 1999). Oliveira reports that in the 1992 contest, which was marked by a striking diversity of candidates, Afro-Brazilian candidates made important strides. This local election was to designate 35 city council seats. The candidate pool comprised 1,149 persons from 22 different parties, which the author divides in the following way: 575 Afro-Brazilians (54.1 percent), 377 whites (35.1 percent), and 100 morenos (light browns, 10.3 percent). The election results reveal that the number of Afro-Brazilians elected increased from 11.4 percent on the 1988 council to 34.1 percent of the newly elected 1992 council.
However, it was the 1996 mayoral election in São Paulo that, according to Reichmann (1999, 16), represented a “significant turning point” in debates regarding nonwhite political representation in Brazil. In this election, the rightist PPB, or Brazilian Popular Party, which had walked hand-in-hand with Brazil’s previous military dictatorship, “played the race card” (17). Its candidate, Celso Pitta, a nonwhite economist, used the campaign slogan, “Don’t vote for me because I am black, and don’t not vote for me because I am black.” Reichmann contends that the party “banked on the expectation that whites would privilege Pitta’s class status over his race and that black voters would privilege race rather than voting according to class interests” (1999, 17). Whatever the exact reasons, Pitta won the election, and the incumbent of the leftist Workers’ Party (PT) was shut out. According to Reichmann,

For the first time in Brazilian history, every election poll analyzed results by race. By the runoff election millions of black votes had migrated to Pitta, and many more black activists had turned to Pitta than admitted it publicly. Their hopes must have been dashed when the newly elected Pitta stated in a January 1997 press conference, “I have no color” (Reichmann 1999, 17).

Pitta’s election, however, as reported in the Washington Post (Escoobar 1996), “put a black man in charge of the world’s third-largest city.” Even though Pitta later may have tried to downplay his color, Escobar wrote, “Merely broadcasting his face sends a powerful message to a segment of the population that is short on role models who are not athletes or musicians.”

Changes at the national level are less evident but perhaps also occurring. Johnson (2001) provides a glance at the make-up of the National Congress from 1995 through 1999. Among the 81 national senators and 513 federal deputies during that period, Johnson identifies 18 “blacks.” He notes that if blacks were proportionally represented in the Chamber of Deputies, there would be 236 black deputies, a far cry from the 15 black deputies he identifies in the 50th legislature (1995–99).

At the same time, however, Johnson does record some increase in nonwhite representation. In the Chamber of Deputies, only 0.8 percent was black between 1983 and 1987; that percentage increased to 2.9 percent between 1995 and 1999. Although this increase, similar to the one experienced locally in Bahia, is around 300 percent, in a national population that Johnson calls 46 percent black, these percentages are staggeringly low.

The historical lack of nonwhite representation in Brazil continues in the 2000s, although change in the direction of greater nonwhite political involvement and representation at different government levels is evident. Speaking to these changing dynamics, Rennó (2007, 772) asserts,
“Nonetheless, it’s important to note that there is progress on a few fronts. For example, women and Afro-descendents obtained palpable gains in the last Brazilian governments in terms of access to political positions. . . .” These political position gains for “Afro-descendents” surely include the cases of Matilde Ribeiro and Edson Santos.

These two cases relate to the climate of political openness to negro movement grievances and actors created by Cardoso and later Lula. Lula’s Workers’ Party victory in 2002 was especially important because this party includes a significant number of prominent nonwhites from political and social movement spheres. This feature perhaps favored the possibility that some of those politicians would fill the political appointee ranks in Lula’s administration.11 Such is the case of the minister of the Special Secretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality, Matilde Ribeiro, a member of the negro movement and the Workers’ Party. The cabinet-level secretariat was created in Lula’s first year as president for the purpose of establishing state links to social movements and for energizing the attempts of diverse state agencies in the fight against inequality (IPEA 2003).

Ribeiro was replaced in 2008 by Edson Santos, an important nonwhite politician from the state of Rio de Janiero and also a member of Lula’s PT. His political trajectory is impressive, and perhaps speaks to a changing climate for nonwhite candidates. In 1998 he was elected to the city council of Rio de Janiero (and subsequently reelected four times). In 2002, he ran for the national senate, and although he was not elected, he gained national prominence (and received an impressive 1.8 million votes). That notoriety paid off in 2006, when he was elected to the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the National Congress, from the state of Rio de Janeiro. Representing the PT, he became the most-voted-for nonwhite deputy in the country; he was also the most-voted deputy in general from Rio de Janeiro.12 On July 23, 2008, he was named to Lula’s cabinet to replace Ribeiro as minister of the special secretariat.

In sum, there is movement toward greater nonwhite inclusion in formerly exclusive spheres in contemporary Brazil; and as Rennó (2007, 772) asserts, “the moment is opportune for evaluating if some of these realized gains in social and public spheres, although modest, affect the electoral politics dimension.” This evaluation will certainly occupy the research and political agendas of many social scientists and negro politicians in the coming years.

EXPLANATIONS FOR NONWHITE UNDERREPRESENTATION

To what do researchers generally attribute the poor showing of persons with varying degrees of African ancestry as regards elected office in
Brazil? At least two central dimensions organize the existing literature: the difficulty a nonwhite person has in becoming a viable candidate, and the inability of the negro movement and negro politicians to mobilize a constituency around “blackness.”

**ELECTING A NONWHITE PERSON**

Several factors can provide clues as to why it is so difficult for a person of some African descent to be elected to political office. Foremost may be the existence of negative stereotyping associated with the darker end of the color spectrum embedded in Brazilian culture (Souza 1971; Winant 1999; Bailey 2002). Skin color is lived as a continuum; belonging to the darker end of the continuum is considered unflattering and is frequently correlated with general ineptness (Sheriff 2001). Oliviera (1999, 168), for example, writes that “Afro-Brazilians are stereotyped as passive, irrational, dependent.” Hence, they may not be seen as having the capacity for electoral politics. Moreover, some scholars argue that the most perverse effect of stereotyping may have been historically on persons of varying degrees of African origin themselves: “Naturally, the hierarchical ordering of people in terms of their proximity to whiteness helped in the disdain that darker-colored people show of their African origin” (Rout 1976, 132). Negative stereotyping in Brazil, therefore, may plague individuals throughout the color spectrum (Hanchard 1994).

In addition, several other individual characteristics may combine with stereotyping to exclude nonwhite persons from political office. For example, Fontaine (1985), Castro (1993), and Oliveira (1999) argue that a lack of political experience works against the election of a new class of nonwhite politicians, for the logic of candidate recruitment favors traditional political families and networks. Because these networks tend to be made up of whites, nonwhite exclusion is overdetermined: “The institutions governing recruitment, the roles assigned to political elites and their power to regulate entrance into parties” (Oliveira 1999, 168) all work against outsiders.

Another issue is the education deficit, from which nonwhite Brazilians suffer disproportionately (Fontaine 1985; Castro 1993). Brazil’s traditional patterns of candidate recruitment privilege college-educated candidates (Oliveira 1999). In 1999, however, only 2.6 percent of nonwhites aged 25 to 64 completed a university education (compared to 11 percent of whites) (Telles 2004). These differential levels of education may be a significant factor that systematically works against nonwhites in the search for viable political candidates.
Building a Negro Constituency

A second core dimension that may help explain why nonwhites are underrepresented in public office rests in a failure among nonwhite candidates and negro movement actors to mobilize a nonwhite or negro constituency. Guimarães (2001a) claims, for example, that Brazilians do not respond to “Afrocentric appeals.” Research suggests at least three contributing factors for this phenomenon: a nonwhite denial of the existence of racial discrimination (Twine 1998), class differences between middle-class negro activists and candidates and the mass of poor nonwhites that they might claim as their putative constituency (Andrew 1991, 2000), and the lack of a perceived racial-ethnic commonality among nonwhites around which to mobilize (Sansone 1998, 2003). Benedita da Silva exemplarily points to all three issues in a 1993 interview:

When we use race, we have more difficulties. . . . In Brazil, it doesn’t help to use race; the identity is not strong. . . . Even blacks say we have no racism. . . . [They say] we are poor not because we are black. . . . In my campaign it was the intellectuals who raised the question of race. (Cited by Marx 1998, 259 from his personal interview with Benedita da Silva in 1993.)

Let us therefore briefly review those three factors—a denial of racism, class differences between activists and the masses, and weak racial consciousness—offered in the literature for the disconnect between negro politicians and movement actors and their putative constituency.

Denying Racial Discrimination. Of the three factors that Benedita da Silva mentions, perhaps the most prominent and widely accepted reason given in the literature for the absence of a mobilized nonwhite constituency concerns a pervasive denial of racial discrimination by all Brazilians, but most significantly by nonwhites (Souza 1971; Twine 1998). This denial is specifically charged with neutralizing racial mobilization through its function as an orienting “stratification belief” or ideology (Kluegel and Smith 1983; Bailey 2004). Stratification beliefs are explanations for racialized inequality and are generally of two sorts: structural or individualist. The latter refers to ways of explaining racial disadvantage through “blaming the victims,” like claiming that racial inequality is due to a lack of motivation on the part of the disadvantaged population. In contrast, a structuralist explanation views racial inequality as the product of discrimination. While structuralist accounts have been found to promote antiracist mobilization, individualist accounts can lead to inaction on the part of disadvantaged populations.

Guimarães (2001b) points directly to an individualist account as characterizing Brazilian stratification beliefs: “Brazilian society does not recognize racism, whether by attitude or system, as being responsible
for racial inequalities in the country” (170). Earlier, Souza (1971) writes, “the negro subscribes to the Brazilian racial ideology: the inexistence of prejudice and racial discrimination” (63). Hasenbalg and Huntington (1982) also specify that the belief in the nonexistence of racial discrimination is held “by whites and nonwhites alike” (256). Many researchers consider this denial a key component of the pervasive myth of racial democracy (Winant 1999). This myth (or ideology), which is believed to form the basis of Brazil’s “racial common sense” (Hanchard 1994), is frequently interpreted as a naïve or even perverse belief in the unifying and deracializing effects of miscegenation in Brazilian history (Guimarães 2001a, b). Hence, this myth, exemplified in its companion belief in the absence of racial discrimination, is believed to lead to apathy among nonwhites regarding mobilization around overt racial agendas (Twine 1998).15

Social Class Disjuncture. A second element possibly explaining an absence of a nonwhite constituency is the disjuncture between the vital interests of middle-class negro activists and leaders and those of the poor nonwhites named as their constituency. Burdick (1992, 25) claims that from their very initiation and into the contemporary period, “black consciousness groups” have been composed primarily of professionals, intellectuals, and upwardly mobile students. This class specificity results in political discourses and the formulation of political agendas that appear to address mostly middle-class, nonwhite issues and to be of secondary concern for the mass of poor nonwhites. Andrews contends:

The conclusion to be drawn from the elections of the 1980s, as well as from the 1930s and 1950s, is that candidates who base their campaigns on racial issues stand virtually no chance of being elected. Such issues are of primary concern to a segment of the black middle class which possesses neither great voting power nor the ability to mobilize the votes of others. (1991, 198)

Andrews concludes that middle-class black activists and poor nonwhites may “have little in common beyond the color of their skin” (1991, 198). Stated differently, but suggesting the importance of cross-racial class identification as opposed to racial group–specific dynamics, Fontaine asserts, “As the lower and working classes—to which most Blacks belong—are fully integrated in the same conditions of poverty, the racial appeal is limited in its impact” (1985, 8).

Some research suggests, then, that unlike the United States, where “race trumps class” in terms of most attitudinal stances, including voting preferences (Kinder and Sanders 1996), in Brazil, class-based sentiments may be more salient and organizable than racial identification in the realm of electoral politics (Sansone 2003). Hence, Andrews (1991) posits that black candidates may more readily find success by integrating racial
issues into a broader platform addressing primarily the concerns of poor and working-class whites and blacks. In addition, Bacelar (1999), Fiola (1990), and Castro (1993) comment that nonwhite candidates focusing exclusively or primarily on race do not gain electoral victories.

**Weak Racial Consciousness.** A third explanation offered for the failure to mobilize a constituency around “blackness” concerns the weakness of *negro* versus white racial subjectivity in Brazil (Twine 1998; Burdick 1998b). Students of social movements have long held that appeals to specific populations to act collectively depend on the crystallization of group-based identification (Pizzorno 1978). For example, Marx writes that only when identity is consolidated will “the logic of response to structural conditions apply” (1998, 266). Simply put, to mobilize a constituency as *negros*, the collectivity or population category must embrace that identification. However, the racially ambiguous or *mestiço* paradigms that have traditionally characterized most of Latin America may create an infertile context for particularist racial mobilization (de la Fuente 1998; Sansone 2003; Andrews 2004).

In Brazil, the great majority of the nonwhite population does not self-classify using the *negro* label in open-format questions (Bailey and Telles 2006). Ethnographic research, too, reports that Brazilians continue to embrace a variety of color labels and eschew dichotomous nonwhite versus white labels in face-to-face interaction (Sansone 2003). In addition, although Brazilians may “understand” the nonwhite versus white discourse on racism and how dichotomous racial dynamics may affect their daily lives (Sheriff 2001), ethnographers point to an apparent “avoidance” dynamic among nonwhites toward straightforwardly embracing *negro* racial group identification (Twine 1998).

Burdick (1998a, b) examined this dynamic closely, and conceptualizes it as “color-identity alienation” or, in the view of *negro* movement actors, “the refusal of the majority of Afro-Brazilians to acknowledge their blackness” (Burdick 1998b, 149). According to Burdick, the *negro* movement’s insistence that all nonwhites call themselves *negros* hampers the antiracism agenda: “This refusal [to self-identify as *negros*] quite obviously erodes the movement’s efforts to build a unified ethnic identity” (150). As one of his subjects stated, “I could call myself *negra* . . . but I just don’t feel it” (151).

Similarly, some of Burdick’s research subjects felt that to call themselves *negros* was to deny the reality of their other ancestries and heritages. One informant was quite articulate on this point.

Do I value my blackness? Of course! I take pride in it. But am I only black? No! I also am descended from Indians, and from Europeans. Should I disdain these heritages? Why shouldn’t I value all my heritages? Why should I pretend I only have one heritage when this is just not true? (Cited in Burdick 1998b, 151)
In such an environment of color ambiguity and embraced mixed-heritage identification, Sansone (1998, 9) suggests that “there is little ethnicity organized or organizable for electoral politics.” That is, as referenced in the title of his recent book (Sansone 2003), Brazil is a context in which there exists “blackness without ethnicity”; that is, color variation that is not imbued with robust sentiments of ethnic group identification.\(^{19}\)

In sum, the literature points to two general dimensions in attempting to explain the underrepresentation of nonwhites in political office: certain hindering characteristics associated with nonwhite persons, and the inability of negro movement actors or politicians to mobilize a constituency around “blackness.” From the first dimension, factors such as negative stereotyping associated with nonwhite skin color, the nonwhite educational deficit, and scarce political experience among the nonwhite population may help explain nonwhite exclusion. From the second dimension, the literature posits the neutralizing effects of a denial of racial discrimination on the part of nonwhites, social class differences between negro movement and political actors and the mass of poor nonwhites, and a weak sense of common racial origins or ethnicity among nonwhites. These explanations found in the literature serve as premises on which this study’s empirical analyses can shed some light.

**DATA**

This exploration of Brazilian attitudes toward race and politics uses original data gathered through collaboration on a study of racial attitudes in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.\(^{20}\) The bulk of the project involved the elaboration of a context-sensitive research instrument (questionnaire). To that end, the author spent one year in the field (August 1998–August 1999) in Rio de Janeiro. Fieldwork included weekly work sessions with the research staff of CEAP, directing focus groups, and conducting informal field interviews with key informants. This extensive process was necessary to understand what and how best to ask about racial politics in Brazil.

The testing and application of the instrument were entrusted to the university-based research center DataUff. This institute specializes in instrument elaboration, sampling, and instrument application. The sampling frame consisted of Brazilian adults aged 18 and older residing in the state of Rio de Janeiro. The frame was defined using official census tract data gathered in 1996 by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. The sampling method was a stratified, multistage technique to draw a probability sample of 1,170 persons.

The state of Rio de Janeiro was initially divided into three regions: “capital city,” “greater metropolitan area,” and “rest of state.” After selecting municipalities at random from the regional strata, successive
random samples were taken of neighborhoods, then streets, households, and individual residents. The response rate approached 90 percent. Three weights were included to correct for the oversampling of the interior of the state, for the within-household probabilities of selection, and for the sampling variance on age and gender. Special care was taken regarding the training of the interviewers for dealing with racially sensitive topics. Also, in an effort to temper the possible introduction of nonrandom measurement error through race-of-interviewer bias, the project employed interviewers of diverse skin colors in an attempt to reflect the general population.

**METHODS AND FINDINGS**

For analysis, various survey items were selected (listed in table 1) that spoke to the intersection of race and electoral politics. In addition to presenting frequency distributions on each survey item and on key items by color, elements from these questions were used as dependent variables in four logistic regression models in order to isolate factors associated with important attitudinal stances.

**ELECTING A NONWHITE PERSON**

The survey begins with a question that asks respondents to gauge the difficulty that several personal characteristics might cause if a person wants to be elected to political office (item 1, table 1), such as education and skin color. Table 2 presents the frequency distributions of responses as percentages for this first survey item (and for all subsequent items).

The results show that respondents view having a low level of education as presenting the largest problem for the election of someone to political office. Fully 65 percent claimed that this would make election to a political office very difficult. A majority of respondents also viewed a lack of high economic conditions (i.e., not being wealthy) as making it very difficult to be elected. Being negro or not already having a politician in the family were viewed as making it very difficult by about a third of the respondents. Larger percentages, though, claimed otherwise. Respectively, 40 and 46 percent believe that being negro and not having a politician in the family present no problems for election.

Do nonwhites differ from whites in terms of the weight they give to the difficulty that being a negro is perceived to occasion (item “c” on that first question)? Table 3, item 1 presents results from a cross-tabulation of that response by color. The table suggests that color does structure that perception to some extent: 52 percent of whites compared to 70 percent of pretos believe that being a negro creates some level of difficulty.
In order to explore more rigorously the variables, including color, that are associated with perceptions of the difficulty of being a negro for getting elected to public office, the analysis turns to regression techniques. It begins with a binomial logistic regression model. The dependent variable is formed by collapsing responses “a lot” and “some” for that survey question (table 2, item 1c), in which individual respondents claim that being negro causes some amount of difficulty, counterpoising that category to the “not at all” response. The independent variable “color” is formed according to self-classification in the official census format: white, pardo, and preto. White is the omitted category. Other sociodemographic independent variables are age, a continuous variable; sex, a dummy variable denoted by female; the log of household income,

<table>
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<th>Table 1. Survey Questions</th>
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| 1. I would like you to tell me whether or not the following characteristics would constitute a difficulty for a person who wishes to be elected to political office: This element 1) presents “a lot” of difficulty, 2) presents “some” difficulty, or 3) presents “no” difficulty. | a. Having a low educational level  
   b. Lacking adequate economic conditions  
   c. Being negro  
   d. Not being from a family involved in politics |
| 2. In Brazil, there are very few negros in politics. In your opinion, this is the case because . . . | a. negros don’t like politics  
   b. a prejudice exists against negros  
   c. negros do not have the capacity to enter politics |
| 3. Did you ever vote for Benedita da Silva? | a. Yes  
   b. No |
| 4. Of the characteristics that I am going to name, I would like you to tell me whether each one influenced your vote for Benedita a lot, some, or not at all. | a. Being a woman  
   b. Being negra  
   c. Having been a favelada  
   d. Being from the Workers’ Party  
   e. Being from the povo  
   f. Being an Evangelical |
| 5. Some studies show that in general negros have worse jobs, salaries, and education than white persons. I am going to mention some reasons that people say explain that situation. You are going to tell me if you agree or disagree, a lot or a little. | a. Racial discrimination impedes negros from getting good jobs and bettering their lives |

Source: CEAP/DataUff
Also included is an attitudinal independent variable to test the specific premise regarding the effect of a hypothesized denial of the existence of racial discrimination on opinions about nonwhite political underrepresentation. This stratification belief variable is operationalized using an item from the survey that asks a respondent whether he or she agrees that discrimination explains why negros occupy a disadvantaged socioeconomic position in Brazil (table 1, item 5). Levels of agreement and disagreement are collapsed to form a dummy variable (0 = disagree, 1 = agree).

Table 4, panel 1 presents the regression results. As suggested by the bivariate results (table 3), the regression results show that pardos and

Table 2. Response Distributions on Selected Survey Items, Brazilian Adults, 2000 (percent)

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<tr>
<th>1. Difficult characteristics:</th>
<th>A lot</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Having a low education</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Lacking economic level</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Being negro</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. No politician in family</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 1,030</td>
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<tr>
<th>2. Why few negros in politics?</th>
<th>Distaste</th>
<th>Prejudice</th>
<th>No capacity</th>
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<tr>
<td>N = 991</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Voted for Benedita?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=1,015</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>65</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. Influencing characteristics</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Woman</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Negra</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Favelada</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Workers’ Party</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Povo</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Evangelist/Pentecostal</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=345a, b,c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. Discrimination behind inequality</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=1,029</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

aThe number of actual cases responding to each of these individual items varied slightly.

bIncludes all three color categories.

cIncludes only those respondents who voted for Benedita.

Source: CEAP/DataUff
pretos are significantly more likely than whites to believe that being negro makes election more difficult (“blackness hampers”), holding all else constant. The odds of pardos and pretos making this claim are 1.7 and 2.1 times greater than for whites, respectively, holding all other variables constant (odds ratios are listed in table 5). Education, age, sex, and income have no significant effects. However, if a respondent claims that discrimination is behind negro disadvantage (a stratification belief), he or she is significantly more likely to perceive that being negro makes election to political office difficult (the odds are 1.7 times greater, holding all other variables constant; see table 5). As seen in table 2, item 5, fully 81 percent of Brazilians in Rio affirm the stratifying effect of racial
discrimination in Brazil; and table 3, item 5 reveals that even 77 percent of white Brazilians point to that conclusion.

The next survey item concerns possible explanations of why there are so few negros in politics (item 2, table 1): a distaste for politics, racial prejudice, or a lack of capacity. Table 2, item 2 shows that of the three choices listed, respondents overwhelmingly point to prejudice against negros as explaining their exclusion from the political arena (fully 78 percent).\textsuperscript{23}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Panel 1</th>
<th>Panel 2</th>
<th>Panel 3</th>
<th>Panel 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blackness</td>
<td>Don't like</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Voted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>variables</td>
<td>hampers</td>
<td>politics</td>
<td>capacity</td>
<td>Benedita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color\textsuperscript{a}</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\textit{Pardo}</td>
<td>.558***</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>-.241</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.150)</td>
<td>(.221)</td>
<td>(.311)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\textit{Preto}</td>
<td>.736***</td>
<td>-.138</td>
<td>.476</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.203)</td>
<td>(.320)</td>
<td>(.338)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\textit{Pardo}\textsuperscript{b}</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>-.085</td>
<td>.310***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.058)</td>
<td>(.087)</td>
<td>(.113)</td>
<td>(.088)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.163</td>
<td>-.639**</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-.306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.138)</td>
<td>(.203)</td>
<td>(.273)</td>
<td>(.192)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.037***</td>
<td>.018**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.004)</td>
<td>(.007)</td>
<td>(.008)</td>
<td>(.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.018</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.028)</td>
<td>(.045)</td>
<td>(.053)</td>
<td>(.041)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrim.</td>
<td>.541**</td>
<td>-.978***</td>
<td>-.397</td>
<td>.222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.171)</td>
<td>(.233)</td>
<td>(.344)</td>
<td>(.275)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-.448</td>
<td>-1.33**</td>
<td>-3.43***</td>
<td>-2.20***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.366)</td>
<td>(.540)</td>
<td>(.727)</td>
<td>(.543)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>972</td>
<td>866</td>
<td>499\textsuperscript{c}</td>
<td>329\textsuperscript{d}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{**p<.01 ***p<.001. ( ) Indicates standard errors.}
\textsuperscript{a}White is the reference category.
\textsuperscript{b}\textit{Preto} is the reference category.
\textsuperscript{c}Includes only \textit{pardos} and \textit{pretos}.
\textsuperscript{d}Includes only those respondents who voted for Benedita.
Source: CEAP/DataUff
How does color structure these explanations of why there are so few negros in politics? Results from table 3, item 2, suggest that color differences are not important: 76 percent of whites and 79 percent of pardos and pretos point to prejudice.

To isolate other factors associated with these explanations, the analysis uses multinomial logistic regression. The dependent variable comprises three categories, which are the response options to the item: “prejudice against negros,” “negros don’t like politics,” and “negros lack the capacity.” The first option is treated as the reference category. The independent sociodemographic and attitudinal variables are the same as those in the first regression model.

Notable results from table 4, panel 2, confirm that pardos and pretos do not differ significantly from whites on this item. However, females are significantly less likely than males to explain the absence of negro politicians by claiming that “negros don’t like politics,” compared to faulting prejudice for that outcome. Table 5 shows that the odds of females’ claiming this are only .52, or half, those of males, holding all other variables constant. Here, too, there is a strong attitudinal effect based on the way a person explains negro disadvantage. Respondents who point to racial discrimination as causing negro disadvantage are significantly less likely to choose “negros don’t like politics” over “prejudice against negros” (odds ratio of .37, shown in table 5). Comparing the “negros lack capacity” to the “prejudice” response, older persons are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Panel 1</th>
<th>Panel 2</th>
<th>Panel 3</th>
<th>Panel 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prejudice</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackness hampers</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don’t like politics</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No capacity</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voted</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benedita</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Color</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pardo</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preto</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pardo</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.17</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*aWhite is the reference category.

*Preto* is the reference category.

Source: CEAP/DataUff
significantly more likely to point to *negros* lack of capacity than are younger ones, holding all other variables constant. Being ten years older, for example, increases the odds by a factor of 1.4.24

**Benedita da Silva and Racial Identity Politics**

Another cluster of questions addressing the intersection of race and electoral politics refers to Benedita da Silva, a very successful *negra* politician from Rio de Janeiro. She lists her impressive political record thus: “I was a councilor in the municipality [of Rio de Janeiro], then federal deputy twice; I was a candidate for mayor of Rio de Janeiro and was almost elected. Now, I have been elected senator” (Silva 1999, 180). Subsequently, she was vice governor of Rio; and at the resignation of the governor, she assumed that position. She lost, however, her subsequent bid for election to the governor’s post. Hence, at one time or another, virtually all the residents of the state of Rio de Janeiro have had the opportunity to vote for her, making her case ideal for exploring some concrete attitudinal stances toward a *negro* political candidate.25

A first question regarding Benedita is whether or not the respondent has ever voted for her in any of her runs for public office. Thirty-five percent of respondents answered affirmatively (table 2, item 3). Bivariate results presented in table 3, item 3, reveal some color differences on this item. Whereas about 40 percent of *pardos* and *pretos* claim to have voted for Benedita, that figure is 29 percent for whites.

This survey item is then used to form two binomial logistic regression models isolating the factors associated with voter response (1 = yes, 0 = no). An initial model, not shown, confirms that color is significant: the odds of *pretos* and *pardos* voting for Benedita are about two times greater than for whites, holding all other variables constant.

To isolate the influence of class divisions among nonwhites that may explain the hypothesized inability of *negro* candidates and leaders to mobilize a nonwhite constituency, the sample in a second regression model regarding Benedita is limited to respondents self-classifying as *pardo* or *preto*. The results in table 4, panel 3 show that among *pretos* and *pardos*, color is not a significant predictor; instead, education and age structure voting behavior among *pretos* and *pardos*, both positively related to voting for Benedita. Table 5 shows that with a one-unit increase in educational level, the odds of voting for Benedita are 1.4 times greater, holding all other variables constant. Being ten years older increases the odds of voting for Benedita by a factor of 1.2, holding all else constant. Thus, results suggest an important educational divide among nonwhites in terms of their expressed vote for a nonwhite candidate.

Last is a survey item that asks respondents who voted for Benedita about her personal characteristics and whether or not each of these
influenced the respondents’ votes (item 4, table 1). (People who did not vote for Benedita did not answer this survey item.) Benedita has several rare characteristics in terms of traditional politics. She is a woman, a *negra*, a *favelada*, an Evangelical Protestant, and is seen as one of the *povo* or masses. She is also a member of the Workers’ Party. Table 2 reveals that her class position, as represented by the term *povo* (item 4e), was overwhelmingly the most important factor influencing respondents’ expressed yes vote (58 percent said it influenced their vote “a lot”). In addition, table 3, which isolates the association of color through bivariate cross-tabulations, shows that majorities of each color category pointed to that class position as possessing some level of importance in their decision to vote for her (item 4e): 65 percent of whites compared to 70 percent of *pardos* and *pretos*.

Turning next to the importance attributed to Benedita’s being a *negra*, results in table 2, item 4b, reveal that 29 percent of the sample that voted for her claims that characteristic influenced their vote “a lot.” However, the bivariate presentation in table 3, item 4b, reveals some important color differences on this item. Respectively 69 and 62 percent of whites and *pardos* judged her color as “not at all” important to their vote, whereas only 42 percent of *pretos* opined the same. These differences perhaps are starkest in terms of the “a lot” responses category: whereas 46 percent of *pretos* chose that category, only 18 and 31 percent of whites and *pardos*, respectively, did the same.

Binomial regression is used to isolate more clearly variables associated with these opinions about how Benedita’s color influenced each respondent’s decision to vote for her (item 4b, table 1). The dependent variable in the equation comprises two responses: 1 = yes (that her color influenced the vote “a lot” or “some” [categories combined]) and 0 = no (signifying the “not at all” response category). The independent sociodemographic and attitudinal variables are the same as above. Table 4, panel 4 shows that *pretos* are significantly more likely than whites to say that her color influenced their vote, whereas whites and *pardos* do not differ significantly on this issue. The odds that *pretos* name color as an influencing factor are more than 3 times greater than for whites, holding all other variables constant (table 5).

**Discussion**

This article began by asking about the state of racial identity politics and why so few nonwhites are elected to political office in a country where that population segment makes up approximately one-half of the national population. One way to approach this question was to ask Brazilians directly why they believe this to be the case. From a list of possible disadvantaging conditions, a majority of Brazilians opined that
two present “a lot” of difficulty: a lack of education (65 percent) and inadequate economic conditions (57 percent). When asked specifically about the effect of being negro, 35 percent stated that this attribute presents “a lot” of difficulty for being elected, although for fewer whites than nonwhites. Hence, the actual effect of “blackness” is believed to be secondary to other, more critical disadvantages that restrict the general possibility of being elected to political office in Brazil: low education and inadequate economic conditions—that is, social class proxies.

The strength of these two class proxies suggests that politics in Brazil is seen as an arena of elites, which, of course, is not surprising. Moreover, the strength of these proxies indicates that in the opinion of Brazilians in Rio de Janeiro, the exclusion of negros from elected office is extremely overdetermined: not only do many Brazilians see “blackness” itself as a stigma hampering election, but negros are also disproportionately represented among those with low educational levels and among the poor.

When social class proxies are excluded as possible choices, however, and respondents were asked to choose one of three explanations (distaste for politics, no capacity, or prejudice) for the absence of negros in political office, their responses starkly reveal the distinct disadvantage that Brazilians believe darker skin color has for electoral politics. Of the three possible responses to this survey item, 78 percent of Brazilians, including 76 percent of whites, chose prejudice as the best explanation for negro exclusion. Hence, regarding the premise concerning the role of prejudice in the underrepresentation of nonwhites in the political arena, results suggest that according to common sense understandings in Rio de Janeiro, prejudice against negros and the exclusion of negros from elected office are solidly related.

The finding that the overwhelming majority of Brazilians of all colors in the state of Rio de Janeiro implicate prejudice in Brazilian politics calls into question the long-held premise that nonwhites deny racial prejudice and discrimination in Brazil (Hasenbalg and Huntington 1982; Hanchard 1994; Twine 1998; Guimarães 2001b). Clearly, these results suggest that no overwhelming majorities of nonwhites or whites deny the existence of prejudice in Rio de Janeiro. The direct effect of a denial of racial discrimination, a stratification belief, was also tested on perceptions of negro disadvantage in the electoral sphere. The finding was that respondents who believe that discrimination produces socioeconomic inequality for nonwhites (the overwhelming majority of the sample) in general also view “blackness” as an obstacle for election and prejudice as a root cause of electoral exclusion.

Therefore, contrary to much of the literature, these results suggest that a denial of racial discrimination is not pervasive in Brazilian society, as captured by this survey of opinions in Rio de Janeiro in 2000.
Indeed, what appears to characterize the opinions of everyday Brazilians is an understanding that their society is far from a realized racial democracy. On the other hand, the keenness of their perception of the prevailing counterreality suggests that, as Nogueira (1985) has posited, everyday Brazilians’ racial common sense, steeped in the myth of racial democracy, “has a positive side when taken as a proclamation of an ideal or a contrasting value with which it is possible to criticize existing conditions” (1985, 26). That is, these results offer some support to the view that the myth of racial democracy may be best understood as a utopian creed, one that is both prescriptive (as opposed to descriptive) and that acts as a “measuring stick” of that society’s inability to live up to its ideals (Reis 1997; Sheriff 2001; Bailey 2002, 2004, 2009).

How do these results indicting prejudice speak more specifically to the state of racial identity politics in Brazil? They suggest that it would be a difficult task to argue that a denial of racial discrimination by nonwhites explains nonwhites’ lack of success in the electoral realm. The difficulties of the negro movement and potential nonwhite politicians in mobilizing a constituency around “blackness” must, then, be approached from other angles, as Burdick and Sansone suggest.

The question involving the exemplary case of Benedita da Silva may speak most clearly to the status of racial identity politics, and therefore could shed some additional light. When asked specifically about whether or not a respondent had ever voted for Benedita, and including whites in the tested sample, results indicate that color is associated with that decision. That is, whites were less likely than pretos and pardos to have voted for her, all else held constant, suggesting a racial undercurrent.

A second survey item lends some further support to the finding of a racial undercurrent in expressed voting behavior. When those who voted for Benedita were specifically asked about the relevance they attributed to her color, 40 percent responded that they gave it some level of importance (29 percent gave it “a lot” of importance). However, among this group of Benedita supporters, whites and pardos were significantly less likely than pretos to name her color as a reason for voting for her. That is, there was a preto–non-preto divide on this item. Both of these regression models suggest nonetheless the differential importance placed on Benedita’s color by the demographic “color category.” It therefore appears that the formation of political allegiances around the notion of common “racial” origins was operative, suggesting some underlying racial current in Brazilian electoral politics, although there is some ambiguity as to where the central color cleavage is located.

These findings appear to complicate Sansone’s suggestion (1998, 2003) that “blackness” tends not to create a commonality in Brazil that can be organized for electoral politics. Instead, they lend some support
to the findings of Mitchell (1977), Soares and Silva (1985), and Castro (1993), whose earlier studies suggest an operable racial undercurrent in the Brazilian political realm.\(^{32}\) Perhaps as an illustration, but also nicely nuanced, Castro concludes,

> The infrequency of collective movements organized around racial grievances does not necessarily imply that differences between whites and nonwhites do not exist as regards other types of political behavior. It is perfectly possible that at an individual level, negros and mulattos differ from whites in how and with what orientation they participate in electoral politics. In sum, it is plausible to imagine that racial allegiances constitute one of the factors explaining voting patterns [in Brazil]. (Castro 1993, 475)

The analysis and findings in this study, however, differ from those of Castro, Mitchell, and Soares and Silva in that they directly measure a specific and vital electoral dynamic not captured before: expressed voting behavior of nonwhites toward a nonwhite candidate.

Of course, Sansone’s scholarship (1998, 2003) is not totally inconsistent with these findings; nor does the author agree fully with the perspectives on negros and racial politics offered by Mitchell (1977) and Soares and Silva (1985). The relationship between race and electoral politics is not an “either-or” question in Brazil, but one of degrees. One the one hand, Sansone is basically correct when he points to a low level of organized racial or ethnic sentiments in the political realm; racial identity politics in Brazil has not been robustly manifest in the electoral sphere.\(^{33}\) On the other hand, it may be that Mitchell (1977), and to a much lesser extent Soares and Silva (1985), have overstated what their data reveal about the amount of “racial consciousness” operable in the electoral realm for nonwhites in their periods of study. Castro’s measured statement above, then, may be the better description of the effect of racial identification dynamics in that sphere.

The last premise regarding the effect of social class on the possible mobilization of a nonwhite constituency around perceived racial origins raises the question, do class differences among nonwhites contour their attitudes toward racial identity politics? The results suggest that they do. Table 4, panel 3 demonstrates that education, a class proxy in Brazil (Andrews 2000), is robustly associated with expressed voting behavior for Benedita independent of color difference among nonwhites. Holding all else constant, the higher the educational level, the more likely were nonwhite respondents to say they voted for Benedita. The conditioning effect of social class (approximated through education) on the development of a negro constituency therefore may be important. The premise regarding the class disjunction between negro political and movement actors and the masses of nonwhites as an explanation for the lack of
mobilization around “blackness” thereby receives some cautious support. Lending some further legitimacy to a social class effect, Sansone (2003) and Bailey and Telles (2006) all find that preference for the negro label itself among nonwhites, which negro movement actors view as key for mobilization (Burdick 1998a, b), is positively associated with education.

Only about 10 percent of nonwhites belong to the middle class in Brazil, leaving close to 90 percent to make up part of the lower, less-educated classes (Andrews 2000). These percentages suggest the limited scope of success possible for racial identity politics that may speak most clearly to middle-class nonwhites. A last look at table 2, showing the importance of Benedita’s personal characteristics for those who voted for her, reveals that about twice as many people stated that her povo origins had much more to do with their vote than her negra classification. Therefore, as Andrews (2000) suggests, the masses of poor nonwhites may view class-based issues as more vital to their survival. Much of Benedita da Silva’s success may be, in reality, due to her ability to interpret these sentiments of the masses. She asserts, “I have yet to see anyone succeed in winning political elections just with discussion of racism” (Silva 1999, 179); instead, according to Benedita, her struggle succeeded because it began as one based on “community issues” (179)—that is, issues meaningful to the povo, or masses, rather than specifically racial ones.

In the end, as Sansone (1998, 2003) and Andrews (2000) suggest, class identity politics may indeed have been the more effective vehicle of progressive social change in the racially ambiguous context of Brazil at the turn of the third millennium. The coming together of the Brazilian masses of all colors in the election of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the country’s first working-class president, in 2002 may support that notion; it also created great expectations for a shift toward privileging the political agenda of the working class, among whom nonwhites are disproportionately represented. Of course, as noted earlier, Lula’s assumption of the presidency also had the effect of increasing the visibility of “blackness” and a negro agenda at the national level through important appointments of prominent Afro-Brazilians. Hence, the success of class identity politics may even turn out to have important effects in the realm of racial identity politics.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The future of racial identity politics in Brazil, however, is not yet clear, and at least two final factors deserve mention in terms of their ability to affect the possibly shifting state of that politics.

Affirmative action policies are quickly being institutionalized in many realms of Brazilian society, marking a monumental shift in gov-
ernmental orientation toward race. Previous research (Bailey 2008) argues that inscribing race in law and onto the face of public life for inclusionary purposes using a negro or nonwhite versus white classification scheme may have a “racemaking” effect (Marx 1998). Bailey 2008 reports, for example, that the mere mention of quotas for negros at the beginning of one version of a split-ballot survey in 2002 nearly doubles the percentage of the sample that chose to self-classify as negro in an open-format question, compared to the half of the sample not exposed to the mention of racial quotas. Race-targeted policies thus may create resource-based incentives to self-classify as negro; moreover, the symbolic power of the state may also legitimate negro as a social identity. Either way, these policies may indirectly create more fertile ground for political coalition building along color lines—that is, more robust racial identity politics—through increasing the salience of negro identification.

Even more directly, however, one political stake that has yet to be won and that would surely lead to increased nonwhite success in electoral politics would be the use of racial quotas for selecting political candidates in Brazil. Gender or sex quotas are currently being employed to attempt an increase in the ranks of women in electoral politics in that context. The policy requires that about a third of a political party’s candidate pool be women (Araujo 2001; Miguel 2008). If the same proportion were employed regarding skin color, the success of a given political party might also mean greater skin color diversity among elected officials. In an important sense, the abovementioned success of class-based politics, as suggested by the success of the Workers’ Party, could be a privileged forum to carry potential recipients of racial quotas for nonwhite political candidates into elected office.

Surely Andrews (2004) is correct that there appears to be a paradigm shift on racial dynamics occurring in Latin America. Without longitudinal data, however, it is difficult to know whether that shift resides more at elite levels—governmental, movement, and academic actors—or whether, or how much, the common sense understandings of ordinary Brazilians are also significantly changing. Will this paradigm shift reverberate in the electoral realm in terms of an increase in racial identity politics in Brazil? In contrast to Sansone, who, on the basis of his extensive ethnographic research, concludes that in the coming years, “black ethnicity is not expected to be a growing factor of Brazilian society in terms of party politics and voting habits” (2003, 196), the analysis presented here suggests that color, a potential ethnic boundary marker, is already present in the voting habits of many Brazilians, and may be expected to increase in salience in the future. Clearly, however, a true racial democracy in terms of proportional nonwhite representation in the electoral realm remains a “utopian dream” (Sheriff 2001).
NOTES

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1. Researchers often collapse the census terms *preto* (roughly “dark black” [Guimarães (2001b)] and *pardo* (brown or mulatto) into a “nonwhite,” “Afro-Brazilian,” “*negro*,” or “black” category. This study maintains *preto* and *pardo* in the original Portuguese. When referring to a combined category, it generally adopts “nonwhite” as the better analytic term, due to its ability to signal a statistical category (collapsing *pretos* + *pardos*) as opposed to implying a “social group” (Loveman 1999). When citing specific researchers, the terminology they employ is maintained.

2. Due partly to the cost of public opinion surveys and to the lack of importance placed on racial issues in earlier periods, the data are lacking. For example, Soares and Silva (1985, 263) claim, “In 40 years of empirical [survey] research, we were able to locate only two empirical articles exploring racial politics” (see also Castro 1993, 474). Souza (1971) is one exception in terms of the use of survey methods; Castro (1993) is a notable later exception. Nevertheless, the field of research on public opinion and race in contemporary Brazil is now growing (Hasenbalg and Silva 1999; Bailey 2002, 2004, 2009), including work that specifically focuses on some aspect of the intersection of race and electoral politics (Rennó 2007) and political association (Bueno and Fialho 2009), or that at least includes a color-race variable in more general analyses of election issues (Nicolau 2007). There is also some earlier notable work on race and electoral politics using survey methods, but based on nonrandom, smaller samples (e.g., Mitchell 1977).

3. The “*negro* movement” is conceptualized here as that multiplicity of organizations dedicated to “struggling against racism and building a positive black identity” (Burdick 1998b, 137).

4. “Perceived common racial origin” is conceptualized as the use of phenotype as the primary boundary marker of differing degrees of ethnic sentiments, including common experiences of social exclusion. See Sansone’s 2003 framing of ethnic sentiments.

5. See Warren 2002 for a racial framing of indigenous political mobilization in Brazil.

6. The PIC in Cuba suffered racist repression leading to its demise in 1912 in the midst of a growing “raceless paradigm” born of Cuban nationalism (de la Fuente 1998). The Frente Negra in Brazil was disbanded by the authoritarian politics of the Vargas era (Andrews 1991). The PAN in Uruguay was unable to attract significant attention from a black constituency and disbanded in 1944 (Andrews 2004).

7. Conflict and rebellions were common during the era of slavery, for example. Of special note were the runaway slave communities called Quilombos (Mitchell 1977).

8. Soares and Silva (1985, 253) note that the 1982 elections were the first “truly free” ones in 20 years.

9. See also Fontaine (1985) for a detailed account of nonwhite electoral successes and failures in the early 1980s.
10. Oliveira distinguishes between Afro-Brazilians and *morenos*. These are not categories of self-identification; rather, they are the researcher’s classifications based on photographs and other electoral file data. Oliveira considers *morenos* somewhere in between whites and Afro-Brazilians.


12. See Santos’s profile on the website of that secretariat (see Brazil, Special Secretariat n.d.).

13. See Castro 1993 for a discussion of several explanations for a lack of mobilization of nonwhites in the electoral realm. Burdick (1998a, b) looks at a similar issue as to why the *negro* movement has been unable to mobilize a unified *negro* identity for antiracism.

14. Other factors less frequently mentioned in the literature surely exist. For example, Davis (1999, 23) points to the plethora of parties in Brazil, which divides possible political allegiances: “Unlike the United States, which has had a two-party system. . . , allowing for a relatively coherent African-American community to align itself with one party, . . . in Brazil . . . the existence of many political parties makes it difficult for Afro-Brazilians to rally around a candidate because of their stand on racial or human rights issues, diminishing the potential for racial solidarity.” Castro (1993) argues that white cooptation of lighter-skinned blacks is also a factor.

15. Some researchers view this “denial” perspective on racial democracy as reductionist or simply incorrect (Reis 1997; Sheriff 2001; Bailey 2002, 2004; Sansone 2003).

16. In contrast, some researchers posit that the extent of racial conscious-ness in Brazil “may have been seriously underestimated by social scientists” (Mitchell 1977, 7; see also Souza 1971; Soares and Silva 1985; Castro 1993).

17. Recently released data collected in 2008 by Datafolha, the research branch of the national newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, show that only 7 percent of a national sample of Brazilians self-classified as *negro* in an open-ended question.

18. Burdick’s central concern (1998a, b) in terms of explaining why the *negro* movement has been unsuccessful in mobilizing an undivided *negro* identity is to turn the lens back on that movement and its strategies and away from stereotyping the masses of nonparticipants. He seeks to “move beyond the view that the movements fail to persuade segments of their constituency primarily because people in these segments are confused, hegemnonized, or alienated. Our question should be not just ‘Why don’t they respond?’ but also ‘What is it about the movement’s framing of issues that fails to resonate for them?’” (Burdick 1998a, 9).

19. Similar to Burdick (1998a, b), Sansone (1998, 2003) advocates a different treatment of the question of nonwhites who apparently do not respond to calls from the *negro* movement to a unified *negro* identity. He asserts that the movement should change its strategy from viewing the masses of nonwhites as *não assumidos* (not embracing that which they “are,” i.e., *negros*) or victims of “false consciousness” (2003, 2) to learning to work with them within the parameters of their own nonracially polarized worldviews.

20. Other project collaborators were a Brazilian *negro* movement NGO, Centro de Articulação de Populações Marginalizadas (CEAP, Center for the
Articulation of Marginalized Populations), and DataUff of the Federal Fluminense University in Rio de Janeiro. Edward E. Telles, program officer of the Ford Foundation in Rio de Janeiro at the time, was instrumental in funding the CEAP-DataUff survey. Telles was also on the faculty of the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he served as cochair of the author’s dissertation committee and facilitated his participation in the survey project. He is currently a professor of sociology at Princeton University.

21. To view survey items in Portuguese, see appendix 1 at <https://web-files.uci.edu/xythoswfs/webui/_xy-6180972_1>

22. Education variable values: 1) illiterate/primary incomplete, 2) primary complete/junior incomplete, 3) junior complete/secondary incomplete, 4) secondary complete/superior incomplete, and 5) superior complete.

23. This result appears not to coincide completely with the previous finding that 40 percent of the sample claims that “being negro” is not a problem for being elected. However, question content and format matter. This question forces respondents to choose from among other options that do not include a clear social class alternative explanation; moreover, it directly asks about negro underrepresentation and not about a general difficulty to being elected to public office, like the previous survey item.

24. The formula for calculating that result is \((\exp[b*10])\).

25. Voting is obligatory in Brazil, and voter turnout averages about 80 percent for both regional and national elections. Benedita was later appointed by Lula to head the Ministry of Social Assistance, and currently heads the Secretariat of State for Social Assistance and Human Rights in the state of Rio de Janeiro. See the website of that secretariat (listed in the reference list) to view her profile.

26. Povo is a code word in political discourse for “the masses” or the poor in Brazil.

27. A model not shown, using pardos as the reference category, reveals that pretos are significantly more likely than pardos to consider Benedita’s color as important in influencing their vote, holding all other variables constant.

28. These results in Rio de Janeiro coincide with earlier findings on the question of the recognition of racial discrimination based on a national sample of the population (Bailey 2002).

29. Sheriff’s 2001 research draws attention to the prescriptive essence of the myth of racial democracy while arguing that it also contains a descriptive, obscurantist element. Sheriff therefore counters a reductionist account that focuses only on the latter. See also Reis 1997.

30. In a methodological piece on the importance of question order in surveys, in which he compares a subsample of the CEAP survey with a comparable survey of the same period (applied only in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro) on the issue of expressed voting behavior for Benedita, Almeida (2002) reports that pardos responded in the comparable survey in numbers closer to whites, not pretos.

31. Numerous studies differ as to where the cleavages between color groupings lie in terms of political and electoral behavior (e.g., Soares and Silva 1985; Castro 1993; Rennó 2007; Bueno and Fialho 2009).

32. The different methods employed by researchers using large-sample surveys, as this study does, compared to ethnography may be driving some of
these contrasting findings in terms of racialized voting behavior. These method-driven differences, however, do not appear to pertain as well to the issue of perceptions of racism in Brazil. Twine’s 1998 research, for example, reports a pervasive denial of racial discrimination among her research subjects, whereas Sheriff (2001) documents an equally strong consciousness of racial discrimination among the subjects she studied.

33. Sansone (2003) clearly does not deny ethnic sentiments along the lines of “blackness” in Brazil; instead, attempting to move beyond U.S.-centric, race relations approaches, he seeks to point out that “not all ethnic feelings develop into relevant political instruments as such” (2003, 168). He challenges in Brazil the expectation of “demographic ethnicity” or the assumption of a robust correlation between the actual size of the nonwhite population and a “black political and even electoral force” (179).

REFERENCES


