

End of affirmative action at UC hurt Black, Latinx students, study finds

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When California banned affirmative action, thousands of underrepresented minority students were deterred from applying to the University of California — even though most would have qualified for admission, according to new research. Credit: Adam Lau/Berkeley Engineering

The end of affirmative action at California universities 22 years ago had

a significant negative impact on Black and Latinx students, forcing many out of the University of California system and reducing their later earnings, according to a new study from the Center for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE) at UC Berkeley.

The study by economics Ph.D. [student](#) Zachary Bleemer found that voter approval of Prop. 209 in 1996 broadly imposed costs on underrepresented minority students. Specifically, the research found:

- The measure deterred more than 1,000 underrepresented [minority students](#) per year from applying to any UC campus, "despite the fact that most of them would still have been admitted to many UC campuses."
- The measure led to "disproportionate declines" in Black and Latinx enrollment in the UC system, with many applicants to UC enrolling instead at lower-quality public and private universities.
- As qualified students were pushed into less prestigious schools, some applicants with lower test scores at those schools were pushed entirely out of university-level education.
- After graduation, annual wages were on average 5% lower for post-university Black and Latinx students between the ages of 24 and 34.

The study was released Friday (Aug. 21) as part of the CSHE Research and Occasional Papers Series. It comes as Californians prepare to vote in November on Proposition 16, an amendment to the state constitution that would repeal Prop. 209, which was approved by voters in 1996 and went into effect in 1998.

With the passage of Prop. 209, California became the first state in the nation to ban race-based and sex-based affirmative action via a constitutional amendment.

Some earlier research concluded that students who gain admission to universities based on affirmative action are harmed because they struggle to keep up with their academic peers. But the CHSE study calls such conclusions into question.

"University affirmative action policies are highly controversial," Bleemer said yesterday. "This study answers many of the key questions at the base of that controversy. If you don't support [affirmative action](#) because you think it might not help targeted Black and Hispanic students, this study should make you rethink your beliefs."

The study was based on an anonymized database of all students who applied to eight campuses in the University of California system from 1994 to 2002, including demographic data, academic information and their work experience after graduation.

In its [report on the study](#), the The New York Times concluded that Prop. 209 "seems to have set back a generation of Black and Hispanic students."

More information: Zachary Bleemer. Affirmative Action, Mismatch, and Economic Mobility After California's Proposition 209. (2020). [cshe.berkeley.edu/publications ... ity-after-california%E2%80%99s-proposition-209](https://cshe.berkeley.edu/publications...ity-after-california%E2%80%99s-proposition-209)

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