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FACULTY RACIAL AND GENDER DIVERSITY IN A TURBULENT ERA:
THE ROLE OF STATE PARTISAN CONTROL AND HIGHER EDUCATION
FUNDING

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the racial and gender diversity of faculty at public four-year postsecondary institutions in the United States between 2015 and 2023, a period marked by political polarization, economic uncertainty, and intensified opposition to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Grounded in Critical Race Theory, specifically the tenets of interest convergence and intersectionality, this study examines how state-level factors—namely partisan control and higher education appropriations—influence faculty diversity over time.

Using data from IPEDS, SHEEO, and NCSL, the study constructs a faculty diversity index and employs mixed-effects regression and structural equation modeling to assess both direct and indirect effects of political and fiscal contexts. Findings reveal a consistent increase in faculty diversity across the study period, driven primarily by declining representation of White men and modest gains among nonwhite men and women. Democratic legislative control and increased state appropriations are positively associated with faculty diversity, while Democratic gubernatorial control shows a surprising negative direct effect, suggesting complex dynamics between executive leadership and legislative influence.

This research contributes to the literature by offering a comprehensive, nationwide quantitative analysis of faculty diversity and its structural determinants. It highlights the need for sustained legislative engagement and funding commitments to advance inclusive representation in academia and underscores the importance of intersectional and context-sensitive approaches to understanding equity in higher education.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On his second day back in the White House, President Donald Trump signed an executive order banning diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies and programs across the federal government, including all institutions of higher education that receive federal grants or participate in the federal student loan assistance program (Exec. Order No. 14173, 2025). Shortly after, the U.S. Department of Education launched investigations into over fifty universities alleging that the use of race-based scholarships, admissions, and mentorship programs at these institutions violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (U.S. Department of Education 2025). These institutions include prominent private universities such as Duke, Yale, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, along with dozens of large public institutions like the University of California-Berkeley and University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. The second Trump Administration went to extraordinary lengths to snuff out diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education, including withholding and threatening to withhold billions of federal funding from institutions that do not comply. Columbia University faced losing \$400 million in federal funding before eventually capitulating to a list of demands from the Trump Administration (Marquez 2025). Following this, the administration threatened to revoke over \$2.2 billion in multi-year grants and contracts from Harvard University for refusing to comply with its anti-DEI orders (U.S. Department of Education 2025b).

This aggressive campaign was preceded by several years of amplified anti-DEI movements at the local, state, and federal levels. Since January 2023, The Chronicle has tracked over 134 anti-DEI bills introduced across 29 states and the U.S. Congress, with 20 of them becoming law (The Chronicle of Higher Education 2025a). These bills prohibit colleges and universities from having DEI offices and staff, mandating diversity training, using diversity statements in hiring and promotion, and considering race, ethnicity, or national origin in admissions and employment. The Chronicle has also tracked institutional responses to anti-DEI legislation, tracking changes at 329 college campuses across 40 states since January 2023 (The Chronicle of Higher Education 2025b). These changes include closing university diversity, equity, and inclusion offices, discontinuing scholarships for racial and gender minorities,

eliminating identity-based affinity groups such as LGBTQ+ and Black student unions, prohibiting the use of personal pronouns in email signatures, and scrubbing university websites of diversity and identity-based content and resources. In recent years, the sociopolitical landscape of higher education has become increasingly hostile to ideas of equity and access for marginalized communities in such a way that challenges decades of social movements for desegregation, racial justice, and gender equality. Against this backdrop, this dissertation examines whether the politicization of higher education diversity policies and funding has had an impact on the gender and racial diversity of faculty at public 4-year institutions.

Sociologists have studied diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education through numerous theoretical lenses. One such approach is Critical Race Theory (CRT), which places discourses of race and racism within a broader perspective that includes sociopolitical, historical, economic, and psychological factors. Two core tenets of Critical Race Theory which are often employed in sociology of education scholarship are interest convergence and intersectionality. Interest convergence, coined by Derrick Bell (1980) in his analysis of the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruling, contends that progress toward racial justice occurs only when White and Black interests converge. Bell argues that White individuals and institutions support efforts toward racial equity only when doing so confers social, political, or economic value. Intersectionality, coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) in her study of court cases involving discrimination against Black women in hiring and promotion, emphasizes the interconnectedness of social categories such as race, gender, age, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. Crenshaw maintains that examining discrimination through a single-axis framework erases those oppressed by multiple intersecting identities, particularly Black women and other women of color. Together, both constructs highlight how systems of domination and subordination shape diversity in higher education, specifically in terms of race and gender.

Within this body of literature, there are few quantitative assessments of faculty racial and gender diversity and other theoretical frameworks, such as the balance wheel hypothesis or democratic backsliding, may inform this study as well. While the interest convergence principle has been applied in studies of institutional diversity and inclusion policies, programs, and initiatives regarding enrolled students, it has not yet been used to examine the racial and gender diversity of faculty. Faculty and students may have differing interests and thus differing conditions for their interests to converge with that of the institution. Research applying

intersectionality within higher education predominantly utilizes qualitative methods, using interviews and focus groups, storytelling, and content analysis. There is a need for more quantitative analyses of women of color in academia in order to understand factors such as nationwide hiring and retention rates, tenure promotion patterns, and gaps in salary and grant funding. Further, more research is needed to understand the contextual factors that contribute to faculty diversity within and across institutions. Faculty racial and gender diversity may be shaped by political and economic factors at the institutional, state, and federal levels.

This dissertation will assess whether state-level factors, such as partisan control and higher education funding, influence the racial and gender diversity of faculty at public 4-year post-secondary institutions in the United States. It is guided by the interest convergence and intersectionality tenets of CRT and enriched by concepts from other disciplines including inequality regimes, the balance wheel hypothesis, and democratic backsliding. To examine the impact of state partisan control and higher education funding on faculty diversity, I analyze data from the Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS), National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), and the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) between the years of 2015 and 2023. In my analyses, I calculate a faculty racial and gender diversity index and track it over time with respect to several institution- and state-level factors including Carnegie classification, HBCU status, state partisan control, and state funding. I employ two-level mixed-effects models, clustering by state and institution, in four steps: first, a base model regressing year on diversity index with controls (1), then incorporating (2) gubernatorial partisanship, (3) legislative partisan composition, and (4) higher education funding. Next, I run mixed-effects models for each year separately, including all covariates and controls, to understand whether these state-level factors are more or less influential at different times. Finally, I use structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the numerous pathways linking time, state partisan control, higher education funding, and faculty diversity.

My findings reveal consistent growth in the racial and gender diversity of faculty of public post-secondary faculty in the United States between 2015 and 2023, despite the tumultuous social, political, and economic events that characterized the period. Disaggregating diversity trends by state partisan control and funding levels revealed significant variation across contexts. I extend the literature on faculty diversity by examining the direct and indirect effects of state-level political and economic factors, revealing that they play a complex and important

role in creating circumstances that promote or inhibit faculty diversity. State partisan control and higher education appropriations mediate the growth in faculty diversity over time, primarily through Democratic legislatures appropriating greater amounts to higher education and in turn resulting in increased average diversity index values. Taken together, these results demonstrate that changes in the composition of the professoriate are not merely demographic but are significantly shaped by state political and fiscal structures, indicating that sustained improvements in faculty diversity will require coordinated policy and funding commitments at the state level.

This dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter 1 briefly introduces the purpose, significance, guiding theoretical frameworks, and methods of this study. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the existing literature on interest convergence, intersectionality, and faculty diversity. In this chapter, I highlight gaps in these bodies of literature and summarize my contributions, research questions, and hypotheses. Chapter 3 outlines the design of this study, including its data sources, analytic sample, measures, and modeling strategy. Chapter 4 reports the findings from my descriptive and multivariate analyses. In this chapter, I present summary statistics, bivariate analysis of faculty diversity and its covariates over time, as well as mixed-effects regression and structural equation modeling. Finally, in Chapter 5, I relate my findings back to the central research questions of this study, discuss the empirical and theoretical implications of my findings, review the limitations of this study and suggest directions for future research before concluding with closing remarks on the contemporary challenges facing faculty diversity in the United States.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I present theoretical and empirical context from the literature on faculty diversity, particularly with respect to race and gender. First, I present the primary theoretical framework informing the formulation of research questions for this dissertation, Critical Race Theory (CRT), and outline two tenets which are most relevant to this study, interest convergence and intersectionality. In this section, I also introduce alternative lenses—inequality regimes, the balance wheel hypothesis, and democratic backsliding—that capture structural and political dynamics beyond what interest convergence and intersectionality explain. Second, I review the current state of racial and gender diversity in university faculty along with trends in faculty diversity over time. Third, I discuss how racial and gender diversity within faculty hiring, promotion, and tenure is influenced by both overarching and context-specific factors, including economic uncertainty, partisan control, and the recent coronavirus pandemic. Fourth, I outline gaps in CRT and faculty diversity literature and describe the theoretical and empirical contributions of this dissertation. Finally, I present a set of research questions and hypotheses which guide this study’s analyses.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated in the 1970s as a movement in critical legal studies aimed at challenging race-neutral understandings of the U.S. legal system. This framework expanded upon conventional civil rights and ethnic studies scholarship by placing discourses of race and racism within a broader perspective that includes sociopolitical, historical, economic, and psychological factors. There are numerous key tenets of CRT, as outlined by Delgado and Stefania (2023) in their book *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (Fourth Edition):

(1) Racism, rather than being an aberration, is pervasive, permanent, and normalized in U.S. policy and culture. The ubiquitous nature of racism makes it more difficult to address, especially for more covert expressions of racism such as microaggressions or racial profiling.

(2) The social construction thesis holds that race and racism are not rooted in an objective, inherent, or biological reality. Rather, races are social categories that society “invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (2023:9).

(3) Racism affords numerous material and psychological benefits for the dominant group, leaving little incentive for them to challenge the existing racial hierarchy. This tenet is often referred to as interest convergence or material determinism.

(4) Differential racialization refers to the ways in which the dominant group racializes different groups in response to shifting needs and circumstances at a particular time, such as the labor market or geopolitical climate. Different minority racial groups experience unique forms of racism which may change over time due to political, economic, or social factors.

(5) Beyond race, an individual’s identity and experiences are also shaped by a myriad of other social dimensions such as gender, age, religion, nationality, and sexuality. This tenet is known as intersectionality and challenges the assumption that racial groups are monolithic.

(6) Finally, CRT emphasizes the importance of counter-storytelling. In opposition to the majority narratives that dominate social life, counter-stories amplify the unique voices, perspectives, and experiences of racial minority groups.

Although its origins lie in legal scholarship, CRT has been applied and further developed within the fields of sociology and education as well (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). Sociologists of education have utilized Critical Race theory and methodology to examine a broad range of issues such as affirmative action and race-sensitive post-secondary admissions, curricular tracking, residential and school segregation, and the school-to-prison pipeline, among other phenomena (Dutil 2020; Parker 1998; Solorzano and Ornelas 2004). Two core tenets of Critical Race Theory which are often employed in sociology of education scholarship are interest convergence and intersectionality. Together, both constructs highlight how systems of domination and subordination shape diversity in higher education, specifically in terms of race and gender.

Interest Convergence

The principle of interest convergence was coined by Derrick Bell (1980) in his analyses of the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). This case ruled that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, overturning the “separate but equal”

clause established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). Bell argued that this decision was not solely motivated by a governmental commitment to furthering racial justice. Rather, whites in policymaking positions recognized the economic and political value of ending segregation – primarily to gain power and legitimacy on the global stage amid the Cold War era. From this, Bell developed the concept of interest convergence to describe the tendency that “the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites” (Bell 1980:523). In other words, white individuals and institutions will only support efforts towards racial equity when these efforts stand to benefit white society as well.

Within the study of higher education, the interest convergence principle has primarily been used to examine affirmative action and race-sensitive admissions as well as the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and institutional responses to campus racial incidents (Davis and Harris 2016; Nishi 2020; Tichavakunda 2021). Baber (2015) conducted interviews with program administrators of STEM diversity initiatives at 10 research-intensive institutions listed among the top 40 public universities by the U.S. World and News Report. Participants noted increasing the enrollment and retention of underrepresented minorities as the primary goal of their program, focusing their efforts mainly on meeting specific recruitment targets based on historical trends and comparison with peer institutions. However, some program administrators expressed frustration with stalling progress and the lack of a plan for creating an inclusive campus environment. One program director shared that “the numbers have been roughly 2 or 3% [increase] each for African Americans and Latinos [over] 30 years, with all the money thrown in. Nothing has really changed. You can’t change it until you build the community” (2015:261). This study’s findings highlight that STEM diversity initiatives can oftentimes prioritize recruitment goals aligned with institutional competitiveness and reputation rather than fostering genuine inclusion through structural change, suggesting that progress is contingent on aligning the interests of underrepresented students with the broader institutional agenda.

Scholars have used the interest convergence principle to draw attention to the “window dressing” of post-secondary diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts (Bhopal and Pitkin 2020; Masutha, Naidoo, and Enders 2023; McKinley Jones Brayboy 2003), highlighting that institutions often utilize diversity-focused initiatives, programs, and policies as a public relations measure without committing to tangible, substantive institutional change. Lewis and Shah (2021) applied the interest convergence principle in their qualitative study exploring how Black students

make meaning of the implementation of diversity and inclusion initiatives at their predominantly-white institution. Many of the respondents viewed their institution's diversity initiatives as falling flat, relying on surface-level diversity efforts and neglecting to focus on inclusion and access. Further, respondents noted that these diversity initiatives were only put into place by the institution after immense pressure from the Black student body. One respondent stated that "if the pressure's not put on them, they're not gonna do it" (2021:195). In line with the interest convergence principle, these findings suggest that post-secondary institutions may often adopt diversity initiatives in response to external pressure rather than a genuine commitment to equity, using such efforts more as a means of public appeasement than as a path to meaningful institutional transformation.

The interest convergence principle doesn't only apply to the numerical diversity of students and faculty or equitable institutional policies and procedures, but also to more symbolic forms of inclusion and representation of racial and gender minorities. Castagno and Lee (2007) applied the principle of interest convergence in their case study of a predominantly-white Midwestern university's policies towards the use of native mascots. After rising concerns from Indigenous students about the co-optation of native imagery in college athletics, the university adopted a policy in which they would refuse to schedule games against teams using native mascots unless the team is a traditional rival or a conference member. The interests of the university and its Indigenous students converged and led to the adoption of this policy discouraging the use of native imagery. Their interests diverge, however, at the point where this policy could threaten the university's operational status quo, athletic conference standing, or revenue from ticket sales. Although the university addressed its students' concerns and acknowledged the harm that using native mascots can do to Indigenous communities, the university's concession came with stipulations that ultimately protected the reputation and revenue of the institution itself.

Critiques of Derrick Bell's interest convergence theory highlight several key limitations. First, Driver (2011) argues that Bell's conceptualization of "Black interests" and "White interests" is overly broad, failing to account for significant intraracial disagreements on what constitutes genuine progress toward racial equity. Using the case of segregation in the Civil Rights era, Driver illustrated how many Black business owners benefitted from being the only establishments to serve Black clientele and thus were against ending segregationist policies.

According to Driver, the interest convergence principle would be better applied using a broader view of “Black interests” and “White interests,” allowing for the possibility of a wide array of ideological viewpoints within a given racial group. Second, the interest convergence principle has been criticized for obscuring the agency of Black and White actors in the struggle for racial equity. The theory relies too heavily on “fortune and happenstance” (Driver 2011:176) and treats Black Americans as passively awaiting moments of sociopolitical opportunity, without acknowledging the many Black activists and cultural leaders that have played a pivotal role in achieving racial justice in the United States. Similarly, it minimizes the role of White Americans in either actively upholding or challenging the existing racial hierarchy.

Third, the interest convergence principle is severely limited by its assumption that the interests of Black and White Americans are primarily divergent and may only converge momentarily and opportunistically. Johnson (2024) introduces the concept of “perpetually convergent interests” (2024:1352), which are white interests that are so deeply interconnected with racial equality that they remain consistently aligned with corresponding Black interests and will never diverge. Two examples given to demonstrate this concept are spiritual and democratic interests. Spiritual interests refer to the spiritual, emotional, and psychological harm to White Americans from engaging in a white supremacist social structure. Democratic interests refer to the aim of cultivating a robust and equitable democracy. Both Black and White Americans may consistently align on these values, challenging the assumption that Black and White interests are inherently at odds and highlighting the potential for sustained alignment in the pursuit of racial justice.

While the interest convergence principle has been applied in studies of institutional diversity and inclusion policies, programs, and initiatives with regard to enrolled students, it has not yet been used to examine the racial and gender diversity of faculty. It is possible that patterns in the hiring and retention of racial and gender minority faculty will mirror that of the student body. However, it is also possible that faculty face unique challenges due to their positioning within the institution – while students are catered to by institutions as the consumers of their educational services, faculty are the laborers administering these services as employees of the institution. Faculty and students may have differing interests and thus differing conditions for their interests to converge with that of the institution. Further, the role of contextual factors in mediating the convergence and divergence of interests is left unclear. Are the interests of racial

groups consistent across time, place, and circumstance, or are they variable in response to social, political, and economic context? As Driver highlighted, Bell's original theorization of interest convergence treated "Black interests" and "White interests" as monolithic and immutable. More research is necessary to better understand the variability of the interests of racial groups, both with regard to intraracial differences as well as macro-level contextual factors.

Intersectionality

The principle of intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), emphasizes the interconnectedness of social categories such as race, gender, age, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. It argues that individuals experience multiple layers of privilege and oppression simultaneously, and these intersections shape their experiences and identities. At its core, the principle of intersectionality recognizes that a person's identity is multifaceted, and different forms of oppression or privilege can't be understood independently. Instead, they intersect to create complex, and sometimes contradictory, experiences.

Crenshaw coined the concept in her study of court cases involving discrimination against Black women in hiring and promotion (1989). Her analysis demonstrated how the courts dismissed the grievances of Black women by mounting counterexamples of Black men to negate claims of racism, and of white women to negate claims of sexism. For example, in *DeGraffenreid v General Motors* (1976), the court dismissed allegations of sexist and racist discrimination in the company's hiring, promotion, and layoff practices on the basis that the company had historically hired both white women and Black men. In these cases, the courts overlooked the possibility that Black women experience unique challenges in the workplace due to the overlapping and compounding effects of both racism and sexism. This study highlights the importance of considering the impact of multiple intersecting systems of oppression rather than relying on single-axis frameworks.

Although intersectionality is most often applied within a critical race lens, the framework expands far beyond analyses of variance within and between racial groups. The intersectional approach considers the complex interrelations of categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, nationality, ability status, ethnicity, and age, among many others. In her book *Intersectionality* (2020), Patricia Hill Collins illustrates how intersectional analyses can assume many different forms to accommodate a wide range of social problems. Intersectionality

can be deployed as an analytic tool to understand intersecting power relations across a range of domains including queer liberation movements, global economic inequality, and indigenous land rights. For example, Collins demonstrated how studying the FIFA World Cup through an intersectional lens highlights the complex interplay of wealth, citizenship, race, gender, and ability which shapes patterns of opportunity and disadvantage within the sports industry.

Within the context of higher education, intersectionality has primarily been used to study outcomes and experiences of undergraduate and graduate students. For example, Morales (2014) wielded the intersectional lens in her interview study of Black university students' experiences with microaggressions on campus, finding distinct differences depending on gender and perceived socioeconomic status. However, several scholars have applied the principle of intersectionality to examine disparities in faculty hiring and tenure promotion processes, professional expectations, and the efficacy of initiatives promoting faculty diversity. Research shows that women of color in academia face multiple challenges in the field including high teaching and service loads, ambiguous standards for tenure promotion, and a lack of culturally responsive mentorship (Corneille et al. 2019). Women faculty of color also face increased scrutiny from their colleagues and administrators. In qualitative studies of women faculty of color's experiences with microaggressions in the workplace, respondents reported having had their professional qualifications and quality of work questioned as well as being presumed incompetent by students, colleagues, and administrators (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012; Young and Anderson 2021).

Further, interventions aimed at promoting diversity in faculty hiring and retention often neglect to account for intersectional factors. In practice, these initiatives tend to primarily benefit white women over men and women of color. Hunt and colleagues (2012) analyzed the language of program announcements for the National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE diversity initiative, finding that the program privileges the racially unmarked location of White women. The program announcements list numerous specific interventions which institutions and academia at large can implement to foster the equity and inclusion of women generally, while only passively and vaguely discussing women from underrepresented groups such as women of color or disabled women. One quantitative analysis of the impact of NSF's ADVANCE initiative on faculty racial and gender diversity revealed a modest improvement in women's representation in academia between 2000 and 2020 (Mcquillan and Hernandez 2021). The magnitude of

increasing representation, however, differs by race. White women experienced the largest gains in representation, while the proportion of women faculty of color remained well below their share of the workforce. By placing gender equality as a focal concern without also attending to racial, socioeconomic, and other structural barriers facing underrepresented women in the academy, the ADVANCE program has primarily favored the outcomes of upper-middle class White women.

Blake (2022) applied the principle of intersectionality in their qualitative study of nine academic couples undergoing the dual career hiring process at Association of American Universities (AAU) institutions. All couples interviewed were heterosexual and both partners were racially minoritized, shedding light on how gendered dynamics occur within racial groups. Findings revealed that most women interviewed made career sacrifices in accepting dual career offers with their partner, while none of the couples accepted offers that disadvantaged men's careers with respect to fit or tenure status. For example, one couple's move required the woman to accept a position at an institution that did not align with her career interests (a research university rather than her preferred liberal arts university), leaving her institution which was more progressive and inclusive of women and people of color for an institution described as "very conservative" and "very White" (2022:125). In addition to this, she was placed in a department in a different field than the one she was trained in due to the institution not having a department in her area of expertise. These observations illustrate the gendered and racialized concessions that women of color in academic couples may be expected to make.

Women faculty of color also face a lack of clarity on tenure and promotion pathways and requirements. Kulp et al. (2022) analyzed data from the 2013 to 2018 iterations of the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) Survey of Faculty Satisfaction to assess the perception of promotion clarity among tenure-track associate professors. In their analyses, they considered three separate stages of associate professorship: early stages (1-5 years as an associate professor), middle stages (6-10 years), and late stages (11-20 years). Their findings revealed that women had less promotion clarity than men throughout each stage, especially for women of color in the middle stages of the associate career. Similarly, Domingo and colleagues' (2022) mixed methods study of STEM faculty, deans, and members of the university tenure and promotion committee found that women faculty of color face unclear promotion requirements within their departments along with a devaluation of the service work

that is inequitably distributed to them. For example, in response to the survey question “How would you rate the Retention, Tenure and Promotion (RTP) criteria established by your department in terms of providing guidance for successful tenure and promotion?”, women of color were more likely to rate their departments as “poor or terrible” (approximately 67% of WOC) compared to White women (approximately 25% of white women).

Social science scholars have raised some concerns with the intersectional framework. In her article *Re-thinking Intersectionality*, Nash (2008) identified four main paradoxes within intersectional literature. First, the concept of “intersectional” is often vaguely defined and leaves unanswered the question of who is intersectional. Because of the theory’s focus on Black women’s experiences, it remains unclear whether all identities are considered intersectional or only those that are multiply marginalized. For example, would a white woman or black man be considered to have an intersectional identity within this theoretical framework? Both subjects experience intersecting racial and gendered dimensions of identity, yet neither is multiply marginalized by this intersection. Scholars continue to debate this issue (Ferguson 1998; Runyan 2018; Zack 2005). Second, intersectional scholarship overwhelmingly centers the intersection of race and gender, paying little attention to other factors of one's identity such as socioeconomic status, sexuality, nationality, disability status, etc. In using Black women as “prototypes” to juxtapose against the experiences of Black men and white women, there is a lack of concern for the ways in which Black women’s experiences of oppression can differ based on their social class, level of education, and ethnicity along with many other axes of identity.

Further, there is little attention paid to the ways in which the intersecting forces of racism and sexism are shaped by historical context, positioning Black women’s experience of race and gender as “trans-historical constants” (Nash 2008:7) that affect all Black women similarly throughout history. Admittedly, this dissertation is limited by the nature of IPEDS data and will only be able to account for the intersection of race and gender. Fourth, scholarship on intersectionality lacks a defined intersectional methodology, highlighting the empirical difficulty of systematically examining a complex myriad of intersecting dimensions of identity simultaneously. The experiences of multiply marginalized people cannot be adequately understood using a purely additive approach (race + gender = racially gendered identity), posing a methodological conundrum for quantitative studies of intersectionality (Hancock 2007). Further, modeling can become cumbersome and unwieldy when including increasing numbers of

variables to account for the many relevant axes of identity beyond race and gender that shape people's experiences and social positionings.

Research applying intersectionality within higher education predominantly utilizes qualitative methods, using interviews and focus groups, storytelling, and content analysis. There is a need for more quantitative analyses of women of color in academia that employs intersectionality as a theoretical framework, in order to understand factors such as nationwide hiring and retention rates, tenure promotion patterns, and gaps in salary and grant funding. To address this gap, this dissertation will conduct quantitative analyses of the racial and gender diversity of post-secondary faculty, with emphasis on the representation of women of color, and evaluate the potential influences of state partisan control and higher education funding. Doing so will provide quantitative support for findings observed in previous qualitative intersectional literature. Both perspectives are necessary to cultivate a deeper, more holistic understanding of the gendered and racialized dynamics experienced by women faculty of color.

Other Theoretical Frameworks

Scholars in other disciplines have drawn on a range of theoretical lenses to examine how politics shapes both faculty diversity and higher education funding. In organizational studies, the concept of inequality regimes captures the meso-level practices, processes, meanings, and routines through which workplaces reproduce class, gender, and racial hierarchies (Acker 2006). One clear example is the “ideal worker” norm—implicitly a White man unburdened by caregiving—that privileges those able to work continuous, flexible, long hours. Faculty who shoulder primary caregiving responsibilities, most often women, clash with performance standards designed around an unencumbered workforce. Whereas interest convergence theory highlights macro-level political alignments that advance or stall equity, inequality regimes focus our attention on the local hiring networks, job classifications, and reward systems that can undercut even well-intentioned equity policies.

Taylor, Kunkle, and Watts (2022) bring two additional concepts to bear on state funding for higher education between 2008 and 2019: the balance wheel hypothesis and democratic backsliding. The balance wheel hypothesis posits that states adjust higher-education appropriations counter-cyclically—cutting in downturns and restoring when revenues recover—a pattern well supported in nonpartisan settings (Delaney and Doyle 2007, 2011; Weerts and

Ronca 2012). Democratic backsliding, by contrast, describes how partisan actors weaken institutional autonomy through legal and budgetary means. Taylor et al. show that states under unified Republican control began the post-Recession period at lower funding baselines compared to Democratic or divided states and enacted significantly deeper cuts to appropriations from 2014 to 2019. The balance wheel hypothesis uncovers how economic cycles drive resource availability in ways that interest convergence's emphasis on coalition benefits might miss, while democratic backsliding reframes funding cuts as deliberate tactics to weaken institutional autonomy rather than unintended by-products of identity-based bias. Together, they situate racial and gender equity struggles within broader patterns of partisan control and budgetary fluctuation, which neither interest convergence nor intersectionality fully capture.

Diversity in the U.S. Professoriate

Much of the literature on trends in post-secondary faculty diversity have been analyses of specific fields, particularly medical and clinical fields such as radiology, oncology, and family medicine (Ali et al. 2023; Kamran et al. 2022; Omoruyi et al. 2022; Xierali et al. 2017; Zhang et al. 2021). However, one study stands out as examining cumulative national faculty diversity trends over time and serves as a model for this dissertation. Kim et al. (2021) used data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to evaluate the diversity of newly hired faculty between 1999 and 2015. Analyses included a sample of 1,170 public and private not-for-profit institutions that offer baccalaureate and higher degrees in the United States which hired new faculty at least twice within the observed timeframe. The study centered eight key racial and gender groups: White women, White men, Black women, Black men, Asian women, Asian men, Hispanic women, and Hispanic men. The researchers plotted faculty hiring patterns by race and gender across three time periods (before, during, and after the Great Recession) and three Carnegie classification groups: "very high research activity" doctorate (R1), "high research activity" doctorate and master's (R2/MA), and baccalaureate (BA). Several controls were accounted for including institutional revenues, total tenure-track hires, and total tenure-line faculty.

Findings revealed an overall decline in tenure-track hires which disproportionately affected Black, Hispanic, and Asian American scholars. Between 1999 and 2007, hiring of Black, Hispanic, and Asian men and women in public institutions had been rising. The number

of newly hired Asian women faculty nearly doubled between these years (97.8% increase). Following Asian women, the largest hiring gains were observed by Asian men (46.2%), Hispanic men (32.1%), and Black women (29.5%). Hiring of White women remained fairly constant (4.0% increase) and hires of White men were declining (8.5% decrease). During the recession, all six minority groups saw the biggest proportional declines in hiring in R1 schools while White women and men saw the biggest gains. This trend was much more prominent in public institutions than private not-for-profit institutions. The steepest hiring losses in public institutions during the Great Recession were experienced by Black women (45.6% decline) and Black men (43.0% decline), notably larger than the losses observed for White men and women (31.5% and 31.9%, respectively). Between 2009 and 2015, only three groups were able to recover their positions in faculty hiring: Hispanic men (returned to pre-recession levels), Hispanic women (exceeded pre-recession levels by 13.5%), and Asian women (exceeded pre-recession levels by 5.1%).

R2/MA schools saw the largest numerical declines in the hiring of women and people of color after 2007 and experienced the slowest recoveries. After controlling for institutional revenue, total hires, and faculty size, the greatest proportional declines in diversity of newly hired faculty were in R1 institutions, followed by R2/MA institutions. To explain this, the authors concluded that institutions facing financial pressures may prioritize cost-cutting measures that negatively affect the recruitment of women and racial minority faculty. These findings highlight how budgeting constraints due to broader economic uncertainty can contribute to the underrepresentation of faculty of color, regardless of whether the university seeks to have a more diverse faculty. This study is limited in that the analysis accounts only for meso-level institutional factors including revenue and faculty size, leaving out data on macro-level contextual factors such as economic conditions or political influences which may also affect diversity in faculty hiring. As such, their conclusions on the cause of disproportionate declines in hiring are more speculative than inferential. Although Kim et al. provide a compelling look into the overarching trends of racial and gender diversity in faculty hiring across time, we still do not understand if or how larger social, political, and economic factors contribute to shaping faculty diversity. This dissertation will extend the work of Kim and Stout to provide a comprehensive analysis of faculty diversity over time, and the impact of macro-level political and economic factors on faculty diversity.

The importance of faculty diversity extends beyond numerical representation, as research demonstrates its significant impact on key student outcomes such as retention, graduation rates, and academic achievement. For example, Stout (2018) examined the relationship between faculty diversity and graduation rates of racially minoritized students using IPEDS data. Their analyses included data on 15,917 faculty and 234,224 students from 64 public post-secondary institutions across the United States. Findings revealed that higher racial/ethnic variance among faculty is associated with higher graduation rates for all nonwhite racial/ethnic groups. Student graduation rates were most strongly correlated with the percentage of same-race/ethnicity faculty at their institution. Numerous studies have found similar results, showing that increased faculty racial diversity and same-race professors are associated with improved graduation rates (Bowman and Denson 2022), transfer and drop-out rates (Cross and Carman 2022), and average GPA (Llamas, Nguyen, and Tran 2021). These findings underscore the importance of faculty diversity for student success and sense of belonging.

Factors Shaping Faculty Diversity

The condition of racial and gender diversity within faculty hiring, promotion, and tenure is complex and influenced by both overarching and context-specific factors. Broadly, patterns of inequity persist across academic institutions, where women and racial minorities face barriers to career advancement. However, this dynamic is further complicated by factors such as economic uncertainty, state partisan control, and the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which have distinct impacts on faculty diversity.

Racial and Gender Diversity in Faculty Hiring, Promotion, and Tenure

Race and gender strongly influence the experiences of faculty in hiring, promotion, and tenure processes. Among those institutions, administrators, faculty, and students who support the promotion of diversity in academia, this support often remains abstract and does not translate into tangibly improved outcomes for women and racial minorities in the academic job market. Carey et al. (2020) investigated this discrepancy through their experimental study of faculty and student preferences for diversity in hiring decisions at two large public universities in the Western U.S. Participants were presented with the profiles two hypothetical candidates with identical qualifications, differing only in the listed race and gender of the candidate, and asked

which candidate they prefer to be hired. Faculty at both universities included in the study were between 11 and 21 percentage points more likely to prefer a Hispanic, Black, or Native American candidate to a white one. Similarly, students and faculty at both universities were more likely to prefer women and non-binary faculty than men faculty.

These findings, however, only capture preferences for hypothetical candidates in an experimental setting and may not reflect the hiring preferences and decisions of academic search committees in practice. For example, Bagues et al. (2017) analyzed academic search committees consisting of over 8,000 total evaluators for associate and full professorship positions in Italy and Spain, finding that a larger presence of women on academic search committees did not increase the number of qualified female candidates moving forward. Further, male evaluators included in the study became less favorable toward female candidates when there was one or more women present on the committee. Disparities in the representation of women and racial minorities in academia persist, particularly at senior leadership levels and in research-intensive universities. This disparity is most pronounced at the full professor level, with men making up the overwhelming majority in these roles across the United States (O'Connor 2019). Similarly, racial disparities in the professoriate also persist despite representative gains over the last several decades. Underrepresented minority faculty, particularly Black and Hispanic scholars, occupy a smaller share of senior and leadership positions compared to their white counterparts (American Association of University Professors 2020; Fox Tree and Vaid 2022).

Women of color face compounded challenges in the academic job market that are distinct from those encountered by their white and male counterparts. One review of the literature concluded that implicit biases and stereotypes significantly disadvantage women of color in academic hiring, where they are often perceived as less competent and less “fit” for prestigious positions (Turner, González, and Wood 2008). One systematic literature review found that once hired, women of color experience disparities in citation rates, grant funding, and letters of recommendation compared to their colleagues, in addition to being less likely to be first or sole authors on their publications, less often invited to give presentations and addresses, and less likely to be given leadership positions (Fox Tree and Vaid 2022). Further, women of color report carrying disproportionate service and mentorship loads compared to their white and male colleagues. For example, in one time diary study, women faculty reported spending more time on campus service, student advising, and teaching-related activities while men faculty spent more

time on research (O'Meara et al. 2017). This discrepancy was particularly pronounced among women faculty of color. These barriers hinder the professional advancement of women of color and exacerbate their underrepresentation in academia, reinforcing a cycle of exclusion that limits diversity and equity within the academic workforce.

Contextual Factors Affecting Faculty Diversity

One of the primary critiques of the interest convergence and intersectionality tenets of CRT is that they can be seen as framing racial inequality as pervasive and constant rather than contextual and varying. This dissertation bridges two distinct literatures: Critical Race Theory–driven analyses of how institutional structures and cultures produce racial and gender disparities among underrepresented faculty, and political science research on state-level governance and budgetary processes that has largely examined funding patterns rather than faculty demographics. Specifically, I will assess whether contextual factors like state partisan control and appropriations to higher education uniquely impacted the diversity of university faculty. These factors influence institutional priorities and decision-making processes, which may exacerbate existing disparities in faculty hiring, promotion, and tenure among women and racial minorities. Beyond Kim et al., there are no other quantitative analyses of the impact of macro-level political and economic conditions on faculty diversity. This dissertation will fill this gap by including state partisan control and state appropriations to higher education in its analyses of faculty diversity between 2015 and 2023, a period containing both political and economic strain. This timeframe saw the COVID-19 pandemic along with growing Republican opposition to DEI programs, organizations, and curricula in public schooling, both of which may have negatively impacted the racial and gender diversity of post-secondary faculty.

To appreciate the intensely politicized climate surrounding campus diversity initiatives today, I begin with an overview of the surge in state-level anti-DEI legislation over the past two years. As of November 2024, twelve states have passed anti-DEI legislation and many more have proposed such legislation (Knox 2024; Landry-Thomas 2023; The Associated Press 2024). These bills ban the use of diversity statements in enrollment and hiring decisions, mandatory DEI trainings for students or faculty, funding and/or operation of diversity or identity-based programs and organizations, and even prohibiting discussion of race and racism in classrooms. Figure 1 illustrates the prevalence of anti-DEI legislation across all U.S. states since January 2023, using

data from The Chronicle’s anti-DEI legislation tracker (Gretzinger et al. 2024). More than half of U.S. states (56%) have proposed anti-DEI legislation and almost a quarter of states (24%) have signed legislation into law. Among states that have passed anti-DEI legislation, Florida stands out for its opposition to diversity and inclusion in public education. Although this dissertation examines public four-year universities nationwide, Florida serves as a particularly illustrative case, demonstrating the scope and speed of recent state-level legislative and executive efforts aimed at rolling back institutional support for faculty diversity. In 2021, the Florida State Board of Education passed its “Required Instruction Planning and Reporting” rule, which prohibited the teaching of Critical Race Theory, particularly the idea that racism is embedded within American society and its legal system (Florida Department of Education 2021). This ban was codified into state law through Florida’s “Stop WOKE” Act, also known as HB 7, which took effect in 2022 (Fla. 2022). This bill restricts the way that race, racism, and the country’s history of race relations can be taught in public institutions, prohibiting instructors from discussing topics including reparations, colorblindness, and systemic racism.

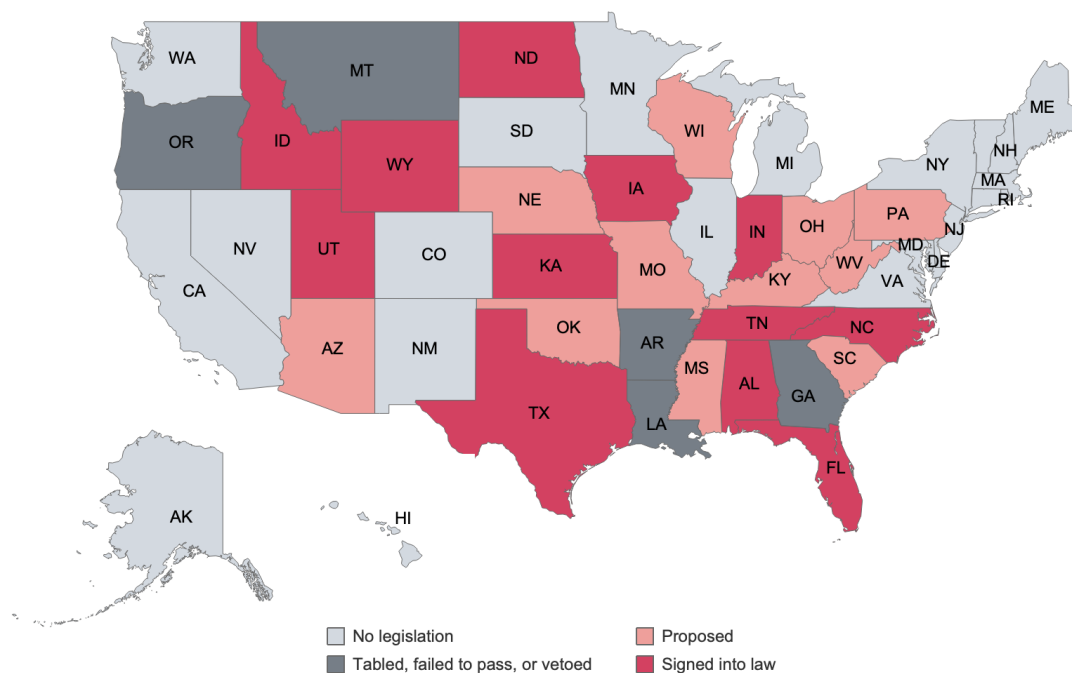


Figure 1: Prevalence of Anti-Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Legislation in the United States since January 2023

Florida passed its most comprehensive anti-DEI legislation with Senate Bill 266 (Fla. 2023). This bill requires that the Florida Board of Governors monitor and possibly eliminate college courses or curricula grounded in theories of privilege or systemic racism, as well as banning institutions from using their federal funding to “promote, support, or maintain any programs or campus activities that ... advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion or promote or engage in political or social activism” (2023). As a result of these bills, many state universities have closed or renamed their DEI centers, fired or relocated DEI staff and faculty, discontinued their race and gender studies programs, or ended support for identity-based affinity groups (Alfonseca 2024; Bryant and Appleby 2024; Diaz 2023).

Alternative framings of the prevalent anti-DEI and anti-“woke” movements can be observed in a memorandum that Florida’s Commissioner of Education sent to parents of children in K-12 schooling on July 14th, 2025. This memorandum cited Florida’s House Bill 241 (2021), or the “Parents’ Bill of Rights,” which formally affirms parents’ rights to direct their children’s education, upbringing, and healthcare. This law empowers parents to withdraw their child from “objectionable portions” of the school’s curriculum at their discretion. The dominant narrative within both the memorandum and HB241 was an emphasis on “not assign[ing] guilt or blame based on a student’s background or the way God created them” and, more specifically, to “protect students from being made to feel inferior or uncomfortable because of their race, sex or religion” (Anastasios Kamoutsas 2025). Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives are thus cast as efforts that shame members of majority groups rather than as policies designed to address historical and systemic inequities. This rhetorical framing reframes structural harms as matters of individual discomfort, redirecting attention away from institutional remedies and complicating efforts to pursue substantive, equity-focused reforms.

One of the contributions of this dissertation will be to examine how state partisan control and appropriations to higher education may shape racial and gender diversity in academia. To the best of my knowledge, there are no existing studies on the impacts of state partisan control or higher education funding on faculty diversity. However, several studies have addressed adjacent questions at the state level, examining the relationship between legislative racial/ethnic representation, state partisan control, and state appropriations to higher education. These studies found that the strength of the Democratic Party in the state executive and legislative branches is associated with higher levels of state appropriations to higher education, which can in turn

support the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty (Dar and Lee 2014; McLendon, Hearn, and Mokher 2009; Ortega 2020). This relationship, however, appears to be conditioned by factors such as political polarization and economic conditions, with the positive effect of Democratic control diminishing as these contextual variables become more pronounced. Only two studies have addressed the influence of state level political context at the institutional level using IPEDS data. Hicklin and Meier (2008) found that as the proportion of Black and Hispanic state legislators increases, so too does minority student enrollment in public universities within those states. Ortega (2020) found that Democratic victories in gubernatorial elections are associated with a \$560 per student increase in state appropriations to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and a \$300 per student increase for associate's-granting colleges, but did not observe significant differences in other institutions. Although these two studies provide important insights into the impact of legislative racial/ethnic representation and state partisan control on institutional revenues and student minority enrollment at the institutional level, neither study addresses faculty diversity. This dissertation will expand upon this line of scholarship to examine whether state partisan control and appropriations to higher education influence the racial and gender diversity of university faculty.

It is also important to acknowledge that faculty diversity can be impacted by emergent national or global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic that occurred within the study period. The economic downturn prompted by the pandemic led many institutions to implement hiring freezes and budget cuts (Flaherty 2024), which may have consequently stalled efforts to diversify faculty and reduced opportunities for women and racial minorities to enter or advance within academia. The pandemic caused not only an economic recession but also widespread closings of schools and a transition to virtual schooling. These conditions impacted women, especially women of color, disproportionately due to the gendered division of household labor and childcare responsibilities. Shouldering the majority of housework and childcare, including supervising children attending school virtually from home, leads to reduced research productivity for women faculty compared to their male colleagues (Malisch et al. 2020). For example, one recent study has identified a widening gender gap in journal article submissions in some fields due to the COVID pandemic (Amano-Patiño et al. 2020). In turn, women faculty were more likely to make use of tenure clock extensions which have been shown to decrease the long-term earning potential of women faculty, preclude women faculty from leadership positions requiring

tenure, and reduce their likelihood of achieving tenure compared to male faculty (Antecol, Bedard, and Stearns 2018; Malisch et al. 2020).

Contributions and Research Questions

Although scholarship on women of color in academia is fairly extensive, numerous theoretical and empirical gaps remain. The CRT principle of Interest Convergence has predominantly been applied to studies assessing the diversity of the student body and has paid little attention to the diversity of the professoriate. While the dynamics observed with respect to student diversity may be reflected in that of the faculty, it is also possible that minoritized faculty experience unique challenges compared to minoritized students. More research is necessary to better understand the interests and outcomes of women and racial minority faculty in hiring, promotion, and tenure processes. This dissertation will contribute relevant insights to help resolve debates about Bell's original formulation of Interest Convergence by considering the potential impact of the political and economic context on faculty diversity. Specifically, I will analyze how state partisan control and higher education funding serve as mediating factors that could either promote or inhibit the alignment of white interests with the advancement of racial and gender diversity in faculty. Doing so will also help clarify whether racial and gender oppression are variable across time and circumstance, or if they are immutable. Moreover, this dissertation interrogates the core assumptions of interest convergence and their limits in empirical research and explores whether alternative frameworks, such as the balance wheel hypothesis or democratic backsliding, more accurately capture the ebb and flow of partisan control, state funding, and faculty diversity.

Similarly, the Intersectionality principle has primarily been utilized to study the experiences of women faculty of color through qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups, but there is very little quantitative data on the representation of women faculty of color using the intersectional framework. Quantitative analyses of the representation of women and racial minority faculty would provide additional support for the trends observed in the existing qualitative studies. To address this gap, this dissertation will conduct quantitative analyses of the racial and gender diversity of post-secondary faculty. Rather than conducting case studies of one or two universities, this dissertation will provide nationwide coverage of all public four-year universities which report to IPEDS. Further, the interest convergence and intersectionality tenets

have not yet been used in tandem to investigate racial and gender diversity in the professoriate. Utilizing both theoretical frameworks would provide a more holistic understanding of the gendered and racialized dynamics experienced by women faculty of color. Additionally, I will examine whether alternative institutional or political frameworks, such as inequality regimes, provide a more appropriate lens for analyzing faculty racial and gender diversity over time.

There are few comprehensive assessments of the racial and gender diversity of the U.S. professoriate over time. Much of the research on faculty diversity focuses on race and gender separately, rather than considering how race and gender jointly shape faculty outcomes and experiences. Further, the bulk of literature on faculty racial diversity prioritizes Black-White disparities and pays little attention to the representation of other racial and ethnic groups such as Hispanic, Asian American, Indigenous, and multiracial faculty. Kim et al.'s (2021) study of the racial and gender diversity of U.S. faculty between 1999 and 2015 stands out within the faculty diversity literature as addressing each of these empirical gaps, and serves as a model for this dissertation's updated study of the racial and gender diversity of faculty between 2015 and 2023. This dissertation will also consider contextual factors such as state partisan control and higher education appropriations, as outlined in the conceptual diagram below.

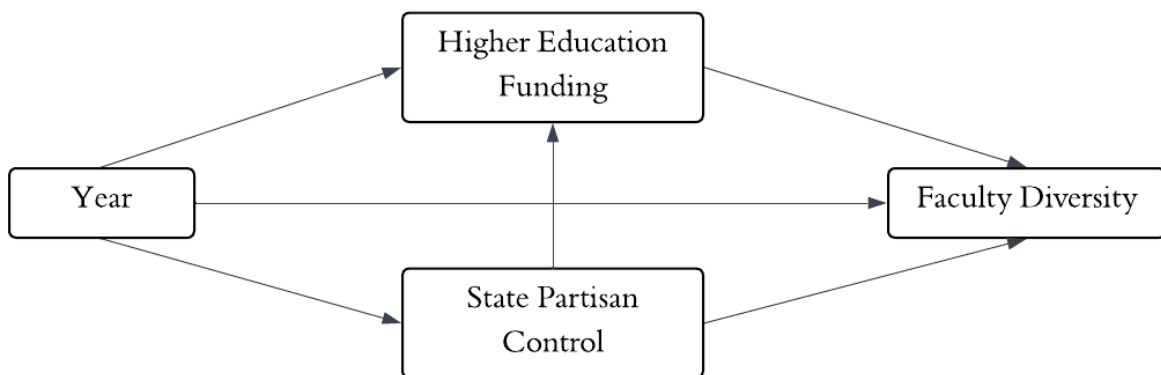


Figure 2: Conceptual Diagram of Dissertation Constructs

In this conception, faculty diversity is shaped by several factors both directly and indirectly. The shock of the pandemic and state partisan control may have direct effects on faculty diversity through mechanisms such as inequitable workloads for women and racial minority faculty and anti-DEI legislation, respectively. Both factors likely also have indirect

effects on faculty diversity through financial constraints, such as state appropriations to higher education. Hiring freezes due to the pandemic or Republican leadership appropriating less state funds to higher education may impact an institution's ability to recruit and retain women and racial minority faculty. This approach will not only extend Kim's work but will also help settle ongoing debates on the nature of racial and gender inclusion and exclusion. Bell's formulation of Interest Convergence treats the interests of majority and minority groups as monolithic and permanent, while others such as Driver (2011) view them as more fluid and variable across time and place. This dissertation will clarify the extent to which state-level political and economic factors influence the racial and gender diversity of post-secondary faculty.

This dissertation will apply concepts of interest convergence and intersectionality to examine changes in faculty diversity over time using IPEDS data from 2015 to 2023. I aim to answer the following research questions:

1. How did the racial and gender diversity of public post-secondary faculty in the United States change between 2015 and 2023?
2. To what extent are state-level political and fiscal contexts associated with faculty diversity over time?
3. Are the associations between partisan governance and faculty diversity over time indirect through funding, or direct via policy and institutional climate?

Based on the interest convergence tenet, the balance wheel hypothesis and democratic backsliding, and the findings in Kim et al. (2021), I expect to find a decline in the representation of Nonwhite men and women in faculty, particularly in the years following 2016 and 2020 (RQ1). The election of Republican President Donald Trump and the coronavirus pandemic created conditions which could constrain faculty diversity, such as hiring freezes, mass layoffs, and growing anti-DEI and anti- "woke" movements. Kim et al. speculated that hiring committees at institutions facing fiscal constraints may prioritize cost-cutting measures that negatively affect the recruitment of women and racial minority faculty, such as relying more heavily on networks when recruiting new hires. As such, I expect to find that Democratic gubernatorial and legislative leadership and higher education funding is positively associated with faculty diversity (RQ2). Several studies have examined the relationship between state partisanship and higher education funding, finding that Democratic partisan control is associated with increased state appropriations to higher education (Archibald and Feldman 2006; Ortega 2020; Taylor, Kunkle,

and Watts 2022). However, there are no existing studies that assess direct and indirect pathways through the factors that contribute to changes in faculty racial and gender diversity over time. Based on the existing literature, I anticipate finding that the relationship between year and faculty diversity is mediated by state partisan control and higher education appropriations (RQ3). Answering these research questions will contribute both theoretically and empirically to the literature on faculty diversity by assessing the extent to which political and economic contextual factors influence the racial and gender composition of all faculty at four-year post-secondary institutions in the United States.

CHAPTER 3

DATA AND METHODS

In this chapter, I present the data and methodology for this dissertation's analyses. First, I detail how and where the data used in this dissertation were obtained. Second, I describe the population and sample. Third, I outline the independent, dependent, mediating, and control measures used in my analyses. Finally, I outline the analytic strategy of this dissertation, from univariate to multivariate analyses.

Data Sources

This dissertation utilizes data from the Integrated Post-Secondary Data System (IPEDS) between the 2015-16 and 2023-24 academic years to analyze the racial and gender diversity of U.S. faculty over time. The IPEDS is a system of interrelated survey components created by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and collected annually from all colleges, universities, and technical and vocational institutions that participate in the federal student financial aid programs. The IPEDS gathers a wide variety of data under numerous domains including institutional characteristics, enrollment and student demographics, finance and human resources, as well as outcome measures such as completion and graduation rates. These data are publicly available online and were extracted and downloaded through the IPEDS Data Center. I downloaded a total of ten (10) data files: one (1) file containing data from the Institutional Characteristics component and nine (9) files containing yearly data waves for the racial and gender composition of faculty across all four-year or above public institutions in the U.S. between 2015 and 2023. Faculty data were sourced from the Human Resources component of the IPEDS and encompasses the total number of full-time instructional staff by academic rank, tenure status, race/ethnicity, and gender. These data files were cleaned and merged using Stata SE 18.

Supplemental data on yearly state appropriations to higher education are sourced from the State Higher Education Finance (SHEF) report (2024), produced annually by the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO). The full dataset is publicly available on the SHEF website, containing data on enrollment, state and federal funding, and tuition revenues for

each state between 1980 and 2023. The data file was prepared for analysis by excluding observations between 1980 and 2014 and dropping all but the following variables: year, state, and education appropriations (both including and excluding federal stimulus) per FTE enrollment. State partisan control data are obtained from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) which has tracked state legislative and gubernatorial partisan composition since 2009. These data are publicly available on the NCSL website (2024) with annual data waves for years 2009 through 2021 and between two to four waves per year between 2022 and 2024. To maintain consistency between the two collection formats, I use the February data wave for 2022 and 2023. Each data wave is presented on its own PDF file, totaling nine (9) files for years 2015 through 2023. These PDF files were converted to Excel spreadsheets using Adobe Acrobat. Then, I added a year variable and merged each year's data into one dataset using Stata. Finally, all but the following variables were dropped: year, state, house partisan control, senate partisan control, and governor party.

Altogether, I obtained twenty (20) data files across three sources. Data files from each source were merged into three data files – IPEDS, NCSL, and SHEF – and cleaned individually before being merged into one master dataset using Stata. More information on this dissertation's measures and sample can be found below.

Population and Sample

The IPEDS provides data on all postsecondary institutions in the United States including public, private not-for-profit, and private for-profit institutions from technical and community colleges to advanced degree-granting institutions. For the purposes of this dissertation, I restrict the analytic sample to all public four-year or above degree-granting institutions in the U.S., a total of 801 institutions. Private institutions do not receive state funding for higher education and, thus, are outside the scope of this study. Excluding private institutions ensures a more precise examination of how state-level policies and funding decisions impact faculty diversity without the confounding effects of privately controlled financial and administrative policies. Moreover, the conditions for faculty hiring, retention, and promotion differ significantly between two-year and four-year institutions (American Association of University Professors 2024; American Historical Association 2012; Opp 1994). Restricting the sample to four-year or above institutions ensures a more consistent analysis of faculty diversity within institutions that share comparable

organizational structures and promotion trajectories. Although the data captures the entire population of public post-secondary institutions in the U.S., there is some slight missingness in the faculty reporting. Pennsylvania State University, for example, did not report their faculty composition data between 2019 and 2021 while restructuring its institutional reporting procedures. Fourteen institutions were excluded from the analyses due to missing at least seven out of nine years of faculty data, including several campuses of the University of Connecticut, University of Wisconsin's "Flex" campus, and the Air Force Institute of Technology Graduate School of Engineering & Management. After restricting the sample to public four-year institutions and dropping those that did not report their faculty composition, the sample includes between 780 to 784 institutions per year between 2015 and 2023.

Measures

This dissertation will examine changes in the racial and gender diversity of postsecondary faculty over time and assess whether faculty diversity is influenced by contextual factors including state partisan control and appropriations to higher education. Table 1 outlines the variables used in this dissertation's analyses, their sources, and possible values.

Independent Variable

Year: This study includes years 2015 through 2023 for all three data sources. Of particular interest are the years surrounding midterm and general elections as well as the years during and after the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. Due to faculty hiring often taking place up to a year in advance, it is most likely that effects of the pandemic will be observed in 2021 and subsequent years. It is possible, however, for effects to be observed in 2020 due to last minute pandemic-related layoffs, firings, hirings, etc.

Dependent Variable

Faculty diversity: Within the context of this dissertation, analyses of diversity are focused on race, gender, and the intersection of the two. Growing faculty diversity would be indicated by an increasing representation of racial minorities, women, and particularly women of color within the professoriate.

Table 1: Dissertation Concepts and Measures

<i>Concept</i>	<i>Measure</i>	<i>Variable Name</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Possible Values</i>
Independent Variable				
Time	Year	<i>year</i>	IPEDS, NCSL, SHEF	2015-2023
Dependent Variables				
Faculty Diversity	Count of faculty, by race/gender group per institution	Total Asian men and women	<i>m_asian</i> <i>w_asian</i>	IPEDS 0 to ~4,000
		Total Black men and women	<i>m_black</i> <i>w_black</i>	
		Total Hispanic men and women	<i>m_hisp</i> <i>w_hisp</i>	
		Total White men and women	<i>m_white</i> <i>w_white</i>	
		Total Other Race men and women	<i>m_other</i> <i>w_other</i>	
	Proportion of faculty, by racial/gender group per institution	Proportion of Asian men and women	<i>p_asian_m</i> <i>p_asian_w</i>	Calculated from IPEDS 0.0 to 1.0
		Proportion of Black men and women	<i>p_black_m</i> <i>p_black_w</i>	
		Proportion of Hispanic men and women	<i>p_hisp_m</i> <i>p_hisp_w</i>	
		Proportion of White men and women	<i>p_white_m</i> <i>p_white_w</i>	
		Proportion of Other Race men and women	<i>p_other_m</i> <i>p_other_w</i>	

	Diversity index		<i>i_diversity</i>	Calculated from IPEDS	0.0 to 1.0
<i>Concept</i>	<i>Measure</i>		<i>Variable Name</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Possible Values</i>
Mediating Variables					
Higher Education Appropriations	Thousands of dollars per FTE enrollment, by state	State and local only	<i>educappFTE</i>	Calculated from SHEF	~ \$3,000 to \$35,000
State Partisan Control	Governor party		<i>dem_gov</i>	NCSL	Democrat (1) Republican or Independent (0)
	Democratic representation	Proportion of Democrats in state legislature	<i>dem_legisprop</i>	Calculated from NCSL	0.0 to 1.0
Control Variables					
Institution Size	Institution size		<i>size_midsize</i>	IPEDS	Midsize (1) Small and large (0)
			<i>size_large</i>		Large (1) Midsize and small (0)
Institution Research Focus	Carnegie 2015 classification		<i>c_r1</i>	IPEDS	R1 University (1) All Others (0)
			<i>c_r2</i>		R2 University (1) All Others (0)
HBCU Status	HBCU designation		<i>hbcu</i>	IPEDS	Yes (1) No (0)

To examine racial and gender diversity in univariate and bivariate analyses, I calculate the proportion of each race and gender group (ten total – Asian men, Asian women, Black men, Black women, Hispanic men, Hispanic women, White men, White women, other race men, and other race women) out of the total faculty and assess changes in representation of each group over time. To examine racial and gender diversity in multivariate analyses, I employ Peter Blau's Index of Heterogeneity (1977). Blau's index is a well-regarded metric in sociological research for measuring categorical diversity, such as race, gender, or sexuality. It is particularly suited to studies focusing on discrete group differences, whereas continuous variables like income or education are better analyzed using measures such as the Gini coefficient. Sociologists have applied Blau's index in diverse contexts, including studies on neighborhood interracial conflict, hiring practices in private industries, and diversity in European soccer leagues (Feng et al. 2020; Rao Sahib 2015; Sampson 1984). Alternatively, scholars of ecological diversity often use the Shannon index of diversity (1948), which is less affected by very small groups and thus may generate different results.

The diversity index used in this dissertation is calculated using the following equation:

$$i_diversity = 1 - (p_asian_m2 + p_asian_w2 + p_black_m2 + p_black_w2 + p_hisp_m2 + p_hisp_w2 + p_white_m2 + p_white_w2 + p_other_m2 + p_other_w2)$$

The above equation produces an index with values ranging between 0 and 1, with a score of 0 representing no diversity and a score of 1 representing maximum diversity. Higher scores would indicate more heterogeneity in the racial and gender composition of post-secondary faculty, while lower scores would indicate a faculty that is more homogeneous in terms of race and gender. While this index offers a standardized way to compare racial and gender diversity across institutions, its abstract nature makes interpretation challenging. A given change in the index does not clearly convey how faculty composition shifted. For instance, two universities may record similar increases in diversity index values yet experience very different underlying changes. Table 2 illustrates this with the University of the District of Columbia (.148 increase) and Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences (.152 increase). Despite comparable index growth, the former saw modest gains concentrated among Black and White men alongside declines in Black and White women, whereas the latter quadrupled its faculty size and expanded representation across all groups, primarily among White men and women.

Table 2: Diversity Index and Faculty Composition Change Examples

University of the District of Colombia											
	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Other Race</i>	<i>Other Race</i>	<i>Total</i>
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>l</i>
2015	4	5	25	102	0	0	15	35	2	7	195
2023	10	8	46	66	2	3	34	32	11	11	223
Change	6	3	21	-36	2	3	19	-3	9	4	28
Percent of Growth	8.96%	4.48%	31.34%		2.99%	4.48%	28.36%		13.43%	5.97%	
Oklahoma State University Center for Health Science											
	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Other Race</i>	<i>Other Race</i>	<i>Total</i>
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>l</i>
2015	0	2	0	1	0	0	31	15	3	1	53
2023	11	7	2	4	4	4	82	67	9	17	207
Change	11	5	2	3	4	4	51	52	6	16	154
Percent of Growth	7.14%	3.25%	1.30%	1.95%	2.60%	2.60%	33.12%	33.77%	3.90%	10.39%	

Mediating Variables

Higher education appropriations: From the SHEF report data, I calculate the total state and local appropriations to higher education (in thousands of dollars) per FTE enrollment for all U.S. states and Washington, D.C. This amount includes state and local funding available for public higher education operating expenses excluding research, hospitals, and medical education. Federal stimulus funding is excluded as well to better isolate the state-level effects of higher education appropriations on faculty diversity. Calculating appropriations per FTE enrollment provides a standardized measure to account for differences in postsecondary enrollment across states.

State partisan control: NCSL data include the party composition of state legislatures as well as the governor's party for all U.S. states and Washington, D.C. Using these data, I calculate the proportion of Democratic legislators relative to the total number of seats in each state's legislature. This measure will aid in determining if there is a critical mass for Democrat representation to significantly affect faculty diversity. Multivariate analyses use this variable (*dem_legisprop*) as well as a dichotomous variable capturing whether a state's governor is a Democrat (*dem_gov*), coded 1 for Democrat and 0 for Republican and Independent.

For descriptive analyses, gubernatorial control is also measured as partisan stability or variability across the time period, as some states remained under one party the entire period while others changed from Democratic to Republican leadership or vice versa. States are categorized as either having a consistently Democratic governor across the entire period, a consistently Republican governor, shifted from a Republican to Democratic governor, or shifted from Democratic to Republican leadership. To better visualize state partisan control at the legislative level, I also ordered values of the proportion of Democrats in a state's legislature into the following categories: Strong majority Democrat (greater than 75% of total state legislature), majority Democrat (between 50% and 75%), majority Republican (between 25% and 50%), and strong majority Republican (less than 25%).

Control Variables

Institution size: The IPEDS measures institution size categorically using the following brackets: under 1,000 students, 1,000 - 4,999 students, 5,000 - 9,999 students, 10,000 - 19,999 students, and 20,000 students and above. I collapsed these into three categories: small institutions

(less than 5,000 students), midsize institutions (5,000 – 19,999 students), and large institutions (20,000 or more students). Controlling for institution size helps account for variations in hiring demands and resource availability between smaller and larger institutions. Multivariate analyses will use dummy variables for small (`size_small`) and large (`size_large`) institutions, with small institutions as the comparison group.

Carnegie classification: Based on the 2015 Basic Carnegie Classification, I grouped institutions into research-extensive doctorate (R1), research-intensive doctorate (R2), and all other institutions. This measure will account for variations in research emphasis across institutions, which may shape faculty hiring resources and priorities. Multivariate analyses will use dummy variables for R1 (`c_r1`) and R2 institutions (`c_r2`), with all other institutions as the comparison group.

HBCU status: Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) employ significantly larger amounts of Black faculty compared to Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Samayoa and Gasman 2019). Controlling for HBCU status helps account for historical patterns in faculty hiring across institution types. The IPEDS provides a dichotomous variable coded 1 for HBCUs and 0 for all other institutions.

Analytic Strategy

This dissertation employs univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses to assess changes in faculty diversity over time and whether state-level contextual factors, such as partisan control and higher education appropriations, impact faculty diversity in US public institutions. Table 3 summarizes the analyses, visualizations, and research questions addressed for each step of this dissertation's analysis. First, I present descriptive statistics for the sample, including summary statistics and a pairwise correlation matrix for all model variables. Next, I track changes in faculty composition and the faculty diversity index over time. In this step, I chart overall faculty growth across US institutions and changes in the racial and gender diversity of faculty between 2015 and 2023. In these presentations of trends in public higher education faculty diversity, I both describe changes overall across the 784 institutions in my sample as well as changes in the average institutional proportional representation of each race and gender group.

In my multivariate analyses, I examine the impact of state partisan control, higher education appropriations, and time on faculty racial and gender diversity while controlling for

institution size, Carnegie classification, and HBCU status. Due to the nested nature of the data, being clustered at both the state and institution level, I first employ multi-level mixed-effects estimation. Modeling at this stage occurs in four steps: first, a base model regressing year on diversity index with controls (1), then incorporating (2) gubernatorial partisanship, (3) legislative partisan composition, and (4) higher education funding. Next, I run mixed-effects models for each year separately, including all covariates and controls, to understand whether these state-level factors are more or less influential at different times. Finally, I use structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the numerous pathways linking year, governor party, legislative partisan composition, higher education appropriations, and faculty diversity. This model includes mediation pathways to assess whether the growth in faculty diversity occurs through partisan governance and/or higher education funding, as well as pathways to examine the relationship between state partisanship and appropriations to higher education.

Table 3: Analytic Strategy

<i>Step</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Analyses Conducted</i>	<i>Reported or Visualized In</i>
1	Univariate	Descriptive statistics for each quantitative variable	Table 4: Summary Statistics
2	Bivariate	Correlation between all model variables	Table 5: Pairwise Correlation Matrix
3	Bivariate	Total faculty growth between 2015 and 2023, overall and by state	Figure 3: Percent Change in Total Faculty by State
4	Bivariate	Diversity index of US professoriate between 2015 and 2023, overall and by institution	Figure 4: Faculty Diversity Index Over Time Figure 5: Change in Faculty Diversity Index by State Figure 6: Diversity Index Values by HBCU Designation
5	Bivariate	Representation of race and gender groups within institutions, between 2015 and 2023	Figure 7: Proportion of White and Nonwhite Men and Women in Faculty Figure 8: Nonwhite Race and Gender Groups in Faculty
6	Multivariate	State partisan control and faculty diversity, between 2015 and 2023	Figure 9: State Gubernatorial Partisan Control and Variability Figure 10: Gubernatorial Swing Count by Year Figure 11: Proportion of Democrats in State Legislatures by Governor Party Figure 12: Average Diversity Index Values by Partisan Control Figure 13: Proportion of White and Nonwhite Men and Women in Faculty by Partisan Control

<i>Step</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Analyses Conducted</i>	<i>Reported or Visualized In</i>
7	Multivariate	State appropriations to higher education and faculty diversity, between 2015 and 2023	<p>Figure 14: Average and Median State Appropriations to Higher Education</p> <p>Figure 15: Percent Change in Higher Education Funding by State</p> <p>Figure 16: State Appropriations to Higher Education by Partisan Control</p> <p>Figure 17: Average Diversity Index Value by Higher Education Appropriations</p> <p>Figure 18: Proportion of White and Nonwhite Men and Women Faculty by Higher Education Appropriations</p>
8	Multivariate	Mixed-effects regression modeling for year on diversity, with covariates and controls	<p>Table 6: Mixed-Effects Maximum Likelihood Regression Model Results</p> <p>Table 7: Mixed-Effects Maximum Likelihood Regression Model Results, by Year</p> <p>Table 8: Mixed-Effects Regression Results with Year and Higher Education Funding Interaction</p> <p>Figure 19: Margins for Higher Education Funding and Diversity Index, by Year</p>
9	Multivariate	Structural equation modeling (SEM) for year on diversity, with covariates and controls	<p>Figure 20: Structural Equation Model Standardized Results</p> <p>Table 9: Direct and Indirect Effects of Year on Diversity</p>

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In this chapter, I present the results of my analyses. First, I review descriptive statistics for the sample, including summary statistics and a pairwise correlation matrix for all model variables. Next, I summarize changes in faculty composition and the faculty diversity index over time. In this section, I discuss overall faculty growth across US institutions and chart changes in the racial and gender diversity of faculty between 2015 and 2023. In these presentations of trends in public higher education faculty diversity, I both describe changes overall across the 7,010 institutions in my sample as well as changes in the average institutional proportional representation of each race and gender group.

In the analyses that seek to explain time-related and institutional variations in diversity, I explore the association of state-level partisan control and higher education funding on faculty diversity over time. In this section, I analyze changes in state partisan control at the gubernatorial and legislative levels across the period, as well as changes in the average appropriations to higher education per full-time student. I then examine the association of these state-level factors on the average diversity index value and the average proportion of Nonwhite men and women in the professoriate over time. Finally, I present the results from several mixed-effects maximum likelihood regressions on diversity index, both overall and by year.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 4 displays summary statistics for the analytic sample. The average value for the faculty diversity index across all institutions and years in the sample is 0.663, indicating that public post-secondary institutions in the U.S. exhibit generally moderate-to-high racial and gender diversity in their faculty. The race and gender groups with the largest representation in the professoriate are White men (an institutional average of 38.2% of faculty) and White women (37.4% per institution), followed by Asian men (5.3% per institution), Black women (4.0%), Asian women (3.7%), Black men (3.4%), Hispanic women (2.6%), Hispanic men (2.5%), other race women (1.5%), and, lastly, other race men (1.3%).

Table 4: Summary Statistics

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Obs</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Std Dev</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
<i>Total faculty</i>	7,007					
<i>Institutional proportion of...</i>						
<i>Asian men</i>	7,007	.053	.045	.042	0	.407
<i>Asian women</i>	7,007	.037	.033	.029	0	.190
<i>Black men</i>	7,007	.034	.019	.060	0	.474
<i>Black women</i>	7,007	.040	.020	.071	0	.523
<i>Hispanic men</i>	7,007	.025	.180	.033	0	.471
<i>Hispanic women</i>	7,007	.026	.017	.035	0	.420
<i>White men</i>	7,007	.382	.392	.109	0	.803
<i>White women</i>	7,007	.374	.384	.117	0	1
<i>Other race men</i>	7,007	.013	.006	.036	0	.615
<i>Other race women</i>	7,007	.015	.006	.039	0	.538
<i>Diversity Index</i>	7,007	.663	.664	.083	0	.856
<i>Proportion of Democrats in state legislature</i>	7,007	.445	.411	.173	0	.934
<i>Democratic governor</i>	7,007	.440	0	.496	0	1
<i>Appropriations per FTE (in thousands)</i>	7,007	8.188	7.451	3.091	2.894	37.721
<i>HBCU</i>	7,007	.051	0	.220	0	1
<i>Institution size...</i>						
<i>Small (<5K students)</i>	7,007	.372	0	.484	0	1
<i>Midsized (5K-20K)</i>	7,007	.436	0	.496	0	1
<i>Large (>20K)</i>	7,007	.192	0	.394	0	1
<i>Carnegie classification...</i>						
<i>R1</i>	7,007	.104	0	.305	0	1
<i>R2</i>	7,007	.096	0	.295	0	1
<i>All others</i>	7,007	.792	1	.406	0	1

Institution size among American public postsecondary institutions varies considerably. The majority are midsize, enrolling between 5,000 and 20,000 students (43.6%), followed by small institutions with fewer than 5,000 students (37.2%) and large institutions with over 20,000 students (19.2%). Approximately 20% are classified as having high or very high research activity, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) comprise 5.1% of all public institutions nationwide. State appropriations to higher education also vary widely, with some states allocating less than \$3,000 per full-time equivalent (FTE) student and others exceeding \$37,000. These disparities reflect deep structural inequities in public higher education funding across states.

Similarly, institutions differ markedly in their diversity index values, with some exhibiting high levels of racial and gender diversity and others showing low to moderate representation. By 2023, the institutions with the highest diversity index values included the University of Hawaii–West Oahu (.853), West Los Angeles College (.852), and two campuses of California State University, Dominguez Hills (.848) and Los Angeles (.846). In contrast, institutions with the lowest diversity index values included the Marine Maritime Academy (.401), Carolinas College of Health Sciences (.402), and the University of New Hampshire College of Professional Studies Online (.403), which began the study period with only three White women faculty and a diversity index of .000. Closer examination of institutions at the extremes of representation reveals distinct patterns. Those with an overwhelming majority of White men (over 75%) include the Marine Maritime Academy and the United States Merchant Marine Academy, while institutions with no White men on faculty include Haskell Indian Nations University and Teachers College of San Joaquin. The highest representation of Black women occurred in 2015 at the University of the District of Columbia, where they comprised 52.3% of the faculty. Other institutions with high representation of Black women include Coppin State University, Mississippi Valley State University, and Southern University and A&M College, all HBCUs. Institutions with the greatest representation of other race men and women include Haskell Indian Nations University and the Institute of American Indian and Alaska Native Culture and Arts Development.

Table 5: Pairwise Correlation Matrix

<i>Variable</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
(1) <i>Faculty diversity</i>	1.000											
(2) Year	0.128	1.000										
(3) Governor party	0.078	0.091	1.000									
(4) Proportion of Dems in state legislature	0.250	0.075	0.569	1.000								
(5) <i>Higher education appropriations</i>	0.268	0.369	0.204	0.392	1.000							
(6) <i>HBCU</i>	0.282	0.003	-0.047	-0.080	-0.022	1.000						
(7) <i>Small institution</i>	-0.290	0.026	-0.045	-0.111	-0.028	0.104	1.000					
(8) <i>Midsize institution</i>	0.081	-0.016	0.066	0.084	0.025	-0.011	-0.068	1.000				
(9) <i>Large institution</i>	0.253	-0.012	-0.028	0.031	0.002	-0.113	-0.375	-0.430	1.000			
(10) <i>R1 university</i>	0.156	0.000	0.026	0.032	0.008	-0.079	-0.262	-0.263	0.651	1.000		
(11) <i>R2 university</i>	0.057	0.001	-0.067	-0.030	-0.013	-0.016	-0.242	0.134	0.128	-0.112	1.000	
(12) <i>All other universities</i>	-0.163	-0.003	0.036	0.004	0.003	0.075	0.363	0.109	-0.582	-0.666	-0.639	1.000

Note: Bolded values are significant at the 0.05 level. Shaded values correspond to the dependent variable, faculty diversity index

Table 5 reports a pairwise correlation matrix between all model variables, including indications of statistical significance ($p < .05$). The majority of correlations between all covariates are significant, and the coefficients are generally small to moderate. With respect to the faculty diversity index, all covariate correlations are significant. Faculty racial and gender diversity was most strongly correlated with small institution size (-0.291 , $p < .001$), HBCU designation (0.280 , $p < .001$), and state appropriations to higher education per FTE enrollment (0.268 , $p < .001$).

Faculty Diversity Over Time

Overall, the professoriate at public, four-year institutions in the United States grew by 6.11% between 2015 and 2023, up to a total of 365,620 faculty members in 2023. Figure 3 illustrates the percent change in total faculty at these institutions in each state during this timeframe.

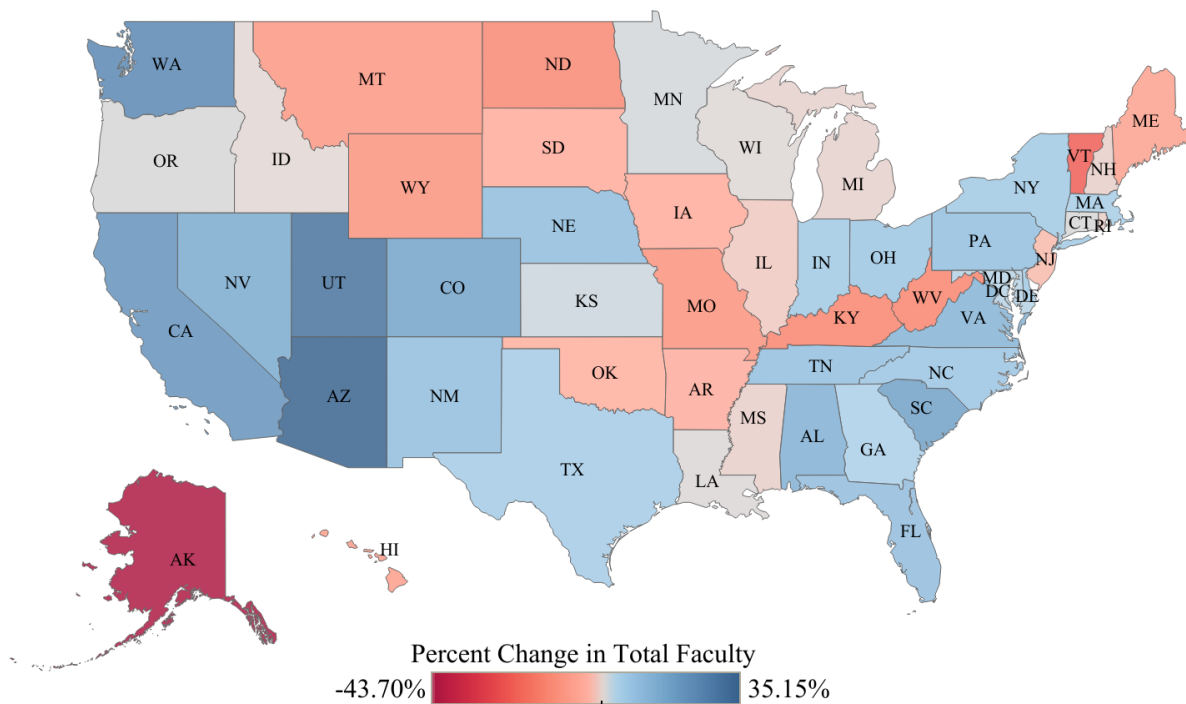


Figure 3: Percent Change in Total Faculty by State (2015-2023)

Regionally, faculty growth between 2015 and 2023 was concentrated in the South, the West, and parts of the Northeast, while Alaska, the Midwest, and other areas of the Northeast

experienced notable declines. Alaska saw the steepest reduction, losing 44% of its faculty, followed by Vermont with a 27% decrease. In contrast, the largest gains occurred in Arizona (35%) and Utah (30%), with Washington (24%) and California (21%) also showing substantial growth. Several states exhibited minimal change in faculty size, including Idaho (-0.05%), Wisconsin (+0.29%), and Louisiana (+0.45%). Faculty growth also varied by gubernatorial partisanship. Institutions in states led by Democratic governors experienced an average increase of 6.74%, compared to 3.22% in Republican-led states and 1.10% in states that transitioned from Republican to Democratic leadership. Conversely, states that shifted from Democratic to Republican governance saw an average faculty decline of 8.30% over the same period.

Figure 4 charts the diversity index values across time, both for the total U.S. professoriate and the average institutional diversity index value, revealing remarkably linear and slightly positive slopes.

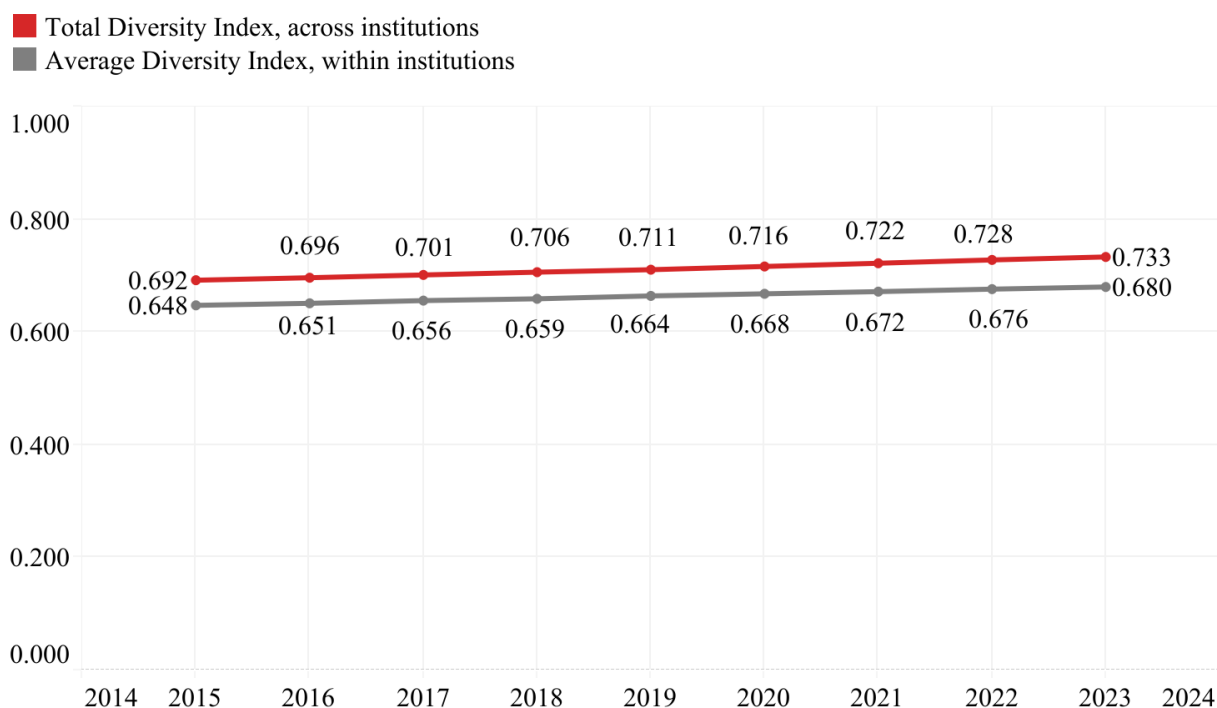


Figure 4: Faculty Diversity Index Values, Total and Average by Institution (2015-2023)

The U.S. public post-secondary professoriate cumulatively is slightly more diverse than faculty within institutions, with both showing subtle yet stable increases across time. The average faculty racial and gender diversity within institutions rose slightly between 2015 and

2023, from an average index value of .648 to .680. Diversity in the total professoriate slightly increased in the same period, from .692 to .733. The total professoriate has an index value that is higher than the institutional average, reflecting the great variation in faculty composition across schools seen in Table 1.

To contextualize national trends in faculty diversity, it is important to examine how average diversity index values shifted across individual states over the study period. Figure 5 maps the average overall change in the institutional faculty diversity index value by state between 2015 and 2023.

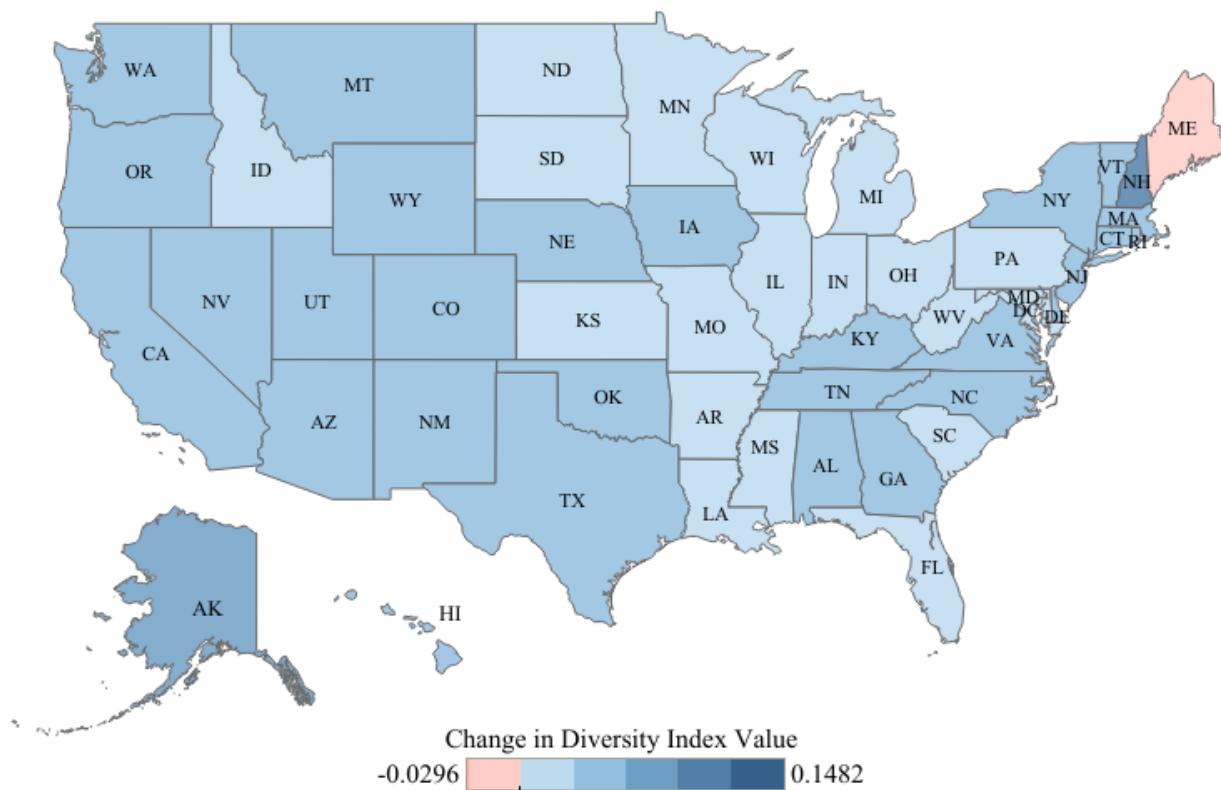


Figure 5: Change in Faculty Diversity Index by State (2015-2023)

The map shows broadly consistent increases in faculty racial and gender diversity across U.S. states between 2015 and 2023. Most states recorded average diversity index gains of roughly .030–.050. The District of Columbia exhibited the largest increase (.148), followed by New Hampshire (.113). Maine was the only state to decline, with its average institutional diversity index falling by .005. These patterns broadly mirror regional trends in overall faculty

growth: the largest diversity gains occurred in the Southeast, the West, and parts of the Northeast, while the Midwest and other Northeastern states experienced more modest increases.

Variation in faculty diversity can be better understood when looking at the total and average diversity index values by HBCU designation, as charted in Figure 6.

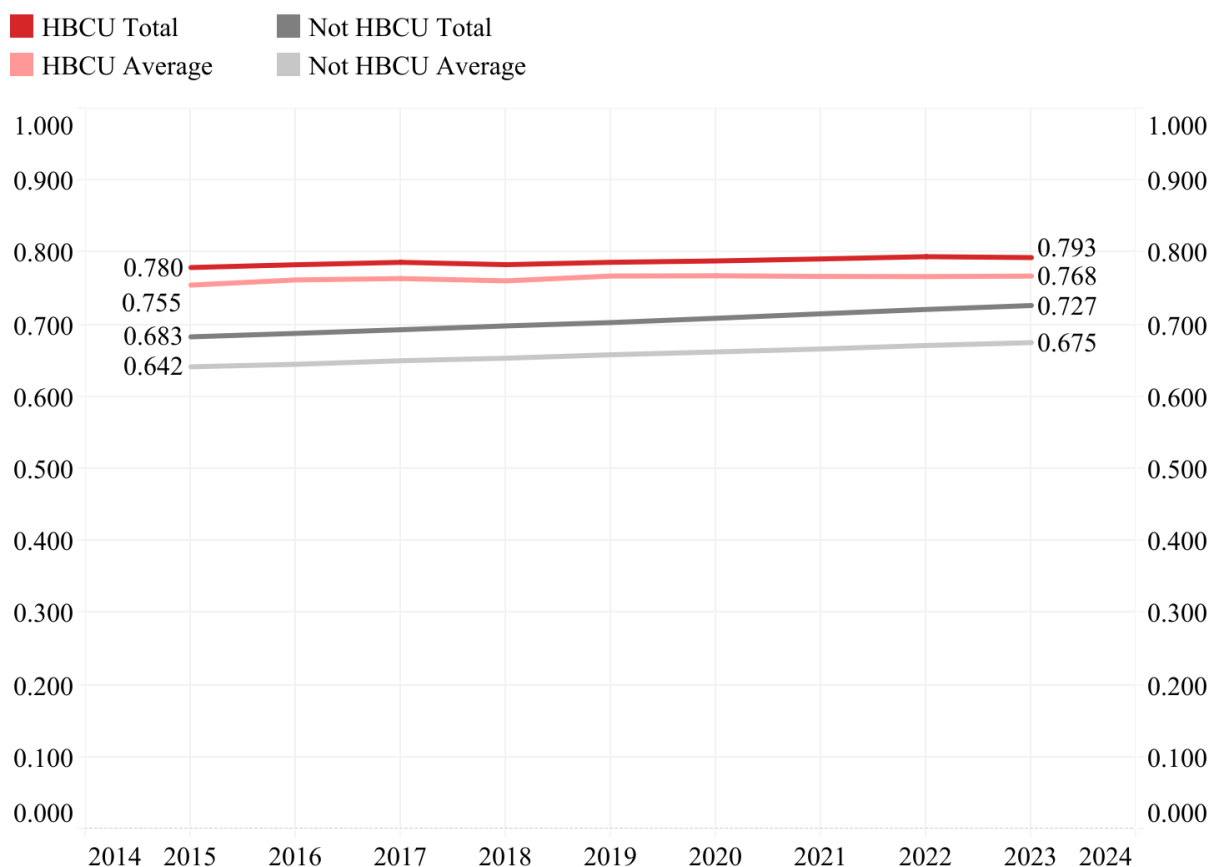


Figure 6: Diversity Index Values by HBCU Designation (2015-2023)

HBCUs had notably higher total and average diversity index values compared to non-HBCU institutions across the entire period. The diversity index value for HBCUs increased from 0.780 in 2015 to 0.793 in 2023, while the average within HBCU institutions increased from 0.755 to 0.768. Although HBCUs demonstrated higher racial and gender diversity in their faculty, non-HBCUs saw greater gains in diversity between 2015 and 2023. The total diversity

index value for non-HBCU institutions increased from 0.683 to 0.727, and the average diversity within institutions increased from 0.642 to 0.675.

To better capture changes in faculty composition not as visible in the diversity index, I next present trends for the percentage of White and Nonwhite faculty within institutions. Figure 7 depicts changes in the average proportion of White and Nonwhite men and women within institutions by year between 2015 and 2023.

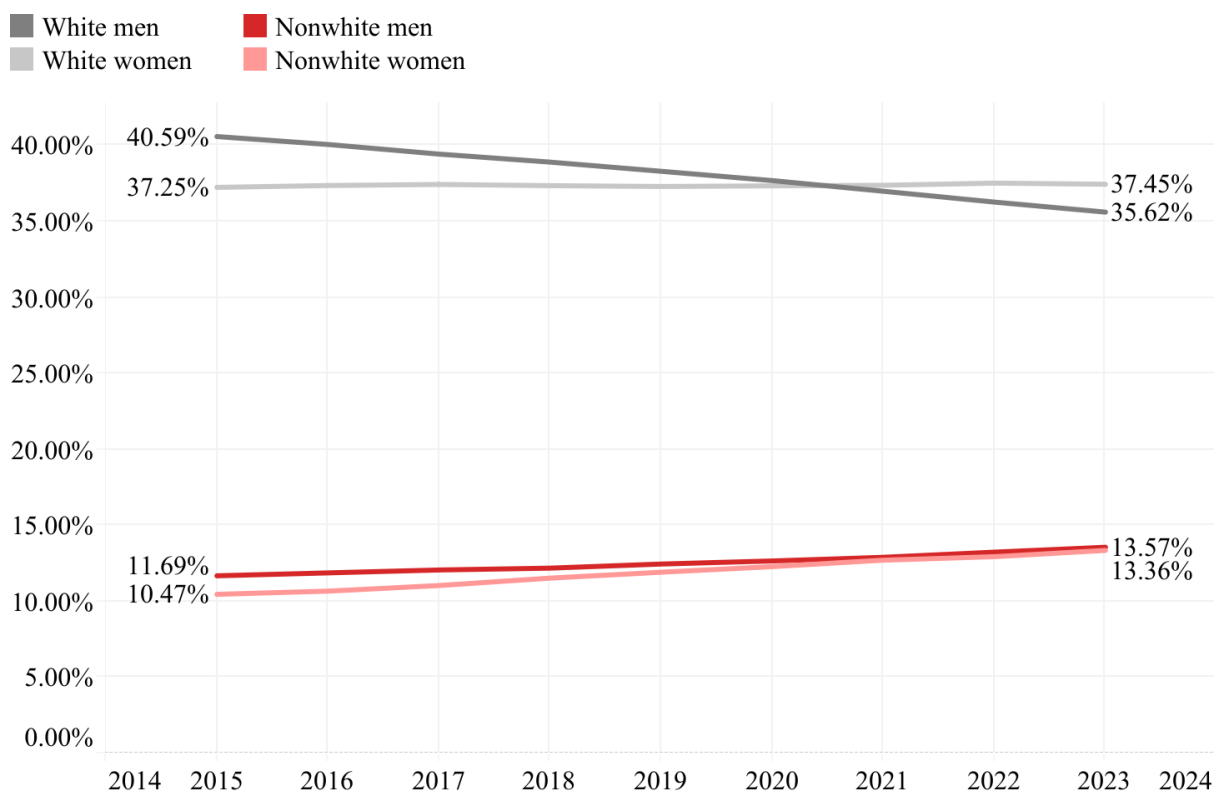


Figure 7: Proportion of White and Nonwhite Men and Women in Faculty (2015-2023)

Overall, the representation of Nonwhite men and women slowly increased across time, and the gap between Nonwhite men and women narrowed to near parity by 2023. On average, the proportion of Nonwhite men faculty within institutions rose between 2015 and 2023 from 11.69% to 13.57%, while the proportion of Nonwhite women grew in the same period, from

10.47% to 13.36%. The representation of White men faculty within institutions declined from 40.59% in 2015 to 35.62% in 2023. Interestingly, the average proportion of White women within institutions remained stable across time, maintaining approximately 37% of institutional faculty across each year between 2015 and 2023. The overall racial and gender diversity is slowly increasing both across and within institutions, as demonstrated in Figure 4, and this trend is primarily driven by the decline in the representation of White men within the professoriate.

Taking a closer look at the representation of nonwhite race and gender groups can shed light on the specific racial and gender trends underlying the changes in overall faculty diversity. Figure 8 charts the average percent of each Nonwhite race and gender group within institutions by year.

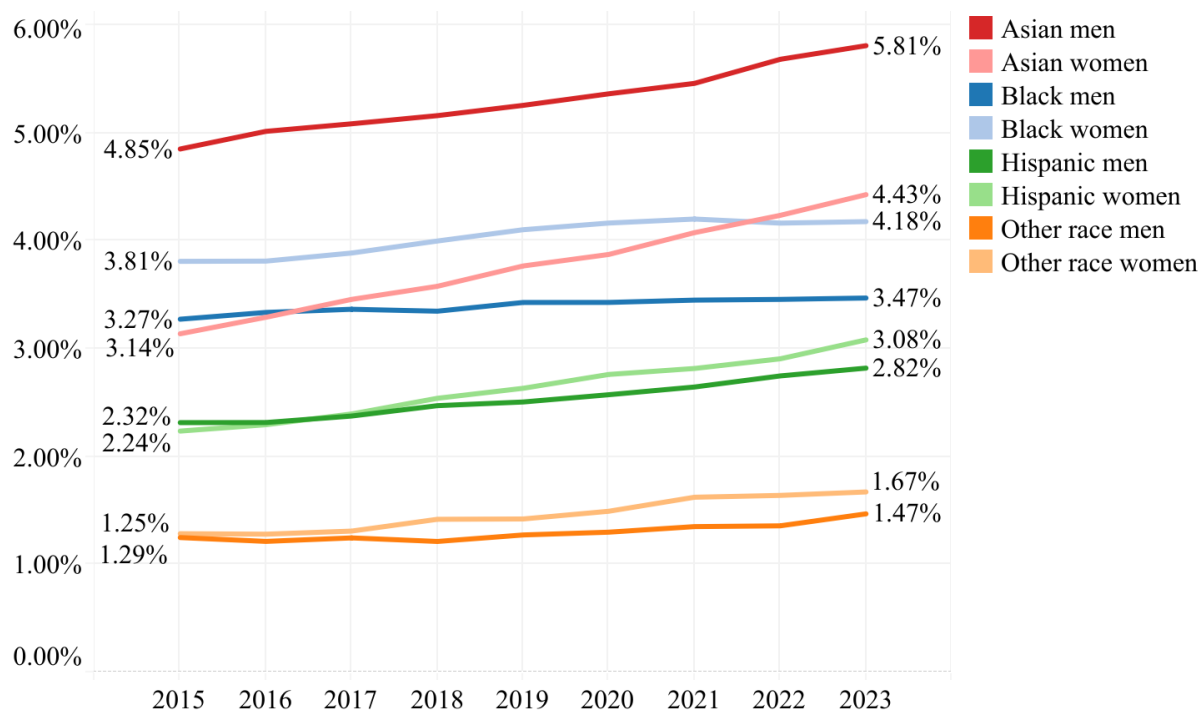


Figure 8: Nonwhite Race and Gender Groups in Faculty (2015-2023)

Of these race and gender groups, Asian men had the greatest representation across the entire period. Asian men comprised an average 4.85% of faculty within institutions in 2015, rising to an average of 5.81% in 2023. Asian women experienced the greatest growth of all race and gender groups, rising from 3.14% in 2015 to 4.43% in 2023. Once the fourth most represented group (behind Black men and women) at the beginning of the period, Asian women rose to have the second greatest representation of nonwhite race and gender groups by the end. Still, Asian women lag behind their male counterparts across the entire period, with an average difference of 1.54 percentage points, while all other nonwhite racial groups show women having greater representation. Following Asian women, the next greatest increases in representation were observed in Hispanic women and other race women. Black men and women experienced the least gains in representation. Across the board, women faculty of all racial groups gained representation at a greater rate than their male counterparts between 2015 and 2023.

State-Level Factors and Faculty Diversity

Understanding the influence of state-level factors, such as partisan control and higher education appropriations, is essential to assessing the racial and gender diversity of postsecondary faculty. These factors shape the broader political and economic contexts in which institutions operate and may create structural constraints that limit efforts to diversify academic staffing. To date, there appear to be no empirical studies directly examining the effects of state partisan governance or funding levels on faculty diversity. Kim et al. have speculated that institutions facing fiscal pressures may adopt cost-cutting hiring practices that disadvantage women and racially minoritized candidates, such as relying more heavily on informal networks. From our vantage point in 2025, we have observed how political and economic conditions can restrict diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, particularly amid the intensifying anti-DEI and anti- “woke” movements permeating government, corporate sectors, and public discourse. In the analyses that follow, I expect to find that Democratic partisanship is positively associated with both higher education appropriations and faculty diversity. Likewise, I anticipate that increased funding will be positively correlated with greater racial and gender representation among faculty.

Partisan Control

Figure 9 maps gubernatorial partisan control by state between 2015 and 2023. States are shaded by their partisan stability or variability across the time period, as some states remained under one party the entire period while others changed from Democratic to Republican leadership or vice versa. States shaded in blue were consistently under a Democratic governor between 2015 and 2023, while light blue shaded states shifted from Republican to Democratic leadership at some point across the period. Conversely, states shaded red were under consistent Republican leadership and light red shaded states moved from a Democratic to Republican governor within this time frame.

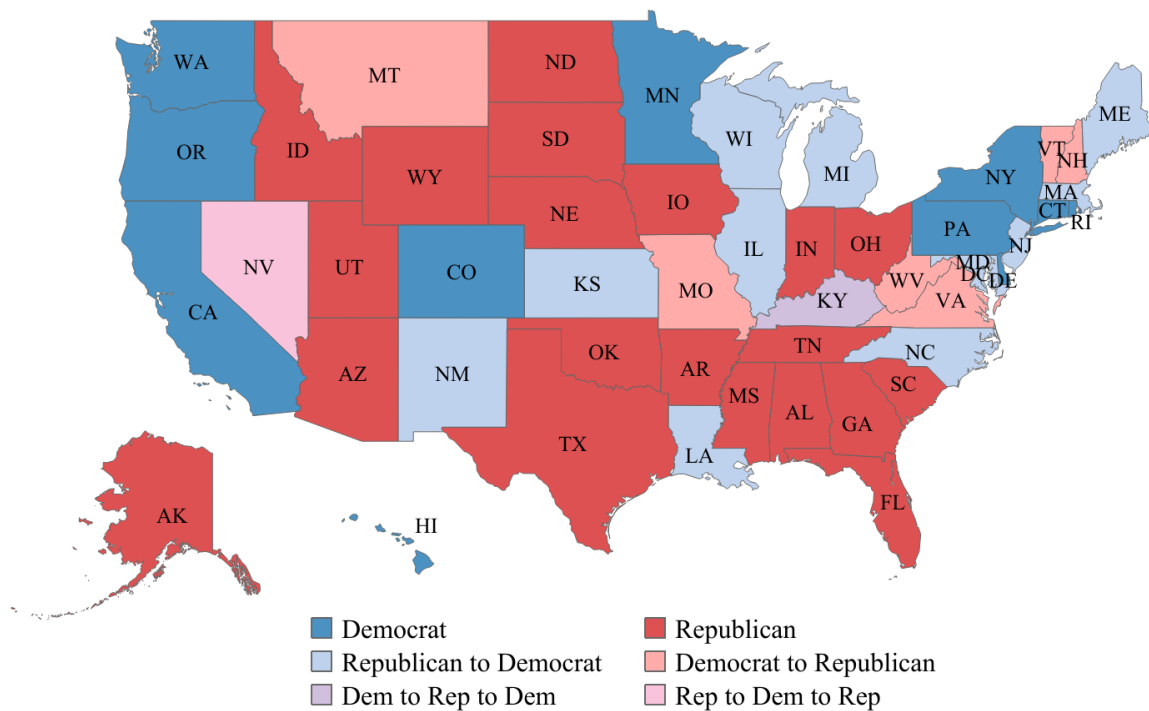


Figure 9: State Gubernatorial Partisan Control and Variability (2015-2023)

Two states stand out for changing partisan control twice within the period between 2015 and 2023. Nevada, shaded in light pink, was under a Republican governor in 2015 and changed

to Democratic leadership before returning to Republican control by the end of the period. Kentucky, shaded in light purple, underwent the opposite procedure – beginning with Democratic leadership, shifting to a Republican governor, and returning to Democratic control. The majority of states were under consistent Republican control, with 21 states having a Republican governor across the entire time frame. Eleven states were under consistent Democratic control, while an equal number of states shifted from Republican to Democratic leadership. Six states changed from Republican to Democratic leadership within the period. Six states changed from Democratic to Republican leadership within the period.

Figure 10 illustrates the total number of partisan swings at the gubernatorial level per year between 2015 and 2023.

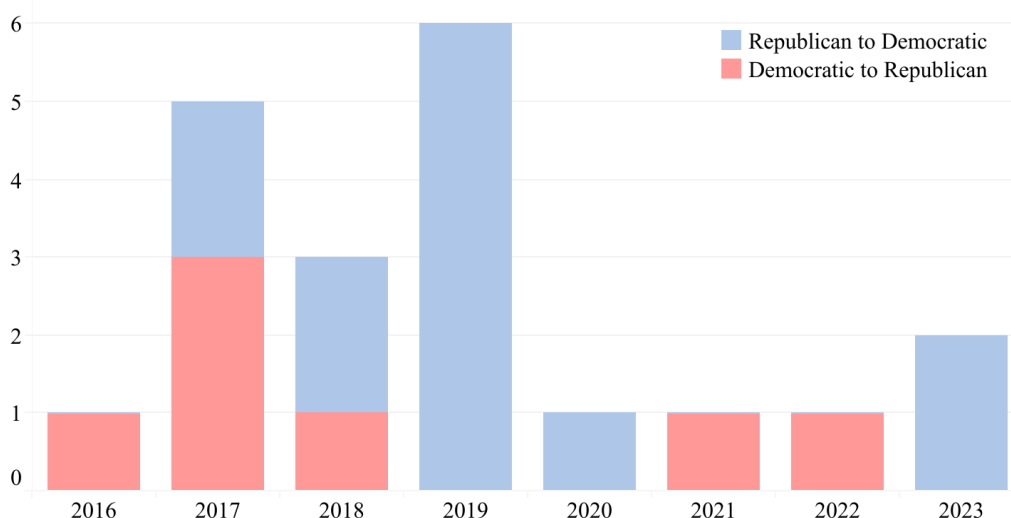


Figure 10: Gubernatorial Swing Count by Year (2015-2023)

The greatest number of partisan swings occurred in 2019, in which six states changed from a Republican to Democratic governor, followed by 2017, in which three states shifted to Republican leadership while two states made the opposite swing. Partisan gubernatorial swings seem to occur in waves which correspond with election and mid-term years, with the most

swings occurring in the year following the 2018 midterm and 2016 presidential elections. Compared to these years, the rest of the time period is quite calm in terms of partisan variability.

Another way to understand the influence of party affiliation in state government is to consider the partisan composition of its legislature. Overall, the average proportion of Democrats within state legislatures rose from 42.50% to a peak of 47.24% in 2019 before falling to 45.36% by 2023. Figure 11 breaks this down further, charting the average representation of Democrats in the state legislature by partisan control and variability per year between 2015 and 2023.

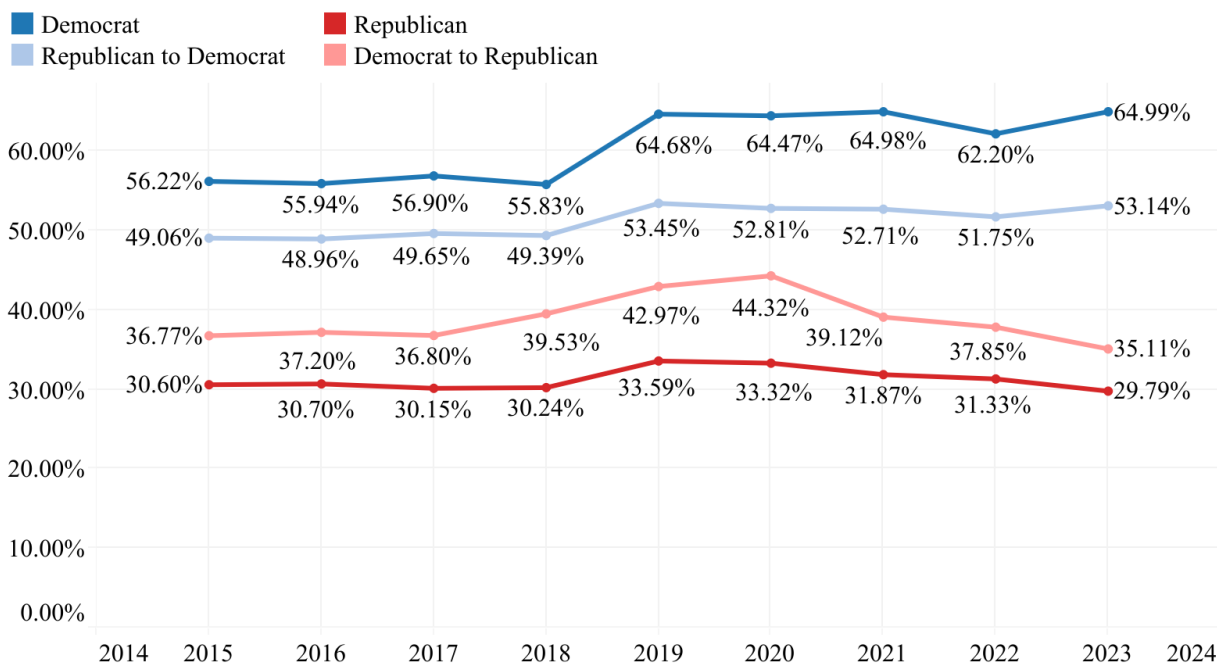


Figure 11: Proportion of Democrats in State Legislatures by Governor Party (2015-2023)

Unsurprisingly, the proportion of Democrats within state legislatures corresponds with gubernatorial partisan control. States consistently under Democratic governors had markedly higher Democratic representation within the state legislature, rising from 56.22% in 2015 to 64.99% in 2023, followed by states that shifted from Republican to Democratic leadership (growing, on average, from 49.06% to 53.14%). States that changed from a Democratic to

Republican governor had an interesting trajectory, starting with an average 36.77% Democratic representation in 2015 and rising to a peak of 44.32% in 2020 before falling to 35.11% in 2024. Consistently Republican states, as expected, had the lowest average proportion of Democrats within the state legislatures, hovering between approximately 30% to 34% across the period. These patterns indicate the growing polarization within state governments, with both consistently Democratic and consistently Republican states exhibiting legislative majorities of roughly 65–70% on average.

Figure 12 shows average diversity index values by (a) gubernatorial control and variability and (b) state legislature control per year between 2015 and 2023. Considering state partisan control reveals slight variations in average diversity index values, at both the gubernatorial and legislative levels. Institutions in states with consistently Democratic governors and states that shifted from Republican to Democratic leadership had similar but slightly higher average diversity index values compared to states with consistently Republican governors. Interestingly, institutions in states that shifted from Democratic to Republican leadership had markedly lower diversity index values on average compared to all other partisan control groups. Despite these modest differences, states in all four partisan control groups slightly increased their average diversity index values at similar rates, by approximately .03 to .04 points between 2015 and 2023. To better visualize state partisan control at the legislative level, I ordered values of the proportion of Democrats in a state's legislature into the following categories: Strong majority Democrat (greater than 75% of total state legislature), majority Democrat (between 50% and 75%), majority Republican (between 25% and 50%), and strong majority Republican (less than 25%).

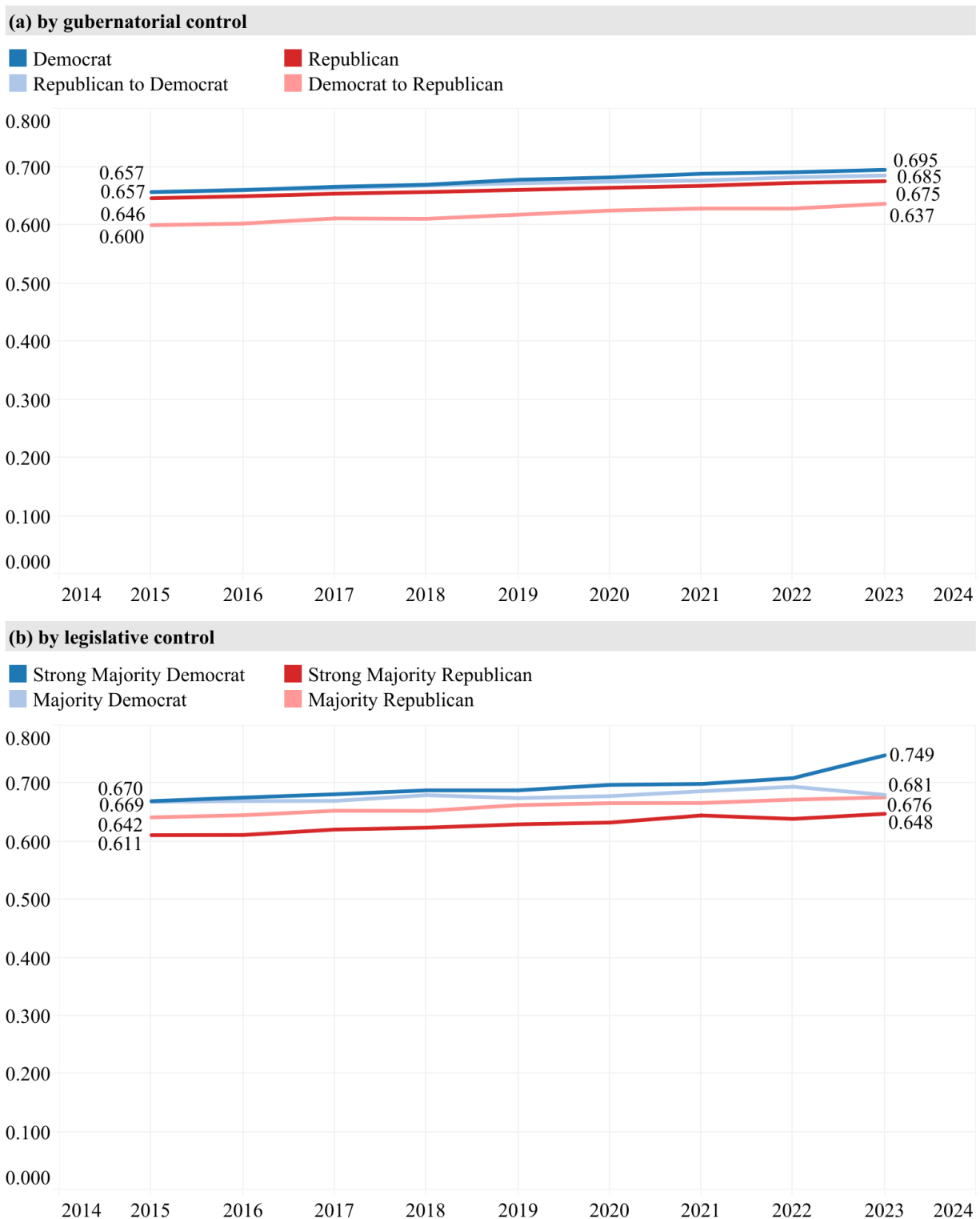


Figure 12: Average Diversity Index Values by Partisan Control (2015-2023)

Here, we can observe more distinguished differences between partisan control groups compared to those at the gubernatorial level. Average diversity index values are highest for institutions in states with a strong Democratic majority in the legislature and lowest for institutions in states with a strong Republican majority. Hawaii had both the highest average Democratic legislative representation across the time period (91.33%) as well as the highest average diversity index value (.794).

Another notable state was California, with an average 78.33% Democratic legislative majority across the period and an average diversity index value of .763. This disparity increases over time as well, starting with a difference of .059 points in 2015 and rising to .101 points by 2023. For most of the period, the average diversity index value of institutions in states with a Democratic majority closely followed behind those with a strong Democratic majority. Between 2022 and 2023, however, the two diverged. States with a strong Democratic majority gained an average of .039 points in just one year, while states with a Democratic majority decreased by an average of .015 points.

Taking a closer look at the representation of White and Nonwhite men and women paints a clearer picture of the impact of state partisan control on faculty racial and gender diversity over time. Figure 13 charts the average proportion of White and Nonwhite men and women within institutions by (a) gubernatorial partisan control and (b) legislative partisan control each year between 2015 and 2023. The party of a state's governor (13a) generates more consistent patterns in faculty racial and gender diversity compared to the partisan control of a state's legislature (13b). Each gubernatorial partisan control group displays a similar trend overall – increasing the representation of Nonwhite men and women while decreasing the representation of White men, and in every panel White men fell below White women by 2023.

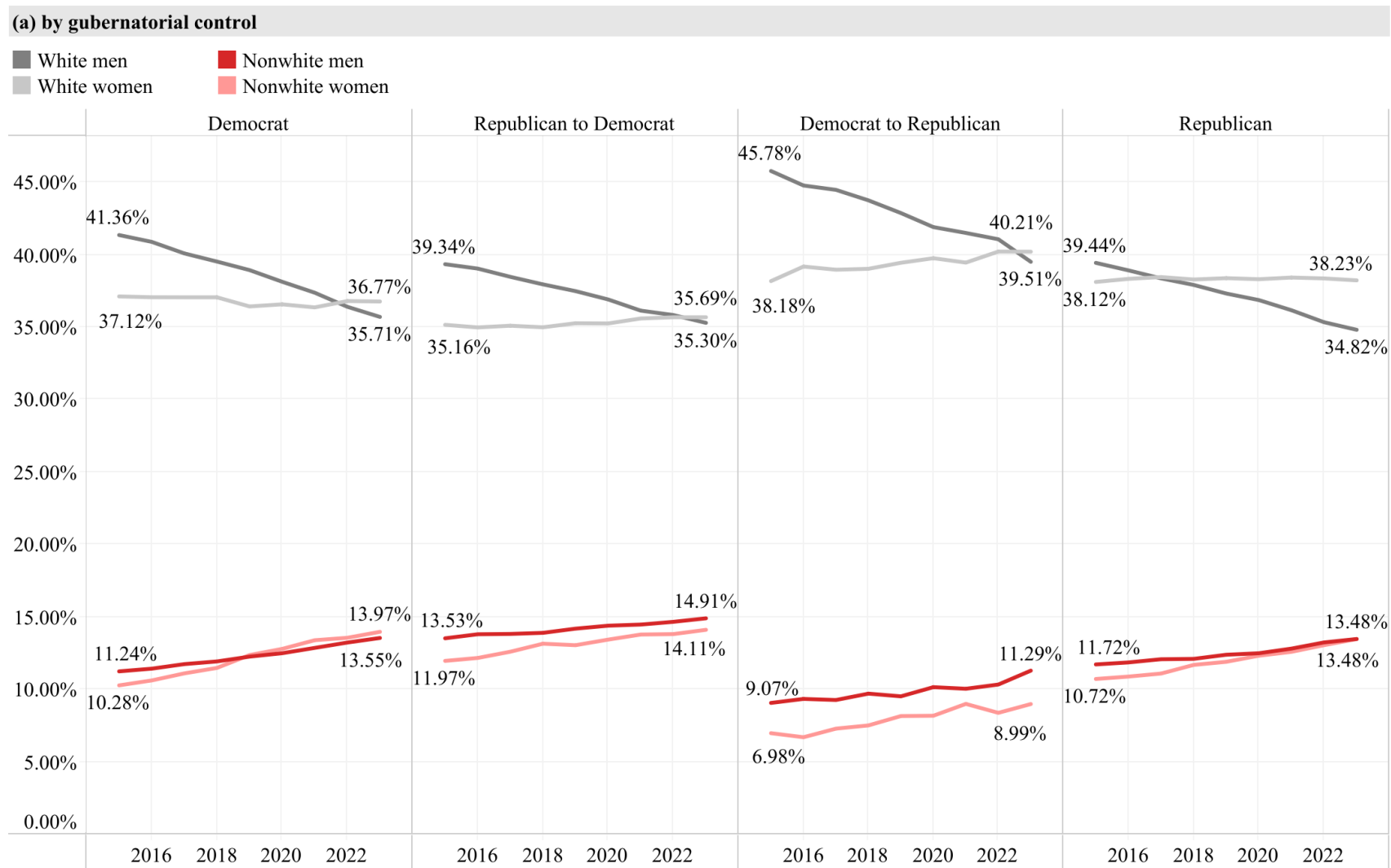
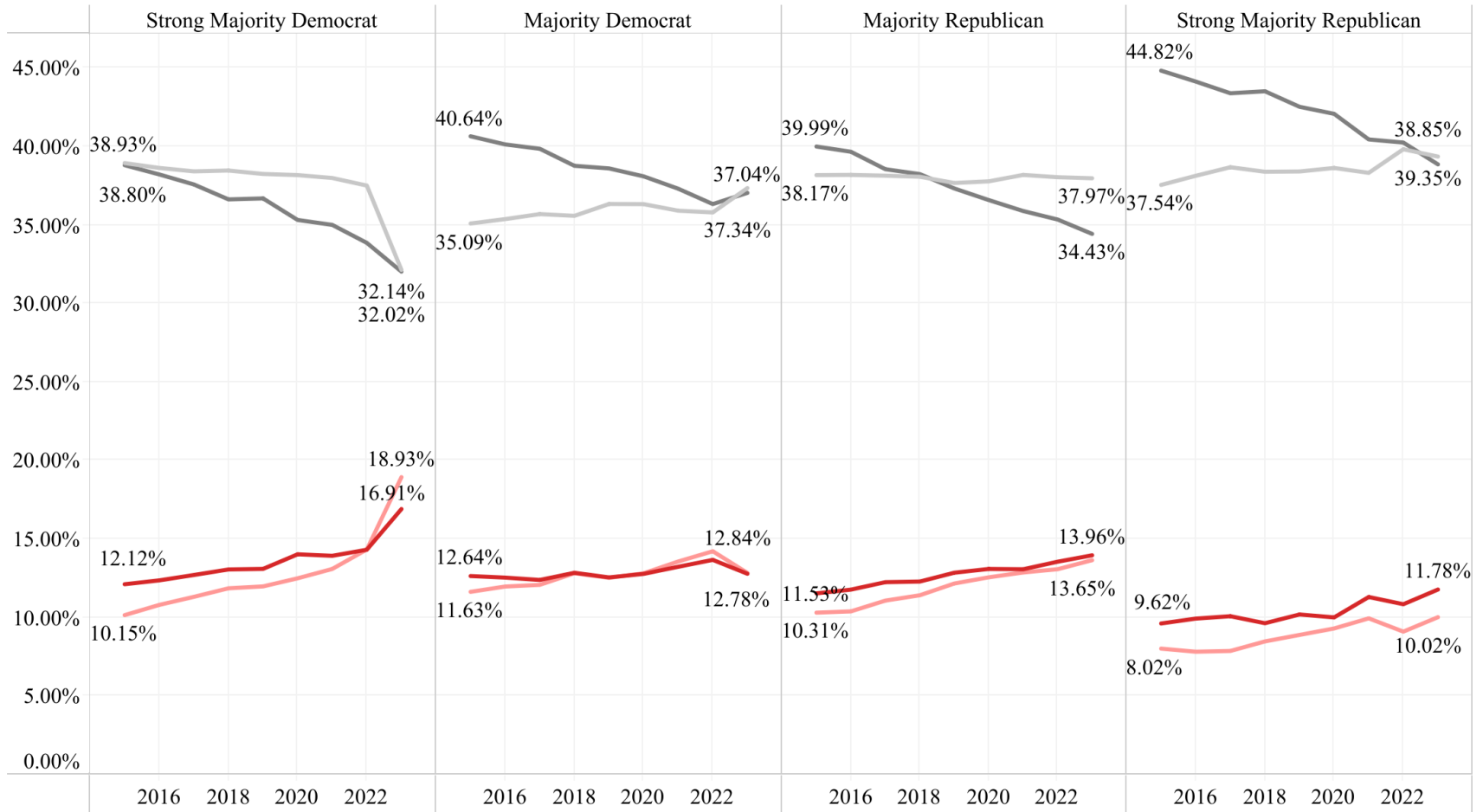


Figure 13: Proportion of White and Nonwhite Men and Women in Faculty by Partisan Control (2015-2023)

(b) by legislative control

■ White men
■ White women
■ Nonwhite men
■ Nonwhite women



It is fairly remarkable that on average, White men faculty lost their numerical advantage in public four-year institutions regardless of the political context. States with consistently Republican governors achieved this in 2018, while other states did not reach this point until 2022 (consistently Democratic states) or 2023 (both groups of swing states). Although all four gubernatorial partisan groups gained in the average representation of Nonwhite men and women across the period, each group had somewhat different outcomes. Nonwhite men maintained a slight advantage over Nonwhite women for the entire period in both groups of swing states, with the difference being narrower in states that shifted from Republican to Democratic governors (average difference of 0.80 percentage points) and wider in states that changed from Democratic to Republican leadership (2.30 percentage points).

Institutions in states with consistently Republican governors narrowed the gap in representation of Nonwhite men and women to achieve parity between the two groups by 2023, both at an average 13.48% of faculty within institutions. Consistently Democratic states, on the other hand, achieved this parity between 2019 and 2020 with Nonwhite women having a slight advantage over Nonwhite men for the rest of the period (average differences between 0.30 and 0.53 percentage points). White women, across all four gubernatorial control groups, either remained stable or increased very slightly (1.33 percentage points in Democratic to Republican states) between 2015 and 2023, hovering around an average 35% to 40% of faculty within institutions.

Overall, the party affiliation of a state's governor does seem to be of some consequence for the racial and gender diversity of the faculty within its institutions, although this effect is admittedly quite small. The picture complicates when considering the proportion of Democrats within a state's legislature (13b). Again, all four partisan control groups show a similar trend of

increasing the representation of Nonwhite men and women while decreasing the representation of White men, but here we observe more variability between groups compared to the gubernatorial partisanship groups.

Most notable between these four groups are the states with a strong Democratic majority in their legislature, which experienced a sharp narrowing of the gap between the representation of White men and women and Nonwhite men and women in just one year. Between 2022 and 2023, the proportion of Nonwhite women and men increased by an average 4.60 and 2.60 percentage points, respectively, while the proportion of White men decreased by an average 1.83 percentage points. Here, we also see a dramatic decline in the representation of White women within institutions, dropping an average 5.36 percentage points in just one year. White women faculty in these states were maintaining a consistent representation for themselves and a growing advantage over their male counterparts until the sharp drop in 2022, when their average proportion within institutions fell to reach approximate parity with White men around 32% each. This may indicate a significant and swift evolution in these states' approaches to promoting intersectional diversity, equity, and inclusion within their institutions of higher education. Additionally, although White men's representation declined by about six percentage points in these states, those with strong Republican majorities consistently exhibited higher shares of White men than other states throughout the period.

Higher Education Funding

Beyond partisan control, faculty racial and gender diversity may also be shaped by state higher education funding. To the best of my knowledge, no existing studies have directly examined the relationship between state appropriations and faculty diversity. I hypothesize that higher levels of state funding are positively associated with increased representation of racially

and gender minoritized faculty. Figure 14 charts the average and median state appropriations to higher education in thousands of dollars per FTE enrollment by year between 2015 and 2023. Within these years, both the average and median state appropriations increased substantially. The average appropriations per FTE enrollment increased 54.42% from \$6,778 in 2015 to \$10,467 in 2023, while the median appropriations increased about the same.

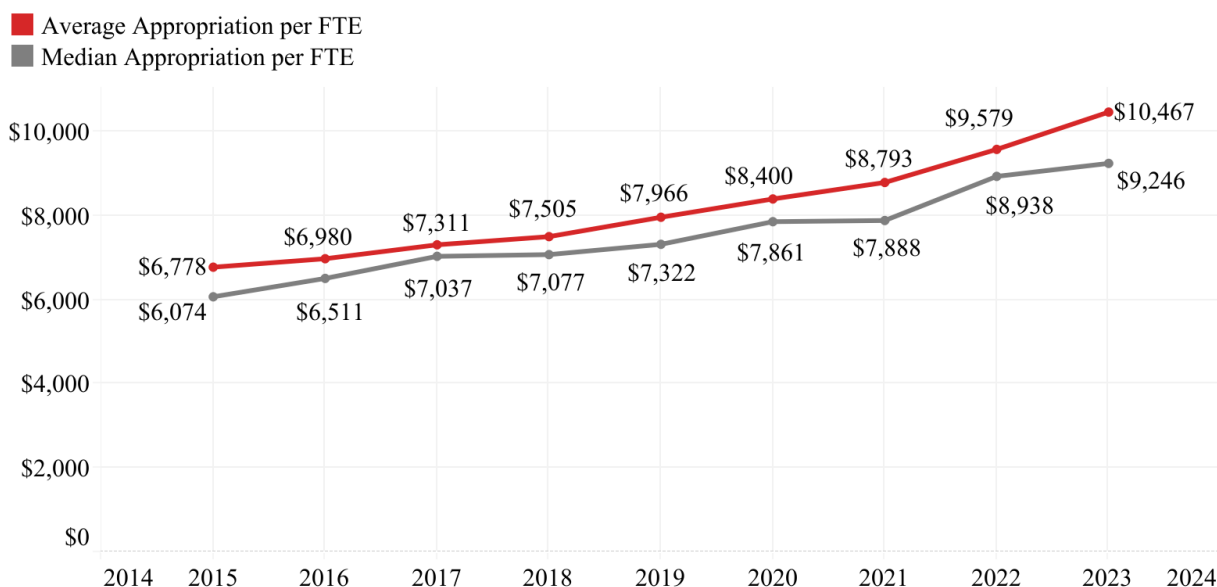


Figure 14: Average and Median State Appropriations to Higher Education (2015-2023)

The greatest proportional gains were observed in Alabama (142.04% increase), Oregon (116.68%), Washington (101.56%), Tennessee (97.59%), and New Mexico (95.59%). States with the lowest proportional gains include North Dakota (5.16% increase), Iowa (9.16%), Oklahoma (12.20%), Wyoming (12.75%), and New Hampshire (14.80%).

Figure 15 maps the percent change in states' higher education appropriations per FTE enrollment per year between 2015 and 2023. Between these years every state increased their funding of public higher education, with some states doubling their appropriations or more. The District of Columbia had the highest dollar appropriated per FTE enrollment for the entire period

as well as the highest dollar amount increase, rising from \$21,206 in 2015 to \$36,574 in 2023. These figures are drastically different from the lesser funded states like New Hampshire and Vermont which allocate less than \$5,000 per FTE enrollment across the entire period, and are even more perplexing when we consider the fact that there is only one public four-year post-secondary institution in D.C. In comparison, the two states with the highest number of public colleges and universities – Texas (63) and California (52) – were 25th and 10th in the nation for the dollar amount appropriated per FTE enrollment.

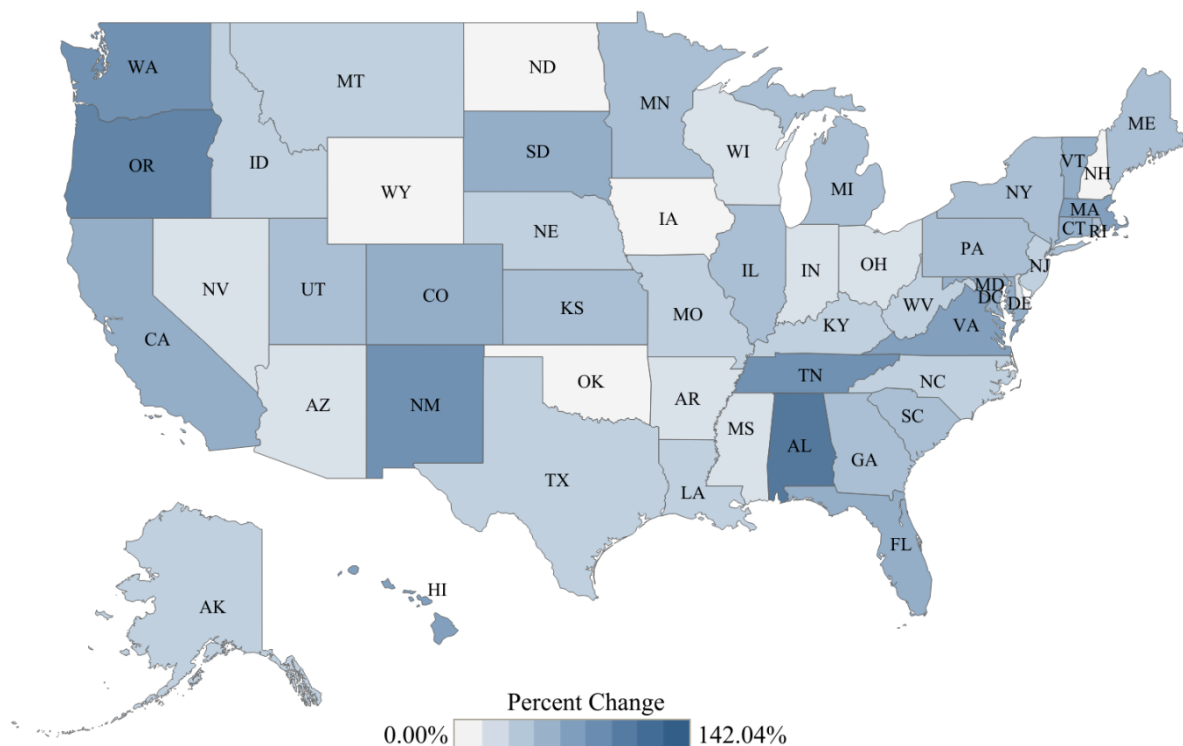


Figure 15: Percent Change in Higher Education Funding by State (2015-2023)

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Existing studies link state partisanship with higher education funding, finding that Democratic partisan control is associated with increased state appropriations to higher education (Archibald and Feldman 2006; Ortega 2020; Taylor, Kunkle, and Watts 2022). As such, I expect to find that Democratic gubernatorial and legislative control are both correlated with increased higher education funding. Figure 16 charts average appropriations to higher education by (a) gubernatorial partisan control and (b) legislative partisan control each year between 2015 and 2023. It is evident that partisanship of a state's governor and legislature are related to its funding of higher education. On both the gubernatorial and legislative levels, Democratic control is associated with greater appropriations to higher education per FTE enrollment as well as higher rates of funding growth compared to states under Republican leadership. The states that exhibited the greatest gains in higher education appropriations were those with a strong Democratic majority in their state legislatures (73.05% increase, up to \$14,889 per FTE in 2023) and those with consistently Democratic governors (68.80% gain, up to \$11,870 per FTE in 2023). Interestingly, states with a strong Republican majority in their legislatures appropriated more dollars to higher education than to those with a weaker Republican majority across the entire time period (by 2023, \$10,265 and \$8,559 per FTE, respectively), and a similar trend is observed on the governor's level (by 2023, \$9,467 and \$7,501 per FTE, respectively). This is likely due to states like New Hampshire, which is in the majority Republican group and allocates only around \$3,000 to \$4,000 per FTE enrollment.

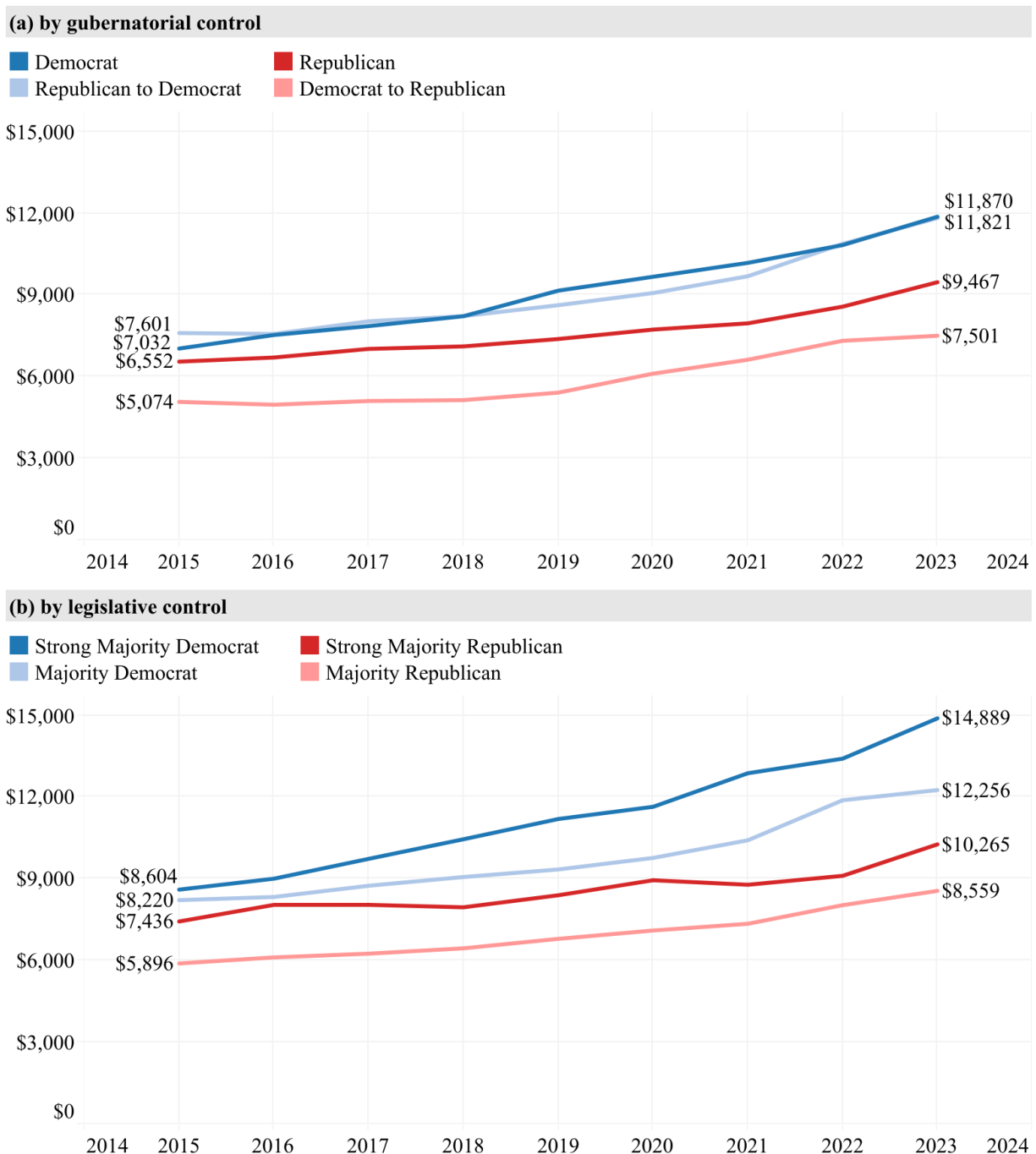


Figure 16: State Appropriations to Higher Education by Partisan Control (2015-2023)

Kim et al. concluded that financial constraints lead to cost-cutting measures that may negatively impact faculty diversity. As such, I expect to find that greater state higher education

funding supports the recruitment and retention of faculty from underrepresented groups. Figure 17 illustrates the average diversity index value for institutions by higher education appropriations between 2015 and 2023. States are categorized by their percentile rank in higher education appropriations each year: 25th percentile or below, 25th to 50th percentile, 50th to 75th percentile, and 75th percentile and above. Overall, all four higher education appropriation quartile groups increased the racial and gender diversity of their faculty across the time period. As I expected, institutions located within states with the greatest appropriations to higher education had the greatest average diversity index values as well as the greatest increase in faculty diversity out of the four percentile groups, rising from .670 in 2015 to .717 in 2023. States with the lowest appropriations, likewise, saw the lowest average diversity index values, lagging behind states within the highest quartile by approximately .050 to .075 points across the entire time period.

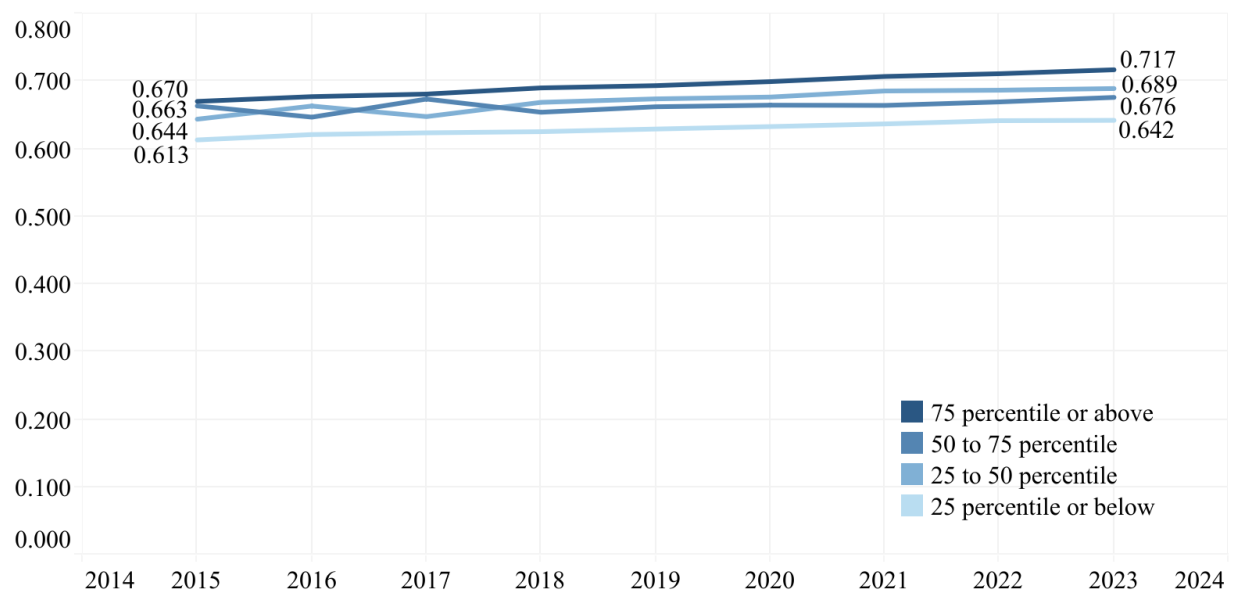


Figure 17: Average Diversity Index Value by Higher Education Appropriations (2015-2023)

States within the middle two quartiles fluctuated between 2015 and 2018, alternating increases and decreases in average diversity values between the two groups, before leveling out for the rest of the period. This may be due to states dipping just above or below the median dollar amount for higher education appropriations (and thus vacillating between the middle two quartiles) each year, although it is not clear why this would only occur between 2015 and 2018 if that were the case.

To shed light on the relationship between state higher education funding and the racial and gender diversity of faculty, we can take a closer look at the representation of race and gender groups within each appropriations quartile group. Figure 18 charts the proportion of White and Nonwhite men and women within institutions by higher education appropriations between 2015 and 2023. It is immediately evident that the disparity between the representation of White and Nonwhite men and women in postsecondary faculty is smaller, on average, when state funding is higher. Across all nine years, institutions within states in the highest quartile for appropriations had the lowest proportion of White men and women (by 2023, an average of 34.46% and 33.11% within institutions, respectively) and the highest proportion of Nonwhite men and women (15.98% and 16.44%, respectively, by 2023) out of the four appropriation quartile groups. Interestingly, the highest quartile is the only group to still maintain White men's advantage over their women counterparts by the end of the period.

In the other quartile groups, White women's representation surpassed White men's as early as 2017 (lowest quartile) and as late as 2023 (second quartile). States in the bottom half for appropriations saw Nonwhite men maintaining an advantage over their women counterparts across the entire period, while states in the top half saw Nonwhite women's representation coming to surpass Nonwhite men's between 2018 (third quartile) and 2021 (highest quartile).

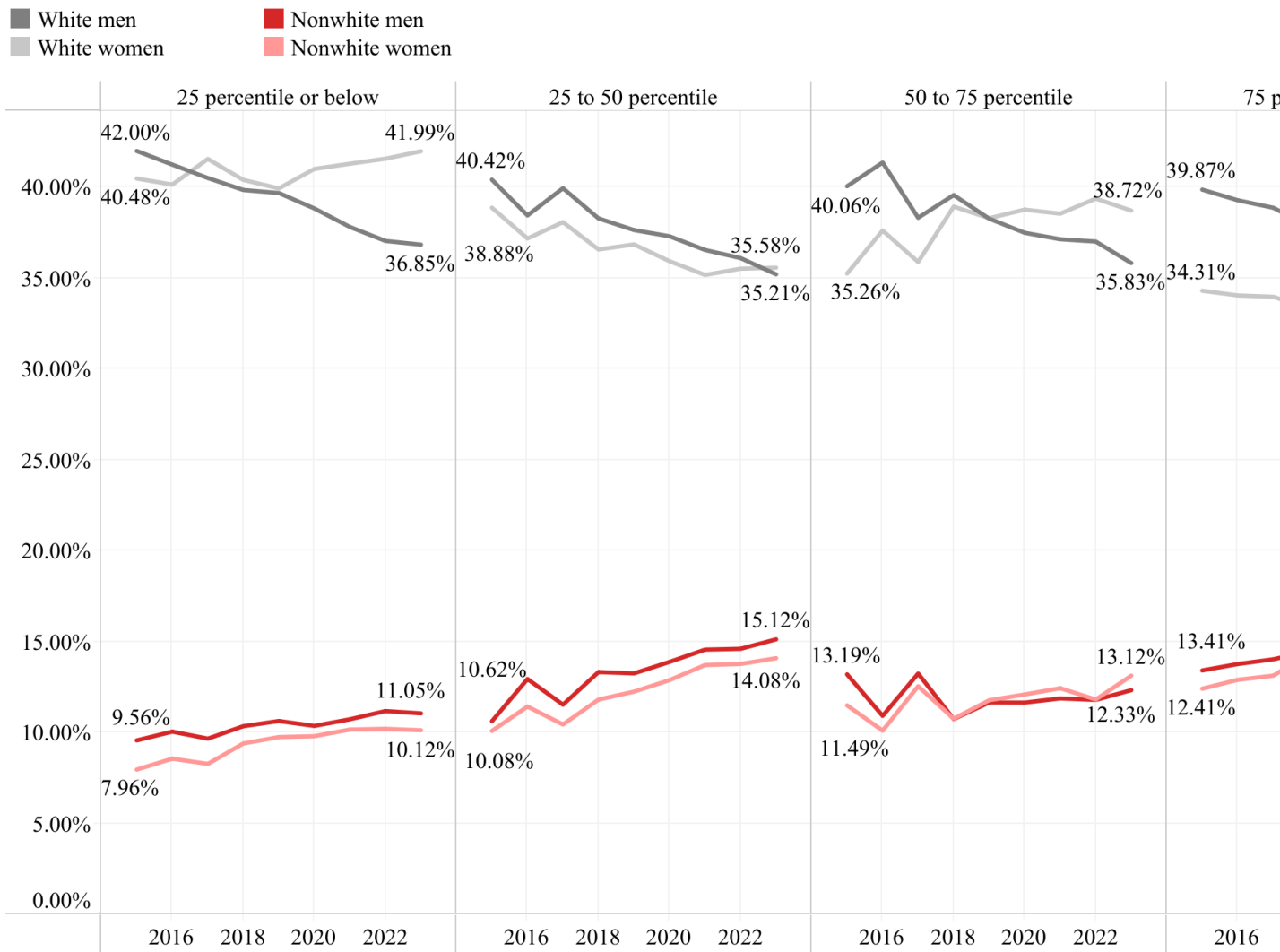


Figure 18: Proportion of White and Nonwhite Men and Women Faculty by Higher Education Appropriations (2015-2023) While White women’s representation in the second and fourth quartiles slightly decreased across time, their representation increased in states within the first (by 1.51 percentage points) and third (3.46 percentage points) quartiles for higher education appropriations.

Multivariate Analyses of Public University Faculty Diversity

While these descriptive statistics offer valuable insight into broad trends in state partisan control, higher education funding, and faculty racial and gender diversity, they do not account for covariates or control variables, nor do they assess statistical significance. To address these

limitations, I employ mixed-effects regressions and structural equation models, which allow for the inclusion of covariates and provide a more nuanced representation of the state-level contextual factors shaping faculty diversity over time. Here, the term ‘effect’ follows its usage in structural equation modeling (direct, indirect, and total effects) rather than implying causal inference. In these analyses, I expect to find that gubernatorial partisanship, legislative partisan control, and state higher education appropriations are each significantly and positively associated with faculty diversity, and that they collectively help explain its growth across the study period.

Mixed-Effects Models

I run several mixed-effects regressions models on the diversity index to better understand the statistical significance of the trends observed thus far. Table 6 reports the results from three mixed-effects regression models: (1) year on diversity index with controls, then adding (2) gubernatorial partisanship, (3) legislative partisan composition, and (4) higher education funding. Year is a significant predictor in all four models, capturing a steady upward trend that likely reflects institutional momentum, demographic shifts, or other underlying factors beyond the political and funding influences.

Table 6: Mixed-Effects Maximum Likelihood Regression Model Results

Each year is associated with a .003 increase in average diversity index value net of all other variables, highlighting the consistent and significant growth of faculty diversity within this

<i>Variable</i>	<i>(1)</i>	<i>(2)</i>	<i>(3)</i>	<i>(4)</i>
<i>Year</i>	.004***	.004***	.004***	.003***
<i>Democratic governor</i>		-.004***	-.005***	-.005***
<i>Proportion of Dems in state legislature</i>			.047***	.041***
<i>Higher education funding</i>				.002***
<i>HBCU</i>	.079***	.079***	.081***	.082***
<i>R1 institution</i>	.033***	.033***	.033***	.033***
<i>R2 institution</i>	.029***	.030***	.029***	.029***
<i>Midsized institution</i>	.005**	.006**	.006***	-.007***
<i>Large institution</i>	.013***	.013***	.013***	.013***
Constant	-7.64	-7.77	-7.35	-5.75
Observations	6,981	6,981	6,981	6,981
Wald Chi-Square	2110.46***	2128.36***	2199.92***	2256.43***
LR test Chi-square	14509.33***	14471.42***	14019.15***	13828.49***

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

time period. State partisan control and higher education funding account for a portion, but not all, of the upward trend over time on diversity. All three covariates in this model are significant ($p < .001$). Counter to my expectations, having a Democratic governor is negatively associated with faculty diversity (associated with an average .005 decrease in diversity index value) while having a greater proportion of Democrats within the state legislature is positively associated with diversity (average .040 increase per percentage point increase in Democratic representation). An increase of \$1,000 per FTE enrollment in state appropriations to higher education is associated with an average increase of approximately .002 on the diversity index, and an increase of \$10,000 per FTE enrollment would correlate with an average diversity index value increase of

.019. All control variables in this model are significant at the $p < .001$ level, except for the dummy variable for midsize institutions in models 1 and 2 which are significant at the $p < .05$ level. As I expected, HBCU's have significantly more diverse faculties than other public institutions. Institutions with high and very high research activity (R2 and R1 institutions) have significantly higher diversity index values (by an average of .029 and .033, respectively) compared to other institutions. Smaller institutions with less than 5,000 students had significantly lower diversity index values compared to mid-sized institutions (-.007), while larger institutions with more than 20,000 students had greater diversity index scores on average (.007).

Next, I ran mixed-effects models for each year separately, including all covariates and controls, to understand whether these state-level factors are more or less influential at different times. Table 7 reports the results of these models for each year between 2015 and 2023 and provides several notable takeaways. Firstly, the relationship between gubernatorial control and faculty diversity is not significant for any year within this time period, despite being significant ($p < .001$) in the overall regression models reported in Table 6. This may be indicative of the chain-of-command within state governments – governors may introduce policy themselves, but typically they enact their will through the legislature rather than executive action. The state legislature, on the other hand, is directly involved with drafting and voting on legislation and thus would have a more immediate impact on faculty diversity outcomes compared to the governor in any particular year.

Table 7: Mixed-Effects Maximum Likelihood Regression Model Results, by Year (2015-2023)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>2016</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>	<i>2023</i>
<i>Democratic governor</i>	-.020	-.019	-.004	.004	.006	.000	.001	.003	.001
<i>Proportion of Dems in state legislature</i>	.145***	.135***	.111***	.105***	.076*	.090**	.091**	.085**	.078*
<i>Higher education funding</i>	.000	.000	.000***	.000**	.000**	.000***	.000***	.000***	.000***
<i>HBCU</i>	.140***	.143***	.140***	.134***	.137***	.132***	.125***	.119***	.119***
<i>R1 institution</i>	-.009	-.007	-.003	-.005	.001	.004	.009	.010	.014
<i>R2 institution</i>	.007	.006	.006	.005	.010	.011	.012	.015	.015
<i>Midsized institution</i>	-.029***	-.032***	-.029***	-.034***	-.032***	-.033***	-.033***	-.030***	-.031***
<i>Large institution</i>	.037***	.038***	.038***	.040***	.036***	.035***	.033***	.034***	.033***
Constant	.563	.557	.565	.563	.575	.575	.580	.580	.586
Observations	780	780	781	784	764	763	763	784	782

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Further, these regressions reveal that the coefficient measuring the relationship between legislative partisan control and faculty diversity halved in magnitude and weakened in significance between 2015 and 2023. This trend may indicate a weakening of Democratic power and influence within state politics or, alternatively, a gradual shifting away of Democratic lawmakers from prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion. Finally, the relationship between state appropriations and faculty diversity gains significance in 2017 and remains significant through the rest of the period. This relationship was weakest in 2015, when a \$10,000 increase in appropriations per FTE was (not significantly) associated with an average .025 increase in the diversity index, and strongest in 2018 when a \$10,000 increase corresponded with an average .052 diversity index increase.

Table 8: Mixed-Effects Regression Results with Year and Higher Education Funding Interaction

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	
<i>Year</i>	.002***	
<i>Higher education funding</i>	-.344***	* $p < .05$
<i>Year * Higher education funding</i>	.000***	** $p < .01$
<i>Democratic governor</i>	-.006***	*** $p < .001$
<i>Proportion of Dems in state legislature</i>	.043***	
<i>HBCU</i>	.082***	
<i>R1 institution</i>	.033***	
<i>R2 institution</i>	.029***	
<i>Midsized institution</i>	.007***	
<i>Large institution</i>	.013***	
Constant	-3.901	
Observations	6,891	
Wald Chi-Square	2277.54***	
LR test Chi-square	13844.17***	

Next, I ran a model with an interaction between year and higher education funding, reported in Table 8, to take a closer look at how the relationship between funding and faculty diversity changes over time. Figure 19 illustrates the margins for higher education funding and diversity index value by year. This chart clearly demonstrates the growing importance of state funding in promoting racial and gender diversity in post-secondary faculty over time. In 2015, predicted diversity index values remained stable across all funding levels from \$5,000 to \$35,000 per FTE enrollment. Each year the slope gradually gets steeper until the end of the period in 2023. In this year, states allocating \$5,000 per FTE enrollment had a predicted diversity index value of .662 while those allocating the maximum of \$35,000 had a predicted value of .704.

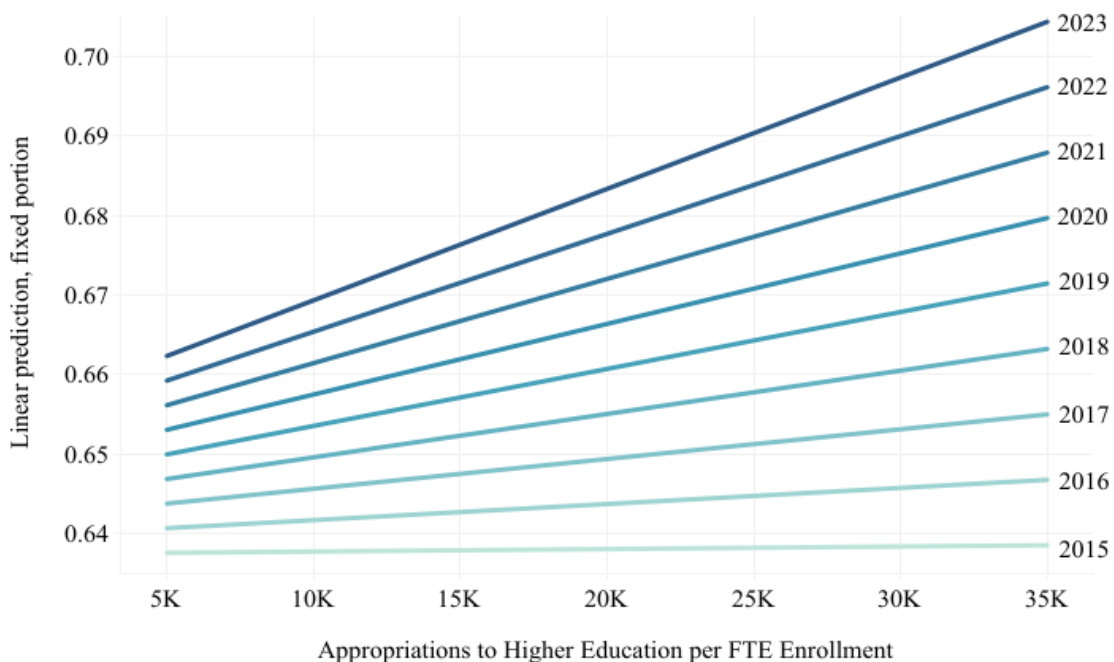


Figure 19: Margins for Higher Education Funding and Diversity Index, by Year

Structural Equation Modeling

Although standard linear regression modeling techniques provide important insights, they cannot fully capture the complex and simultaneous associations between year, state partisan

control, higher education funding, and faculty diversity. Utilizing structural equation modeling (SEM) allows me to conduct numerous regressions at once and measure the indirect effects of mediating variables on the relationship between year and faculty diversity. Based on the literature, I expect to find that Democratic gubernatorial and legislative control are associated with increased higher education appropriations, which then in turn lead to higher average diversity index values. Figure 20 illustrates standardized coefficients and significance levels for all relationships measured in the structural equation model. Whereas my earlier regression tables reported unstandardized coefficients, Figure 20 reports standardized coefficients which better allow for comparison of the magnitude of effects across the relationships captured in the model.

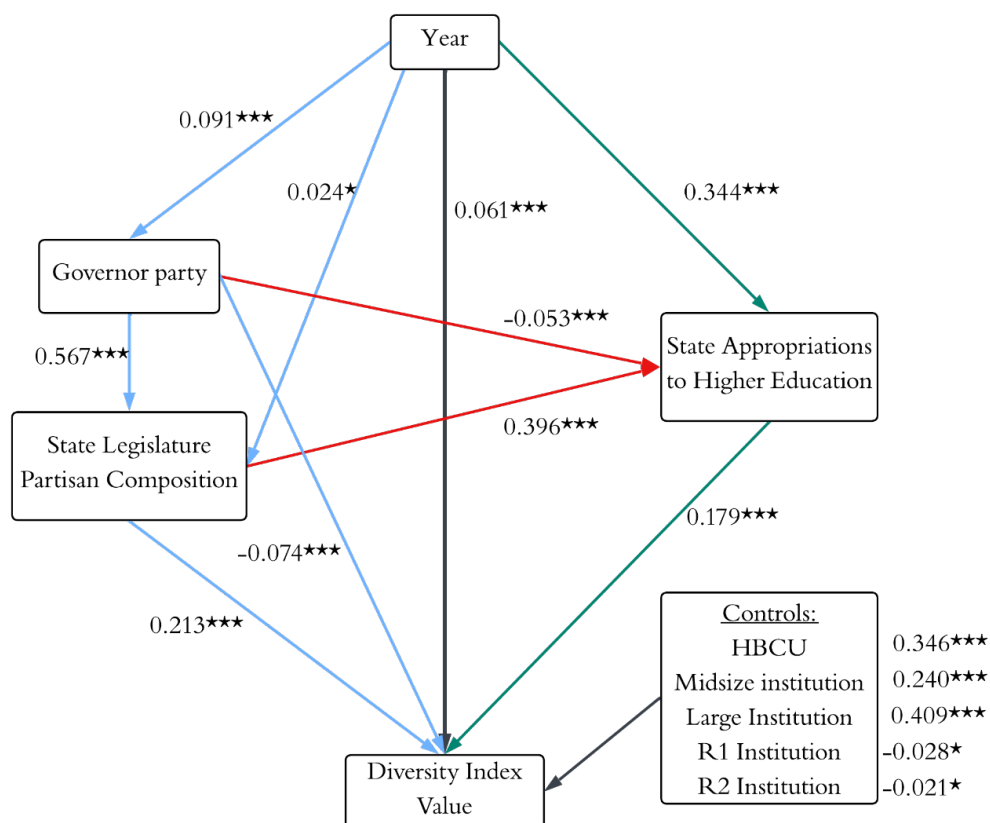


Figure 20: Structural Equation Model Standardized Results

All relationships in the model are significant, net of all other relationships and controls. For example, the relationship between year and faculty diversity is significant ($p < .001$) net of the indirect effects of year through state partisan control and higher education funding. Each year, the average diversity index value shows an unstandardized increase of .002 that cannot be accounted for by mechanisms of partisan control or higher education funding. Similarly, year is positively associated with Democratic gubernatorial partisanship (.091), Democratic legislative representation (.024), and higher education appropriations (.344). The party of a state's governor is moderately associated with the partisan composition of its legislature – having a Democratic governor is associated with an average 20 percentage point increase in Democratic representation in the state legislature.

Surprisingly, having a Democratic governor is negatively associated with both higher education appropriations and average diversity index values. States with Democratic governors saw an average \$331.18 decrease in appropriations per FTE enrollment compared to states with Republican or Independent governors. Democratic representation in the state legislature, on the other hand, is positively associated with higher education funding. On average, a completely Democratic legislature would allocate \$7,064.24 more per FTE enrollment than a legislature devoid of Democrats. This reveals a perplexing set of relationships between gubernatorial partisanship, legislative partisan composition, and higher education appropriations. While Democratic governors have a positive indirect effect on appropriations through increasing Democratic legislative representation, the direct effect of Democratic gubernatorial partisanship on higher education funding is negative. One possible explanation for this is partisan mismatch between the governor and legislature, which may cause a lack of cooperation on either or both

sides and thus an unwillingness to settle budget or policy disagreements which may directly impact higher education funding.

A similar trend is observed regarding the relationship between partisan control and faculty diversity. Democratic gubernatorial partisanship is negatively associated with faculty diversity, leading to a .012 decrease in average diversity index values compared to states with Republican or Independent governors. Meanwhile, Democratic representation in the state legislature is positively associated with faculty racial and gender diversity. Net of all other relationships and controls, a completely Democratic legislature would correspond with a .101 increase in average diversity index values compared to a legislature with no Democratic representatives. This indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between Democratic legislative representation and faculty diversity that cannot be accounted for through its indirect effects on higher education funding. For example, legislatures with a stronger Democratic presence may be more likely to advance policy that supports the hiring, promotion, and retention of underrepresented racial and gender groups in public post-secondary faculty. Higher education funding is also positively associated with faculty diversity, with a \$1,000 increase in appropriations per FTE enrollment corresponding with an average .005 increase in diversity index values.

Table 9 lists the unstandardized direct and indirect effects of year on diversity from the model depicted in Figure 19, as well as ratios of indirect effects to total effects for each pathway. Indirect pathways through year, gubernatorial partisanship, legislative partisan composition, and higher education are all significant in this model ($p < .001$).

Table 9: Direct and Indirect Effects of Year on Diversity

	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Indirect</i>	<i>Indirect:Total</i>
<i>Democratic governor</i>			
<i>Year</i>	.017***		
<i>Proportion of Dems in state legislature</i>			
<i>Democratic governor</i>	.198***		
<i>Year</i>	.002*	.003***	0.60
<i>Higher education funding</i>			
<i>Democratic governor</i>	-.332***	1.400***	1.31
<i>Proportion of Dems in state legislature</i>	7.064***		
<i>Year</i>	.411***	.030***	0.07
<i>Faculty diversity</i>			
<i>Democratic governor</i>	-.012***	.025***	1.92
<i>Proportion of Dems in state legislature</i>	.101***	.033***	0.24
<i>Higher education funding</i>	.005***		
<i>Year</i>	.002***	.002***	0.50
<i>HBCU</i>	.130***		
<i>Midsized institution</i>	.040***		
<i>Large institution</i>	.086***		
<i>R1 institution</i>	-.008*		
<i>R2 institution</i>	-.006*		

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Considering all pathways leading from year to faculty diversity, the indirect effects comprise half of the total effects. This indicates that half of the rise in faculty racial and gender diversity over time is due to the mediation of state partisan control and higher education appropriations. Again, Democratic governors have negative direct effects on both appropriations and faculty diversity while having positive indirect effects on these measures. Although

Democratic governors alone are associated with lower higher education funding and diversity index values, they contribute indirectly to increasing both measures through the state legislature.

Each pathway from year to faculty diversity can be distinguished and compared by multiplying the standardized coefficients for each segment of the pathway, revealing that two pathways stand out as having the greatest effects on diversity. Firstly, the path between year, higher education funding, and diversity returns a standardized coefficient of .062 ($p < .001$), the strongest association of all pathways between year and diversity. Each standard deviation increase in year is associated with greater state appropriations to higher education, which in turn leads to a .062 standard deviation increase in diversity index score. Secondly, the pathway between year, gubernatorial partisanship, legislative partisan control, and faculty diversity returns a coefficient of .011 ($p < .001$). A one standard deviation increase in year is associated with an increase in Democratic governors, which in turn promotes Democratic representation in the legislature, which finally leads to an average increase of .011 standard deviations in diversity index scores. Another significant pathway (.004, $p < .001$) follows how each year is associated with an increase in Democratic governors, which promotes Democratic legislative representation, which then leads to a rise in higher education funding, and in turn increases faculty racial and gender diversity.

Taken together, the results reported in this chapter highlight the political and economic contexts that contribute to faculty diversity and supports the idea that faculty diversity can be constrained or promoted depending on the political, economic, and even temporal context. Faculty racial and gender diversity at public post-secondary institutions in the United States has been steadily increasing since 2015. Growth in faculty diversity over time seems to be mediated through pathways linking gubernatorial partisanship, legislative partisan control, and state

appropriations to higher education. These findings underscore the importance of state-level policy and fiscal decisions in shaping the composition of the professoriate and point to legislative engagement and sustained appropriations as key targets for efforts to advance faculty diversity.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation tracked changes in the racial and gender diversity of faculty at public post-secondary institutions in the United States between 2015 and 2023, and to examine how faculty diversity is influenced by state partisan control and higher education funding. The interest convergence and intersectionality tenets of Critical Race Theory guided my focus on the simultaneous interplay of race and gender and on the ways institutional resistance yields only incremental progress without broad social and political alignment. However, CRT alone does not explain the marked variation in faculty diversity across states and over time. To capture those dynamics, I drew on inequality regimes, the balance wheel hypothesis, and democratic backsliding to capture the differing institutional practices, budgetary cycles, and partisan dynamics influencing these trends. In this final chapter, I review my overall findings and discuss whether they provide support for my hypotheses. Next, I summarize this dissertation's empirical and theoretical implications. Then, I outline the limitations of my study and propose suggestions for future research on faculty diversity. I conclude with closing remarks on the contemporary challenges facing faculty diversity in the United States.

Study Findings

At the start of this dissertation, I set out to answer three research questions addressing the trends and contributing factors of faculty racial and gender diversity over time.

Research Question 1: How did the racial and gender diversity of public post-secondary faculty in the United States change between 2015 and 2023?

Based on the interest convergence tenet and the findings in Kim et al. (2021), I expected to find a decline in the representation of Nonwhite men and women in faculty, particularly in the years following 2016 and 2020. The election of Republican President Donald Trump and the coronavirus pandemic created conditions which could constrain faculty diversity, such as hiring

freezes, mass layoffs, and growing anti-DEI and anti- “woke” movements. My findings, however, reveal that faculty racial and gender diversity at public post-secondary institutions has been consistently increasing over time, uninterrupted by the larger social, political, and economic crises experienced within these years. This finding may reflect a demonstrated sustained commitment of post-secondary faculty and administration to promoting diversity within academia. In response to anti-DEI legislation and movements earlier this year, many universities and colleges have pivoted to rebranding their existing efforts, offices, and programs in order to comply with state and federal policy while also remaining committed to diversity and inclusion (Richey 2025; Tsui 2025; Weissman 2025), a phenomena known in education policy literature as decoupling (Mampaey 2017).

Between 2015 and 2023, the average diversity index score within institutions rose from .648 to .680 while the value for the total US professoriate increased from .692 to .733. This trend was primarily driven by a decline in the representation of White men within the professoriate along with a slight increase in Nonwhite men and women. Examining women of color specifically reveals a more nuanced picture than aggregate diversity trends suggest. Their representation did improve between 2015 and 2023, but gains were modest and uneven across racial groups. Asian women accounted for the largest increase, rising from 3.14% to 4.43% of faculty, while Black and Hispanic women saw only incremental growth. These patterns underscore that progress for women of color is neither automatic nor uniformly distributed, and they highlight the enduring structural barriers faced by historically underrepresented groups.

White women’s representation in faculty remained stable across the period, highlighting the uniquely insulated position that they have historically occupied within American academia (Wise 1998). White women's racial identity affords them access to structural advantages and

protections not extended to their Nonwhite peers, while their gender identity simultaneously buffers them from the intensified racial scrutiny often directed at White men. Although White women are not exempt from sexism, their intersectional position, being both racially privileged and marginalized by gender, places them in a sociopolitical sweet spot that shields their academic representation from the volatility experienced by other groups. This dynamic underscores how intersecting systems of power can simultaneously marginalize and protect, revealing the nuanced ways that privilege operates at the intersection of race and gender.

Research Question 2: To what extent are state-level political and fiscal contexts associated with faculty diversity over time?

To the best of my knowledge, there are no existing studies on the impacts of state partisan control or higher education funding on faculty diversity. Kim et al. speculated that hiring committees at institutions facing fiscal constraints may prioritize cost-cutting measures that negatively affect the recruitment of women and racial minority faculty, such as relying more heavily on networks when recruiting new hires. I expected to find that Democratic gubernatorial and legislative leadership and higher education funding is positively associated with faculty diversity. This is partially supported by my findings. State appropriations to higher education were indeed positively associated with faculty diversity, with a \$1,000 increase in appropriations per FTE enrollment correlating with a .005 increase in average diversity index values, net of all other variables and relationships. Further, the relationship between state funding of higher education and faculty diversity became consistently stronger over time. By 2023, institutions allocating the maximum dollars per FTE enrollment had higher predicted diversity index values by .042 compared to those allocating the minimum. Increased state funding likely enables institutions to invest in targeted recruitment strategies and retention programs that increase the

representation of women and racially minoritized faculty. Well-resourced institutions can expand search efforts, offer competitive start-up packages, and fund mentorship and retention initiatives that reduce attrition among underrepresented scholars (Pham and Tsai 2024). Increased hiring capacity may also dilute disproportionate service and teaching burdens on existing underrepresented faculty, improving retention and creating conditions conducive to more equitable faculty representation.

Surprisingly, while descriptive analyses showed states with Democratic governors having higher average diversity index values compared to those with Republican or Independent governors, accounting for covariates and controls revealed that Democratic gubernatorial partisanship was significantly negatively associated with faculty diversity. Democratic legislative representation, however, was positively associated with faculty diversity even after controlling for other variables and relationships. The divergent associations for Democratic governors and state legislatures point to an important distinction: the governor's office and the state legislature exercise distinct powers, incentives, and relationships with public higher education that can produce opposing effects on faculty diversity. The negative association with Democratic gubernatorial partisanship alongside a positive legislative effect suggests that gubernatorial politics may produce executive actions or political signaling that does not translate into effective diversification, while legislative majorities appear better positioned to enact the sustained funding and policy changes that promote faculty diversity. These findings emphasize the need to model gubernatorial and legislative partisanship separately and to consider both direct political actions and mediated budgetary pathways when interpreting partisan effects on higher education outcomes.

Research Question 3: Are the associations between partisan governance and faculty diversity over time indirect through funding, or direct via policy and institutional climate?

Several studies have examined the relationship between state partisanship and higher education funding, finding that Democratic partisan control is associated with increased state appropriations to higher education (Archibald and Feldman 2006; Ortega 2020; Taylor et al. 2022). However, there are no existing studies that assess direct and indirect pathways through the factors that contribute to changes in faculty racial and gender diversity over time. Based on the existing literature, I anticipated finding that the relationship between year and faculty diversity is mediated by state partisan control and higher education appropriations. After controlling for all other variables and relationships, Democratic gubernatorial partisanship had a significantly negative direct effect on both appropriations and faculty diversity, while also having a positive indirect effect on both outcomes through promoting Democratic legislative representation. One possible explanation for this is partisan mismatch between the governor and legislature, which may cause a lack of cooperation on either or both sides and thus an unwillingness to settle budget or policy disagreements which may directly impact higher education funding. Alternatively, unified Democratic gubernatorial and legislative control may reduce partisan conflict and streamline the passage of budgets and policies that support faculty diversity. Further, Democratic representation in the state legislature was positively associated with higher education funding and faculty diversity. This indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between Democratic legislative representation and faculty diversity that cannot be accounted for through its indirect effects on higher education funding. For example, legislatures with a stronger

Democratic presence may be more likely to advance policy that supports the hiring, promotion, and retention of underrepresented racial and gender groups in public post-secondary faculty.

In my structural equation model, the strongest pathway between year and faculty diversity was through higher education appropriations, followed by the pathway linking through gubernatorial partisanship, legislative partisan control, and faculty diversity. These findings reveal that state partisan control affects faculty diversity both directly and indirectly, through legislative partisanship and higher education funding.

Empirical Contributions and Implications

This dissertation expanded upon the work of Kim et al. to provide a comprehensive descriptive analysis of the growth of our overall faculty as well as its growing racial and gender diversity since 2015. While Kim stands out as being, to the best of my knowledge, the only existing quantitative analysis of faculty racial and gender diversity, their study only captures a small portion of faculty (new hires) and cannot speak to the overall diversity of the total professoriate nor to the possible attrition of underrepresented faculty over time. My findings reveal consistent growth in the racial and gender faculty of public post-secondary faculty in the United States between 2015 and 2023, despite the tumultuous social, political, and economic events that characterized the period. Further, I extend the literature on faculty diversity by examining the direct and indirect effects of state-level political and economic factors, revealing that they play a complex and important role in creating circumstances that promote or inhibit faculty diversity. State partisan control and higher education appropriations mediate the growth in faculty diversity over time, primarily through Democratic legislatures appropriating greater amounts to higher education and in turn resulting in increased average diversity index values. Taken together, these results demonstrate that changes in the composition of the professoriate are not merely demographic but are significantly shaped by state political and fiscal structures, indicating that sustained improvements in faculty diversity will require coordinated policy and funding commitments at the state level.

Theoretical Contributions and Implications

This dissertation advances the interest convergence and intersectionality tenets of Critical Race Theory by applying them to state-level and institutional analyses of faculty diversity, while also drawing on insights from other disciplines to contextualize observed patterns. CRT provides a powerful lens for understanding why progress toward faculty diversity remains slow and why race–gender intersections produce distinctive patterns of exclusion. Interest convergence and intersectionality illuminate the conditional nature of equity gains and the heterogeneity of outcomes across groups. At the same time, my findings underscore that CRT alone does not fully account for intra-institutional differences or the modest upward trend in representation; such patterns are better understood in light of broader political struggles and resource disparities across states and universities. These theoretical applications raise questions about the assumptions underlying interest convergence and its efficacy for empirical application. Bell’s formulation of interest convergence relies on overly vague and monolithic assumed “interests” for broad racial categories, a premise that strains when extended beyond a Black/White binary to also consider the interests of Asian, Hispanic, and other race men and women. We cannot plausibly treat an entire race and gender group as homogeneous without imposing broad assumptions that obscure internal variation. For example, the policy priorities and institutional experiences of Asian women may differ from those of Black men or White women. These limitations present methodological challenges for quantitative research, namely how to operationalize and validate group interests empirically and how to identify evidence of convergence or divergence without relying on a priori assumptions.

To address these gaps, this study incorporates concepts from organizational and political science literatures. Acker’s notion of inequality regimes highlights the meso-level practices such

as hiring networks, workload norms, and reward systems that reproduce racial and gender hierarchies within universities, even under formal equity mandates. The balance wheel hypothesis situates these institutional dynamics within cyclical patterns of state appropriations, revealing how fiscal contractions and recoveries condition opportunities for diversification. Democratic backsliding further contextualizes these trends by framing partisan interventions through budgetary cuts and anti-DEI legislation as deliberate strategies to weaken institutional autonomy and constrain equity initiatives. Together, these frameworks explain the significant differences between institutions and the vulnerability of diversity efforts to broader political contests. By synthesizing CRT with theories of organizational inequality and state governance, this dissertation reframes faculty diversity as a politically mediated and structurally constrained process, offering a foundation for future research on how partisan control, resource allocation, and institutional practices jointly shape equity outcomes in higher education.

Study Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This dissertation has several empirical and theoretical limitations that temper its conclusions and point toward avenues for future research. The analysis was constrained to race and gender because IPEDS faculty data are disaggregated only along those axes, excluding other salient identities such as disability, nativity or immigration status, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic background. Future work should draw on alternative secondary sources or primary data collection to capture these additional intersections and produce a more granular account of the factors shaping faculty diversity. Further, my analyses did not differentiate between tenured and tenure-track faculty versus specialized or non-tenured faculty. As a result, increases in diversity may be disproportionately concentrated in adjunct or less lucrative roles, potentially constraining the career advancement of racial and gender minority faculty. Future studies could also assess other faculty diversity outcomes such as hiring, resignation, and promotion rather than just an overall headcount of each race and gender group within institutions each year, which could reveal trends that cannot be seen above the surface. I would be particularly intrigued to see or conduct a re-assessment of the time period covered by Kim and colleagues, examining how the racial and gender diversity of both new hires and overall faculty are influenced by state-level political and economic contexts. Methodologically, the mixed-effects models used here do not accommodate mediation pathways, while the structural

equation model is not nested within state and institution—each approach yields important but partial insights, and more advanced techniques that integrate multilevel mediation or otherwise better represent the full field of relationships without overfitting the model would strengthen causal inference. As stated above, theoretical application of Bell’s interest convergence also proves difficult in a strictly quantitative design: interest convergence functions better as a guiding heuristic for hypotheses than as a readily testable theory, and mixed-methods studies are likely necessary to adjudicate when and for whom interests actually converge. Finally, the current models explain only a portion (about 35%) of variance in faculty diversity, suggesting additional institutional and state-level predictors warrant investigation, including alternative measures of partisanship that capture public political leanings rather than formal governmental control.

Concluding Remarks

While the consistent upward trend in faculty racial and gender diversity amid social, political, and economic volatility may appear promising, it should not be interpreted as a justification for complacency in protecting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the coming years. My findings regarding the relationships between partisan governance, higher education funding, and faculty diversity underscore the urgency of the Trump administration’s punitive threats to revoke federal funding from institutions like Columbia and Harvard earlier this year. These actions place universities in a precarious position—forced to choose between complying with anti-DEI mandates or risking substantial financial loss, both of which jeopardize progress toward inclusive representation. Concurrently, increasing Republican resistance to H-1B and other visas may impede the recruitment and retention of international scholars and thus exacerbate losses among underrepresented faculty. In light of these recent developments, it is imperative for educational sociologists to continue investigating the structural and political determinants of faculty diversity. Ongoing monitoring of the professoriate will be essential to identify and address disproportionate losses among underrepresented groups, especially Black, Hispanic, and

other women of color. Such vigilance will allow institutions and policymakers to proactively develop targeted recruitment, retention, and support initiatives. The American academy must remain committed to elevating the voices and contributions of communities minoritized by race, gender, sexuality, religion, and ability. This commitment requires active participation from scholars across all positionalities, including White men and women, in sustaining and defending the diversification of our faculty against political and institutional threats.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Trinity Amethyst Lakin is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology at Florida State University. A proud first-generation college student, she earned both her Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees in Sociology from Florida State University. Her research agenda centers racial, gender, and socioeconomic disparities in higher education, with a particular focus on structural inequality and access.

Her master's thesis was a quantitative investigation into the relationship between supplementary education and post-secondary enrollment before and after the Great Recession, utilizing data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Grounded in the Effectively Maintained Inequality (EMI) theoretical framework, the study examined how race and socioeconomic status shape participation in supplementary education and subsequent college enrollment.

During her graduate tenure, Trinity served as a graduate teaching assistant and course instructor for undergraduate courses including Social Problems, Sociology of Sex and Gender, and Sociology of Death and Dying. Beyond academia, she contributed to landmark longitudinal research as a field interviewer for the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 (NLS72), focusing on cognitive health and dementia. She also worked as a data scientist, where she supported the fielding and reporting of the Community Health Assessment (CHA) for the Florida Department of Health in Alachua County.

Trinity is an alum of the Consortium on Analytics for Data-Driven Decision Making (CAnD3) fellowship at McGill University, where she collaborated with an international cohort of interdisciplinary fellows to produce research projects, policy briefs, and data visualizations aimed at informing public policy. Her scholarly work includes the publication of "Racial/Ethnic Differences in Accelerated Credit and Inequalities in College Completion" in *Social Currents* (August 2023).

Outside of her academic and professional pursuits, Trinity is a passionate visual artist who enjoys oil painting and block printing, as well as exploring a wide range of creative media.