

# Affirming the Racial Divide?

## The Political Consequences of Affirmative Action in Brazil

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### Summary of the Paper

Does racial affirmative action, by making race a salient dimension in the allocation of public resources, foster racial voting? In this paper, I investigate such unintended consequence of affirmative action by studying the implementation of the first race-targeted affirmative action policy in Brazil, the Law of Quotas, which mandated the reservation of half of admission seats in federal universities to underrepresented groups. I start documenting that the expansion of racial quotas in federal universities increased the enrolment of non-white students through racial quotas. Combining granular voting data with electorate demographics and predicted race of candidates from ballot box pictures, I show that the expansion of racial quotas led to a racial divide in Brazilian politics: voters increased support for federal candidates of their own race. The introduction of racial quotas also translated in a redefinition of the vote across the left-right political spectrum: non-white voters increased support for left-wing parties, while white voters expressed a backlash by voting to conservative parties.

### Research Question

- Race-targeted affirmative action policies widely used to redress historical inequalities across racial groups, but particularly divisive



Does racial affirmative action, by making race a salient dimension of policy-making, enhance racial political divisions?

- I focus on **Racial Voting**, i.e. voting along racial lines
- In particular:
  - Do voters increase preferences for same-race candidates?
  - Do they trade-off other policy dimensions, s.a. economic policies or candidate competence?
- To answer these questions, I study the first nationwide racial affirmative action policy in Brazil: the Law of Quotas

### Racial Inequalities & The Law of Quotas

- Brazil: largest recipient of enslaved Africans during the Atlantic Slave Trade era
- Centuries of racial mixing + European migration → “racial democracy”
- Today, 51% non-white (mixed-race, Black, and Indigenous), 48% Whites and 1% Asian, but
  - ↳ pronounced racial disparities
  - ↳ few government initiatives that explicitly tackled them
- **2013**: the government, lead by the Worker’s Party (PT), introduced a system of quotas in public tertiary education → **Law of Quotas**
  - For each program in federal universities: Reservation of 50% of vacancies to public high-school, low-income, and/or non-white students
  - Percentage of racial quotas based on the racial composition of the university’s state
  - Advertised quotas for non-whites: 5% in 2012 → 30% in 2016
- From 2015: “Comissões de Heteroidentificação” following complaints of fraud
- Polarizing policy in the Brazilian National Congress

### Data

- **Census of Higher Education Microdata**: universe of students enrolled in tertiary education + program information (individual-level), 2010-2018
- **Implementation of Quotas** across federal universities, 2010-2018
- **Electoral data** at municipality and ballot box level (~ 350 voters), 2006-2018
- **Race of candidates**: classified according to phenotypical traits using ballot box pictures + Multi-label image classification AutoML model from Google Vertex AI platform



### Exposure to Racial Quotas

Local exposure to racial quotas defined as *the predicted share of racial quotas allocated to each municipality, according to the pre-policy enrolment of students across universities*

$$Q_{mt} = \sum_u \left( \frac{s_{mu}}{s_u} \times \frac{Q_{ut}}{pop_m^{18-24}} \right)$$

- $s_{mu}$  = students from  $m$  enrolled in federal university  $u$  in 2010
- $s_u$  = students enrolled in  $u$  in 2010
- $Q_{ut}$  = advertised vacancies reserved to non-whites in  $u$  in year  $t$
- $pop_m^{18-24}$  = population in  $m$  from 18 to 24 in 2010

### Identification Strategy

I estimate the following Difference-in-Difference model for the period 2010-2018:

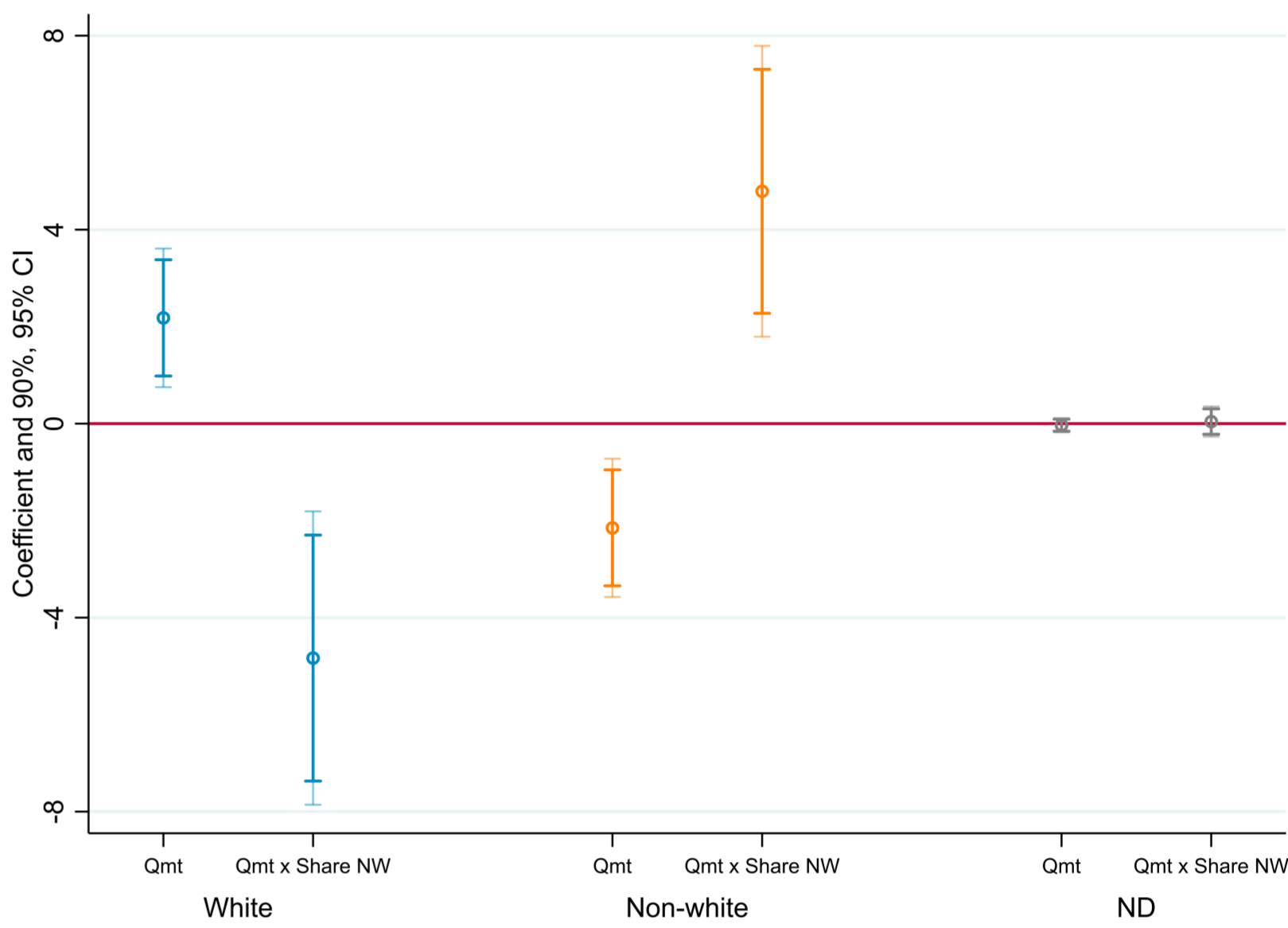
$$V_{mt} = \beta_1 Q_{mt} + \beta_2 Q_{mt} \times pop_m^{nw} + X_m^I \gamma_t + \alpha_m + \alpha_{st} + \varepsilon_{mt}$$

- $V_{mt}$  = vote share in municipality  $m$  in year  $t$
- $Q_{mt}$  = exposure to racial quotas in  $m$  at  $t$
- $pop_m^{nw}$  = share of non-white population in  $m$
- $X_m$  = municipality controls at baseline
- $\alpha_m$  and  $\alpha_{st}$  are municipality and state x year FE, respectively
- $\varepsilon_{mt}$  = error term

### Main Results

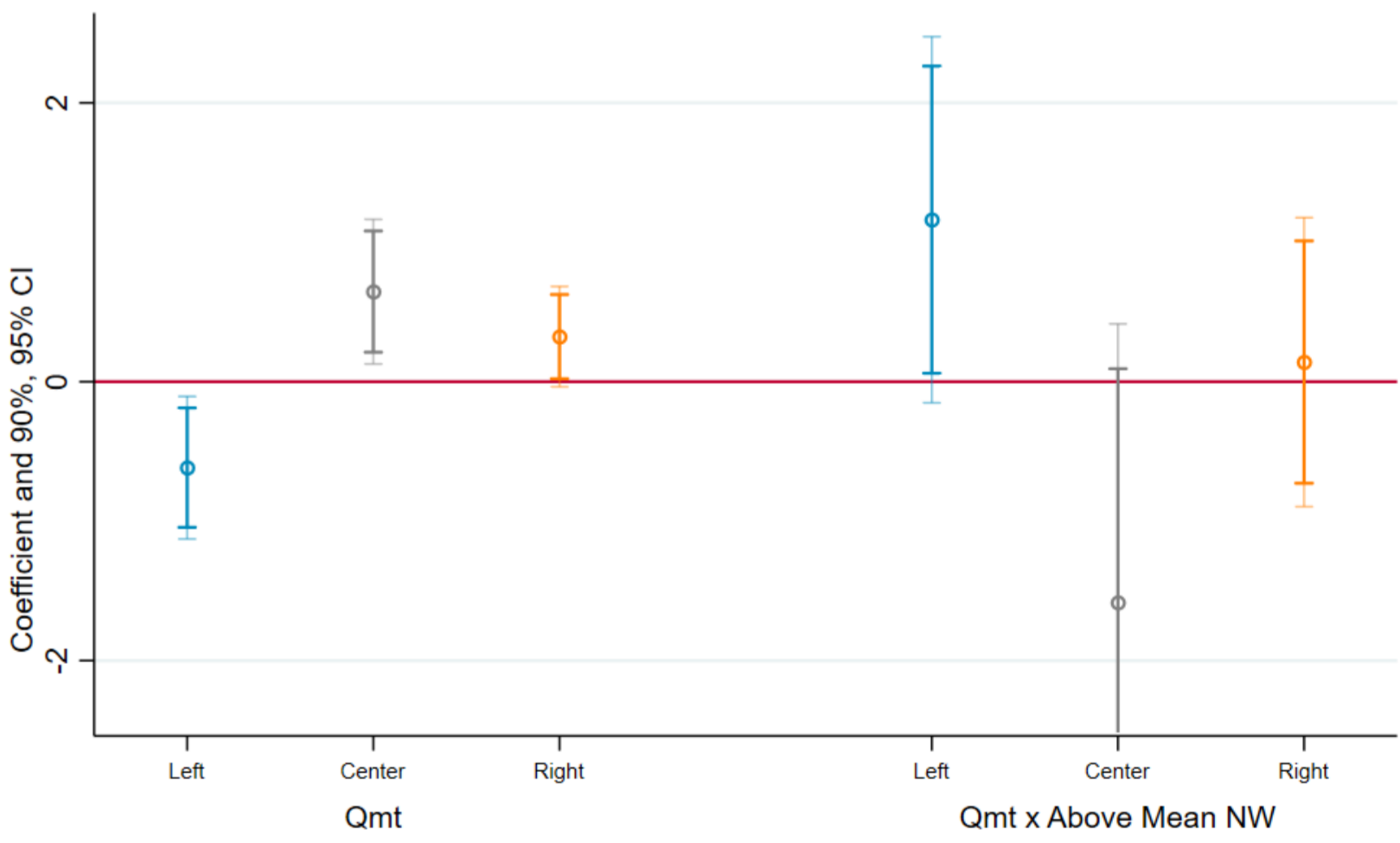
#### 1. Preferences for Same-Race Candidates

$\Delta Q_{mt} = 0.01 \rightarrow \Delta \text{Vote NW} = -0.1 + 0.23 \times \text{Share}_m^{nw}$  wrt to baseline support



#### 2. Ideological Realignment across Racial Groups

↑ Vote to Left in predominantly non-white municipalities, while overall shift to center and right-wing parties



### Discussion

- This paper contributes to the longstanding policy debate on whether affirmative action should be based on race by adding an important trade-off: accelerating the representation of minorities vs ↑ racial divisions.
- By exploiting the first racial affirmative action in Brazil and granular electoral data, I show that racial quotas increase preferences for same-race policy-makers in federal legislative elections, at the expense of economic policy stances.
- Future research involves investigating whether voters trade-off other relevant dimensions of policy-making, such as candidates' competence.