

The Distorted Mirror: An Exploratory Study on Ethnoracial Representation and Social Equity in the Mexican Federal Government

Felipe Blanco

This article presents an exploratory assessment of the ethnoracial composition of the federal government in Mexico, and its possible consequences for social equity by asking: How representative is Mexico's federal bureaucracy of the different ethnoracial groups in the country. What are the possible implications of that composition for social equity? To answer these questions, data were gathered through an online randomized survey. Results suggest that Mestizos and Whites may be overrepresented, and Indigenous and Afro-Mexicans may be underrepresented when compared to the overall population. This “distorted mirror” of Mexican demographics would be by itself unlikely to advance social equity in terms of symbolic and active representation. Furthermore, this research suggests that ethnoracial identities may not be salient for public administrators, which would impede the transition from passive to active representation needed to promote social equity.

Keywords

social equity, representative bureaucracy, race, ethnicity, Mexico

In racially and/or ethnically diverse societies, public organizations should reflect and nurture the demographic variety of the populations they serve. An administrative body that represents or “mirrors” the different groups within society—especially disenfranchised ones—may contribute to the correction of social inequalities (Meier 2023; Riccucci and Van Ryzin 2017), including those occurring along ethnoracial¹ lines. Moreover, for race and ethnicity in particular, research shows that bureaucratic representation and its potential effects on social equity are increased when people of color hold top-level positions in governmental agencies (Naff 2001).

However, studies of representative bureaucracy that employ a racial or ethnic lens have been largely

limited to the United States and have rarely examined the sociohistorical, political, and administrative processes of identity formation around the category “race” itself (Bishu and Kennedy 2020; Meier n.d.). This lack of research is exceptionally noticeable for Latin America, a large and diverse region where racial inequalities and racism are increasingly acknowledged as public problems (Moreno Figueroa and Wade 2024; Telles et al. 2025), but where data on the representation of historically marginalized populations in public administration is still scarce (Bello-Gomez et al. 2024).

The small number of studies on ethnic/racial representation is even more intriguing for Mexico, the second largest country in the region by population (World Bank n.d.), and a self-proclaimed multicultural nation where several social inequalities linked to ethnoracial identities and/or features like skin color have been consistently documented in the last decade (Altamirano 2020; Arceo-Gómez and Campos-Vázquez 2012, 2014; Campos-Vázquez and Medina-Cortina 2019; Lomelín et al. 2019; Martínez Casas et al. 2014;

1. Following Loveman (2004), the term ethnoracial is used here as “a generic umbrella descriptor to refer to any categorical distinction that names or delimits sets of human beings who are construed to belong together naturally, as a collectivity or community, due to some source of heritable similarity” (37). From this perspective, ethnoracial categories are the product of historical and political processes that allow for the racialization of groups of people within a certain national context.

Monroy-Gómez-Franco 2023; Monroy-Gómez-Franco and Vélez-Grajales 2021; Solís, et al. 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2021; Telles et al. 2015; Telles et al. 2025; Trejo and Altamirano 2016; Vélez-Grajales and Monroy-Gómez-Franco 2024; Villarreal 2010; Woo-Mora 2022).

This article addresses the gap above by exploring the ethnoracial composition of public administration and its possible equity implications in Mexico. The two questions that guide this work are:

- How representative is Mexico's federal bureaucracy of the different ethnoracial groups in the country?
- What are the possible implications of this ethnoracial composition for social equity in that setting?

To answer those questions, data were gathered employing an online survey distributed to a randomly selected group of public administrators at the federal level in Mexico. The results of the survey allow for an exploratory assessment of the ethnoracial composition of the Mexican population and its implications in terms of social equity.

To that end, the rest of the article is organized as follows. The next section presents a short overview of the theories of representative bureaucracy and its relationship with social equity, and discusses how these theories have been applied so far in Latin America. Then, a historical summary of the ways in which ethnoracial identities have been shaped by the Mexican state, setting the expectations for representation in that country, is provided. With that background, the methodology and data collection technique employed for this study are presented, followed by the results of this investigation. The article ends with a discussion of those results, as well as the limitations and implications of this study.

Representative Bureaucracy and Social Equity

In public administration, social equity entails a commitment to social justice and the uplifting of historically marginalized populations (Blessett et al. 2019; Frederickson 1990; Gooden et al. 2023; Guy and Williams 2023; Wooldridge and Bilharz 2018, among others). Consequently, social equity calls for the active correction of all kinds of inequalities, including those occurring along ethnoracial lines through and within public organizations (Blessett et al. 2019; Gooden 2014).

One of the ways to try to advance social equity in racially and/or ethnically diverse societies is by making sure that public organizations reflect and nurture

such diversity. A way to do so is by promoting a public administrative apparatus that mirrors or represents the demographics of the society it is supposed to serve in terms of race, gender, class, among other categories (Kingsley 1944; Long 1952; Meier 2023; Mosher 1968; Peters et al. 2013). From an instrumental standpoint, representative bureaucracy is then a mechanism that can promote diversity and social equity in the public sector and a nation, more broadly (Meier 2023; Riccucci and Van Ryzin 2017).

Theories of representative bureaucracy distinguish between the passive, active, and symbolic dimensions of representation. Passive representation refers to “the source of origin of individuals and the degree to which, collectively, they mirror the total society” (Mosher 1968, 12) in terms of race, class, religion, among other identities. The active dimension of representation, in turn, would occur when public officers “press for the interests and desires of those whom [they are] presumed to represent, whether they be the whole people or some segment of the people” (Mosher 1968, 12). Active representation thus assumes that demographic features like race, ethnicity, or gender correspond with a given set of values that, when adequately represented in public administrative settings, will generate better outcomes for individuals self-identifying with one or more of those identities (Meier 2023; Riccucci and Van Ryzin 2017). Active representation can thus be limited if the shared-values assumption does not hold true.

In addition, the literature has identified identity salience as one of the preconditions for active representation to occur (Meier and Morton 2015; Meier and Rutherford 2020; Randell 2002; Riccucci and Van Ryzin 2017). This feature refers to an embedded and manifested sense of identity and group belonging. In the workplace, identity salience has been conceptualized as “an individual-level measure of how prominently a demographic category is used to describe one's work group members,” for example, thinking of a group of colleagues primarily in terms of women and men (Randell 2002, 750) instead of using racial categories or other identities. The salience of the different identities of bureaucrats—such as race, class, gender, among others—varies from nation to nation because of their local history and sociopolitical context. Politics, in particular, plays a major role in the process of uplifting certain identities and obscuring others (Meier and Morton 2015; Meier and Rutherford 2020).

Lastly, symbolic representation suggests that passive representation can be positive in itself, fostering a perception of a government that is open to all demographics in society, thus increasing trust and legitimacy of governmental actions (Meier 2023). Openness and legitimacy, in turn, can increase cooperation, coproduction, and ultimately the effectiveness of public interventions (Meier and Rutherford 2020; Riccucci et al. 2016; Riccucci and Van Ryzin 2017).

At the organizational level, the hierarchical echelon in which representation occurs also matters in terms of equity. The benefits of representation may not arise if people of color, women, and/or other historically marginalized populations are concentrated at the bottom of the hierarchy and/or are unable to achieve leadership positions (Naff 2001; Peters 2013).

In sum, social inequalities of all kinds can be potentially addressed in and through the administrative apparatus, via the instrumental benefits of representation discussed above. Due to the possibility of creating more equitable outcomes for historically marginalized groups, the theories of representative bureaucracy have been part and parcel of the social equity perspective for about five decades (Blessett et al. 2019). However, the theoretical and empirical developments of representative bureaucracy have been mostly limited to the United States. (Bishu and Kennedy 2020; Meier n.d.). Moreover, despite acknowledging the contextual and political nature of identity salience (Meier and Morton 2015), literature on representative bureaucracy has paid little attention to the actual processes of identity formation, particularly around the notion of race (Bishu and Kennedy 2020).

Paying attention to ethnoracial formation processes from a historical perspective may help to better understand and frame the *expectations for representation*. This is, which groups *should be* represented in the bureaucracy, and why? Of course, the intention is inclusionary rather than exclusionary, understanding representation as a tool for increasing the presence and influence on governments for historically marginalized identities.

The next section reviews and discusses how the theories of representative bureaucracy employing a racial or ethnic lens have been incorporated in the Latin American context.

Representative Bureaucracy, Race, and Ethnicity in Latin America

In the Latin American region, the issue of representation has been mostly developed around the political aspect

of representation, with sex as the main category employed. Comparatively, the issue of the representation of the different groups in society within public administration has lacked substantial attention (Bello-Gomez et al. 2024). This is particularly the case for ethnic or racial approaches to bureaucratic representation. Consequently, data and research on the representation of historically marginalized groups, particularly Indigenous and Afro-descendant people in public administration is still very limited in the region (Bello-Gomez et al. 2024). This may be the result of pervasive colorblind or “raceless” ideologies, like *Mestizaje* (Blanco 2024) or “racial democracy” that are at the core of the foundation of several countries in the region (Appelbaum et al. 2003; Loveman 2014), and that were relatively unchallenged until recently (Moreno Figueroa and Wade 2024; Telles et al. 2025).

Thus, prior to this article, just seven peer-reviewed articles in English (Arvate et al. 2021; Bello-Gomez et al. 2024; Bello-Gomez and Avellaneda 2022; Dantas Cabral et al. 2021; Enloe 1978; Figueroa Huencho and Araya Orellana 2020; and Pardo 2013), and two governmental studies in Portuguese and Spanish, respectively (Dias Silva and Lopez 2021; Pérez Ramírez 2020) were located on ethnic or racial representation in Latin America. Out of them, the actual composition of bureaucracies in terms of race and/or ethnicity was, at least partially, the focus of five works (Bello-Gomez et al. 2024; Dias Silva and Lopez 2021; Enloe 1978; Pardo 2013; Pérez Ramírez 2020). These works are discussed next.

Passive Representation. A Glimmer of Hope and a Pending Assignment in Latin America

While representative bureaucracy was gaining popularity in the United States, Enloe (1978) aimed to understand the creation and extension of state power through ethnic representation in Latin America and Africa. From a “power perspective,” she argues, meaningful analysis of bureaucratic representativeness should go beyond “gross numerical terms [and] examine ethnic concentrations according to (1) salience of the given policy realm, (2) distribution by hierarchical rank within agencies and (3) relative influence of agencies within the entire state structure” (Enloe 1978, 342). Although no data is offered in that study beyond some generalizations, this work is an early attempt to link the development of the modern administrative state with ethnoracial categorization and representation.

More than three decades later, Pardo (2013) inquired into the representation of Indigenous peoples in Mexico, arguing that these populations have been actively represented through several institutions designed to address their demands at the national level. However, the ethnic origin of bureaucrats was considered irrelevant; thus, no data was available then on the share of bureaucrats that self-identified as Indigenous (Pardo 2013). The first attempt to produce such data came in 2020, with the study by Pérez Ramírez, discussed in detail later in this article. One important limitation of Pérez Ramírez's (2020) study is that it just accounts for public employees who self-identified as Indigenous or Afro-Mexicans. Although these figures are important, having data on all the groups of the population represented in bureaucratic settings allows for a more accurate description of the administrative state. More importantly, data that offers the full picture arguably allows for a more legitimate and effective design, implementation, and ongoing evaluation of policies to increase diversity and representation in public service.

In that regard, the Brazilian case is both an outstanding rarity and a glimmer of hope in the region. In that country, data on the "color or race" (*cor ou raça*) of federal public employees is available since 1999 and was key for the creation of affirmative action policies and quotas for Black Brazilians (*Pardos* and *Pretos*) in public higher education in 2012, and the federal civil service in 2014 (Bello-Gomez et al 2024; Dias Silva and Lopez 2021). In 2023, those policies were expanded to reserve a minimum quota of 30% of leadership positions in the federal public administration for self-identified *Pretos* and *Pardos* (Ministério da Gestão e da Inovação em Serviços Públicos, MGISP 2024). Despite some important progress, as of 2024 there was "still a representational gap in the federal public service, as just over one-third of individuals in the administration are Black and 45.9% are women—compared to a country that is predominantly Black (55.5%) and female (51.5%)" (MGISP 2024, para. 5).

Official data on the ethnoracial background of public employees by hierarchical level is also available for state and local governments in Brazil. When combined with data on gender, these figures allow for an intersectional approach that has been used to highlight the severity of underrepresentation for Black Brazilian women in public administration (Dias Silva and Lopez 2021). These types of data are thus fundamental to bet-

ter understand and potentially enhance the diversity—and representativeness—of public organizations (Bello Gomez et al. 2024).

Identity Salience and Representation

In addition to the issue of passive representation, some studies have addressed the relationship between identity, representation, and management in Latin America. In Chile, Figueroa Huencho and Araya Orellana (2020), analyzed the elements that preclude active representation in the case of Indigenous public managers, and found that despite the presence of a salient identity (i.e., that of being Indigenous), active representation tends to be hindered by political loyalty to local authority and rigid organizational systems that severely limit autonomy and discretion in bureaucratic decision-making. In the case of Guatemala, Bello-Gomez and Avellaneda (2022) explored whether the Indigenous identity (as opposed to that of *Ladinos*, or "culturally Westernized /Hispanicized individuals") of mayors is related to more collaborative management styles. Their research had mixed results, showing that "the share of Indigenous population is associated with a stronger mayoral outward management orientation and a higher likelihood to collaborate with an Indigenous partner organization" (2020, 175). Both studies used self-identification as the criteria to design a "salient identity."

In Brazil, other studies of bureaucratic representation had taken an intersectional lens. There, Dantas Cabral et al. (2021) tested the interaction of symbolic representation and bureaucratic reputation in a *favela*; a space where race, class, and spatial segregation intersect. Their results show that when the leader of the agency better represents the *favelados*, expectations of procedural justice rise for less reputable local police agencies. In the same national setting, Arvate et al. (2021) use the case of Women's Police Stations to explore the conditions that promote structural change at the intersection of race and gender. They use the concept of "structural advocacy organizations" to argue that representation, specialized procedures, and clear institutional mandates matter to create change. However, complementary policies around education and infrastructure are needed to address violence, particularly against women of color in Brazil.

Collectively, the literature above suggests a renewed and growing regional interest in studying representa-

tive bureaucracy with an ethnoracial lens in the Latin American region, with Brazil at the forefront of data collection and policy implementation to increase representation. At the same time, that literature marginally shows the complexity of identity formation around race in the region, a historical process linked to colonialism, influenced by ancestry, culture, space, and phenotypical features. The case of *Ladinos* in Guatemala (Bello-Gomez and Avellaneda 2022), *Mestizos* in Mexico (Pardo 2013), and *favelados* in Brazil (Dantas Cabral et al. 2021) are just examples of such regional complexity. So far, the emphasis has been put on historically marginalized groups in the region, particularly Indigenous and Afro-descendant people. Although these are very important contributions, except for Brazil, the literature on representative bureaucracy in the region still falls short in offering complete depictions of public administration in ethnoracial terms. Moreover, the historical development and complexity of identity formation processes in Latin America have not been fully incorporated in these studies yet.

That complexity is especially relevant for the Mexican case, where the administrative state has historically played an important role in shaping ethnoracial identities around the narrative of *Mestizaje*—that claims that all Mexicans are “*Mestizos*” or people of mixed descent—thus shaping the expectations for bureaucratic representation, as discussed next.

The Administrative State and Ethnoracial Categories, Setting the Expectations for Representation in Mexico

Research on representative bureaucracy and social equity at the cross-national level needs to pay significant attention to national politics and the larger local sociohistorical context (Gooden et al. 2023; Meier and Morton 2015), as these factors influence both identity formation processes and the main values held by the administrative state. These elements, in turn, frame the normative expectations for the composition of public administration in ethnoracial terms (i.e., which groups *should be* represented and why) and the ability of public organizations to achieve passive and active representation (which groups can access and effectively influence the administrative state) (Meier and Morton 2015; Meier and Rutherford 2020). Thus, although a full discussion of the Mexican sociopolitical context is out

of the scope of this article, an account of the different phases that the administrative state has gone through and the ways in which ethnoracial identities have been constructed in each of those eras is useful to better frame this research and its results.

Previous literature in public administration has roughly divided the development of the Mexican state into three periods: the colonial era (1521–1821), the independence and the single-party regime (1821–2000), and the transition to democracy and economic liberalization, (1980s–2018) (Arellano-Gault 1999; Pardo 2013). Arguably, a fourth phase emerged in 2018 and remains in place at the federal level with the so-called governments of the “fourth transformation” or *cuarta transformación* (Sánchez-Castañeda et al. 2022). Each era added to the current institutional and administrative framework that in turn sets the expectations for the composition of public administration in ethnoracial terms that lies at the core of this study.

In colonial times (1521–1821), the strong need for political and administrative control from the metropolis to the colony and within the colony itself gave origin to *patrimonialism* and hierarchical centralism; order was the main political and administrative value, and agreement between central and local powers was the basis for administration (Arellano-Gault 1999). The emphasis on political order was also at the core of the ethnoracial regime of the colonial society, structured around the “Caste System” (*Sistema de Castas*), a social arrangement that distributed burdens and privileges through relatively fixed categories or “castes” created around notions of purity/miscegenation and religiosity (Martínez 2009). Thus, governmental positions were mainly held by individuals from the most privileged groups, namely Spaniards, *Criollos*, and other castes with a “mixture close enough” to that of Spaniards. It was also during the colonial period that the term “*Mestizo*” arose, as a category to name the descendants of Indigenous peoples and Spaniards (Martínez 2009).

The Caste System was formally abolished when Mexico achieved its independence from Spain, in 1821, but the need for political stability remained a high priority for the survival of the new nation (Merrill et al. 1997). In consequence, during the 19th and 20th centuries *patrimonialism* muted, diminishing the power of local bosses, and eventually transitioning toward an even more centralized and hierarchical political system after the 1917 Revolution (Oropeza 1998). At the center of

that system was the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*) or PRI, a political organization founded in 1929 that either repressed or coopted diverse social sectors through a combination of benefaction and authoritarianism (Schroeder 2016). This system, aptly dubbed *presidentialism*, functioned in a highly centralized and ordered manner, with the president at the top providing stability through a downward patronage chain and acting as ultimate arbiter during internal conflicts (Arellano-Gault 2000; Rodriguez and Ward 1991). That order was nevertheless achieved at the expense of inefficiencies, delays, duplications, corruption, and patron-client practices along the whole administrative apparatus (Méndez 2010; Rodriguez and Ward 1991).

Importantly, under *presidentialism*, the PRI revamped, promoted, and politically capitalized on the Mestizaje ideology as a nation-building narrative of a new “national identity” (that of the Mestizo) arising from the supposed “biological” and cultural mixture of Spaniards and Indigenous populations (Blanco 2024; LAPORA n.d.; Martínez Casas et al. 2014; Wade 2010, 2017).² The adoption and diffusion of Mestizaje as a state-sponsored narrative/ideology had several important consequences in terms of the social construction and hierarchization of ethnoracial categories, framing the expectations around bureaucratic representation in modern Mexico.

First and foremost, it effectively placed the Mestizo as the dominant ethnoracial category, associating it with national identity and asserting the Mestizo as the “quintessential Mexican” (Sue 2013; Trejo and Altamirano 2016). Second, the Mestizaje narrative successfully erased references to race and racism, under the idea that racism cannot exist in a *racially mixed* society in which “all Mexicans are Mestizos” (Knight 1990; Moreno Figueroa and Saldívar Tanaka 2016; Sue 2013). Thus, inequalities came to be explained largely by class, ruling out alternative explanations based on ethnoracial identities and/or phenotypical features (Martínez Casas et al. 2014; Trejo and Altamirano 2016).

Third, the proclaimed union of Spaniards and Indigenous peoples as the only source of Mestizaje excluded Afro-descendants and other minoritized groups from the national narrative, allowing for Anti-Black-

ness to flourish in the country (Moreno Figueroa 2020; Velázquez and Iturralde 2016a, 2016b). Fourth, the Mestizaje ideology fostered a contradictory narrative of and towards Indigenous peoples, both as a “source of pride from the past” while treating actual Indigenous peoples as “backward” populations that were “blocking the modernization of the country” (Knight 1990; Pardo 2013). Consequently, it was by diluting rather than affirming their individual and collective identities (i.e., “becoming” Mestizos) that minoritized populations could find a place in the Mexican nation (Pardo 2013; Trejo and Altamirano 2016). Lastly, despite its “raceless” discourse, the Mestizaje narrative kept exalting Whiteness as an ideal of superiority to aspire to, equating it with notions of modernity and progress (Blanco 2024; Knight 1990; Lomnitz in Deans-Smith and Katzew 2009).

A third “phase” in the history of the administrative apparatus in Mexico came in the mid-1980s, when amid growing discontent on the political and economic fronts, the PRI-regime attempted a major transformation, in a dual process that involved democratic concessions and economic liberalization (Cejudo 2008). In the process, intergovernmental relationships were also modified through decentralization efforts carried out under New Public Management–inspired programs. These initiatives were aimed at increasing efficiency and effectiveness through a service-oriented culture rooted in accountability, evaluation, and citizens’ rights (Arellano-Gault 2000; Cejudo 2008; Rodriguez and Ward 1991). Key among them was the creation of a career civil service in 2003, based on meritocratic ideals and seeking to put an end to the spoils system, corruption, and patronage that were prevalent in the federal administration (Cejudo 2008; Méndez 2000, 2010). Under that logic, the ethnoracial origin of bureaucrats was once again perceived as irrelevant, as the system sought to hire and advance the professional career of the “best candidates,” regardless of their ethnoracial origin, at least in theory.

Yet again, while the so-called neoliberal state adopted the New Public Management rhetoric, it also embraced the “multicultural turn,” with the creation of the Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples in 2003, and the endorsement of the United Nations’ Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 (Pardo 2013). This resulted in a conflicting approach between the recognition of Indigenous peo-

2. For a full discussion of Mestizaje, its relationship with Whiteness and the implications of this relationship for social equity in Mexico, see Blanco (2024).

ples as rightful subjects of public policies and a rhetoric of efficiency and profitability that subsumed ethnoracial identities under the notion of “citizenship,” ignoring the socioeconomic conditions and challenges of historically marginalized populations (Pardo 2013). It is not surprising then that the issue of passive representation of ethnoracial groups was not part of the public agenda, and thus by 2013, no data existed on the ethnoracial origin or identity of federal public employees at all (Pardo 2013).

Lastly and more recently, in a rebuttal of “neoliberalism”—at least discursively—Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) was elected president of Mexico for the 2018–2024 period. Coincidentally, during his tenure, racial injustices were arguably elevated to the public agenda, with civil society organizations, outstanding actors, and the president himself openly talking about racial inequalities and racism for the first time (Blanco 2024). These claims for racial justice were supported by a growing group of research that provided evidence of a correlation between ethnoracial identities and/or markers like skin color, and inequalities in several policy arenas in Mexico (Altamirano 2020; Arceo-Gómez and Campos-Vázquez 2012, 2014; Campos-Vázquez and Medina-Cortina 2019; Lomelín et al. 2019; Martínez Casas et al. 2014; Monroy-Gómez-Franco 2023; Monroy-Gómez-Franco and Vélez-Grajales 2021; Solís et al. 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2021; Telles et al. 2014; Telles et al. 2015; Trejo and Altamirano 2016; Vélez-Grajales and Monroy-Gómez-Franco 2024; Villarreal 2010; Woo-Mora 2022; among others).

In parallel and as the result of a long process of political mobilization, the last decade also saw important changes in the formal recognition of another largely neglected ethnoracial group in Mexico, that of Afro descendants (Velázquez and Iturralde 2016a, 2016b). Afro-Mexicans achieved Constitutional recognition in 2019 and were counted in the general population census for the first time in 2020. In this context, some symbolic yet important actions were taken by the federal government to acknowledge historical racial inequalities. Among them, the formal asks for forgiveness offered by the Mexican state to populations that have been abused because of their racialized identities (Blanco 2024), and the unprecedented nomination of three Indigenous women to lead the National Council to Prevent Discrimination, in 2021 (González 2021).

The changes above triggered novel conversations

on the need to actively open the Mexican governments to the groups that have been historically marginalized because of their ethnoracial identities, explicitly linking these concerns to the achievement of social equity (Estación Totoaba 2020; González 2021). In this context, an interesting study aimed to offer a preliminary account of the number of Indigenous Peoples and Afro-Mexicans in the federal government arose (Pérez Ramírez 2020). Using a “self-adscription automated survey,” Pérez Ramírez found that just 0.2% ($n = 2,631$) of employees within federal public administration self-identified as either Indigenous ($n = 2,149$), Afro-Mexicans or Afro descendants ($n = 404$), or both ($n = 78$). However, the public version of the study does not report any details on how the survey was designed and carried out in terms of population and sampling techniques (if any), which impedes assessing the validity, reliability, and generalizability of their results.

More importantly, as mentioned earlier, the work by Pérez Ramírez (2020) did not inquire about other ethnoracial identities that public employees were likely to identify with, namely those of Mestizos and Whites, leaving the question of the representativeness of the different ethnoracial groups in the Mexican federal government unanswered. To answer this question, an examination of the data available on the ethnoracial composition of the Mexican population is needed, as a reference to compare the results of this study with.

Assessing the Ethnoracial Composition of the Mexican Population

Despite the growing interest in racism and racial inequalities, and maybe as another proof of the pervasiveness of the Mestizaje myth, official figures of the Mexican population by ethnoracial groups are scarce and incomplete, at best. The population census has historically inquired only about Indigenous identities using the language criterion and incorporating self-identification in 2000. In contrast, Afro-Mexican populations were not officially counted until the 2015 intercensal survey (INEGI 2018) and more recently during the 2020 general population count, as stated before. According to data from the 2020 census, 23.2 million Mexicans self-identified as Indigenous then, and 7.1 million out of them declared to speak an Indigenous language, while 2.57 million or 2% of the total population self-identified as Black, Afro-Mexican,

or Afro-descendant (INEGI 2021a, 2021b). Similarly, in 2016, the Intergenerational Social Mobility Module (MMSI) inquired on the “racial origin” of people aged 25 to 64 in Mexico and found that 61.2% of respondents self-identified as Mestizos, 13.9% as Indigenous, 11.6% as Whites, 10.2% Unspecified, and 3.1% as members of Other Race (INEGI 2017).

Three unofficial surveys offer a more comprehensive picture of the ethnoracial origins of the Mexican population: The AmericasBarometer of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA), and the Project on Ethnoracial Discrimination (PRODER). All these datasets are representative at the national level. However, as Table 1 shows, they differ in the age range of their target populations, the sample size, the years in which data were collected, and in the categories used, especially as to the inclusion of and language employed for Afro-descendants. The categories used to refer to people of African descent in Mexico are particularly disputed, and include terms like *Negros*, *Morenos*, *Prietos*, *Afro-Mexicanos*, *Mulatos*, among several others (Velázquez and Iturralde 2016a, 2016b; Sue 2021). Out of them, the terms Black person (*Persona Negra*), Afro-Mexican or Afro descendant are the ones that have proven useful and acceptable to refer to Black populations in the intercensal survey, the national census, and field research conducted in areas with important Black populations in Mexico (Sue 2021).

Thus, for the purpose of having a baseline to compare the data on public employees obtained for this research, the categories employed by the PRODER survey were followed. The reason was twofold: (1) The PRODER survey had published the most recent dataset available at the time when data was collected for this study, as compared for example to the PERLA and MMSI datasets (2) and it employs the most accepted categories to refer to Black populations.

Moreover, the PRODER survey was developed specifically “to collect statistical information about racism, ethnoracial discrimination perceptions, and socioeconomic inequality in Mexico” (PRODER n.d., para. 1). The questionnaire asked people aged 25 to 64 years old to self-identify by race and ethnic group, using open-ended questions first and offering specific categories afterward. The specific wording employed there was as follows: “I would like to ask you some questions on the way that you self-identify. In our country, there are people with multiple features and origins. Could you tell me what do you think your race is? . . . And which do you think your ethnic group is?” Then, the PRODER questionnaire offered specific categories for self-identification, by asking “Do you consider yourself . . . an Indigenous person, a Black person, a White person, a Mestizo person, other, or none of those?” (PRODER 2019, 3).

The results of the PRODER survey show that race and ethnicity are categories that most Mexicans are not

Table 1. Mexican Population by Ethnoracial Origin, PRODER, PERLA, MMSI and LAPOP Surveys

Ethnoracial group	PRODER ^a	PERLA ^b	MMSI ^a	LAPOP ^b
	(2019, n = 7,187)	(2010, n = 1,000)	(2016, n = 25,634)	(2021, n = 1,500)
Mestizo people	57.50%	64.30%	61.20%	50.00%
White people	9.60%	13.00%	11.60%	19.60%
Indigenous peoples	27.00%	11.90%	13.90%	13.20%
Black people/Afro-Mexican	3.00%	3.00%	N.A.	1.80%
Another group	0.40%	3.00%	3.1%†	14.00%
No group	19.00%	4.8%±	10.2%*	1.4%‡
Total percentage	116.50%	100%	100%	100%

Notes: a Individuals 25 to 64 years of age; b Individuals 18 and older; * Unspecified; † Including Black people; ‡Mulatto; ±Don't know/ not available. The total percentage for the PRODER survey is larger than 100 because the instrument allowed multiple categories to be selected.

familiar with. When asked the open-ended questions above, 35% of respondents declared that they did not know their race, and 50% did the same when asked about their ethnic group. Furthermore, 22% and 8% of respondents declared not having a race or ethnic group, respectively (Solís et al. 2020a). However, when specific categories were offered, Solís and his colleagues found that 81% of respondents selected at least one of them. In their survey, most of the participants (57.5%) selected Mestizo, followed by Indigenous (27%), and followed by people who selected the “none of them” option (19%). People who self-identified as White accounted for nearly 10%, Black people 3% and Other groups, just 0.4% (Solís et al. 2020a).

Methodology and Data Collection

Population, Sampling, and Data

The study population for this research was comprised of public administrators of the 19 secretaries of state at the federal level ($n = 211,184$; INEGI 2021c). A sampling frame was created using the information publicly available at the National Transparency website (*Portal Nacional de Transparencia*, hereafter referred to as PNT) as mandated by the General Act of Transparency and Access to Public Information (Article 70).

As Table 2 shows, by January 21, 2022, the PNT reported information available for 138,568 bureaucrats in the 19 secretaries of state. However, after cleaning the data, the number of unique entries that included at least the full name and email address of public employees was just 49,460. Table 2 also shows significant differences regarding the number of employees per state secretary reported in the National Census of the Federal Government (2020) and the number of employees whose information was actually available via the PNT. These differences may be due to the lag between the time information was collected for the NCFG and the data from the PNT was retrieved. Similarly, Table 2 shows important variations in the degree of compliance with transparency laws. Taken together, these discrepancies represent an important limitation of the data available to assess the representativeness of bureaucracy in Mexico. These figures were, however, the most updated and accurate available at the time of the study, to the best of knowledge of the researcher.

With the data obtained, a file was created, and the 49,460 entries were randomized. Then the first 15,000

public employees were emailed an invitation to complete the survey in a staggered manner (5,000 per week, for three weeks) following the standard ethical guidelines for conducting research using online surveys. A staggered process was followed for practical reasons, as it allowed the researcher to increase the number of invitations in the hope of increasing the number of respondents to the survey.

By March 21, 2022, all three groups had received three rounds of emails: invitation, first reminder, and last reminder, with around 2,000 undelivered emails in total. The main reason was the servers rejecting some of the emails, but no consistent pattern of rejection was evident. In this manner, considering the undelivered emails, the survey was fully answered by 404 federal bureaucrats, a 3.1% response rate (404/13,000). Assuming a random response to the survey, with this number of responses, valid inferences on the population can be made with a confidence level of 95% and a 5% margin error (Newman and McNeil 1998). This is, however, a highly problematic assumption, as discussed in detail while assessing the limitations of this research; thus, the data collected and discussed in this article must be considered exploratory in nature.

Survey on Ethnoracial Categories and Skin Color in Public Administration, SESPA

The SESPA questionnaire was created and distributed using Qualtrics. The survey had a minimum of 25 questions and a maximum of 29; up to five of the questions were open-ended and the rest of them were closed questions, for an average estimated completion time of 10 minutes. The survey was divided into four sections: (1) general information, (2) ethnoracial information and skin color, (3) personal experiences with ethnoracial categories and skin color in the workplace, and (4) school attainment and professional experience. The instrument was pretested with a pool of local experts in public administration and bureaucrats at the federal level using a convenience sample ($n = 20$). They provided feedback on the clarity of the goals, instructions, and language, among other technical and theoretical aspects of the survey.

As stated earlier, the questions employed to assess the ethnoracial origin of the respondents closely followed the language and strategy used in the PRODER survey (2019), inviting bureaucrats to identify their race and their ethnic group using open-ended questions first to try

Table 2. Agency Size, Data Reported in the PNT, and Degree of Compliance with Transparency Obligations

Secretary	Number of employees (CNGE, 2020)	Employees per Secretary/ Total number of employees for 19 Secretaries (%)	Number of entries in the PNT (January 21, 2022)	Unique entries in PNT	Unique entries per agency/ total number of unique entries (%)	Degree of compliance with transparency laws (unique entries/ total number of employees) (%)
Agriculture and Rural Development	8,744	4.1	5,375	963	1.9	11.01
Welfare	33,363	15.8	43,997	6,900	13.9	20.68
Culture	2,976	1.4	528	509	1.0	17.10
Agrarian, Territorial, and Urban Development	1,605	0.8	536	452	0.9	28.16
Economics	2,770	1.3	4,242	1,143	2.3	41.26
Public Education	103,136	48.8	34,038	14,116	28.5	13.69
Energy	835	0.4	1,539	444	0.9	53.17
Interior	3,392	1.6	2,598	1,307	2.6	38.53
Finance and Public Credit	5,194	2.5	5,400	1,551	3.1	29.86
Infrastructure, Communications, and Transportation	13,344	6.3	10,884	7,048	14.2	52.82
Defense	1,924	0.9	221	66	0.1	3.43
Civil Service	1,909	0.9	2,506	2,188	4.4	114.61
Labor and Social Welfare	5,544	2.6	3,889	3,366	6.8	60.71
Navy	1,472	0.7	63	63	0.1	4.28
Environment and Natural Resources	3,452	1.6	13,919	3,433	6.9	99.45
Foreign Affairs	3,709	1.8	3,600	3,273	6.6	88.24
Health	15,759	7.5	557	553	1.1	3.51
Security and Civilian Protection	1,423	0.7	3,277	803	1.6	56.43
Tourism	633	0.3	1,399	1,382	2.8	218.33
Total	211,184	100	138,568	49,560	100	23.47

Note: Elaborated with data from the National Census of the Federal Government, 2020, and the National Transparency Portal.

to minimize a priming effect (Parkin 2008; Telles et al. 2014). These questions read: What would you say is your race? What would you say is your ethnic group? Then, specific categories were offered, asking them if they consider themselves Indigenous, Black, Afro-Mexicans, or Afro descendants, Whites, Mestizos, or from another or neither group.

To assess the salience of different identities (Randel 2002), the survey used a five-point Likert scale (from extremely likely to extremely unlikely; Vagias 2006), and probed: If you were asked to describe the members of your closest group of work, how likely would it be for you to employ each of the following categories: The gender of your coworkers, the ethnoracial identity of your coworkers, the place of origin of your coworkers, the social class of your coworkers, the skin color of your coworkers, or the sexual preference of your coworkers?

Data was analyzed using Qualtrics, eliminating incomplete responses as well as those by individuals who did not agree to participate or declared not being a federal public officer at the time. Data was further filtered by categories to obtain the results below.

Results

Gender, Place of Origin, and Education

By gender, 47% of the 404 respondents were female, 52% male, and 1% preferred to self-identify in other ways. Nearly half of the participants (48%) declared to have a bachelor's degree, 37% a master's, and 6% a doctoral degree. The rest of them (9%) reported a high school diploma as their highest academic achievement. Regarding place of origin, 49.5% of respondents reported being born in Mexico's capital, Mexico City, 7.4% in the neighboring State of Mexico, followed by Jalisco, Puebla, and Veracruz, with 3% of respondents each. The overrepresentation of Mexico City is not surprising due to the historical centralism of the country discussed earlier. This concentration may have influenced the results on ethnoracial identity reported next.

Ethnoracial Identity

As was the case in the PRODER survey (2019), open-ended questions on race and ethnicity generated varied responses, showing a general lack of understanding, confusion, and in many cases, open rejection of both notions. Common answers on both race and ethnicity included mentioning the Mestizo category as both a

race and an ethnicity, but also mentioning Human/Homo Sapiens, Mexican, Latino, and I don't know, among other responses. However—and again, mirroring the results of the PRODER survey—when specific categories were offered, all respondents of the SESPA selected one category. When presented with a set of options, participants overwhelmingly self-identified as Mestizos ($n = 303$ or 75%), followed far behind by White ($n = 62$, or 15.35%), Indigenous ($n = 14$, or 3.47%), none (3.22%), from other group (2.23%), and just three public officers (0.74%) self-identified as Blacks or Afro-Mexicans. Thus, in ethnoracial terms and according to this exploratory data, public administration at the federal level in Mexico would be comprised almost entirely by individuals who consider themselves either Mestizo or White (90%), while Afro-Mexicans and Indigenous public officers would just add to 4% of public employees. When comparing these numbers with those of the PRODER survey, both Mestizos and Whites would be overrepresented and Afro-descendants and Indigenous people would be underrepresented in federal public administration. The potential underrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in this comparison would be particularly acute, with a 23.13% gap between the SESPA and PRODER surveys.

Table 3. Ethnoracial Self-Identification of Individuals Aged 25 to 64 Years in Federal Public Administration and the General Population in Mexico. SESPA and PRODER Surveys

Ethnoracial group	Federal public employees (SESPA, $n = 362$)	Mexican population (PRODER, $n = 7,187$)
Mestizo	74.31%	57.5%
Indigenous peoples	3.87%	27.0%
White	15.19%	9.6%
Black/Afro-Mexican	0.83%	3.0%
Other group	2.49%	0.4%
No group	3.31%	19.0%
Total percentage	100.0%	116.5%

Note: The total percentage for the PRODER survey is larger than 100 because the instrument allowed to select multiple categories.

Agency, Hierarchical Level, and Ethnoracial Identity by Hierarchical Level

Regarding the organizations where respondents were employed, 21% of bureaucrats reported to be working at the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, followed by the Secretary of Public Education (19%), Secretary of Agriculture and Rural Development (10%), Secretary of Welfare (8%), Secretary of the Interior (6%), Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources (6%), and other Secretaries ranking from 1% to 4%. Public employees from two Secretaries did not complete a single survey, namely those from the National Defense and the Navy. These proportions do not correspond to the actual size of the Secretaries by number of employees as reported in the CNGE, 2020 (see Table 1). The Secretary of Foreign Affairs is particularly overrepresented, which may have implications for the validity of the results of this study, discussed later.

Following the classification of the National Census of the Federal Government (INEGI 2021c), the survey was mostly taken by mid-level bureaucrats, from Department Chief to Adjunct General Director (65%), followed by bottom-level public employees, namely administrative liaisons and operatives (24%). Top-level managers, from General Director to Secretary of State, accounted for just 8% of the respondents, with just one undersecretary and no secretaries (the two top levels in the hierarchy) taking the survey. In terms of professional experience, respondents who have been working in federal public administration between one and five years and those who have been employed for more than 25 years accounted for 23% each, followed by public officials with 11 to 15 years of experience in public administration at the federal level (19%).

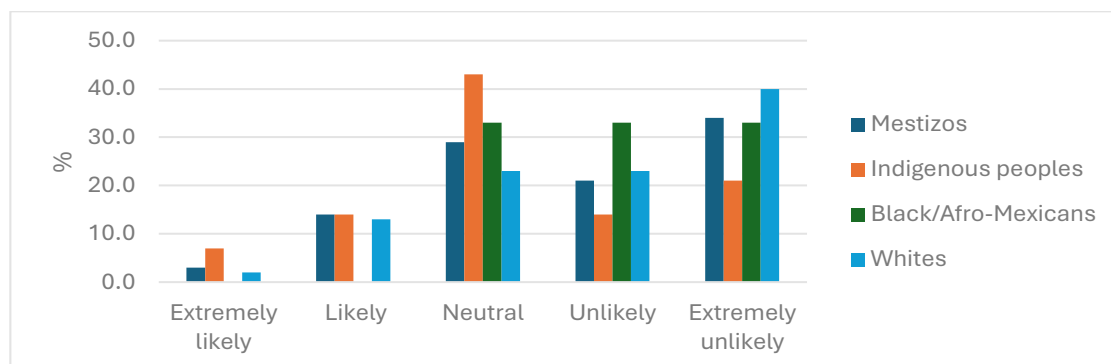
Out of the 34 top-level public officials that completed the survey, 28 self-identified as Mestizo (82%) and six as White (18%). In other words, not a single individual self-identified as Indigenous nor as Afro-Mexican at the top levels of the surveyed organizations. In contrast, the group of mid-level officials that responded to the survey ($n = 261$) included people from every single group: 75% of bureaucrats self-identified as Mestizo, followed again by White (15%), Indigenous people (4%), and just one Afro-Mexican individual. People who selected “none” and/or other ethnoracial groups accounted for 3% each. At the bottom of the hierarchy ($n = 94$), Mestizos accounted for 75%, followed by Whites with 14%, neither group 4%, and people who self-identified as Indigenous, Afro-Mexicans, or as part of any other group with 2% each.

Identity Salience

In terms of identity salience, most of the public employees surveyed (55%) expressed that it would be either extremely unlikely (34%) or unlikely (21%) for them to use ethnoracial categories to describe the members of their closest work group. In contrast, just 3% percent selected the “extremely likely” option, and 13% selected “likely.” When breaking these perceptions by ethnoracial categories, two out of the three Afro-Mexicans surveyed reported that it would be either extremely unlikely or unlikely for them to use the ethnoracial identity of their colleagues to describe them. Similarly, 63% of their White counterparts selected the extremely unlikely (40%) and unlikely options (23%), while 34% and 21% of Mestizos did so, respectively (see Figure 1).

In contrast, out of the identities tested, gender was the most salient one, as bureaucrats who took the survey

Figure 1. Perceived Salience of Ethnoracial Identities of Federal Public Officers in Mexico by Ethnoracial Groups



declared that it would be likely (25%) and extremely likely (17%) that they would use that category to describe their colleagues.

Discussion, Limitations, and Implications

The results above suggest that public administration at the federal level in Mexico may not be representative of the different ethnoracial groups of the country when comparing the results of the SESPA with those of the PRODER survey. According to these exploratory data, Black and Indigenous people would be underrepresented, with the gap between public employees who self-identified as Indigenous (3.87%) at the federal level and the actual share of Indigenous people in the country (27%) being particularly striking. In contrast, individuals who self-identified as Mestizos and Whites would be overrepresented, with White public administrators (15.19%) nearly duplicating the share of White people in the overall population (9.6%).

The underrepresentation of historically marginalized populations would also be observed in different degrees when comparing the results of the SESPA survey with the other datasets available on the ethnoracial composition of the Mexican population (see Tables 4 and 5). These comparisons, however, are not as accurate as the SESPA-PRODER one, for the reasons discussed earlier in this article (see Assessing the Ethnoracial Composition of Mexico).

Table 4. Ethnoracial Self-Identification of Individuals Aged 18 Years and Older in Federal Public Administration and the General Population in Mexico. SESPA, PERLA, and LAPOP

Ethnoracial group	SESPA (n = 382)	PERLA	LAPOP
Mestizo	74.87%	64.30%	50.00%
Indigenous peoples	3.40%	11.90%	13.20%
White	15.18%	13.00%	19.60%
Black/Afro-Mexican	0.79%	3.00%	1.80%
Other group	2.36%	3.00%	14.00%
No group	3.40%	4.8%±	1.4%‡
Total percentage	100.0%	100%	100%

Note: ‡ Mulatto; ± Don't know/not available.

Table 5. Ethnoracial Self-Identification of Individuals Aged 25 to 64 Years in Federal Public Administration and the General Population in Mexico. SESPA and MMSI Surveys

Ethnoracial group	SESPA (n = 362)	MMSI
Mestizo	74.31%	61.20%
Indigenous peoples	3.87%	13.90%
White	15.19%	11.60%
Black/Afro-Mexican	0.83%	N.A.
Other group	2.49%	3.1%**
No group	3.31%	10.2%*
Total percentage	100.0%	100%

Note: * Unspecified; ** Including Black people.

In sum, instead of mirroring the demographics of Mexican society, public administration at the federal level would look like a “distorted mirror” that may be exaggerating the images and arguably the influence of Mestizos and Whites, while potentially diminishing the presence and influence of Indigenous peoples and Afro-Mexicans in the decision-making processes of public organizations at the federal level. However, unlike the innocuous images of the mirrors at a funhouse, this “distorted mirror” of public administration may have perverse effects on the chances to advance social equity in the country. The exploratory data obtained through the SESPA survey also suggests that Afro-Mexicans and Indigenous populations may not have the chance of having their voices, values, and concerns represented in public organizations, at least not directly.

In addition, the potential lack of representation of historically marginalized populations showed here may have adverse effects in terms of symbolic representation, negatively affecting the relationship between Indigenous and Black populations with the federal government in terms of trust, perceived legitimacy, and the willingness to cooperate and/or coproduce (Meier 2023; Meier and Rutherford 2020; Riccucci and Van Ryzin 2017). Moreover, the chances to advance social equity in Mexico may be further harmed by the lack of representation of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican public administrators in the top levels of the bureaucratic hierarchy of the 19 secretaries of state, according to the exploratory data presented here. As stated earlier, evidence shows that the

positive effects of bureaucratic representation are augmented when ethnoracial “minorities” hold top-level positions in governmental agencies (Naff 2001; Peters 2013), which may not be the case in Mexican bureaucracy at the federal level.

At the same time, results of this research suggest that race and ethnicity, separately and grouped under the notion of ethnoracial categories, may not be salient identities for federal public administrators in Mexico. Not only did they struggle when asked openly to self-identify in ethnoracial terms, but most of them also rejected the idea of using ethnoracial categories to describe their coworkers. These findings are aligned with those of Solís and his colleagues of the PRODER project (Solís, et al. 2020a), but most importantly, they suggest that active representation would not be triggered, even if passive representation is achieved (Meier and Morton 2015; Meier and Rutherford 2020; Randel 2002; Riccucci and Van Ryzin 2017). Ultimately, the impossibility of advancing from passive to active representation would also harm the chances of advancing social equity in the country. This finding also raises questions on the potential and limits of ethnoracial categories to study representative bureaucracy in Mexico, and possibly in other settings in which “race” is not a salient social category. Due to the local (and regional) evidence that links skin color with several inequalities (Telles et al. 2025), that phenotypical marker emerges as a potential alternative to be incorporated into studies on representative bureaucracy.

The potential overrepresentation of Mestizos and Whites and the possible underrepresentation of Blacks and Indigenous populations in public administration, plus the perceived lack of importance of ethnoracial identities, may be having negative effects on social equity, through the symbolic and active dimensions of bureaucratic representation. However, Afro-Mexicans and Indigenous populations could still be actively represented by bureaucrats who do not share their ethnoracial origins, as argued by Pardo (2013), thus actually increasing the chances to enhance social equity. Empirical research is further needed to prove or disprove these scenarios.

The causes for the underrepresentation of Black and Indigenous groups, if verified by more robust data, may be diverse and include inequalities in education access and attainment that make it more challenging for those populations to achieve undergraduate and graduate education (Lomelín et al. 2019; Monroy-Gómez-Franco 2023; Solís et al. 2019), as well as well-justified per-

ceptions of the Mexican state as illegitimate in the first place (Aguilar Gil 2018), among other reasons. But the data presented here may be indicating another equity problem, that of the potential discrimination against Afro-Mexicans and Indigenous peoples in the hiring and promotion processes of public administration at the federal level in Mexico. The fact that the *Mestizaje* narrative has historically promoted anti-Blackness (Moreno Figueroa and Saldívar Tanaka 2016; Velázquez and Iturralde 2016a and 2016b) and portrayed Indigenous populations as “backward” (Knight 1990), plus the mounting evidence on ethnoracial inequalities referred to earlier in this text, supports the possibility of a biased treatment against these historically marginalized groups. Again, empirical research will be needed in this regard to back up or refute this possibility.

Finally, to better assess the possible implications of the ethnoracial composition of Mexican public administration, an intragroup study of the data related to the dominant ethnoracial category, that of the *Mestizo*, is needed. Public officials who self-identified as *Mestizos* are likely to have important differences not only in terms of overlapping identities (*Mestizo* and *White/Black/Indigenous*) and phenotypical features such as skin color, but also in values, understanding of public service, among other aspects potentially related to representative bureaucracy and equity. Thus, the study of the *Mestizo* identity in public service may allow us to paint a more accurate picture of the distorted mirror of Mexican public administration.

This research has several limitations. First, despite the mandates in terms of transparency, the data available at the PNT did not accurately reflect the actual size of federal agencies as measured by the number of employees (see Table 1). This affected the chances that public employees had to be invited to complete the *SESPA* survey, artificially increasing the relative chances to participate for public employees in organizations with high levels of compliance (i.e., accurately reporting contact information) and diminishing the opportunity for those in organizations that barely complied with transparency laws.

Second, and most importantly, the assumption of a random response to the survey is problematic for several reasons. Due to the nature of the topic, self-selection bias may have occurred, with public employees who have been socialized to notions of “race” and those with more time and availability being more likely to take the

survey. The fact that one in five respondents were from the Secretary of Foreign Affairs—which has its largest representation in the United States—seems to support this possibility. Similarly, the fact that just a small fraction of top-level public officials took the survey suggests that federal public employees with higher levels of responsibility and probably less free time available may have opted out of the survey.

Among public employees who completed the survey, social desirability may have occurred around ethnoracial self-identification as well. As this paper showed, *Mestizaje* is a powerful and still highly prevalent national ideology. This narrative is reinforced by the educational system, and self-ascription to the *Mestizo* category tends to increase with educational attainment (Solís et al. 2020a). Similarly, a preference for a white phenotype and Whiteness more broadly (Blanco 2024), and a profound sentiment of anti-Blackness (Moreno Figueroa 2020) are part and parcel of Mexican culture and can thus be contributing to social desirability within respondents of the SESA survey.

Despite the limitations above, this research presents the first attempt to explore the degree in which all the different ethnoracial groups are represented – or not– in public administration at the federal level in Mexico. Employing the literature on representative bureaucracy, this paper also examined the possible consequences of such composition in terms of social equity. But the data and discussions offered here have at least one more obvious implication: that of the implementation of corrective actions for the underrepresentation of historically marginalized populations. These measures could take the form of affirmative actions and/or quotas in federal public administration, and/or the educational pipeline of the federal government. The Brazilian case could be a footprint for these measures, with legally mandated data collection on ethnoracial categories as a necessary condition (Bello-Gomez et al. 2024; Dias Silva and Lopez 2021). The viability of such measures, given the current legal framework, its implementation challenges, and the elements needed to overcome such difficulties must be fully examined in future work.

REFERENCES

- Aguilar Gil, Yásnaya. E. 2018. “Nosotros sin México: Naciones Indígenas y Autonomía.” *Revista Nexos*. <https://cultura.nexos.com.mx/nosotros-sin-mexico-naciones-indigenas-y-autonomia>
- Altamirano, Melina. 2020. “Estratificación Racial en el Uso de Servicios y Programas Sociales en México. Percepciones, Estereotipos y Sesgos Implícitos.” *Documento de Trabajo # 4 Proyecto sobre Discriminación Étnico-Racial en México* (PRODER). El Colegio de México.
- Appelbaum, Nancy P., Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Roseblatt, eds. 2003. *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Arceo-Gómez, Eva O., and Raymundo M. Campos-Vázquez. 2012. “Discriminación en el Mercado Laboral Mexicano: Un Experimento de Campo.” In *Premio Nacional de Investigación Social y de Opinión Pública 2012*, edited by Guadalupe Meixueiro Nájera, and Saúl Moreno Pérez, 123–157. México, D.F.: CESOP.
- Arceo-Gómez, Eva O., and Campos-Vázquez, R. 2014. “Race and Marriage in the Labor Market: A Discrimination Correspondence Study in a Developing Country.” *American Economic Review: Papers and Proceedings*, 104 (5): 376–380. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.104.5.376>
- Arellano-Gault, David. 1999. “Mexican Public Sector Reform: Patrimonialist Values and Governmental Organisational Culture in Mexico.” *International Review of Public Administration*, 4 (2): 67–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/12294659.1999.10804934>
- Arellano-Gault, David. 2000. “Challenges for the New Public Management: Organizational Culture and the Administrative Modernization Program in Mexico City (1995–1997).” *American Review of Public Administration*, 30 (4), 400–413. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02750740022064740>
- Arvate, Paulo, Sandro Cabral, Anita McGahan, and Paulo Reis. 2021. “Structural Advocacy Organizations and Intersectional Outcomes: The Role of Women Police Stations.” *Academy of Management Proceedings*, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMBPP.2021.18>
- Bello-Gomez, Ricardo A., and Claudia N. Avellaneda. 2022. “The Mayor or the People? Indigenous Identity and Differences in Managerial Practices.” *Global Public Policy and Governance* 2: 175–202. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43508-022-00039-w>
- Bello-Gomez, Ricardo A., Josefina Cárcamo Vergara, and Eduardo Gomor dos Santos. 2024. “Race and Gender in the Brazilian and Colombian Public Administrations.” In *Handbook on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Pub-*

- lic Administration*, 212–230. Edward Elgar Publishing, <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781802206173.00027>
- Bishu, Sebawit. G., and Alexis R. Kennedy. 2020. “Trends and Gaps: A Meta-Review of Representative Bureaucracy.” *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 40 (4): 559–588. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X19830154>
- Blanco, Felipe. 2024. “Whiteness, *Mestizaje*, and Social Equity.” *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 46 (2): 125–143. <http://doi:10.1080/10841806.2024.2305057>
- Blessett, Brandi, Jennifer Dodge, Beverly Edmond, Holly T. Goerdel, Susan T. Gooden, Andrea M. Headley, Norma Riccucci, and Brian N. Williams. 2019. “Social Equity in Public Administration: A Call to Action.” *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance* 56 (1): 321–343. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ppmgov/gvz016>
- Campos-Vázquez, R. M., and Eduardo M. Medina-Cortina. 2019. “Skin Color and Social Mobility: Evidence From Mexico.” *Demography* (56): 321–343. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-018-0734-z>
- Cejudo, Guillermo M. 2008. “Explaining Change in the Mexican Public Sector: The Limits of New Public Management.” *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 74 (1): 111–127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852307085737>
- Dantas Cabral, André, Alketa Peci, and Gregg G. Van Ryzin. 2021. “Representation, Reputation and Expectations Towards Bureaucracy: Experimental Findings from a Favela in Brazil.” *Public Management Review* 24 (9): 1452–1477. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2021.1906934>
- Deans-Smith, Susan, and Ilona Katzew. 2009. “Introduction: The Alchemy of Race in Mexican America.” In *Race and Classification: The Case of Mexican America*, edited by Iona Katzew and Susan Deans-Smith, 1–24. Stanford University Press.
- Dias Silva, Tatiana, and Felix Lopez, F. 2021. “Perfil Racial do Serviço Civil Ativo do Executivo Federal (1999–2020).” *Nota Técnica Diest/Ipea*, 49. <https://doi.org/10.38116/ntdiest49>
- Enloe, Cynthia H. 1978. “Ethnicity, Bureaucracy and State-Building in Africa and Latin America.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 1 (3): 336–351.
- Estación Totoaba. 2020. “Burocracia Representativa y CONAPRED.” Maestría en Administración y Políticas Públicas. Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas. <http://administracionpublica.cide.edu/burocracia-representativa-y-conapred/>
- Figueroa Huencho, Verónica, and Juan Pablo Araya Orellana. 2020. “Representative Bureaucracy: Exploring the Factors That Inhibit Active Representation in Indigenous Managers from a Latin American Case.” *International Journal of Public Administration* 44 (16): 1404–1414. <https://doi:10.1080/01900692.2020.1773496>
- Frederickson, H. George. 1990. “Public Administration and Social Equity.” *Public Administration Review* 50 (2): 238–237.
- González, Alejandro. 2021. “La Representación de las Minorías Étnicas en la Administración Pública Federal: Una Agenda Pendiente.” Medium. Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, PNUD. México. https://pnudmx.medium.com/la-representación-de-las-minorías-étnicas-en-la-administración-pública-federal-una-agenda-19b2644aa308#_ftn1
- Gooden, Susan, Richard Gregory Johnson III, Sean McCandless, and RaJade Berry-James. 2023. “The Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration: From Vision to Victory.” *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* 1 (1): 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.24926/jsepa.v1i1.4770>
- Gooden, Susan. T. 2014. *Race and Social Equity: A Nervous Area of Government*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315701301>
- Guy, Mary, and Brian Williams. 2023. “A Journal Dedicated to Social Equity and Public Administration.” *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* 1 (1): 13–18. <https://doi.org/10.24926/jsepa.v1i1.4824>
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, INEGI. 2017. “Módulo de Movilidad Social Intergeneracional 2016.” <https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/mmsi/2016/#Tabulados>
- INEGI. 2018. “Encuesta Intercensal 2015. Marco Conceptual.” https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/productos/prod_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvinegi/productos/nueva_estruc/702825098742.pdf
- INEGI. 2021a. “Censo de Población y Vivienda 2020. Presentación de Resultados. Versión Ejecutiva.” https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/ccpv/2020/doc/Censo2020_Principales_resultados_ejecutiva_EUM.pdf
- INEGI. 2021b. “Censo de Población y Vivienda 2020. Resultados Complementarios.” https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/ccpv/2020/doc/Censo2020_Resultados_complementarios_EUM.pdf
- INEGI. 2021c. “Censo Nacional de Gobierno Federal 2020. Presentación de Resultados Generales.” www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/cngf/2020/doc/cngf_2020_resultados.pdf
- Kingsley, J. Donald. 1944. *Representative Bureaucracy: An Interpretation of the British Civil Service*. The Antioch Press.
- Knight, Alan. 1990. “Racism, Revolution, and Indigenis-

- mo: Mexico, 1910–1940.” In *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940*, edited by Richard Graham. Austin: University of Texas Press, 71–113.
- LAPOP Lab. 2022 (April 1). “Americas Barometer.” LAPOP Data Playground.
- Latin American Anti-Racism in a “Post-Racial” Age Project, LAPORA, n.d. Policy Briefing. <https://www.lapora.sociology.cam.ac.uk/files/briefingen.pdf>
- Lomelín, Rojas Marco A., Jhader Aguad Revilla, and Judith A. Morrison. 2019. “Diversidad Étnico-Racial en México y su Influencia en la Movilidad Social.” *Nota Técnica del BID 1674*. Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18235/0001728>
- Long, Norton E. 1952. “Bureaucracy and Constitutionalism.” *American Political Science Review* 46 (3): 808–818.
- Loveman, Mara. 2014. *National Colors: Racial Classification and the State in Latin America*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199337354.001.0001>
- Martínez, María E. 2009. “The Language, Genealogy and Classification of ‘Race’ in Colonial Mexico.” In *Race and Classification: The Case of Mexican America*, edited by Ilona Katzew and Susan Deans-Smith. 25–42. Stanford University Press.
- Martínez Casas, Regina, Emiko Saldívar, René D. Flores, and Christina A. Sue. 2014. “The Different Faces of Mestizaje: Ethnicity and Race in Mexico”. In *Pigmentocracies: Ethnicity, Race and Color in Latin America*, edited by Edward Telles, 36–80. University of North Carolina Press.
- Meier, Kenneth J. n.d. “Representative Bureaucracy Research Archive.” Accessed March 15, 2022. <https://www.kjmeier.com/rb-article-archive>
- Meier, Kenneth J. 2023. “Representative Bureaucracy and Social Equity: Bias, Perceived Fairness and Efficacy.” *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration*, 1 (1): 23–38. <https://doi.org/10.24926/jsepa.v1i1.4814>
- Meier, Kenneth J., and Tabitha S. M. Morton. 2015. “Representative Bureaucracy in a Cross-National Context: Politics, Identity, Structure and Discretion.” In *Politics of Representative Bureaucracy: Power, Legitimacy and Performance*, edited by Guy B. Peters, Patrick Von Maravić, and Eckhard Schröter, 94–112. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Meier, K.J. and Rutherford, A. 2020. “Race and Public Administration. Current Status and Future Issues.” In *Race and Public Administration*, edited by Amanda Rutherford and Kenneth J. Meier. 163–187. Routledge.
- Méndez, José. L. 2000. “La Profesionalización del Estado Mexicano; ¿Olvidando o Esperando a Godot?” In *Lecturas Básicas de Administración y Políticas Públicas*, edited by José Luis Méndez, El Colegio de México, 477–502. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv6jmx1d.23>
- Méndez, José. L. 2010. “Implementing Developed Countries’ Administrative Reforms in Developing Countries: The Case of Mexico.” In *Comparative Administration Change and Reform: Lessons Learned*, edited by Jon Pierre and Patricia W. Ingraham. McGill-Queen’s University Press.
- Merrill, T., Miró, R., and Library of Congress. Federal Research Division. 1997. “Mexico: A Country Study.” Accessed October 10, 2022. Federal Research Division. <https://www.loc.gov/item/97013481>
- Ministério da Gestão e da Inovação em Serviços Públicos, MGISP. 2024. “Políticas Afirmativas Ampliam Presença de Pessoas Negras em Postos de Decisão do Governo Federal.” *Gestão – GOV.BR*. Accessed June 16, 2025. <https://www.gov.br/gestao/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2024/marco/politicas-afirmativas-ampliam-presenca-de-pessoas-negras-em-postos-de-decisao-do-governo-federal>
- Monroy-Gómez-Franco, Luis. 2023. “Shades of Social Mobility: Colorism, Ethnic Origin and Intergenerational Social Mobility.” *Quarterly Review of Economics and Finance* 90: 247–266. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.qref.2022.10.004>
- Monroy-Gómez-Franco, Luis, and Roberto Vélez Grajales. 2021. “Skin Tone Differences in Social Mobility in Mexico: Are We Forgetting Regional Variance?” *Journal of Economics, Race, and Policy* 4 (4): 257–274. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41996-020-00062-1>
- Moreno Figueroa, Mónica G. 2020. “¿De qué Sirve el Asco? Racismo Anti-Negro en México.” *Revista de la Universidad De México*, (864): 63–67. <https://www.revistadelauniversidad.mx/articles/1d9d5638-d8fb-46b1-a0bc-b74715ec5994/de-que-sirve-el-asco-racismo-antinegro-en-mexico>
- Moreno Figueroa, Mónica G., and Emiko Saldívar Tanaka. 2016. “‘We Are Not Racists, We Are Mexicans’: Privilege, Nationalism and Post-Race Ideology in Mexico.” *Critical Sociology* 42 (4–5), 515–533. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920515591296>
- Moreno Figueroa, Mónica G., and Peter Wade. 2024. “Introduction: The Turn to Racism and Anti-Racism in Latin America.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 47 (11): 2311–2325. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2024.2329335>
- Mosher, Frederick C. 1968. *Democracy and the Public Service*. Oxford University Press.
- Naff, Katherine C. 2001. *To Look Like America: Dismantling Barriers for Women and Minorities in Government*. Westview Press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429495625>
- Newman, Isadore, and Keith, A. McNeil. 1998. *Conduct-*

- ing Survey Research in the Social Sciences. University Press of America.
- Oropeza, M. G. 1998. "Constitution of 1917." In *Encyclopedia of Mexico: History, Society & Culture*, edited by Michael S. Werner. Routledge.
- Pardo, María del Carmen. 2013. "Representative Bureaucracy in Mexico." In *Representative Bureaucracy in Action: Country Profiles from the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia*, edited by B. Guy Peters, Patrick Von Maravi, and Eckhard Schröter, 1742–1835. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9780857935991>
- Parkin, Michael. 2008. "Priming." In *Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods*, edited by Paul J. Lavrakas. Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963947>
- Pérez Ramírez, Rodrigo. 2020. "Estudio Sobre la Participación de los Pueblos y Comunidades Indígenas y las Personas Afrodescendientes y Afromexicanas en la Administración Pública Federal (APF)." Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo – Secretaría de la Función Pública. México. <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/mx/Estudio-Participacion-Pueblos-Final.pdf>
- Peters, B. Guy. 2013. "Representative Bureaucracy in the United States." In *Representative Bureaucracy in Action: Country Profiles from the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia*, edited by B. Guy Peters, Patrick Von Maravić, and Eckhard Schröter, 21–34. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9780857935991>
- Peters, B. Guy, Eckhard Schröter, and Patrick Von Maravić. 2013. "Representative Bureaucracy: Concept, Driving Forces, Strategies." In *Representative Bureaucracy in Action: Country Profiles from the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia*, edited by Peters, B. Guy, Patrick Von Maravić, and Eckhard Schröter, 1–18. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9780857935991>
- Proyecto Sobre Discriminación Étnico-Racial en México, PRODER. n.d. "PRODER Survey, 2019." El Colegio de México. <https://discriminacion.colmex.mx/proder-survey-2019/>
- Proyecto Sobre Discriminación Étnico-Racial en México, PRODER. 2019. "Encuesta del Proyecto Sobre Discriminación Étnico-Racial en México 2019." El Colegio de México https://discriminacion.colmex.mx/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/cuestionario_proder.pdf
- Randel, Amy E. 2002. "Identity Salience: A Moderator of the Relationship Between Group Gender Composition and Work Group Conflict." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 23 (6): 749–766. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.163>
- Riccucci, Norma M., and Gregg G. Van Ryzin. 2017. "Representative Bureaucracy: A Lever to Enhance Social Equity, Coproduction, and Democracy." *Public Administration Review* 77 (1): 21–30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12649>
- Riccucci, Norma M., Gregg G. Van Ryzin, and Huafang Li. 2016. "Representative Bureaucracy and the Willingness to Coproduce: An Experimental Study." *Public Administration Review* 76 (1): 121–130. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12401>
- Rodríguez, Victoria E., and Peter M. Ward. 1991. "Opposition Politics, Power and Public Administration in Urban Mexico." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 10 (1): 23–36. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3338562>
- Sánchez-Castañeda, Alfredo, Sonia Venegas Álvarez, Pastora Melgar Manzanilla, and Daniel Márquez Gómez. 2022. *Cuarta Transformación y Administración Pública: Las Tensiones entre el Neoliberalismo y la Economía Moral*. Editorial Tirant Lo Blanch.
- Schroeder, M. J. 2016. "Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)." In *World History: A Comprehensive Reference Set*, edited by Marsha E. Ackermann, Michael J. Schroeder, Janice J. Terry, Jiu-Hwa Lo Upshur, and Mark F. Whitters. Facts On File.
- Solís, Patricio, Braulio Güémez Graniel, and Virginia Lorenzo Holm. 2019. *Por mi Raza Hablará la Desigualdad. Efectos de las Características Étnico-Raciales en la Desigualdad de Oportunidades en México*. Oxfam México.
- Solís, Patricio, Braulio Güémez Graniel, and Marcela Avitia. 2020a. "Autoadscripción Étnico-Racial en México." *Reporte de la Encuesta Proder # 2*. El Colegio de México. <https://discriminacion.colmex.mx/>
- Solís, Patricio, Marcela Avitia, and Braulio Güémez Graniel. 2020b. "Tono de Piel y Desigualdad Socioeconómica en México." *Reporte de la Encuesta Proder # 1*. El Colegio de México. <https://discriminacion.colmex.mx/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/info1.pdf>
- Solís, Patricio, Braulio Güémez Graniel, and Christina A. Sue, C. 2021. "Razones de Autoadscripción Étnico-Racial en México." *Reporte de la Encuesta Proder # 4*. El Colegio de México. https://discriminacion.colmex.mx/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/reporteproder_4.pdf
- Sue, Christina A. 2021. "Is Mexico beyond *Mestizaje*? Blackness, Race Mixture, and Discrimination." *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 18 (1): 47–74. doi:10.1080/17442222.2021.1949811.
- Sue, Christina A. 2013. *Land of the Cosmic Race: Race Mixture, Racism, and Blackness in Mexico*. Oxford University Press.
- Telles, Edward E., and Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America. 2014. *Pigmentocracies: Ethnicity, Race, and Color in Latin America*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Telles, Edward, René D. Flores, and Fernando Urrea-Giraldo. 2015. "Pigmentocracies: Educational Inequality

- ty, Skin Color and Census Ethnoracial Identification in Eight Latin American Countries.” *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 40: 39–58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2015.02.002>
- Telles, Edward E., Stanley R. Bailey, Shahin Davoudpour, and Nicholas C. Freeman. 2025. “Racial Inequality in Latin America.” *Oxford Open Economics* 4 (suppl. 1): i200–i218. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ooec/odae022>
- Trejo, Guillermo, and Melina Altamirano. 2016. “The Mexican Color Hierarchy: How Race and Skin Tone Still Define Life Chances 200 Years After Independence.” In *The Double Bind: The Politics of Racial and Class Inequalities in the Americas*, edited by Juliet Hooker and Alvin B. Tillery. American Political Science Association Publications.
- Vagias, Wade. M. 2006. *Likert-Type Scale Response Anchors*. Clemson International Institute for Tourism and Research Development, Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management. Clemson University.
- Vélez Grajales, Roberto, and Luis Monroy-Gómez-Franco. 2024. *Por una Cancha Pareja. Igualdad de Oportunidades para Lograr un México Más Justo*. Editorial Grano de Sal.
- Velázquez, María Elisa, and Gabriela Iturralde. 2016a. “Afromexicanos: Reflexiones Sobre Las Dinámicas Del Reconocimiento.” *Anales De Antropología* 50 (2): 232–246. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.antro.2016.05.002>
- Velázquez, María Elisa, and Gabriela Iturralde. 2016b. *Afrodendientes en México. Una Historia de Silencio y Discriminación*. Segunda Edición. CONAPRED. www.conapred.org.mx/documentos_cedoc/Afrodendientes_2daEdicioon_WEB.pdf
- Villarreal, Andrés. 2010. “Stratification by Skin Color in Contemporary Mexico.” *American Sociological Review* 75 (5): 652–678. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122410378232>
- Wade, Peter. 2010. *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*, 2nd ed. Pluto Press.
- Wade, Peter. 2017. “Racism and Race Mixture in Latin America.” *Latin American Research Review*, 52 (3): 477–485. <http://doi.org/10.25222/larr.124>
- Wooldridge B., and Bilharz B. 2018. “Social Equity: The Fourth Pillar of Public Administration.” In *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance*, edited by Ali Farazmand. Springer. <https://doi:10.1007/978-3-319-20928-9>
- Woo-Mora, L. Guillermo. 2022. “Unveiling the Cosmic Race: Racial Inequalities in Latin America.” World Inequality Lab Working Paper 2022/03. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3870741>
- World Bank. n.d.. “Population, Total – Latin America & Caribbean.” World Bank Open Data. Accessed June 17, 2025. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=ZJ>

Acknowledgments. I want to thank Drs. Jodi Benenson, Angela Eikenberry, Nuri Heckler, Susan Gooden, Alice Kang, and Marc Garcia for their support and guidance while conducting this research. I also want to thank Dr. Ken Meier and the three anonymous reviewers of JSEPA for their valuable comments on previous versions of this article.

Felipe Blanco (he /him/él) is an Assistant Professor in Public Administration at the University of Colorado Denver. His research interests include social equity and ethnoracial inequalities, representative bureaucracy, and comparative public administration and public policy.