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Mexican American Public Sector Professionals: Perceptions of Affirmative Action Policies and Workplace Discrimination

Ramona Ortega¹, Gregory K. Plagens¹,
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Abstract

Diversity among civil service employees, affirmative action, and workplace discrimination continue to be salient and potentially dynamic issues for public sector human resource managers. In an effort to better understand a fast-growing but rarely studied subgroup of the public workforce, this study compares Mexican American managers' perceptions of affirmative action and workplace discrimination to those of their White and Black, non-Hispanic peers. Data for this study come from two large Southwestern United States cities, Phoenix, Arizona and San Antonio, Texas. Results from bivariate and multivariate analyses show that managers, as a collective group, do not believe affirmative action policies and workplace discrimination have affected advancement. However, when the data are disaggregated and reexamined by race or ethnicity, significant differences of opinion emerge. We find evidence that Mexican American managers perceive affirmative action policies and workplace discrimination differently than their peers.

Keywords

Mexican Americans, discrimination, affirmative action, public managers, race, urban, local government

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Introduction

Affirmative action policies and workplace discrimination remain salient issues throughout private and public sector organizations (Levine, 2003; Martin, 1997; Riccucci, 2007; Szmborski, 1996). Passage of seminal pieces of 1960s civil rights legislation (Congressional Record, 1964) led to increased numbers of minorities and women entering administrative positions in major U.S. cities (Brewer & Selden, 2003). The purpose of this study is to measure managers' perceptions about affirmative action and workplace discrimination in two cities, Phoenix, Arizona and San Antonio, Texas. These cities were selected because they are similar in population size, ethnic diversity, and they are both located in the Southwest. The City of Phoenix has a population of approximately 1.5 million and the City of San Antonio has an approximate population of 1.3 million (U.S. Census, 2006). Mexican Americans are the dominant ethnic group in both cities and far too little is known about their public service careers as white-collar municipal managers.

Two Research Questions

Two research questions are addressed in this article:

Research Question 1: Are Mexican American perceptions about affirmative action different from White and Black, non-Hispanic administrators?

Research Question 2: Are Mexican American perceptions of workplace discrimination different from White and Black, non-Hispanic administrators?

We expect to find significant differences between Mexican Americans and their peers. Specifically, we expect to find that Mexican American administrators perceive higher levels of workplace discrimination and will report a higher level of satisfaction with affirmative action policies and programs. Results of this study may be of interest to researchers and public and private sector human resource managers who are interested in attracting greater numbers of minorities to their organizations.

In addition to survey questions about affirmative action and workplace discrimination, participants were asked to answer demographic questions about gender, income, education, and seniority. We asked these questions to better understand Mexican Americans as white-collar professionals. Early studies show that education, seniority, and on-the-job training (OJT) influenced the professional career advancement of White males (Taussig & Joslyn, 1932; Warner & Abegglen, 1955). An assumption of this study is that these variables have contributed to the successful advancement of Mexican American municipal government professionals. It is important to note that early studies did not include questions about workplace discrimination or affirmative action. In this study we have asked these important and timely questions.

Definitions and Terminology

Spanish-surnamed/Hispanic/Latino/Mexican American/Chicano are terms widely used as ethnic identifiers in the literature. This study uses the term Mexican American to refer to persons of Mexican descent born in the United States. The current study excludes Mexican Nationals (persons born in or arriving from Mexico) from survey results because our focus is on the perceptions of white-collar professionals of Mexican descent born in the United States. Another reason to use the term Mexican American is that Mexican Americans form the largest ethnic group among Latino/Hispanic populations living in the Southwest (U.S. Census, 2006).

The words *administrator* and *manager* are used interchangeably and refer to groups of white-collar professionals working in municipal governments. Mexican American white-collar professionals, as opposed to blue-collar workers, are the focus of this study.

Literature Review

Since the issuance of President John F. Kennedy's Executive Order 10925 (1961) to "take proactive steps necessary to dismantle prejudice," the public sector has relied on equal employment laws and affirmative action as the primary strategy to redress past injustices (Marable, 1996, p. 82). Together, Executive Order 11246, as amended, Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and affirmative action provisions, as amended, (Section 4212) of the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act, as amended, create the necessary antidiscrimination laws that mandate employers who receive federal support "take affirmative action to ensure that all individuals have an equal opportunity for employment, without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability or status as a Vietnam era or special disabled veteran" (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002, p. 1).

Political power and legal protection for minorities and women in the workforce evolved as a result of a three-tier process: equal employment laws, affirmative action laws and programs, and diversification programs (Klingner & Nalbandian, 1998). Equal opportunity laws exist to protect minorities and women from discriminatory treatment regarding hiring, promoting, and working conditions. Affirmative action policies and programs are used to actively recruit members of protected classes into the workforce through outreach efforts and innovative organizational initiatives. In the acquisition of human resources, affirmative action was intended to redress historical inequities and correct imbalances resulting from institutional practices that favored certain groups over others.

Since the late eighties, however, special interest groups, political officials and strong opponents of affirmative action have called on presidential leadership to downgrade or dismantle affirmative action programs (Berry, 2004). After the 1995 White House Review of Affirmative Action, former-President Clinton declared that

“affirmative action has always been good for America” and recommended that we, as a nation, “mend it, not end it” (Edley, 1996, pp. 38-39). This presidential declaration was a direct response to political agitation calling for the dismantling of affirmative action policies and programs. These laws and initiatives support social progress in leveling the playing field for minorities, women, and others who seek career opportunities in the public sector. After more than four decades, policies which promote social equity in America continue to face legal, administrative, and political challenges (Berry, 2004). As we debate the utility of equal employment opportunity laws and affirmative action policies and programs, we must also assess whether organizations are capable of sustaining workforce diversity in an environment free of discriminatory misperceptions about minorities and women. While some organizations have been able to develop dynamic diversification programs that welcome and celebrate minorities and women into the workforce, others never really shifted their focus from tolerating diversity to embracing diversity (Klingner & Nalbandian, 1998).

Over the last decade, the focus of controversy has shifted: whereas affirmative action was once seen as a measure to provide access to education, employment, and contracting for minorities and women, more recently affirmative action policy has been seen as a tool for achieving social equity (Berry, 1999). Affirmative action is *action* undertaken by employers to increase the hiring, retention, and promotion of minorities, women, and persons with disabilities or *action* undertaken by institutions to ensure that members of these groups (e.g., Asians, blacks, Hispanics, and women) have equal chances to gain access to education and employment opportunities (Crosby & Cordova, 1996). Surprisingly, opinion polls show that most Americans believe affirmative action policies and programs lead to numerical quotas and preferential selection of minorities and women (Pratkanis & Turner, 1996). Klingner and Nalbandian (1998) point out that widespread disagreement around affirmative action was most likely caused by societal disagreement over the relative importance of social equity as an underlying value and over the appropriateness of alternative strategies for achieving it (equal employment opportunity, affirmative action, or workforce diversification programs).

Fully implemented equal opportunity and affirmative action policies help to ensure the full participation of minorities and women in employment, education, and contracting and workforce diversification programs. In the workplace, “equal employment opportunity laws accept minorities and women into organizations, affirmative action laws and programs recruit minorities and women into organizations, and diversification programs welcome minorities and women into organizations” (Klingner & Nalbandian, 1998, p. 168). Where an organization stands depends on its ability to manage diversity—organizations that experience problems in attracting and maintaining diversity may also be unable to manage diversity. In particular, employee relations in diverse organizations are often fraught with tension and negative stereotype (Constable, 2007).

These tensions, negative stereotypes, and workplace conflicts are a consequence of attracting, retaining, and securing a workforce made up of employees who speak a

different language, celebrate different cultures, and promote different values. Thomas (2001) notes that federal employment discrimination lawsuits have increased threefold over the past decade where minority plaintiffs have alleged discriminatory employment patterns and hostile work environments. Thomas further recognizes that the “diversity tensions” behind discrimination suits stifles an organization’s ability to recruit a representative workforce and highlights the organization’s inadequacy or inability to manage diversity. As such, managers and employees must be taught that when differences are valued, discrimination and employee turnover decreases while productivity and employee respect increases. Respecting individual differences and dealing with internal conflicts are paramount to moving organizations from resisting diversity to learning from diversity, with the optimal goal of effectively managing diversity.

Workforce diversification programs focus on improving organizational effectiveness and rely on diversity to enhance productivity. Klingner (1998) defines workforce diversification as

a set of changes in organizational mission, culture, policies, and programs designed to enhance an organization’s effectiveness by shifting its focus from tolerating diversity to embracing diversity through a range of personnel functions such as job design, recruitment and retention, pay and benefits, orientation and training, and performance evaluation and improvement. (p. 2418)

According to Klingner and Nalbandian (1998), the most effective workforce diversity policies and programs have the following characteristics:

1. A broad definition of diversity that includes a range of characteristics, rather than only those used to define “protected classes” under existing affirmative action;
2. A systematic assessment of the existing culture to determine how members at all levels view the present organization;
3. Top-level initiation of, commitment to, and visibility of workforce diversity as an essential organizational policy rather than as a legal compliance issue or staff function;
4. Establishment of specific objectives;
5. Integration into the managerial performance evaluation and reward structure;
6. Coordination with other activities such as employment development, job design, and TQM; and
7. Continual evaluation and improvement (p. 172).

This research provides a framework for providing a systematic assessment of the organizational culture to identify how employee perceptions around discrimination and affirmative action are linked to personal and career advancement in the public sector. This approach is important because perceptions about organizational culture and

climate issues affect the ability of the organization to retain a diverse workforce. Dass and Parker (1999) cite four perspectives of organizational culture that distinguish approaches for acquiring and managing diversity: the resistance paradigm, the discrimination and fairness paradigm, the access and legitimacy paradigm, and the learning and effectiveness paradigm (pp. 69-72). Each paradigm offers organizational motivation for acquiring diverse employees and suggests the strategic responses that organizations utilize to retain diversity. Organizations that resist diversification are threatened and typically view diversity changes as too costly. Resisting organizations react negatively to external pressures for change and are more likely to avoid equal employment and affirmative action initiatives (pp. 69-70).

Despite internal and external pressures to diversify, some organizations simply resist hiring minorities and women and often run the risk of being investigated for discrimination complaints. In organizations where discrimination and prejudice have resulted in untapped human resources, diversity initiatives like equal employment and affirmative action are proven strategies to recruit diverse employees. According to Dass and Parker (1999, pp. 70-71), these organizations find themselves negotiating and pacifying different interest groups while grappling with legal questions of compliance. As a quick fix, these organizations are more likely to negotiate with minority groups and provide economic resources for disadvantaged groups. Under these circumstances, group interest tends to be strong and conflict seems to be certain. A greater value is placed on access and legitimacy to acquire diversity instead of managing diversity and the value of diversity is often riddled by negative employee perceptions around who is qualified to lead.

Other research examines the importance of affirmative action in various settings, including educational institutions, the workplace, and the military (Leach, 2005; Riccucci, 2007). Riccucci (2007) suggests, "Affirmative action is and will always remain an important legal tool for redressing past discrimination and achieving gender and racial balance in the workplace and educational institutions" (p. 138). We agree with Riccucci's assessment that affirmative action remains an important legal tool for employees in the public and private sectors and in colleges and universities. An earlier study (Harper & Reskin, 2005) concluded similarly that affirmative action in schools and in the workplace remains an important legal tool useful for minorities. Harper and Reskin (2005) assert that "[t]here is every reason to believe that AA [affirmative action] will be topical for some time to come. Both social science and public policy stand to gain from additional scholarly analyses" (p. 374). The approach we have taken in this study may contribute something new to the debate about affirmative action and workplace discrimination. In particular, we hope to shed some light on what employees are thinking which may lead to a better understanding of how different groups perceive these issues and the policies emanating from extant public policies.

When studying the affects of affirmative action and workplace discrimination on Spanish-speaking subcultures, researchers are wise to recognize that Spanish-surnamed people are not all alike. Early research suggests there is a critical need to disaggregate research data along specific Latino/Hispanic ethnic lines to more clearly

distinguish and measure differences between and among different Latino/Hispanic groups (Bean & Tienda, 1987; Borjas, 2002, 2006). The literature suggests that by separating data we may come to better understand the life and work experiences of each particular group. Researchers have acknowledged that there are differences between Mexican Americans and Cubans (Fernandez Barrios, 1999), between Puerto Ricans and Mexican Nationals, between Mexican Americans and Mexican Nationals, and so forth; however, there remains a great tendency to lump all Latino/Hispanics together.

Differences occur because different Latino/Hispanic groups have vastly different experiences (Borjas, 2006; Chavez, 1991). Persons of Mexican descent born in the United States are American by birth and generally do not have the same socioeconomic, language, or cultural experiences as Mexican Nationals. Mexican Americans tend to be better educated and have higher social standing than their Mexican National counterparts living in the United States (Borjas, 2002, 2006; Chavez, 1991). Mexican Nationals generally come to the United States as migrant or blue-collar workers and cannot reliably be compared to Mexican Americans on issues of education, income, work experiences, and social mobility. We agree with the sentiment expressed by scholars who have studied Latino subcultures that only by understanding differences in subcultures can academics and researchers provide this nation's policymakers with the information they need to begin to write policies and implement programs that effectively address the social and political inequities occurring in each group.

We believe that researchers, academics, human resource directors, and city managers wanting to diversify their respective workforces need more reliable information if they are to understand this large, growing, and culturally different segment of the population. As suggested by Levine (2003), "Organizations committed to [the] ideal of diversity value their employee's group identities and see themselves as places where members of different groups live and work together without the conflict that often characterizes intergroup interaction" (p. 279).

Using the City of Denver as a case study Levine (2003) discusses how valuing diversity means recognizing and appreciating "that individuals are different," where different refers to "values, perspectives and ways of doing things." Levine also reported that when respondents were asked why the city should have diversity initiatives, the response was, "It makes good business sense to use the talent of all employees, to gain a maximum of effort, therefore affecting employee productivity . . ." (p. 280). From our perspective, it makes good business sense in public and private sector workplaces and the academy to engage all employees in a productive, meaningful workplace environment—an environment that values diversity and actively implements affirmative action policies intended to prevent workplace discrimination.

Significance of Study

This research is significant because it examines a subset of the fastest growing, and now largest, minority group in the United States. According to the 2006-2008 U.S.

Census American Community Survey, Hispanics now make up 15.1% of the American population, surpassing the Black, non-Hispanic population at 12.3%. Looking at passive representation of Hispanics nationwide in state and local government (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2005) reveals that 7.9% of full-time employees in the top four EEOC categories are Hispanic, well below the 15.1% found in the national population. Data on Hispanics in state and local government in the Southwest, where Hispanics are found in greater numbers, suggests underrepresentation there as well. Looking again at the top four EEOC categories, Hispanics make up 29.6% of the Arizona population but only 18.5% of full-time employees in state and local government. Likewise, in Texas, Hispanics make up 35.9% of the population but only 22.1% of employees in state and local government.¹

This study contributes to the public personnel literature by focusing on the Mexican American white-collar administrator, about whom little is known despite the fact that Mexican Americans are the largest Hispanic subculture in the country (United States Fact Sheet, 2006). Black, non-Hispanic, and White managers are used as comparison groups. This research helps fill the void articulated by scholars who have studied Latino/Hispanic populations (Bean & Tienda, 1987; Borjas & Tienda, 1985; Browning, Marshall, & Tabb, 1984; Cafferty & McCready, 1985; Chavez, 1991; Knouse, Rosenfeld, & Culbertson, 1992; Fernandez Barrios, 1999; Fischkin, 1997; Levine, 2003; Repack, 1995; Santiago, 1994, 1999).

Method

Data and Hypotheses

Data for this study come from two convenience samples of white-collar administrators, one group from San Antonio, Texas and the other from Phoenix, Arizona. In each case we asked the human resource managers to select for inclusion managers at the executive, professional, and supervisory levels of the organization. Managers are defined by their responsibility of supervising subordinate employees. Individuals invited to participate come from the following four EEOC categories: officials/administrators, professionals, technicians, and protective services. We chose these four categories to gain perspectives vertically within the organizations. The human resource managers were encouraged in their selection of participants to pay particular attention to diversity, being sure to include representation of racial or ethnic groups proportionate to the organization overall.²

Overall response rates to the survey from the two cities vary (44.8% vs. 36%), with fewer responses coming from San Antonio than from Phoenix. The number of managers invited to participate was nearly identical (563 for Phoenix vs. 540 for San Antonio), and conversations with the human resource managers who assisted in the survey administration revealed nothing obvious that would explain the variation. One possibility might be our timing in putting the surveys into the field. The survey was released in Phoenix in September 2008 and in San Antonio in November 2008.

Table 1. Description of Sampling Frame

	Phoenix (n = 225)			San Antonio (n = 171)		
	Invited n	Responding n	Rate %	Invited n	Responding n	Rate %
Race						
Hispanic	159	50	31.4	235	74	31.5
White	271	127	46.9	240	80	33.3
Black	133	48	36.1	69	17	24.6
Gender						
Male	350	117	33.4	425	118	27.8
Female	213	108	50.7	115	53	46.1
Total	63	225	40.0	540	171	31.7

Releasing the San Antonio survey closer to the busy holiday season, when employees often seek to take time off of work, may not, in retrospect, have been a good idea. Still, with 252 responses from Phoenix and 194 responses from San Antonio, the sample sizes were sufficiently large for analysis.

In organizing our data for analysis we found that not all observations could be used. Twenty-seven respondents (13 in Phoenix vs. 14 in San Antonio) failed to self-report their race or ethnicity and 23 respondents (14 in Phoenix vs. nine in San Antonio) fell into race or ethnic categories containing few other respondents. Since the interest of this article is Mexican American managers, we culled from the data set the observations of managers who self-reported their race or ethnicity as something other than Mexican American, White or Black, non-Hispanic. The response rates for the two cities when considering only these observations is slightly lower, with 40% of managers responding in Phoenix and 31.7% of managers responding in San Antonio. Removed from the data sets were six respondents who reported themselves as other Hispanic, nine respondents reporting mixed race/ethnicity, seven reporting other race/ethnicity, and one reporting American Indian. Table 1 shows the race and gender composition of the pared-down data set used in our analysis, distinguishing between the employees invited to participate in the survey and those actually responding. The Hispanic category shows the number of Hispanics invited to participate in the survey and the number of Mexican Americans responding.

We propose to test four hypotheses in the section to follow. First, we expect to find that, compared to their White counterparts, Mexican American managers are more likely to perceive affirmative action policies in the city to have affected their personal advancement in the organization. Second, we expect to find that, compared to White managers, Mexican American managers are more likely to perceive racially or ethnically based workplace discrimination to have affected their career advancement into management positions. Our third and fourth hypotheses compare Mexican American managers to Black, non-Hispanic managers on these two outcomes. Since Black,

non-Hispanics also possess minority status we hypothesize that their perceptions will be similar to their Mexican American colleagues. That is, we expect that we will not be able to reject the null hypothesis of no difference between Mexican American and Black non-Hispanic managers on their perceptions of the affect of affirmative action and discrimination on their career advancement.

Measures and Methods

The dependent variables of interest are measured using two questions from the survey. First, participants were asked the following: “To what extent do you believe that the Affirmative Action Programs of the City have impacted your personal advancement in the organization?” Responses to this item ranged from 1 (*strongly reduced my chances*) to 5 (*strongly helped my chances*). Second, participants were asked the following: “To what extent do you personally believe that racially or ethnically based discrimination affected your career advancement into management positions?” Responses to this item ranged from 1 (*absolutely none*) to 4 (*high level*).

The independent variable of interest is race or ethnicity, and it has been captured using three dummy variables—Mexican American; White; and Black, non-Hispanic. In each case the number 1 has been assigned if the person is of the race of the variable and 0 if not. Control variables are included for gender, salary, education, and years working in the city. Gender is coded 0 for male and 1 for female. Salary is a six-category, ordered categorical variable ranging from less than US\$50,000 to greater than US\$110,000. Education is an ordered categorical variable ranging from high school diploma or GED to PhD. Years working in the city is the actual number of years the respondent reported working in the city. Since our sample includes two cities, resulting in nested data, analyses are conducted separately for each site.

Preliminary analyses were conducted using the SPSS 16.0 statistical program. Final regression models were run using the Mplus 5.1 statistical package. Comparisons between sites (i.e., Phoenix vs. San Antonio) were conducted using the chi-square (for two-by-two tables), the Tau-C (for ordered categorical tables), and logistic test for mean differences (for interval/ratio variables), as appropriate. Final ordinal (using the logit link) regression models utilized Full Information Likelihood (FIML) estimates to address missing data.³ Models include the dependent variables, the independent variable of interest (race/ethnicity) with Mexican American as the reference category compared to both White and Black, non-Hispanic categories, in addition to each of the control variables described above.

Both dependent variables were treated as ordered categorical variables. McKelvey and Zavoina (1975) and Winship and Mare (1984) provide evidence that treating ordered categorical variables as interval or ratio variables can produce misleading results. Thus, despite the current popularity of using linear regression modeling by treating ordered categorical variables as interval or ratio variables, we opt to follow the advice of Long (1997) and take the more conservative approach in our estimation. Regression models were ordinal logistic regression models utilizing the “categorical

outcome" designation of Mplus (using the logit link) with Monte Carlo integration. Model fit for each model was estimated using two indicators. First, the Satorra Bentler Scaled Chi-Square difference test is conducted to determine if the estimated model is a significantly better fit to the data than the model with only the intercept (both models allow each of the independent variables to be correlated with all other independent variables). This test is conducted using the difference in Log Likelihood between the intercept only model and the estimated model, with the corresponding difference in degrees of freedom; the chi-square distribution is used to determine the significance of the difference (Satorra, 2000). The second fit measure is the Pseudo R^2 for the model. A significant R^2 indicates the independent variables contribute significantly to the explained variance in the dependent variable.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics

The two samples are similar in terms of respondents' age and average years working for the city. The samples differ noticeably in terms of respondents' gender, race or ethnicity, salary, and education. Table 2 provides demographic information about the two samples. The Phoenix sample has a higher percentage of female respondents (44.0% vs. 26.9%), significantly fewer Mexican American respondents (22.2% vs. 43.3%), and significantly more Black, non-Hispanic (21.3% vs. 9.9%) and White (56.5% vs. 46.8%) respondents. The salaries for Phoenix respondents are higher than for San Antonio (Tau-C = $-.225$; $p = .000$) and the average level of education is higher for the Phoenix sample (Tau-C = $-.235$; $p = .000$). The two samples do not differ on their means for the two dependent variables (affirmative action and discrimination).

Survey respondents from Phoenix range in age from 26 to 64 years old and have worked for the city of Phoenix for as little as 1 year or for as long as 36 years. On average, respondents are 47 years old and have been with the city for 16 years. They are U.S.-born citizens, with the exception of two individuals (who were included in our analyses). Nearly half of them (48.9%) hold a master's degree or a doctoral degree, and more than half of them (54.5%) make at least US\$95,000 per year. More men than women (55.8% vs. 44.1%) answered the survey.

Survey respondents from San Antonio range in age from 27 to 69 years old and have worked for the City of San Antonio for as little as half of 1 year or for as long as 40 years. On average, respondents are 47 years old and have been with the city for nearly 16 years. They are U.S.-born citizens, with the exception of six individuals (who were included in our analyses). Nearly a third of them (28.1%) hold a master's degree or a doctoral degree, and nearly a third of them (29.2%) make at least US\$95,000 per year. More men than women (73.1% vs. 26.9%) answered the survey.

Most respondents felt that affirmative action programs had no effect on their advancement (M , Mode = 3.0). However, when disaggregating opinions by race or ethnicity (within site), we find that Mexican Americans in both Phoenix (Tau-C = $.422$;

Table 2. Description of Samples

	Phoenix (n = 225)		San Antonio (n = 171)	
	n	%	n	%
Female	99	44	46	26.9
Ethnicity/race				
Mexican American	50	22.2	74	43.3
Black, Non-Hispanic	48	21.3	17	9.9
White	127	56.4	80	46.8
Salary				
Less than US\$50,000	18	8	26	15.2
US\$50,000-US\$64,999	23	10.2	23	13.5
US\$65,000-US\$79,999	36	16	29	17
US\$80,000-US\$94,999	25	11.1	41	24
US\$95,000-US\$109,999	49	21.8	26	15.2
Above US\$110,000	73	32.4	24	14
	M	SD	M	SD
Age	47.1	8.0	47.2	7.8
Education	5.9	1.9	5.1	1.8
Years worked for the city	15.8	8.8	15.5	9.6
Dependent variables	M (Mode)	SD	M (Mode)	SD
Extent to which affirmative action affected your advancement into management.	3.0 (3.0)	.92	3.0 (3.0)	.77
Extent to which racial or ethnic discrimination affected your career advancement into management.	1.8 (1.0)	.97	1.7 (1.0)	.96

Note: Phoenix significantly more females ($\chi^2 = 13.1, p = .000$). Mexican American ($\chi^2 = 20.0; p = .000$); Black, non-Hispanic ($\chi^2 = 9.2; p = .002$); White ($\chi^2 = 3.6; p = .036$). San Antonio salaries significantly lower than Phoenix (Tau-C = $-0.255, p = .000$). Phoenix significantly higher level of education (Tau-C = $-0.235; p = .000$).

$p = .000$) and San Antonio (Tau-C = $.408, p = .000$) were more likely than Whites to believe that affirmative action helped them advance. No difference between the opinions of Mexican Americans and Black, non-Hispanics was found.

As in the case of affirmative action, most respondents did not perceive racial or ethnic discrimination as having affected their advancement (Phoenix $M = 1.8$; San Antonio $M = 1.7$, Mode both sites = 1.0). Again, disaggregating the data by race or ethnicity (within site) reveals variation in opinions. We find that in Phoenix (but not in San Antonio), Mexican Americans were more likely than Whites to believe discrimination

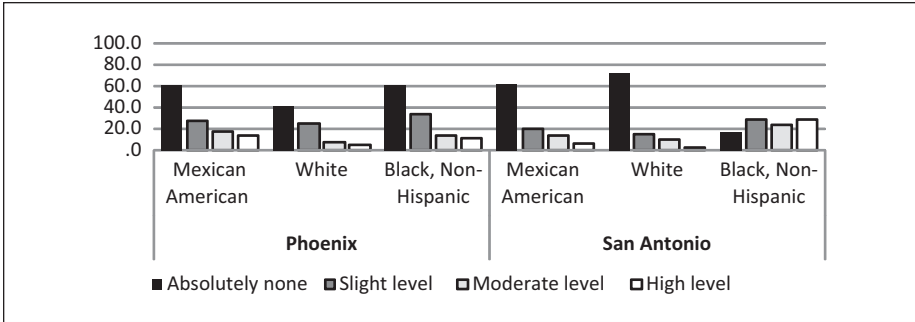


Figure 1. To what extent has discrimination affected career advancement?

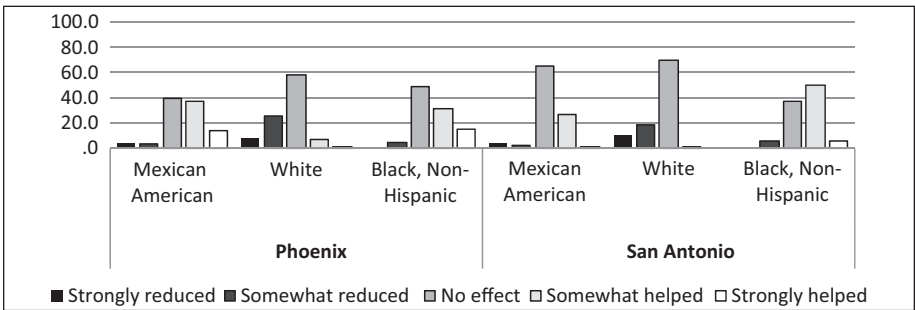


Figure 2. To what extent has affirmative action affected career advancement?

affected their career advancement ($Tau-C = .206; p = .005$). Mexican Americans in San Antonio felt less strongly than Black, non-Hispanics in San Antonio that discrimination affected their careers ($Tau-C = -.305; p = .001$). (see Figures 1 and 2).

The bivariate analyses presented above (ethnicity by affirmative action and ethnicity by discrimination) using the Tau-C are informative, but they lack controls for other measures that may influence the two outcome variables of interest. Limiting the analysis to these bivariate tests may lead us to wrong conclusions about the relationship between race or ethnicity and perceptions of affirmative action’s role in career advancement and between race or ethnicity and workplace discrimination’s role in career advancement.

Regression Models

We extended our bivariate analysis with four ordinal regression models (two outcomes for each of the two sites) that show these relationships while controlling for the influence of education, gender, the number of years working for the city and salary (see Table 3). In each regression model presented, the thresholds for the dependent

Table 3. Ordered Categorical (Logit) Regression Model for Affirmative Action Outcomes

	Phoenix			San Antonio		
	ES	SE	p value	ES	SE	p value
Thresholds affirmative action						
Strongly reduced my chances	-3.598	.685	.000	-4.155	.925	.000
Somewhat reduced my chances	-1.723	.600	.004	-2.959	.856	.001
No effect on me	1.596	.567	.005	1.170	.722	.105
Somewhat helped my chances	3.504	.629	.000	4.435	1.034	.000
Parameter estimates						
White	-2.565	.519	.000	-2.091	.465	.000
Black, non-Hispanic	.041	.461	.930	1.339	.636	.035
Education	-.136	.082	.099	-.092	.108	.394
Female	1.464	.316	.000	1.031	.408	.011
Years worked for city	.004	.018	.840	-.017	.019	.371
Salary	.384	.118	.001	.142	.126	.259
R^2 for model = .259; $p = .000$; LL Intercept only model = 2448, $df = 25$; LL Estimated model = 2,401, $df = 31$; Satorra Bentler Difference Test LL = 106.8; $df = 6$; $p = .000$.			R^2 for model = .210; $p = .000$ LL Intercept only model = 1,809, $df = 25$ LL Estimated model = 1782, $df = 31$ Satorra Bentler Difference Test LL = 66; $df = 6$; $p = .000$.			

variable are in the first set of rows with the logit, standard error and p value listed for the independent variables in the last six rows.

The survey question about affirmative action asked managers to rate the extent to which they perceived city policies on affirmative action having affected their advancement. Respondents were to choose from among five responses coded from 1 to 5—*strongly reduced my chances*, *somewhat reduced my chances*, *no effect*, *somewhat helped my chances*, or *strongly helped my chances*. In the Phoenix model for affirmative action (see Table 3), Whites are significantly lower on their perceptions that affirmative action helped further their career than Mexican Americans; the logit value for Whites is -2.565 ($p = .000$) indicating that for a one unit increase in race (the difference between Mexican American and White) the expected log odds increases by 2.6 as you move to the next higher category of affirmative action. There was no statistically significant effect for Black, non-Hispanics (when compared to Mexican Americans). The model fit the data well (difference in LL $\chi^2 = 106.8$; $df = 6$; $p = .000$) and the R^2 for the model was .259 ($p = .000$).

Table 4. Ordered Categorical (Logit) Regression Model for Discrimination Outcomes

	Phoenix			San Antonio		
	ES	SE	p value	ES	SE	p value
Thresholds discrimination						
Absolutely none	-.170	.567	.765	1.409	.822	.087
Slight level	1.228	.567	.030	2.408	.822	.003
Moderate level	2.242	.575	.000	3.731	.836	.000
Parameter estimates						
White	-1.154	.374	.002	-.474	.351	.177
Black, non-Hispanic	-.410	.405	.311	1.791	.526	.001
Education	.240	.095	.012	.201	.126	.112
Female	-.392	.289	.175	-.311	.437	.476
Years worked for city	.032	.016	.044	.017	.020	.396
Salary	-.289	.107	.007	-.074	.131	.572
R^2 for model = .069; $p = .023$; LL Intercept only model = 2417, $df = 24$; LL Estimated model = 2,406, $df = 30$; Satorra Bentler Difference Test LL = 20.8; $df = 6$; $p = .002$.			R^2 for model = .076; $p = .021$; LL Intercept only model = 1,809, $df = 24$; LL Estimated model = 1797, $df = 30$; Satorra Bentler Difference Test LL = 21; $df = 6$; $p = .002$.			

In the San Antonio model for affirmative action (see Table 3), Whites are significantly lower on their perceptions that affirmative action helped further their career than Mexican Americans (logit = -2.091 ; $p = .000$). Black, non-Hispanics are significantly higher on these perceptions (logit = 1.339 ; $p = .035$), indicating that for a one unit increase in race (the difference between Black, non-Hispanic, and Mexican American) the expected log odds decreases by 1.3 as you move to the next higher category of affirmative action. The model fit the data well (difference in LL $\chi^2 = 66$; $df = 6$; $p = .000$) and the R^2 for the model was .210 ($p = .000$).

The survey question about workplace discrimination asked managers to rate the extent to which they perceived workplace discrimination having affected their advancement. Respondents were to choose from one of four responses—*none*, *slight*, *moderate*, or *high level*.

In the Phoenix model for discrimination (see Table 4), Whites are significantly lower than Mexican Americans on their perceptions that discrimination hindered their career; the logit value for Whites is -1.154 ($p = .002$) indicating that for a one unit increase in race (the difference between Mexican American and White) the expected log odds increases by 1.1 as you move to the next higher category of discrimination. There was no statistically significant effect for Black, non-Hispanics on

the discrimination outcome (compared to Mexican Americans). The model fit the data well (difference in LL $\chi^2 = 20.8$; $df = 6$; $p = .002$) and the R^2 for the model was .069 ($p = .023$).

In the San Antonio model for discrimination (see Table 4), Whites are not significantly different than Mexican Americans on their perceptions that discrimination hindered their career (logit = $-.474$; $p = .177$). Black, non-Hispanics, however, are significantly higher on these perceptions (logit = 1.791 ; $p = .001$), indicating that for a one unit increase in race (the difference between Black, non-Hispanic, and Mexican American) the expected log odds decreases by 1.8 as you move to the next higher category of the discrimination outcome. The model fit the data well (difference in LL $\chi^2 = 21$; $df = 6$; $p = .002$) and the R^2 for the model was .076 ($p = .021$).⁴

The purpose of the regression models was to examine by race or ethnicity the perceptions of affirmative action policies and workplace discrimination while controlling for the possible influence of education, gender, years working for the city and salary. In particular, we hypothesized that compared to Whites, Mexican Americans would be more likely to perceive affirmative action policies as having helped their advancement and more likely to perceive workplace discrimination as having hindered their career advancement. Our second set of hypotheses proposed that Mexican American and Black, non-Hispanic managers would have similar perceptions of the extent to which affirmative action policies helped their advancement and more likely to perceive workplace discrimination as having hindered their career advancement.

In the case of affirmative action, we find that the differences observed between Mexican Americans and Whites remains significant. Where we previously did not find a difference between Mexican Americans and Black, non-Hispanics, the regression analysis reveals there is a significant difference in opinion; Black, non-Hispanics in San Antonio believe more strongly than their Mexican American peers that affirmative action policies have helped them advance. In the case of workplace discrimination, the relationship between Mexican American and White managers is again significant, and the difference observed between Mexican Americans and Black, non-Hispanics remains for the San Antonio site.

Limitations

The racial or ethnic category of Hispanic, the fastest growing minority population in America, comprises groups from many distinct regions of the world, of which Mexicans are but one. The findings of this study are important for understanding Mexican Americans as a subset of the Hispanic population. Parallel findings from two different samples in our study suggest evidence of internal validity. However, our research design and data have their limitations, and below we discuss what are believed to be the threats to external and construct validity.

First, we discourage readers from thinking too generally about the findings of this article. We believe it is reasonable to conclude that our study captures the perceptions

of Mexican American managers in the Southwestern United States, where they can be found in large concentrations. Whether a Mexican American public manager working in Chicago, St. Paul, Seattle, Roanoke, or Boston would feel similarly is not a claim we are prepared to make. Studying Mexican American managers in the Southwest is advantageous because they can be found in sufficient numbers to justify use of quantitative methods, which can help rule out observed patterns in opinions that actually might be due only to chance. Outside the Southwest, the concentration of Mexican Americans in any one organization are likely to be too small to provide meaningful information in a quantitative study.

Second, with regard to our measure of discrimination, one might posit that the direction of discrimination is not clear and may have been interpreted by respondents as either helping or hindering career advancement. While this is possible, our findings show effects in the direction that might be expected for this measure in these subgroups—that is, Whites do not perceive that discrimination has affected them to the extent that the (minority group) Mexican Americans do. Also, Black, non-Hispanics believe that discrimination is more a factor for them compared to Mexican Americans. These findings lead us to believe that the question was interpreted in the way it was intended; that is, discrimination hindered rather than helped career advancement.

Conclusions

Opportunities for minorities in public managerial positions appear to be increasing, which has led to more Mexican American and Black, non-Hispanics advancing in their careers. This research sought to explore the extent to which Mexican American managers believe affirmative action policies have been helpful and workplace discrimination has been harmful, when compared to their White and Black, non-Hispanic peers.

The findings of this article are similar to those reported in previous research (Ortega, 1999). When looking at managers as an aggregate group, there is no evidence that they perceive affirmative action policies and workplace discrimination to have affected their advancement. When examining the data disaggregated by race or ethnicity, however, differences in perceptions emerge. We find evidence that Mexican American managers possess different perceptions than their White or Black, non-Hispanic peers.

Mexican American managers, when compared to their White peers, reported that affirmative action policies were more helpful and that workplace discrimination was more harmful to advancement. Black, non-Hispanic managers differed from Mexican Americans only on their perceptions of discrimination as a hindrance to career advancement, and this difference was seen only in San Antonio. Not surprisingly, White managers believe affirmative action, on average, has had no effect or reduced their chances for advancement (significantly so, when compared to Mexican Americans). Also, Whites are significantly less likely to believe that discrimination

had an effect on their career advancement than Mexican Americans. These findings make sense given that Whites are the historical majority to which all other ethnic groups are compared with regard to affirmative action and workplace discrimination.

The public workforce is increasingly more diverse. Evidence suggests that opportunities for minorities to advance are greater and that the public value placed on equitable hiring and promotion in the public sector may be in the process of being achieved, at least to some degree. Perhaps in the midst of all this diversification it is still too soon to expect to see softening of opinions with regard to the policies designed to be helpful to certain groups and actions perceived to be harmful.

Future Studies

Numerous topics for future study have emerged as a result of our research; each of which may help us better understand the variables that influence public sector careers for Mexican American professionals. Topics that are worthy of future examination include the affects of on-the-job training (OJT), workplace mentoring and seniority, English-proficiency and education.

Issues surrounding workplace diversity, cultural competence, and representative bureaucracy are equally important to understanding environments in which a healthy workplace encourages successful integration, inclusion, and prosperity for all employees. If workplaces are to be productive environments, then human resource managers must actively promote greater understanding and appreciation for cultural differences among employees. Workplace diversity and representative bureaucracy are timely topics worthy of future study. Indeed, diversity is germane to our research. In this study, we have separated the data and focused our attention on a specific ethnic group. We have done so to better understand the effects of public policies and programs on diverse subcultures and, where possible, to measure the workplace experiences of specific minority groups, in particular the public service Mexican American professional.

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Notes

1. The EEOC categories for race or ethnic groups are White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Indian. It is not clear how many of the employees counted as Hispanics are actually Mexican American.
2. We did not require city personnel to provide us with information regarding the extent to which they carried out our requests as described. Although we have representation across the three groups, we do not know the extent to which the percentages are proportional.

3. Missing data analysis indicated data are missing at random (but not completely at random). The FIML approach is a direct model method of handling missing data, which assumes data are missing at random; all available information is used to provide estimates and standard errors, which are unbiased (see Olinsky, Chen, Harlow, 2003).
4. We tested the proportional odds assumption in SPSS using the test of parallel lines. The results for each model indicated the null hypothesis that the slopes are the same across response categories held; none of the models produced a chi-square significance of $<.05$.

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