

## UCSD Study Suggests Affirmative Action Leads to Better Minority School Results

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### Body

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SAN DIEGO (CNS) - In a UC San Diego study published today, a researcher found minority students perform better in school when affirmative action policies are in place.

The study, published in the Review of Economics and Statistics, found minority students attain 0.8 additional years of education where affirmative action policies are in place. The study underscores previous work on affirmative action which shows the opportunity to be admitted to college may motivate students to graduate from high school, according to the study's author, Gaurav Khanna, assistant professor of economics at UCSD's School of Global Policy and Strategy.

"In the policy space, people have made claims that affirmative action lowers standards and the learning gains for underrepresented students who will "no longer work as hard." My research suggests the opposite," Khanna said. "Affirmative action makes going to a good college much more attainable, and actually encourages minority groups to work harder to get into such schools. Without affirmative action, many colleges may not appear attainable, and it may discourage students from even trying."

The timing of the study is fitting, as California voters will be asked to approve a return to affirmative action on Nov. 3 with Proposition 16 -- which would restore the right of the state's colleges and universities to consider race, ethnicity and gender in admission decisions.

Affirmative action is a contentious issue across the globe, hotly debated in countries such as India, as well as the United States. The UCSD study used evidence from India to show that affirmative action has indirect benefits on the behavior of underrepresented high school students, who tend to stay in school longer when they know higher education is within reach.

India's federal government instituted affirmative action policies in 1993, reserving 27% of government jobs that are highly sought after for "Other Backward Classes," a collective term used by the country's government to classify castes which are educationally or socially disadvantaged. In 2006, reservations in colleges were implemented.

The UCSD study explores the question of whether affirmative action incentivizes students to stay in school by looking at the educational attainment at pre-collegiate levels.

Khanna compiled a number of data sources to map trends in educational attainment by birth cohort and social group. Those born in India before 1976 would be over the age of 18 by the time the federal government policy was

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implemented. Thus, he looked at education levels of minority students in this cohort and compared them to education levels attained by OBCs before the affirmative action policies were enacted.

The results show that after affirmative action policies were implemented, there was a marked increase in OBCs' educational attainment. While non-minorities were still more likely to pursue more education, wide-scale affirmative action helped bridge the education gap by about 40% over a decade and a half.

Similarly, in the U.S., the issue is divisive. The Trump administration announced in 2018 that it was abandoning Obama administration policies that called on universities to consider race as a factor in diversifying campuses. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos stated that "schools should continue to offer equal opportunities for all students."

Given the debate in both countries, the other question Khanna sought to answer regards whether this educational response from minority groups is rational in terms of the expected costs and benefits.

With education levels being important for the qualification criteria for government jobs in India, Khanna found that between 2000 and 2005, the fraction of OBCs in public sector jobs rose from 22% to 27%. These jobs are extremely lucrative, especially in rural areas, where they guarantee benefits and job security. As such, increases in the likelihood of getting such jobs can greatly influence the decision made by minority groups.

"Yet even for members of the minority group who do not get government jobs, an increase in education may translate into benefits (like better health) and high wages as the estimated returns to education in developing countries are between 6% and 13%," he wrote. "Indeed, lowering educational inequalities -- and possibly wealth inequalities -- may be intrinsically valuable to policymakers. In light of these results, policymakers should consider the externalities of affirmative action policies when designing them."

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