Afro-descendants in the Land of the Cosmic Race: Do They Fare Worse than the Indigenous? New Evidence from the 2015 Intercensal Survey of Mexico

Eduardo Torre Cantalapiedra, El Colegio de México

ABSTRACT

For the first time in Mexico's statistical history, the 2015 Intercensal Survey includes a question about Afro-descendants that will allow an official count of this population and provide more knowledge about their characteristics. This could lead to specific public policies to improve their living conditions previously identified as precarious. Thus, the aim of this paper is to analyze the situation of the Afro-descendant population in the Mexican social stratification system. In order to explore this issue, we conduct a descriptive analysis of the socio-economic status of Afro-descendant, indigenous populations and the rest of the population using the Intercensal Survey. Besides, we estimate two regression models to see how Afro-descendant or indigenous identification, is associated with different educational levels and occupational statuses controlling for other variables. The expected finding is that Afro-descendant people would have the worst socio-economic status, relative to the rest of the population, including indigenous people.
Afro-descendants in the Land of the Cosmic Race: Do They Fare Worse than the Indigenous? New Evidence from the 2015 Intercensal Survey of Mexico

INTRODUCTION

For the first time in the history of the Mexican statistics, the Intercensal Survey includes a question about Afro-descendant identification that will allow increase the visibility of a population who lacks an official count and statistical recognition. Moreover, it will provide details on their socio-economic, demographic, identity and family characteristics, among other information, which in turn could lead to greater legal recognition and the design of specific public policies at different governmental levels in order to improve their living conditions.¹

Regarding socioeconomic status, various social actors and academics have noted the precarious situation of Afro-descendants in Mexico, even when compared to the indigenous population. Ricardo Bucio Múgica, Director General of the National Council to Prevent Discrimination, said that this sector of society tends to be more discriminated against than the indigenous community because their human rights are not officially recognized (cited in Arellano García, 2015). The president of the association México Negro (Black Mexico), Sergio Peñaloza, considered that indigenous and Mexican blacks face similar discrimination conditions (cited in Rudiño, 2014). Likewise, academics and experts suggest that the Afro-descendant population in Latin America has worse socioeconomic status than the indigenous population (see, for example, Telles, 2014). Despite the work that anthropologists and historians have made in this field for a few decades,² nowadays the exclusion that the Afro-descendant population would have experienced, has not been sufficiently studied. The “problem is the lack of solid, unbiased, and systematic data necessary to provide convincing empirical evidence on this issue, as well as the lack of empirical methods that can help to identify any specific discriminatory behavior as opposed to related behavior that appears to be discriminatory but might not be. For

¹ As it has happened in other countries in the region, such as Brazil, which today has affirmative action policies (Telles y Paixão, 2013).
example, the fact that Afro descendants and people of indigenous descent have, on average, lower earnings than mestizos or whites in Latin American cities may well be the result of differences in endowments of human capital and not necessarily due solely to discrimination, as the collective tends to think” (Ñopo, Chong y Moro, 2010: 1).

This being so, the aim of this study is to explore where the Afro-descendant/"black" population is located in the Mexican social stratification system. To achieve this, we will use the Intercensal Survey to conduct a descriptive analysis comparing the socioeconomic status of Afro-descendants / "blacks", indigenous and the rest of the population who does not self-identify in any of those ways, especially their educational levels and their different occupational statuses. This will allow us to see the position of Afro-Mexicans in comparison with the indigenous population and the rest of the Mexican population. Since living conditions vary from one region to another, we perform this analysis at the national and regional levels.

Also, we will estimate two ordinal logistic regression models to see how African descent and indigenous identification is associated with educational levels and different occupational statuses.

BACKGROUND

Although the study of African descent and of blackness in Mexico has been a field of study that for a long time was predominantly occupied by anthropologists and historians, in recent years, demographers have had new databases that have allowed them to account for the existence of stratification and social inequalities generated by ethnic and racial issues (Villarreal, 2010; Flores & Telles, 2012; Martínez Casas et al., 2014; Telles, Flores & Urrea-Giraldo, 2015).

These new demographic research gave primacy to the external determination of skin color as an element of classification (Torre Cantalapiedra, 2015), since they consider that skin
pigmentation is a fundamental element on social determination of race\textsuperscript{3}, that reflects how people are located in color-race hierarchy and how they are treated by society (Sue, 2013). Therefore, pigmentation is key to the study of racial stratification in Mexican society.

In this paper, our purpose is to analyze the situation of Afro-Mexicans / "black" in the social stratification system using the ethno-racial identity categories recognized in the Intercensal Survey, since this allows for a view of the phenomenon of “negritude” and Afro-descent in Mexico, although this may pose certain biases and limitations.\textsuperscript{4} In addition, one of the most important goals of the added question on African descent identification in the Intercensal Survey was precisely to allow for the investigation of the socioeconomic conditions experienced by Afro-Mexicans, so that it can lead to public policies that reverse existing social inequalities and processes of discrimination.

To account for social stratification and inequality in Mexico according to different ethnic and racial classifications previous research has often used educational levels and occupational statuses (Villarreal, 2010; Flores & Telles, 2012; Martínez Casas et al., 2014). Using The Mexico 2006 Panel Study, Villarreal (2010) found that people with darker skin tone have the lowest socioeconomic status, followed by those with the intermediate skin color, even after controlling for several individual characteristics of subjects. Flores & Telles (2012) propose to disentangle the issues of race, ethnicity and class in terms of their implications for the Mexican social stratification; using a nationally representative survey realized in several countries, Mexico among them, in the Latin American Public Opinion Project, 2010 LAPOP, which allows to accurately analyze the socioeconomic status of people. While Flores and Telles agree with Villarreal (2010) that the color of the skin is a good predictor of socioeconomic status of people, for these authors skin color affects the socioeconomic status even before people enter in the labor market, because the relevant

\textsuperscript{3} See for example, Telles, 2014; Telles, Flores & Urrea-Giraldo, 2015.
\textsuperscript{4} Investigating discrimination based on ethno-racial self-identification can be problematic, since it includes a calculation based not only on appearance but also on variables such as culture, personal trajectories and social status (Telles, 2014); especially in an environment of high fluidity of racial and ethnic identities as is the case in Mexico. Also, we considered that analyzing Afro-descendants / "blacks" in a country where national identity is so tied to miscegenation is problematic.
variables are the education and occupation of parents. For his part, Martínez Casas et al. (2014) analyzed the educational levels achieved in terms of different ethno-racial classifications, according to the main survey Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA). They note that when academic performance is analyzed using self-identification categories (indigenous, black and mestizos), the analysis shows that the mestizos have higher educational levels; whereas when the classification based on the color palette is used, you get that darker skin tone is consistently associated with lower educational levels, even controlling by different ethno-racial categories. Although in this latest research ethnic and racial categories are used to analyze social stratification, unfortunately, the sample size of the PERLA’s surveys in Mexico did not allow to include people of Afro-descendant population in all analyses, which highlights the importance of the research proposed in this paper.

DATA AND METHODS

The source of data used in this work is the Mexican Intercensal Survey conducted by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, for its acronym in Spanish). The purpose of this survey is to generate statistical information to provide estimates of the size, composition and distribution of population and housing in the country, as well as various indicators of its main characteristics. To prepare the final questionnaire, the relevance of the questions for the definition of public policy at different levels of government is considered (INEGI, 2015). The great advantage of this survey is its large sample size that offers to better capture social phenomena because it allows more precise estimates and to conduct analyses by region.

Among the questions included in the survey of 2015 (see Table 1), there are two questions on self-identification: one about Afro-descendants (the first time this question has been asked) and other about indigenous (although there was a similar question in the 2000 and 2010 censuses it is the first time that it is introduced with such phrasing and those response options). The question of Afro-descendants introduces a new category of ethno-
racial identity by the state, asking each family member to indicate whether, according to their culture, history and traditions, they self-identify as "black"/ Afro-Mexican or Afro-descendant.

In this paper we analyze the educational attainment and occupation status of the black population / "black", the indigenous population and the rest of the population who do not self-identify in any of those ways. In addition, since living conditions vary from one region to another, we perform the analysis noted above at national and regional levels (Guerrero, Oaxaca and Veracruz and Coahuila, Michoacán, Chiapas and Tabasco compared to other states).

Second, we estimate two proportional odds ordinal logistic models to see how self-identifying as Afro-descendant and/or indigenous is associated with the educational levels and the different occupational status. The choice of logistic models instead of lineal regression model has the advantage of not having to impose a certain scale to dependent variables (Villarreal, 2010), moreover the choice of an ordinal logistic model against a logistic model prevents missing the information contained in the ordering of outcomes (IDRE-UCLA, 2015). Therefore, this model has been used before in similar studies (see for example, Villarreal, 2010; Flores y Telles, 2012).

In Model 1, the ordinal dependent variable is the educational level (the survey included 14 possible answers) and the independent variables are two: self-identification of African descent, indigenous self-identification, and their intersection, and the control variables are age, sex, municipality type (urban or rural), region, size of the municipality.

In Model 2, the ordinal dependent variable is the occupational status (occupations are classified in 8 categories) and the independent variables are two: self-identification of African descent, indigenous self-identification, and their intersection, and the control variables are: education, age, sex, municipality type (urban or rural), region, size of the municipality.

5 In reality, in every household, a person eighteen years old or older answers the questions for all the household members.
EXPECTED FINDINGS

We expect to find the Afro-Mexican population as the most disadvantaged of all because of two reasons: 1) the existence of a historical discrimination against Afro-Mexicans / "black" that is evidenced anthropological and historical research, even more in areas where these populations are concentrated; 2) because their skin color is probably darker than that of other population groups and possessing phenotypic traits that differentiate them from the rest of the population would make them more likely to suffer racial discrimination and therefore have worse socioeconomic status as has been shown in previous studies.⁶

⁶ See for example Villarreal, 2010; Flores & Telles, 2012; Martínez Casas et al., 2014; Telles, Flores & Urrea-Giraldo, 2015.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1</th>
<th>Questions about self-identification Afro-descendant and indigenous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>- AFRODESCENDIENTES</strong></td>
<td>De acuerdo con su cultura, historia y tradiciones, ¿(NOMBRE) se considera negra(o), es decir, afromexicana(o) o afrodescendiente?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sí / Sí, en parte / No / No sabe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>- PERTENENCIA INDÍGENA</strong></td>
<td>De acuerdo con su cultura, ¿(NOMBRE) se considera indígena?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sí / Sí, en parte / No / No sabe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own calculations based on the questionnaire Intercensal Survey, 2015
REFERENCES


