Race, Resources, and Representation
 evidence from brazilian politicians

By Natália S. Bueno and Thad Dunning

What explains the persistence of racial or ethnic inequalities in descriptive representation in the absence of strongly politicized racial or ethnic cleavages? This article uses new data to demonstrate a substantial racial gap between voters and politicians in Brazil. The authors show that this disparity is not plausibly due to racial preferences in the electorate as a whole, for instance, deference toward white candidates or discrimination against nonwhites, and that barriers to candidate entry or discrimination by party leaders do not likely explain the gap. Instead, they document persistent resource disparities between white and nonwhite candidates, including large differences in personal assets and campaign contributions. The findings suggest that elite closure—investments by racial and economic elites on behalf of elite candidates—help perpetuate a white political class, even in the absence of racialized politics. By underscoring this avenue through which representational disparities persist, the article contributes to research on elite power in democratic settings.

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