

**The Effect of Banning Legacy Admissions  
Versus Banning Race-Conscious Admissions  
on Higher Education Enrollment**

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Senior Honors Thesis

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April 2, 2024

## Acknowledgements

First, to my advisor Professor Claire Adida. Your insightful guidance throughout this challenging process not only inspired this research idea but was pivotal in each stage from structuring my theory to developing the research design. I am grateful for how gracious you have been with your time and how accessible you have made yourself starting from the moment I asked you to be my advisor. Your forthright advice and empathetic encouragement enabled me to push forward with confidence. I attribute the growth I experienced as a person and as a scholar to you.

To Ph.D. student Linh Le, who kindly offered me resources, tools, and suggestions during our meetings. I appreciate how you have been so reassuring of my progress in both the thesis and in my academic pursuits.

To Professor Desposato, Professor Sean Ingham, and Ph.D. student Anthony Anderson, who led the Seminars in the Fall Quarter. Your feedback helped me to refine my research idea, and your guidance made this process as smooth as it could have been. I am grateful for how you all encouraged us and empathized with the challenges we were experiencing.

To Dr. Thomas Flaherty, whom I first turned to before beginning this program. Learning from you as your research apprentice in my sophomore year not only bolstered my experience and knowledge in preparation for this program, but it enabled me to discover my passion for research. Thank you for your guidance as I began navigating the initial process and for your helpful suggestions.

To Professor Ban, who gave me the space to discuss my thesis during office hours. I am grateful for your words of encouragement during a difficult time during the research process. The knowledge I gained from your class was also pivotal for my research design.

To my parents and friends, who have provided me with emotional support for the past two quarters. Thank you for your constant words of encouragement.

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## Abstract

How does the impact of legacy admissions compare to the impact of race-conscious admissions on the racial composition of universities? The Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Students For Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* ended the use of race-based affirmative action in higher education admissions. In the aftermath of the decision, a debate emerged regarding how universities can fairly conduct college admissions to promote educational opportunities. Despite the rising salience of alternate admissions policies, such as eliminating legacy admissions, we lack rigorous quantitative evidence about how the relative impact of legacy admissions compares to race-based affirmative action. In order to determine whether or not eliminating legacy admissions is an effective alternative policy to race-based affirmative action, I conduct a quantitative analysis on the top twenty public universities in the U.S. to compare the magnitude of the impact of both race-conscious admissions and legacy admissions on the enrollment outcomes of white students, underrepresented minority students, and non-white students. I run multiple regressions and a Wald test to determine whether the differences found between the effect of these two admissions policies are statistically significant. I find statistically significant evidence that eliminating legacy admissions decreases the proportion of white enrollment and increases the proportion of non-white enrollment. I also find statistically significant evidence that legacy admissions have a greater impact on the racial composition of a university than race-conscious admissions. My results indicate that eliminating legacy admissions is more consequential for enrollment outcomes than race-based affirmative action. I hope to contribute to the discussion of how universities can promote educational equity through fair admissions policies.

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# 1 Introduction

The belief in educational opportunity is fundamental to the United States. However, the pursuit of equal educational opportunity for all has led to much disagreement (Coleman, 2012). Until the 1960s, education was far from equal as underrepresented minority students (URMs) attended segregated schools. According to the Current Population Survey Data and American Community Survey Data from the U.S. Census, URMs include Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans (Hinrichs, 2012). In *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the segregation of schools was deemed constitutional (1896). *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) may have marked the end of outright racial segregation in the education system, but inequality persists in less blatant but considerable ways. This is evident in the educational achievement gap between whites and URMs. The root of these achievement gaps is the inherently unequal education system in which URMs are disproportionately concentrated in either poor urban districts or rural districts with substantially lower financial resources and, consequently, lower quality of education (Darling-Hammond, 1998). These racial disparities lead to consistently lower enrollment rates of URMs in higher education as seen in the National Center for Education Statistics Annual Report on Educational Attainment (2021).

To increase the proportion of URMs in higher education, universities began implementing race-based affirmative action in the mid-1960s. Race-based affirmative action, or race-conscious admissions, is an admissions policy where universities consider an applicant's race as a factor of admissions. However, on June 29, 2023, the Supreme Court ruled that the consideration of race in higher education admissions is unconstitutional in *Students for Fair Admissions v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* (2022). In the majority opinion, Justice Roberts reasons that race-based affirmative action violates the equal protection clause by favoring certain individuals based on their race. This decision reignited the widespread debate regarding the fairness of affirmative action in higher education admissions and how universities can increase diversity and access to educational

opportunities.

This landmark decision heightened the controversy surrounding race-based affirmative action policies. However, it also has placed a separate admissions policy into question: legacy admissions (Patel, 2023). Legacy admissions is an admissions practice where students whose parents are alumni of a given university are given an advantage in admissions. These students are referred to as students with legacy status. Legacy preferences started in the 1920s in response to an influx of migration into the US. The practice has since continued, and current research shows that the advantage given to legacy applicants can be substantial. The admittance rate for legacy applicants was double that of the general application pool in Harvard and Yale (Lamb, 1993). The concern with legacy admissions lies in the fact that this admissions practice may disproportionately benefit wealthy white applicants (Lamb, 1993). Following the Supreme Court's ruling, several universities have banned legacy admissions. For instance, Amherst and Johns Hopkins University banned the practice of legacy admissions, reasoning that it sustains systems of privilege (Patel, 2023). There has been a growing sentiment against legacy admissions across party lines. Following the Supreme Court decision, President Biden called upon the Education Department to examine the practice of Legacy Admissions (Patel, 2023).

While current research has evaluated the effects of both of these admissions policies on enrollment outcomes, there has yet to be a comparison of the impacts of these two policies on diversity in higher education. Empirical evidence shows that race-based affirmative action may be effective in increasing the proportion of URMs in universities (Bowen & Bok, 1998). Moreover, existing literature suggests that state bans on the consideration of race in higher education admissions have undermined universities' ability to achieve pre-ban levels of diversity (Kahlenberg, 2014). In regards to the effect of legacy admissions, there is a consensus among scholars that this admissions practice increases the admissions rates of white applicants with a wealthier socioeconomic background, particularly at prestigious private universities (Lamb, 1993). Comparing how these two admissions policies



impact enrollment outcomes can provide insight into what is truly the fairest and most effective way to increase diversity in higher education institutions. This raises the question: how does the impact of legacy admissions compare to the impact of race-conscious admissions on diversity in higher education enrollment?

My research provides a more complete and nuanced answer to this question by comparing the impacts of both of these admissions policies at the top public universities for three separate groups: white students, URM students, and non-white students. I expect the two admissions policies to have different effects on each of these three groups. First, I predict that eliminating legacy admissions decreases the proportion of white enrollment. On the other hand, I expect that banning legacy admissions may be an effective measure for increasing the proportion of both URMs and non-whites enrolled. As for the effects of race-based affirmative action, I predict that eliminating race-based affirmative action increases the proportion of whites enrolled. I expect that banning race-based affirmative action will decrease URM enrollment. For non-whites, which includes Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) students in addition to URMs, I expect race-based affirmative action to have a different impact. This is because, unlike URMs, AAPI students are not considered viable candidates under race-based affirmative action programs (Hsia, 1988). I predict that banning race-based affirmative action may increase AAPI enrollment. Thus, I expect that banning race-conscious admissions will result in a smaller decrease in non-white enrollment than in URM enrollment. When comparing the relative impact of legacy admissions to the relative impact of race-based affirmative action, I predict that legacy admissions have a greater impact on the enrollment outcomes of all three groups. Some states have turned to banning legacy admissions as an alternative way to increase diversity in universities after ending the use of race-based affirmative action (Kahlenberg, 2014). While it is currently unclear whether or not banning legacy admissions outweighs the impact of race-conscious admissions on enrollment, it is possible that banning legacy admissions has a greater impact on enrollment than race-based affirmative action. Current

research shows that the advantages given to legacy applicants are substantial across universities of varying levels of selectivity (Hurwitz, 2011). Contrarily, the advantages given to URMs through race-based affirmative action are more narrow in scope, depending on both the selectivity of the institution and the student's racial background (Espenshade et al., 2004).

To answer my research question and test my hypotheses, I rely on a mixed methods approach. First, I rely on two in-depth case studies as a plausibility probe for my hypothesis that banning legacy admissions increases diversity. Second, to empirically measure how these two admissions policies affect enrollment outcomes, I conduct a quantitative analysis to evaluate the enrollment outcomes of three separate groups: whites, URMs, and non-whites. I run multiple regressions using a novel dataset I constructed by researching publicly available information regarding the admissions policies at the top 20 public universities in the US (U.S. News & World Report) from 1991 to 2022. More specifically, I construct this dataset by observing whether or not these universities have ever banned legacy admissions or race-conscious admissions in any given year. To measure enrollment outcomes for each of the three differential groups, I use data from the National Center for Education Statistics's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (NCES IPEDS) (National Center for Education Statistics). Using this data on admissions policies and enrollment outcomes, I first run initial regressions to estimate the impacts of each admissions policy individually on the enrollment outcomes for each of the three groups. I then run regressions to compare the effects of both admissions policies on the enrollment outcomes for each of the three groups. In my regressions, I include fixed effects at the University level. I also include a dummy variable to account for the variation in the level at which enrollment counts were aggregated in the NCES IPEDS for the years 1991 to 1999 versus 2000 to 2022. Lastly, I conduct a Wald test to determine whether the difference between the effect of the two policies is statistically significant. I find that eliminating legacy admissions decreases the proportion of whites enrolled by 2.6 percent. Furthermore,

I find that eliminating race-conscious admissions decreases the proportion of URMs enrolled by 0.09 percent. My findings also suggest that eliminating race-conscious admissions does increase the proportion of AAPI enrolled. The results of my main regressions confirm my hypothesis that the magnitude of the coefficient of legacy admissions is greater than that of race-conscious admissions for all three groups. After running the Wald test, I found that the difference between the two coefficients was statistically significant.

My research addresses an issue that has yet to be explored to provide insight into the current discussion surrounding alternative admissions policies to race-based affirmative action. Existing literature on higher education admissions practices has focused on the effects of race-conscious admissions (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Kahlenberg, 2014; Weisskopf, 2001) and the effects of legacy admissions (Lamb, 1993; Ladewski, 2010). However, there has yet to be empirical research comparing the effects of each of these respective admissions policies on enrollment outcomes. I use a novel dataset that I constructed and a unique systematic approach that evaluates enrollment outcomes for three differential groups. In doing so, my research expands the current understanding of how admissions policies can impact the diversity of enrollment outcomes. Comparing the effects of both of these admissions practices also provides insight into the future of higher education admissions practices in a post *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* era to pursue true educational opportunities for all.

In my thesis, I begin by reviewing the current literature on the effects of race-conscious admissions and legacy admissions. Following that, I explain the reasoning behind my hypotheses and then use two case studies as a plausibility probe. I then detail my research design. I discuss my quantitative analysis approach, beginning by detailing how I acquired and pre-processed my data. Then, I provide an overview of my statistical analysis, which involves multiple regressions for three differential groups. After explaining my approach, I discuss the results of my statistical analysis and whether or not these results are consistent with my hypotheses. Lastly, I discuss limitations, conclusions based on my results, and

how my findings may inform avenues for future research.

## **2 The Current Discussion On Affirmative Action and Legacy Admissions**

### **2.1 Race-Conscious Admissions**

#### **2.1.1 Historical Roots**

The predecessor of affirmative action programs in higher education is equal opportunity programs, which aimed to address systemic barriers to access for historically underrepresented minority groups. These groups include African Americans, other people of color, and women. These equal opportunity programs are rooted in the Constitution's guarantee of equal rights for all citizens, and they aim to address the distinct barriers to progress placed on African Americans due to systemic racism. The concept of affirmative action in higher education was established in 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson's Executive Order 11246. This policy measure not only acknowledged the historical racism in the US but mandated proactive actions to expand access. By 1988, undergraduate admissions expanded for many underrepresented groups including white women, Asian Americans, Latinos, African Americans, and others. However, the fatal flaw of race-conscious affirmative action programs was their failure to adequately consider the roots of social inequities that required alternative models to truly tackle (Allen et al., 2002). Thus, existing literature has focused on evaluating the extent to which race-conscious admissions policies in higher education effectively address these inequities that are rooted in historic racism.

Existing literature shows that the rationale behind affirmative action programs in higher education admissions is based on both educational goals and justice-related goals. The educational rationale argues that a racially diverse student body will further an

institution's mission. The justice-related rationale argues that affirmative action programs can increase the presence and success of minority professionals, thereby securing distributive justice for other members of their racial or ethnic groups (Brest & Oshige, 1995). Prior research further confirms this justice-related rationale. According to prior research, the first wave of race-based affirmative action in undergraduate admissions began in response to inspiration from the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. In the second wave, selective universities in the north implemented race-based affirmative action in response to urban riots and campus protests. Historically, the implementation of race-based affirmative action in undergraduate admissions was initiated by social movements, but ultimately depended on the beliefs of college administrators who had the power to launch these policy plans (Stulberg & Chen, 2014).

### **2.1.2 The Role of The Government and The Supreme Court**

Existing research has varied in its findings regarding the role of the Government and the Supreme Court in shaping the use of affirmative action in higher education. On the one hand, the literature shows that statewide affirmative action bans and state judicial rulings did result in a decline in affirmative action policies in universities in affected states. Specifically, these states include California, Florida, Texas, and Washington. These actions had ripple effects on students living in adjacent states as well (Blume & Long, 2014). This indicates that statewide policies regarding the use of affirmative action by universities do have significant public policy implications.

Contrarily, a public policy analysis of *Gratz v. Bollinger and Grutter v. Bollinger* shows that these Supreme Court decisions had minimal public policy implications (Mattox, 2009). In *Gratz* (2002) and *Grutter* (2003), the Supreme Court upheld the use of affirmative action by universities but limited the legal basis for the use of race-based affirmative action. These rulings set the ruling precedent regarding the use of affirmative action by universities, before the Supreme Court's recent ruling in *Students for Fair*

*Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* (2022). This indicates that from the time that *Gratz* and *Grutter* were decided, until 2023, states have been able to decide whether or not to allow the use of race-conscious admissions. There has been variation in how states have chosen to regulate the consideration of race in higher education admissions, offering scholars an opportunity to evaluate the disparate effects.

### **2.1.3 Diversity Outcomes**

Prior research has empirically shown that eliminating race-based affirmative action harms the representation of URMs in higher education. For example, affirmative action bans have not only decreased URM enrollment in selective colleges but have also shifted URMs from attending more selective to less selective campuses (Hinrichs, 2012). In Texas, the affirmative action ban caused the odds of admissions for URMs to decrease when compared to the odds of admissions for white applicants, specifically at Texas A&M and the University of Texas at Austin (Long & Tienda, 2008). Among the states that have banned race-based affirmative action, several universities have been unable to achieve pre-ban levels of diversity despite efforts to implement alternative policies. These states include California, Michigan, and New Hampshire (Kahlenberg, 2014). Existing literature also predicts that mandating race-neutral policies in higher education would decrease Black and Hispanic representation in 4-year colleges (Howell, 2010). This indicates that bans on race-conscious affirmative action can harm the diversity of enrollment outcomes in universities.

Evaluating whether or not race-based affirmative action has increased the enrollment rates of minority groups is challenging. There is no way to know with complete certainty whether or not an applicant would have been admitted had race not been a factor. However, existing research has shown that, in highly selective universities, race-based preferences did increase the acceptance rates of African American students (Bowen & Bok, 1998). The significance of increased enrollment rates of minority students is evident

considering that prior research shows that increased enrollment rates of minority students can directly lead to more minority students having long-term careers (Weisskopf, 2001). Not only can it impact the longevity of their career, but increasing diversity can also improve college graduates' ability to work effectively with people from different backgrounds (Bowen & Bok, 1998).

Another major point of contention in the literature, and in the debate over the fairness of affirmative action, is whether or not affirmative action programs harm Asian Americans. Understanding the history of Asian American immigration into the United States helps to contextualize where Asian Americans stand in the affirmative action debate. Following the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act, there was an influx of highly educated immigrants from Asia (Lee, 2021). This resulted in rapid racial mobility. Asian Americans have since been over-represented in higher education, which distinguishes Asian Americans from URM's (Lee 2021). By the 1970s, Asian Americans were no longer included in affirmative action programs (Hsia, 1988). Critics of affirmative action programs have argued that these programs unfairly discriminate against Asian-Americans (Wu, 1995). Others, however, argue that such claims are merely a political ploy to undermine the legitimacy of affirmative action programs, resulting in Asian Americans being pitted against URM's (Wu, 1995).

#### **2.1.4 Educational Outcomes**

There has been disagreement over the theoretical educational outcomes of implementing affirmative action policies in higher education admissions. Opponents of affirmative action assert that "minority mismatch", an indirect consequence of affirmative action where underrepresented minority students are admitted into universities with higher rigor than they are prepared for, demonstrates how affirmative action can negatively affect educational outcomes. Prior research has empirically shown that racial preferences place URM's in situations that they are not academically equipped for (Sander & Taylor, 2012).

Opponents have also argued that affirmative action policies can inhibit academic performance by placing psychological pressure on minority students, also known as the stereotype threat hypothesis (Fischer & Massey, 2007). Proponents, however, argue that URMs benefit from race-based affirmative action by gaining greater access to resources provided in universities. Moreover, proponents argue that URMs can improve the educational outcomes of their peers at selective universities (Hinrichs, 2012).

First, current literature demonstrates how affirmative action programs can positively impact educational outcomes, specifically college graduation rates and degree attainment. Empirical research shows that affirmative action policies within higher education do have substantial impacts. For example, prior research shows that statewide affirmative action bans, which prohibit the use of race-conscious admissions in public universities, resulted in a decline in URMs' graduation rates from selective universities. This indicates that affirmative action bans can potentially exacerbate existing racial disparities in college graduate rates (Hinrichs, 2014). Furthermore, existing literature establishes that affirmative action programs can be a motivating factor, thereby improving educational outcomes. For example, affirmative action programs in higher education in India are causally linked to minority groups staying in school longer (Khanna, 2020).

On the other hand, the current literature has also evaluated the validity of critics' claims that affirmative action policies indirectly harm the educational outcomes of minority students. Empirical evidence shows that contrary to the mismatch hypothesis, students with lower-than-average credentials do not suffer from being admitted into universities. Existing literature shows that students with lower-than-average credentials succeeded academically in comparison to their peers (Fischer & Massey, 2007). Moreover, prior research shows that African Americans' graduation rates increased with the increasing selectivity of an institution, regardless of entry qualifications (Bowen & Bok, 1998). Thus, existing research challenges the mismatch hypothesis, indicating that race-conscious affirmative action can potentially benefit the educational outcomes of minority students.



However, empirical evidence does show that the psychological pressure faced by minority students as a result of affirmative action programs can affect academic performance. The effects of this psychological pressure is small in comparison to other determinants of academic performance (Fischer & Massey, 2007).

### **2.1.5 Economic Outcomes**

Prior research has evaluated the long-term economic effects of affirmative action bans on higher education graduates. Empirical evidence shows that Proposition 209, which banned the consideration of race in California’s public university admissions, not only negatively affected degree attainment but also resulted in a decline in the average wages of underrepresented minority students (Bleemer, 2021). Moreover, prior research shows that Proposition 209 decreased the proportion of young URMs earning over 100,000 dollars (Bleemer, 2019). This indicates that affirmative action bans can have negative effects beyond educational outcomes, and can potentially worsen existing socioeconomic inequities. Existing research also shows that workforce diversity declined after Proposition 209’s enactment (Monique et al., 2006). Thus, the evaluation of Proposition 209’s impact on the economic outcomes of public university graduates demonstrates that affirmative action bans can negatively impact the economic performance of URMs after leaving university.

Overall, the current literature establishes that race-based affirmative action, though not without its flaws, can be beneficial for URMs. Race-based affirmative action programs fail to target the root of systemic inequalities and may have unintended consequences on AAPI. However, race-based affirmative action programs may improve educational outcomes and economic outcomes for URMs.

## **2.2 Legacy Admissions**

### **2.2.1 Historical Roots**

The emergence of legacy admissions policies can be explained by a nativist response to the influx of immigrants into the United States in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During this period, higher education institutions that were a part of the Protestant establishment enacted legacy admissions policies to exclude religious minorities, particularly Jews (Coe & Davidson, 2011). In 1926, Harvard was the first college to enact legacy admissions as a less obvious way to curb Jewish enrollment (Lamb, 1993).

While the historical roots of legacy admissions can be explained by the desire to maintain general and religious stratification, this does not help to explain the continued use of legacy admissions. This question becomes even more puzzling considering that current research finds that legacies are not any more qualified than other applicants (Castilla & Poskanzer, 2022). The continued, and even increasing, use of legacy admissions can be explained by material logic. Legacy students often have wealthier parents who can make larger donations to institutions compared to the parents of non-legacy students (Castilla & Poskanzer, 2022). Proponents of legacy preferences argue that such policies are necessary for university funding, and they defend these policies because they no longer intentionally discriminate against minorities (Ladewski, 2010).

### **2.2.2 Diversity Outcomes**

While legacy admissions may not intentionally discriminate by race, they disproportionately benefit white applicants (Lamb, 1993). This is because the racial and ethnic composition of the legacy applicant pool mirrors that of past generations, which was far less diverse than it is today (Ladewski, 2010). Empirical research has shown that the proportion of racial minorities who apply with legacy status is substantially lower than the proportion of white applicants who apply with legacy status (Ladewski, 2010). While

preferences have also been given to minority students under race-based affirmative action programs, the preferences given to legacy applicants can sometimes exceed preferences for minority students at highly selective institutions (Espenshade et al., 2004). Furthermore, empirical research shows that the advantage given to legacy admissions can be substantial. Lamb (1993) finds that in the 1980s, the admittance rate of legacy applicants was over twice that of general applicants. However, legacy preferences may be institution-specific, and the magnitude of this advantage may also depend on how qualified the rest of the applicant pool is (Espenshade et al., 2004). The consequences of legacy admissions has resulted in calls for further research on how legacy admissions harm the objectives of race-based affirmative action programs (Coe & Davidson, 2011).

### **3 Legacy Admissions Versus Race-Based Affirmative Action**

#### **3.1 Hypotheses**

Before detailing the argument behind my hypotheses, I must first establish the three groups that my argument differentiates between. For the purposes of this study, I evaluate the enrollment outcomes for three separate groups: The first group is white students. The second group is URMs, which includes Black students, Hispanic students, and AIAN. The third group is non-white students, which includes Black students, Hispanic students, AIAN, and AAPI. My theory and predictions revolve around the differences in expected enrollment outcomes for these three groups based on university admissions policies.

First, I detail my predictions for enrollment outcomes of white students based on university admissions policies. I expect that banning legacy admissions decreases white enrollment. This is because implementing legacy admissions increases the proportion of whites enrolled. By giving added weight to applicants' legacy status, legacy admissions

disproportionately benefit white applicants (Lamb, 1993). Compared to other racial groups, white applicants are more likely to possess legacy status because their parents are more likely to be alumni. This is because the ethnic composition of past generations who attended universities is far less diverse than it is today (Ladewski, 2010).

In terms of the effect of race-based affirmative action on white students, banning race-based affirmative action would increase the proportion of whites enrolled. This is because race-based affirmative action results in URMs being given preference over other applicants, including white applicants. With limited spots at any given university, if race-conscious admissions increase the admissions of URMs, they would conversely result in lower admissions of white applicants. Thus, I hypothesize that:

- **H1A:** Banning legacy admissions decreases the proportion of white students enrolled while banning race-conscious admissions increases the proportion of white students enrolled.

As for impacts on URMs, I predict that banning legacy admissions increases the proportion of URMs enrolled. This is because legacy admissions decrease URM enrollment. URM students, whose parents are more likely to be either immigrants or to not have attended college, are less likely to possess legacy status compared to white applicants (Ladewski, 2010). The implementation of legacy admissions can result in legacy applicants being chosen over other equally qualified applicants solely due to their legacy status. If legacy applicants are chosen over non-legacy applicants, this means that there would be more instances where white applicants are chosen over URM applicants.

On the other hand, banning race-conscious admissions would decrease the proportion of URMs enrolled. Current research estimates that affirmative action bans result in lower admissions rates of URMs in selective universities (Hinrichs, 2012). This is evident based on empirical research on the effects of *Hopwood v. Texas* (1996), in which the Fifth Circuit court banned the use of race-conscious admissions in Texas public universities. Following

*Hopwood v. Texas*, Texas public universities were unable to achieve pre-ban levels of diversity for Black and Hispanic students (Kain et al., 2005). Thus, I hypothesize that:

- **H1B**: Banning legacy admissions increases the proportion of URMs enrolled while banning race-conscious admissions decreases the proportion of URMs enrolled.

Lastly, for non-whites, which includes both URMs and AAPI students, I predict that banning legacy admissions increases the proportion of non-white enrollment. In comparison to the impact of banning legacy admissions on URM enrollment, I expect to observe a greater increase in non-white enrollment. As previously stated, legacy admissions likely harms the admissions rates of URMs. However, legacy admissions may also harm the admissions rates of AAPI applicants. Like URMs, AAPI applicants are less likely to possess legacy status than white applicants. Take, for example, Harvard University. At Harvard University, the admissions of white legacy students exceeds the admissions of AAPI, Black, and Hispanic enrollment combined (Lee, 2021). Thus, banning legacy admissions would increase the admissions rates of all non-whites.

I argue that banning race-conscious admissions decreases the proportion of non-whites enrolled. However, I expect this decrease to be smaller in comparison to the expected decrease in the proportion of URM enrollment. Race-based affirmative action programs, while aimed to increase diversity, may harm the admissions rates of AAPI applicants since they have not been considered viable candidates under affirmative action programs since the 1970s (Hsia 1988). Thus, I expect that banning race-conscious admissions would increase AAPI enrollment. However, I expect that the change in the proportion of non-white enrollment, which includes both the proportion of URM and AAPI enrollment, would still be net negative. This is because I expect the decrease in URM enrollment to outweigh the expected increase in AAPI enrollment. While it is true that AAPI applicants are not considered viable candidates under affirmative action programs, AAPI students have continued to experience increases in college attendance and graduation rates even with the implementation of affirmative action (Lee, 2021). This suggests that the increase

in AAPI enrollment caused by banning race-conscious admissions may be relatively small if not inconsequential. Thus, I hypothesize that:

- **H1C**: In comparison to the impacts on the proportion of URMs enrolled, banning legacy admissions causes a greater increase in the proportion of non-whites enrolled. Banning race-conscious admissions causes a smaller decrease in the proportion of non-whites enrolled.

The second portion of my argument focuses on how the impact of legacy admissions compares to the impact of race-conscious admissions for each of the three groups. Overall, when evaluating the general effect of both policies, I predict that race-conscious admissions has a smaller effect than legacy admissions on the enrollment outcomes of white students, URMs, and non-white students.

First, I predict that legacy admissions has a greater impact on the proportion of white enrollment than race-conscious admissions does. Research suggests that the advantage given to legacy applicants is substantial in terms of increasing an applicant's chances of being admitted (Hurwitz, 2011). As stated previously, white applicants are more likely to possess legacy status than any other applicants. This indicates that legacy admissions may cause a great increase in white enrollment.

I predict that legacy admissions have a greater impact on both the proportion of URM enrollment and non-white enrollment in comparison to the impact of race-conscious admissions. I expect the decrease in the proportion of URM and non-white enrollment caused by legacy admissions to supersede the increase in enrollment caused by race-conscious admissions. Research suggests that the advantage given to minorities through race-based affirmative action programs may only be substantial for certain racial groups. For example, elite universities provide a substantial advantage to African American applicants compared to the advantage given to other racial groups (Espenshade et al., 2004). Thus, implementing race-conscious admissions may increase admissions of only certain groups of minorities rather than for all URMs and non-white applicants.

Moreover, the advantages given to applicants through race-conscious admissions may be further limited based on the selectivity of the institution. Current research shows that the advantages given under race-based affirmative action programs may only be substantial in highly selective institutions (Hinrichs, 2012). Thus, my second hypothesis is:

- **H2:** Legacy admissions have a greater effect on the proportion of white, URM, and non-white enrollment compared to race-conscious admissions.

### **3.2 Case Studies: Why Legacy Bans Are Enacted And Their Effects**

I do two in-depth case studies as a plausibility probe for **H2**, which is that banning legacy admissions is effective for increasing diversity through admissions. As discussed previously, race-based affirmative action began with the objective of increasing the admissions of URMs. However, unlike race-conscious admissions, the rationale behind implementing legacy admissions is not directly correlated to the objective of changing the racial composition of a university or increasing diversity. Nonetheless, eliminating legacy admissions may still be an effective policy measure for increasing diversity. For my case studies, I focus on two universities that banned legacy admissions to evaluate what motivated the bans and what the effects of the bans were. In each of the case studies, I first analyze the historical events leading up to the ban to understand the nature of legacy admissions policies and the motivating factors that lead to universities banning legacy admissions. I analyze how implementing legacy admissions interfered with the objectives of affirmative action programs. I also analyze whether or not universities' decisions to ban legacy admissions were connected to the objective of increasing diversity. Lastly, I evaluate whether or not eliminating legacy admissions led to any notable changes in diversity levels.

The two cases I focus on are the elimination of legacy admissions at the University of Texas at Austin and The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. I chose these two cases

because each of these schools banned legacy admissions while race-based affirmative action was being implemented. Thus, analyzing each of these universities will demonstrate what motivates universities to ban legacy admissions when race-based affirmative action is held constant. For each of these schools, I first analyze the University's history of admissions policies, specifically regarding race-conscious admissions and legacy admissions. In this analysis, I evaluate whether or not each university's decision to ban legacy admissions was tied in any way to the universities' race-conscious admissions policy or to the racial composition of the university.

### **3.2.1 University of Texas at Austin**

The first case is the elimination of legacy admissions at the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin). As an overview of the admissions policies at UT Austin, race-conscious admissions were banned in 1996 and re-implemented in 2003 (Ballotpedia, 2023). Legacy admissions were banned starting in 2015 (The Texas Tribune, 2015). In analyzing these admissions policy changes, I analyze whether or not legacy admissions were banned in order to increase racial diversity and whether or not the ban on legacy admissions led to an increase in racial diversity.

Race-based affirmative action was a contentious issue at UT Austin, eventually becoming a pivotal part of the institution after a series of legal battles. In 1996, race-conscious admissions were banned in UT Austin following the Fifth Circuit Court's decision in *Hopwood v. Texas*. In *Hopwood v. Texas* (1996), four white plaintiffs were denied admission to UT Austin's School of Law. They subsequently challenged the University's consideration of race as a factor in admissions. The plaintiffs argued that the consideration of race in admissions is a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause. Following the District Court's ruling in favor of the plaintiffs, the University appealed the decision. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the lower court's decision. In response to *Hopwood v. Texas* (1996), students and faculty alike were



angered (Hentoff, 1997). Robert Berdahl, the president of the University at the time, expressed concerns that banning affirmative action would prevent the university from sustaining the number of minorities that they previously had admitted (Lauer, 1996). The Supreme Court declined to review this case following the Circuit Court's decision. Universities nationwide were concerned about the implications of this ruling (Applebone, 1996). In the aftermath of this decision, Mr. William P. Hobby, Lieutenant Governor of Texas at the time, sent a request to the Attorney General of Texas to answer questions regarding the actual implications of this ruling. In Attorney General Dan Morales's formal opinion, in which he interpreted the Court's reasoning and ruling, he stated that *Hopwood's* ruling extended beyond the consideration of race in admissions – it also prevented the consideration of race in other university programs such as scholarship and financial aid programs.

In 1997, the state of Texas responded to the ban on race-based affirmative action by passing Texas House Bill 588, also known as the "Top 10 Percent Law". Under this law, the top ten percent of each high school class is guaranteed admission to all public universities in Texas. While it was not explicitly stated that this law was intended to address the consequences of the *Hopwood* ruling, supporters of the law stated that some of the law's objectives included increasing opportunities for students from "all backgrounds and all parts of the state". Supporters cited evidence for this by stating that, "The group admitted under CSHB 588 would be not only talented but diverse: about two-thirds of graduating seniors in 1996 represented minority groups" (Texas Legislature Online). UT Austin was overwhelmed beyond its capacity with applicants and admitted students after the passage of this law. Thus, in 2009, the state revised this law to make an exception for UT Austin. This revision guaranteed admission for the top six percent of each high school class (Texas Education Agency).

Several years later, in 2003, affirmative action was reintroduced in UT Austin after the Supreme Court's ruling in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003). Barbara Grutter was denied

admission to the University of Michigan Law School. The Supreme Court ruled that Michigan Law School's consideration of race did not violate the Equal Protection Clause or Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In her majority opinion, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor reasoned that race-conscious admissions does not "unduly harm non-minority applicants". Following this decision, UT Austin lifted the ban on affirmative action and saw increases in college applications, college attendance, and graduation rates for minority students.

In 2013, affirmative action was challenged again at UT Austin in *Fisher v. University of Texas* (2013). However, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the University, holding that race can be considered in undergraduate admissions. In its ruling, the Supreme Court established that race-conscious admissions do not violate the Equal Protection Clause as long as the admissions policy meets the standard of strict scrutiny. This marked the end of a series of legal battles over this admissions policy. After defending this policy time and time again, the University demonstrated its commitment to implementing race-based affirmative action.

However, just two years later, in 2015, a major scandal emerged regarding the admissions practices at UT Austin. This scandal shifted the focus from the university's use of affirmative action to its use of legacy admissions. Wallace J. Hall, a member of the UT Board of Regents at the time, led an investigation on President Bill Powers, the president of UT Austin at the time. This investigation exposed how President Powers admitted both legacy students and students with political connections. In doing so, he overrode the discretionary power of the Office of Admissions (Blanchard & Malewitz, 2015). These students were "arguably less qualified" candidates (Blanchard & Malewitz, 2015). President Powers did not deny the findings of this investigation and defended himself by saying he "inherited this process", implying that legacy admissions were common practice at UT Austin. Furthermore, President Powers argued that other UT officials were actually in on the process, at times asking him to "intervene on their behalf" (Blanchard &

Malewitz, 2015). Following the outbreak of the scandal, President Powers resigned. Bill McRaven, who was Chancellor of UT at the time, made a statement implying that changes would be made at the University to "...look to the future..." and "...rebuild trust between all stakeholders..." (Blanchard & Malewitz, 2015).

While there is no evidence indicating that UT Austin banned legacy admissions in order to increase diversity, immediately following the elimination of legacy admissions, diversity rates increased. The proportion of African American students for the incoming class in 2015 was 5.3 percent, which was an increase compared to 4.2 percent in 2014 (UT News, 2015). In 2019, it was confirmed that UT Austin no longer considers legacy status. In an interview with *The Daily Texan*, Miguel Wasielewski Ph.D., the executive director of the Office of Admissions, stated that UT Austin does not consider the legacy status of applicants. He also stated that doing so would be "against state law", though he did not clarify which state law this would violate (Wasielewski, 2019).

Analyzing the elimination of legacy admissions at UT Austin has several implications. In regards to my original inquiry, there is no indication that UT Austin's decision to end legacy admissions was tied directly to the goal of increasing admissions of minority students. Rather, it seems that the main ethical concern was that the opinions and power of the Office of Admissions were being undermined. Thus, it was the President's alleged abuse of power that led to the change in admissions policy. Even though UT Austin's ban on legacy admissions was not enacted with the objective of increasing diversity, the fact that diversity increased in the year immediately following the elimination of legacy admissions suggests that banning legacy admissions is effective for increasing diversity. On another note, the scandal that prompted the ban demonstrates that preferences may be given to legacy applicants even if universities do not have an official legacy admissions policy. If this is true, then there is an even greater risk that legacy admissions are occurring in a manner without any mechanism for oversight. This would not only undermine the fairness of admissions policies, but it would also undermine opportunities for URM.

### 3.2.2 University of Illinois At Urbana-Champaign

The second case I focus on is the elimination of legacy admissions at the University of Illinois At Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). As an overview of the history of admissions policies at UIUC, race-conscious admissions were never banned. On the other hand, legacy admissions were banned starting in 2009. In analyzing the University's decision to ban legacy admissions, I specifically evaluate whether or not the elimination of legacy impacted diversity levels.

Race-based affirmative action started at UIUC in 1968, with the launch of the Special Education Opportunities Program, also known as Project 500. This project began after the death of Martin Luther King Jr., and the goal of the program was to increase educational opportunities for the residents of Illinois. Under this program, 565 Black and Latino students were admitted into UIUC (University Library University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 2018). Since then, UIUC has continued to use affirmative action as part of its admissions policy (Illinois Library, 2022). This demonstrates that affirmative action has been and continues to be an important commitment for UIUC.

Much like the scandal at UT Austin, an investigation resulted in the exposure of UIUC's legacy admissions practices. In 2009, this investigation, led by the *Chicago Tribune*, revealed how administrators were giving preference to the relatives of prominent individuals such as legislators, trustees, and other influential individuals (Cohen & St. Clair, 2009). After the release of the *Chicago Tribune's* findings, the state of Illinois created a special panel to further investigate the allegations made against the University. The panel found that these allegations were true and that these prominent individuals were overriding the decisions of the admissions office. More specifically, these prominent individuals endorsed applicants by applying pressure on high-ranking university officials who, in turn, pressured admissions officers (Jaschik, 2009). Following the investigation, the commission called for the resignations of the Board of Trustees, who was appointed by the Governor. The commission also made recommendations to the University such as getting

rid of the "special admissions category" and preventing the consideration of endorsements from prominent individuals (Jaschik, 2009).

In response to this scandal, the University stated that they would move forward by taking the Commission's recommendations to eliminate the consideration of legacy status. In its joint statement, the University also stated that it would make "significant changes" to the admissions process. One of the University's stated goals was to change the admissions process to "...offer equality of access..." (Jaschik, 2009). Starting in 2009, UIUC began releasing the annual "Inclusive Illinois Impact Report" (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 2018). This report details the university's efforts to cultivate a diverse community and promote equity. The start of this initiative reflects an effort to promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. It is not clear whether or not this initiative started in response to the scandal. However, the fact that the initiative started in the same year that the scandal was released seems to demonstrate that the university was making a more proactive effort in its commitment to promoting diversity and equality of access. Furthermore, in the year following the legacy admissions ban, diversity increased at UIUC. In the 2010 report, it was reported that the proportion of URM undergraduates increased at UIUC (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 2010).

Once again, analyzing UIUC's history of admissions practices and the eventual ban on legacy admissions reveals several implications. Like the case of UT Austin, it seems that the ultimate reason for the University's ban on legacy admissions was the exposure of hidden admissions practices. Thus, the primary objective of UIUC was to regain its legitimacy by addressing this breach of integrity. Based on the university's statement, however, the desire to increase equality of access also played a role in its decision to ban legacy admissions, albeit not the main motivating factor. Furthermore, the beginning of the annual release of the Inclusive Illinois Impact Report in 2009 reaffirms that increasing diversity was a priority for the university, especially in light of the scandal. This case study, once again, emphasizes the concern that universities are practicing legacy admissions

behind closed doors. This is an unfair practice that, as seen by both UT Austin and UIUC, allows for the unchecked abuse of power. For universities like UIUC, which have a long history and commitment to increasing opportunities for URMs through affirmative action programs, this is especially concerning because it completely undermines this commitment. Both of these cases demonstrate that even though increasing diversity was not the universities' objective, eliminating legacy admissions may have resulted in this outcome.

## 4 Research Methodology

To test my hypotheses systematically, I run multiple regressions using a novel dataset. My research design aims to answer the following questions: How does banning legacy admissions and banning race-conscious admissions impact the enrollment outcomes of white students, URMs, and non-white students? How does the effect of banning legacy admissions compare to the effect of banning race-conscious admissions on the enrollment outcomes of white students, URMs, and non-white students?

Figure 1

Legacy, Race	Legacy, No Race
No Legacy, Race	No Legacy, No Race

Within my sample, there are four types of observations, as displayed in the table above. The first type of observation is a university that used both legacy and race-conscious admissions in a given year. The second type of observation is a university that used legacy admissions but did not use race-conscious admissions in a given year. The third type of university is a university that did not use legacy admissions but used race-conscious admissions in a given year. Lastly, the fourth type of university is a university that did not use legacy or race-conscious admissions in a given year. I conduct a quantitative analysis in order to empirically measure the differences in the effects of each of these admissions

policies and how the impact of these effects compare to each other in terms of magnitude. For my quantitative analysis, I will be looking at the admissions policies and enrollment outcomes for the top twenty public Universities according to the U.S. News & World Report over the time period 1991 to 2022.

## 4.1 Independent Variable

For my independent variable, I constructed a novel dataset that encodes the admissions policies for each of the twenty universities in my sample. I constructed this dataset using publicly available information regarding the admissions policies of these universities from 1991 to 2022. First, I researched each university to find whether they ever used legacy admissions, banned legacy admissions, used race-conscious admissions, or banned race-conscious admissions. For the purposes of this study, legacy admissions is defined as an official policy where a university considers an applicant's legacy status as a factor of admissions. Race-conscious admissions is defined as an official policy where a university considers an applicant's race as a factor of admissions. Some of the universities within this sample, including Rutgers University in New Brunswick, Purdue University, the University of Washington in Seattle, and the University of Illinois in UrbanaChampaign, were contacted directly to obtain this information.

After obtaining this information, regarding the years that these policies were either implemented or banned for each school from 1991-2022, I created two independent variables. The first independent variable is the variable "legacy". This variable is a discrete variable taking on a value ranging from 0 to 4. The value of this variable represents how many of the four undergraduate classes enrolled in a given year that a university considered legacy status in admissions. For example, a value of 4 would represent that legacy admissions was used by the university for four out of the four of the undergraduate classes enrolled in a given year. I used this measurement instead of making "legacy" a binary variable because the NCES IPEDS did not contain enrollment data for solely the

incoming class of each given year. Thus, the variable "legacy" accounts for the lagged effect of a ban on legacy admissions. This lagged effect occurs because if a ban is enacted in a given year, the effect of the ban would not occur until the next admissions cycle. In other words, the ban would only affect the enrollment outcomes of the incoming class of the following year. Thus, the ban would only affect the enrollment outcomes of all four enrolled classes four years after being enacted.

The second independent variable that I created is the variable "race". Like "legacy", this is also a discrete variable that takes on a value ranging from 0 to 4. The value of this variable represents how many of the four undergraduate classes enrolled in a given year that a university used race-based affirmative action. Once again, this variable accounts for the lagged effect of an affirmative action ban on the enrollment outcomes of all undergraduates enrolled.

## **4.2 Dependent Variables**

For my dependent variable, I use publicly available data from the NCES IPEDS. From this data, I obtained the 12-month enrollment unduplicated headcount for all undergraduates from 2000 to 2022. From 1991 to 1999, the specific count for only undergraduates was unavailable, and thus, the total count for all students was used instead. I aggregate these counts into six racial categories based on the information available from NCES IPEDS. These six categories are American Indian/American Native, white, Black, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and unknown.

From these six categories, I calculate the proportion of each racial category of the total students enrolled. The proportions for the years 1991-1999 are calculated using the total number of students enrolled. However, for the years 2000-2022, the proportions are calculated using the total undergraduates enrolled. To account for this difference, I include a dummy variable in my regressions. This dummy variable equals zero for the years 1991-1999 and equals one for the years 2000-2022.



After obtaining the proportions of enrollment for each of the six racial categories, I aggregate them into three groups to test my hypotheses. These three groups are: the proportion of whites, the proportion of URMs, and the proportion of non-whites. These proportions are used to estimate how the admissions policies impact admissions rates for each of these three groups.

### 4.3 Statistical Analysis

In my final dataset, the unit of analysis is university-year. For each unit of analysis, there is a value for both "legacy" and "race". Furthermore, for each unit of analysis, I calculated the proportion of white students enrolled, the proportion of URMs enrolled, and the proportion of non-whites.

For the first part of my statistical analysis, I run initial regressions. The first set of initial regressions have a coefficient for the variable "legacy". I run three separate regressions with the independent variable being "legacy" and the three dependent variables being the proportion of whites enrolled, the proportion of URMs enrolled, and the proportion of non-whites enrolled. For the second set of initial regressions, I run three separate regressions with the independent variable being "race" and the three dependent variables being the proportion of whites enrolled, the proportion of URMs enrolled, and the proportion of non-whites enrolled. For each of these regressions, I include fixed effects at the university level to account for university-specific factors in any given year.

Furthermore, I cluster standard errors at the University-level, since observations for the same university are not independent of one another. The results of these initial regressions are expected to be consistent with **H1** and what has been established in the literature regarding the effects of both admissions policies. I expect that the first set of initial regressions, with the independent variable being "legacy", will reflect that banning legacy admissions decreases the admission rates of white applicants while increasing the admissions rates of URMs and non-whites. I expect to see a larger increase in the

proportion of non-whites than in the proportion of URMs. As for the second set of initial regressions, with the independent variable being "race", I expect the results to reflect that banning race-conscious admissions decreases the admission rates of both URMs and non-whites. However, I expect the decrease in the proportion of URMs to be greater than the decrease in the proportion of non-whites. I also expect that they will reflect that race-conscious admissions result in a decrease in the admissions of whites.

After running the initial regressions, I run the main regressions. These main regressions include a coefficient for both "legacy" and "race". Once again, I will run three separate main regressions, with the dependent variables being the proportion of whites enrolled, the proportion of URMs enrolled, and the proportion of non-whites enrolled. Once again, I include university-level fixed effects and cluster standard errors at the university level. The results of the main regressions are expected to be consistent with **H2**, that the magnitude of the impact of legacy admissions is greater than the impact of race-conscious admissions for all three differential groups. As previously mentioned, in terms of the impact on the proportion of white enrollment, I predict that legacy admissions will have a positive effect on white enrollment while race-conscious admissions will have a negative effect on white enrollment. I expect that these two admissions policies will have opposite effects on the proportion of URM enrollment. Legacy admissions would have a negative effect on URM enrollment while race-conscious admissions would have a positive effect on URM enrollment. Thus, I expect the legacy coefficient to be negative and the race coefficient to be positive. As for the impact on non-white enrollment, I predict that both legacy admissions will have a positive effect while race-conscious admissions will have a negative effect. For all three main regressions, I expect the absolute value of the "legacy" coefficient to be greater than that of the "race" coefficient.

After running all three main regressions, I run a Wald Test to test whether or not the difference between the value of the two coefficients is statistically significant (Nguyen, 2020). The null hypothesis is that the difference between the two coefficients is equal to

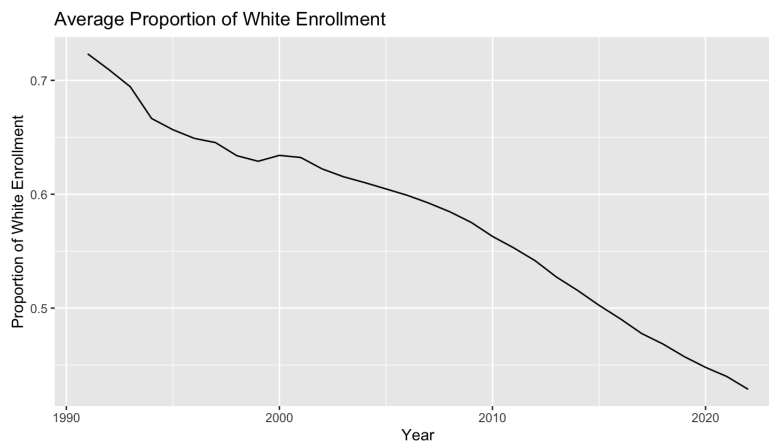
zero for all three dependent variables.

## 5 Results

### 5.1 Descriptive Analysis of Variables

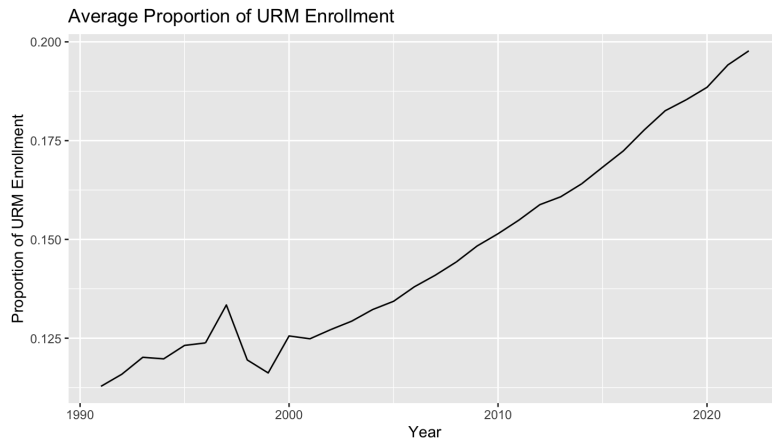
Before conducting my regressions, I provide an overview of all of my main variables over the time period 1991 to 2022.

Figure 2: The average proportion of white enrollment from 1991 to 2022



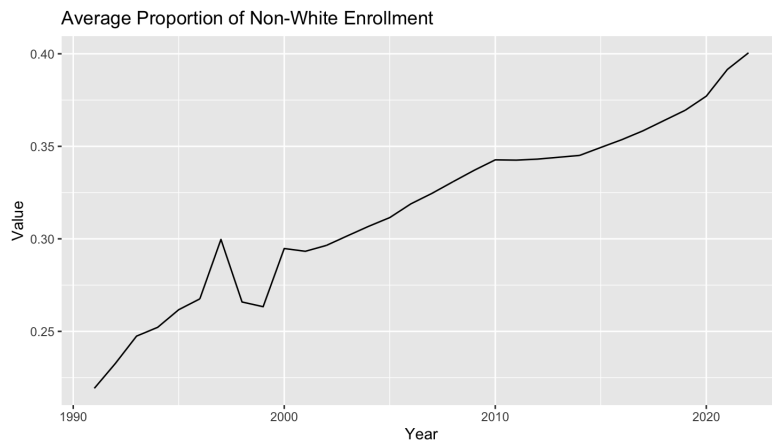
As seen in Figure 2, the proportion of white enrollment across the twenty institutions from 1991 to 2022 appears to be decreasing consistently. This may be indicative of the fact that higher education has become more accessible to non-white students over time, thereby reducing the over-representation of white students in universities.

Figure 3: The average proportion of URM enrollment from 1991 to 2022



Based on Figure 3, it appears that the average proportion of URM enrollment has increased consistently from 1991 to 2022. This indicates that higher education has become more accessible to URM students over this time period, which could be a result of race-based affirmative action.

Figure 4: The average proportion of non-white enrollment from 1991 to 2022



Based on Figure 4, the average proportion of non-white enrollment has also increased over this time period. This indicates that a greater proportion of AAPI students are enrolling in the top public universities in addition to URM students.

Figure 5: The average number of undergraduate classes where race-based affirmative action was used from 1991 to 2022

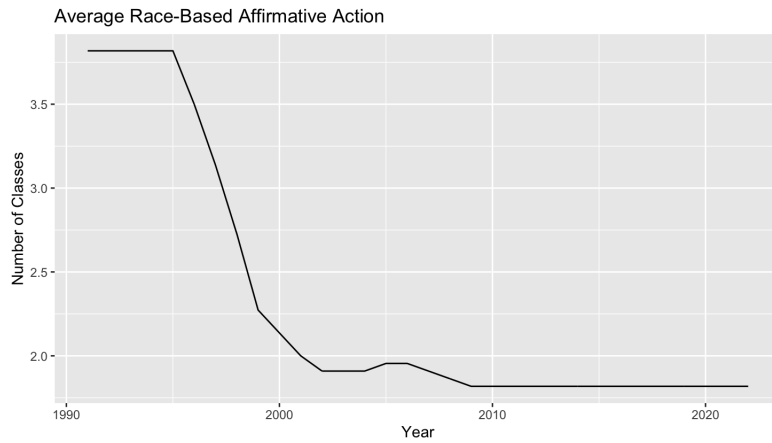
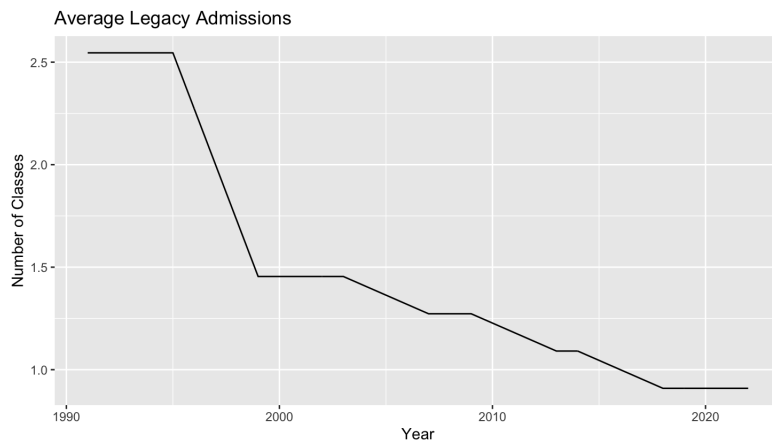


Figure 6: The average number of undergraduate classes where race-based affirmative action was used from 1991 to 2022



Figures 5 and 6 show that both legacy admissions and race-conscious admissions exhibit similar patterns over the period 1991-2022. The decline in race-based affirmative action can largely be attributed to California’s ban on affirmative action through Proposition 209 (Bleemer, 2021). This is the same time period when the University of California Regents chose to ban the practice of legacy admissions (University of California Board of Regents). Since University of California schools account for 30 percent of the top 20 public universities, these policy changes have a sizeable impact, as seen in the two figures.

## 5.2 Initial Regressions

Table 1: Legacy Admissions

Independent Variable	Proportion white	Proportion URM	Proportion non-white
legacy dummy	0.0261*** (0.0057) -0.0968*** (0.0146)	-0.0073 (0.0042) 0.0276*** (0.0071)	-0.0148** (0.0043) 0.0667*** (0.0102)
No. Obs.	638	638	638
$R^2$	0.88765	0.75585	0.94009
University FE	Y	Y	Y

\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

**Note:** Standard errors are clustered at the University level.

To test **H1**, I first run multiple regressions with a coefficient for legacy admissions. These regressions are consistent with both my hypothesis and what has been found in the literature.

For the first dependent variable, the proportion of white students enrolled, I find that implementing legacy admissions results in approximately a 0.0261 increase in the proportion of white students enrolled. This is consistent with my hypothesis and the findings in the literature that legacy admissions disproportionately benefit white students by increasing their odds of admission.

For the second dependent variable, the proportion of URMs enrolled, I find that implementing legacy admissions results in approximately a 0.0073 decrease in the proportion of URMs enrolled. This is consistent with my hypothesis and the findings in the literature that implementing legacy admissions results in a decrease in the admissions of URMs. However, the results were not statistically significant.

For the last dependent variable, the proportion of non-whites enrolled, I find that implementing legacy admissions results in a 0.0148 decrease in the proportion of non-whites enrolled. This is consistent with my hypothesis and the findings in the literature that show that implementing legacy admissions results in a decrease in the admissions of minorities.

Moreover, as predicted, implementing legacy admissions resulted in a greater decrease in the proportion of non-whites enrolled compared to the decrease in the proportion of URMs enrolled. This indicates that legacy admissions affects not only URMs but AAPI as well.

Table 2: Race-Conscious Admissions

	<b>Proportion white</b>	<b>Proportion URM</b>	<b>Proportion non-white</b>
race dummy	0.0095 (0.0066) -0.1113*** (0.0155)	0.0009 (0.0039) 0.0377*** (0.0078)	-0.0013 (0.0054) 0.0818*** (0.0146)
No. Obs.	638	638	638
$R^2$	0.87409	0.74308	0.93285
University FE	Y	Y	Y

\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

**Note:** Standard errors are clustered at the University level.

To test the second part of **H1**, I run multiple regressions with a coefficient for race-conscious admissions. I find varying levels of support for my hypothesis and what has been found in the current literature.

For the first dependent variable, the proportion of whites enrolled, I find that implementing race-conscious admissions results in a 0.0095 increase in the proportion of whites enrolled. This contradicts my hypothesis that banning race-conscious admissions increases the proportion of whites enrolled. However, these results were not statistically significant.

For the second dependent variable, the proportion of URMs enrolled, I find that implementing race-conscious admissions results in a 0.0009 increase in the proportion of URMs enrolled. This is consistent with my hypothesis that banning race-conscious admissions decreases the admission rate of URMs. Once again, these results were not statistically significant.

Lastly, for the proportion of non-whites enrolled, I find that implementing

race-conscious admissions results in a 0.0013 decrease in the proportion of non-whites enrolled. This is consistent with my hypothesis that the decrease in the proportion of non-whites as a result of banning race-conscious admissions would be less than the decrease in the proportion of URMs. This indicates that banning race-conscious admissions may increase the proportion of AAPI enrollment, which is consistent with what has been found in the current literature regarding how race-conscious admissions harm the admissions rates of AAPI students. However, these results were not statistically significant.

### 5.3 Main Regression

Table 3: Main Regressions

	<b>Proportion white</b>	<b>Proportion URM</b>	<b>Proportion non-white</b>
race	0.0002 (0.0072)	0.0041 (0.0046)	0.0046 (0.0059)
legacy	0.0260** (0.0071)	-0.0089. (0.0048)	-0.0166** (0.0052)
dummy	-0.0965*** (0.0140)	0.0327*** (0.0059)	0.0769*** (0.0111)
No. Obs.	638	638	638
$R^2$	0.88765	0.75968	0.94075
University FE	Y	Y	Y

\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

**Note:** Standard errors are clustered at the University level.

To test **H2**, I run multiple regressions with a coefficient for both legacy admissions and race-conscious admissions. I find varying levels of support for my hypothesis.

For the first dependent variable, the proportion of white students enrolled, I find that implementing legacy admissions results in a 0.0260 increase in the proportion of whites enrolled while implementing race-conscious admissions results in a 0.0002 increase in the proportion of whites enrolled. However, only the coefficient for "legacy" was statistically significant. These results are partially consistent with my hypothesis. As expected, the absolute value of the coefficient for legacy admissions is greater than the coefficient for



race-conscious admissions. However, contrary to my hypothesis, the coefficient for "race" is positive rather than negative. However, the coefficient for "race" is very close to zero, indicating that implementing race-conscious admissions may not have a notable effect on the proportion of whites enrolled.

For the proportion of URMs enrolled, the results are consistent with my hypothesis. I find that implementing legacy admissions decreases the proportion of URMs enrolled by 0.0089. On the other hand, implementing race-conscious admissions increases the proportion of URMs enrolled by 0.0041. However, neither of these coefficients were statistically significant. As predicted, the coefficient for legacy admissions is negative while the coefficient for race-conscious admissions is positive. Furthermore, as predicted, the absolute value of the coefficient for legacy admissions is greater than the absolute value of the coefficient for race-conscious admissions.

Lastly, for the proportion of non-whites enrolled, the results are consistent with my hypothesis. I find that implementing legacy admissions results in a -0.0166 decrease in the proportion of non-whites enrolled. I find that implementing race-conscious admissions results in a 0.0046 increase in the proportion of non-whites enrolled. However, only the coefficient for legacy admissions was statistically significant. As stated in my predictions, the coefficient for race-conscious admissions was positive while the coefficient for legacy admissions was negative. Furthermore, as predicted, the absolute value of the coefficient for legacy admissions is greater than the absolute value of the coefficient for race-conscious admissions. It is interesting to note that, unlike the results in Table 2, the race-conscious admissions coefficient for non-whites is greater than for URMs. This indicates that race-conscious admissions may not harm AAPI enrollment, contradicting what has been discussed in the current literature.

## 5.4 Wald Test

Table 4: Wald Test

	<b>Proportion white</b>	<b>Proportion URM</b>	<b>Proportion non-white</b>
df	1	1	1
Chi-Sq	3.9558	2.2972	4.3568
<i>p</i>	0.04671	0.1296	0.03686

To test whether or not there is a statistically significant difference between the coefficient for legacy admissions and the coefficient for race-conscious admissions in my main regressions, I run a Wald Test for all three dependent variables. The null hypothesis is that the difference between these two coefficients is equal to zero.

For the first dependent variable, the proportion of whites, I find a chi-square value of 3.9558. With a p-value of 0.04671, I can reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the effect of legacy admissions versus race-conscious admissions on the proportion of white students enrolled.

For the second dependent variable, the proportion of URMs, I find a chi-square value of 2.2972. With a p-value of 0.1296, I can reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the effect of legacy admissions versus race-conscious admissions on the proportion of URMs enrolled.

Lastly, for the third dependent variable, the proportion of non-whites, I find a chi-square value of 4.3568. With a p-value of 0.03686, I can reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the effect of legacy admissions versus race-conscious admissions on the proportion of non-white students enrolled.

Overall, I can reject the null hypothesis for all three dependent variables. Thus, I can conclude that the differences observed between the two coefficients for all three dependent variables are statistically significant and cannot be explained by random chance.

## 6 Conclusion

My findings suggest that eliminating legacy admissions may have considerable impacts on the racial composition of universities. As seen in my regression results, legacy admissions have a statistically significant positive impact on white enrollment and a negative impact on non-white enrollment. Thus, banning legacy admissions decreases white enrollment while increasing non-white enrollment. Furthermore, I find statistically significant evidence that the magnitude of the impact of legacy admissions on white and non-white enrollment is greater than the impact of race-conscious admissions.

There are certain limitations of this study that are important to address. One limitation of this study is that the dependent variable included international students. This is because the NCES IPEDS did not distinguish between international students enrolled and domestic students enrolled. This could potentially have influenced the findings for the proportion of non-white enrollment. There is a possibility that including international students resulted in an underestimation of the decrease in AAPI enrollment caused by race-conscious admissions and legacy admissions. Enrollment of international students in US universities has increased since 2014. Furthermore, the majority of international students enrolled at US institutions are consistently from India and China, with these students composing 53 percent of international students enrolled in 2022 (opendoors, 2023). If the number of students from China and India is increasing, this could interfere with how accurately the data reflects the true effect of these admissions policies on AAPI enrollment.

Another limitation of this study is that there is a possibility that universities are not fully transparent regarding their admissions policies. This limitation is reaffirmed by the findings of my case studies, which demonstrated how universities may be practicing legacy admissions unofficially. Other than the two case studies, other universities may use legacy admissions despite claiming not to. For example, William & Mary, a public university in Virginia, claimed that they did not consider legacy status in admissions. However, data shows that applicants with legacy status are twice as likely to be accepted at this school

compared to applicants without legacy status (Edmonds, 2024). My case studies demonstrate how universities can give advantages to legacy applicants without an official policy for legacy admissions in place. In each of the cases I analyze, legacy applicants gained advantages through the discretion of high-ranking university officials rather than from the admissions office itself. These practices were only exposed through investigations. If such admissions practices are occurring in the universities included in this study, then this could have made the independent variable less accurate. To create the independent variable dataset, I relied on public information regarding these universities' official admissions policies. Thus, if universities are not transparent regarding their admissions policies, this could have created a measurement error since I may have counted universities as not using legacy admissions when they actually do. If this is true, then this attenuates the effect of legacy bans. There is a possibility that the effect of legacy admissions is even stronger than what I find in my results, once again reaffirming the potential efficacy of legacy admissions bans.

The Supreme Court's recent ruling has left universities and policy makers searching for the answer to a question that has been contentiously debated for decades: what is the most effective and fair way to address gaps in educational opportunity through higher education admissions policies? With race-based affirmative action being declared unconstitutional, the answer has only become more elusive. However, there are several race-neutral alternatives to race-based affirmative action that states and universities have considered. Some of these alternative measures include economic affirmative action, financial aid programs, and K-12 partnerships (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2012). In recent months, prestigious universities such as Yale, Dartmouth, and MIT implemented another alternative measure: reintroducing the consideration of standardized test scores after making them optional during the pandemic (Picchi, 2024). Critics have argued that requiring standardized exams placed low socioeconomic students at a disadvantage since they lacked the resources and preparation that wealthier students have access to (Picchi,

2024). However, in Yale's statement, they found that making standardized exams optional harmed lower-income applicants (Picchi, 2024). This is because standardized exams supplement applications from lower-income applicants whose schools often do not offer academically rigorous classes. Evaluating the efficacy of all of these alternative measures is crucial to answer the question stated above. In this paper, I focus on one alternative policy to race-based affirmative action: the elimination of legacy admissions. Just weeks ago, Virginia chose to ban legacy admissions at public universities, becoming the second state to do so (Edmonds, 2024). This law was unanimously voted on, echoing the nationwide sentiment against legacy admissions across party lines (Edmonds, 2024). With the elimination of legacy admissions gaining greater traction, this paper aims to evaluate how the impact of this policy compares to race-based affirmative action for three separate groups: white students, URMs, and non-white students.

I find varied levels of support for my hypotheses regarding the impacts on the proportion of white students enrolled. My findings are consistent with what has been discussed in the literature, that legacy admissions increase the proportion of white students enrolled. Thus, my findings suggest that banning legacy admissions decreases the proportion of white students enrolled. My statistically significant results from the Wald test are consistent with my hypothesis that legacy admissions have a greater impact than race-based affirmative action on the enrollment outcomes of white students.

My findings regarding the impacts on the proportion of URMs enrolled are consistent with my hypotheses. First, my findings, while not statistically significant, are consistent with the current literature as they show that race-based affirmative action increases the proportion of URMs enrolled while legacy admissions decreases the proportion of URMs enrolled. These findings suggest that banning race-conscious admissions decreases URM enrollment while banning legacy admissions increases URM enrollment. The statistically significant results from the Wald test are also consistent with my hypothesis that legacy admissions have a greater impact than race-based affirmative action on URM enrollment.

Lastly, my findings regarding impacts on the proportion of non-white students enrolled are consistent with my hypotheses. As stated in the literature, legacy admissions decrease non-white enrollment, which is consistent with my statistically significant findings. Moreover, my findings indicate that, as discussed in the literature, race-conscious admissions may be harmful to AAPI enrollment. My statistically significant results indicate that legacy admissions are harmful to all non-white students, not just URMs. Lastly, the statistically significant results from the Wald test are consistent with my hypothesis that the impact of legacy admissions on non-white enrollment is greater than the impact of race-conscious admissions. This further emphasizes why banning legacy admissions may be a fairer and more effective policy for promoting diversity. Based on previous literature and my findings, AAPI are not only excluded from the benefits of race-based affirmative action but they are also harmed by legacy admissions. While race-based affirmative action may be beneficial for increasing opportunities for URMs, banning legacy admissions would accomplish this same objective without unintended consequences on AAPI students.

These findings address an important question as universities consider how to move forward without race-based affirmative action. Based on my findings, eliminating legacy admissions may have a greater impact on diversity in enrollment than race-based affirmative action does. Thus, based on these results, eliminating legacy admissions may be an effective alternative policy to race-based affirmative action to increase educational opportunities for URMs without disadvantaging AAPI students. My findings regarding the effects on non-white students further suggest that taking collective action is more effective for promoting education equity rather than pitting minorities against each other in the pursuit of educational opportunities.

While this study is a start to answer the question of how universities can promote equity through college admissions, there are many directions for further research. Future research should continue exploring the impacts of legacy admissions beyond the scope of the top public universities. Another avenue for further research is evaluating whether or

not legacy applicants receive advantages in universities that do not claim to consider legacy status. Other than research regarding legacy admissions, further research can also apply this approach to other race-neutral alternative policies. Doing so can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of equitable college admissions policies.

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# Appendix

## Codebook

Variable Name	Variable Type	Label and Values
legacy	Numeric (discrete)	Number of enrolled classes in a given year for which legacy admissions was implemented 4 = 4 classes 3 = 3 classes 2 = 2 classes 1 = 1 class 0 = no classes
race	Numeric (discrete)	Number of enrolled classes in a given year for which race-conscious admissions was implemented 4 = 4 classes 3 = 3 classes 2 = 2 classes 1 = 1 class 0 = no classes
prop_white	Numeric (continuous)	Proportion of white students enrolled

prop_URM	Numeric (continuous)	Proportion of Hispanic, Black, and AIAN students enrolled
prop_nonwhite	Numeric (continuous)	Proportion of Hispanic, Black, AIAN, and AAPI students enrolled
avg_white	Numeric (continuous)	Average proportion of white students enrolled by year
avg_URM	Numeric (continuous)	Average proportion of URM students enrolled by year
avgnonwhite	Numeric (continuous)	Average proportion of non-white students enrolled by year
avg_race	Numeric (continuous)	Average number of classes enrolled where race-conscious admissions was implemented by year
avg_legacy	Numeric (continuous)	Average number of classes enrolled where legacy admissions was implemented by year

college_year	Character/string	"college abbreviation-year"
institution.name	Character/string	Name of institution
dummy	Numeric (binary)	1991 - 1999 = 0 2000 - 2022 = 1
year	Numeric (discrete)	1991 - 2021

## Universities

University Name	Legacy Admissions Source	Race-Conscious Admissions Source
UC Berkeley	Regents Policy 2102	Ballotpedia
UCLA	Regents Policy 2102	Ballotpedia
University of Michigan Ann Arbor	Inside Higher Ed	Ballotpedia, <i>Grutter v. Bollinger</i>
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	The Washington Post	Ballotpedia
University of Virginia	UVAToday	UVAToday
University of California, San Diego	Regents Policy 2102	Ballotpedia
University of Florida	Admissions By Design	College Transitions, Tampa Bay Times
University of Texas at Austin	Texas Tribune	<i>Hopwood v. Texas</i> , <i>Grutter v. Bollinger</i>



Georgia Tech	Georgia Tech Alumni Magazine	Ballotpedia
University of California, Irvine	Regents Policy 2102	Ballotpedia
University of California, Santa Barbara	Regents Policy 2102	Ballotpedia
University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign	Chicago Tribune, Inside Higher Ed	Illinois Library
University of Wisconsin—Madison	Emailed (Nov 20, 2023, 8:00 AM) but received no response	UW News
Rutgers University—New Brunswick	Undergraduate Admissions Office	Undergraduate Admissions Office
University of Washington	Emailed (Mon, Nov 20, 2023, 12:18 PM)	Ballotpedia
Ohio State University	Emailed (Mon, Nov 20, 2023, 8:00 AM) but received no response	OSU Office of Institutional Equity, Ohio Capital Journal
Purdue University	Emailed (Tue, Nov 21, 2023, 11:50 AM)	Ballotpedia
University of Maryland, College Park	Emailed (Mon, Nov 20, 2023, 8:00 AM) but received no response	Ballotpedia
Texas A&M University	The New York Times	<i>Hopwood v. Texas</i> , <i>Grutter v. Bollinger</i>

University of Georgia	The Red&Black	The Red&Black
Virginia Tech	UVA Office of Admissions, The New York Times	UVAToday