

The Civil Rights Project



Proyecto Derechos Civiles

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New research summaries available for CA voters seeking fact-based information about affirmative action

Los Angeles, CA—Californians face a key decision next week about the Proposition that would permit California agencies to implement affirmative action in higher education. The leadership of the University of California has strongly supported this proposed plan. The Civil Rights Project is pleased to provide the public with three new research briefs that summarize key findings relating to the controversy.

The documents by William Kidder, David Mickey-Pabello, Gary Orfield and Danielle Jarvie examine research showing the consequences of the present affirmative action ban on the ability of California's public colleges to admit strong students from all groups in our population, and the losses to California, compared to the 41 states and all private universities that retain the right to implement affirmative action when they believe it will strengthen their educational program.

These papers consider data both from California and nationwide research. They show that college access has declined in California; there are well-documented educational benefits from affirmative action for all groups of students; and affirmative action can help resolve shortages of key scientific, technical and medical personnel the state needs. In addition to these findings, the research summaries present new data showing unequal preparation for college in the state's highly segregated schools. Very few Black, Latino and American Indian students have an opportunity to attend the high performing schools that most Asian and White students attend and that greatly help in preparation for the state's demanding universities.

"A quarter century ago, in a period of divisive racial politics in California, propositions wrote three anti-civil rights policies into the California Constitution -- against services to immigrants, against bilingual education, and against affirmative action. The first two have now been repealed." Civil Rights Project Co-Director Gary Orfield noted, "It is long past time to restore to California's universities the ability to use essential tools to overcome inequalities in the state's public schools, and to overcome a history of discrimination and unequal opportunity."

The first educational policy brief, [Proposition 16 and a Brighter Future for All Californians](#), by CRP Research Associate William Kidder, is a short but research-dense resource that synthesizes research from over 100 studies. The brief focuses on enrollment, graduation and career success for traditionally underrepresented students, the benefits of diverse learning environments including campus racial climate, and the need to increase diversity in UC professional and graduate schools to better serve the health and wellbeing of all Californians.

A second resource, [Scholarly Findings on Affirmative Action Bans](#), by David Mickey-Pabello, provides an overview of what is known about the impact of these bans nationally and complements research specific to California that Kidder summarizes. The research findings describe the following impacts of affirmative action bans:

- decreased racial and ethnic diversity in higher education
- failure to accomplish the goal of admitting the best academically credentialed students
- lower STEM attainment by underrepresented minorities (URM)
- reduced applications from URM students
- smaller URM proportions in graduate and professional schools (law and medicine)
- exodus of URM students from highly selective schools, like UC Berkeley and UCLA
- narrowing of the diversity pool for the faculty pipeline

Research also finds that alternative pathways to affirmative action aiming to maintain racial diversity in higher education are insufficient.

Often debates over affirmative action assume all students have an equal chance to prepare for college entrance exams. The third brief, [Unequal Public Schools Makes Affirmative Action Essential for Equal Opportunity](#), by CRP Co-director Gary Orfield and Senior Research Analyst Danielle Jarvie, shows that college preparation and access is systematically unequal by race, and provides new statistics on the extent of segregation by race and poverty for California's non-white students. It uses state testing and enrollment data to show that Black, Latino and American Indian students are concentrated in the most low-achieving schools, while Whites and Asians attend the most high-achieving schools. This produces a very unequal path to college, making affirmative action necessary to level the playing field.

About the UCLA Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles:

The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles is co-directed by UCLA Research Professors Gary Orfield and Patricia Gándara. Founded in 1996 at Harvard University, CRP's mission is to create a new generation of research in social science and law on the critical issues of civil rights and equal opportunity for racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. CRP is a trusted source of segregation statistics, has commissioned more than [400 studies](#), published more than 25 books and issued numerous reports monitoring the success of American schools in equalizing opportunity. The U.S. Supreme Court, in its 2003 [Grutter v. Bollinger](#) decision upholding affirmative action, and in Justice Breyer's dissent (joined by three other Justices) to its 2007 [Parents Involved](#) decision, cited the Civil Rights Project's research.

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