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UC 2030, I See Color: The Impact of Affirmative Action on California Higher Education

Broadly, what has been the long-term impact of Proposition 209, which repealed affirmative action in 1996, on higher education in California? Specifically, how have freshman undergraduate enrollment and graduation rates changed for different racial/ethnic groups at public universities, specifically University of California institutions, compared to private institutions from 1994 to 2022? To answer this question, I will analyze public and private colleges, comparing admission statistics and graduation outcomes to assess how the removal of affirmative action has influenced higher education outcomes for various racial/ethnic groups. This analysis aims to provide insights into the long-term effects of Proposition 209 in California and how similar policy decisions might impact students from different racial/ethnic groups on a national scale.

CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE

Affirmative action is a program implemented by public, private, or government entities to address historical injustices faced by minorities, particularly in education and employment opportunities. The first mention of affirmative action appears in President John F. Kennedy's 1961 executive order, which required government contractors to take affirmative action to ensure fair consideration of candidates before and during employment, regardless of identity characteristics including more than race but sex, gender, or creed ("Affirmative Action in California"). This

marked the beginning of a shift towards ensuring equal opportunities for all, predating the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, it was not until President Lyndon B. Johnson's 1965 executive order which emphasized increasing minority employment and awarding government contracts to underrepresented groups, that affirmative action became more widespread ("Affirmative Action in California").

In higher education, race became a consideration in university admissions to address historical injustices and promote campus diversity. However, the Supreme Court case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (438 U.S. 265, 1978) limited the scope of affirmative action in university admissions, ruling that diversity could be the only permissible justification for affirmative action policies in admissions. The Court also mandated that such programs must be tailored to achieve this goal (*Affirmative Action: Crash Course Government and Politics #32*, 00:02:16–00:02:52). Since then, scrutiny of affirmative action has increased, shaping legal precedents in subsequent cases. For instance, in *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003), the Supreme Court struck down the University of Michigan's affirmative action policy, which used a point system that automatically awarded additional points to minority applicants (*Affirmative Action: Crash Course Government and Politics*, episode 32, 00:04:20–00:05:01). This case also introduced the concept of a temporal limitation on affirmative action, with Justices suggesting that such policies might no longer be necessary by 2028. Over its storied legal history, affirmative action has remained highly controversial, prompting numerous legal challenges, and leaving its implementation up to individual states. As a result, many states have chosen to ban or modify affirmative action policies entirely.

On June 29, 2023, in two landmark Supreme Court cases, affirmative action was effectively banned in college admissions nationwide, eliminating race as a consideration in admissions

decisions at public and private universities (Sherman). However, in 1996, California had already enacted Proposition 209, the *Affirmative Action Initiative*, which prohibited "discriminating against or granting preferential treatment based on race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in public employment, public education, and public contracting," as reported by Ballotpedia. Unlike public institutions, private colleges and universities in California have remained exempt from Proposition 209 since its passage.

In this context, the recent federal decision will not impact California's state policy on race-based admission standards in public education, as affirmative action policies were already banned. However, it introduces new restrictions on private institutions nationwide, including those in California. The decades since Proposition 209's passage provide a valuable statistical foundation for understanding the long-term effects of affirmative action repeal, offering insights unavailable in the brief time since the Supreme Court's 2023 ruling. By examining California's experience, we can establish a preliminary framework for understanding the potential consequences of the 2023 SCOTUS decision.

Furthermore, analyzing the repeal of affirmative action and its long-term implications can inform broader policy debates, as the Supreme Court's decision is likely to have far-reaching consequences. In California, the debate over affirmative action is ongoing. As recently as 2020, Proposition 16—the *Repeal Proposition 209 Affirmative Action Amendment*—appeared on the ballot, though it failed to pass. The persistence of this debate underscores the significance of higher education as a mechanism for socioeconomic mobility, providing increased income and job opportunities. However, the challenge lies in ensuring equal access to opportunities within a system prohibited from addressing the root causes of inequality, specifically historical racial disparities. Addressing policies that exacerbate or overlook the persistent education gap is

essential. Such gaps disproportionately impact racial/ethnic groups across California, as the consequences of those impacts are passed down through generations. Understanding how these policies affect different populations is critical to fostering a more equitable education system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The implementation of affirmative action in college admission practices nationwide raises a compelling discussion about fostering equality or equity along racial/ethnic lines. Over the past 50 years, judges, policymakers, and admission offices have grappled with varying applications and interpretations of affirmative action, often reflecting evolving societal attitudes toward addressing racial inequalities. Although early Supreme Court cases limited explicit acknowledgment of the policy's purpose, its original intent—rooted in the executive orders that established it—persisted. By the 1990s, as public sentiment began to shift, several states started placing affirmative action on their ballots, leading researchers to investigate its impact on admissions and broader educational outcomes. These studies have provided critical insights into the implications of affirmative action policies, particularly after states like California implemented affirmative action bans. This research has sought to move beyond advocacy for or against affirmative action, focusing instead on its measurable effects on admissions, enrollments, graduation rates, and workforce outcomes.

To structure this discussion, I have organized my literature review methodologically. While studies on the intent and effects of affirmative action date back to the late 1960s, the focus of this paper is on the more recent decades of affirmative action repeal policies, which predate the Supreme Court's nationwide ban. States such as Texas, Florida, and California, which banned affirmative action earlier than at the federal level, provide useful case studies. Many of the papers included in this review examine the years following the repeal of affirmative action at public universities, revealing potential gaps in the policies effects during its implementation. As such,

much of the existing research evaluates the composition and outcomes of universities without affirmative action, while fewer studies focus on its effects when actively implemented.

The literature highlights two contrasting perspectives. Critics often cite “reverse discrimination,” claiming that affirmative action results in unfair admissions practices disadvantaging non-minorities, despite limited evidence supporting such critiques. Proponents responded by emphasizing the significant, positive effects of affirmative action on the lifetime earnings of minority groups. Relevant to my research question, the literature suggests that enrollment rates and degree outcomes for minorities at public institutions have been negatively affected by affirmative action bans (Hinrichs, 24). Meanwhile, graduation rates since the bans have increasingly supported the theory of academic mismatch, where students admitted under affirmative action struggle to meet institutional standards, potentially impacting their long-term success.

Many key studies have been conducted to understand the impact of repealing affirmative action. Peter Hinrichs’ 2012 study primarily examined enrollment, educational attainment, and the demographic composition of University of California college undergraduates pre and post ban. Pertinent to my analysis of enrollment statistics at public universities, his findings revealed a decrease in underrepresented minority enrollment at these institutions, which, in turn, has significant implications for their projected outcomes later in life (Hinrichs, 721). Similarly, in a comprehensive 2020 study on Proposition 209’s impact on California public universities, Zachary Bleemer analyzed enrollment trends and observed a decline in total enrollment among Black and Latino students. His study also highlighted adverse academic outcomes, such as reductions in STEM degrees and applications for underrepresented minority groups after the ban (Bleemer, 139).

Further supporting these findings, Ly and colleagues' 2022 research analyzed affirmative action bans' effects on enrollment in U.S. public medical schools. Their conclusion underscored a consistent trend across academia: affirmative action bans are "...associated with significant reductions in percentages in U.S. public medical schools from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups" (Ly 873). What emerges clearly from these studies is that enrollment for underrepresented minorities declines at public institutions following affirmative action bans. My research aims to explore the extent to which these trends differ from private institutions, thereby offering insights into what might have occurred had affirmative action policies remained intact. Additionally, I will explore whether affirmative action has yielded positively compounding corrective effects for underrepresented minorities over the years since its implementation.

Turning to graduation rate statistics, a key focus is the "mismatch theory"—a phenomenon suggesting that admitting less academically prepared students into highly selective universities may reduce their educational outcomes. This theory has been a major concern among both researchers and critics of affirmative action. The argument posits that America's cultural emphasis on equality of opportunity is undermined if preferential treatment is granted where merit should be the sole consideration. Critics contend that affirmative action provides such preferential treatment to people of color, thereby disadvantaging other racial/ethnic groups such as American Indian/Alaskan Native, African American/Black, and Hispanic/Latino(a) groups.

One study by Peter Arcidiacono and colleagues examined the mismatch theory, which had gained notoriety amongst researchers analyzing racial preferences at universities by 2011. Their findings suggest that while the theory implies that underqualified minorities may face challenges at highly selective institutions once they are enrolled, this understanding is incomplete. The researchers identified an "asymmetry of information" in the admissions process, wherein

universities possess personal data about a student's capabilities that the student themselves cannot fully observe. This lack of transparency can fuel academic mismatch, as students enroll in institutions where they may struggle to succeed, often influenced by affirmative action policies (Arcidiacono, 329).

In another study, Hinrichs (2014) explored the correlation between affirmative action bans and college graduation rates. His research provided additional evidence for mismatch theory, noting that following such bans, less-prepared underrepresented minorities adjusted their applications to less selective colleges. This adjustment resulted in higher graduation rates for these students. However, Hinrichs also pointed out critical caveats: improved graduation rates might reflect demographic shifts at universities rather than the complete elimination of mismatch. He observed a reduced number of graduates from selective colleges among underrepresented minorities, owing to lower admissions rates post-ban (Hinrichs).

These findings lead to an important question. To what extent have graduation rates improved for underrepresented minorities at public institutions compared to private institutions? While existing evidence suggests that graduation rates for underrepresented minorities have increased at public institutions post-ban, it is not clear whether similar patterns exist at private institutions, as their exclusion to the banning of affirmative action across California in 1996 did not affect their admission practices. My research aims to address this potential gap by comparing outcomes across enrollment and graduation admission statistics, offering a broader understanding of how affirmative action policies and their absence affect academic success.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS

In my analysis, I draw on the theoretical framework of educational equity and institutional responses to policy changes, focusing on how affirmative action policies—such as Proposition 209—have affected minority student outcomes in California. My conceptual hypothesis is that Fall enrollment and graduation rates for minorities among all racial/ethnic groups have remained more stable at private colleges compared to public colleges since the passage of Proposition 209 in 1996, and its official implementation in 1998. This stability suggests that private institutions, with greater autonomy in admissions and less direct influence from state policies, may have been more effective in maintaining diversity and supporting minority students post-1996. As their admission practices were not barred from using race-based criteria, they continued to promote diversity on their campuses by using race as a direct metric. Public institutions had to look to other means to do so. Private institutions were less likely to experience the immediate negative effects of banning affirmative action, such as decreased underrepresented minority enrollment or mismatched academic outcomes. Able to give preferential treatment to applicants based on race and maintain enrollment targets, they managed to stabilize these practices despite the impact of Proposition 209 on public institutions.

My operational hypothesis posits that the implementation of Proposition 209 in 1996 led to a measurable decrease in minority enrollment and graduation rates at public colleges in California, compared to private colleges. This trend persisted from 1994 to 2022, as public universities were restricted from considering race as a factor in admissions, while private colleges retained the flexibility to do so. Consequently, private colleges did not experience significant declines in minority or non-minority enrollment, and their graduation rates remained stable, despite a smaller proportion of minority enrollees overall.

The causal mechanism driving these shifts in admission statistics lies in the prohibition of public universities from considering existing racial disparities in education during the admissions process. The shift to more merit-based admissions practices limited the ability of public institutions to account for systemic inequities—such as lower average test scores, reduced access to educational resources, and limited availability of tutors and teachers—that disproportionately affect minority students (Jefferson-Jones et al.). Consequently, public colleges, which had previously leveraged admissions policies to promote diversity, struggled to mitigate these disparities. Private institutions, unaffected by Proposition 209, continued to uphold their commitment to campus diversity with minimal changes to their admission practices. This led to declines in overall minority enrollment and lower higher education outcomes for underrepresented groups.

While this mechanism partially aligns with the mismatch theory, the observed increase in minority enrollments at private institutions post-Proposition 209 suggests that these institutions were better equipped to address educational inequities. Their greater flexibility in admissions contributed to positive long-term outcomes for minority students that may not be fully captured in public universities' graduation rate statistics. Ultimately, enhancing diversity through increased minority enrollment necessitates addressing systemic racial disparities and their consequences in higher education—a challenge that private institutions were better positioned to navigate after Proposition 209.

RESEARCH DESIGN

My two independent variables (X) were time from 1994 to 2022 and the public or private classification of the universities, which were required to adhere to different admission practices as per Proposition 209 in 1996. I am using Ballotpedia to rely on the background and language of the

bill. This allows me to understand the impact of the repeal of affirmative action as it pertains to the location of my data and, more so, what to expect in 1994 and onward. I chose California because aspects of this project need to be localized, but also because it would be easier to relate variables from the same state that is subject to similar populations attending these colleges. Therefore, any observed changes in my dependent variables would be more likely explained, either public or private colleges are now required to take different approaches regarding race-based admission practices since Proposition 209.

My dependent variables (Y) include the fall freshman undergraduate enrollment rates as a percentage of each year's incoming class, normalized to 1,000 per year from 1994 to 2022, to account for institutional variation in sizes. Additionally, they include the ratio of students in a respective to those completing a bachelor's degree in four years or less, in order to capture the graduation rate for each racial group. To collect this data, I have relied on the University of California data for enrollment and graduation data by race they have on the UC system. For private schools such as Stanford and USC, I use Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) which has similar data stored for enrollment and graduation data by race. However, for any gaps in data I rely on IPEDS, as I search either of the public or private colleges by each admission statistics.

I have chosen these academic metrics for my evaluation based on prior research conducted on affirmative action banning. However, as alluded to in the title, the University of California has set ambitious goals to be achieved by the year 2030. Aptly titled the "UC 2030 Goals," these metrics focus on increasing the number of undergraduate and graduate degrees awarded as well as achieving baseline graduation rates for Pell Grant recipients, first-generation students and, as relevant to this paper, underrepresented groups (University of California, 2024). I aim to address

how the initial repeal of affirmative action impacted the University of California schools in achieving their stated objectives. Specifically, to what extent did underrepresented minorities face setbacks in relation to the metrics outlined in the UC 2030 goals. By analyzing the populations targeted for improved graduation rates we can explore disparities along racial lines based on enrollment rates, potentially tracing these disparities back to the repeal of affirmative action—a pivotal moment that marked a divide between public and private institutions in California.

Given my research question, the most important control variable (Z) is the year. It remains critical to compare the length of time after Proposition 209's effect on each respective admission policy. This distinction allows for a clearer understanding of how the repeal of affirmative action has affected enrollment and graduation trends over the time span of Proposition 209's implementation. Another key control variable is the total number of enrollees and the four-year or less graduation rate at each institution. Using IPEDS, which provides college distinctions by default, I gathered admission statistics. This control variable will be used to compare these statistics with factors that may independently influence enrollment or graduation trends across institutions.

The unit of analysis comprises the public and private colleges in California for a total observation number of $n=15$: California Institute of Technology, Claremont McKenna College, Harvey Mudd College, Pomona College, Santa Clara University, Stanford University, University of Southern California, University of California-Berkeley, University of California-Davis, University of California-Irvine, University of California-Los Angeles, University of California-Riverside, University of California-San Diego, University of California-Santa Barbara, and University of California-Santa Cruz. These institutions will be compared over a consistent period, from 1994 to 2022, as data availability permits. The analysis will focus on admission statistics and

outcomes, including enrollment rates of freshman students from various racial/ethnic groups and their graduation rates within four years, constituting multiple cases at a time. By examining these measures, the study aims to evaluate the longitudinal outcomes of the repeal of affirmative action on these institutions.

The total number of each race/ethnicity group classified by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and University of California datasets included: American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino(a), International/Nonresident Alien, Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian, Two or More Races, and White. For the sake of maintaining completed datasets across the period from 1994 to 2022, I opted to exclude Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian and Two or More Races as variables for either enrollment or graduation data. This decision was based on their classification for incoming enrollees and later cohort/completers for graduation data, which only existed after 2006, according to IPEDS, my primary source. This caveat is important for the following regressions I ran, as it highlights the evolving interpretations of race/ethnicity over the course of this study—particularly how admission offices defined and categorized different race/ethnic groups or determined the need for separate classifications.

RESULTS

For my results on the regressions on enrollment, I normalized the data from both public and private schools to enrollees per 1,000 by multiplying the percentage of race/ethnicities by 1,000. This normalization allowed for a more direct comparison between larger public institutions and their smaller private counterparts, bypassing discrepancies in the total number of enrollees for certain race/ethnicity groups. Given that admission offices at both types of universities must accommodate varying cohort sizes and levels of selectivity, this approach ensured a consistent

evaluation of institutions' capacity to enroll specific racial/ethnic groups within their incoming classes. For graduation rates, the data combined cohorts from as early as 1997 with completers from 2001, reflecting the four-year or less graduation timeline required for degree completion.

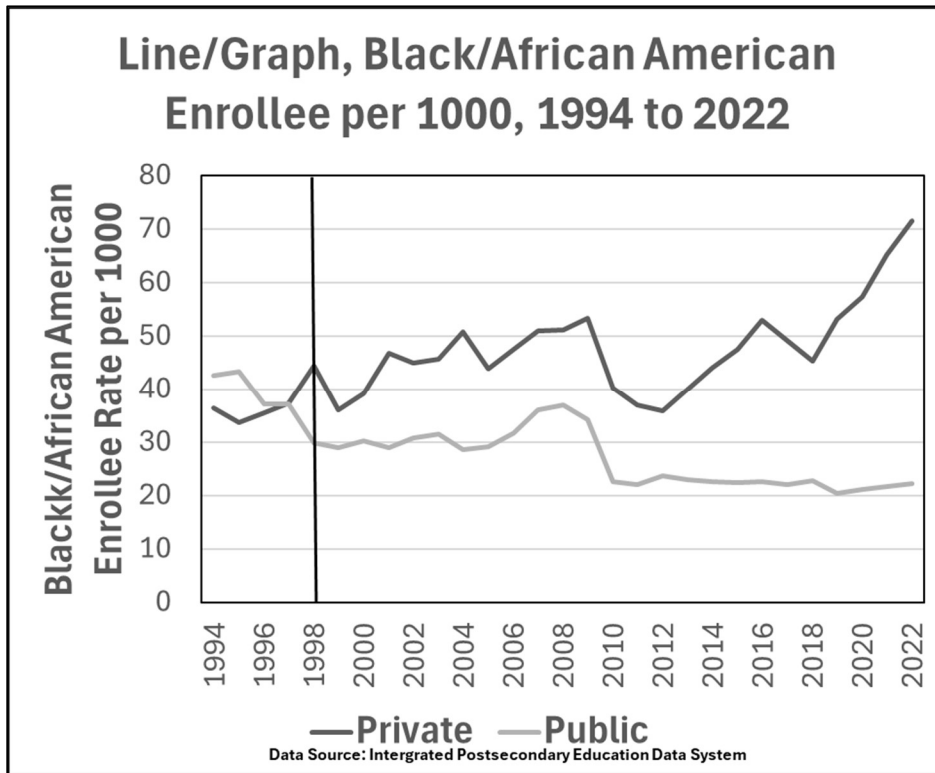
As for the regression tables, I ran multilinear regressions analyzing race/ethnicity variables in conjunction with private/public indicators, years, and the total number of enrollees/graduation rates per institution. At the bottom of each table, the number of observations (n) and adjusted R² values are displayed, providing insight into whether the model explains the data with minimal noise. The coefficients retrieved at each intersection indicate trends in the data relative to the respective variables. The statistical significance of these coefficients is denoted by asterisks (*), corresponding to p-values, with additional details provided by the standard error rows, which represent the potential range—additive or subtractive—of each coefficient's value.

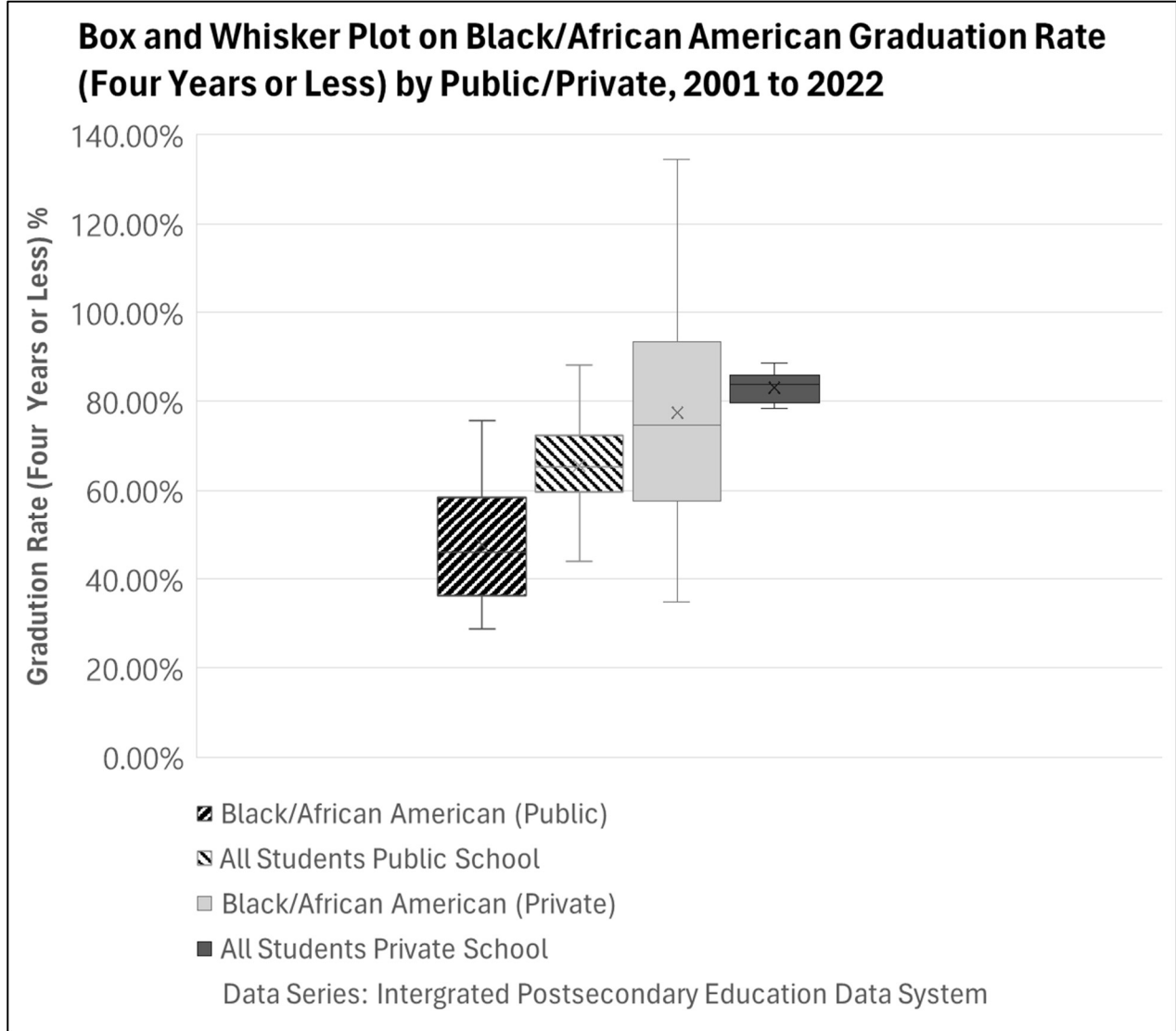
Enrollment Rate per 1000 Regression Table by Race/Ethnicity, 1994 to 2022							
Race/Ethnicity	Native American	Asian	African American	Latino(a)	International	Unknown	White
Intercept	607.39***	3360.18***	4090.11***	-9475.57***	-7199.16***	2186.58***	19167.71***
	-52.75	-1271.23	-672.71	-686.14	-509.21	-561.95	-1226.34
Private(0)/Public(1)	-2.66***	107.09***	-68.41***	67.94***	-57.24***	42.55***	-138.51***
	-0.78	-18.84	-9.97	-10.17	-7.55	-8.33	-18.17
Year	-0.30***	-1.57**	-2.03***	4.78***	3.61***	-1.06***	-9.32***
	-0.03	-0.63	-0.34	-0.34	-0.25	-0.28	-0.61
Total Enrollee	0.00***	0.01*	0.04***	0	0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
N	435	435	435	435	435	435	435
Adjusted R ²	0.25	0.34	0.47	0.48	0.51	0.18	0.6
Note: Blank Rows are Standard Errors (SE); *p-value<0.1, **p-value<0.05, ***p-value<0.01							
Data Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System							

Graduation Rate (Four Years of Less) Regression Table by Race/Ethnicity, 2001 to 2022							
Race/Ethnicity	Native American	Asian	African American	Latino(a)	International	Unknown	White
Intercept	27.37**	-1.62	-7.5	-34.38***	-72.55***	94.50***	18.26***
	-13.67	-3.32	-9.03	-7.46	-12.28	-16	-2.76
Private(0)/Public(1)	-0.38***	-0.01	-0.23**	-0.35***	0.18	-0.23**	0.03***
	-0.1	-0.02	-0.11	-0.05	-0.02	-0.09	-0.06
Year	-0.01**	0	0	0.02***	0.04***	-0.05***	-0.01***
	-0.01	0	0	0	-0.01	-0.01	0
Total Grad Rate	1.12***	0.92***	1.27***	0.09	1.01***	1.10***	1.03***
	-0.22	-0.05	-0.14	-0.12	-0.19	-0.25	-0.04
N	328	328	328	328	328	328	328
Adjusted R ²	0.21	0.6	0.37	0.22	0.22	0.17	0.69
Note: Blank Rows are Standard Errors (SE); *p-value<0.1, **p-value<0.05, ***p-value<0.01							
Data Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System							

The most significant takeaways from these regression tables, which provide statistical support for my hypothesis, are the negative coefficients for the private/public variable's comparison with each race/ethnicity. These results indicate that public institutions were associated with decreased enrollment per 1,000 for Native American/Alaskan Native, Black/African American, International, and White students from 1994 to 2022. For graduation rates, public institutions were associated with higher four-year graduation rates only for International and White students from 2001 to 2022. Despite varying adjusted R² values, the statistical significance of these variables—with p-values under 0.01—highlights the predictive power of the negative coefficients. However, it is important to note that other variables, such as year and total enrollees/graduation rates, also yielded significant indicators. These variables implied positive enrollment growth

outcomes for Hispanic/Latino(a) students and diminishing outcomes for White students in California. This pattern is particularly evident in the enrollees per 1,000 table. Moreover, overall graduation rates demonstrated strong improvements for all race/ethnicity groups, reflecting institutions' growing ability to graduate students. This trend may bias private institutions, which report higher four-year or less graduation rates than public ones.





Guided by the results above, I attempted to exemplify the outcomes of my regressions by focusing on a race/ethnicity group that experienced a significant negative effect due to Proposition 209, passed in 1996 and implemented in 1998. For Black/African American students, the expected enrollment per 1,000 was 68.41 fewer at public institutions, and their four-year or less graduation rate was 0.23 lower. These values represent the second-largest negative coefficient effect in the enrollment regression and the third lowest in graduation rate. As such, I chose to highlight the significant harm suffered by this group due to Proposition 209. Specifically, the differences in their

enrollment rate per 1,000 over time are illustrated in a line graph, which depicts the remarkable divergence between public and private institutions beginning in 1998 at the onset of affirmative action ban at public colleges. At its largest gap, the enrollee rate per 1000 for Black/African American students in 2022 was 49.24 percentage points, with private at 71.55 per 1000 and public at 22.31 per 1000. Additionally, a box-and-whisker plot of four-year or less graduation rates show a more substantial gap for Black/African American students at public institutions compared to the overall student population, as opposed to private institutions. As from 2001 to 2022, Black/African American students had a 47.69% graduation rate in four years or less at public universities, compared to their overall average of 65.68%. Comparatively, Black/African American students at private institutions had an average graduation rate of 77.49%, compared to the overall average of 83.04%.

DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

My results partially support the hypothesis that Proposition 209 disproportionately reduced the enrollment and graduation rates of American Indian/Alaskan Native, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino(a) students. However, there are significant caveats to this conclusion. As previously discussed, Black/African American students were among the most negatively affected at public institutions, while American Indian/Alaskan Native students experienced similarly negative coefficients in their admissions outcomes at public institutions. Conversely, Hispanic/Latino(a) students demonstrated improved enrollment rates per 1,000 at public institutions, despite maintaining the lowest four-year graduation rates during the same period. This trend must be contextualized within broader demographic changes. According to USA Facts data on California's population growth from 1994 to 2022, Hispanic/Latino(a) individuals experienced the largest increase in population share, rising by 11.6 percentage points to 40.3% of California's

population, surpassing White populations as the largest racial/ethnic group (USA Facts, 2022). In my interpretation, the increasing enrollment of Hispanic/Latino(a) students at public institutions reflects this demographic shift. If the applicant pool in California is becoming more heavily composed of Hispanic/Latino(a) individuals, their enrollment growth—even under Proposition 209—is consistent with population trends. Moreover, the year coefficients for Hispanic/Latino(a) and White populations align with these demographic changes, as Hispanic/Latino(a) coefficients are the largest positive, while White coefficients are the largest negative within the dataset. These patterns mirror shifts in population shares between 1994 and 2022. This may mean the Hispanic/Latino(a) population has since recovered their decrease in enrollment rates since Proposition 209, given their increasing population size.

A surprising finding in the data concerns the statistical performance of International students. Their enrollment growth at both public and private institutions was staggering, with a visual increase in admissions statistics warranting further investigation. This trend has been corroborated by prior research. According to the Pew Research Center (Ruiz and Radford, 2017), the number of International students in the United States doubled between the Great Recession of 2008 and 2016, significantly outpacing nationwide enrollment trends, which grew by only 3–4% during the period. International student enrollment increased by an astonishing 104% during this same period. This rapid growth is evident in my line graph depicting Black/African American enrollees per 1,000, which shows a noticeable inflection point following 2008. Importantly, the rise of International students affected enrollment trends for all racial/ethnic groups at both public and private institutions. Despite their rise, as visualized in the data and regression analyses, it is notable that the year coefficients for International students did not surpass those of Hispanic/Latino(a) students in enrollment rates per 1,000. This finding highlights the significant

influence of demographic shifts on enrollment patterns, even amidst notable external factors like the rise in International student representation.

While this statistic is relevant to my research extension, an alternative explanation emerges when considering the College-Going Rate (CGR) of California's high school students. Specifically, the CGR measures the percentage of California public high school graduates in a given year who enroll in any public or private postsecondary institution in the United States—either in-state or out-of-state—within 12 or 16 months of graduation (“Information about the College-Going Rate (CGR) - Accessing Educational Data, CA Dept of Education”). According to the California Department of Education, during the 2021–2022 academic year, underrepresented racial/ethnic groups—such as American Indian/Alaskan Native, Hispanic/Latino(a), and Black/African American students—had CGRs ranging from 45.9% to 55.2%. In contrast, White and Asian students reported significantly higher CGRs at 67.8% and 85.4%, respectively. These disparities suggest that barriers to college enrollment at public or private universities persist, influencing both the enrollment and admission outcomes of these groups in California. At its core, these statistics reveal that minority students are attending college at lower rates compared to other racial/ethnic groups. This disparity may partly explain the weaker performance metrics observed at public and private institutions. Public universities, which admit larger numbers of students, may enroll these groups at rates proportional to their CGRs, while private institutions—despite their smaller, more selective admissions—may show better outcomes for those minority students who do attend. This dynamic potentially highlights a perception of more favorable results for underrepresented groups at private institutions compared to public ones, exacerbated by the banning of affirmative action.

When considering future policy outcomes, affirmative action, as it was deployed at public and private universities across the country, is no longer allowed after the Supreme Court's ban in June 2023. Legal precedents established during affirmative action's 50-year span had decreed it to last only a brief time after the Supreme Court case *Grutter v. Bollinger* in 2003. Now, states must follow suit in implementing the language edits of the California constitution added in Proposition 209 to ban this form of preferential treatment based on race. However, admissions offices still aim to increase diversity on their campuses and will find ways to do so, according to Denise O'Neill, the Director of Enrollment Management at Pennsylvania State University. She stated that race still has various proxies, such as gender, ethnicity, and class, which can be incorporated into newer holistic approaches to application and recruitment cycles. As the struggle for "...perception of fairness and equity and inclusion at all levels and in all environments" continues, it extends beyond just higher education. The implementation of affirmative action policies addressing K-12 educational systems and workplace environments must continue to rectify historical inequalities across race/ethnicity within the confines of the law (Gaddis, 2023).

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND RESEARCH EXTENSTIONS

Many of my limitations were related to racial/ethnic classifications. The removal of Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian as a category, despite being a small group, was a decision I would have preferred not to make. Including Two or More Races would also have provided additional insights, as it is a newer classification with relevance to contemporary enrollment trends. However, each of these groups were only recorded following 2008. Furthermore, greater emphasis on the interaction of Unknown race/ethnicities with enrollment and graduation trends following Proposition 209 could have yielded more in-depth results. Notably, freshman undergraduate enrollment trends for Unknown race/ethnicities align more closely with Proposition 209 than with the period following

the Great Recession. For example, in 1998, 4,835 applicants who declined to state or omitted their race/ethnicity applied to California universities, compared to 7,851 in 1999—a 62% increase in a single year (Arcidiacono et al., 6). As many of these Unknown applicants were projected to be Asian and White students, adaptive enrollee trends may have shifted perceived effects of affirmative action, necessitating a closer look. Especially if the implications of the variation in their enrollment at institutions following private or public institutions might have improved their outcomes to decline to state their race. Potentially offering more comprehension on the perceived effect of listing your race and enrollment, yet their overall statistical relevance is short lived in the period after Proposition 209.

As I noted previously, I would have liked to include the College-Going Rate (CGR) in my dataset as a control variable. Unfortunately, CGR data only extends back to 2014, which limited its utility for this analysis covering data from 1994 onward. As I believe that it may speak to earlier trends in data not captured at enrollment or graduation trends at university. Able to more accurately depict trends that start before the public or private distinction can intervene with their own admission policies to address diversity. However, a broader extension of this study could involve analyzing the effects of the Supreme Court decision banning affirmative action from June 2023 onward, where CGR could serve as a robust predictor of trends among minorities. Incorporating controls for population growth and diversity indexes in recent years could also refine future analyses, especially when focusing on more contemporary times. These additions would enhance the evaluation of enrollment and graduation trends among underrepresented groups.

When Proposition 209 was passed, its implications for minority enrollment and graduation rates were studied immediately. As highlighted in my Literature Review, comprehensive evaluations of the data were conducted in the years preceding and following the ban on affirmative

action in California's public higher education system. My analysis extends these evaluations by including data through 2022. It is evident however, that the Supreme Court's 2023 decision will require years of study to fully assess its impact. If given the opportunity to replicate this study in two years, I would aim to evaluate the nationwide effects of this decision. Comparing public universities across states newly forced to ban affirmative action could provide valuable insights into its broader implications. A comparative time-series analysis spanning 2020–2023 (before the ban) and 2023–2026 (after the ban) could illustrate trends in enrollment and graduation rates. Such an analysis is critical for understanding the effects of policy changes, particularly when initial perceptions suggest limited impact.

CONCLUSION

As of 1996, Proposition 209 banned affirmative action across California higher public education. Since its implementation in 1998, numerous studies, including this one, have analyzed the implications and observed similar decreases in enrollment trends among minority groups, such as American Indian/Alaskan Native, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino(a) students. As well as mixed results for graduation rate changes amongst these groups, in which some hypothesize better outcomes at less selective institutions after the ban. Whatever the case may be, the mechanism of social mobility obtained through furthering education after high school is a crucial battleground for those seeking to elevate their socioeconomic status. As such, it is critical to evaluate the policies attempting to provide that access to as many as people as possible regardless of creed, sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation etc. At its basis, the discussion of affirmative action in higher education aimed to bring to the forefront of discussion the historical inequities persistent in time that have divided our country by race. Therefore, it is the people's obligation to decree its feasibility or reasonability through sweeping admission practices, as

California has done in the past and the Supreme Court determined recently. Whilst the policy is as good as finished after the ban, it epitomizes a progress towards inclusion, equity, and diversity to bridge preexisting gaps in American society at large. This effort is best summarized by the decades of legislation and legal action pursued to challenge these injustices. An objective that is certainly not over, or soon from being completed.

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