

Skin color discrimination in Mexico: findings from the 2017 National Survey of Discrimination

Introduction

In Mexico, the lack of information on racial identification has resulted in the invisibility of this dimension of discrimination and inequalities in the society. The lack of racial information in modern official statistics has been pointed out as the consequence of the nation building approach in Latin American countries, where the idea of *mestizaje* was central for identity formation. As a consequence, the long-standing castas system in Mexico abolished after its independence from Spain in 1821, was replaced by the mestizo project — originally whitening project — for the consolidation of a national identity, but resulting in the notion of otherness regarding indigenous populations and other *non-integrated* minorities (Telles, 2014).

While the indigenous identity and multicultural nature of the Mexican society has been recognized at the Constitutional level, afro-mexican populations continue to be neglected in this multicultural approach (Telles, 2014). Not until recently, different data sources started collecting information on racial identity and phenotype, particularly skin color. This information has allowed academics and policy-makers identifying experiences of racial discrimination and structural racism in Mexican society. The present paper explores experiences of discrimination by skin color in Mexico following the two approaches: interpersonal and structural discrimination.

Previous research

One of the most significant researches in the field of skin-color discrimination comes from the Project of Ethnicity and Race in Latin America project (PERLA). This project, using an eleven-tone palette found that most perceived discrimination was economic-based, but individuals having light or medium colored skin were less likely to identify themselves as victims of discrimination (Telles, 2014). Moreover, this same study found the presence of important discrimination against indigenous people and skin color. Using the same color palette from PERLA, the AmericasBarometer gathers information on skin color, political and economic attitudes, and demographic and socioeconomic variables. Using this information, Zizumbo and Flores (2017) identified negative relationship between skin color and wealth and educational outcomes, even after controlling for possible confounding variables.

In 2017, the Mexican Institute of Statistics and Geography released the results of the Module of Intergenerational Social Mobility 2016 (INEGI, 2017). Using PERLA's skin color scheme, the MMSI not only confirmed the aforementioned findings regarding educational attainment and wealth, but also occupational prestige and, more important, the intergenerational effects of skin color. According to INEGI, those born in the lowest quintile of income and with darker skin colors are less likely to move forward in the socioeconomic scale than those with lighter skin.

The aim of the present research is twofold. First, to explore the levels of perceived racism based on skin color, social class and their interaction. Second, to identify some of the long-term effects of skin color discrimination in three social rights dimensions: health care, education and work.

Data source and methods

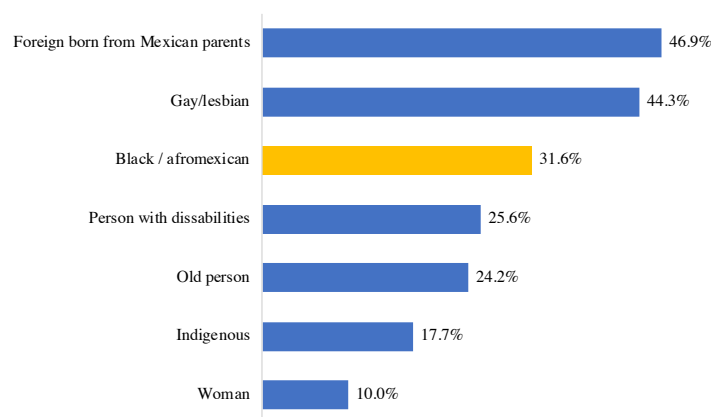
The 2017 National Survey of Discrimination (ENADIS) included a color palette where individuals indicated the skin color closer to theirs. This was the first time that a major survey in Mexico, sponsored by the official sources and with information collected by the National Institute of Statistics (INEGI) included this information in a survey to measure different components of discrimination¹. ENADIS used the PERLA palette, resulting in eleven skin tone categories.

Using the information from the skin color palette and the demographic and socioeconomic information from the survey I estimate the Dissimilarity Index (DI) for the distribution of each population into the categories of three key dimensions: health care provider, educational attainment, and occupation. Using the DI the present analysis focuses on the structural component of discrimination.

Findings

According to information from ENADIS 2017, 94.8% of Mexicans say that they would agree their son or daughter marrying a poor person, but only 87.3% would agree they marrying a black person. This clear distinction between the two percentages indicates that, while most Mexican believe social class discrimination is the most common in the country, skin color discrimination is actually higher. Another indicator of this, is the share of the population that indicates if they would not like the president to be black or afromexican. Almost one out of three Mexicans are against the idea of having a black president, only below a foreign born or gay/lesbian person.

Figure 1. Percentage of population ages 18 and older disagreeing with having a black president, 2017.



Data source: ENADIS 2017.

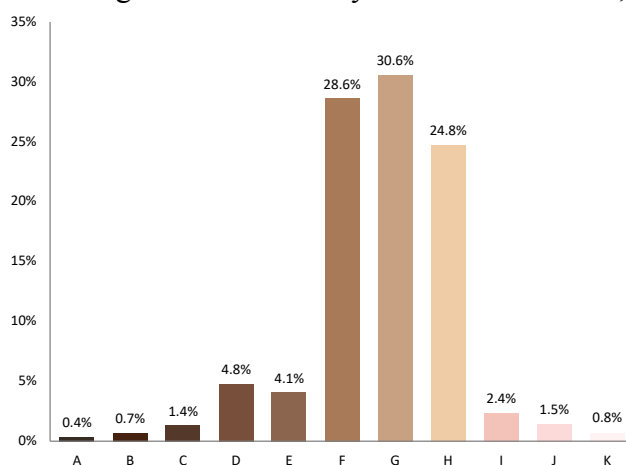
These perceptions of the general population reflect the traditional and official position regarding discrimination in the country. Moreover, when it comes to experiences of discrimination, social class discrimination was reported more frequently than skin color. In general terms, only 2.6% and 3.6% of Mexicans reported discrimination in the last year as a consequence of their skin color or class, respectively. However, among the population that reported any form of discrimination, skin color increased to 13.1% and class to 17.7%. When

¹ The 2010 ENADIS collected this information, but the survey design and sample sizes limit the analysis of the information.

considering the combination of both forms of discrimination, 36.4% of those reporting skin color discrimination also reported class discrimination; whereas 26.9% reporting class discrimination reported skin color discrimination as well.

Figure 2 shows the population distribution by their reported skin color. Almost 84% of the population ages 18 and older indicated a skin color in the categories F-H, 11.4% reported darker skin colors and 4.6% reported a lighter tone. Given the sample size, a new categorization was necessary so the tones from A-E were grouped in the darker skin group, F-G in average skin, and H-K in the lighter skin group.

Figure 2. Population ages 18 and older by declared skin color, Mexico 2017.



Data source: ENADIS 2017.

Structural discrimination

Table 1 displays the values from the dissimilarity index for different comparison groups and dimensions of structural discrimination. The reported values indicate the percentage of the population that should change categories (i.e., occupation, place of health care, etc.) in order to achieve parity or equal distribution among all the groups².

The first two sections of the table indicate the presence of a higher discrimination by skin color for women than for men, particularly for the darker skin/ average skin comparisons. We can also see higher values in education and occupation than in health care facilities. However, structural discrimination in educational attainment has more effect for the darker/average comparison, while average/lighter skin results indicate higher discrimination in occupations. The third section of table 1 aims to understand the presence of multiple sources of discrimination. First, the indigenous/non-indigenous results show a higher discrimination in the type of health care facilities than in education and occupation; however, when skin color is included, the values for education and occupation increase. Similar patterns are observed for the SES comparisons presented. Combined, findings from this preliminary analysis indicate not only the presence of skin color discrimination in Mexico from a structural perspective, but also the interaction between this and other forms of discrimination in the country.

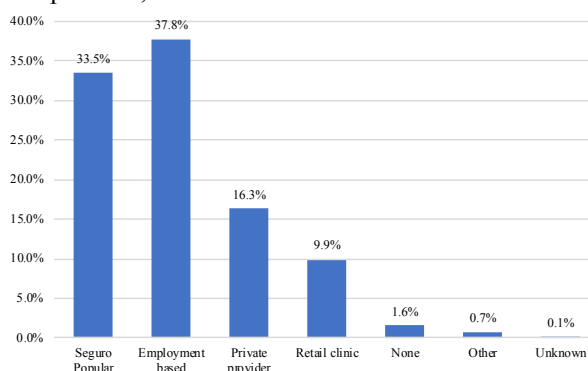
² The general distribution of Mexican population into the different categories can be found at the end of the present document.

Table 1. Dissimilarity index by population and skin color variation and dimension of structural discrimination, 2017.

Population skin tone variation	Dimension		
	Health Care	Education	Occupation
Total darker skin / Total average skin	10.6%	13.6%	12.8%
Men darker skin / Men average skin	10.7%	13.8%	11.7%
Women darker skin / Women average skin	15.3%	15.5%	14.9%
Total average skin / Total lighter skin	10.1%	10.2%	13.5%
Men average skin / Men lighter skin	9.7%	8.0%	15.4%
Women average skin / Women lighter skin	11.9%	12.2%	11.3%
Indigenous / Non-indigenous	40.2%	30.1%	32.9%
Indigenous darker skin / Non-indigenous average skin	39.3%	37.3%	35.9%
Low SES / High SES	32.4%	33.1%	32.6%
Low SES darker skin / High SES average skin	41.4%	44.2%	42.9%

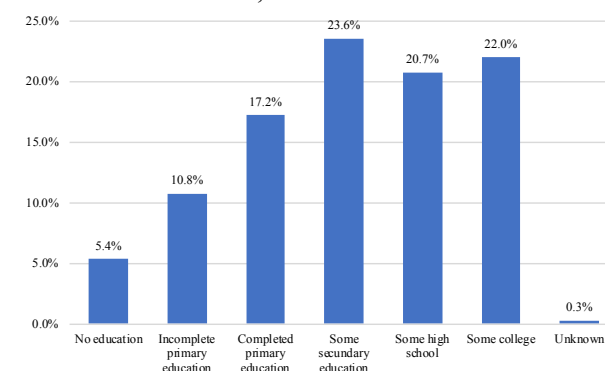
Data source: ENADIS 2017.

Figure 3. Population ages 18 and older by health care provider, 2017.



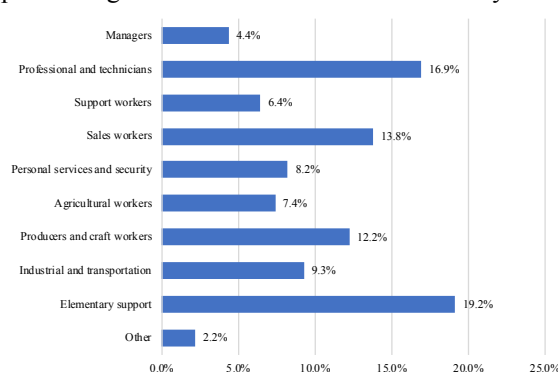
Data source: ENADIS 2017.

Figure 4. Population ages 18 and older by educational attainment, 2017.



Data source: ENADIS 2017.

Figure 5. Population ages 18 and older in the labor force by occupation, 2017.



Data source: ENADIS 2017.

References

- INEGI. (2017). Presenta INEGI, por primera vez, resultados sobre la movilidad social intergeneracional. Press release: http://www.inegi.org.mx/saladeprensa/boletines/2017/mmsi/mmsi2017_06.pdf
- Telles, E. (2014). *Pigmentocracies: Ethnicity, race, and color in Latin America*. UNC Press Books.
- Zizumbo-Colunga, D., & Martínez, I. F. (2017). *Is Mexico a Post-Racial Country? Inequality and Skin Tone across the Americas*.