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# Pushing Back on the DEI Pushback: The Demographic Imperative

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# Pushing Back on the DEI Pushback: The Demographic Imperative<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The United States is facing demographic headwinds that threaten our nation's future innovation capacity and economic competitiveness. State-level Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) bans ignore the impact of slowing total population growth and continued White population losses due to declining fertility, normal aging-related mortality, and premature deaths of despair among the prime working-age males. States with the most aggressive anti-DEI policies should embrace—rather than pushback on—immigration-driven demographic diversity to avoid a working-age population demographic depression and enrollment cliffs in both K-12 and higher education. And, rather than attempting to skirt state-imposed DEI bans, public university leaders must embrace data-driven decision-making regarding campus and societal demographic diversity; leverage iceberg demographics in faculty, staff, and student recruitment and retention; implement well-designed DEI policies and programs that create a strong sense of belonging for their diverse

constituencies; and reimagine curriculum and instruction by adopting the courageous conversation model of student engagement, critical thinking, and learning.

## Introduction

DEI has emerged as a major culture war issue less than four years after the tragic murder of George Floyd prompted a national conversation and a host of public and private sector-funded initiatives as well as philanthropic investments in programs aimed at redressing racial and structural inequities in American society.<sup>2</sup> Firms and communities conducted organizational culture and climate audits; reviewed daily routines, practices, tactics, procedures, and policies; and in some instances, implemented the changes necessary to achieve reputational equity.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We wish to thank Huan Lian and Torrance Todd for their assistance with the graphics and formatting of this document. We--the authors--are solely responsible for the views, opinions, analyses, conclusions, and recommendations presented in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> For two of the many divergent perspectives, see: Ashlynn Warta, 2022, "Diversity-Office Funding Wastes UNC-System Resources," James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal, August 8, available at <https://www.jamesgmartin.center/2022/08/diversity-office-funding-wastes-unc-system-resources/>; and Barron Witherspoon, Sr., 2024, "DEI is under attack. Here's the real reason it makes many white men uncomfortable," Fortune, April 19, available at <https://fortune.com/2024/04/19/dei-under-attack-real-reason-it-makes-white-men-uncomfortable-careers-leadership-diversity/>

<sup>3</sup> James H. Johnson, Jr and Jeanne Milliken Bonds, 2020, "Does Your Firm Have Reputational Equity?," Journal of Business and Social Science Review, November, available at <https://jbssrnet.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/1.pdf>.

Today, however, DEI pushback is strong and widespread, especially in higher education. <sup>4</sup> According to the [Chronicle of Higher Education DEI Legislative Tracker](#), 28 states have enacted, unsuccessfully attempted to enact, or are contemplating enacting legislation that bans or prohibits public colleges and universities from:

- considering race, sex, ethnicity, and national origin in admissions or employment;
- establishing offices and spending money on DEI programs;
- using DEI statements in hiring and promotion; and/or
- requiring employees to participate in DEI programs.

In states where such laws have been enacted, public universities have been forced to close DEI offices and either layoff or redeploy staff. <sup>5</sup> In Texas, for example, a DEI ban reportedly has led to “more than 100 job cuts at state universities,” <sup>6</sup> including 50 professionals relieved of their duties due to the elimination of DEI offices and programs at the University of Texas at Austin. <sup>7</sup>

In some states, anti-DEI legislation has been used to target specific demographic groups. For example, the University of Texas at Austin also has imposed restrictions on particular employee affinity groups (those related to race, color, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation), stipulating that such groups “can no longer meet during paid work hours, use any university resources, or have departments pay members’ dues.” <sup>8</sup> And, ignoring the well-documented contributions of foreign graduate students and postdoctoral fellows to creativity and innovation, a new Florida law prohibits the state’s public universities from recruiting and employing graduate students from “seven countries of concern” (China, Cuba, Venezuela, Syria, Iran, and Russia) to work on research projects. <sup>9</sup>

4 Alexis, Wray, 2024, “How these 10 states’ anti-DEI laws will impact college campuses,” *reckon.news*, March 27, available at <https://www.reckon.news/justice/2024/03/how-these-9-states-anti-dei-laws-will-impact-college-campuses.html>; Erin Gretzinger & Maggie Hicks, 2024, “The Chaos of Compliance: How Public Colleges in Two States are Actually Responding to DEI Bands,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 22, available at [https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-chaos-of-compliance?utm\\_campaign=che-social-20240322&utm\\_medium=o-soc&utm\\_source=li..](https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-chaos-of-compliance?utm_campaign=che-social-20240322&utm_medium=o-soc&utm_source=li..)

5 Alecia Taylor, 2024, “3 Ways That Anti-DEI Efforts Are Changing How Colleges Operate,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 18, available at <https://www.chronicle.com/article/3-ways-that-anti-dei-efforts-are-changing-how-colleges-operate>. Here in North Carolina, the UNC System Board of Governors is considering a DEI ban. See Korrie Dean & Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi, 2024, “UNC System board committee approves policy gutting DEI. Students say they were kept out,” *The News & Observer*, April 18, available <https://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/education/article287765275.html>.

6 Acacia Coronado, 2024, “Texas’ diversity, equity, and inclusion ban has led to more than 100 job cuts at state universities,” *apnews.com*, April 13, available at <https://apnews.com/article/dei-texas-university-job-cuts-939b334d85108e498c0f85d2ad44ebc2>.

7 Texas Tribune, 2024, “Layoffs and Upheaval at Texas Universities Spur Fear as Lawmakers Continue DEI Crackdown,” *Daily Kos*, April 2, available at <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2024/4/20/2236147/-Layoffs-and-upheaval-at-Texas-universities-spur-fear-as-lawmakers-continue-DEI-crackdown>.

8 Katherine Mangan, 2024, “Want to Celebrate Your Culture? Better Clock Out First,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 23, available at [https://www.chronicle.com/article/want-to-celebrate-your-culture-better-clock-out-first?utm\\_source=lterable&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=campaign\\_9662038\\_nl\\_Academe-Today\\_date\\_20240424&cid=at&sra=true](https://www.chronicle.com/article/want-to-celebrate-your-culture-better-clock-out-first?utm_source=lterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=campaign_9662038_nl_Academe-Today_date_20240424&cid=at&sra=true)

9 The new Florida law has prompted the ACLU to file a discrimination lawsuit against the state on the behalf of two Chinese doctoral students at Florida International University who are at risk of losing the financial support needed to complete their degrees and an agricultural economics professor of Chinese descent at the University of Florida who is no longer able to recruit talented international postdoctoral fellows to work on his research on the state’s citrus industry. See Kimmy Yam, 2024, “Faculty and students protest Florida law that they say could keep top Chinese talent out of their grad schools,” *NBC News*, March 29, available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/faculty-students-protest-florida-law-say-keep-top-chinese-talent-grad-rcna144988>; and Asian American Scholars Forum, 2024, “Chinese Students at University of Florida Declare ‘We Belong,’” *AsAmNews*, March 27, available at <https://asamnews.com/2024/03/27/bans-hiring-of-research-assistants-from-7-countries-china-north-korea-florida/>

In other states, legislative bodies contemplate forcing university departments to require that faculty post on a public-facing website not only their course syllabi and assigned reading materials but also their curriculum vitae. This kind of “big brother is watching” tactic is designed to cleanse university curricula of any content remotely connected to DEI.<sup>10</sup>

As higher education institutions face a major enrollment cliff and businesses struggle to recruit and retain talent, we think these state-level policies—and growing anti-DEI public sentiment more generally—are taking our nation down the wrong path and may well spell disaster for our national sense of belonging and economic viability in the long run. If we as a nation aspire to win the war for talent; maintain a competitive edge in creativity and innovation; and remain attractive as a place to live, work, play, and do business, we must embrace diversity as a strategic demographic imperative.<sup>11</sup>

In this paper, we adopt a case study approach to demonstrate why state-level DEI programs must be embraced rather than dismantled. Specifically, we focus on the 11 states that have passed the most aggressive and expansive anti-DEI legislation according to the [Chronicle of Higher Education DEI Legislative Tracker](#). We draw upon publicly available census data to illustrate how a set of disruptive demographic trends enveloping our nation, summarized below and discussed in detail elsewhere, are dramatically transforming the size, composition, and distribution of each state’s population. These trends necessitate purposeful and intentional policymaking designed to embrace, nurture, support, and manage

the resulting diverse mix of people that will comprise each state’s higher education institutions, communities, workplaces, and consumer markets for the foreseeable future.

We begin with a brief overview of the disruptive demographic trends that are transforming our nation. Next, we present the latest census data on demographic change in the U.S. and the 11 states that are leading the nation’s pushback on DEI. We use the Balance of Population framework to guide our analysis and interpretation of the census data. We conclude by outlining a five-pronged approach that will enhance the ability of higher education institutions to continue to recruit, nurture, and develop diverse talent; enhance and deepen interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary research anchored in “diversity of thought;” and produce talent with the analytical reasoning skills, discernment, and foresight required to successfully navigate, survive, thrive, and prosper in an ever-changing and turbulent geo-political and economic environment.

10 Ryan Quinn, 2024, “Virginia Officials Scrutinize Two Universities’ DEI Course Syllabi,” *Inside Higher Ed*, March 18, available at <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/diversity/2024/03/18/va-officials-scrutinize-2-universities-dei-course-syllabi>; John R. Przypyszny & Sarah L. Pheasant, 2023, “State Legislatures Targeting DEI in Higher Education,” *Faegre Drinker*, June 29, available at <https://www.faegredrinker.com/en/insights/publications/2023/6/state-legislatures-targeting-dei-in-higher-education>; Campbell Robertson & Anna Betts, 2024, “Indiana Law Requires Professors to Promote ‘Intellectual Diversity’ or Face Penalties,” *The New York Times*, March 23, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/23/us/indiana-professors-tenure-diversity.html?auth=login-google1tap&login=google1tap>.

11 Luke Rogers, 2021, “COVID-19, Declining Birth Rates and International Migration Resulted in Historically Small Population Gains,” U.S. Census Bureau, December 21, available at <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/12/us-population-grew-in-2021-slowest-rate-since-founding-of-the-nation.html>. For a discussion of the potential impact of the anti-DEI movement on North Carolina’s economy, see Danielle Paquette, 2024, “Far Right politics could hurt business in North Carolina, some fear. Again.” *Washington Post*, April 5, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2024/04/04/north-carolina-economy-election-2024/>.



## Critical Background

The pushback against DEI is running full speed into U.S. demographic headwinds and threatens our nation's future innovation capacity and economic competitiveness.<sup>12</sup> A quick review of recent and ongoing demographic trends highlights the problem.

Census statistics reveal the U.S. experienced the second slowest rate of population growth in the nation's history during the 2010s (7.4%), only slightly higher than the growth rate during Great Depression (7.3%).<sup>13</sup> In part, this slowing rate of growth was driven by another historic first in our nation: the White population declined by -5.1 million during the 2010s and by another -1.6 million between 2020 and 2022.<sup>14</sup> The nation's net growth has been fully driven by people of color over the past thirteen years.

This emergent trend, popularly referred to as the "browning" of America,<sup>15</sup> has been evident in Census data since the 1990s and will continue well into the future.<sup>16</sup> With the highest median age in our history (38.8), we are an aging nation. Whites have by far the highest median age (43.9) compared to African Americans (35.3) and Hispanics (30.5).<sup>17</sup>

12 J. H. Johnson, Jr., J. M. Bonds, & A. M. Parnell, 2021, "Business alert! Gale force demographic wind gusts ahead," Kenan Institute White Paper. <https://kenaninstitute.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Business-Alert-V2-002.pdf>. J. H. Johnson, Jr., J. M. Bonds, & A. M. Parnell, 2022, "Urgently Needed: Equity Tools to Navigate Demographic Gale-Force Wind Gusts," North Carolina Medical Journal, available at <http://www.wholecommunityhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Equity-Tools-to-Navigate-Demographic-Gale-Force-Wind-Gusts.pdf>. J. H. Johnson, Jr., A. M. Parnell, & J. M. Bonds, 2023, "North Carolina at a Demographic Crossroad: Loss of Lives and the Impact," Kenan Institute White Paper, September, available at <https://kenaninstitute.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/North-Carolina-at-a-Demographic-Crossroad.pdf>

13 Sabrina Tavernise, and Robert Gebeloff, 2021, "U.S. Population Over Last Decade Grew at Slowest Rate Since 1930s," The New York Times, August 17, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/26/us/us-census-numbers.html>; Tara Bahrapour, Harry Stevens, Adrian Blanco, and Ted Mellnik, 2021, "2020 Census Shows U.S. Population Grew at Slowest Pace Since the 1930s," Washington, Post, April 26, available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/interactive/2021/2020-census-us-population-results/?itid=ik\\_inline\\_manual\\_4](https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/interactive/2021/2020-census-us-population-results/?itid=ik_inline_manual_4).

14 Anagha Srikanth, 2021, "White Population Declines for First Time in History, New Census Expected to Say," thehill.com, August 11, available at <https://thehill.com/changing-america/respect/diversity-inclusion/567360-White-population-declines-for-first-time-in-us/>; Azmi Haroun and Madison Hoff, 2021, "America's White Population Fell for First Time in US History, 2020 Census Data Shows," Business Insider, August 12, available at <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-census-2020-White-population-declines-first-time-2021-8>.

15 James H. Johnson, Walter C. Farrell, Jr. & Chandra Guinn, 1997, "Immigration Reform and the Browning of America: Tensions, Conflicts, and Community Instability," International Migration Review, Vol. 31, 1029-1069.

16 Congressional Budget Office, 2024, The Demographic Outlook: 2024 to 2054, January, available at <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2024-01/59697-Demographic-Outlook.pdf>

17 Jonathan Vespa, 2018, The U.S. Joins Other Countries with Large Aging Populations, census.gov, March 13, available at <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/03/graying-america.html>

Moreover, the U.S. fertility rate has been below the replacement level for the past fifteen years, driven largely by a decline in childbearing among White women.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, the U.S. also has experienced a sharp rise in premature deaths of despair among prime working-age White males, which has affected both the marriage rate and the fertility rate among Whites.<sup>19</sup> Combined, these developments have contributed to the “browning” of the school-age population, the next generation of talent that will have to propel our nation in the hyper-competitive global economy.<sup>20</sup>

Against the backdrop of these demographic headwinds, we are convinced that winning the war for talent and our future prosperity in the global marketplace requires higher education and government leaders to not only embrace but also invest—purposefully and intentionally—in our demographic diversity as a strategic imperative, in both K-12 education and college admissions. To underscore why this endowment is important, we illustrate how these disruptive demographic trends are reshaping the states with the most aggressive anti-DEI initiatives and policies.

## Research Design & Context

Our insights are derived from applying the Balance of Population Change Equation, as we have done in prior research,<sup>21</sup> to the Census Bureau’s April 1, 2020 – July 1, 2022, population estimates for the 11 states with the strongest pushback on DEI.<sup>22</sup> Descriptively, the equation stipulates that for any state over a specified timeframe:

**Population Change = In-Flows minus Out-Flows, where**

**In-Flows = (Births + In-Migration) and Out-Flows = (Deaths + Out-migration)**

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- 18 Brady Hamilton, Joyce A. Martin, & Michelle J.K. Osterman, 2024, “Births: Provisional Data for 2023,” Vital Statistics Rapid Release Report No. 35, April, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/vsrr/vsrr035.pdf>; Jennifer Calfas & Anthony DeBorroros, 2024, “U.S. Fertility Rate Falls to Record Low,” Wall Street Journal, April 25, available at <https://www.wsj.com/us-news/america-birth-rate-decline-a111d21b>; Sydney Lake, “The economy is moving us back into the 19th century as fertility rates plunge,” Fortune, April 26, available at <https://fortune.com/2024/04/26/fertility-rates-plunge-economy-genz-children/>; Tanya Lewis, 2021, “The Pandemic Caused a Baby Bust, Not a Boom,” Scientific American, August 3, available at <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-pandemic-caused-a-baby-bust-not-a-boom/>; Wendell Cox, 2022, “US Total Fertility Rates: Toward Europe?,” newgeography, July 28, available at <https://www.newgeography.com/content/007528-us-total-fertility-rates-toward-europe>; Sabrina Tavernise, Claire Cain Miller, Quoc Trung Bui, and Robert Gebeloff, 2021, “Why American Women Everywhere Are Delaying Motherhood,” The New York Times, June 16, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/16/us/declining-birthrate-motherhood.html>; Sabrina Tavernise, 2018, “Fewer Birth Than Deaths Among Whites in Majority of U.S. States,” The New York Times, June 20, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/20/us/White-minority-population.html>; Ro Kwon, 2020, “More Women Like Me Are Choosing to Be Childfree. Is this the Age of Opting Out?,” The Guardian, July 6, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/jul/06/more-women-like-me-are-choosing-to-be-childfree-is-this-the-age-of-opting-out->; PRB, 2021, “Why is the U.S. Birth Rate Declining?,” Population Reference Bureau, May 6, available at <https://www.prb.org/resources/why-is-the-u-s-birth-rate-declining/>; Paula M. Lantz, 2021, “The Social Determinants of Declining Birth Rates in the United States: Implications for Population and Public Policy,” Milbank Quarterly Opinion, November 10, available at <https://www.milbank.org/quarterly/opinions/the-social-determinants-of-declining-birth-rates-in-the-united-states-implications-for-population-health-and-public-policy/>.
- 19 Roge Karma, 2020, “Deaths of Despair: The Deadly Epidemic that Predated Coronavirus,” Vox, April 15, available at <https://www.vox.com/2020/4/15/21214734/deaths-of-despair-coronavirus-covid-19-angus-deaton-anne-case-americans-deaths>.
- 20 James H. Johnson, Jr. and Tawannah G. Allen, 2016, “Disruptive Demographics: The Triple Whammy of Geographic Disadvantage and the Future of K-12 Education in America,” Chapter 5 in *Leading Schools in Challenging Times: Eye to the Future*, Information Age Publishing. We should note that fertility rates also have declined among women of color, which foreshadows an impending enrollment cliff in K-12 education. See: Layman Stone, 2018, “Baby Bust: Fertility is Declining the Most Among Minority Women,” Institute for Family Studies, May 16, available at <https://ifstudies.org/blog/baby-bust-fertility-is-declining-the-most-among-minority-women>.
- 21 See James H. Johnson, Jr., Allan M. Parnell, and Jeanne Milliken Bonds, 2024, “Shifting U.S. and North Carolina Demography During COVID-19,” forthcoming in *Time Journeys*, edited by Stanley D. Brunn, Springer
- 22 Alabama, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, North Carolina, North Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

Table 1 specifies the data we extracted from the [Census Bureau's American Community Survey \(ACS\)](#) to operationalize the model.

**Table 1: Concepts, Variables, & Specific Measures**

Concepts	Variables	Specific Measures
<b>Total Population Change</b>	2020 Population 2022 Population	Absolute Change 2020-22 Percent Change 2020-22
<b>Components of Change</b>	Natural Change Net Migration	Births minus Deaths In-migration-Outmigration
<b>Sources of Migration</b>	Domestic Migrants International Migrants	Interstate Movers Movers from Abroad
<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>	Race/Ethnicity Age Fertility	White Population Change Nonwhite Population Change Hispanic Population Change Preschool Age Change (0-4) School Age Change (5-17) Working Age Change (18-64) Older Adult Change (65 and Older) Total Fertility Rate
<b>Political Orientation</b>	Republican Democratic	Red Blue Swing
<b>Geographic Location</b>	Census Regions	Northeast Midwest South West
	Census Divisions	New England Mid-Atlantic South Atlantic East South Central West South Central East North Central West North Central Mountain Pacific

Source: authors



The components of change and source of migration variables enable us to specify how the dynamic interactions among the specific measures of natural population change (births and deaths) and net migration (in- and out-migration) influenced or shaped the demographic experiences of the top 11 anti-DEI states over the 27-month period covered in the ACS data. We also extracted demographic data on race/ethnicity, age, and fertility from the ACS file and other sources. These data allowed us to assess the extent to which these states' population dynamics align with two key features of our nation's growing diversity: the simultaneous "browning" and "graying" of the national population, the workforce, workplaces, and consumer markets.

In addition, as background and context, we collected information on the political orientation of the states promulgating the most expansive DEI bans. Eight of the eleven—Idaho, Indiana, Texas, Utah, North Dakota, Alabama, Tennessee, and Wyoming—are "steadfast" Republican-leaning red states; in terms of electoral outcomes, the remaining three are classified as less predictable Swing states—Florida, North Carolina, and Wisconsin. To date, none of the states classified as Democratic-leaning blue states have enacted DEI bans.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, given that geographic location is an important driver of demographic change, we documented where the anti-DEI states, as defined in this research, are located within the U.S., using the U.S. Census Bureau classification of the nation's fifty states into four regions and nine divisions.<sup>24</sup> As we show below, the census regions and divisions where the 11 anti-DEI states are located were major population growth centers between 2020 and 2022. However, given their unique demographic dynamics (irrespective of

political orientation), the anti-DEI states face some major workforce challenges in the future if they do not embrace and accommodate the demographic groups that have driven and are likely to continue to drive population growth.

## Findings

Nine of the eleven anti-DEI states experienced more rapid population growth than the nation (0.5%) between 2020 and 2022 (Figure 1). Idaho (5.4%) led the way, followed by Florida (3.3%), Utah (3.3%), Texas (3.0%), North Carolina (2.5%), and Tennessee (2.0%). Alabama (1.0%) and Indiana (0.7%) grew more slowly but still at a higher rate than the nation (0.5%). Only two of the anti-DEI states experienced population growth below the national average between 2020 and 2022: North Dakota grew by .02% while Wisconsin experienced slight population decline (-0.02%).

**Figure 1: Absolute and Percent Population Change, Anti-DEI States, 2020-2022**

2022 Population	State	Percent Population Change, 2020-2022	Absolute Population Change, 2020-2022
333,278,557	United States	0.5%	1,838,037
5,074,296	Alabama	1.0%	49,940
22,244,823	Florida	3.3%	706,597
1,939,033	Idaho	5.4%	99,942
6,833,037	Indiana	0.7%	47,369
10,698,973	North Carolina	2.5%	259,559
779,261	North Dakota	0.0%	170
7,051,339	Tennessee	2.0%	140,553
30,029,572	Texas	3.0%	884,144
3,380,800	Utah	3.3%	109,186
5,892,539	Wisconsin	-0.0%	-1,186
581,381	Wyoming	0.8%	4,554

Source: ACS

23 Mohammad Jazib, 2023, "List of Red and Blues States 2023 in the US," available at <https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/red-and-blue-states-in-us-1701677972-1>

24 At the regional level, five of the eleven anti-DEI states are in the South (Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas), three are in the Midwest (Indiana, North Dakota, and Wisconsin), and three are in the West (Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming). At the division level, two are in the South Atlantic division (North Carolina and Florida), two are in the East South Central division (Alabama and Tennessee), one is in the West South Central division (Texas), two are in the East North Central division (Indiana and Wisconsin), one is in the West North Central division (North Dakota), and two are in the Mountain division (Utah and Wyoming). None of the anti-DEI states, as defined in this research, are in the nation's Northeast region, and none are in the Middle Atlantic, New England, and Pacific divisions of the country.

Notably, in the 11 states that have implemented anti-DEI policies, net migration—a major source of demographic diversity—drove population change between 2020 and 2022 (Figure 2). Net migration was responsible for over 90% of absolute population growth in five anti-DEI states—Idaho, Indiana, North Carolina, North Dakota, and Wyoming—and for between 50% and 89% of growth in five of the states: Tennessee, Florida, Alabama, Texas, and Utah.

A very diverse group of domestic migrants fleeing COVID-19 exposure risks in major urban centers in the New England, Middle Atlantic, East North Central, and Pacific divisions of the country were principally responsible for the migration-driven population growth in these states between 2020 and 2022.<sup>25</sup> Within these now anti-DEI states, domestic migrants settled primarily in small- and medium-sized metro areas and amenity-rich micropolitan communities with broadband access, which allowed some of the transplants to work remotely. Some of the micropolitan areas in the Mountain West where pandemic refugees settled are popularly referred to as Zoom towns.<sup>26</sup>

Figure 2: Net Migration and Natural Change Shares of Absolute Population Change, Anti-DEI States, 2020-2022

Area	Natural Change Share	Absolute Population Change	Net Migration Share	Area
United States	24%	1,838,037	76%	United States
Alabama	-31%	49,940	69%	Alabama
Florida	-12%	706,597	88%	Florida
Idaho	9%	99,942	91%	Idaho
Indiana	6%	47,369	94%	Indiana
North Carolina	4%	259,559	96%	North Carolina
North Dakota	9%	170	91%	North Dakota
Tennessee	-11%	140,553	69%	Tennessee
Texas	26%	884,144	72%	Texas
Utah	50%	109,186	50%	Utah
Wisconsin	-9%	-1,186	1%	Wisconsin
Wyoming	-5%	4,554	98%	Wyoming

Source: ACS

Adding to cultural and linguistic diversity, international migrants accounted for much of the net migration induced growth in some of these eleven states (Figure 3). In Wisconsin and Indiana, for example, movers from abroad were responsible for 100% and 49% of net migration, respectively, between 2020 and 2022. International migrants were responsible for more modest but nevertheless significant shares of the net migration gains in Texas (26%), Florida (22%), North Carolina (15%), Utah (14%), Wyoming (10%), Alabama (9%), and Tennessee (7%) during this period (Figure 3).

25 William H. Frey, 2022, "New Census Data Show a Huge Spike in Movement Out of Big Metro Areas During the Pandemic," Brookings Metro, April 14, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2022/04/14/new-census-data-shows-a-huge-spike-in-movement-out-of-big-metro-areas-during-the-pandemic/>. James H. Johnson, Jr., 2021, "Coronavirus Pandemic Refugees and the Future of American Cities," Urban Studies and Public Administration, Vol. 4, No. 1, available at <http://www.scholink.org/ojs/index.php/uspa/article/view/3511>.

26 P. Stoker, D. Rumore, L. Romaniello, & Z. Levine, 2021, "Planning and Development Challenges in Western Gateway Communities," Journal of the American Planning Association, Vol 87, available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01944363.2020.1791728>. D. Yancey, 2022, "Census Bureau suggest we may be seeing a Zoom migration, after all," Cardinal News, March, 28, available at <https://cardinalnews.org/2022/03/28/census-bureau-suggests-we-may-be-seeing-a-zoom-migration-after-all/>. Anja Solum, 2023, "Best Zoom Towns in the U.S. - 2023," May, 3, SmartAsset, available at <https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/best-zoom-towns-in-the-u.s.-2023-study>.

Figure 3: Sources of Net Migration, Anti-DEI States, 2020-2022

Area	Domestic Share	Net Migration	International Share	Area
United States	0%	1,406,845	100%	United States
Alabama	91%	71,884	9%	Alabama
Florida	78%	797,809	22%	Florida
Idaho	97%	91,246	8%	Idaho
Indiana	51%	44,591	49%	Indiana
North Carolina	85%	248,898	15%	North Carolina
North Dakota	76%	-5,434	24%	North Dakota
Tennessee	93%	157,821	7%	Tennessee
Texas	74%	639,314	26%	Texas
Utah	86%	54,712	14%	Utah
Wisconsin	0%	195	100%	Wisconsin
Wyoming	90%	4,851	10%	Wyoming

Source: ACS

Moreover, these domestic and international migrants contributed to both the “browning” and “greying” of the populations of these states. People of color were responsible for over half of net population growth in every one of the anti-DEI states—except Idaho, where nonwhites were responsible for one third of net growth. In the other 10 states, as Figure 4 shows, the nonwhite share of net growth ranged between 46% and 100%. In most of these states, Hispanic newcomers were responsible for most of the nonwhite population growth.

Figure 4: NonWhite and Hispanic Shares of Population Growth, Anti-DEI States, 2020-2022

Area	Non-White Share	Absolute Population Change	Hispanic Share	Area
United States	100%	1,838,037	100%	United States
Alabama	73%	49,940	38%	Alabama
Florida	66%	706,597	44%	Florida
Idaho	33%	99,942	23%	Idaho
Indiana	100%	47,369	72%	Indiana
North Carolina	70%	259,559	30%	North Carolina
North Dakota		170		North Dakota
Tennessee	46%	140,553	30%	Tennessee
Texas	92%	884,144	50%	Texas
Utah	51%	109,186	34%	Utah
Wisconsin		-1,186		Wisconsin
Wyoming	76%	4,554	60%	Wyoming

Source: ACS

\*In North Dakota, people of color (5,093) and Hispanic (2,224) growth barely exceeded White population decline (-4,923), resulting in miniscule net growth (170).

\*\*Wisconsin experienced nonWhite (30,036) and Hispanic (19,269) growth but not sufficient to offset White population loss (-30,622).

At the same time the non-White population was growing sharply in these anti-DEI states, the non-Hispanic White population was either declining or growing much slower than the total population (Figure 5).<sup>27</sup> Continuing a trend first observed between 2010 and 2020, the non-Hispanic White population declined in Indiana (-0.5%), North Dakota (-0.7%), and Wisconsin (-0.6%) between 2020 and 2022. The non-Hispanic White population grew more slowly than the total population in the remaining anti-DEI states of Idaho, North Carolina, Texas, Utah, Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, and Wyoming, which largely accounts for the increasing demographic diversity.

27 Azmi Haroun and Madison Hoff, 2021, “America’s White Population Fell for First Time in US History, 2020 Census Data Shows,” Business Insider, August 12, available at <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-census-2020-white-population-declines-first-time-2021-8>; Rogelio Saenz and Kenneth M. Johnson, 2016, “White Deaths Exceed Births in a Majority of U.S. States,” Census Data Brief, University of Wisconsin Applied Population Lab, available at [https://apl.wisc.edu/briefs\\_resources/pdf/natural-decrease-18.pdf](https://apl.wisc.edu/briefs_resources/pdf/natural-decrease-18.pdf)

**Figure 5: Non-Hispanic White Population Change, Anti-DEI States, 2020-2022**

Absolute Total Population Change	Percent Change	State	Percent Change	Absolute White Population Change
1,838,037	0.5%	United States	-0.8%	-1,660,619
49,940	1.0%	Alabama	0.6%	13,655
706,597	3.3%	Florida	-2.1%	53,547
99,942	5.4%	Idaho	4.5%	67,246
47,369	0.7%	Indiana	-0.5%	-27,032
259,559	2.5%	North Carolina	1.2%	77,088
170	0.0%	North Dakota	-0.7%	-4,923
140,553	2.0%	Tennessee	1.5%	76,088
884,144	3.0%	Texas	0.5%	69,362
109,186	3.3%	Utah	-2.1%	53,447
-1,186	-0.0%	Wisconsin	-0.6%	-30,622
4,554	0.8%	Wyoming	0.2%	1,097

Source: ACS

Notably, at the same time the 11 anti-DEI states were experiencing either slowing non-Hispanic White population growth or non-Hispanic White population decline—and becoming racially and ethnically more diverse in the process—these states were also aging. Consistent with the national “greying of America” trend, the older adult population grew more rapidly than the total population in each of the anti-DEI states between 2020 and 2022. Moreover, as Figure 6 shows, in 8 of the 11 anti-DEI states, the rate of older adult population growth also exceeded the national rate of population aging (5.9%), a strong indicator that seniors were a major driver of population change in these states during this period. Idaho (10%) had the highest rate of elderly or senior population growth followed by Utah (9.0%), Wyoming (8.1%), Texas (7.6%), North Carolina (7.2%), Florida (6.8%), Wisconsin (6.5%), and Tennessee (5.9%) (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Absolute Change in Total and Senior Populations, Anti-DEI States, 2020-2022**

Absolute Total Population Change	Percent Change	State	Percent Change	Absolute Senior Population Change (65 and older)
1,838,037	0.5%	United States	5.9%	3,219,619
49,940	1.0%	Alabama	4.2%	39,233
706,597	3.3%	Florida	6.8%	307,243
99,942	5.4%	Idaho	10.1%	30,280
47,369	0.7%	Indiana	5.4%	59,507
259,559	2.5%	North Carolina	7.2%	125,748
170	0.0%	North Dakota	5.6%	6,886
140,553	2.0%	Tennessee	5.9%	68,369
884,144	3.0%	Texas	7.6%	285,388
109,186	3.3%	Utah	9.0%	33,311
-1,186	-0.0%	Wisconsin	6.5%	67,049
4,554	0.8%	Wyoming	8.1%	8,065

Source: ACS

In contrast to the senior population, the working age population (18-64) declined nationally (-0.1%) and in three of the anti-DEI states—North Dakota (-1.1%), Wisconsin (-1.0%), and Wyoming (-0.2%)—between 2020 and 2022. In four of the anti-DEI states, the status of the working age population was only slightly better, growing but more slowly than the rate of total population growth during this period: Alabama (0.2% versus 1.0%), Florida (2.6% versus 3.3%), Tennessee (1.4% versus 2.0%), and North Carolina (1.9% versus 2.5%). Idaho’s working age population growth (5.4%) achieved parity with the state’s rate of total population growth (5.4%) between 2020 and 2022. But, as Figure 7 shows, working age population growth outpaced total population growth in only two states—Texas (3.1% versus 3.0%) and Utah (4.2% versus 3.0%). In the absence of diverse groups of newcomers (immigrants, pandemic refugees, and people of color), the working age population in these two states likely would have declined or grown much slower during this period.

Figure 7: Total & Working Age (18-64) Population Change, Anti-DEI States, 2020-2022

Absolute Total Population Change	Percent Change	State	Percent Change	Absolute Population Change (18-64)
1,838,037	0.5%	United States	-0.1%	-307,468
49,940	1.0%	Alabama	0.2%	6,438
706,597	3.3%	Florida	2.6%	336,140
99,942	5.4%	Idaho	5.4%	58,803
47,369	0.7%	Indiana	0.0%	146
259,559	2.5%	North Carolina	1.9%	121,510
170	0.0%	North Dakota	-1.1%	-5,165
140,553	2.0%	Tennessee	1.4%	60,660
884,144	3.0%	Texas	3.1%	551,243
109,186	3.3%	Utah	4.2%	82,992
-1,186	-0.0%	Wisconsin	-1.0%	-37,513
4,554	0.8%	Wyoming	-0.2%	-848

Source: ACS

The deteriorating status of the American male is principally responsible for these observed changes in the working age population in these anti-DEI states—and the nation generally. The noteworthy indicators are as follows:

- Skill mismatches, disabilities, and incarceration have forced many less-than-college-educated males out of the labor market.<sup>28</sup>
- Other prime working age males have succumbed to lethal violence, suicides, alcohol dependency, and substance abuse disorders—“deaths of despair.”<sup>29</sup>
- An entire generation of young males has given up on college, creating a major sex ratio imbalance in college enrollment and graduation.<sup>30</sup>

The loss of young male talent to these causes, in conjunction with the adverse impacts of COVID-19 crisis on the employment prospects of women with young children,<sup>31</sup> has created a major demographic depression in the U.S. workforce, underscoring the imperative for anti-DEI states—and the rest—to embrace rather than push back on DEI.

28 Saul Kaplan, 2011, “The Plight of Young Males,” Harvard Business Review, March 9, available at <https://hbr.org/2011/03/the-plight-of-young-males>; Tara Bahrapour & Scott Clement, 2016, “White working-class men increasingly falling behind as college becomes the norm,” The Washington Post, October 5, available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/white-working-class-men-increasingly-falling-behind-as-college-becomes-the-norm/2016/10/05/95610130-8a51-11e6-875e-2c1bfe943b66\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/white-working-class-men-increasingly-falling-behind-as-college-becomes-the-norm/2016/10/05/95610130-8a51-11e6-875e-2c1bfe943b66_story.html); Diana Gehlhaus, 2016, “Young workers without a college degree face uncomfortable truths,” Rand Research & Commentary, June 23, available at <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2016/06/young-workers-without-college-degrees-face-uncomfortable.html>; Andrew Yarrow, 2020, “The Male Non-Working Class: A Disquieting Survey,” Milliken Institute Review, July 30, available at <https://www.millikenreview.org/articles/the-male-non-working-class>; Jacob Zinkula & Andy Kiersz, 2024, “Why so many men in the US have stopped working,” Business Insider, April 28, available at <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-men-working-less-recessions-employment-productivity-2024-4>

29 Anne Case and Angus Deaton, 2020, Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism. Princeton University Press, available at <https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691190785/deaths-of-despair-and-the-future-of-capitalism>; NCDHHS, 2022, “North Carolina Reports 40% Increase in Overdose Deaths in 2020 Compared to 2019; NCDHHS Continues Fight Against Overdose Epidemic,” March 21, available at <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/news/press-releases/2022/03/21/north-carolina-reports-40-increase-overdose-deaths-2020-compared-2019-ncdhhs-continues-fight-against>.

30 The sex ratio in higher education enrollment has been 60 percent female and 40 percent male for more than four decades. In some higher education institutions, the sex ratio is 70 percent female and 30 percent male. This disparity in college enrollment, as you would expect, is also reflected in college graduation statistics. In the University of North Carolina Higher Education System, comprised of 16 campuses, the systemwide enrollment mix was 59 percent female and 41 percent male in 2022. Between 2017-18 and 2021-22, the UNC System awarded 300,000 degrees with women earning 50,000 more degrees than men earned during this period. For detailed discussions of the societal implications of this disruptive demographic trend, see Douglas Belkin, 2021, A Generation of American Men Give Up on College: ‘I Just Feel Lost,’ Wall Street Journal, September 6, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/college-university-fall-higher-education-men-women-enrollment-admissions-back-to-school-11630948233>; Hanna Rosin, 2013, The End of Men: And the Rise of Women. Riverhead Books; Richard Fry, 2022, “Women Now Outnumber Men in the U.S. College-Educated Labor Force,” Pew Research Short Read, September 26, available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/09/26/women-now-outnumber-men-in-the-u-s-college-educated-labor-force/>. The Economist, 2024, “Why Young Men and Women are Drifting Apart,” March, 13, available at <https://www.economist.com/international/2024/03/13/why-the-growing-gulf-between-young-men-and-women>.

31 Liana Christin Landivar and Mark deWolf, 2022, “Mother’s Employment Two Years Later: An Assessment of Employment Loss and Recovery During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” Women’s Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, May, available at <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/media/Mothers-employment-2%20years-later-may2022.pdf>.

Declining fertility is the other major factor driving instability in the working age population. Nationally, the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has been below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman of childbearing age since 2008 and is likely to remain that way given women’s pivotal and growing role in the workforce, the shrinking pool of comparably educated and marriageable males, changing attitudes toward marriage and childbearing, and the documented uptick in vasectomies among young men since the Supreme Court’s decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*.<sup>32</sup> As Table 2 shows, the total fertility rate in every anti-DEI state is below the replacement level and has been that way for years.<sup>33</sup>

**Table 2: Total Fertility Rates and Natural Population Change, Anti-DEI States, 2020-2022**

Area	2021 Total Fertility Rate	2020-2022 Births	2020-2022 Deaths	2020-2022 Natural Change (Births-Deaths)
United States	1.66	8,164,738	7,733,546	431,192
Alabama	1.77	129,259	151,091	-21,832
Florida	1.62	478,834	567,881	-89,047
Idaho	1.85	49,863	39,550	10,313
North Carolina	1.73	267,681	256,741	10,940
North Dakota	1.94	22,785	16,939	5,846
Tennessee	1.75	180,491	199,485	-18,994
Texas	1.81	831,637	588,117	243,520
Utah	1.92	104,519	50,337	54,182
Wisconsin	1.69	137,200	139,365	-2,165
Wyoming	1.75	13,930	14,173	-243

Source: ACS & Cox (2022).

32 Yascha Mounk, 2023, “Nothing Defines America’s Social Divide Like a College Education,” *The Atlantic*, October 4, available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/10/education-inequality-economic-opportunities-college/675536/>; Andrew Reiner, 2023, “Young, Male and Adrift, Inside Higher Ed, December 12, available at <https://www.insidehighered.com/opinion/views/2023/12/07/young-men-need-feel-more-supported-connected-opinion>; Davd J. Ayers, 2019, “The Gender Gap in Marriages Between College Educated Partners, Institute for Family Studies Blog, October 23, available at <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-gender-gap-in-marriages-between-college-educated-partners>; Zhong Huang, Max J. Hyman, and Omer A. Raheem, 2023, Trends in the Vasectomy Rate Among Privately Insured Men Aged 18-64 in the United States between 2014 and 2021, *Urology*, September, available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37353084/>

33 Brady Hamilton, Joyce A. Martin, & Michelle J.K. Osterman, 2024, “Births: Provisional Data for 2023,” *Vital Statistics Rapid Release Report No. 35*, April, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/vsrr/vsrr035.pdf>



These disruptive demographic developments have enormous implications for marriage, family formation, homeownership, and household consumer purchasing power, not to mention their impacts on state budgets, residential and commercial real estate development, travel, tourism, and entertainment industries.<sup>34</sup> Further, the prospect for future growth and development of homegrown talent in these anti-DEI states is not good. Three demographic indicators support this view: the number of these anti-DEI states experiencing natural population loss, that is, more deaths than births and changes in the size of both the school-age (5-17) and pre-school-age (0-4) populations in these states.

Five of the anti-DEI states, as Table 2 shows, experienced natural population loss due to more deaths than births between 2020 and 2022: Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Like Wisconsin, the other four states would have experienced absolute population decline in the absence of net migration during this period (see Figure 2).

Reflecting the impact of declining fertility, most of the other anti-DEI states, as Table 2 shows, experienced net natural population growth (i.e., more births than deaths) between 2020 and 2022, but the growth was modest at best—in the 5,000 to 10,000 range in Idaho, North Carolina, and North Dakota. Texas and Utah were the exceptions. Both states experienced significant absolute natural population growth—likely due to the substantial presence of Hispanic and immigrant newcomers, who tend to be younger and therefore more likely to be in their childbearing ages than the native-born population.

The effects of declining fertility are further reflected in changes in the pre-school-age (0-4) and school-age (5-17) populations, which constitute the education and future workforce pipelines in these states. Nationally, as Figures 8 and 9 illustrate, the population in both age groups declined between 2020 and 2022.

Between 2020 and 2022, as Figure 8 shows, the pre-school-age population declined in seven of the anti-DEI states: Indiana, Texas, Utah, North Dakota, Alabama, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Among these states, Wisconsin was the outlier because the state also experienced total population loss, and the pre-school-age rate of population decline (-3.7%) exceeded the rate of total population decline (-0.02%).

The pre-school-age population grew but much slower than the total population in the remaining four anti-DEI states: Idaho, North Carolina, Florida, and Tennessee. Emblematic of an impending enrollment cliff in K-12 education, the pre-school-age population's contribution to overall population growth was small in all four states, accounting for .01% of net growth in Idaho, .03% in North Carolina, .01% in Florida, and .01% in Tennessee.

34 Jeff Chapman, 2022, "The Long-Term Decline in Fertility—and What it Means for State Budgets, PEW Issue Brief, December 5, available at <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2022/12/the-long-term-decline-in-fertility-and-what-it-means-for-state-budgets>; Lindsay Kornick, 2023, "Population Rate Decline in the US Triggers Economic Alarms from Experts: 'Calamitous Effect,'" Fox News, October 24, available at <https://www.foxnews.com/media/population-rate-decline-us-triggers-economic-alarms-experts-calamitous-effect>; JEC Republicans, 2022, The Consequences of Declining Fertility for Social Capital, Joint Economic Committee Republicans Social Capital Project, December, available at [https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/\\_cache/files/635c69dc-6a5a-467b-b7b0-3ab906fb4a94/the-consequences-of-declining-fertility-for-social-capital.pdf](https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/635c69dc-6a5a-467b-b7b0-3ab906fb4a94/the-consequences-of-declining-fertility-for-social-capital.pdf)

Figure 8: Absolute and Percent Change in Total and Pre-School Aged Population (0-4), Anti-DEI States, 2020-2022

Absolute Total Population Change	Percent Change	State	Percent Change	Absolute Population Change (0-4)
1,838,037	0.5%	United States	-3.2%	-627,712
49,940	1.0%	Alabama	-1.0%	-2,853
706,597	3.3%	Florida	1.2%	7,394
99,942	5.4%	Idaho	0.8%	925
47,369	0.7%	Indiana	-1.8%	-7,399
259,559	2.5%	North Carolina	1.2%	7,394
170	0.0%	North Dakota	-6.2%	-3,347
140,553	2.0%	Tennessee	0.5%	2,113
884,144	3.0%	Texas	-1.4%	-26,527
109,186	3.3%	Utah	-3.1%	-7,356
-1,186	-0.0%	Wisconsin	-3.7%	-11,896
4,554	0.8%	Wyoming	-5.8%	-1,928

Source: ACS

Similarly, three of the anti-DEI states experienced school-age population (5-17) losses between 2020 and 2022: Indiana, Wyoming, and Wisconsin (Figure 9). Again, like the pre-school population, the school-age population experienced modest growth in the other eighth states—modest in the sense that the rate growth in each case was slower than corresponding rates of total population growth. The school-age population’s share of net absolute growth did not exceed 10% in any of these states between 2020 and 2022 and accounted for the greatest share of net growth in Idaho (10%), Florida (9%), and Texas (8%), followed by Tennessee (7%), Alabama (4%), North Carolina (2%), and Utah (.01%).

Figure 9: Absolute and Percent Change in Total and School Age Population (5-17), Anti-DEI States, 2020-2022

Absolute Total Population Change	Percent Change	State	Percent Change	Absolute Population Change (5-17)
1,838,037	0.5%	United States	-4.5%	-2,566,765
49,940	1.0%	Alabama	0.2%	2,122
706,597	3.3%	Florida	2.1%	66,596
99,942	5.4%	Idaho	2.9%	9,933
47,369	0.7%	Indiana	-0.4%	-5,067
259,559	2.5%	North Carolina	0.3%	4,967
170	0.0%	North Dakota	1.4%	1,796
140,553	2.0%	Tennessee	0.8%	9,411
884,144	3.0%	Texas	1.3%	74,090
109,186	3.3%	Utah	0.0%	139
-1,186	-0.0%	Wisconsin	-2.0%	-18,826
4,554	0.8%	Wyoming	-0.7%	-745

Source: ACS

In absolute numbers, the pre-school and school-age shares of net growth are much too small to constitute a reliable workforce as these young people age into adulthood. Failing to embrace immigration and immigrants, which are hot button DEI issues, these states will have to prepare for a major enrollment cliff or downturn in K-12 education, which over time will adversely affect both future college enrollment and the availability of educated and skilled workers needed to propel the states’ economies.<sup>35</sup>

35 George Glover, 2024, “Americans aren’t having enough Kids. That’s bad news for the economy—and immigration may be the answer, Business Insider, February 21, available at <https://www.businessinsider.com/economy-us-birth-rate-declining-population-immigration-china-elon-musk-2024-2>. Adrian Raftery, 2021, “The dip in the US birthrate isn’t a crisis, but the fall in immigration may be,” The Conversation, June 21, available at <https://theconversation.com/the-dip-in-the-us-birthrate-isnt-a-crisis-but-the-fall-in-immigration-may-be-161169>; Ayelet Scheffey, 2024, “More Gen Zers could ditch college this fall—and some schools are worried they might never fully recover,” Business Insider, April 27, available <https://www.businessinsider.com/college-enrollment-crisis-what-is-causing-it-fafsa-student-debt-2024-4>; Jon Marcus, 2024, “Colleges are now closing at a pace of one a week. What happens to the students?” Washington Post, April 26, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2024/04/26/college-closures-student-impact/>.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

To survive, thrive, and prosper in the future, we as a nation and these anti-DEI states will have to embrace, nurture, support, and manage the population diversity that undergirds ongoing disruptive demographic trends. Given how our neighborhoods and communities, the workforce, workplaces, and consumer markets are being dramatically transformed demographically, higher education and government leaders must push back on the DEI pushback.

Government leaders in anti-DEI states must recognize the potential adverse impacts of their policies on future net migration-induced population growth, particularly among members of Generation Z who, according to public opinion polls, are more likely than members of other generations to engage in “conscious quitting” if a company’s or the CEO’s values do align with their own.<sup>36</sup> Our in-class polling of second year MBA students who were about to graduate and re-enter the workforce in 2023 align with the national polling results. As Table 3 shows, a significant percentage of the students we polled indicated that they would consider turning down a job offer or leaving a company whose core values do not demonstrate a commitment to various manifestations of diversity, equity, and inclusion. And a significant percentage indicated they were either disinclined or uncertain about moving to a state that did not support marriage equality or reproductive rights—two hot button diversity issues.

Table 3: Class Polling Questions on DEI Issues, Spring 2023

Question	Yes	No	Unsure/ Don't Know
<b>Would you consider turning down a job offer or leaving a company whose stated core values do not include demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity, &amp; inclusion?</b>	79%	7%	14%
<b>Would you consider turning down a job offer or leaving a company if there was a lack of race/ethnic diversity in community leadership?</b>	53%	20%	33%
<b>Would you consider turning down a job or leaving a company if there was a lack of gender diversity in company leadership?</b>	29%	21%	50%
<b>Would you consider turning down a job or leaving a company if leadership did not support reproductive rights?</b>	85%	15%	0%
<b>Would you consider turning down a job or leaving a company if leadership did not support marriage equality?</b>	100%	0%	0%
<b>Would you consider turning down a job offer or leaving a company if leadership does not demonstrate a commitment to ethical transformation in the way it treats people (employees &amp; customers) and the planet (ESG)?</b>	85%	0%	15%
<b>Would you be inclined to move to a state that does not support reproductive rights?</b>	14%	35%	50%
<b>Would you be inclined to move to a state that does not support marriage equality?</b>	8%	85%	8%

Source: authors

36 Emma Burleigh, 2024, “Over a third of American Workers would Consider Quitting if their CEO’s politics don’t align with their own,” Fortune, March 21, available at <https://fortune.com/2024/03/21/workers-consider-quitting-disagree-ceo-politics/>; Chloe Berger, 2024, “Refusing to drink the corporate Kool-Aid, half of Gen Zers would turn down a job that doesn’t align with their beliefs,” Fortune, April 8, available at <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/refusing-drink-corporate-kool-aid-180516517.html?guccounter=1>; Sander Van’t Noordende, 2024, Gen Z making ‘conscious quitting’ the norm—but employees of all generations are seeking jobs that align with their values, Fortune, April 4, available at <https://fortune.com/2024/04/04/gen-z-conscious-quitting-employees-generations-seeking-jobs-values-careers/>

What should public universities specifically do to combat the pushback against DEI? Rather than trying to develop strategies to skirt DEI bans as some public universities reportedly have tried to do,<sup>37</sup> we offer five alternative strategies.

First, public universities must much more persuasively make the demographic case for maintaining a focus on DEI in the higher education marketplace. The disruptive demographic trends that we face are predictable, and the geopolitical, social, and economic consequences of failing to properly address them are well documented.

Second, in pushing back on the political DEI pushback discourse, public university leaders must insist on inserting the “B” for belonging in “DEI” and offer clear definitions of each of the corresponding words in the expanded DEIB mnemonic. Widely accepted definitions of each of the concepts appear in Table 4.<sup>38</sup>

**Table 4: DEIB Definitions**

Concept	Definition
Diversity	The presence of difference within a given setting—differences in our appearances, thoughts, likes and dislikes, values, and identities.
Equity	While “equality” means “sameness,” Equity means fair treatment, fair access, fair opportunity, and fair advancement for all people. Equity...ensures everyone is supported in their personal and professional development. Unlike equality, equity does not aim to treat all individuals the exact same way.” <sup>39</sup>
Inclusion	How you are treated—specifically whether you are accepted, respected, and encouraged or disrespected and ignored.
Belonging	How you feel—specifically whether you feel comfortable and appreciated or discriminated against or harassed. “Supportive environments...trigger different responses in the brain leading to better collaboration and problem solving.” <sup>40</sup>

Source: compiled by authors.

Building on the definitions, leaders of public universities must confidently assert that carefully crafted and properly implemented DEIB policies, practices, and programming will transform organizational cultures and climates. In the process, DEIB will create “diverse intellectual incubators of thought” capable of producing pathbreaking innovations that address some of the world’s most difficult and perplexing problems. Viewed from this perspective, in a highly competitive global marketplace, pursuing rather than opposing diversity is a form of enlightened self-interest for our public universities, states, and nation.

37 Kate Anderson, 2024, “More universities are finding key loophole to skirt state diversity, equity and inclusion bans,” Daily Caller News Foundation, April 12, available at <https://dailycaller.com/2024/04/12/universitieskey-loophole-skirt-state-diversity-equity-inclusion-bans/>.

38 Elaborating specifically on the concept of belonging, we have noted elsewhere that it is about “...striving to create workplaces where employees feel that they have been personally invited to the dance and the DJ is playing the music perfectly attuned to their preferences.” We go on to note, “[t]his metaphor highlights the significance of creating environments that extend beyond mere inclusivity to tailoring the workplace experience to every employee’s unique identity and aspirations.” See J.H. Johnson, Jr. & G.R. Alexander (2024). “Confronting the Nursing Profession’s Workforce Challenges: Embracing Iceberg Demographics,” Creative Nursing, February, available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38304938/>.

39 See discussion at <https://www.researchgate.net/post/Equality-implies-sameness-Equity-implies-fairness-What-is-the-difference-between-Equality-Equity-Please-give-your-opinion#:~:text=%2D%2DIn%20equity%2C%20the%20differences,access%20to%20what%20they%20need>.

40 Phyllis Ingham, 2024, “Welcome Home: Finding Your Place in the Warm Embrace of “Belonging,” ASCLS Today, Vol 38, February, available at <https://ascls.org/welcome-home-finding-your-place-in-the-warm-embrace-of-belonging/>.

Third, given the Supreme Court’s recent decisions on affirmative action and reproductive rights at the federal level and anti-DEI policies enacted at the state level,<sup>41</sup> public universities must master people analytics and leverage iceberg demographics in student recruitment, admissions, matriculation, and graduation as well as in faculty and staff recruitment, hiring, development, and retention.<sup>42</sup> Students, faculty, and staff are far more diverse today in terms of not only race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, but also in family structure, living arrangements, and financial wellbeing—and they often face a more complex set of challenges than prior generations of university students and employees. Additionally, in some instances, COVID-19 may have exacerbated existing challenges and added new ones, including residential dislocations due to the accelerated cost of housing; loss of wages that supported family and education pursuits; additional caregiving responsibilities due to COVID-related casualties in families; and cognitive impairments that make learning and working difficult, if not impossible, without the appropriate accommodations.<sup>43</sup>

The concept of iceberg demographics derives from scientific discoveries about the physical characteristics of a freshwater iceberg, defined in the *New World Encyclopedia* as a “mountain of ice that has broken off from a glacier or ice shelf and is floating in open waters.”<sup>44</sup> While varying in both size and shape, only about 10% of a freshwater iceberg is visible above the water line. The balance (90%) is submerged below the surface.<sup>45</sup>

To embrace an analogous iceberg model of demographic diversity in both recruiting and retention of students, faculty, and staff,<sup>46</sup> public universities must look beyond the visible attributes of demographic identity, such as race, ethnicity, and gender, and strategically leverage other inherited and acquired traits and experiences that exist in the student body and the higher education workforce. Like a freshwater iceberg, some of these attributes are not readily apparent, but, if comprehended and accommodated effectively, can be successful pathways to student recruitment, matriculation, and successful graduation in four years.<sup>47</sup> Embracing iceberg demographics also can create a strong sense of belonging for university employees, reducing high staff turnover, which has plagued many universities post-COVID-19.

41 McKenzie Beard, 2024, “Reproductive rights take center stage at the Supreme Court,” Washington Post, March 25, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/03/25/reproductive-rights-take-center-stage-supreme-court/>; The Editorial Board, 2024, “The persistent threat to abortion rights,” The New York Times, March 30, available at [https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/30/opinion/abortion-drug-supreme-court.html?campaign\\_id=2&emc=edit\\_th\\_20240330&instance\\_id=118962&nl=todayshdlines&regi\\_id=13175790&segment\\_id=162217&user\\_id=664c8dfc94b9617d16b79d249ce98ec4](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/30/opinion/abortion-drug-supreme-court.html?campaign_id=2&emc=edit_th_20240330&instance_id=118962&nl=todayshdlines&regi_id=13175790&segment_id=162217&user_id=664c8dfc94b9617d16b79d249ce98ec4)

42 James H. Johnson, Jr. and Allan M. Parnell (2023). *Shortsighted Decision*, PublicEd Works, available at <https://hew.aveltsagency.com/2023/07/johnson-and-pannell-shortsighted-decision/>.

43 Research reveals that U.S. working age people with a disability who are employed increased by 1.5 million since 2020. Most of the increase is due to long COVID concentrated among workers under the age of 40 who are experiencing problems with brain fog—remembering, concentrating, and making decisions. See R. Deitz, 2022, “Long COVID appears to have led to a surge of the disabled in the workplace,” Liberty Street Economics, October 20. <https://libertystreeteconomics.newyorkfed.org/2022/10/long-covid-appears-to-have-led-to-a-surge-of-the-disabled-in-the-workplace>. Z. Li, Z. Zhang, Z. Zhang, Z. Wang, and H. Li, 2023, “Cognitive impairment after long COVID: Current evidence and perspectives,” *Frontiers in Neurology*, 14: 1239182. <https://doi.org/10.3389>. Also see, J. H., Johnson Jr., A. M. Parnell, & J. M. J. M. Bonds, 2022, “COVID-19 and North Carolina’s shifting demography,” Kenan Institute White Paper, August. <https://kenaninstitute.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/COVID-19-and-North-Carolina's-Shifting-Demography.pdf>. J.H., Johnson, Jr., A. M. Parnell, & J. M. Bonds, 2023, “North Carolina at a Demographic Crossroad: Loss of Lives and the Impact.” Kenan Institute White Paper, September. <https://kenaninstitute.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/North-Carolina-at-a-Demographic-Crossroad.pdf>

44 New World Encyclopedia, 2018, Iceberg, January 25. <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Iceberg>

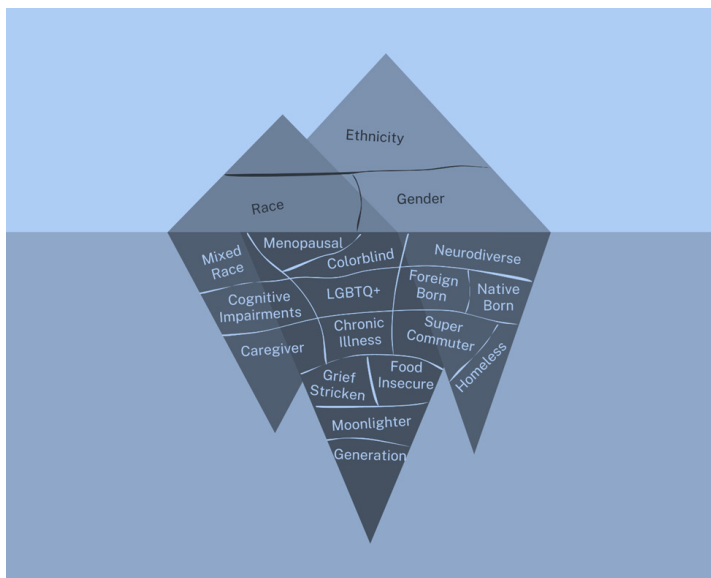
45 P. Wadhams, 2023, Iceberg. December 25. <https://www.britannica.com/science/iceberg>.

46 T. Butts, 2012, “The diversity iceberg,” Chico State Today, March 1. <https://today.csuchico.edu/the-diversity-iceberg/>; Johnson, J. H. Jr., & Parnell, A. M., 2023, “Shortsighted decision,” PublicEd Works, July 7. <https://www.higheredworks.org/2023/07/johnson-and-pannell-shortsighted-decision/>; Think Up Consulting, 2021, Diversity dimensions: The iceberg illustration. <https://thinkupconsulting.com/embracing-celebrating-diversity-dimensions-the-iceberg-illustration>.

47 T. Sutorius, 2022, “The Iceberg Model—How leaders can help their employees go below the surface,” Brainz Magazine, September 26. <https://www.brainzmagazine.com/post/the-iceberg-model-how-leaders-can-help-their-employees-go-below-the-surface>

Figure 10 depicts iceberg demographic indicators prevalent nationally, including in North Carolina and the other anti-DEI states. Focusing on these (and other) less visible diversity traits forces us to recognize and appreciate the overwhelming commonalities present in the nation’s populace and empowers us to embrace the ties that bind us together while dispensing of the “isms,” stereotypes, and phobias that drive us apart.<sup>48</sup>

**Figure 10: The Iceberg Demographic Schema**



Source: Johnson & Alexander, 2024.

To capitalize on the iceberg demographics model of workforce and student recruitment and retention, public universities must:

- Conduct pulse surveys to determine the types and prevalence of iceberg demographic identities in the existing staff and student body.<sup>49</sup>
- Create staff and student resource groups (SSRGs) based on the prevalence of iceberg demographic identities in the university community.
- Solicit input from the various SSRGs regarding what can be done to accommodate them in the University community (i.e., make them feel like they belong).<sup>50</sup>
- Institute required accommodations and leverage newly created SSRGs to recruit new students and staff with similar demographic identities.

The pulse survey should be conducted annually, and recruitment, retention, and accommodation strategies should be modified based on the iceberg demographic findings.

Given the continued deceleration in U.S. total population growth and non-Hispanic White population decline as well as other disruptive demographic shifts, including premature deaths of despair among prime working-age individuals,<sup>51</sup> embracing and accommodating iceberg identities should be a strategic priority for both student and workforce recruitment and retention in public universities.<sup>52</sup>

48 Francesca Polletta, 2020, *Inventing the Ties That Bind Us: Imagined Relations in Moral and Political Life*. University of Chicago Press, available at <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/I/bo60081321.html>

49 We recommend that universities either replicate or launch a survey similar to UNC-Greensboro’s iBelong campus climate survey (<https://sa.uncg.edu/division-of-student-affairs/students/campus-involvement/ibelong-campus-climate-survey/>).

50 N. Argo & H. Sheikh, 2023, *The belonging barometer: The state of belonging in America*. American Immigration Council Over Zero and the Center for Inclusion and Belonging. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/the-belonging-barometer>

51 J. H. Johnson, Jr., J. M. Bonds, & A. M. Parnell, 2021. “Business alert! Gale force demographic wind gusts ahead,” Kenan Institute White Paper. , available at <https://kenaninstitute.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Business-Alert-V2-002.pdf>; A. Case & A. Deaton, 2020. *Deaths of despair and the future of capitalism*. Princeton University Press.

52 G. R. Alexander & J. H. Johnson, Jr., 2021, “Disruptive demographics: Their effects on nursing demand, supply and academic preparation,” *Nursing Administration Quarterly*, 42(1), 58-64. Available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33259372/>; J.H. Johnson, Jr. & G.R. Alexander, 2024, “Confronting the Nursing Profession’s Workforce Challenges: Embracing Iceberg Demographics,” *Creative Nursing*, February, available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38304938/>.



Fourth, public universities must incentivize and reward interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary research that is purposefully designed to rigorously test the veracity of boundary spanning and often competing scientific, ideological, and political theories, hypotheses, and perspectives on pressing societal issues, including those undergirding the DEI pushback. Funded by major foundations and intentionally designed to address “diversity of thought” on the causes and consequences of growing inequality in American cities in the 1990s, the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality (MCSUI) is an excellent education and training model worthy of emulation by public higher education institutions in today’s highly polarized geopolitical environment.<sup>53</sup>

Spanning five major research universities, engaging more than 50 research scholars, and gathering primary survey data on 8,600 households and 3,000 employers across four of our nation’s largest cities (Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles), the MCSUI project generated several books; a host of peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles and evidenced-based policy briefs; and strategically positioned, high impact essays and opinion editorials in major media outlets.<sup>54</sup> Undergraduate, doctoral, and postdoctoral research and training programs were core components of the initiative, which produced a new generation of interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary trained scholars and practitioners who understood and appreciated “diversity of thought” on the causes and consequences of growing inequality in American society.<sup>55</sup> Some of those inter- and cross-disciplinary trained scholars are now senior academic

and administrative leaders in higher education. Others are administrators or senior research scholars in major research think tanks spanning the political and ideological spectrum.

Finally, public universities must reinvent their curricula and reimagine instruction by adopting a courageous conversation model of student engagement in the academic enterprise—an approach that allows students to wrestle with the various competing perspectives on issues of critical import to our society and world. In response to the push for political neutrality in public higher education, we have developed such an approach that we employ in our course offerings in the Kenan-Flagler Business School at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Our curricular innovation is anchored in two foundational beliefs. The first is “students should attend college with the idea of expanding their knowledge and increasing their curiosity about ideas and opinions different from their own.”<sup>56</sup> The second is:

*Universities operate best when they serve as a platform for the robust exchange of ideas. Their role is to encourage [and facilitate] debates, not settle them.*<sup>57</sup>

53 To successfully execute such a model will require a comprehensive audit of the tenure and promotion processes. New rules will be needed to define what constitutes “high quality” research

54 James H. Johnson, Jr., Melvin L. Oliver, and Lawrence Bobo, 1994, “Understanding the Contours of Deepening Urban Inequality: Theoretical Underpinnings and Research Design of a Multi-City Study,” *Urban Geography*, Vol. 15, 77-89. For an example of research that empirically tested competing perspectives on growing inequality using the MCSUI data, see James H. Johnson, Jr., Walter C. Farrell, Jr. & Jennifer A. Stoloff, 2000, “An Empirical Assessment of Four Perspectives on the Declining Fortunes of the African American Male,” *Urban Affairs Review*, Vol 35, No. 5 (May): 695-716.

55 James H. Johnson, Jr. & Melvin L. Oliver, 1991, “Urban Poverty and Social Welfare Policy in the United States: An Undergraduate Research and Training Program,” *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, Vol. 15, 25-34.

56 G. Starner, 2023, “What students must learn and colleges fail to teach,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 14, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/college-student-free-speech-bias-response-virginia-tech-2256ee33>.

57 D. Diermeier, 2022, “Principled Neutrality,” *Inside Higher Ed*, May 5, available at <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2022/05/05/academic-leaders-shouldnt-take-political-stances-opinion>.

A modified version of the fishbowl method of in-class conversation, our reinvented instructional approach creates a “brave” space for students to engage in courageous conversations—to openly share diverse thoughts and opinions as well as vigorously debate sensitive and controversial issues where diverse and divergent opinions and interpretations may exist. The goal is not to indoctrinate or advocate for any specific stance or viewpoint; rather, we aim to facilitate honest, respectful, and transparent dialogue so that students are fully aware of the veracity of diverse viewpoints—strengths, weaknesses, pros, cons—that undergird politically sensitive issues and topics.<sup>58</sup>

Course evaluations and online surveys of student experiences in our courses strongly suggest that the courageous conversation model, properly infused throughout the university curriculum, would be an excellent way to prepare the next generation of “thought diversity” leaders.<sup>59</sup> A version of the courageous conversation approach, we believe, should be offered as mandatory professional development for public university administrators, faculty, staff, and student group leaders. Doing so will ensure that first, DEIB is inculcated in public universities’ DNA; and second, key university stakeholders and constituencies—administrators, faculty, staff, students, and alumni with varied and diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives—feel that they have not only been invited to the party, but also that the DJ is playing their kind of music.

As public universities, institutions of higher education more generally, and state decision makers encounter increasing political pushback on DEI, we encourage them to operate from a demographically informed perspective and push back on the pushback. Make the demographic case, prioritize belonging, leverage iceberg demographics,

reward interdisciplinary research, and hold courageous conversations. These efforts will do much more for future prosperity than will short-sighted bans and political censorship.

58 James H. Johnson, Jr. & Allison Schlobohm, 2023, “Talking through the turmoil,” AACSB Insights, October 2, available at <https://www.aacsb.edu/insights/articles/2023/10/talking-through-the-turmoil>

59 Allison Schlobohm and James H. Johnson, Jr., 2024, “Courageous Conversations: Preparing Students to Lead in a Politically Polarized Business Environment,” *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, March 18, available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/23294906241233873>



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