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UC System Access and Rural Californians: Eligibility in the Local Context and Its Impact

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UC System Access and Rural Californians: Eligibility in the Local Context and Its Impact

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Introduction

On June 29, 2023, the Supreme Court handed down the decision in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Presidents and Fellows of Harvard College*. The Court ruled that affirmative action in college admissions is unconstitutional, violating the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution.¹ Now that the nation's schools have to deal with this shift in jurisprudence, California can serve as a model for other states; California has not had affirmative action programs for employment, contracting, or education, resulting from the passage of Proposition 209 (1996).²

A majority of the research done regarding the effects of race-neutral alternatives has examined the impact of such policies mentioned above on underrepresented minorities. This research, however, will focus on rural populations more broadly. The policy being examined is the Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC) program instituted by the University of California in order to admit more underrepresented minorities (URM). I will be examining the effects of ELC on a per-county basis from 1994 to 2014, focusing on the admittance of students from the 26 rural counties in California into the UC system. The rural and non-rural counties will be compared on a per 100,000 rate using a t-test to examine the validity of my findings. The underlying purpose of this research is to examine the effects of a less thought-of population, in order to look forward to the future policies that will be implemented in the wake of the appropriate ruling in *SFFA v. Harvard College*.

Significance of Issue and Background

¹ “*Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*,” Opinions of the Court - 2022, June 29, 2023, https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/22pdf/20-1199_hgdj.pdf.

² “Proposition 209 Prohibition Against Discrimination or Preferential Treatment by State and Other Public Entities,” Propositions, November 5, 1996, https://lao.ca.gov/ballot/1996/prop209_11_1996.html.

There was quite a bit of uncertainty in precisely what type of affirmative action policies are constitutionally permissible due to the Supreme Court waffling, sidestepping an official, definite, and final interpretation of the Constitution due to a series of nebulous rulings. The first iteration of the Supreme Court's position on the constitutionality of race-conscious admissions policies occurred in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978). UC Davis Medical School had set aside a certain amount of seats for underrepresented minorities. Allan Bakke applied multiple times to the University of California Medical School at Davis but was rejected. Despite being rejected, Bakke's GPA and test scores far exceed the GPAs and test scores that the minority students who were accepted had. Bakke sued the University of California, citing that the policy violated the Equal Protection Clause. To emphasize how convoluted this decision was, the constitutionality of the policy was decided through a controlling opinion, which attempts to pick the narrowest opinion offered by the Justices. This ruling states that the racial quota the University of California implemented was unconstitutional, however, the use of race as a deciding factor was permissible under the Constitution.³ The jurisprudence and constitutionality of race-conscious admissions policies only get more unclear in the *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003) decision. The ruling broadly upheld the Bakke decision which dictated that race is an important consideration in admissions due to the benefits that can be gained from a diverse student body; however, such language such as the Court expecting in "25 years [that]... the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary to further the interest approved today" only brings confusion.⁴ Was this 25-year figure meant to be taken literally? Or was it meant to suggest that at some point in the future race-conscious admissions policies would no longer be necessary?

³ "Regents of Univ. of California v. Bakke, 438 U.S. 265 (1978)," U.S. Supreme Court, accessed August 21, 2023, <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/438/265/>.

⁴ "Grutter v. Bollinger," Legal Information Institute, June 23, 2003, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/02-241.ZS.html>.

Students for Fair Admissions v. University of North Carolina brings clarity to issues surrounding the admissions process and the constitutionality of certain, questionable policies, stating that granting applicants preferential treatment solely based on their status as an underrepresented minority is unconstitutional.⁵ In other words, this decision bars universities from using race as a specific quality that impacts the admissions status of an applicant. It did not bar, however, using one's race as a theme in an application essay, for example. This decision contained none of the baffling issues present in the previous decisions, finally rectifying issues of policy and the language of the Fourteenth Amendment. This decision now compels university systems to reevaluate and modify their admissions processes in accordance with the Constitution.

California, due to this new interpretation of race-conscious admissions policies, can potentially serve as a model for other states' university systems. This is not just because of California's influence due to its size and economic power, but due to the University of California's amicus brief submitted to the Supreme Court; the UC expressly stated its unique position due to the passage of Prop 209. Due to the UC's prior experimentation in how to maximize the amount of diversity on their campuses in the face of only having race-neutral policies available as a policy tool.⁶ Previous research shows that after the passage of Proposition 209, underrepresented minorities, mainly blacks and Hispanics, significantly applied less, systemwide. Before the implementation of the ban on affirmative action policies, the number of URMs who applied to the UC system dropped by 7 percent.⁷ This had broader effects on

⁵ "Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College," Opinions of the Court - 2022, June 29, 2023, https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/22pdf/20-1199_hgdj.pdf.

⁶ "Brief for the President and Chancellors of the University of California as Amici Curiae Supporting Respondents," No. 20-1199, April 1, 2022, https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/20/20-1199/232355/20220801134931730_20-1199%20bsac%20University%20of%20California.pdf.

⁷ Zachary Bleemer, "The Impact of Proposition 209 and Access-Oriented UC Admissions Policies on Underrepresented UC Applications, Enrollment, and Long-Run Student Outcomes," Institutional Research and Academic Planning, January 2023, https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning/_files/uc-

minorities in California; the passage of Prop 209 has led to the average URM's wages declining "by five percent annually."⁸ The number of people who were substantially hurt by the passage of Prop 209 is as low as one hundred thousand URMs. The major pains ultimately arise from the large number of URMs who were deterred from applying to the UC system.⁹ These lost applicants ultimately assumed that they were going to be rejected due to the rhetoric surrounding Prop 209 used by progressive ideologues, despite, in most cases, being highly qualified and likely to be admitted. In order to redress these issues the University of California began implementing race-neutral policies that would increase URM attendance, yet scurrying around the issue in order to not be found unconstitutional. To combat this loss of diversity in the UC campuses, the ELC policy was implemented. This policy is meant to bolster the number of URMs while remaining constitutional with California's Constitution. From 2001 to 2011, the program admitted students who had a top 4 percent GPA in their graduating class automatically to the UC system.¹⁰ The implementation of the ELC policy under the 4 percent threshold led to an additional enrollment of URM enrolling in the UC system totaling around 250 per year.¹¹ The UC system in 2012 increased the threshold to 9 percent, however, this threshold is outside of the scope of previous research.

The UC system has been greatly constrained in exactly how it can meet its illiberal diversity goals as a result of Prop 209. While ELC is certainly helpful in meeting those goals, the

affirmative-action.pdf.

⁸ Zachary Bleemer, "Affirmative Action, Mismatch, and Economic Mobility After California's Proposition 209," Publications, August 20, 2020, <https://cshe.berkeley.edu/publications/affirmative-action-mismatch-and-economic-mobility-after-california%E2%80%99s-proposition-209>.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Zachary Bleemer, "The Impact of Proposition 209 and Access-Oriented UC Admissions Policies on Underrepresented UC Applications, Enrollment, and Long-Run Student Outcomes," Institutional Research and Academic Planning, January 2023, https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning/_files/uc-affirmative-action.pdf.

¹¹ Ibid

UC system ultimately cannot do much more than implement race-neutral admissions policies and tweak them to produce the unsuitable results they are looking for. In order to repeal Prop 209, and increase the effectiveness of the UC admissions policies, ACA 5 (Weber) was placed on the November 2020 ballot. ACA 5, thereafter known as Proposition 16 (2020), sought to repeal Prop 209, allowing for race to be considered in public employment, public contracting, and most relatedly, in college admissions.¹² Voters, just as in 1996, opposed affirmative action policies, with 57 percent of Californians voting “No” on Prop 16 an increase of 2 percent of opposition to affirmative action.¹³

Ultimately, the issue of race-neutral v. race-conscious admissions policies is not just an issue of constitutional interpretation but has wide-reaching impacts on California citizens. The loss in the total amount of income made and the amount students deterred from attending is rather significant to California. California has been struggling with large deficits since the passage of Proposition 209. If residents of the state are making less money because of these policies, the fiscal situation of the state is severely depressed as a result. If citizens are making a larger magnitude less in income due to being turned away from the UC system, then the state ultimately has less income to tax and thus be able to use on services. Given that Sacramento is rather inflexible in cutting costs, especially unlikely given the commitment to a renewable switchover, the policies being implemented by the university systems in the state play a great role in determining the future status of its (prospective) students.

The major connecting thread between previous research, exemplified in Bleemer’s research, is the focus on URMs; there is ultimately a lack of research regarding how rural

¹² “Proposition 16,” Propositions, November 3, 2020, <https://lao.ca.gov/BallotAnalysis/Proposition?number=16&year=2020>.

¹³ Alex Padilla, “Statement of Vote,” General Election - Statement of Vote, November 3, 2020, November 2020, <https://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/sov/2020-general/sov/complete-sov.pdf>.

students were affected by the ELC policy under the 4 percent threshold. This does not discount the previous research, however. It is quite logical to focus on those who would likely be hurt by the passage of Proposition 209. However, given that policy does not cleanly affect just one group, it is necessary to evaluate the potential benefits that race-neutral policies might have to redound to the benefit of other groups. Considering that the experience that California went through after the passage of Proposition 209 will be a similar experience that other university systems will have to go through as a result of the Supreme Court's ruling in *SFFA v. Harvard College*, it is vital to assess the full picture, looking at how race-neutral policies like ELC (which is a policy that will likely see adoption by other states, given Texas's similar policy¹⁴) in order to predict future outcomes.

Theory and Argument

Regarding how rural populations were affected by the passage of Proposition 209, I hypothesize that the passage of Prop 209 leads to rural applicants seeing a benefit in their chances of being admitted. The causal mechanism that explains this relationship is the implementation of the Eligibility in the Local Context policy by the University of California system. ELC, implemented after the passage of Prop 209, was a solution meant to redress concerns about diversity and URM attendance in the system. I purport that the policy was created in a manner that did not solely benefit URM applicants, but also rural applicants. The intention of the ELC policy at 4% was that it would benefit URMs. However, due to the fact that this 4% is not automatically occupied by URMs, it is merely wishful thinking that the URM population, a rather tiny part of the population of California, would see a significant benefit from the policy.

¹⁴ Irma Rangel, "HB 588," Texas Legislature Online, April 16, 1997, <https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/75R/billtext/html/HB00588F.htm>.

This overview, merely grounded in probabilities, ignoring the broader issues of income, worse grades, etc., suggests the underlying issues with this policy, when looking at admissions statewide among different racial groups. In order to rectify this thwarted response, the University of California system raised the percentage from four to nine. Whether or not the nine percent threshold benefits URM is beyond the scope of this analysis. The mere raising of the threshold, however, does raise an important question: Who was being benefited under the four percent plan? As I suggested above the ELC policy did/does a decent job at encompassing new groups into the University of California system. Rural applicants were likely this new group that was now a part of the UC system.

A key aspect of the answer to questions regarding admissions into the University of California system is solved with the Eligibility in the Local Context admission policy. Eligibility in the Local Context focuses on individual, participating, high schools contra other statewide eligibility policies. Under its current form, ELC automatically admits the top 9 percent of seniors from their high school graduating class into the UC system. Seniors would apply to their preferred UC campuses. If they are not admitted to a specific campus they applied to and are a part of their school's nine percent, they would be granted admission to a campus, obviously not their preferred campus, but admitted into the UC system nonetheless. ELC has gone through two main iterations: a 4 and 9 percent policy. The four percent policy was instituted as a stopgap to figuratively stop the large loss of URM students, following the banning of affirmative action in California. Throughout the lifetime of the four percent policy, it is obvious that four percent was not sufficient to meet the racial quotas that the University of California wanted; this assertion is not an anecdotal one as there would have been no need to raise it otherwise.

In order to study the effect that the banning of race-conscious admissions policies had, it is important to reflect on previous studies for URM applicants. The type of analysis that previous research focused on was URM as a whole population, regardless of location within the state; my analysis will follow a similar structure: looking at rural admittances, without taking into account applicants' race, gender, etc. A potential confounding explanation could be, however, the people getting admitted into the UC system are more likely to be admitted due to higher parental incomes, being from a large county, or having a better educational experience. Ultimately, despite these potentially confounding answers, I hypothesize that due to the passage of Proposition 209, rural students will benefit as a result, taking the form of a greater number of admitted applicants from rural counties within California.

Research Design and Data

In order to test my hypothesis, I performed a multivariable linear regression to determine the presence of a relationship between admissions and being an applicant from a rural county. The scope of this study extended to all 58 California counties from 1997 to 2014. My unit of analysis is the individual counties. In order to account for the wide variance of admissions from Glenn and Los Angeles counties, for example, the admissions variable was converted into admissions per one hundred thousand total admissions. Within the model, I also included the total white population, total county population, student-to-teacher ratio, and median, unadjusted income. The underlying reason for including all of these additional variables is to account for the aforementioned confounding effects upon admissions from rural counties. I ran three models comprised of three different periods: 1997-2000, 2001-2011, and 2012-2014; 1997-2000 was when the University of California had no top admissions policy, 2001-2011 was when the 4 percent scheme was in place, and 2012-2014 was when ELC was raised to 9 percent. Overall,

when operationalizing the aforementioned hypothesis, I hypothesize that the group of rural applicants will see more admissions during the period when ELC was set at 4%.

The main independent variable of interest is whether or not a county is rural or non-rural. The decision rule for whether or not a county is rural is based upon membership to the California Rural Counties Task Force. This task force comprises 26 counties which all have the characteristics of “having populations less than 250,000 and do not have a single urbanized area with a population above 50,000.”¹⁵ Within the dataset, rurality is determined through a dummy variable, with 1 coding for rural and 0 coding for nonrural. This decision rule encompasses far more counties than the Census Bureau’s of determining specific parcels as urban and relegating everything else as rural, thus making the determination of a county’s rurality more objective.

Broadly, the dependent variable is the number of admissions. Specifically, the model is most interested in determining the significance of being from a rural county and its impact on admissions. As mentioned above, in order for rural counties, which are smaller in population size by nature, admissions as a whole are transformed into a metric of admissions per 100,000 total admissions to give a rate that is easily comparable to non-rural counties. The amount of admissions is, originally, measured as a raw number tabulated by the number of admissions to the UC system (i.e., regardless of which campus(es) the applicant was admitted to) per public high school in each county in every year. This data was sourced from the University of California’s Admissions by source school. An issue with this data is the data is missing. To illustrate this, one must recognize that there is a conditional requirement. For the total number of applicants from a high school to appear as a number, and not be blank, the high school must have had at least three applicants accepted into the system. Additionally for that data to even show up,

¹⁵ “About Us,” California Rural Counties Task Force, 2023, <https://www.ruralcountiestaskforce.org/>.

the school must have had five students apply to the UC system. In order for the data to be utilized, I decided to have to indicate that zero students were admitted into the UC system if there was blank information. I would like to seriously downplay this apparent issue by providing an example. If you examine the data for Los Angeles County in 2014, you will notice that there are 24 high schools with blank information. You would thus be missing out, in the most extreme case, on 24 applicants from the data. While this is facially significant, if you compare this number to the 16451 students who were admitted from LA County, you would see that this is only 0.03% of the total number of students admitted from LA County.

The first additional independent variable is the white population totals. The significance of this variable is meant to get at the fact that a majority of college students are white.¹⁶ Given that a majority of the students in the various college systems throughout the country are white, the inclusion of this variable in the model is meant to serve as a reference point for the model, given that, just based on the fact a majority of undergraduate students are white, that being a white applicant has a tremendous impact on the admissions status of an applicant. Now while it could be assessed whether structural racism, familial connections, or any other premise leads to more white people being college students, the empirical fact of the matter is that being white has a noticeable effect, regardless of what inegalitarian reason is causing it. This data was collected through the Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program. Related, the next additional independent variable is the county population total. While the white population total requires more context, the reasoning for the inclusion of this variable is clearer; including this variable is meant to capture any nuanced effect that may arise from population size. As a note, this data was

¹⁶ "More Than 76 Million Students Enrolled in U.S. Schools, Census Bureau Reports," Newsroom, October 28, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2018/school-enrollment.html#:~:text=Of%20just%20the%20current%20undergraduate,black%2C%20and%2011.2%20percent%20Asian.>

collected as a whole, without concern for different age groups within a county. This data was also sourced from the Population Estimates Program.

Additionally, included in the model was the median income. This was included in order to account for differences in resources available for non-rural citizens. Typically, due to smaller population sizes, and therefore less revenue collection, rural counties are not able to offer the resources that non-rural counties do. This variable is meant to serve as a substitute for median familial income for those who attend college, as such data can be gleaned from the entire county's median income. This is significant because there is a trend of college-attending parents socializing their children into believing that college is the best way to earn a living in life, thus you see that children of at least one parent who attended college attend college themselves.¹⁷ This data was sourced from the Census Bureau's Small Area Income and Population Estimates Program.

Lastly, included in the model is Pupil-Teacher ratio. The inclusion of this variable is meant to hint at the potential impacts of better education in a specific county. This variable, even before the analysis is a bit superfluous, as the differences between the individual counties are far smaller than one would expect, with a range of about 10 in 2014, a year when the teacher shortage facing the nation was in full swing; when looking when such issues are not occurring, such as in 1996, the range being 5, which isn't surprising considering the relative size of these rural counties. This data was sourced from the California Department of Education through their DataQuest tool.

¹⁷ "Students Are More Likely to Attend College If They Believe Family Can Afford to Pay," Press Releases, January 12, 2022, https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/1_12_2022.asp.

When examining the strength of the type of analysis, the high number of observations (986), is certainly sufficient enough to be able to conclude as it is far higher than the 30 observations required for a typical analysis to be done. Using admissions as a rate rather than a flat number helps to control for differences in population size, and, thus, differences in the number of students who applied from a particular county. For posterity's sake, I will be using the following p-values and drawing conclusions respective to the value: $p < 0.001$ = extremely high significance, $p < 0.01$ = high statistical significance, $p < 0.05$ = moderate statistical significance, $p < 0.1$ = weak statistical significance, $p > 0.1$ = no statistical significance. To support my theory, I would expect the independent variable to be statistically significant at least $p \leq 0.05$.

A dot and whisker plot will most effectively illustrate the model by showing the significance of the length of the lines for each variable in each model. In order for the plot to be more easily interpreted, I will include a table of the output provided by R of the regression summary for each model.

Findings and Analysis

In testing for the relationship between the implementation of Eligibility in the Local Context at the four percent threshold, I did find evidence to support my hypothesis. When looking at the period in which there was no admissions scheme, I did not find any evidence, nor did I find any significant evidence during the period in which the 9 percent policy was implemented.

As a note, when looking at the other, non-main independent variables their extremely high statistical significance is suggestive of my reasoning outlined above for their inclusion: to ensure that the model is accurately representing established trends written about in other research. Broadly speaking there is no real variation between the three periods of time for all the time. The only variable that is an outlier is the pupil-to-teacher rate which is wholly insignificant. This is likely due to the fact that the ranges are typically not large between comparable counties.

To observe these relationships taking place, Tables 1, 2, and 3 showcase the regression summary output. The first set of variables in Table 1 represents 1997-2000, before ELC was implemented, with the variable “Is Rural?” not having any symbol means that the p-value is greater than 0.1, suggesting no statistical significance. The second set of variables in Table 2 represents 2001-2011, during the four percent policy, with rurality having two stars, suggesting $p < 0.01$, representing high statistical significance. The third set of variables in Table 3 represents 2012-2014, the period in which the nine percent policy was enacted; the rural variable has one star, indicating moderate statistical significance. These relationships are also shown graphically in Figure 1.

```

Residuals:
      Min       1Q   Median       3Q      Max
-1444.12  -306.75    8.83   207.17  2620.38

Coefficients:
              Estimate Std. Error t value Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept)  -9.631e+02  5.039e+02  -1.911  0.0577 .
factor(rural)1  5.348e+01  1.070e+02   0.500  0.6178
whites        1.725e-04  7.477e-04   0.231  0.8178
population    2.876e-03  5.651e-04   5.089  9.73e-07 ***
teachers     -2.847e+01  2.453e+01  -1.160  0.2476
income        3.873e-02  4.950e-03   7.826  5.75e-13 ***
---
Signif. codes:  0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 574.2 on 165 degrees of freedom
(3 observations deleted due to missingness)
Multiple R-squared:  0.9807, Adjusted R-squared:  0.9801
F-statistic: 1677 on 5 and 165 DF, p-value: < 2.2e-16

```

Table 1: Regression Output 1997-2000

```

Residuals:
      Min       1Q   Median       3Q      Max
-1922.4  -272.4    15.9   204.8  4587.3

Coefficients:
              Estimate Std. Error t value Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept) -1.194e+03  1.370e+02  -8.715 < 2e-16 ***
factor(rural)1  1.601e+02  5.953e+01   2.689  0.00735 **
whites       -1.980e-03  3.390e-04  -5.841  8.36e-09 ***
population    4.304e-03  2.492e-04  17.274 < 2e-16 ***
teachers     -2.377e+00  3.338e+00  -0.712  0.47671
income        2.369e-02  2.219e-03  10.680 < 2e-16 ***
---
Signif. codes:  0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 665.2 on 624 degrees of freedom
(8 observations deleted due to missingness)
Multiple R-squared:  0.9736, Adjusted R-squared:  0.9734
F-statistic: 4603 on 5 and 624 DF, p-value: < 2.2e-16

```

Table 2: Regression Output 2001-2011


```

Residuals:
  Min       1Q   Median       3Q      Max
-1408.5  -123.3    32.7   154.9  2413.1

Coefficients:
              Estimate Std. Error t value Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept) -1.390e+03  3.722e+02  -3.736 0.000256 ***
factor(rural)1  2.300e+02  9.019e+01   2.550 0.011655 *
whites       -4.459e-03  5.063e-04  -8.806 1.54e-15 ***
population    5.959e-03  3.626e-04  16.432 < 2e-16 ***
teachers     2.120e+01  1.709e+01   1.240 0.216564
income       1.493e-02  2.853e-03   5.232 4.94e-07 ***
---
Signif. codes:  0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 476.1 on 168 degrees of freedom
Multiple R-squared:  0.9867, Adjusted R-squared:  0.9863
F-statistic: 2492 on 5 and 168 DF, p-value: < 2.2e-16

```

Table 3: Regression Output 2012-2014

My findings suggest that Eligibility in the Local Context, at four percent, significantly benefited rural applicants, leading to a greater number of applicants from rural counties being admitted into the UC system during 2001-2011. While the nine percent policy does benefit rural applicants, it does not to the extent that the four percent policy did; this is determined through the comparison of the p-values during the different periods of time, with four percent being more significant.

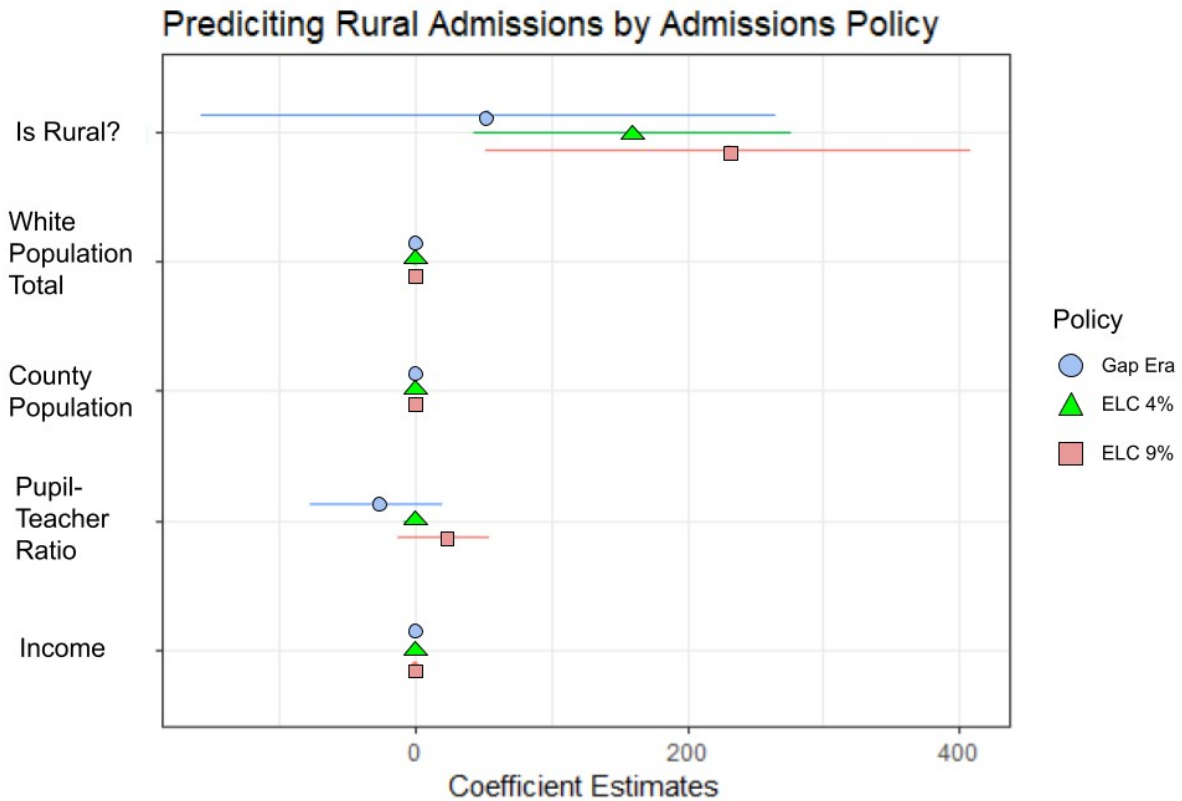


Figure 1: Dot and Whisker Plot for the Different Admissions Policies

Implications

Given the importance of a college education in a world where a high school diploma is no longer sufficient to allow people to earn a living wage, an undergraduate education becomes increasingly important. Who and how becomes increasingly muddier for a country having to totally shift from race-conscious policies being constitutional to race-neutral policies only being permissible. Finding a relationship between rurality and a specific type of admissions policy is a boon for both liberal and conservative representatives. Being that at the 9 percent threshold, both URMs and rural applicants benefit, perhaps further states could adopt a similar admissions policy for their state's flagship universities/university systems.

While the evidence found through this research is motivating, the research itself is not expansive. Given that this research was specifically focused on how rural applicants were affected by this school-specific top admissions plan the data for years widely outside of the interested period is not included. To see whether rural applicants only moderately benefited by nine percent, it would be necessary for data under the nine percent scheme to be included as far as the data is available. There would certainly be no issues with factoring in the secondary independent variables as they are certainly available past 2014.

Conclusion

Eligibility in the Local Context is not just a policy that works automatically, it requires a certain amount of input by applicants and their high school staff. Just because a student is in the top nine percent of their high school's class does not mean they are automatically pegged to apply to the University of California system. There might be concerns surrounding having their application denied and therefore they believe they might as well save their money instead of paying for the application fee. This is especially a key factor to consider since rural counties tend to have lower median incomes and therefore have less spending money to use. In order to incentivize more rural students to apply to the UC system, if that is the goal after all, a few actions should be instituted in order to do so. First, the University of California should host Online Information sessions in order to introduce this concept to students writ large, rural or not. Although this is just anecdotal, I can attest as a student who went through California's public school system that I was not aware of this policy. Furthermore, for students to be admitted they must have somewhat competitive applications. Therefore, it would also be necessary for the University of California to hold application workshops in rural counties in order to strengthen these applications. Above all, however, the most important policy recommendation is that the

state employ more school counselors in order to have this information made known to the high schoolers, as they are the main point of contact for interested applicants.

Looking beyond California, the entire nation could benefit from having certain policies like Eligibility in the Local Context. Given that states like Texas have implemented similar top percentage admissions policies, even conservative representatives could benefit from these policies as ELC did end up benefiting rural students. While it might be a broad generalization to assume that only conservative lawmakers represent rural populations, the underlying point stands nonetheless: top admissions policies based on high school stand to benefit representatives' constituents.

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