

## **UC Davis**

### **Recent Work**

#### **Title**

The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

#### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1s2046pj>

#### **Authors**

Grodsky, Eric  
Kalogrides, Demetra

#### **Publication Date**

2007-02-15

# The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

Eric Grodsky and Demetra Kalogrides  
Department of Sociology  
University of California—Davis

DRAFT: February 14, 2007

Word count: 9,948

We are grateful for comments we received from participants in Notre Dame University's Center for Research on Educational Opportunity's 2005 conference, UC Davis's Economy, Justice and Society's 2005 conference, and the Sociology and Demography seminar participants at RAND. We are also grateful to Bill Carbonaro, Diane Felmlee, William Kidder, Chandra Muller, Devah Pager, Catherine Riegle-Crumb and Barbara Schneider for comments and suggestions, and to Christopher Morhpew and Matthew Hartley for sharing their data with us. This work was supported in part by a faculty research grant from the University of California—Davis. The authors gratefully acknowledge the College Board for providing data for this study; however, the point of view or opinions stated in this report are not intended to represent College Board position or policy.

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

### **Abstract**

Using eighteen years of data from more than 1,300 four-year colleges and universities in the United States we investigate the extent to which institutional characteristics and contextual factors influence the propensity of colleges to indicate that they consider race/ethnicity in their admissions decisions. Consideration of race/ethnicity in admissions declined sharply after the mid-1990s, especially at public institutions. Rather than being shaped by specific historical and political contexts, consideration of race/ethnicity in admissions appears to be a widely institutionalized practice in higher education that has been tempered by changes in the policy environment over time.

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

### *Introduction*

Much of the empirical research on race-based affirmative in higher education action has focused on the effects of affirmative action on student outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Although the bulk of the evidence shows positive effects of affirmative action on its intended beneficiaries (Alon and Tienda 2005; Bowen and Bok 1998; Harper and Reskin 2005; Holzer and Neumark 2005) some contend that affirmative action damages the self-esteem of African American students (Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997) and reduces their graduation rates (Sander 2004; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997). While these issues are central to the debate on affirmative action, relatively little work has considered affirmative action in higher education as an organizational practice. How widespread is affirmative action in higher education? What sort of institutions engage in affirmative action? How if at all have patterns of affirmative action changed over time?

In this paper, we consider the use of student race/ethnicity in the admissions process as one aspect of affirmative action. The consideration of race/ethnicity in admissions is one aspect of a postsecondary structure shaped by the varying goals and actions of individual organizations and the contextual constraints that help shape their behavior. Postsecondary organizations, like individual actors, have their own agendas. They vary in mission (Morphew and Hartley 2006) and identity (Clark 1970; Duffy and Goldberg 1998; Meyer 1970; Pusser 2003) and are constrained by a variety of political, historical and regulatory circumstances largely beyond their control (Duffy and Goldberg 1998; Pusser 2003).

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

Affirmative action policies give preference to a historically disadvantaged group of students over otherwise comparable more advantaged students based on some attribute outside the bounds of what one might generally consider as merit.<sup>2</sup> Though typically construed as a boost in the likelihood of admission conditional on application, affirmative action can begin with targeted recruitment well before a student applies to college and extend to financial aid and ongoing academic and social support during the college years. Affirmative action policies have the potential to undermine social stratification, albeit only for the subset of disadvantaged students who persist through secondary school. Given the importance of postsecondary education to occupational outcomes for young adults today, trends in affirmative action in higher education and the factors that promote or inhibit the extent to which colleges and universities engage in this practice should be of central concern to those interested in racial/ethnic stratification. As we show below, those trends suggest a troubling decline in affirmative action that is especially marked among public institutions in states that have restricted the practice, though by no means limited to such institutions. In fact, the decline in affirmative action is evident among both public and private institutions across the United States. On the other hand, we demonstrate that the practice is far more common than some analysts contend.

We use a rich panel dataset of institutions to document the prevalence of the consideration of race in admissions across colleges and universities and over time. A college's likelihood of considering race in the admissions process may be shaped by the interplay of organizational attributes and historical, political and regulatory contexts that constrain the college's ability to act. While often direct, we suggest that the effect of contextual changes can also be indirect, spilling across state borders to influence postsecondary institutions in other

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

states.

In the following sections we detail how and why we expect organizational characteristics to influence a school's propensity to consider race in admissions. We then outline contextual factors that we believe affect institutional claims to consider students race. After describing our data, we present a series of models testing the salience of each of the organizational and contextual factors we believe shape an institution's propensity to consider race in admissions. Finally, we discuss the implications of our findings for diversity in higher education and our understanding of the role of colleges and universities in the stratification process.

### Organizational characteristics

Several characteristics of postsecondary institutions may influence their propensity to consider race in admissions decisions. First, public and private institutions may differ in the degree to which they are committed to matriculating a racially and ethnically diverse student body. Public institutions are, by definition, intended to serve all eligible residents of a particular state. In their analysis of institutional mission statements, Morphew and Hartley (2006) found that, after serving the local area, public general and liberal arts baccalaureate institutions most commonly include a commitment to diversity in their missions statements. While many private colleges and universities also express a commitment to diversity, that goal was not quite as prominent among private institutions as among public institutions.

Second, public institutions are accountable to a broader set of actors than private institutions and, furthermore, may be more sensitive to negative publicity. Both public and private institutions have constituencies, including a public composed of donors, former and

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

potential students and a set of trustees to whom institutional agents must answer. Unlike private institutions, however, public colleges and universities are to varying degrees accountable to the state legislatures and governors of the states they serve.

As extensions of the state, public colleges will be more likely than private colleges to follow affirmative action policies put into place at the federal and state levels. Edelman (1992) argues that organizations respond not only to the letter of the law, but to the environment the law creates. Edelman found that organizations modify their formal structures by Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action (EEO/AA) structures to symbolize their attention to the law.<sup>3</sup> Following this logic, we argue that public institutions are more likely to engage in affirmative action than comparable private institutions because they are more sensitive to the state legal environment. We also expect states to account for a greater share of the variation in the consideration of race in admissions for public than for private institutions.

Colleges and universities are also likely to vary in their propensity to engage in affirmative action based on their prestige or competitiveness, with more prestigious institutions more likely to engage in affirmative action than less prestigious institutions. Affirmative action has been well documented among elite colleges and universities (Bowen and Bok 1998; Elliot 1993; Espenshade, Chung, and Walling 2004; Fetter 1995; Karen 1990; Steinberg 2002; Toor 2001). There are several explanations for this pattern. First, some analysts have argued that only competitive colleges and universities have enough surplus applicants to engage in any selection of students, including based on student race/ethnicity (Bowen and Bok 1998). Kane (1998), however, shows evidence that 40% of institutions engaged in affirmative action in the mid-1980s, and Identifying Reference (In Press) finds that about half of the comprehensive four-year

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

colleges and universities in the United States engaged in affirmative action between 1972 and 1994. Consistent with Identifying Reference, our data suggest that, for most years of our study, around half of all colleges and universities claimed to consider race in admissions. Based on this evidence, we conclude that affirmative action, while more common among elite schools, is not restricted to them.

A more tenable reason highly competitive colleges may be more likely to engage in affirmative action is the relative dearth of highly qualified under-represented minority candidates in most applicant pools. Among students took the SAT between 1999 and 2001, the share of African American students declines steeply as test scores increase (Card and Krueger 2004; Krueger, Rothstein, and Turner 2005). If elite schools want to matriculate more than a handful of African American and Hispanic youth, they must compromise their academic standards to do so. Without considering race, the competition to enroll the highest achieving minority students would be even more fierce than it is already (Dobbs 2003).

Affirmative action may also be an act of *noblesse oblige* for more elite institutions. Such colleges and universities may feel both empowered and obligated by their privileged position to extend opportunities to historically excluded groups of students, as well as to provide leadership to other institutions in doing so. At times, the motivation is quite explicit. A former dean of admissions at Stanford University writes that “[t]he redress of past and present injustices, of lack of opportunity, and of the negligible representation of minorities in positions of authority and responsibility had to begin somewhere, and affirmative action in college admissions had an essential part to play” (Fetter 1995: 110).



## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

### Institutional context

The capacity of colleges and universities to achieve their goals and the strategies they employ to do so are shaped by the context in which they operate. Duffy and Goldberg (1998) describe how some contextual factors, including the size and attributes of the applicant pool and the behavior of peer institutions, constrain the ability of competitive liberal arts colleges to craft incoming classes of students to their satisfaction. The same may be true of the less elite colleges and universities that educate the majority of American baccalaureate recipients. We focus on four different but sometimes interactive dimensions of institutional context: historical, demographic, political and regulatory.

### **Historical context**

The historical context of institutions includes salient events that may influence their present and future actions. Race riots may be an especially important historical factor in institutions' decisions to adopt and maintain affirmative action policies. Several authors have argued that affirmative action for African Americans first arose as a means of managing the civic crises reflected in the race riots of the 1960s (Bowen and Bok 1998; Karabel 2005; Skrentny 1996). By taking highly visible steps to include more African Americans in their incoming classes, colleges, and universities hoped to reduce social tensions that could lead to violent public conflicts. Although other rationales for affirmative eventually replaced crisis management, it may be that those institutions most physically proximate to actual crises maintain the deepest organizational commitment to attracting diverse classes of students. We believe that schools closer to riots, and perhaps to more intense riots, are both more likely to claim to engage

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

in affirmative action and less likely to back away from this claim over time.

Other elements of the historical context, like trends in student financial aid or events that are more national in scope, may contribute to period effects to which all institutions are subject. We discuss two other facets of the historical context, the demographic context and political context, below. In addition to these factors, however, the period of our study witnessed substantial changes in the cost of higher education and in the structure and amount of financial aid available to help students meet these costs. Where the bulk of federal student aid had taken the form of grants in the 1970s, over the course of the 1980s loans became the dominant means of direct federal tuition assistance (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance 2002; Orfield 1992; The College Board 2002). The real value of grant aid declined while tuition at both public and private colleges rose faster than the rate of inflation. Some researchers speculate that these trends contributed to the decline in the proportion of African American students continuing on to college, discussed below (Hauser 1993; Orfield 1992). We anticipate that, in response to the decline in the proportion of African American students applying to college, postsecondary institutions increased their propensity to engage in affirmative action over the course of the 1980s and 1990s.

### **Demographic context**

We believe that there are two key components of demographic context that will influence colleges' decisions to consider race in admissions, one of which we observe and one of which we do not. In principal, affirmative action programs are compensatory and temporally bound. They are intended to redress a perceived imbalance in the racial/ethnic composition of the population of matriculating students relative to some reference population, and when that perceived

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

imbalance has been corrected affirmative action programs will be abandoned. What is the reference population? We define this population first as the percentage of traditionally college-aged students in a state who are members of an under-represented minority group and second as the percentage of traditionally college-aged high school graduates in a state who are members of an under-represented minority group. We expect that colleges will be more inclined to engage in affirmative action the greater the difference between the percentage of minority students they enroll and the percentage of such students in the state.

Colleges and universities will also adopt different admission strategies conditional on the constitution of their applicant pools. If they receive too few applications from (minimally qualified) minority students in one year, they are likely to weigh minority status more heavily in their admissions decisions in that year and to dedicate more resources to recruiting minority students in the following year. Unfortunately, we do not have access to data on the applicant pools institutions confronted between during our period of study. We do know that the propensity of African American students to enter college declined over the early 1980s and, though it subsequently rose, continued to lag that of white students through the early 1990s (Hauser 1993) and beyond (Kane 2005). Differences in matriculation rates for whites and Hispanics are even greater (Kane 2005). Thus the proportion of under-represented minority students relative to white students applying to college probably declined over time, even as the share of black and Hispanic students applying increased. Such a decline says little about the proportion of each college's applicant pool that is African American or Hispanic.

### **Political context**

While a handful of public institutions are nominally insulated from state politics

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

(McLendon and Hearn 2003), according to one analysis “most public colleges and universities are simply statutory entities subject to whatever a working legislative majority wishes to do with them” (Leslie and Novak 2003). The political environment in which public institutions operate can have profound effects on their recruitment and admissions strategies. This may be particularly true for affirmative action policies which gained in electoral prominence in gubernatorial and state legislative races over the 1980s and 1990s, particularly in the state of California (Pusser 2004) but elsewhere as well (McLendon and Hearn 2003). In fact, running *against* affirmative action became one of the strategies of conservative politicians during this period. In one election cycle, between 1992 and 1994, Democrats went from controlling 72% of lower and 66% of upper houses in the state legislatures to controlling 50% of each. Our point is not to suggest that running against affirmative action contributed to this shift, or even that most conservative candidates made affirmative action a campaign issue. We suggest only that, with the shift in state legislatures (and perhaps the electorate) to a more conservative political ideology, the willingness of public institutions to engage in affirmative action probably declined.

At the same time, increases in the racial/ethnic diversity of state legislatures could buffer colleges and universities from pressures to cease engaging in affirmative action. It may be that Hispanic and African American representatives are more supportive of affirmative action policies and can effectively join together to thwart legislative attempts to restrict such policies. We anticipate that as the percentage of African American and Hispanic representatives in the state legislature grows the likelihood of engaging in affirmative action will increase, or at least not decline.

### **Regulatory context**

Finally, several states experienced regulatory changes that we expect will affect the propensity of institutions to engage in affirmative action. These changes are related in part to the political context discussed above. In both Washington state (Initiative 200) and California (Proposition 209), voters passed ballot initiatives that in effect prohibited public colleges and universities from engaging in race-based affirmative action. Likewise, courts in Georgia (*Johnson v. Board of Regents of the University of Georgia*) and Texas (*Hopwood v. Texas*) curtailed affirmative action programs at public colleges and universities in those states.<sup>4</sup> The *Hopwood* decision extends to private institutions as well. Finally, affirmative action programs in public colleges in Florida were halted under Governor Bush's One Florida policy, established by executive order (Selingo 1999).

We anticipate that these policies will have direct negative effects on the propensity of public institutions in these states to consider race in admissions, and that the effect of the *Hopwood* decision will extend to private institutions as well. We also anticipate that these decisions, all of which came about in the late 1990s, will contribute to or reflect a growing anti-affirmative action policy environment. With major court cases moving forward in several states and advocacy groups organizing effectively to limit affirmative action through litigation and other means, we think that colleges and universities will assume a more cautious posture with respect to under-represented minority students in their admissions and recruitment practices. Just as Edelman (1992) described organizations acting progressively to create EEO/AA structures in a legal environment tilted toward affirmative action, we believe organizations will act to dismantle or at least minimize their affirmative action programs in an environment in which

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

challenges to affirmative action programs are increasingly common. While we cannot bring empirical evidence to bear on this speculation, we come back to it in our discussion.

### Intersections between Organizational and Institutional Context

Institutions may respond differently to contextual factors as a function of their own organizational characteristics. For example, private college and universities were not directly affected by most of the policy changes discussed in the preceding section, with the notable exception of the *Hopwood* decision. Likewise, more competitive institutions may be less sensitive to changes in organizational context simply because they have more status and power.

School sector is a particularly important characteristic of the organization and may condition the effects of several of the contextual factors we discuss. We summarize our hypotheses in Table 1. The final two columns of the table indicate whether we anticipate changes in a particular contextual attribute to affect only public schools or both public and private schools. While we expect historical changes to impact colleges in both sectors, we do not expect shifts in the under-representation of minority youth to have much of an effect on private schools. It is not clear what reference population would be relevant to private colleges, many of which draw substantial shares of their students from other states. Furthermore, we do not believe that private institutions carry the same level of public accountability for their racial/ethnic diversity as public schools. While state colleges and universities may be subject to the regulatory control of political bodies, private institutions are generally more insulated from change in the state legislature.

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

### *Data*

We base our analyses on survey data collected by the College Board in the Annual Survey of Colleges (ASC) between 1986 and 2003.<sup>5</sup> The College Board seeks to survey all accredited two-year and four-year colleges each year. Although response rates are not available for all years, the response rate for the 2000 survey was around 80%. Comparing the proportion of institutions in our samples with the population in IPEDS, we find that in most years around 85% of relevant IPEDS institutions are included in our analyses. We limit our focus to public and private not-for-profit comprehensive four-year colleges, universities and liberal arts colleges in the United States. Such institutions have a broad enough selection of majors to serve a wide range of students, and in fact produce over 95% of the bachelor's degrees in the United States. We exclude special purpose institutions (such as nursing schools, seminaries and other vocational colleges) as well as historically black colleges.

Unweighted annual sample sizes for the dependent variable range from 1,179 in 1986 to 1,275 in 2003. A total of 1,392 colleges participated in the ASC over this eighteen-year period. Of those schools, 75% participated in all 18 years and 88% participated in eight years or more. Schools that consistently participate in the ASC tend to enroll larger cohorts of incoming students. If we weight schools by their first-year enrollment we find that 96% of participating schools participated in all 18 years. Institutions in our dataset issued around 89% of all bachelors' degrees awarded by comprehensive colleges, universities and liberal arts colleges.<sup>6</sup>

Eliminating observations with missing values on the independent variables further reduces our sample size to 1,298 colleges and universities observed a total of 19,416 times. The

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

reduction in sample size comes primarily from missing data on average SAT scores for students in each year and tuition and mandatory fees assessed in each year. Comparing coefficients in models excluding the SAT score and tuition and fee measures, we find little difference between models estimated on complete and incomplete data.<sup>7</sup> For more details on the constitution of the sample, as well as descriptive statistics for the measures we use, see Table 2.

We derive our dependent variable from a battery of questions that ask about the extent to which institutions consider various characteristics of students, including minority group membership, in making admissions decisions. In each year of the survey, responding institutions were asked to identify the relative importance of minority status to admissions decisions: very important, important, considered or not considered. We assume that institutions consider minority status in the service of affirmative action rather than in the hopes of discriminating against minorities. We dichotomize this measure to distinguish between those who claim to at least consider minority status and those who do not claim to consider minority status in their admissions decisions.<sup>8</sup>

Self-reported measures of organizational behavior have both strengths and weaknesses. Self-reports may better tap the *intentions* of organizational actors than observed behavior, particularly given the constraints on what the analyst is able to observe. What happens in admissions decisions is often complex and nuanced; even if minority status is considered it may not actually lead to a substantial increase in minority student admissions or enrollment. For example, in their book on liberal arts colleges, Duffy and Goldberg write:

During the last 3 ½ decades, the colleges we studied expended considerable time and resources to enroll and retain minority students in general and black students in particular. Despite their Herculean efforts, black and Hispanic enrollments have remained essentially flat (1998: 164).



## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

The more comparable or preferred institutions engage in affirmative action, the less effective such practices are likely to appear on average. However, were institutions to stop engaging in affirmative action, the effect could potentially be substantial.

Self-reports are also substantially easier to gather than application and admissions records. We have self-reports for liberal arts colleges and comprehensive colleges and universities that serve the majority of starting college students in the United States over the eighteen-year period, while analyses of applications and admissions rely on samples of postsecondary institutions that are restricted to a small number of non-randomly chosen institutions and cohorts (Bowen and Bok 1998; Lerner and Nagai 2001; Tienda, Leicht, Sullivan, Maltese, and Lloyd 2003). Though informative, such studies cannot speak to the admissions process at the vast majority of postsecondary institutions in the United States.

Self-reports of organizational behavior may, however, be influenced by response bias, including social desirability bias and a fear of censure (Donaldson and Grant-Vallone 2002; Spector 1994). In the case of affirmative action, institutions may under-report, especially where prohibited from engaging in affirmative action by law.

In our view, the case against self-reports, while legitimate, has been overstated. We believe that organizational behavior can best be understood by looking at both self-reports and behavioral outcomes. When analyses based on these complimentary sources are in accord, we can be more confident in our findings. Discordant findings, however, should lead to further theoretical and empirical work.

The consideration of minority status in college admissions is a widespread practice, as

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

shown in Table 2. Slightly over half of the observations in our data indicate that they at least consider a student's race/ethnicity in making their admissions decisions. If we weight by enrollment, the distribution favors preferences for minority students more heavily, with over 60% of students matriculating at institutions that claim to consider minority status in admissions. Recall, however, that observations are institution years, and thus not readily interpretable as differences among institutions at any given time.

We rely on two measures of institutional prestige throughout our analyses: average SAT scores and real tuition and mandatory fees.<sup>9</sup> ASC collected data on the SAT and ACT scores of students at the 25<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the college's incoming freshman class. For schools that only report SAT scores, we estimate the average of verbal and mathematics scores of incoming students based on the mean of these respective scores. We add these averages together to produce an estimate of the sum of mean scores. If schools reported ACT composite scores, we convert those scores to their SAT score equivalents based on an equivalency table published by the College Board.<sup>10</sup> Scores reported after 1995, when the College Board recentered the SAT, are converted to their pre-1995 equivalents.<sup>11</sup> SAT scores for schools reporting both ACT and SAT are a simple average of the two composites, measured in hundreds of pre-1995 SAT points.

To compensate for missing data on test scores, we also draw information from a variety of published sources for 1991 SAT scores and from the College Board's online college search utility for 2003 SAT scores (<http://apps.collegeboard.com/search/index.jsp>). We then estimate moving six-year averages for SAT scores where the weights decline uniformly before and after the target year and are set to 100 for the target year.<sup>12</sup>

We convert tuition and mandatory fees to 2004 dollars based on the CPI-U. For public

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

institutions we take the out-of-state tuition since out-of-state tuition is a better proxy for prestige than the more heavily discounted in-state tuition. Substantive results are robust to the decision of whether or not to include the additional fees paid to public institutions by students from other states.

Our base measure of historical context is simply time. We use both linear and quadratic measures of years elapsed since 1986 (the first year we observe) to capture nonlinearities in temporal patterns in the consideration of race/ethnicity in admissions. In addition to time, we include a variety of measures of a school's proximity to race riots. The riot data come from Carter's (1983) updating of the Governmental Units Analysis Data, 1960: Urban Racial Disorders, 1961-1968 collected by Seymour Spilerman.<sup>13</sup> These data include the date, location and magnitude of 1,551 race riots that took place between 1964 and 1971. Magnitude is measured in days of rioting, number of arsons, number of injuries and number of deaths. We code riot locations to 1990 census place codes and then estimate the distance between the 1990 place centroid of the event and the 2004 zip code centroid of each college and university in our data set. We then collapse the data by college to create a count of the number of riots within 25 and within 50 miles of each postsecondary institution. While the coding of distance is somewhat crude due to changes in the centroids of places between the 1960s and 1990s, we believe that coding errors will be fairly small as a result of our decision to aggregate to 25 and 50 mile categories.<sup>14</sup>

We consider two alternative measures of the demographic context of each college. In each case we deviate the percentage of youth 18-25 years of age in the state that is African American or Hispanic from the percentage of African American or Hispanic youth in a college's

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

matriculating class. In one set of measures, the reference population is simply all youth in the state, while in another measure it is all youth in the state that at least completed high school or earned a GED. Since the results are quite similar, we present only estimates based on all traditionally college-aged youth (the less restrictive definition). Data for distributions of these reference populations are based on three-year moving averages from the March Current Population Surveys. As expected, Table 1 shows that, on average, black students (around 7%) and Hispanic students (around 5%) are under-represented in colleges relative to their share of the college-aged state population. To capture possible curvilinearities in the effect of racial/ethnic composition on affirmative action, we also include a quadratic for each difference in our models.

We anticipate that state political context will mediate part of the association between time and propensity to engage in affirmative action for public institutions. We have three measures of state political context: the proportion of the state legislators who are Democratic, African American and Hispanic. We take measures of the party composition of the state legislatures between 1988 and 1998 from the Statistical Abstract of the United States. Those measures are available only for even numbered years; for odd numbered years we substitute the average of the adjacent even numbered years. Data for 2002 and 2003 are taken from the National Conference of State Legislatures web site.<sup>15</sup> Percentage Democrat is the total number of Democratic legislators in both houses divided by the sum of all representatives. We obtain data for the percentage of state legislators who are African American from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies' annual statistical summary of black elected officials. We extract the percentage of state legislators who are Hispanic from the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials' annual Directory of Latino Elected Officials.

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

Finally, we operationalize policies that restrict affirmative action as dummy variables set to 0 for states and years that are not directly affected by the policy and 1 for states and years that are directly affected by the policy. We examine the influence of court cases that restrict affirmative action in public institutions in Georgia (*Johnson v. Georgia Board of Regents*) and public and private institutions in Texas (*Hopwood v. Texas*), initiatives that restrict affirmative action in public institutions in California (Proposition 209) and Washington (Initiative 200), and an executive order that restricts affirmative action in public institutions in Florida (Governor Bush's One Florida policy). For example, the Proposition 209 indicator (prop209) is set to 0 for all states other than California and for all years prior to 1998. It is set to 1 only for California in and after 1998. See Appendix I for a list of policy changes and effective dates.

### *Methods*

To test our hypotheses, we estimate a three-level binary logistic regression model. We conceive of time (level one) as nested within institutions (level two) and institutions as nested within states (level three). This nesting structure explicitly accounts for the lack of independence among observations within institutions over time and within states. Where measures could be considered at different levels of analysis we chose to represent them at the lowest possible level. For example, the policies we consider (such as a court decision) are actually properties of states. However, those policies also vary across time. In our models, policy measures are included at the temporal level, level one. This decision may overstate our confidence in our findings by downwardly biasing standard errors for such coefficients. On the other hand, standard errors in these models are larger than they should be due to the finite population of postsecondary

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

institutions from which we have sampled. Both of these conditions make it challenging to interpret the standard errors.

Let  $Y_{itk}$  represent the response of school  $i$  at time  $t$  in state  $k$ . At level one, the baseline model is:

$$\ln\left(\frac{\Pr(Y_{itk} = 1)}{1 - \Pr(Y_{itk} = 1)}\right) = \pi_{0ik} + \pi_{1ik}(\text{year}) + \pi_{2ik}(\text{year}^2) + \pi_{3ik}(\text{SAT}) + \pi_{4ik}(\text{tuition}) + \pi_{5ik}(\% \text{ black diff}) + \pi_{6ik}(\% \text{ black diff}^2) + \pi_{7ik}(\% \text{ Hispanic diff}) + \pi_{8ik}(\% \text{ Hispanic diff}^2) + \pi_{9ik}(i200) + \pi_{10ik}(prop209) + \pi_{11ik}(hopwood) + \pi_{12ik}(johnson) + \pi_{13ik}(onefl) + e_{itk}$$

where  $e_{itk}$  is distributed as logistic with mean 0 and variance  $\pi^2/3$ . The intercept (log-odds in 1986) is free to vary across institutions and across states. Measures of school average SAT scores and mandatory tuition and fees are deviated from their school-specific means in the level-one (temporal) model.

At the school-level (level two), the expected school response is predicted as a function of average SAT scores over time and average mandatory tuition and fees. Average SAT scores and mandatory tuition and fees are deviated from their sample means. Thus the intercept in the intercept equation ( $\gamma_{00k}$ ) represents the log odds of considering minority status in admissions for a college in state  $k$  at the sample mean in terms of SAT scores and tuition and fees. Schools are assumed to respond uniformly to annual shifts in mean SAT scores, mandatory tuition and fees, changes in racial/ethnic composition, and policy shifts. The level-two model can be written as:

$$\pi_{0ik} = \gamma_{00k} + \gamma_{001}(\text{avg SAT}) + \gamma_{020}(\text{avg tuition}) + r_{00k}$$

where  $r_{00k}$  is assumed normally distributed with mean 0 and variance  $\tau_{00}$ . Finally, schools in

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

different states are assumed to have different average levels of preferences for minority candidates in 1986. The level three model is:

$$\gamma_{00k} = \beta_{00} + u_{0k}$$

where  $u_{0k}$  is assumed normally distributed with mean 0 and variance  $\tau_{\gamma 0}$ .

We run models separately for public and private colleges as well as a model pooled across sector to test for the statistical significance of sector interactions.

After estimating a baseline model we estimate a series of additional models to test the contribution of proximity to race riots and state political context to schools' propensities to engage in affirmative action. We consider race riots as institution-level factors that are stable over time and estimate the contribution of proximity to race riots to variation in the intercept and the time slopes. Measures of state political context enter at the temporal level. To the extent that shifts in political context mediate the effects of time we would expect the inclusion of these measures to reduce the year and year<sup>2</sup> coefficients.

### *Findings-baseline model*

We present parameter estimates for our baseline models separately for public and private colleges in the main body of Table 3; variance estimates at the institutional and state levels are presented at the bottom of the table. As we expected, the propensity to claim to consider minority status in admissions varies across both institutions and states. The proportion of variance at the state level is appreciably higher for public than private institutions. The state share of the variance at the school and state levels is about 20% for public schools and just over 3% for private schools. This pattern is consistent with our contention that public institutions are subject

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

to a greater degree of state-level control than are private institutions.

Turning to the coefficient estimates, we distinguish between within-institution components (change over time) and between-institution components. In the pooled model, shown in the final two columns of Table 3, we find that public colleges were much more likely than private colleges to consider minority status in admissions decisions in 1986. All else equal, the odds that a public institution considered minority status were about 13.3 times the odds of an otherwise similar private institution [7.4-23.8].<sup>16</sup> It appears that public schools were substantially more likely than private schools to consider race in admissions in the mid 1980s.

The sector-specific estimates in columns 2 through 5 suggest that more prestigious institutions are more likely to consider race than less prestigious institutions, all else equal. Each of the prestige coefficients in the intercept equation is positive and statistically significant. The propensity of public institutions to consider race may be more sensitive to shifts in prestige than that of private institutions. For example, each additional thousand dollars of tuition charged is associated with a 29% increase in the odds that a private school consider race [20%-39%] and a 46% increase in the odds that a public school considers race [18%-81%]. Likewise, each 100 point increase in the combined SAT scores of first-time, first-year students increases the odds of at least considering minority status by a factor of between 2.4 and 6.6 for public institutions and 2.3 and 4.1 for private institutions.

The likelihood of considering race increases over time at a declining rate for both public and private institutions. As shown by the year\*sector interaction terms in the pooled model, sectoral differences are statistically significant. Relative preferences for minority students increase more quickly over time in the public sector but decline more quickly as well. We



## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

illustrate the temporal pattern of minority student preferences in Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of considering race are plotted on the y-axis based on the sector-specific coefficients in Table 3, holding policy measures at 0, year and year<sup>2</sup> at their observed values (plotted on the x-axis) and all other measures at the pooled sample mean.

The predicted probability of claiming to engage in affirmative action increases for both public institutions (dashed line) and private institutions (solid line) at the mean on other characteristics through the early 1990s and declines thereafter. The decline is particularly pronounced for public institutions, whose predicted probability of engaging in affirmative action dips below that of otherwise similar private institutions for the first time in the late 1990s. Although this was the time when the anti-affirmative policies we consider took effect, values on those indicators are set to 0 in this graph. Therefore, if such policies are exerting an influence on the temporal trend in affirmative action, that influence must be indirect.

Public institutions are substantially more responsive than private institutions to differences between the percentage of African American students they enroll and the percentage of 18-25 year olds in the state who are African American. Private schools are close to neutral about the difference between the percentage of under-represented minority students inside and outside their walls, while public schools seem sensitive to differences for African American but not for Hispanic students. Although the racial/ethnic difference coefficients in Table 3 are small, Figure 2 shows that disparities in the African American population between schools and the states they serve (on the x-axis) has a substantial impact on a public school's likelihood of engaging considering race in admissions (y-axis) at the sample means on other covariates. Net of other measures, the rate of increase in the likelihood of considering race appears to decline at

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

around 5% *above* the state percent African American, but continues to increase even to 20%. As implied by the coefficients in Table 2, preferences of private institutions are essentially flat across the distribution of differences in relative racial/ethnic composition.

Why would public institutions be more sensitive to their relative share of African American students than to their relative share of Hispanic students? Though somewhat puzzling, this result is consistent with Identifying Reference's findings for student attendance outcomes based on nationally representative data as well as Duffy and Goldberg's (1998) observations for the liberal arts colleges included in their study. Hispanic students enjoy some of the benefits of affirmative action, but not to as a great a degree as African American students. Though we cannot offer a definitive explanation for this discrepancy, we suspect that affirmative action for African American students is more historically ingrained in institutional practice than is affirmative action for Hispanic students. African Americans were the primary and most visible beneficiaries of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s and the focus of earlier campaigns to press for equal representation at the tertiary level (Bowen and Bok 1998; Karen 1990; Skrentny 2002). To the extent that affirmative action evolved as a response to the civil rights struggle, as these authors contend, it evolved as a response to the demands of African Americans, not Latinos.

The final set of coefficients in the baseline model expresses the effects of policy initiatives that restrict affirmative action programs on stated preferences for minority students net of temporal trends, institutional prestige, and relative racial/ethnic composition. The coefficients for policy measures are quite substantial in magnitude, implying a significant retreat from the practice of considering minority status in admissions decisions.<sup>17</sup> The effects of these policy

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

shifts are in addition to the general shift away from considering race that began in the mid 1990s. To illustrate the severity of the retreat from considering race in admissions, as well as the differences between states that are and are not subject to a policy restricting their use of affirmative action, Figure 3 shows the *observed* proportion of schools claiming to consider minority status in admissions over time. We distinguish among schools by sector and by whether or not the state in which the school is located ever had a policy of restricting the use of affirmative action (California, Florida, Georgia, Texas, Washington).

Figure 3 reveals several interesting patterns. First, schools in states that eventually established prohibitions on affirmative action were somewhat less likely to consider race in admissions even prior to the policy shifts, all of which occurred after 1995. The difference is more marked for public institutions than private institutions. Among public schools, 44% of those in states that would eventually restrict affirmative action claimed to consider race in 1986 (plotted as a dotted line) compared to 57% of those in states that would not restrict affirmative action (the top trend line), a difference of 13 percentage points. Second, while the declines in preferences for minority students are less pronounced for schools in states without anti-affirmative action policies, the shape of the trend is quite similar. In 2003, the last year we observe, the differences between the proportions of public institutions considering race in states with and without legal restrictions was 12 percentage points, a single percentage point smaller than those differences were in 1986. Finally, even with the marked retreat from considering race following the mid 1990s, roughly a third of private institutions nationally and public institutions not in states with legal prohibitions on affirmative action claim to consider minority status in college admissions in 2003.

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

### *Findings- riots and legislative context*

Building on the baseline model discussed above, we add a variety of measures of school proximity to race riots in a series of alternate models. We anticipate that those institutions more proximate to race riots, or at least to more severe race riots, will be more likely to consider race in admissions decisions in 1986 and less likely to falter in their commitment to affirmative action in subsequent years. Each of the four models in Table 4 is based on data pooled across sector and includes all of the controls in the pooled model shown in Table 3. We present only the riot coefficients in Table 4; coefficients from the full models are available upon request. The second column of Table 4 shows coefficient estimates for the intercept, the third column for the linear time slope and the fourth column for the quadratic time slope. We produce means and standard deviations for the riot measures in the last column of the table.

We present estimates from four separate models in the top panel of Table 4. The two linear models include measures of number of riots within 25 miles of each school and number of riots above the third quartile in severity within 25 miles of each school. The nominal models, like the linear models, distinguish between number of riots and number of relatively severe riots. Instead of including linear measures, however, we break the linear distributions into quartiles for the nominal models, omitting the schools in the bottom quartile of riot exposure.

Across different measurement strategies we find no effect of proximity to riots for the net likelihood of engaging in affirmative action in 1986 (the intercept). Our findings on temporal change in institutional commitment to affirmative action are also modest. Where coefficients attain statistical significance they have the wrong sign; schools with greater exposure to race

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

riots have lower likelihoods of adopting an affirmative action policy in subsequent years. We conclude that proximity to riots has little relationship to the likelihood of engaging in affirmative action net of other covariates. Proximity to riots may have influenced the timing of affirmative action adoption, something we do not observe, but has little bearing on the distribution of affirmative action practices in 1986 or changes in those practices thereafter.

Although we expect proximity to riots to affect both public and private colleges and universities, we expect that changes in the composition of the state legislature will generally affect only public institutions. In the bottom panel of Table 4 we present results from two separate models of the effects of political change on the net likelihood that public institutions consider race in admissions. The first model includes a control for percentage of legislators who are in the Democratic Party and the second model includes controls for the percentage of representatives who are African American or Hispanic. None of these coefficients is statistically or substantively significant. It appears that the political context of the state, at least as measured by the racial/ethnic and party composition of the legislatures, has little net effect on the decisions of public colleges and universities to consider race/ethnicity in their admissions decisions.

### *Discussion*

The consideration of race in college admissions is patterned in many of the ways we anticipated. First, sectoral differences are clear in the variance components, temporal patterns, and sensitivity to the demographic and policy context, as reflected in the parametric results in Table 2. State-level variance in considering race is much greater in public than private institutions and public schools are substantially more sensitive to changes in policy and over

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

time. This pattern is also captured by the observed distributions of considering race in admissions plotted in Figure 3.

In both the public and private sectors, more prestigious institutions are more likely to claim preferences for minority students than are institutions with lower test scores and fees. Although we are not able to adjudicate among the competing explanations for this pattern, the pattern is consistent with other empirical work (Bowen and Bok 1998; Espenshade et al. 2004; Kane 1998). At the suggestion of a reviewer we also tested for an interaction between time and average academic achievement. It may be that more prestigious institutions are also less likely to abandon their commitment to the consideration of race over time. Test score by year coefficients did not attain statistical significance, however, and for schools in the private sector they had the wrong sign.

Although we are able to document important temporal changes in affirmative action, we are much less successful in explaining those patterns. We anticipated that schools closer to (especially intense) race riots would be more likely to consider student race and less apt to abandon such a consideration than schools more removed from race riots. We also suggested that public institutions would be more likely to stop considering race as state legislatures became more conservative, but less likely to do so as they became more racially and ethnically diverse. Proximity to race riots and the party and racial/ethnic composition of state legislatures have no bearing on the propensity of public institutions to consider race in admissions.

How can we explain the patterns that we observe? Although we find significant degrees of variation in the propensity of colleges to consider race in admissions, we are also struck by similarities across schools. Between the mid-1980s and early 1990s there was a modest increase

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

in the propensity for colleges and universities to consider race. At the same time, federal enforcement of EEO/AA rules was on the decline, at least under the Reagan administration (1981-1989) (Edelman 1992). The continued diffusion of affirmative action policies on college campuses during this period may have simply reflected the continued institutionalization of these practices in the field of higher education. The increase in the proportion of colleges and universities considering race in admissions may also reflect a decline in the pool of minority candidates (Hauser 1993). Faced with a reduced supply of under-represented minority students, schools may have stepped up their efforts to admit such African Americans and Latinos.

By the mid 1990s the majority of schools in both the public and private sector claimed to engage have race-conscious admissions policies. Given that this is just one form of affirmative action, it seems safe to conclude that an even larger share of schools was acting in ways to increase the diversity of their incoming classes. What led schools not under anti-affirmative action policies to abandon their commitment to affirmative action, and why has the decline in support for affirmative action been so pronounced among such schools?

It may be that postsecondary institutions no longer find it necessary to consider race in admission in order to ensure a diverse entering class. Some might argue that the secondary school opportunities and performance of minority students have increased to the point that minority and majority students are on roughly equal academic footing when they complete high school. Unfortunately, evidence based on NAEP data (Campbell, Hombo, and Mazzeo 2000; Krueger, Rothstein and Turner 2005) and studies of cohorts of students who completed high school between 1960 and 2004 (Identifying Reference 2007) suggest that racial and ethnic gaps in secondary school achievement have persisted.

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

Another possibility is that both public policy and institutional practices are shaped by a common cause. We thought that increases in conservatism may have played a part in the decline of race-conscious admissions policies, but our results undermine this explanation. Race-conscious admissions continued to spread through the Reagan years of the late 1980s, a period of lax enforcement of civil rights rules at the federal level. At the state level, legislative composition seems an unlikely cause. Although state legislatures became more conservative during the period we studied, we find no effect of legislative political composition on the likelihood that public institutions engage consider race. Instead, we find that race-conscious admissions declined across the public and private sectors.

Alternatively, it may be that postsecondary institutions are reacting to shifts in public support for affirmative action in the same way Burstein (1998) describes public policy as following the lead of public opinion.<sup>18</sup> College administrators may sense a shift in public support for affirmative action and in response change their admissions formulas. This seems unlikely in the case of race-conscious admissions however. First, affirmative action was never a popular policy. It has always been a policy championed by small groups of white male elites (Skrentny 2002), so a retreat from general favor is not plausible. Second, there is no empirical evidence to support a shift in public opinion over time prior to 1996 (Steeh and Krysan 1996) or later. In fact, public opinion on affirmative action seems to be very stable over time.<sup>19</sup>

We think a more likely explanation for the similar trajectories we observe in claiming to consider minority status in admissions is that affirmative action had become largely institutionalized by the mid-1980s. Higher education in the United State is a classic and relatively frequently invoked example of a defined organizational field with strong tendencies



## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

toward organizational isomorphism (Davis and Powell 1991). We believe that over the course of the 1970s affirmative action became one component of institutional legitimacy for colleges and universities, at least those that have even moderately competitive admissions processes.<sup>20</sup>

Although we are not able to observe the process by which the consideration of race in admissions diffused across organizations, we are able to observe its retrenchment. We think that this retrenchment may have begun as a result of coercive isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) in which the state, through the legislative, executive or judicial process, changed the regulatory environment for higher education by prohibiting the use of affirmative action in certain (state) contexts. Rather than merely affecting those schools directly subject to the legal restrictions, however, the effects of these changes diffuse across institutional and state lines, changing the legal environment in which postsecondary organizations operate. Part of the story here may be the increased use of litigation as a strategy for rolling back affirmative action programs. Organizations like the Center for Equal Opportunity, started in 1995, have been able to terminate affirmative action programs as well as programs that target financial aid to minority students at many institutions through filing or threatening to file lawsuits.

Once the threat of litigation is in the air, it may be that schools change their policies simply to avoid being targeted. Higher education is a highly structured field; admissions personnel circulate among schools and communicate regularly through professional associations like the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers which claims to have over 10,000 members. As the legal environment changes, or even as it is *perceived* to change, risk-averse institutions may simply abandon or repackage their affirmative action programs to avoid scrutiny, abandoning race-conscious admissions as one component of a

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

broader effort.

### *Conclusion*

Although the true motivation for affirmative action remains elusive, the findings we present have serious implications for our understanding of the evolving role of colleges and universities in mediating racial/ethnic stratification. Over half of the comprehensive colleges and universities in the United States claimed to have race-conscious admissions policies in the 1990s, and they did so in patterned ways. Furthermore, as the last few rows of Table 3 show, there is a substantial degree of variation in net institutional propensities to claim preferences for minority students. These findings highlight the potential importance of institutional agency in the process of racial stratification in educational persistence and, by extension, occupational outcomes.

How has the withdrawal of special consideration affected the access of minority students to colleges and universities that are not open admissions? A simple reading of the evidence might suggest that such opportunities have become scarcer over time. However, many states have mitigated the effect of changes in law and policy by creating forms of sponsorship that skirt the issue of race. For example, Texas, California and Florida each have policies that guarantee college admission to the top x% of students in each high school. As a consequence of continued racial segregation, these policies may disproportionately benefit minority students.<sup>21</sup> Some states have also increased the amount of money they spend on outreach activities designed to increase the number of minority students in the applicant pool. Affirmative action is not confined to admissions, where it is increasingly regulated; it can take many forms over the course of the college—student matching process.

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

How far alternative policies have gone in preserving the access of minority students to higher education remains an open question. Our analyses, however, suggest that the question is increasingly urgent. If schools are acting in ways that conform to their stated preferences, there is reason to believe that the progress we have made in improving access to competitive postsecondary institutions is eroding. We hope that our work will serve in part to motivate research on the postsecondary prospects minority youth experience in what is, at least for many institutions and states, a post affirmative action era.

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

### References

- Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance. 2002. "Empty Promises: The Myth of College Access in America." Washington, D.C.
- Alon, Sigal and Marta Tienda. 2005. "Assessing the "Mismatch" Hypothesis: Differentials in College Graduation Rates by Institutional Selectivity." *Sociology of Education* 78:294-315.
- Bowen, William G. and Derek Bok. 1998. *The Shape of the River: Long-term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cancian, Maria. 1998. "Race-Based versus Class-Based Affirmative Action in College Admissions." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. Winter 17:94-105.
- Card, David and Alan B. Krueger. 2004. "Would the Elimination of Affirmative Action Affect Highly Qualified Minority applicants? Evidence from California and Texas." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 58:416-434.
- Clark, Burton R. 1970. *The Distinctive College*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Davis, Gerald F. and Walter W. Powell. 1991. "Organizational-Environment Relations." Pp. 315-374 in *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, edited by M. D. Dunnette and L. M. Hough. Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press.
- Dobbs, Michael. 2003. "At Colleges, an Affirmative Reaction." Pp. A01 in *Washington Post*. Washington, D.C.
- Donaldson, Stewart I. and Elisa J. Grant-Vallone. 2002. "Understanding Self-Report Bias in Organizational Behavior Research." *Journal of Business and Psychology* 17:245-259.
- Duffy, Elizabeth A. and Idana Goldberg. 1998. *Crafting a Class: College Admissions and Financial Aid, 1955-1994*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Edelman, Lauren B. 1992. "Legal Ambiguity and Symbolic Structures: Organizational Mediation of Civil Rights Law." *American Journal of Sociology* 97:1531-1576.
- Elliot, Laura 1993. "Getting in: After Four Years of High School, It Comes Down to This." *Washingtonian Magazine*.
- Espenshade, Thomas J., Chang Y. Chung, and Joan L. Walling. 2004. "Admission Preferences for Minority Students, Athletes, and Legacies at Elite Universities." *Social Science Quarterly* 85:1422-1446.
- Fetter, Jean H. 1995. *Questions and Admissions: Reflections on 100,000 Admissions Decisions at Stanford University*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Harper, Shannon and Barbara Reskin. 2005. "Affirmative Action at School and on the Job." *Annual Review of Sociology* 31:357-379.
- Hauser, Robert M. 1993. "The Decline in College Entry among African Americans: Findings in Search of Explanations." Pp. 271-306 in *Prejudice, Politics, and the American Dilemma*, edited by P. M. Sniderman, P. E. Tetlock, and E. G. Carmines. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Holzer, Harry J. and David Neumark. 2005. "Affirmative Action: What Do we Know?" *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*.
- Kane, Thomas. 2005. "College-Going and Inequality: A Literature Review." Russell Sage Foundation.

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

- Kane, Thomas J. 1998. "Racial and Ethnic Preferences in College Admissions." Pp. 431-456 in *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, edited by C. Jencks and M. Phillips. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Karabel, Jerome. 2005. *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Karen, David. 1990. "Toward a Political-Organizational Model of Gatekeeping: The Case of Elite Colleges." *Sociology of Education* 63:227-40.
- Krueger, Alan B., Jesse Rothstein, and Sarah Turner. 2005. "Race, Income and College in 25 Years: The Continuing Legacy of Segregation and Discrimination." in *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Papers Series*. Cambridge, MA.
- Lerner, Robert and Althea K. Nagai. 2001. "Pervasive Preferences: Racial and Ethnic Discrimination in Undergraduate Admissions Across the Nation." Center for Equal Opportunity, Washington, D.C.
- Leslie, David W. and Richard J. Novak. 2003. "Substance Versus Politics: Through the Dark Mirror of Governance Reform." *Educational Policy* 17:98-120.
- Long, Mark. 2004. "Race and College Admissions: An Alternative to Affirmative Action?" *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 86:1022-1033.
- McLendon, Michael K. and James C. Hearn. 2003. "Introduction: The Politics of Higher Education." *Educational Policy* 17:3-11.
- Meyer, John W. 1970. "The Charter: Conditions of Diffuse Socialization in Schools." Pp. 564-578 in *Social Processes and Social Structures: An Introduction to Sociology*, edited by R. W. Scott. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
- Morphew, Christopher C. and Matthew Hartley. 2006. "Mission Statements: A Thematic Analysis of Rhetoric across Institutional Type." *The Journal of Higher Education* 77:456-471.
- Orfield, Gary. 1992. "Money, Equity, and College Access." *Harvard Educational Review* 62:337-72.
- Pusser, Brian. 2003. "Beyond Baldrige: Extending the Political Model of Higher Education Organization and Governance." *Educational Policy* 17:121-140.
- . 2004. *Burning Down the House: Politics, Governance, and Affirmative Action at the University of California*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Sander, Richard H. 2004. "A Systemic Analysis of Affirmative Action in American Law Schools." *Stanford Law Review* 57:367-483.
- Selingo, Jeffrey. 1999. "Florida's University System Plans to End Affirmative Action in Admissions." Pp. A36 in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.
- Skrentny, John David. 1996. *The Ironies of Affirmative Action: Politics, Culture, and Justice in America*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Spector, Paul E. 1994. "Using Self-Report Questionnaires in OB Research: A Comment on the Use of a Controversial Method." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 15:385-392.
- Steinberg, Jacques. 2002. *The Gatekeepers*. New York: Viking.
- The College Board. 2002. "Trends in Student Aid." The College Board, New York.
- Thernstrom, Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom. 1997. *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Tienda, Marta, Kevin T. Leicht, Teresa Sullivan, Michael Maltese, and Kim Lloyd. 2003.

## The Declining Use of Race in College Admissions Decisions

"Closing the Gap? Admissions and Enrollments at the Texas Public Flagships Before and After Affirmative Action." in *Office of Population Research Princeton University*.  
Toor, Rachel. 2001. *Admissions Confidential: An Insiders Account of the Elite College Selection Process*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

---

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of brevity we refer to race-based affirmative action programs in the remainder of the text as 'affirmative action' programs.

<sup>2</sup> Those who are advantaged can also receive preferential treatment, though this is not generally thought of as affirmative action. The admissions advantage enjoyed by legacies (Espenshade et al. 2004) or members of families who have given large sums of money to the university (Toor 2001) are two examples.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, Edelman finds that the colleges and universities in her sample were substantially more likely than businesses to have EEO/AA structures.

<sup>4</sup> The *Hopwood* decision was made on appeal to the Fifth Circuit Court and thus applies to Louisiana and Mississippi as well. However, the public postsecondary systems in both Louisiana and Mississippi were operating under a consent decree to address segregation at the time and so were not directly affected by the *Hopwood* decision.

<sup>5</sup> While we would have preferred data going back to the 1960s, ASC data are only available from 1986 to the present.

<sup>6</sup> The figure of 89% is based on an average for 1986, 1995 and 2003. Those proportions were 87.1%, 87.5% and 91.3% respectively.

<sup>7</sup> Independent variables in these models include measures of affirmative action policy interventions, difference in school and state percent black and Hispanic, and time, all of which are discussed below. Models run separately by school sector are available from the first author upon request.

<sup>8</sup> Despite the ordinal nature of the outcome, there are three reasons to prefer the dichotomized version. First, only 2% of observations (280) responded 'very important', giving us little support to estimate parameters at the top end of the distribution. Second, the ordered logit model invokes an assumption of proportionality in the effects of the

independent variables that we found to be severely violated. Finally, the ordinal models we estimated, available upon request, yielded findings that are substantively consistent with those that we present here.

<sup>9</sup> We also included acceptance rates in models not shown. Results were substantively similar, but including acceptance rates substantially reduced our analytic samples due to missing data.

<sup>10</sup> See [http://www.collegeboard.com/prod\\_downloads/about/news\\_info/cbsenior/yr2002/pdf/ten.pdf](http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/news_info/cbsenior/yr2002/pdf/ten.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.collegeboard.com/sat/cbsenior/equiv/rt019019.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Results using only observed SAT scores are quite similar to those presented below and are available upon request.

<sup>13</sup> We are grateful to Dan Myers for providing these data to us.

<sup>14</sup> We experimented with a number of measures, including breaking riot counts into quartiles (e.g., quartiles of number of riots within 25 miles of school) and experimenting with measures based on riot intensity (e.g., quartiles based on the number of injuries in each riot). Results were fairly consistent across measures.

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.ncsl.org/ncslldb/elect98/partcomp.cfm?year=2002> and <http://www.ncsl.org/ncslldb/elect98/partcomp.cfm?year=2003>. Nebraska is excluded from these analyses as it has a unicameral legislature elected without party designation. For other states,

<sup>16</sup> We present 95% confidence intervals in brackets.

<sup>17</sup> These coefficients are largely consistent with what we expected, with the possible exception of Washington's Initiative 200 and the *Johnson* decision in Georgia. In both cases we think that our limited statistical power may be driving our (nonsignificant) results. In the case of Washington, we have only 6 public institutions in our data, five of which claimed to engage in affirmative action between 1993 and 1997. By 2002 none of them made such a claim. In the case of Georgia we have only two years of data following the *Johnson* decision. Furthermore, few public institutions in Georgia claimed to engage in affirmative action *prior* to the *Johnson* decision (generally 2 or 3 of the ten to thirteen schools we observe).

<sup>18</sup> We are grateful to George Farkas for suggesting this possibility to us.

<sup>19</sup> Though no one has updated Steeh and Krysan's (1996) review of trends in public opinion on affirmative action, we evaluate distributions based on questions asked by the Pew Research Center (1997, 1999, 2003), the NBS News/Wall Street Journal Poll (1991, 1995, 2000, 2003) and the ABC News/Washington Post Poll (1995, 1997). We find no evidence of a reliable shift in public sentiment.

<sup>20</sup> We think affirmative action probably diffused from more elite institutional leaders in the field of higher education to other institutions. However, this diffusion predates the first year of our study, so we can only speculate about how affirmative action policies came to be so common.

<sup>21</sup> Simulation studies suggest that these policies will not be as effective at increasing racial and ethnic diversity as policies explicitly targeted at minority students. See Cancian, Maria. 1998. "Race-Based versus Class-Based Affirmative Action in College Admissions." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. Winter 17:94-105, Long, Mark. 2004. "Race and College Admissions: An Alternative to Affirmative Action?" *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 86:1022-1033.



Figure 1.

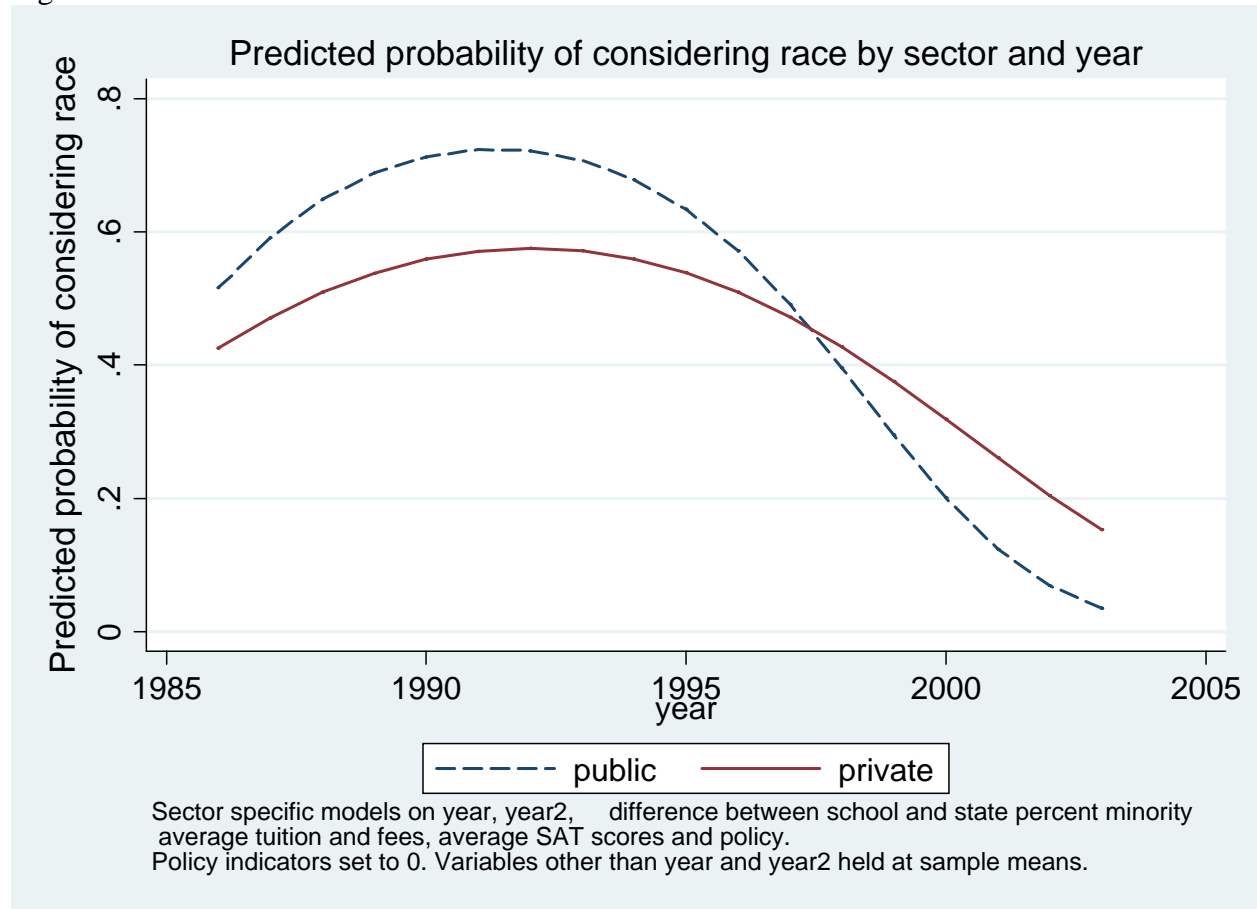


Figure 2.

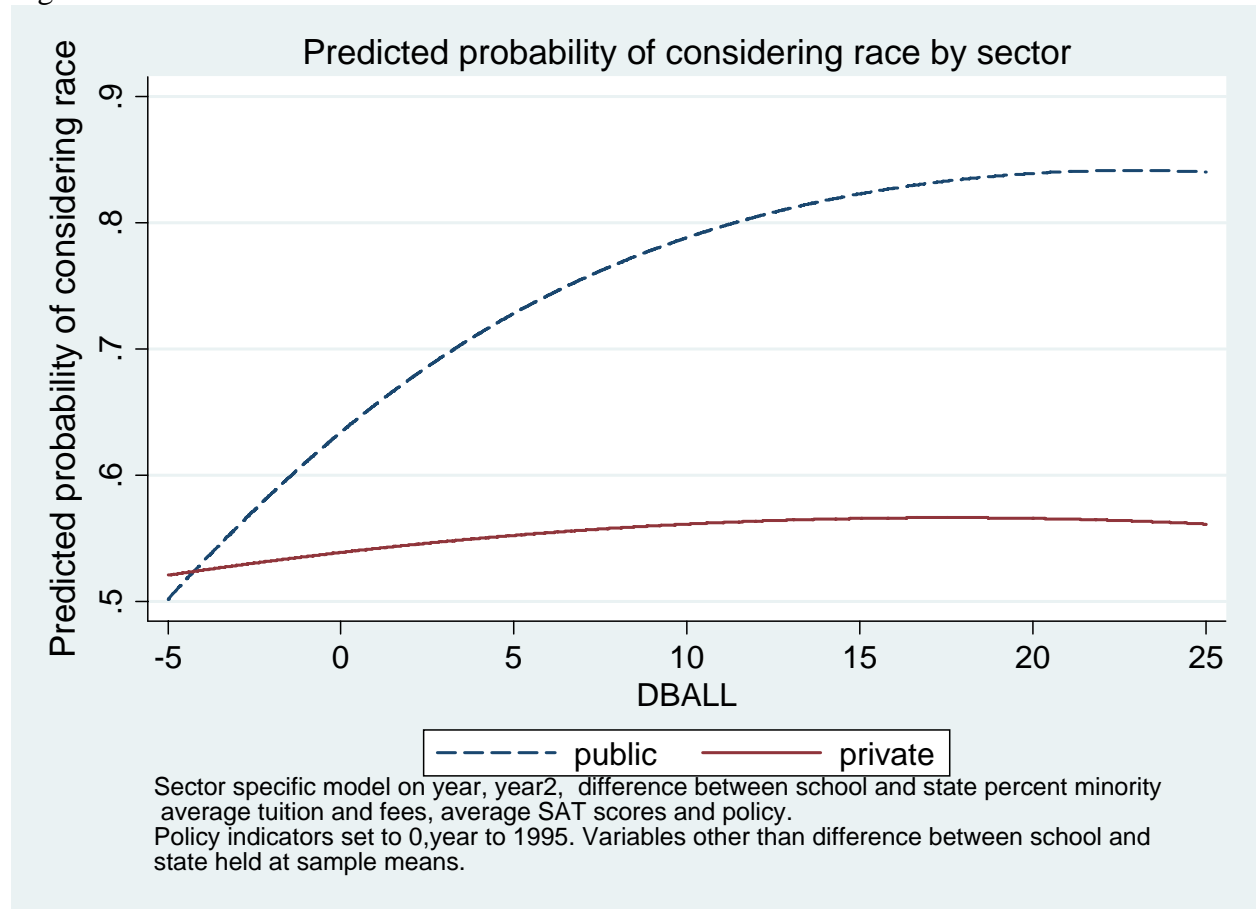


Figure 3.

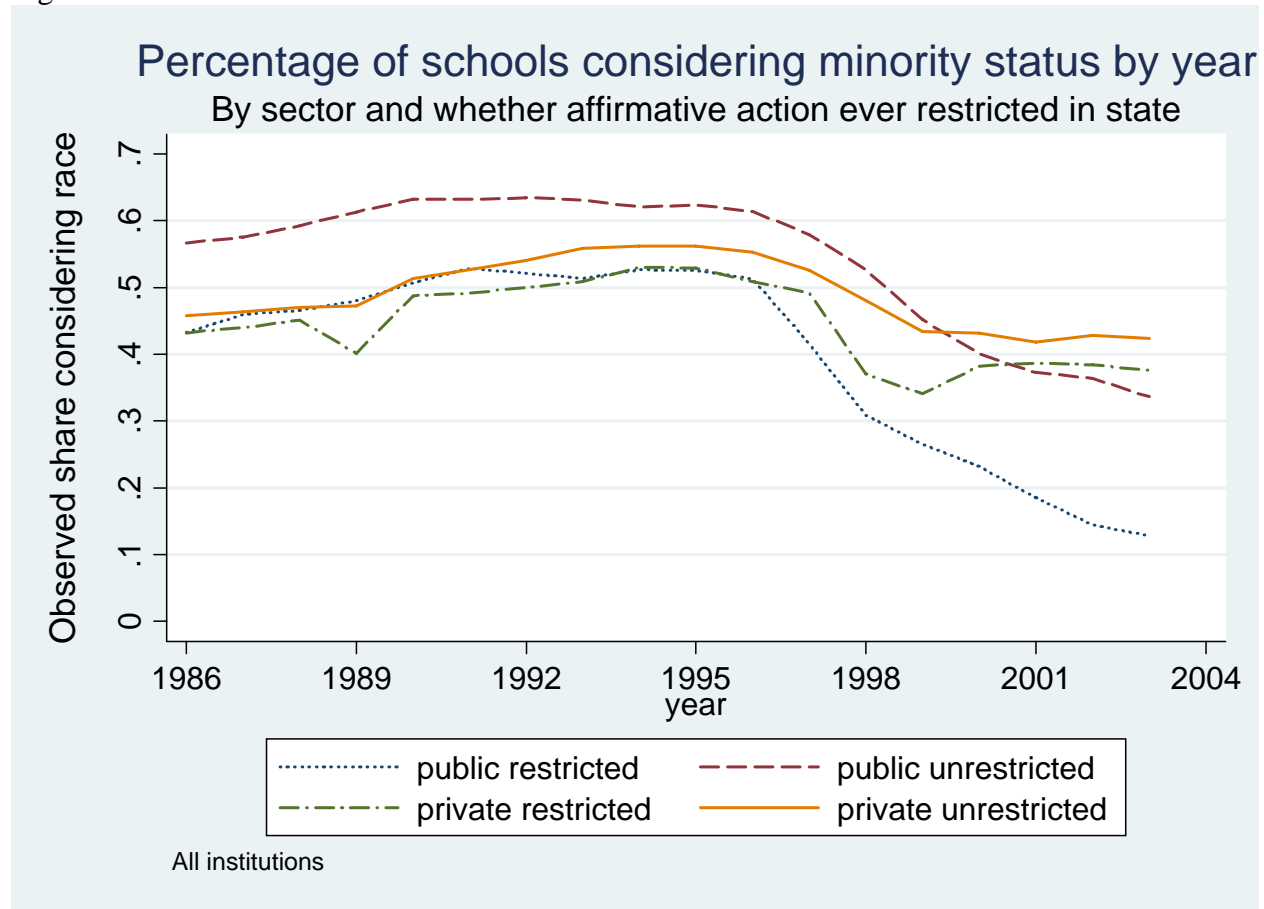


Table 1: Summary of hypotheses

| Context    | H0  | sector of school |         |
|------------|---|------------------|---------|
|            |   | public           | private |
| sector     | public schools more likely to consider race/ethnicity   | --               | --      |
| status     | more prestigious institutions more likely to consider race/ethnicity  | X                | X       |
| history    | proximity to race riots in 1960s predict initiation and persistence in considering race/ethnicity                                 | X                | X       |
|            | consideration of race/ethnicity increases over time   | X                | X       |
| demography | greater difference between % minority students in incoming class and % in state, greater likelihood of considering race/ethnicity | X                |         |
| politics   | % democrats, % Hispanic and % African American in state legislature increases likelihood of considering race/ethnicity            | X                |         |
| policy     | restrictive policies will reduce the likelihood that affected college will consider race/ethnicity                                | X                | X       |

Table 2. Sample Sizes and Descriptive Statistics

|  | <u>public</u> |        | <u>private</u> |        |
|--|---------------|--------|----------------|--------|
|  | Mean          | SD     | Mean           | SD     |
| <b>Sample sizes</b>                                |               |        |                |        |
| <i>Time</i>  |               |        |                |        |
| Avg number of periods                              | 13.09         | 5.28   | 13.27          | 5.15   |
| Median number of periods                           | 15            |        | 15             |        |
| <i>School (n)</i>                                  | 462           |        | 836            | 1298   |
| <b>Time (within school)</b>                        |               |        |                |        |
| <b><i>School characteristics</i></b>               |               |        |                |        |
| Consider minority status                           | 0.53          | 0.50   | 0.52           | 0.50   |
| avg SAT each year, in 100s                         | 10.30         | 0.98   | 10.80          | 1.19   |
| tuition and fees (1000s of 2004 dollars)           | 9.03          | 3.15   | 14.92          | 5.28   |
| <i>Historical context</i>                          |               |        |                |        |
| year-1986  | 8.81          | 5.09   | 8.56           | 5.10   |
| (year-1986) <sup>2</sup>                           | 103.57        | 90.85  | 99.32          | 90.23  |
| State % black-school - %black                      | 6.58          | 9.39   | 7.42           | 9.85   |
| (State % black-school - %black) <sup>2</sup>       | 131.37        | 320.62 | 152.05         | 337.88 |
| State % Hispanic-school - %Hispanic                | 5.00          | 9.80   | 5.05           | 8.83   |
| (State % Hispanic-school - %Hispanic) <sup>2</sup> | 121.09        | 275.26 | 103.56         | 248.89 |
| <i>Political context: State legislature</i>        |               |        |                |        |
| Percent Democrat                                   | 55.73         | 12.99  | 55.81          | 12.01  |
| Percent Latino                                     | 3.51          | 6.50   | 2.70           | 5.07   |
| Percent black                                      | 8.16          | 5.73   | 8.10           | 5.00   |
| <i>Policy Context</i>                              |               |        |                |        |
| Initiative 200 (WA)                                | 0.01          | 0.08   | 0.01           | 0.07   |
| Proposition 209 (CA)                               | 0.02          | 0.15   | 0.02           | 0.14   |
| <i>Hopwood</i> decision (TX)                       | 0.02          | 0.15   | 0.01           | 0.12   |
| <i>Johnson</i> decision (GA)                       | 0.00          | 0.05   | 0.00           | 0.04   |
| One Florida policy                                 | 0.01          | 0.08   | 0.01           | 0.08   |
| <b>School (over time)</b>                          |               |        |                |        |
| Average SATs of incoming students, in 100s         | 10.20         | 0.91   | 10.62          | 1.16   |
| Average tuition and fees, (1000s of 2004 dollars)  | 8.87          | 2.42   | 14.19          | 4.79   |
| <i>Proximity to riots</i>                          |               |        |                |        |
| Number within 25 miles                             | 5.68          | 13.16  | 8.29           | 15.14  |
| Number within 50 miles                             | 12.29         | 25.18  | 17.10          | 26.51  |

Table 3: Parameter estimates from baseline models

|                                    | pooled<br>b/se        | private only<br>b/se  | public only<br>b/se   |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Intercept                          | -1.181 ***<br>(0.232) | -0.360<br>(0.215)     | 0.135<br>(0.372)      |
| public                             | 2.587 ***<br>(0.292)  |                       |                       |
| sch mean SAT                       | 1.312 ***<br>(0.127)  | 1.114 ***<br>(0.145)  | 1.385 ***<br>(0.251)  |
| sch mean fee                       | 0.239 ***<br>(0.035)  | 0.255 ***<br>(0.036)  | 0.377 ***<br>(0.107)  |
| time                               |                       |                       |                       |
| year-1986                          | 0.223 ***<br>(0.026)  | 0.223 ***<br>(0.027)  | 0.325 ***<br>(0.041)  |
| year [public]                      | 0.103 *<br>(0.043)    |                       |                       |
| (year-1986)^2                      | -0.018 ***<br>(0.001) | -0.018 ***<br>(0.001) | -0.031 ***<br>(0.002) |
| year2 [public]                     | -0.013 ***<br>(0.002) |                       |                       |
| within institution                 |                       |                       |                       |
| mean SAT                           | 0.639 ***<br>(0.073)  | 0.617 ***<br>(0.086)  | 0.682 ***<br>(0.140)  |
| sch-state difference: black        | 0.033 ***<br>(0.009)  | 0.020 *<br>(0.008)    | 0.097 ***<br>(0.023)  |
| (sch-state difference: black)^2    | -0.001 *<br>(0.000)   | -0.000<br>(0.000)     | -0.002 **<br>(0.001)  |
| sch-state difference: Hispanic     | -0.002<br>(0.008)     | 0.003<br>(0.009)      | -0.020<br>(0.013)     |
| (sch-state difference: Hispanic)^2 | 0.000<br>(0.000)      | 0.000<br>(0.000)      | -0.000<br>(0.000)     |
| tuition and mand fees              | 0.051 *<br>(0.025)    | 0.045<br>(0.030)      | 0.107 *<br>(0.049)    |
| policies                           |                       |                       |                       |
| WA: Initiative 200                 | -0.357<br>(0.407)     | 0.357<br>(0.536)      | -1.253<br>(0.671)     |
| CA: Proposition 209                | -0.246<br>(0.232)     | 0.293<br>(0.283)      | -1.402 **<br>(0.457)  |
| 5th circuit: Hopwood               | -1.873 ***<br>(0.296) | -2.368 ***<br>(0.382) | -0.970 **<br>(0.466)  |
| 11th circuit: Johnson              | 0.867<br>(0.649)      | 1.456<br>(0.857)      | 0.026<br>(0.991)      |
| FL: One Florida                    | -1.054 **<br>(0.401)  | -0.459<br>(0.451)     | -2.931 **<br>(1.021)  |
| Sample sizes                       |                       |                       |                       |
| within school                      | 19416                 | 12663                 | 6753                  |
| schools                            | 1292                  | 836                   | 462                   |
| states                             | 51                    | 50                    | 50                    |
| Variance components                |                       |                       |                       |
| within school                      |                       |                       |                       |
| schools                            | 7.98                  | 6.96                  | 8.92                  |
| states                             | 0.63                  | 0.25                  | 2.28                  |

Table 4: Proximity to riots, state legislature composition and consideration of raec/ethnicity

| <b>Proximity to riots (pooled models)</b>                 | Intercept         | year-1986             | (year-1986)^2        |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Linear</b>   |                   |                       |                      |
| within 25 miles   | 0.003<br>(0.010)  | -0.003<br>(0.002)     | 0.000<br>(0.000)     |
| 4th quartile intensity<br>and within 25                   | 0.015<br>(0.022)  | -0.007 *<br>(0.004)   | 0.000<br>(0.000)     |
| <b>Nominal</b>  |                   |                       |                      |
| 4th quartile intensity<br>and:                            |                   |                       |                      |
| 2nd quartile: close riot                                  | 0.347<br>(0.322)  | -0.202 ***<br>(0.051) | 0.011 ***<br>(0.003) |
| 3rd quartile: close riot                                  | -0.544<br>(0.388) | 0.027<br>(0.064)      | -0.001<br>(0.004)    |
| 4th quartile: close riot                                  | 0.587<br>(0.345)  | -0.136 *<br>(0.055)   | 0.004<br>(0.003)     |
| <hr/> <b>Legislative composition (public sector only)</b> |                   |                       |                      |
| % legislature democratic                                  | -0.002<br>(0.011) |                       |                      |
| % st legislators black                                    | -0.048<br>(0.030) |                       |                      |
| % st legislators Hispanic                                 | 0.008<br>(0.033)  |                       |                      |

Note: Each model also includes controls for school mean SAT scores, tuition and mandato fees, difference between school % black and state % black, school % Hispanic and state % Hispanic, quadratics for both ethnic difference terms, and policies restricting affirmative : Pooled models also include controls for sector, sector\*year and sector\*year2.

Appendix I: Anti-affirmative action policy indicators

| State | type of event   | description of event  | date policy change in effect | variable |
|-------|-----------------|---|------------------------------|----------|
| TX    | Court           | <i>Hopwood</i> decision abolishes affirmative action in 5th circuit | 1997                         | hopwood  |
| GA    | Court           | Johnson v Board of Regents overturns affirmative action             | 2001                         | johnson  |
| CA    | Initiative      | Prop 209: abolishes affirmative action (supersedes SP1 and SP2)     | 1998                         | prop209  |
| WA    | Initiative      | Initiative 200: Abolishes affirmative action in public institutions | 1999                         | i200     |
| FL    | Executive order | One Florida, Jeb Bush- bans race-based admissions policies          | 2000                         | onefl    |