OBSERVATÓRIO DAS DESIGUALDADES

DEMOCRATIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN BRAZIL:

What kind of future are we building?

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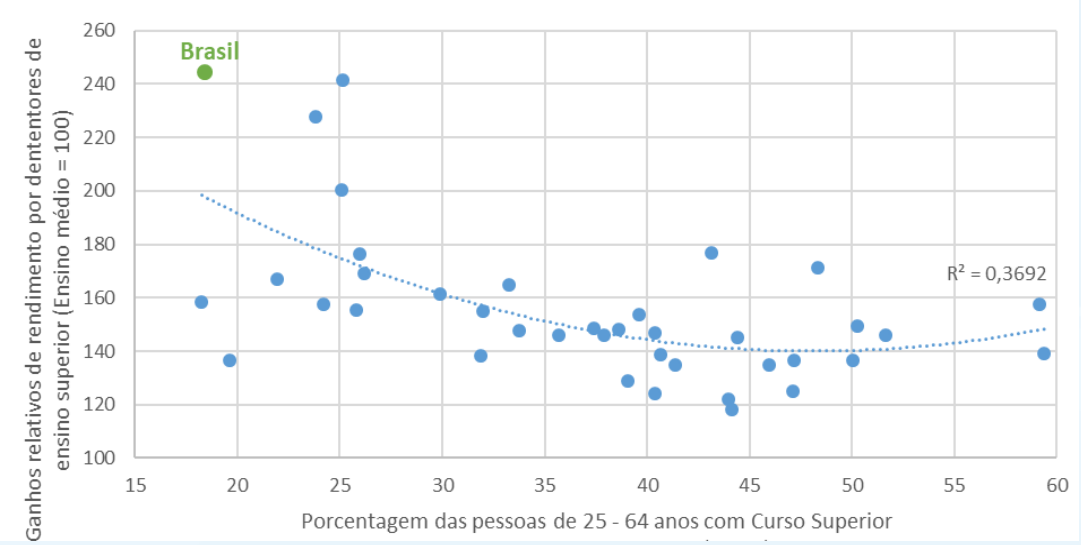
Education: A people's right and a duty of the State

Education, at all levels, is a right consolidated by the 1988 Federal Constitution. Besides being a right of the entire Brazilian population, an important tool for social-political formation and citizen emancipation, education – especially higher education – is also very relevant for social mobility, both as a tool for mobility, and as a sign of status and a mechanism for social stratification.

Graph 01 – Relative income gains, by percentage of access to higher education – Selected Countries (circa 2018)



Nota: Países do gráfico-Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, OECD average, EU23 average, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, South Africa.

Source: Education at a Glance (OCDE)

Graph 1 illustrates precisely this point. Among all the countries analyzed, Brazil is the one that offers the

highest return, in terms of income, for completing higher education: those who complete this level of education have, on average, income 140% higher than those who do not have access to this level. Not by chance, Brazil also figures among the countries with the lowest proportion of adults with higher education completed. And, even more important from the point of view that interests the Observatory, access to higher education in Brazil is not only very low, it is very unequal. This deleterious combination of characteristics of higher education in Brazil – low access, high rate of wage return for completing this level, and very high inequality in access – has historically made higher education an instrument for perpetuating inequality, a means by which the better-off segments of society (white people and those with higher incomes) pass on their advantages from one generation to the next and deny the poorest the same opportunities. In this situation, the recent process of democratization of access to this level, which will be described later on, may have produced, alongside its obvious advantages and benefits, fear and resistance on the part of those who see their monopoly over mechanisms for accessing the most advantageous positions in society and transmitting them to their descendants.

In this sense, it is worth addressing inequality and stratification in higher education, both from the standpoint of access – who attends universities? - as well as in terms of the salary disparity between those who have completed college and the rest of the population, i.e., on average, how much does a graduate earn compared to someone who has not completed higher education?

It is necessary to think about higher education, therefore, under two perspectives: the first is as a tool for mobility and for maintaining or reducing inequalities; the second, as a right of the people and a duty of the State, operationalized through public policies. From the first perspective, we ask: how unequal is the access to higher education in Brazil? What is the trajectory of inequality of access to this level of education in the country? What inequalities (economic, racial, gender etc.) are we talking about? Are there disparities between access and course completion? From the perspective of public policies, we need to discuss: what has the State done to reduce inequalities and increase access? What are the advances and limits of these policies? Moreover, what can still be done to reduce inequalities and democratize access to higher education?

The dimensions of Higher Education: How many people access the University in Brazil?

In order to understand the dimension of inequality of access to higher education in Brazil, is it necessary to explain the coverage of the education system for this range of education? That is, how many people in total have or have had access to college in Brazil? Generally speaking, the lower the coverage of a level of education, the more access to it tends to be exclusive and unequal in relation to the various segments of society.

To analyze the coverage of educational systems, we generally use two types of indicators: stock and circulation. For example, in the case of basic education, the proportion of literate people in the general population is an important stock indicator, and the proportion of people aged 6 to 16 who are enrolled in or have completed elementary school is a circulation indicator.

The value of a stock indicator ends up being a consequence of current public policies, but also of the past and even of the demographic structure of the region. In the case of illiteracy/literacy rates, they take into account the access that children and adolescents currently have to the educational system, but include the access that adults and seniors had 20/30 years ago.

Since educational expansion is recent in Brazil, it takes some time before the total schooling of the population reflects this expansion. For this reason, stock variables are less sensitive to current policies and change more slowly. The circulation indicator takes its name because education systems are dynamic, meaning that every year students enter and leave (there is a circulation of people), and the indicator is a snapshot of what is currently happening with the people in that age group who are or should be enrolled in the education system. In Brazil, for example, our circulation rates in basic education are better than our stock, precisely because the expansion of the basic education system in the country is very recent.

Dealing with the higher education system also requires that we understand what we are talking about when referring to "system". The higher education system is composed of public, private, and third-sector, i.e., non-profit, colleges. It therefore involves public universities, private institutions, religious institutions, on-campus and distance learning courses, and undergraduate and technologist courses. Thus, there is immense diversity within the university ecosystem, both in quality and in the valuation and prestige of the courses. We will deal later with the implications of the inequalities present within the system itself, but for now, in dealing with the size and expansion of the system, we will refer to the entire universe of degrees as a single system. This is because, even though it is broad, diverse, and unequal,

access to the system is still quite restricted.

To analyze the higher education system, we use two main indicators: the total number of enrollments and the proportion of people aged 18 to 24 who are enrolled in higher education or have graduated (Senkevics, 2021). In 2018, there were 8.5 million higher education enrollments in the country, as opposed to 1.8 million in 1995 (in the following topics we will address this expansion process). With regard to circulation, the enrollment rate of 18- to 24-year-olds in higher education was 21.3% in 2018, as opposed to 6.8% in 1995[1].

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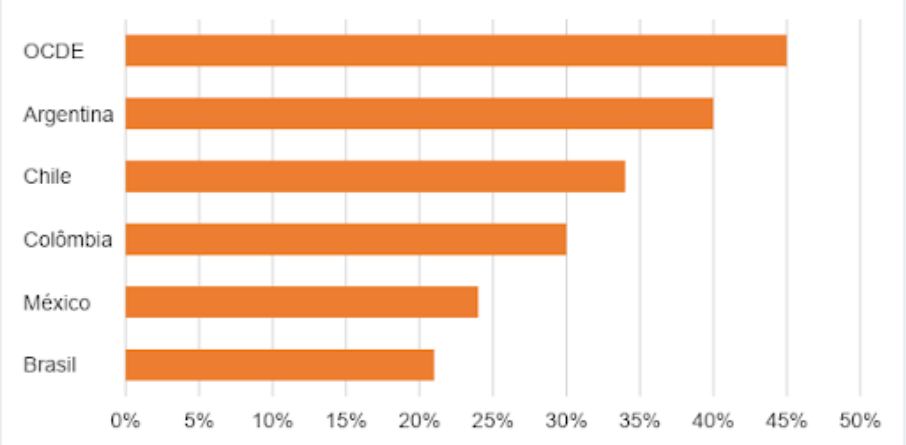
[1] SENKEVICS, 2021. **A expansão recente do ensino superior: cinco tendências de 1991 a 2020** in: Cadernos de estudos e pesquisas em políticas educacionais, V.3, n.4, p. 204

Graph 02 – Percentage of adults aged 25-34 who have completed Higher Education in 2019 by country



Source: SENKEVICS, 2021

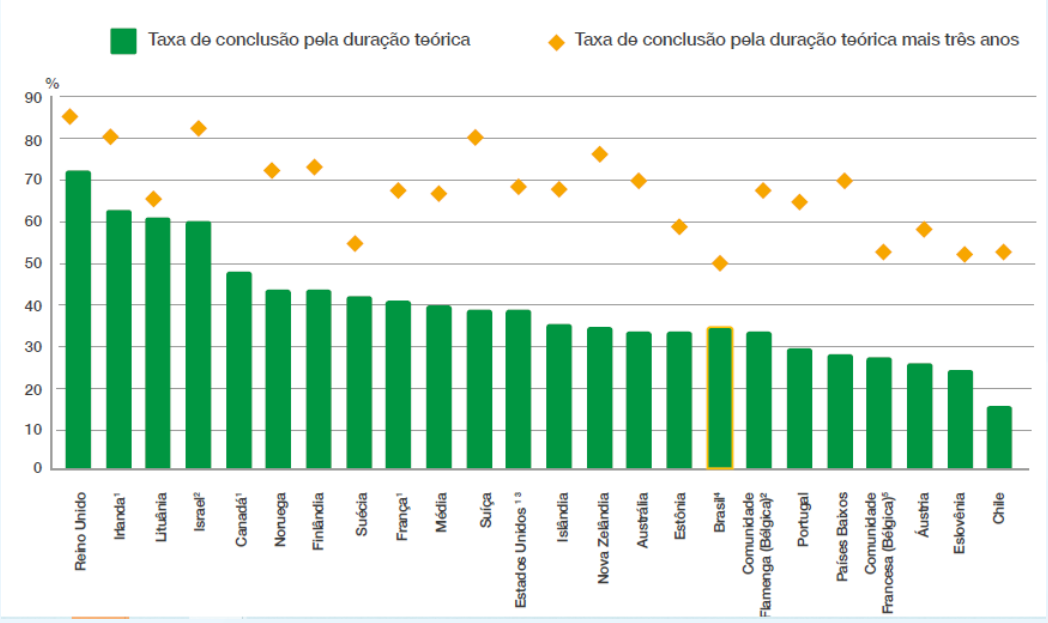
In a very similar way to what (2021) finds, the report prepared by the OECD and translated by Todos Pela Educação[2] proposes to note the rate of 25-34 year olds who have completed higher education, but also the proportion of 25-64 year olds who have obtained a master's degree. In the first case, by 2018, there were 21% of young people with at least one degree completed. Brazil is well below the OECD average, as well as below its Latin American neighbors. The process of expanding higher education in Brazil is recent and needs to be expanded even more: access to graduation is still a privilege of few young people. In the case of post-graduate studies, only 1% of adults have completed a master's degree, which is a very low rate compared to the 13% average in OECD countries.

In addition to looking at access to university, i.e. who is able to enter higher education, it is also important to check the proportion of people who manage to complete a degree in the correct time. This is because staying on a

course also requires resources, whether for food, housing and transport, or the opportunity cost of being able to work, in the case of full-time courses, or work longer hours, in the case of daytime courses. Thus, the OECD report presented data on students who completed full courses in the years provided in Brazil and in other countries.

[2] Report – A Educação no Brasil: uma perspectiva internacional, 2021 p. 82

Graph 03 – Completion rate of students who entered a full-time undergraduate or equivalent course – 2017



Source: Todos pela Educação, 2021

Graph 03[3] presents two key pieces of information: the first is that there is a considerable portion (approximately 50%) of students who do not complete college or that completion takes more than three years after the scheduled period. The other information is that only 1/3 of the students in full-time courses manage to finish them on time. These two phenomena are particularly serious in Brazil, although they occur with different intensities in several countries. In general, these students either fail, or need to spread their credits over more time, mainly because they are divided between work and study, or in the case of private education, because they cannot afford the tuition for many subjects. In 2019, 48% of students were working, and in the case of private institutions, the number was even higher, 58%, as opposed to 37% in thepublic institutions. This indicates that it is possible that many students work during their studies, not for the experience that an internship or job offers, but mainly to be able to support themselves financially, especially at private institutions.Although in some cases students do not pay tuition fees, private institutions generally do not have food and housing assistance programs, as is the case, albeit in insufficient numbers, at many public universities.

What does a public university look like? Who gets in and who stays out of the higher education system?

The presented indicators, especially regarding circulation and stock, are indications of the size of the system and its coverage. It is important to understand coverage because, in general, the narrower a public policy is, the narrower the group it serves. While this statement may seem obvious – since the fewer places available, the fewer people will have access to university – it should be noted that this restriction is not random, much less equitable in relation to the population as a whole. This means that the more restricted the access to education, the more the educational system tends to reproduce social inequalities. In Brazil, access to higher education

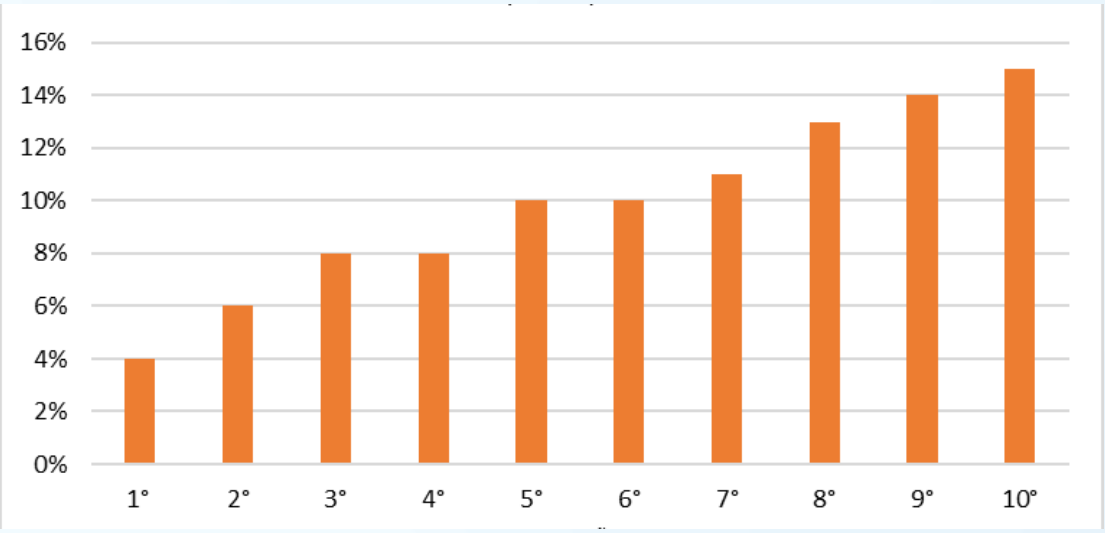
is still restricted and unequal.

When we presented the graduation data, it was already possible to perceive the first aspect of inequality in higher education: that of income. The need to work, either to support oneself or to assist the family, makes many students take longer to finish the course, or not finish it at all. This information presents, on one hand, a negative situation, in the sense that there is still a lack of social-supportive guarantee mechanisms for students to be able to stay at the university and finish their courses in a more adequate way; on the other hand, it indicates that there is currently a greater variation of income within the universities. In other words, if there are people at the university who need to work to support their families, it means that part of the working class has managed to access higher education, even if this number is far from ideal.

In the graph below, the Brazilian population was divided by income decile, with the first decile being the poorest 10%, and the 10th decile the wealthiest 10%, and the proportion of students enrolled in higher education per decile was observed. In a society where income inequality would not impact access to higher education at all, each decile would represent 10% of the total proportion. That is, if all people of different incomes had equal access to universities, the wealthiest 10% would represent 10% of those enrolled, and the poorest 10% as well.

[3]Report – A Educação no Brasil: uma perspectiva internacional, 2021 p. 82

Graph 04 – Proportion of students enrolled in Public Higher Education (undergraduate) by tenth of income in Brazilian society (2019)



Source: Oliveira, Welle e Batista, 2021

In Graph 4, there is a clear relationship between income and access to higher education, unlike the ideal. What the graph shows is that the highest income group, which represents 10% of the Brazilian population, represents 16% of university students, while the group of the poorest 10% of the population represent only 4% of university students. This means that there is under-representation of the poorest and over-representation of the wealthiest. Of every 100 university students, 36% are among the poorest half of the population, and 64% are from the wealthiest half. This analysis. The Marxist division between working class and bourgeoisie, for example, is important in the Brazilian case to understand that the immense majority, even in the highest income deciles, needs to work to support themselves. For these people, called middle class, without access to university they would hardly be able to maintain the same standard of living as their parents or family. The percentage of the population that can support themselves and maintain a high standard of living without higher education is very small. On the other hand, there is also a component of prestige, lifestyles, and network of relationships, which combine with the material and monetary aspects of class that condition a person's opportunities. Therefore, the expansion of universities, combined with investments that

can absorb this labor force, is extremely relevant to increase social mobility, decrease correlation between income and access is so clear that the graph follows a crescendo, and no income decile has a higher proportion of college graduates than the next decile.

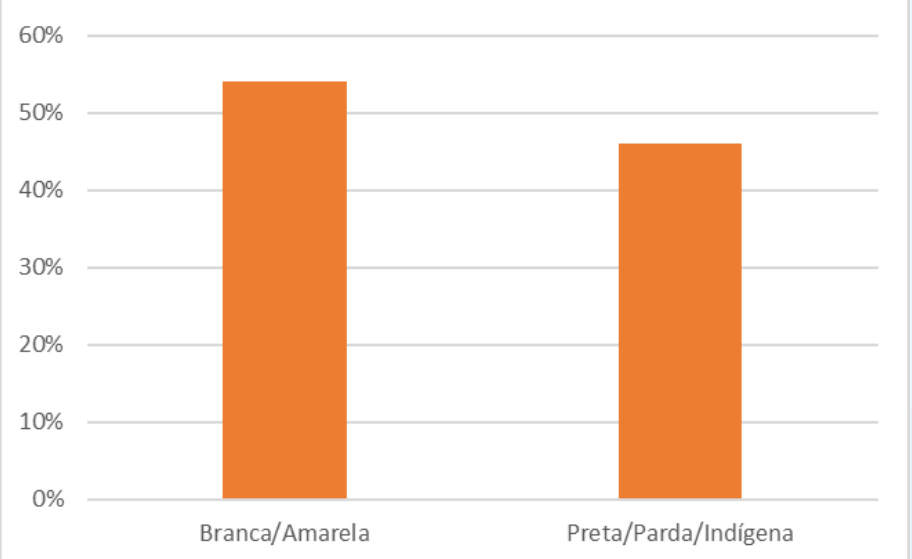
The data on income and access to higher education are clear in demonstrating the relationship between opportunity and social class. However, in the Brazilian case, one must be cautious when analyzing the deciles, because income in the country is extremely concentrated in the top 10%. As an example, in 2015, being among the "wealthiest" 40% only meant receiving more than one minimum wage per capita, which is far from being considered elite or bourgeois. The university and especially the public university, even though it is unequal, are composed of 46% of people who have a per capita income of less than one minimum wage. This reality is still far from the ideal of equality and social justice, but the public university continues to be important for the working population, especially as a tool for social mobility. For the middle classes, the university continues to be a means of maintaining family income, of access to better jobs, wages, and housing. It is also an instrument for maintaining status and for insertion in networks of social relations that are important for access to other benefits and spaces. But, for the poorer classes, it is the main, if not the only, legitimate and socially recognized means of social ascension.

Regarding inequalities between classes, one last remark is in order; here we are treating social classes as income strata only to understand the relations between income inequality and education. However, other class concepts are important tools of analysis. The Marxist division between working class and bourgeoisie, for example, is important in the Brazilian case to understand that the immense majority, even in the highest income deciles, needs to work to support themselves. For these people, called middle class,

without access to university they would hardly be able to maintain the same standard of living as their parents or family. The percentage of the population that can support themselves and maintain a high standard of living without higher education is very small. On the other hand, there is also a component of prestige, lifestyles, and network of relationships, which combine with the material and monetary aspects of class that condition a person's opportunities. Therefore, the expansion of universities, combined with investments that can absorb this labor force, is extremely relevant to increase social mobility, decrease inequalities, and increase the population's income.

In addition to income inequality, race and gender are also important cleavages for understanding the profile of higher education and the inequalities in access and permanence at this level of education. As has been extensively addressed in various texts by this same observatory, Brazil – the last country in South America to abolish slavery of black people and native peoples, and which has never offered any type of reparation to these people – continues to inflict brutal racial inequality. And, despite the advances, higher education is no exception. While the Brazilian population is composed of 54.9% black and brown people, this population represents 46% of young people attending university, as shown in the graph below. In contrast to whites, who represent 44.2% of the population, but 54% of young people at universities.

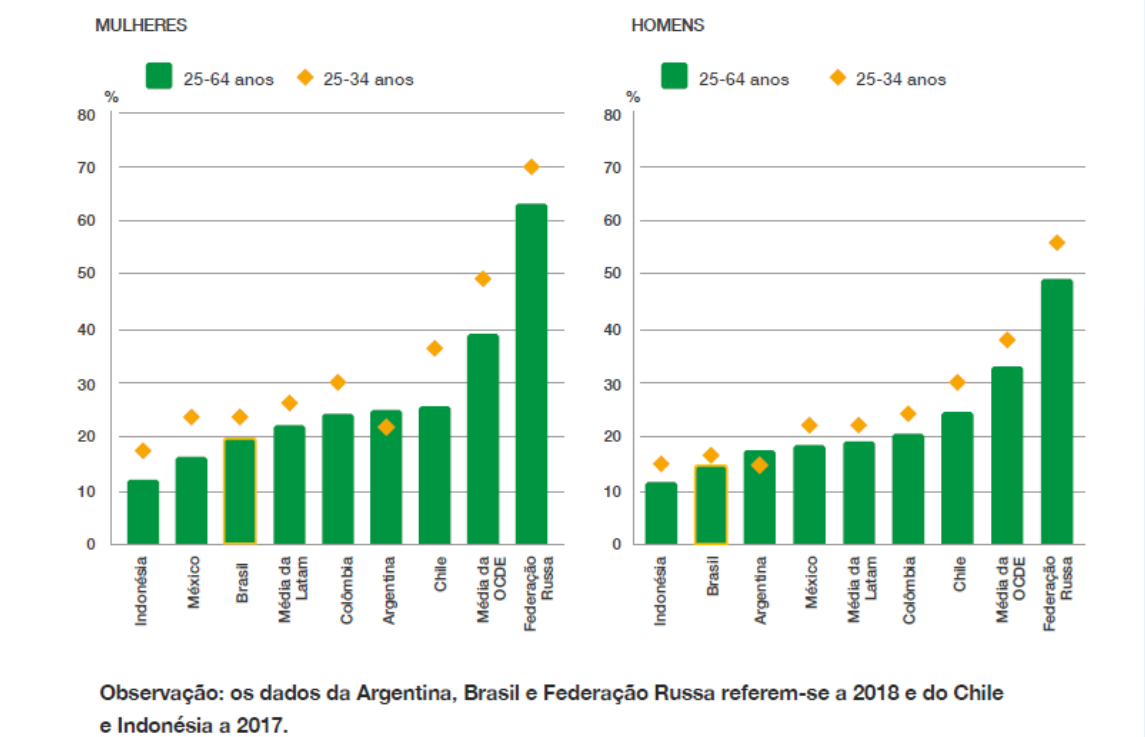
Graph 05 – Racial composition of young people aged 18 to 24 attending university (2019)



Source: SENKEVICS, 2021

Importantly, while there is indeed an income component, since there is an over-representation of black people among the poorest, race alone is a component of exclusion. This is because oppressions accumulate, as well as race and class privileges. While blacks in the highest income decile represent 9% of all blacks in universities, whites in the highest decile represent 20% of all whites in universities. It should be noted, however, that income continues to have a relevant weight, but wealth blacks are less privileged among blacks themselves than wealth whites among whites themselves. This is because the Brazilian elite is historically composed of wealthy whites, so that this same elite continues to concentrate class and race privileges.

Graph 06 – Share of people aged 25 to 64 and 25 to 34 with higher education



Source: Todos pela Educação, 2021

A few points should be made regarding gender inequalities in higher education. The graphs show that in Brazil, there are more women with higher education than men, both in absolute numbers and proportionally. This has been a constant fact since the mid-1990s. The early entry of men into the labor market is a central component in understanding this difference. It is important to point out that not all women have a later entry into the labor market; in general, this is a reality for white women. Non-white women also start working to support their households very young, so that the massive entry of black and indigenous women is much more recent.

Another component to be analyzed is in which courses these women enroll. By disaggregating the data, it was possible to see that women remain in courses related to the gender roles of "caring", such as nursing or education, notably more devalued in terms of average remuneration. In the areas of technology, exact sciences, engineering etc., there is a male predominance. Finally, it should be noted that women

are also still the minority in higher education teaching, even though there are more graduated women (FONCATE, 2021).

Where have we come from and where are we headed? The impacts of public policies on the democratization of universities

So far, we have presented a picture of higher education in Brazil, but we still need to watch the movie. After all, we need to improve a LOT, but we used to be much worse.

In this sense, it is worth highlighting four factors that influence the expansion of an education

The democratization of the education system, which differs from massification in that it also considers the equity and quality of education, is almost a pattern for all educational systems. It is, or should be, a constant process of improving already massive systems. It is

system: the first is to assure the completion of the previous period, that is, to guarantee that people have completed the entry prerequisites, High School in this case; the second is the number of openings; it is clear that expanding education significantly depends on extending the system, although increasing efficiency in the use of the already installed capacity can also contribute; the third is to make the forms of entry more equitable; finally, it is necessary to assure that students have the material conditions to remain studying and complete the stage.

important to understand this differentiation, because it is possible for a policy to become massive, or to expand, while remaining extremely unequal and excluding. Another important consideration is that dealing with the massification of higher education in developing countries means comparing

ourselves with our own history. What does this mean? That, in comparison with developed countries, the percentage of young Brazilians attending universities is still low, but in comparison with our past, we are massifying higher education.

Brazil has gone through two moments of relevant expansion of higher education: the first in the early 1960s and the second in the 2000s. In 1961, the first Law of Curricular Directives and Bases was approved: the LDB. The LDB established that all forms of high school were eligible for entry into higher education. This meant that not only high school (usually attended by a small elite who could study without working), but also technical, agricultural, teaching, etc. courses could have access to higher education. Ten years later, in 1971, we jumped from 93 thousand to 425 thousand enrollments in higher education. With regard to the four factors that influence massification, the LDB transformed the third point, making entry more accessible to the different high school courses. However, there was not such an expressive increase in openings. During the dictatorial period, the military chose to invest in private colleges for profit, either through exemption or tax incentives, so that there was an increase in private openings, to the detriment of the expansion of public universities.

With the re-democratization, the system expanded again, once more with a predominance of the private sector. Thus, in 1995, there was a schooling rate of 5.8% of young people and very high inequality. Among the wealthiest 20%, 20% of the young people were enrolled in some kind of undergraduate course, while among the

poorest 40%, less than 1% of the young people went to university. In terms of race, while 50% of the population was non-white, less than 20% of the people in the universities were black or indigenous. Furthermore, 75% of the openings were located in the south or southeast region.

Even though the system expanded from 93,000 enrollments in 1960 to about 1.4 million in 1990, it remained white, southeastern, and elitist. We are talking about a higher education, therefore, that does not serve the majority of the population and was very distant from any kind of democratization of education.

The second cycle of expansion emerges in a very different context. First of all, it is a process that takes place all the time within a democracy and after a series of pressures from social movements, youth organizations, the black movement, etc. Second, the period beginning in the 2000s and running until 2015 is marked by the democratization of policies and expansion of public investment. Third, in the economic and social perspective of the coalition and the social base that supported the PT governments, the inclusion of the poor and working classes in the labor and consumption market is central to the expansion of the economy, and higher education is one of the mechanisms for the inclusion of workers.

In this sense, we will deal with the policies of this period by dividing them into two groups: the university entrance policies and the vacancy expansion policies. It is evident that these policies are closely linked and interdependent, but for didactic purposes, we will deal with them separately and then with their impacts as a whole.

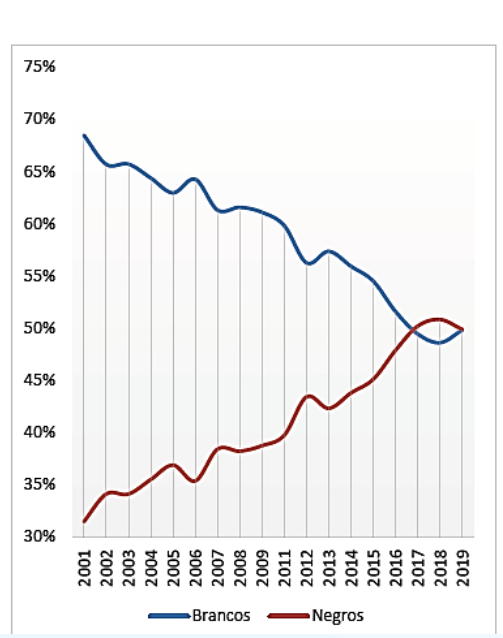
As far as entry to

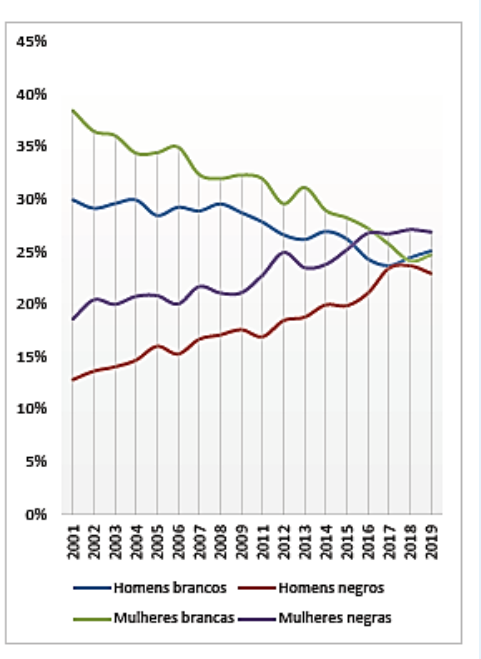
university education is concerned, the aim was, on the one hand, to make the process more equitable, and on the other, to guarantee that people would be able to finish high school. As far as equity is concerned, there are three highlights: the creation of ENEM and SISU, the exemption from ENEM registration fees, and the institution of racial and social quotas. The creation of a single exam and system allowed the reduction of regional inequalities, because, as ENEM started to be held in most cities, candidates from the countryside, from smaller towns, etc., could apply for vacancies anywhere in the country without having to displace themselves. ENEM is also a test designed in view of the diversity of education in Brazil and, although it is far from an "easy" exam, it allows students from different schools and locations to take the test that focuses on text interpretation and logic. The exam has been growing in importance and relevance, from 4.1 million candidates in 2007 to a record 8.6 million in 2015.

Social and racial quotas, instituted in 2009, are both a mechanism for correcting inequalities in access and promoting equal opportunities in the future, and a first step, albeit small, towards historical reparation for the almost 400 years of slavery of black people. Besides the process of genocide and slavery, the Brazilian society left black people out of any education system for most of the 20th century.

There was a great debate about the issue, with much resistance, especially to racial quotas, which were even challenged in the Supreme Court, in a lawsuit brought by the then PFL (Liberal Front Party), today DEM (Democrats). After overcoming this resistance (which remains intense among certain groups), the results of the quotas, both social and racial, show that they have been important mechanisms for reducing racial and income inequalities within universities.

Graph 07: Proportion of enrollees in Public Higher Education by color/race and by color/race and gender (2001-2019)





Source: Todos pela Educação, 2021

As stated, the program of affirmative actions and, in particular, racial quotas was extremely criticized and heavily attacked both during its approval as a law and during its implementation. With a discourse that preached a kind of meritocracy, imbued with racial and class prejudices, the "anti-quota" ideas affirmed, among other things, that the entry of quota students would, on the one hand, reduce the "effort" of these students to get into college and, on the other, reduce the "quality" of teaching at universities.

Regarding these premises, a few considerations are in order. First, access to higher education is not and should not be for the few or for "winners"; education, including higher education, is a right for all. Therefore, the idea of merit cannot be used as a justification for systematic exclusions. Second, even from the standpoint of a liberal conception of justice, it is not only acceptable but also

necessary for the State to act in order to ensure equality of opportunity in the competition for the most valued occupational, socioeconomic, and power positions in society. Education is a central mechanism for accessing these positions; therefore, if there are groups at a systematic disadvantage to these initial conditions of competition (such as the case of poor, black, and indigenous people) for these positions, it is the obligation of the government to act in order to correct these distortions. Without egalitarian initial conditions (such as access to all levels of education), the discussion about merit and meritocracy not even makes sense. Third, the Brazilian State has a historical debt with the black people of this country; racial quotas, therefore, independently of possible results, are a duty of the country with its black citizens and the black population. These arguments, by themselves, should be sufficient to consolidate the relevance of quotas.

However, there are now studies demonstrating that the performance of quota-eligible students, both in terms of entry and completion of higher education, does not match the assumptions of anti-quota discourse. Firstly, with the implementation of affirmative actions in higher education, previously excluded groups now a real possibility. This possibility seems to work as an incentive for students who are the target audience of the program to make even more effort to enter the University, since this reality becomes more possible.

In this sense, in the case of results in mathematics, for example, there was a very significant advance in the performance of students on the SAEB, with increases being observed in all interest groups (public school students, black and

indigenous students from public schools, when compared to their counterpart in private schools). Although this increase was not significant in the case of Portuguese Language, it should be noted that the greatest difference in the performance of public and private school students has always been in Mathematics. This indicates that the introduction of affirmative actions has actually helped to narrow this gap. (GANDELMAN, 2017). Thus, quotas contribute to narrowing the gap in academic performance between the population with low access to quality education and more privileged groups even before they enter higher education. This perception is reinforced by the fact that the greatest advance is registered among students with comparatively lower performance.

With respect to the performance of quota students on the National Student Performance Exam (ENADE), according to ARAÚJO et al. (2020), the results indicate that, in the years analyzed, in fact, the performance of quota students was below the average of non-quota students (a difference of 1 to 2 points). However, these results are quite heterogeneous depending on the type of quota, with a variation of almost 9 points between the average results of students with different types of quota. This indicates that, on the one hand, there were groups of students with quotas with higher average scores than those without quotas and, on the other hand, that quotas alone are not sufficient to explain this difference, given the heterogeneity of students with quotas. A previous study by Waltenberg and Carvalho (2012) reached similar results,

indicating an average 10% lower score on the ENADE 2008 for a final student who entered through some type of affirmative action, compared to students with similar characteristics, a very modest social cost for the level of democratization of opportunities promoted. Furthermore, ARAÚJO et al. (2020) found that there was a significant difference between the results of those students whose parents already had higher education and those who were the first to attend an undergraduate course, indicating an intergenerational inequality. The continuation of quotas and the democratization of higher education could therefore be the very mechanism for reducing inequalities in performance in higher education. Finally, it should be clear that the adopted strategy– the creation of democratizing mechanisms for access COMBINED with the expansion of supply of places and enrollments – means that, in objective and absolute (and even self-interested) terms, no segment has lost or seen access hampered: only previously excluded groups that are beginning to glimpse the opportunity to enter higher education. In other words, the situation of no one has worsened and that of many has improved – a result superior to the previous one under practically any criterion of fairness and even efficiency.

Even though quotas and other social programs have helped reduce inequalities in the entry of non-white students, these students, as well as women, are generally concentrated in less prestigious courses and universities. Until 2010, blacks were not a majority among graduates in any of the 25 courses analyzed by Ribeiro and Schlegel (2015) apud Senkevics (2021). In the graphs below, we observe the dispersion of the percentage of non-white students (black, brown, and indigenous) and low-income students in

different courses. On the left side, we observe careers that are traditionally more popular, less competitive and lower paid, and on the right side, the so-called "imperial careers" that are traditionally more elitist and prestigious.

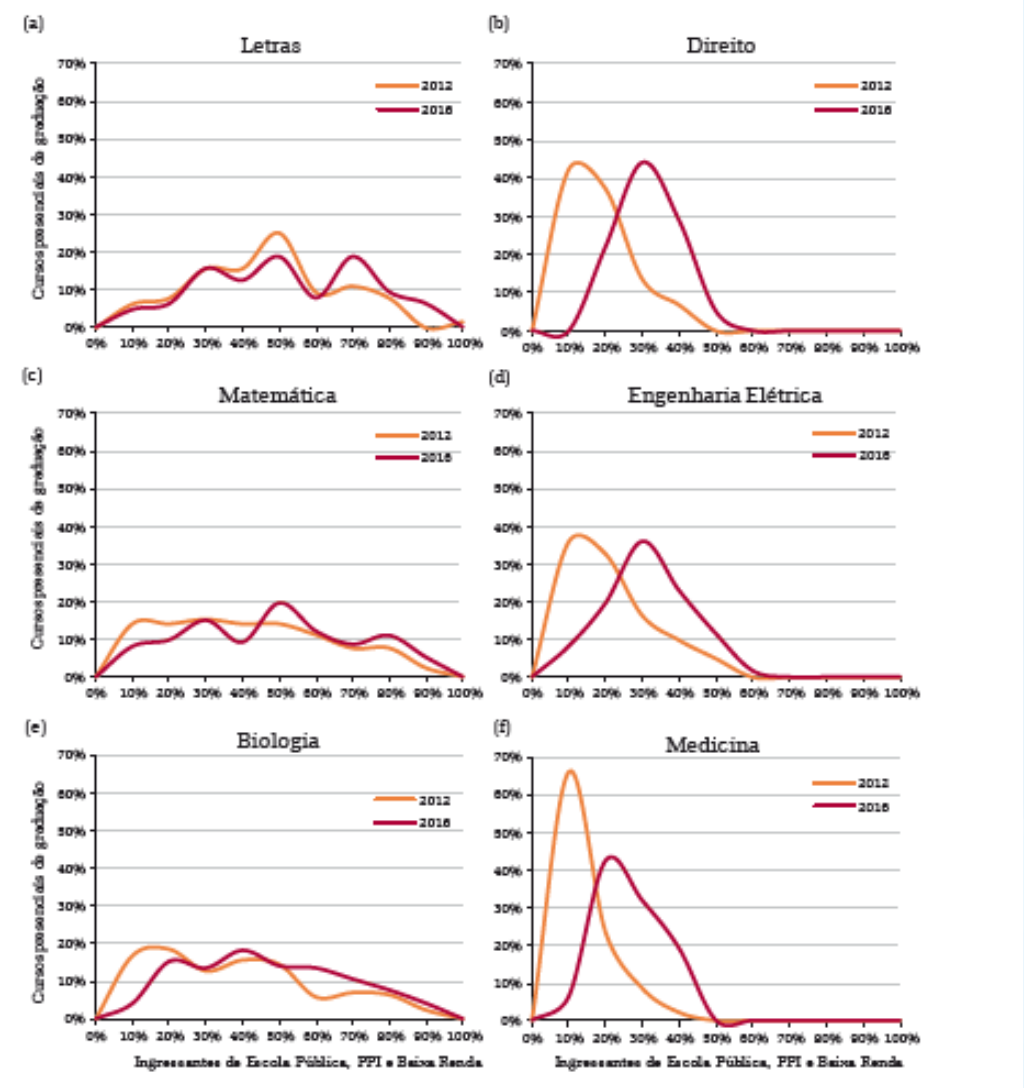
The graphs should be interpreted as follows: a flatter graph, such as those on the left, indicates that in different universities there are varying proportions of non-white people, that is, there are institutions with 30%, 40% or 70% non-white people attending that college. This dispersion likely indicates the varying socioeconomic and ethnic composition of each place. A narrower graph, as is the case with the graphs on the right-hand side, indicates that at most universities there is a very similar perfil. For example, if the curve were narrower and higher near the 50% mark,

it would indicate that in most universities, there is an equal split between whites and non-whites, poor and non-poor. If the curve were higher near the right-hand edge, this would indicate that in most courses, there are more non-white and low-income than white and higher-income students.

However, we observe that the highest point on the graphs of elitized course curves are concentrated on the left side, indicating that in most law, medical, and electrical engineering courses, non-white and poorer students are in the minority. A second finding is that although non-white and lower-income people are in the minority in these courses, they are also where the top of the curve shifted the most from left to right between 2012 and 2016. This means that the proportion of non-white and poor people in universities increased in all the courses analyzed, but even more in elitized courses, pointing to the beginning of a process of democratization of access to these courses and, in the future, of diversification of the profile of the country's

occupational and professional elites.

Graph 08 – Percentage distribution of beneficiaries of the Quotas Law in selected on-site undergraduate courses (2012 and 2016)

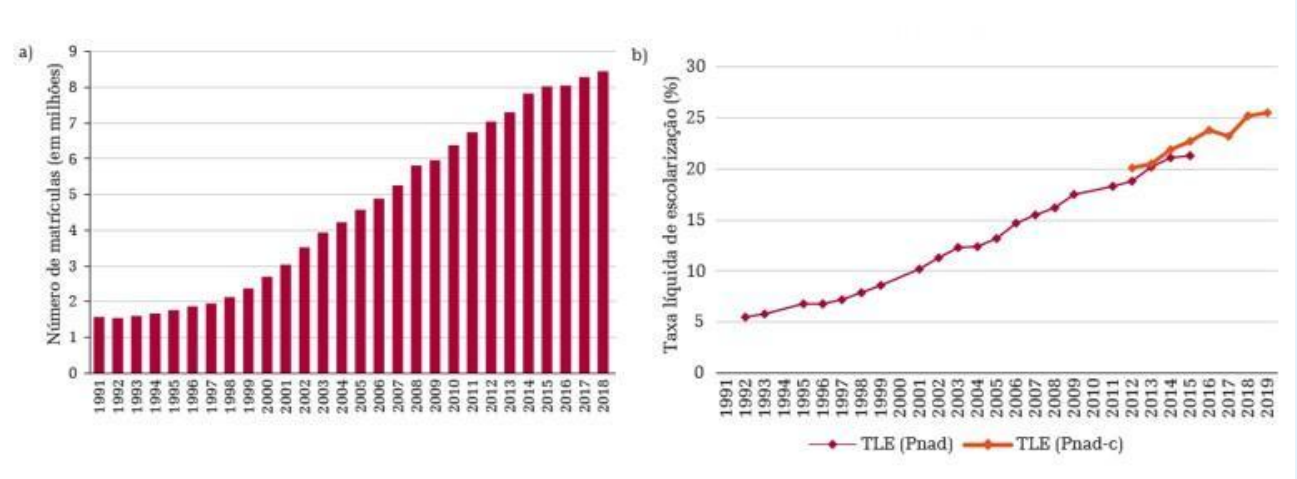


Source: MELLO and SENKEVICS, 2020

The reasons for the increase of non-white people in universities are numerous. Racial quotas, in fact, accelerated this process as of 2009, especially in the more elitist courses, as can be seen in the graph on the right. However, this process had already been taking place. Artes and Ricoldi apud Senkevics (2021), point out that, between 2000 and 2010, most of the growth in enrollments was driven by the entry of black people. If the growth in overall enrollment was 116%, in the same period, the growth in black enrollment was 291%.

We can cite at least two other reasons that drove the decrease in racial inequality in the 2000s. The first is the increase in the number of young people who completed high school: the increase in the average number of years of schooling and the attempt to universalize the entire basic cycle (infant, elementary and high school) was extremely relevant for the democratization of higher education, having impacts on the reduction of racial inequality, but also on gender disparity. Finally, it should be emphasized that this democratization of access was only possible with the expansion of the number of openings in universities.

Graph 09 – Evolution in the number of enrollments in undergraduate courses and the net schooling rate (NSR) for the population aged 18 to 24 years



in Brazil (1991-2019)

Source: MELLO and SENKEVICS, 2020

In the previous subtopic, we mentioned that Brazil continued to be a country with a low rate of higher schooling, even when compared to other Latin American countries. While this is a true fact, it is also true to say that it was a country that greatly expanded its system, which went from being exclusive to a wealthy white elite to being a mass system. Between 2003 and 2018, we practically tripled the number of enrollments, and went from a net schooling rate of 10% to 21% in 2015 and 25% in 2019.

In this sense, it is worth mentioning some important public policies for this process. The first was the expansion in the number of universities and public campuses in the period, with emphasis on universities outside the south-southeast axis and the largest urban centers. REUNI, the Restructuring and Expansion of Federal Universities project, was responsible for opening 14 new universities and 100 new campuses; in 10 years we doubled the number of openings in public universities, surpassing 1 million openings, with emphasis on the expansion of evening

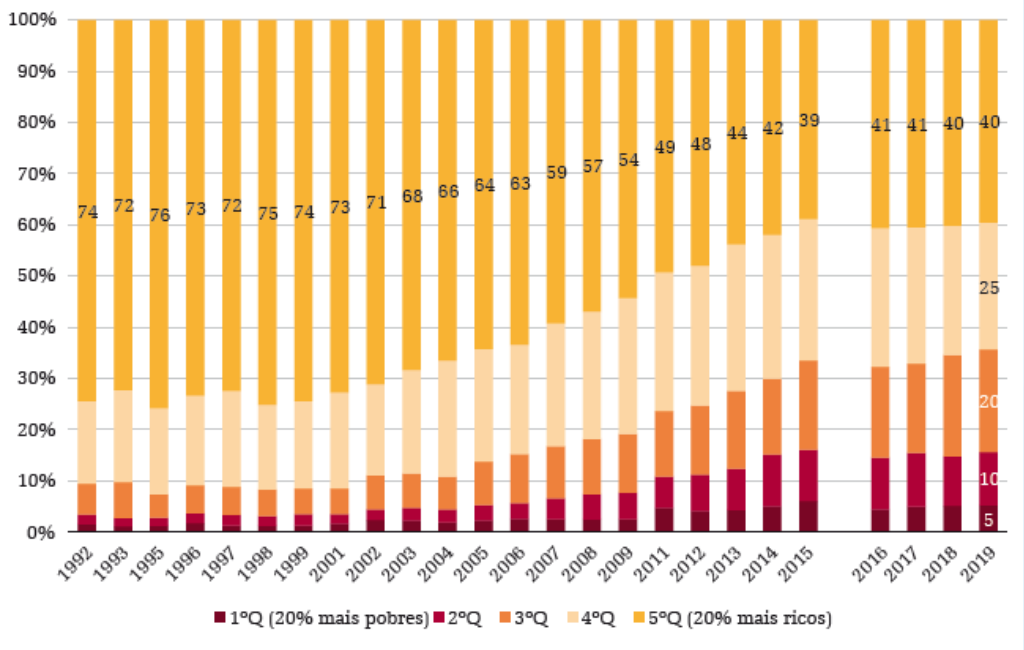
courses. The program was also responsible for the reform and creation of several Federal Institutes.

Under the private education, two programs should be mentioned. The first is ProUni, a program in which the Federal Government pays 50% or 100% of the tuition for black, indigenous and low-income students in private colleges. Although this program has been criticized for favoring investment in the private sector to the detriment of the public sector, it has been responsible

for encouraging the significant expansion of private colleges, which also grew in the number of openings during the period, but in a more inclusive manner, since the openings resulting from the program were increasingly occupied by segments that had previously been excluded from higher education. The second was the restructuring of FIES, a zero-interest student financing program in which the Federal Government funded university education for middle-class students, through subsidized loans, and was the guarantor of these students. Both programs have problems and have been the target of criticism and proposals for reformulation; their contribution, however, to expanding and democratizing access to higher education is undeniable.

The combination of the quota program in public universities, with the strengthening of the financing of student scholarships and the expansion of credit in private universities also made it possible to reduce class inequalities in higher education during this period. Although enrollments grew in all income quintiles, they grew even more among the poorest.

Graph 10 – Socioeconomic composition, by per capita household income quintile, of 18- to 24-year-olds accessing higher education in Brazil (1992-2019)



Source: MELLO and SENKEVICS, 2020

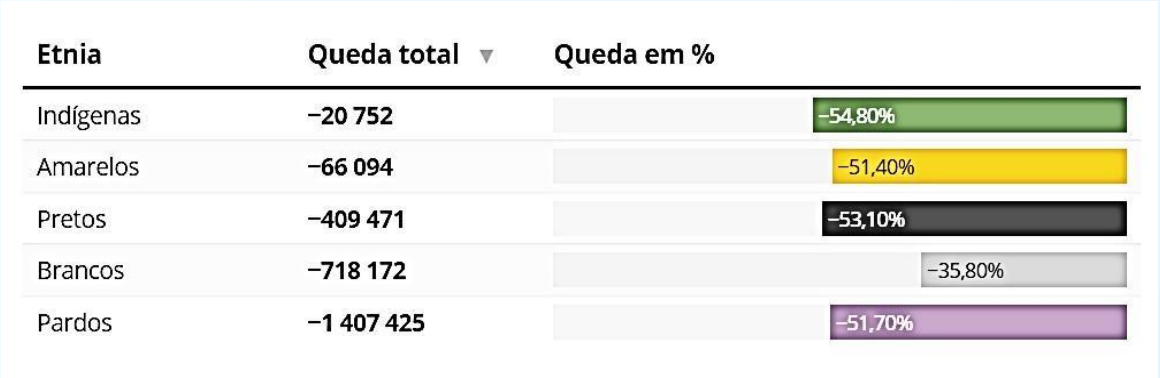
Even though inequality remains high within higher education, and we still need to go a long way, the analysis of Graph 10 makes it quite clear that there has been a significant improvement in all indicators in recent years, especially up until 2015. What can be seen in most of the graphs illustrating the trajectory of inequalities in higher education is that the pace of decline in these inequalities and democratization of education becomes much slower from 2016.

About this slowdown in the expansion and democratization of higher education, it is necessary to make some considerations about the current scenario. First, the years 2015-2017 are marked by a deep economic crisis and recession in Brazil, which entails, on the one hand, an increase in the opportunity cost of getting into and staying in college and, on the other hand, a decrease in the perception of the importance of higher education, mainly due to the increase in unemployment

among young people. Secondly, the political instability starting in 2015, culminating in the coup of 2016, begins a process of disinvestment in public education: whether with the end of Reuni, the cuts to universities, or the dismantling of FIES, the fact is that we have slowed down, not to say stopped expanding higher education and democratizing it. A central component of the social regression that has afflicted Brazil since then, anti-intellectualism has also fed this process through the demonization of universities, professors, and science itself.

This whole process brings visible consequences. The first is the decrease in ENEM enrollment, which had reached 8.6 million students in 2015 and dropped to 5.8 million in 2020. Even worse, not only has the number of applicants dropped a lot, but this year we will have, as shown in Graph 11 below, prepared by the G1 portal, the whitest and most elitist ENEM in the last decade.

Graph 11 – Drop in Enem 2021 applicants by race



Etnia	Queda total	Queda em %
Indígenas	−20 752	−54,80%
Amarelos	−66 094	−51,40%
Pretos	−409 471	−53,10%
Brancos	−718 172	−35,80%
Pardos	−1 407 425	−51,70%

Source: G1

The second consequence is the reversal of the trend of expanding the proportion of blacks in university. In 2017 we had, for the first time in history, more blacks than whites in universities, something closer to the composition of the Brazilian population; however, in 2020 this number reversed again, with more white people than black people in Brazilian higher education. Finally, the proportion of people from the highest income quintile in universities stabilizes at 40%, that is, income privileges stop decreasing.

The dismantling of public universities is an unequal and elitist project. It is necessary to take into account that social changes are the fruit of political-ideological struggle, and popular movement, as well as public policies. It is not possible to democratize higher education without public investment, and it is not possible to talk about democracy without equity in the access to education.

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