



UNEQUAL GROUND

Black Californians' Employment in a Shifting Economy, 2024-2025

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**BLACK CALIFORNIANS' EMPLOYMENT
IN A SHIFTING ECONOMY**

2024-2025

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SUMMARY

Using data from the 2024 and 2025 Current Population Survey (CPS) for California, this 2026 State of Black California (SOBC) short report examines changes in Black Californians' employment over the past year. We draw several findings.

Unemployment Rising: Between 2024 and 2025, there were sharp increases in unemployment for Black Californians. Younger and prime working age Black Californians (age groups 18-34 and 35-54, respectively) were among the groups most affected. Additionally, unemployment increased across all levels of educational attainment, especially for Black women with some college or more.

Employment Stability Overall: However, overall, employment levels declined only slightly for Black Californians over this period.

Involuntary Part-Time Employment Rising: The relative employment stability masked negative employment shifts as involuntary part-time employment increased markedly, especially among Black college-educated men.

Government Employment Declines: Relative employment stability

also masked declines in government (state and local) employment, especially for the most educated Black women.

Institutional Disconnection Rising: Finally, employment stability masked institutional disconnection (defined as being neither employed nor enrolled in schooling) increased over this period, especially for Black women, younger and prime-working-age Black Californians, and those with less education.

These findings indicate that over a very short period of time, many employment pathways used to advance or maintain middle-class status for Black Californians are at risk. At every level of educational attainment and across most age groups, Black Californian families and communities face increased stress from the loss of income and benefits from both the decline in employment and the shift in work from full to part-time. The report highlights several important policy recommendations for California to advance Black employment in this age of unprecedented attacks on policies and programs that have slowed Black economic advancement.

INTRODUCTION

This 2026 State of Black California (SOBC) report focuses on economic outcomes by examining changes in Black Californians' employment from 2024 to 2025. Over this period, substantial chang-

es in economic conditions and federal policy, among other factors, may have altered Black Americans' and, by extension, Black Californians' economic opportunities. In particular, the econom-



ic slowdown, as evidenced by rising unemployment and slowing economic growth over this period, coupled with cuts to federal programs and contracts, the weakening of and assaults on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs at all levels, including government, the private sector, and higher education,¹ and the elimination of affirmative action in higher education admissions,² among other factors, likely negatively impacted labor market outcomes and opportunities for Black Americans.

During periods of economic slowdown, Black Americans are typically the first to experience negative impacts and suffer most substantially compared to other Americans. When economic conditions swing, this “last hired, first fired” pattern, or the phenomenon by which Black job applicants face extra hurdles during the job-seeking process,³ and are subsequently the first to lose their jobs during economic downturn,⁴ has been observed consistently for decades. However, Black Americans with less educational attainment are usually impacted the most, as their unemployment tends to rise sharply during economic downswings, and fall at the slowest pace during economic upswings.⁵

Today, however, Black Americans may be affected differently because of the unprecedented changes and actions at the federal level. Last year, numerous headlines highlighted that nationally, nearly 300,000 Black women lost their jobs or left the workforce between February and April 2025 after a wave of mass federal layoffs.⁶ Indeed, Black Americans with more educational attainment are likely to have been impacted the most. The cuts to federal programs and contracts in areas such as health and human services and education, among others, likely led to job losses for federal workers and for state and local government and non-profit workers who these programs may fund. Moreover, the elimination of DEI programs likely contributed to the closure of many DEI offices and related institutions across the public, private, and educational sectors. Jobs in all of these domains typically require higher educational attainment and are disproportionately filled by Black Americans. Their elimination may mean disproportionate employment losses by Black Americans with higher educational attainment over this period.

This SOBC report follows in the footsteps of notable SOBC work. In 2006, the California Legislative Black Caucus (CLBC) – under the leadership of the then-Majority Leader of the California State Assembly (and now Mayor of Los Angeles), the Honorable Karen Bass – commissioned a report entitled *The State of Black California* (SOBC).⁷ That report sought to understand the social and economic status of Black people in California in the year 2000, one of

the first comprehensive reports of its kind.

Building upon the initial SOBC report, in 2024, the Black Policy Project – under the direction of Faculty Director Dr. Michael A. Stoll – extended the analysis and examined how Black Californians fared in relation to other major racial and ethnic groups along economic, social, and health-related dimensions in 2020, 20 years after the first SOBC report. Using an Equality Index, the 2024 SOBC report found that while the socio-economic well-being of Black Californians had improved slightly over these 20 years, the socioeconomic standing of Black Californians relative to Whites remained greatly unequal, and the racial gap in outcomes would take over 200 years to close at that pace.⁸

These reports represented comprehensive analyses of long-term changes in Black Californians’ socioeconomic standing across six indicators: economics, education, health, housing, criminal justice, and civic participation. This report focuses on economic outcomes over a shorter period. Here, we probe more deeply into how labor market conditions for Black Californians have shifted since 2024, amid tremendous changes to the national landscape and attacks on institutions, policies, and programs that have propelled Black American economic advancement.

Using data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) produced by the U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, we analyze changes in key employment metrics for Black Californians between 2024 and the second half of 2025. Our findings indicate:

1. Between 2024 and 2025, there were sharp increases in unemployment for Black Californians, especially:
 - a. Younger and prime working age Black Californians (age groups 18-34 and 35-54, respectively).
 - b. Across all levels of educational attainment, but especially for Black women with some college or more.
2. However, overall, employment levels declined only slightly for Black Californians over this period.
3. Relative employment stability masked negative full-time employment shifts as involuntary part-time employment increased markedly, especially among Black college-educated men.
4. Government (state and local) employment declined, especially for the most educated Black women.
5. Institutional disconnection (defined as being neither employed nor enrolled in schooling) increased over this period, especially for Black women, younger and prime-working-age Black Californians, and those with less education.

These findings indicate that over a very short period of time, many employment pathways used to advance or maintain middle-class status for Black Californians are at risk. Public sector employment, including work in social and health services, has historically fueled Black economic advancement and security through good pay, health benefits, and pensions. In recent years, so too has employment in DEI sectors. These pathways have been greatly weakened and remain at risk of being shut off entirely. In the meantime, the results suggest Black Californian families and communities will face increased stress from the loss of income and benefits due to both the decline in employment and the shift in work from full to part-time.

At the same time, the results also indicate continued employment challenges for younger Black Californians and for those with less educational attainment. Unemployment rates for these groups continue to remain the highest, and when Black Californians are employed, it is increasingly in involuntary part-time jobs. Moreover, these Black Californians continue to have the highest rates of institutional disconnection, which have also increased over this recent period. This suggests that the costs of these employment challenges to well-being (e.g., increased food insecurity, homelessness, and lack of health care access, to name a few) will be amplified, when paired with near-draconian cuts to federal safety net programs in housing, food assistance, education, and other programs enacted since 2025.⁹

These findings provide timely insights and suggest several policy implications for policymakers, advocates, and stakeholders at all levels who are invested in advancing economic well-being for all Californians, and especially Black Californians.

The increased employment challenges faced by younger and prime-

working-age Black Californians suggest the need for targeted employment policies to support young and middle-aged Black Californians in the labor market.

Moreover, the prevalence of Californians from all racial groups, but especially young Black men, who have experienced increases in involuntary part-time employment, suggests a need for policy to identify barriers that are preventing workers from securing or maintaining full-time employment and facilitate connecting them to desired full-time jobs.

Additionally, our findings demonstrate that while Black Californians remain a core component of our federal, state, and local public sector workforces, they have experienced some of the greatest losses to employment over the last two years, especially educated Black women at the state and local levels. Thus, state and local policymakers and departments should evaluate the practices and policies that contribute to disproportionate declines in Black professional women's employment within their departments.

Moreover, while education may remain an important component of extending economic mobility for Black Californians, our findings about stark unemployment increases amongst educated Black women over the last two years also suggest the need to think beyond education as an assurance for economic equity.

The remainder of this report covers the methodology, including the data sources and analyses used for the study; our findings; and the policy implications of these findings.

METHODOLOGY

To conduct the analysis, we used publicly-accessible, harmonized monthly data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau in conjunction with the Bureau of Labor Statistics, extracted from IPUMS CPS.¹⁰ These are the only data available to study economic or employment trends from 2024 to 2025 at the time of this report.

We analyzed monthly data for California in 2024 and 2025, and included data for individuals in the civilian population aged 18 to 64 who were not employed in the military and did not have a signif-

icant disability. These restrictions are typical when studying employment outcomes. However, excluding people with disabilities from the analysis is likely to yield higher employment estimates than those reported elsewhere. We included this restriction to provide the best possible employment scenario.

For 2024, we combined monthly data for the entire year (excluding December, known for volatile employment due to seasonal holiday trends), a period when economic growth was sustained and had recovered to the greatest extent from the pandemic-in-

duced economic slowdown of 2020. By the end of 2024, unemployment rates were at their lowest since the pandemic, especially for Black Americans.

For 2025, we combined monthly data from June 2025 to November 2025, a period during and after which many of the federal actions and changes discussed above had taken place or were taking hold. We constructed key measures of employment, including unemployment rates, employment and involuntary part-time work rates, public sector employment rates, and a measure of institutional disconnection, which captures the degree to which individuals are neither working, searching for work, nor enrolled in schooling. All data were weighted to reflect California’s actual demographic composition. We then compared the 2024 outcome data with those in 2025 using simple descriptive statistics. Table

A.1 in the appendix shows the total sample sizes for the 2024 and 2025 data, along with the key demographics used in the study.

We note that while the CPS data is the most current and only available data to study economic trends at this time, it is limited to large-scale employment measures. Questions on income are limited, so we are unable to examine changes in individual or household income or poverty over this period. The CPS does collect detailed income data, but only during the March Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) survey (generally available in September of the following year), a period after this report’s publication.

In the analysis, we disaggregate the data by race, gender, age, and education to compare the employment status of Black Californians relative to other racial and ethnic groups across the state.

FINDINGS

UNEMPLOYMENT

Overall, between 2024 and 2025, Black Californians, as expected, experienced the greatest single-year increase in unemployment of any racial or ethnic group. Figure 1 shows that their unemployment rate increased by 2 percentage points, from 5.6% to 7.5%, making it double that of White Californians by the end of 2025.

The unemployment rate is simply the fraction of the labor force that is currently unemployed. The labor force comprises those employed (whether full-time or part-time) and those unemployed (those not employed who have searched for a job in the past six months). Thus, the unemployment rate is a measure of the em-

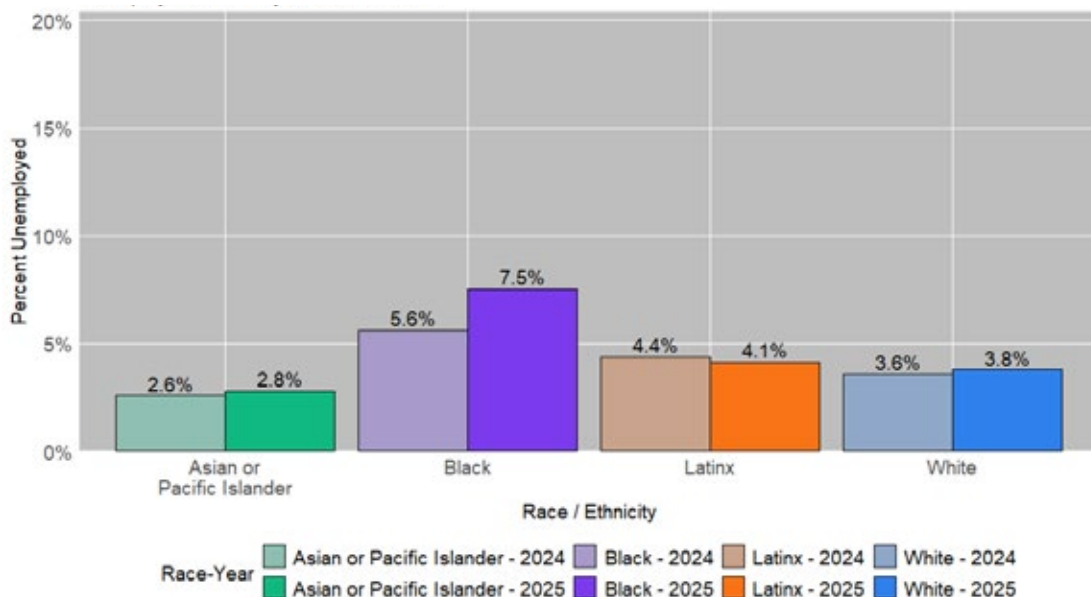


Figure 1. Unemployment Rate by Race, 2024-2025

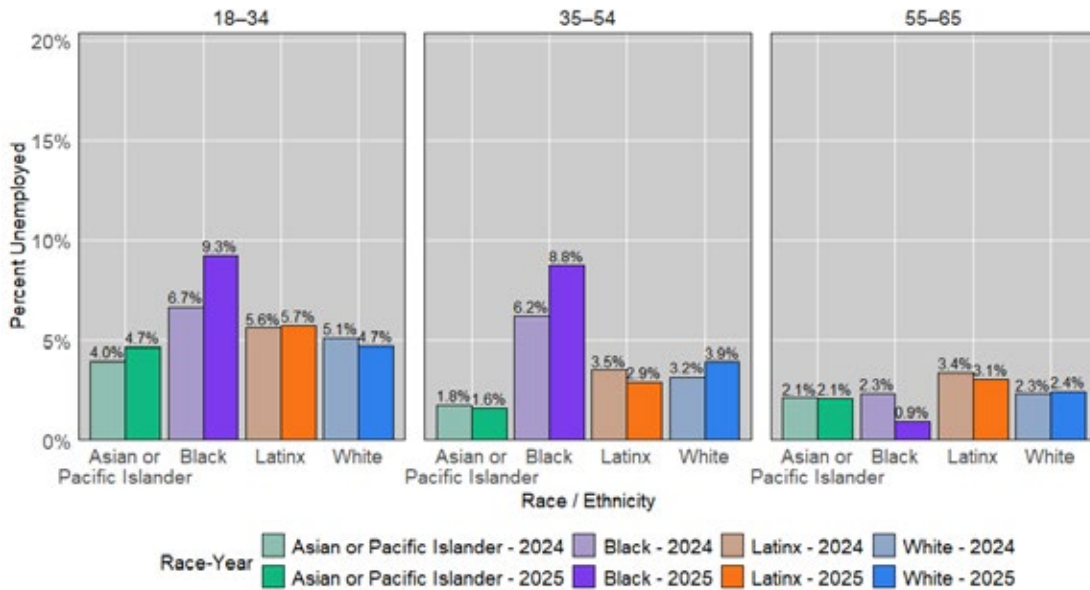


Figure 2. Unemployment Rate by Race and Age, 2024-2025

employment difficulties for those attached to the labor force and actively seeking work.

Our analysis further disaggregates these changes in unemployment rates by age, gender, and educational attainment to examine the demographics of the Black California population that experienced the greatest increases in unemployment.

Figure 2 shows changes in the unemployment rate by race and age. It demonstrates that younger Black Californians (ages 18 to

34) and those in their prime working years (ages 35 to 54) suffered the greatest increases in unemployment. Younger Black Californians' and prime-age Black Californians' unemployment rates increased by over 2.5 percentage points each. By 2025, the unemployment rate for prime-age Black Californians was over two times as high as that for White Californians.

RACE AND GENDER

Disaggregating unemployment by race and gender reveals stark disparities for Black men and women relative

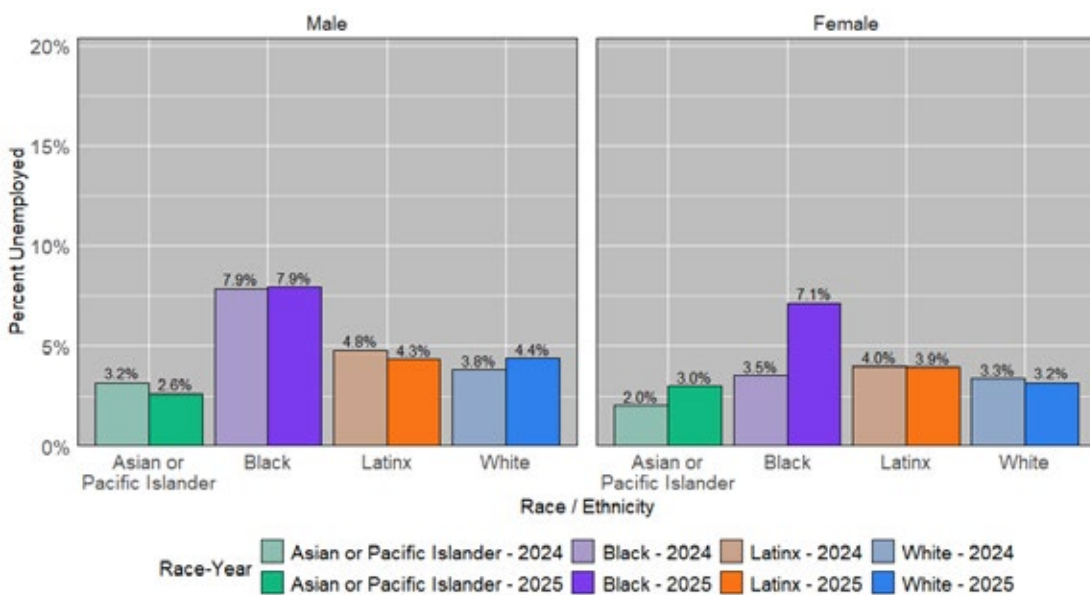


Figure 3. Unemployment Rate by Race and Gender, 2024-2025

to their gendered peers. Black women experienced a sharp increase in unemployment between 2024 and 2025, with the unemployment rate doubling from 3.5% to 7.1% (Figure 3). Before this increase, their unemployment levels were comparable to those of their gendered peers. Among Californian men, Black men experienced a persistently high level of unemployment (7.9%) in 2024 and 2025, a rate nearly double that of their peers.

RACE AND EDUCATION

At both ends of the spectrum of educational attainment, Black Californians continue to experience disparate levels

of unemployment relative to other racial and ethnic groups. Figure 4 highlights unemployment rates by race and educational attainment from 2024-2025.

The unemployment rate increased strikingly for Black Californians with the most education. The unemployment rate for Black Californians with college degrees was higher than that for other racial groups with similar levels of education in 2025 – it was nearly twice as high as the unemployment rate for White Californians with college degrees (Figure 4). In fact, zooming out to compare across racial groups and attainment levels, the unemployment rate

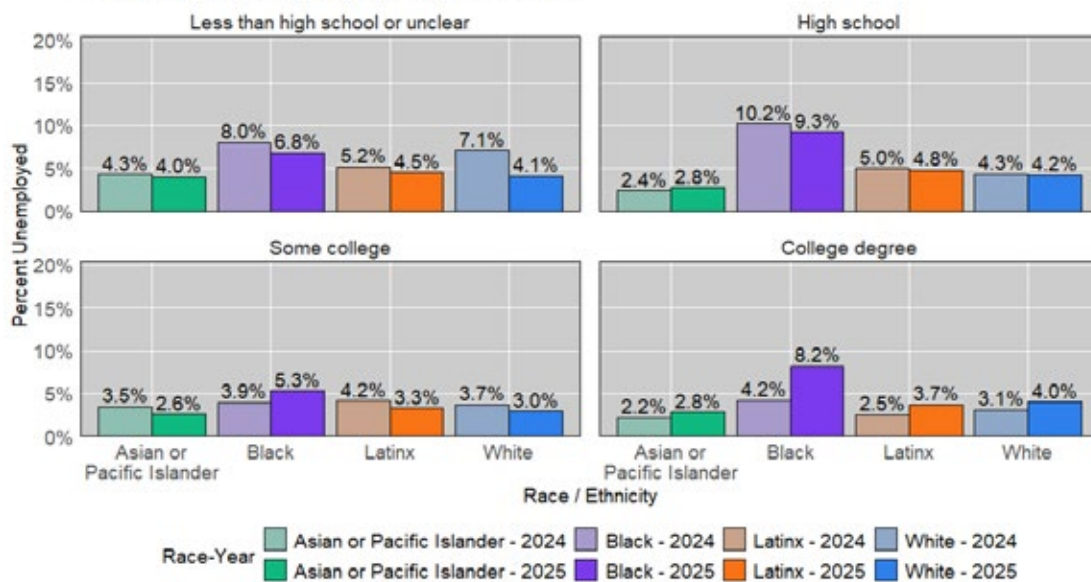


Figure 4. Unemployment Rate by Race and Education, 2024-2025

for Black college-educated Californians in 2025 was second only to that of Black Californians with a high school degree.

At the same time, though unemployment decreased slightly for those with a high school diploma or less, these rates remained higher than those of their educational peers (Figure 4). For example, in 2025, the unemployment rate for Black Californians with a high school diploma was 9.3%, nearly 3 times the rate for Asian Americans or Pacific Islanders, nearly 2 times as high as the rate for Latinos, and over 2 times the rate for White Californians with a high school diploma.

Black women and men may have experienced changes in their unemployment rates by educational attainment differently over this period. To examine this possibility, we examined unemployment rates by educational attainment for Black women and men, respectively. Figures 5 and 6 show that Black men and women with

varying levels of education were differentially impacted by rising unemployment.

Between 2024 and 2025, unemployment increased for Black women with high school diplomas or less, some college, and college degrees. However, unemployment rose the most for Black women with college degrees, with unemployment tripling from 2.7 to 8.5% (Figure 5).

On the other hand, Black men experienced similar or higher levels of unemployment than Black women for nearly every level of educational attainment in 2024 and 2025. Yet, Black men with less than a high school diploma were particularly impacted, experiencing the highest rate of unemployment in 2025, at 15.9% (Figure 6).

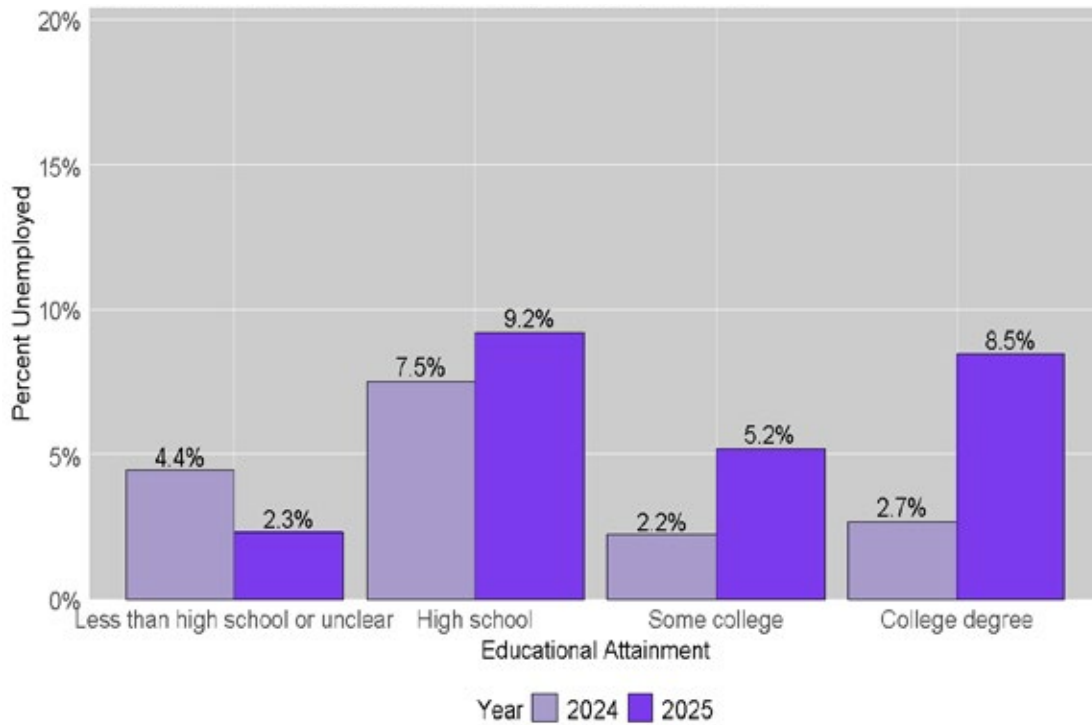


Figure 5. Black Women's Unemployment Rate by Education, 2024-2025

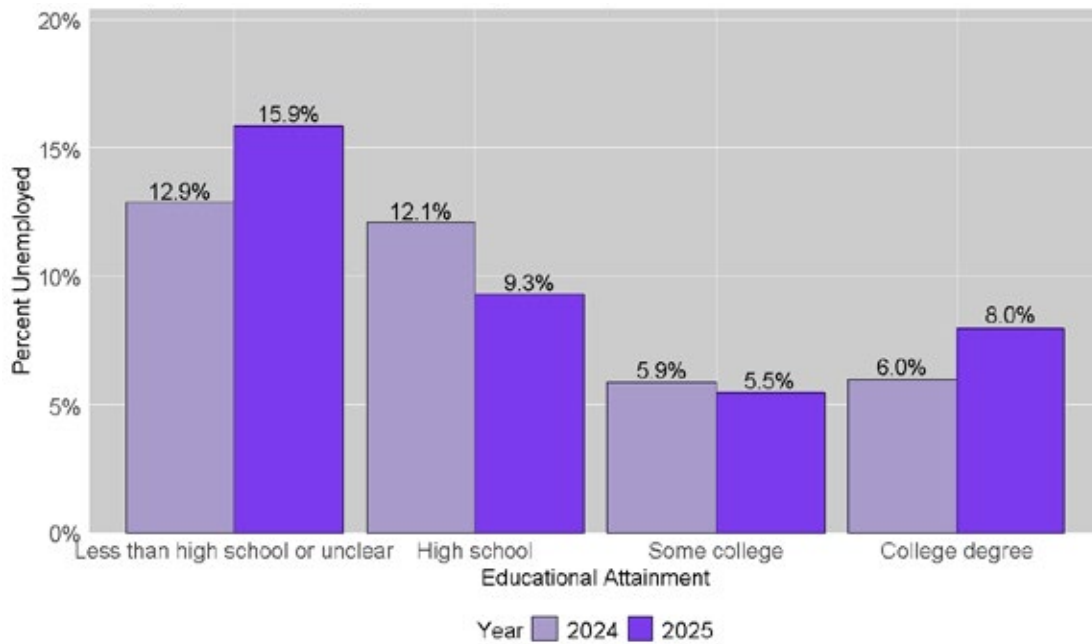


Figure 6. Black Men's Unemployment Rate by Education, 2024-2025

EMPLOYMENT RATES

An alternative way to measure employment levels is the employment rate, which measures the proportion of the population employed (full- or part-time). The unemployment rate tells us something about the extent of immediate employment challenges faced by those actively seeking work. This provides insight into to the fraction of the population that is employed, regardless of whether those who are not employed are searching for work. Thus, it tells us the extent to which a particular population is employed.

Below, Figure 7 displays changes in the employment rate between 2024 and 2025 by race. Black Californians had slightly lower employment rates in both years, and their employment rate dipped slightly (by almost half a percentage point) over this period.

This data, however, masked notable trends. Between 2024 and 2025, Black men’s employment rate increased by about 5 percentage points, while Black women’s decreased by about 6 per-

centage points (See Appendix Figure A.1). Employment rates for younger and older Black Californians increased slightly over this period, while those for prime-age Black Californians decreased (See Appendix Figure A.2). Finally, while employment rates declined for Black Californians with higher educational attainment, they increased slightly for all other educational attainment groups. (See Appendix Figure A.3).

RACE, GENDER, AND EDUCATION

These trends prompt further investigation into whether and to what extent Black men’s and women’s employment rates changed over this period by educational attainment. Figure 8 shows employment rates for Black women over the 2024 to 2025 period, while Figure 9 shows those for Black men.

These figures demonstrate notable differences for Black women and men. Black women’s employment rate decreased over this pe-

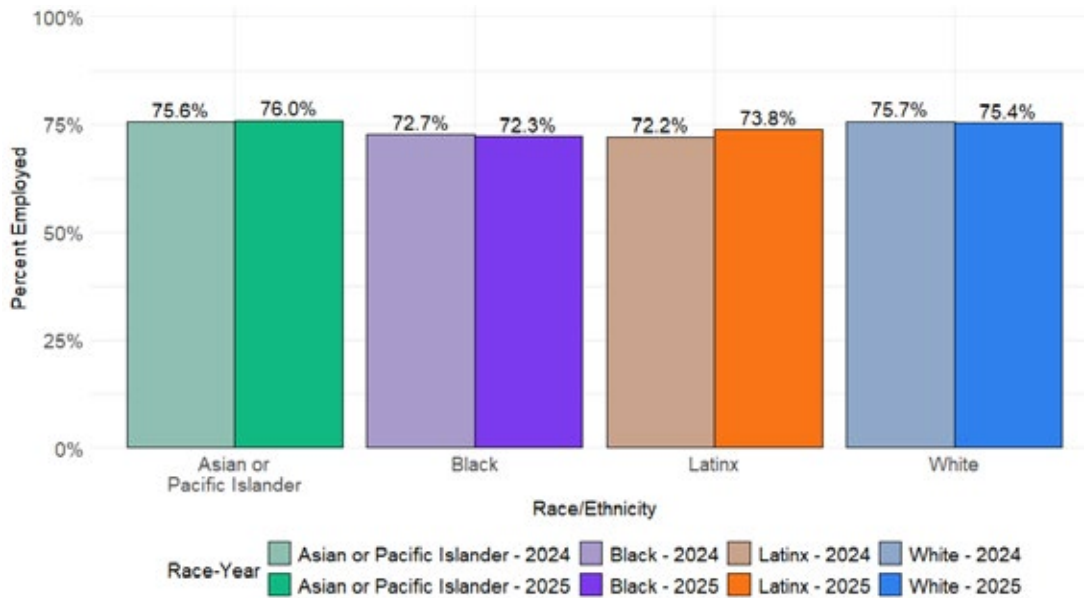


Figure 7. Employment Rate by Race, 2024-2025

riod for those with a high school degree or more, with the largest declines for those with some college or more (Figure 8).

Unlike their female counterparts, Black men’s employment rate increased over this period, except for those with a college degree

or more (Figure 9). The employment increases were somewhat large for Black men with a high school degree or less, averaging about 13 percentage points. Like Black women, Black men’s employment rate for those with a college degree or more declined, but not to the same degree.

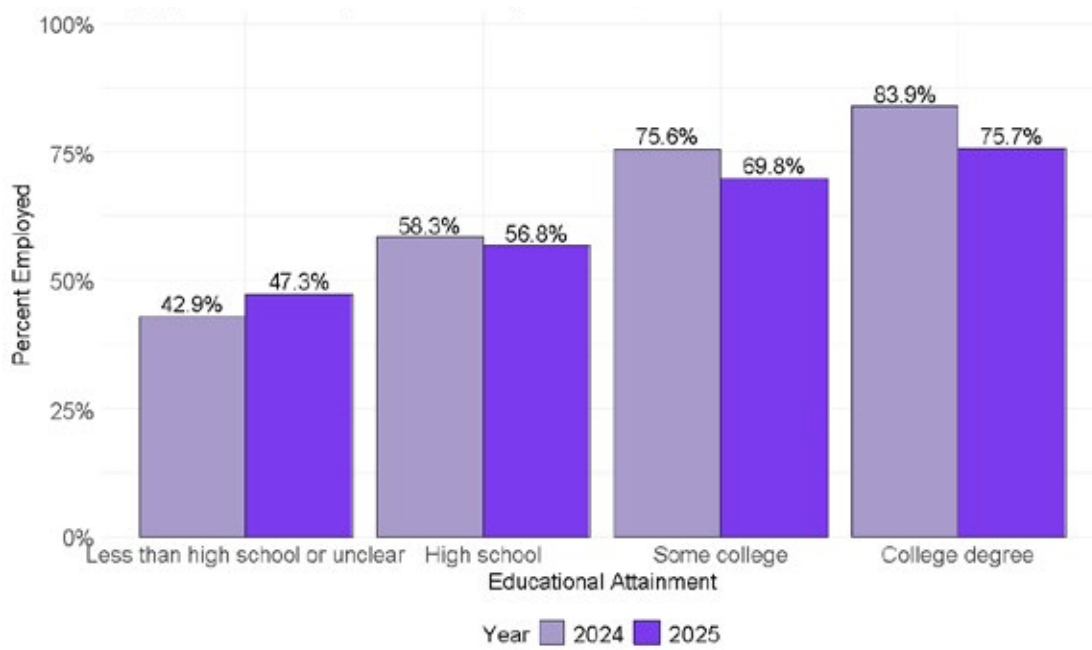


Figure 8. Black Women's Employment Rate by Education, 2024-2025

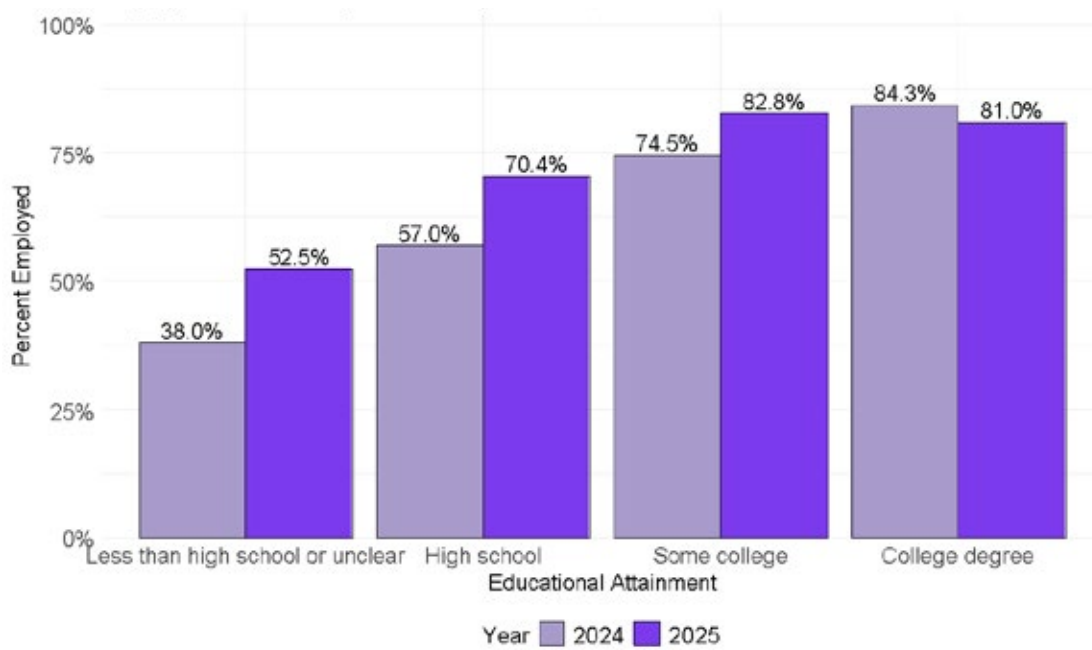


Figure 9. Black Men's Employment Rate by Education, 2024-2025

INVOLUNTARY PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT

We investigate the sources of employment growth over this period, especially for Black men with less than a college degree. We do so by examining the involuntary part-time employment rate, which estimates the fraction of all part-time workers who are involuntarily in part-time jobs. These are workers who prefer full-time work, have likely worked full-time in the past, but are currently working in part-time jobs involuntarily. This could be due to a variety of factors, including a lack of full-time employment opportunities.

RACE Figure 10 displays involuntary part-time employment rates by race over the study period. A notable finding is that the involuntary part-time employment rate for Black Californians increased by 10 percentage points over this period, going from 39 to 49 percent. Moreover, the high prevalence of involuntary part-time employment was notable across most racial groups, but increased most dramatically for Black Californians.

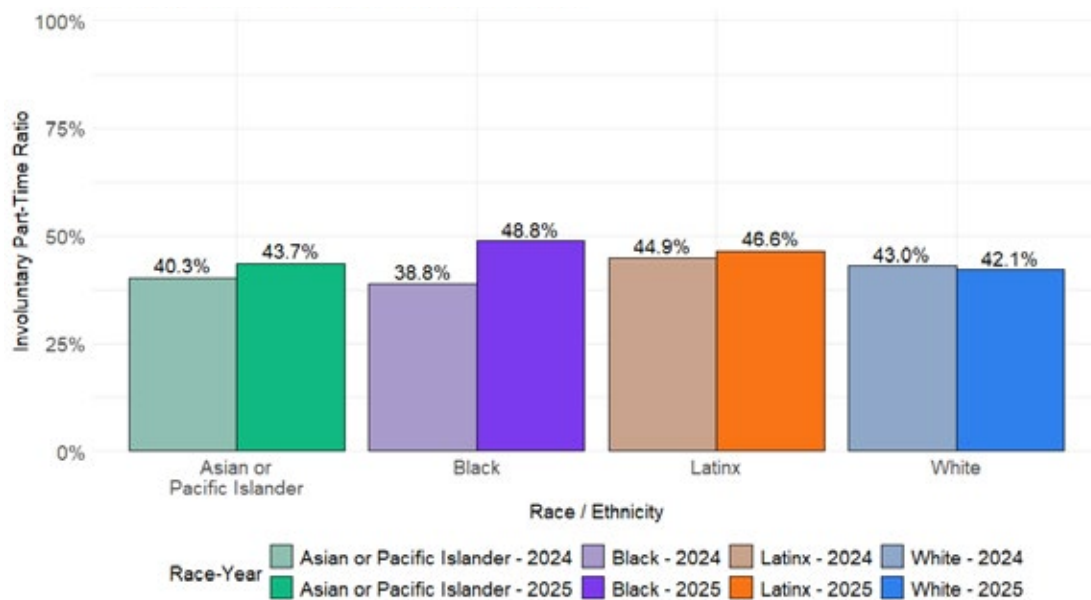


Figure 10. Involuntary Part-Time Employment Rate by Race, 2024-2025

Note that the percentage of all employed workers working part-time in California remained virtually unchanged over the study period (as calculated by authors). This was also the case for Black workers. In both 2024 and 2025, about 20% of Black California workers were employed in part-time jobs (See Appendix Figure A.7). This indicates that the shift to involuntary part-time employment for Black workers observed here represents a real adverse change in employment conditions.

Black men, in particular, experienced the sharpest increase in involuntary part-time work (nearly a 12 percentage point increase—followed by Black women. By age, the largest increases in involuntary part-time work were among older and prime-age Black Californians (See Appendix Figures A.4 - A.5). Finally, between 2024 and 2025, involuntary part-time employment rose greatly among Black Californians with less than a high school diploma, those with a high school diploma, and those with a college degree. For each

of these educational groups, involuntary part-time employment increased by over 13 percentage points, with the greatest increase among those with college degrees – a 25 percentage point increase in involuntary part-time employment (See Appendix Figure A.6).¹¹

RACE, GENDER, AND EDUCATION

Figures 11 and 12 show the involuntary part-time employment rates for Black women and men by educational attainment over the study period, to examine in more detail one potential source of increased employment for Black Californians, especially Black men.

The figures show sharp increases in involuntary part-time work for both Black women and men across almost all educational categories. The notable exception is among those with some college, where the percentage working involuntary part-time jobs declined for both Black women and men. With the exception of those who

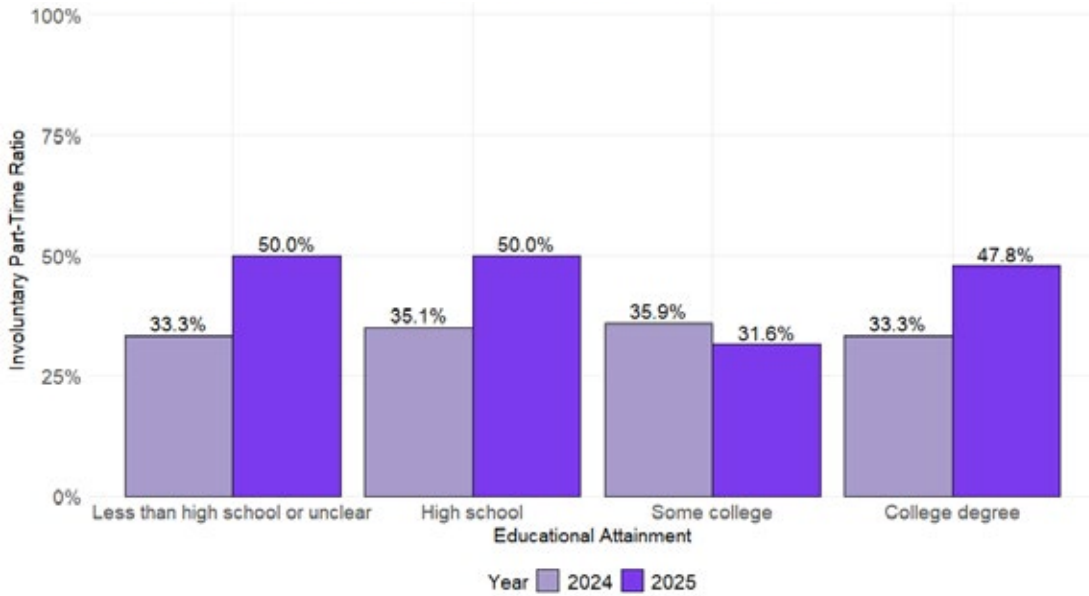


Figure 11. Black Women’s Involuntary Part-Time Employment Rate by Education, 2024-2025

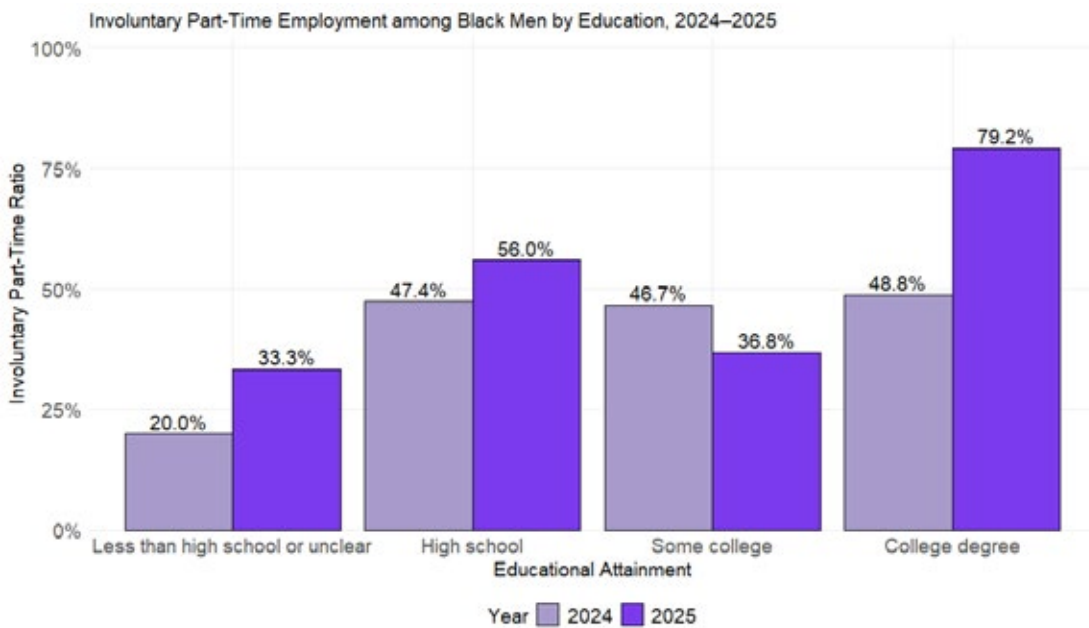


Figure 12. Black Men’s Involuntary Part-Time Employment Rate by Education, 2024-2025

have completed some college, but not a degree, the fraction of Black women who were involuntarily working in part-time jobs increased by roughly 15 percentage points for nearly all educational categories, even for those with a college degree or more (Figure 11).

This same pattern is observed for Black men (Figure 12). However, the increase in involuntary part-time work for Black men with

a college degree or more increased even more sharply than that observed for Black women. It increased by 30 percentage points. For both Black men and women, these results indicated extreme difficulty in finding full-time work, especially for those with a college degree or more.

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT

Given federal actions that cut programs and contracts, we examined government employment rates over the study period. We computed government employment rates by dividing the number of workers at each government level by the total number of employed workers in that demographic group. Across federal, state, and municipal government, Black Californians comprised the largest share of public sector employees, as expected.

workers by race over the study period. Black Californians’ rate of state government employment decreased by nearly 2 percentage points, while it increased for all other racial groups over the study period. Note also that despite this decline, Black Californians have the highest rate of state government employment.

FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT BY RACE

Between 2024 and 2025, the share of Black Californians employed in the federal government remained at 4.2%. Interestingly, federal government employment rates did not decrease for any racial group over the study period (Figure 13). Though not shown here, the share of federal government employment did not change much for Black men or women, or by age or educational attainment. This may not be surprising since only 8% of federal jobs are located in California.

Black women have historically been disproportionately employed in the public sector, so we further examine rates of state government employment for Black women. Figure 15 shows these rates for Black women over the study period. Black women’s share of employment in state government declined by a large amount for both those with some college and those with a college degree or more, by about 3 percentage points. This drop is larger than that observed for Black Californians as a whole, shown above, indicating that the decline in state employment for Black Californians was driven in large part by sharp declines in state employment by Black women. We did not find similar declines among Black men, though they are not shown here.

STATE EMPLOYMENT BY RACE

Federal cuts to programs administered by state and municipal governments may have led to decreased employment in those sectors. Figure 14 displays the share of state government

MUNICIPAL EMPLOYMENT

We conducted a similar exercise for municipal employment and found results similar to those for state employ-

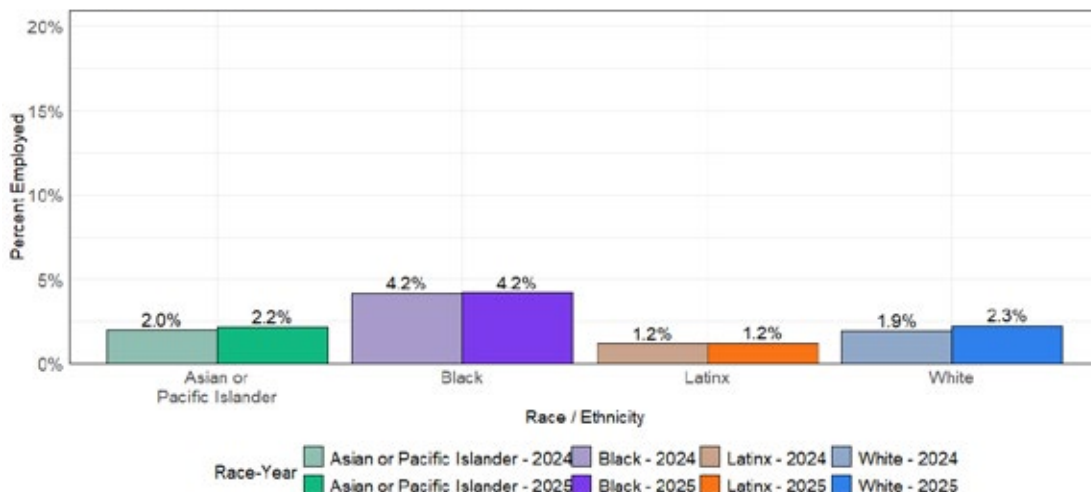


Figure 13. Federal Employment Rate by Race, 2024-2025

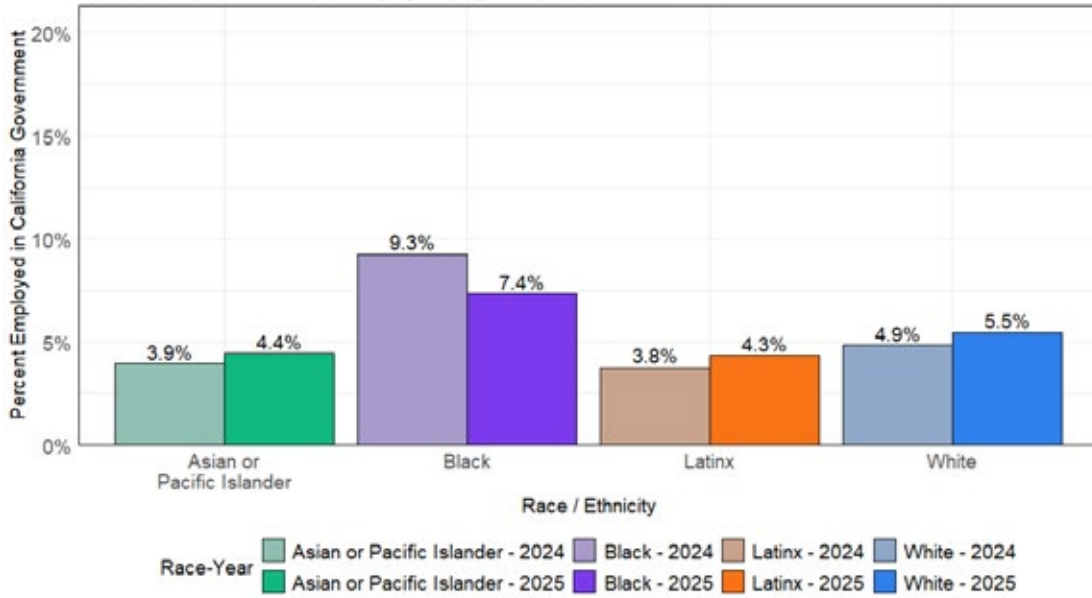


Figure 14. State Employment Rate by Race, 2024-2025

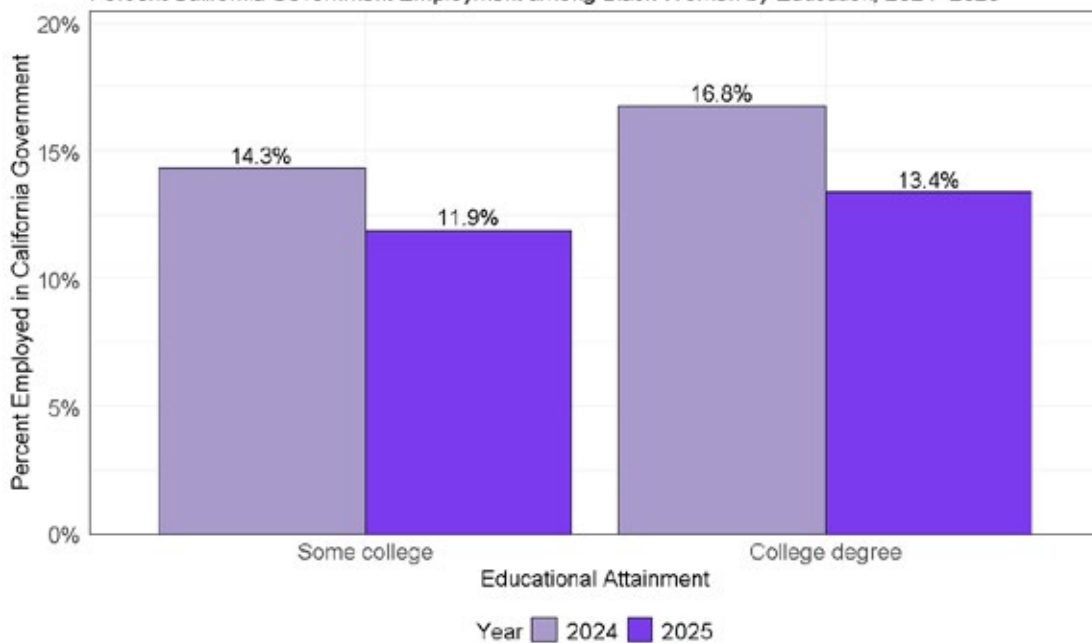


Figure 15. Black Women's Rate of State Employment by Education, 2024-2025

ment. Figure 16 shows the share of workers in municipal government employment by race over the study period. Black Californians' rate of municipal government employment decreased by nearly 3 percentage points, while it remained relatively steady or increased slightly for all other racial groups over the study period. Note again that Black Californians have the highest rate of municipal government employment despite this decline.

for Black women as we did above. In contrast to state-level employment trends, Black women with some college experienced increases in municipal-level employment (Figure 17). However, consistent with state-level employment trends, Black women with college degrees saw a large decrease in municipal employment, even larger than the state-level decline. Again, we did not find similar trends for Black men.

We further examined rates of municipal government employment

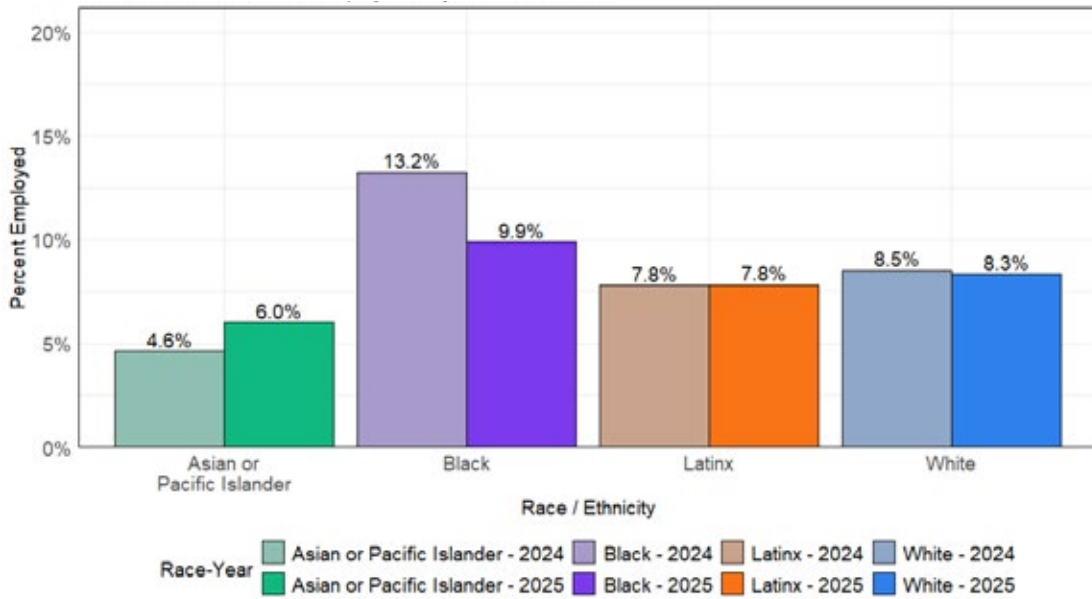


Figure 16. Municipal Rate Employment by Race, 2024-2025

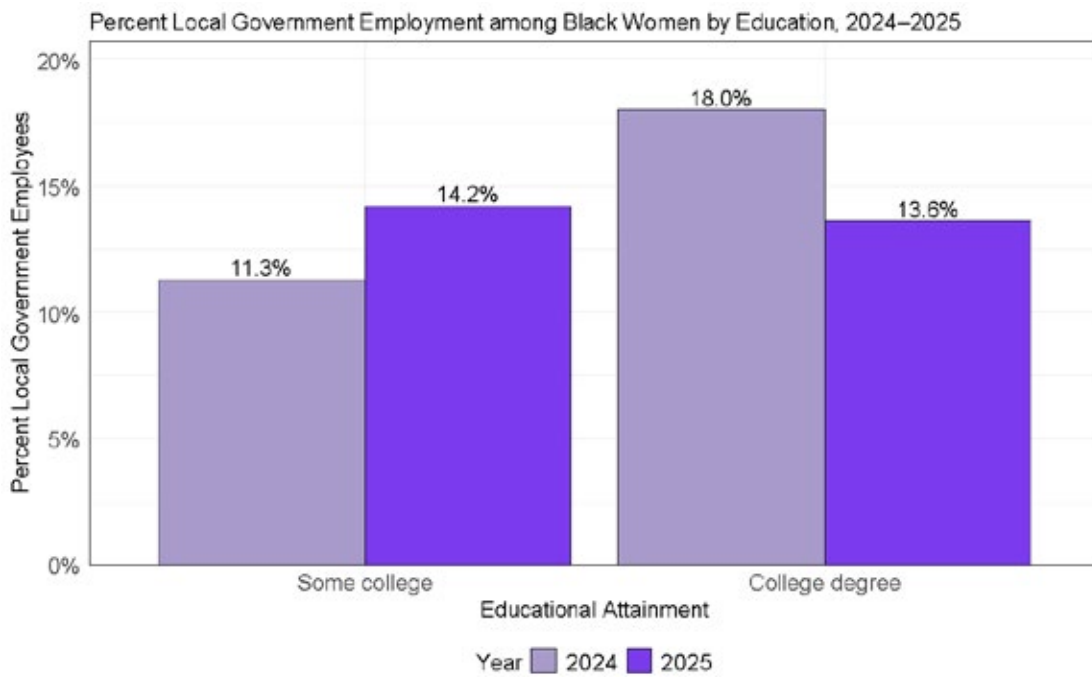


Figure 17. Black Women's Rate of Municipal Employment by Education, 2024-2025

DISCONNECTION

Finally, we analyzed changes in the labor market disconnection rate. According to RAND, “[d]isconnected youth are young people who are not working for pay and are not in school.”¹² We computed the disconnection rate by dividing the number of individuals who are neither employed nor in school by the total population of that respective racial group.

RACE

In 2025, disconnection was highest among Black and Latino Californians. Whereas disconnection fell slightly among Latinos between 2024 and 2025, it increased by 3 percentage points among Black Californians (Figure 18).

RACE AND SEX

Women, in particular, experienced higher levels of employment disconnection than men in 2024 and 2025 (Figure 19). This could be due to gendered experiences within the labor market and social life, such as expectations to support family members. Notably, Latino women experienced the highest rate of disconnection between 2024 and 2025, at nearly 20%. Yet, Black women’s disconnection increased by nearly 7 percentage points over the study period, the sharpest increase of any group.

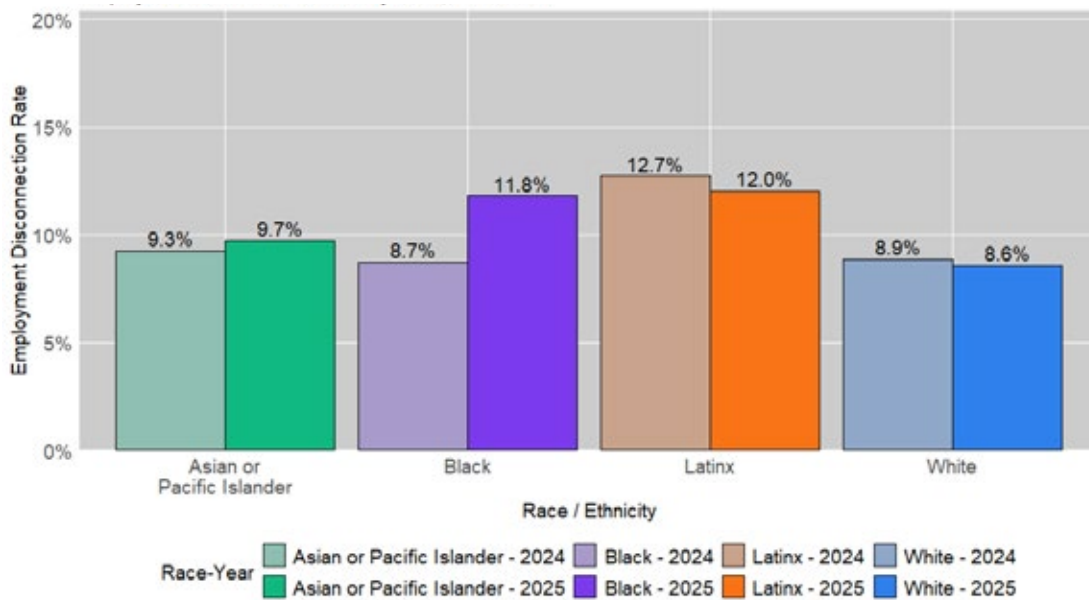


Figure 18. Disconnection Rate by Race, 2024-2025

RACE & AGE

Disconnection increased by nearly 5 percentage points among Black Californians ages 35-54 between 2024 and 2025 (Figure 20).

RACE & EDUCATION

Black Californians with less than a high school diploma experienced a sharp increase in disconnection over the study

period. Their disconnection rate increased by 6 percentage points. Moreover, they have the highest level of disconnection, with over a third experiencing disconnection in 2025. Californians with a high school diploma or less consistently experienced double-digit disconnection, suggesting a need to broadly address barriers to institutional connection that may be associated with lower levels of educational attainment.

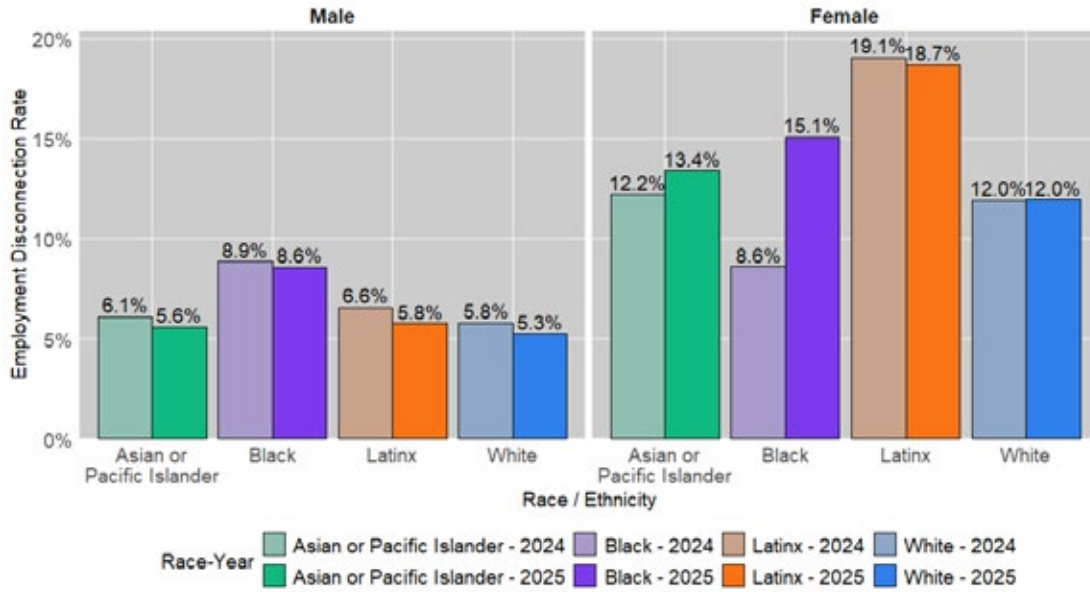


Figure 19. Disconnection Rate by Race and Sex, 2024-2025

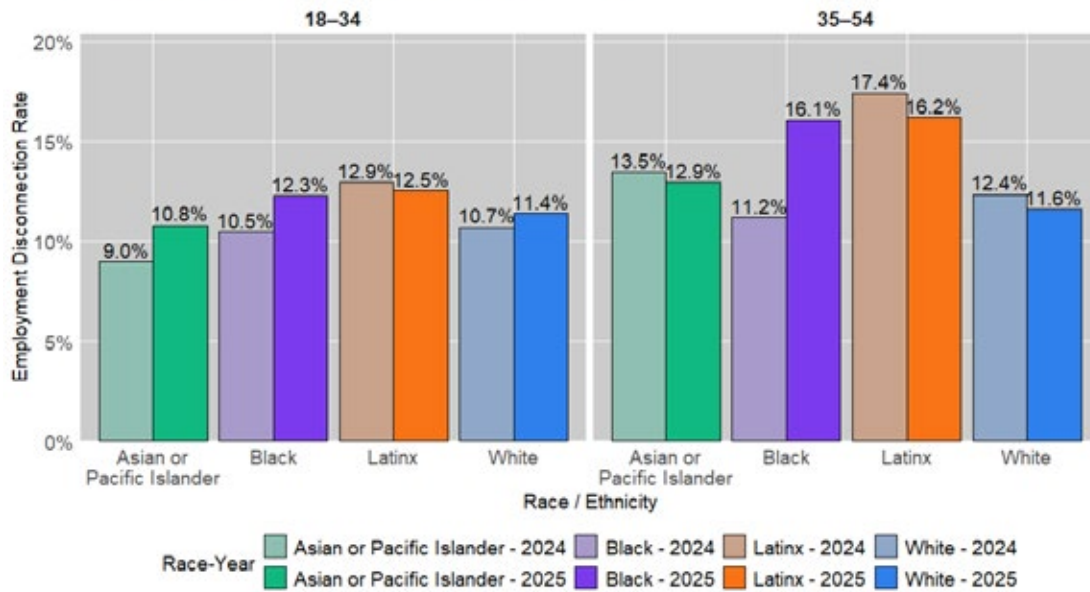


Figure 20. Disconnection Rate by Race and Age, 2024-2025

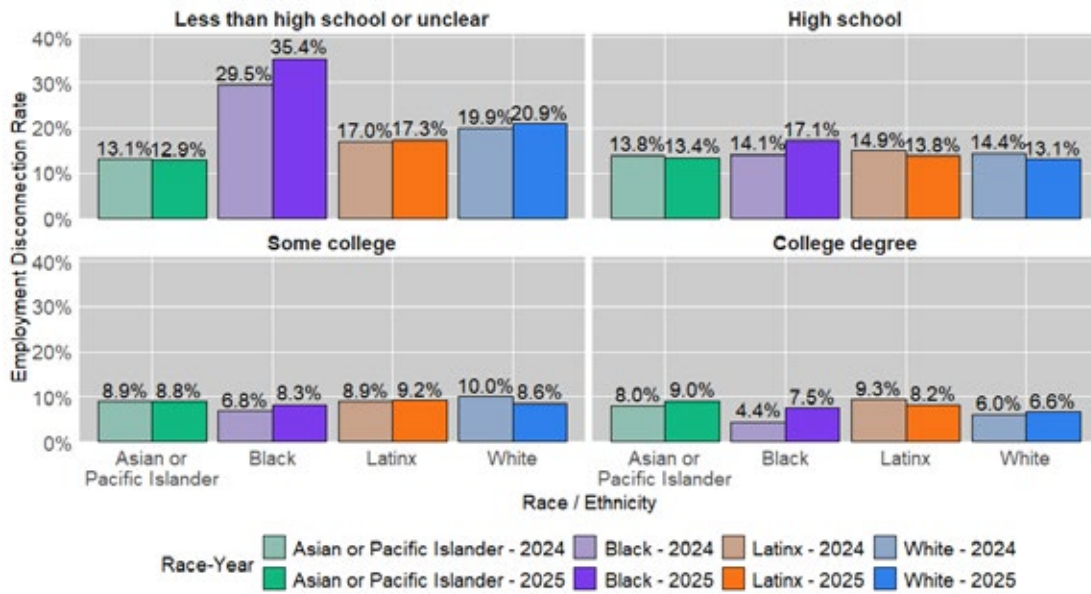


Figure 21. Disconnection Rate by Race and Education, 2024-2025

DISCUSSION & POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Our findings are consistent with those of multiple other studies, such as the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) and the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC). Assessing national trends for 2025, EPI found that “Black women bore the brunt of the economic shutdown, suffering far greater employment losses than other groups of women or Black men.” Moreover, they found “some of the largest [employment] losses among Black women were college graduates and public-sector workers,” consistent with our findings.¹³ Comparing May-August 2022 employment to the same period in 2025, PPIC similarly found that rising unemployment among Black/other workers in California “appears to be driven by women.”¹⁴

A distinction between EPI and PPIC’s analysis and our own is the level of government at which we observed these large employment losses. Whereas EPI and PPIC identified federal employment losses as a major factor affecting Black women, our analysis suggests that college-educated Black women in California working in the public sector experienced the largest losses in state and municipal employment between 2024 and 2025. This finding seems to complicate the traditional narrative of education as a universal assurance for economic security.

While we were limited in our ability to explore the industries in which Black Californian workers are employed beyond the public sector, other studies offer additional insights. According to the PPIC

and the California Black Women’s Collective Empowerment Institute, beyond the public sector, Black Californian women also disproportionately work in “retail, educational services, and information, three sectors with elevated unemployment rates in May-August 2025,”¹⁵ as well as caregiving and health support roles, which tend to offer lower wages and mobility.¹⁶ Current data specific to the employment sectors for Black men in California is noticeably more limited. However, according to BLS reports on national trends and California Competes’ and the PPIC’s most recently available reports on California trends, Black men and men of color tend to be employed in roles related to transportation and material moving, protective and security services, construction, management, sales, and administrative support.¹⁷

Consistent with the studies cited above, our findings spotlight the job loss amongst Black Californian women, and rightfully, much attention has been given to that trend.

Simultaneously, our findings provide insight into the challenges Black men in California face. While Black men may not be experiencing the same levels of unemployment, the increase in involuntary part-time employment and disconnection from employment and school, especially among young Black men, reflects increasing economic precarity for this demographic.

Five hundred thousand Californians between the ages of 16 and 24 are neither in school nor employed, and men are particularly impacted.¹⁸ In July 2025, Governor Gavin Newsom issued an executive order to prioritize the mental health of young men and boys in California, which included an ambition to “reconnect men and boys with pathways to enter education or the workforce.”¹⁹ This order also prioritized increasing allocations to the California Apprenticeship Council (CAC) Training Funds under his Master Plan for Career Education to expand career pathways that do not require a four-year degree.²⁰

While the CPS data included in our analysis did not include income data, according to the PPIC, Black families in California earn \$0.63

for every \$1 earned by White families.²¹ In 2024, the median household income in California was \$99,122.²² Yet, according to the California Pay Data Reporting System – which includes data collected by the state Civil Rights Department from private employers of 100 or more employees – in 2024, 30% of Black Californians earned between \$32,240 and \$68,119. Further, 39% of those Black Californian workers earned less than \$32,239, well below the median income.²³ According to the California Open Data Portal, 20.3% of Black families live below the living wage – “the wage or annual income that covers the cost of the bare necessities of life for a worker and his/her family”²⁴ – compared to 18% for Asian families and 11.4% for White families.²⁵ Thus, Black Californians continue to experience large income disparities within the state.

INTERPRETING FINDINGS

Reasons for the disproportionate employment impacts we observed on Black Californian women are multifold. Namely, the large representation of Black women in public sector employment partially explains this trend. Our findings demonstrate, Black women also comprise a notable proportion of professional services roles. Therefore, anti-DEI efforts across higher education²⁶ and corporate America,²⁷ leading to the restructuring or elimination of roles related to diversity initiatives, may also explain the disproportionate effects on highly-educated Black women. Furthermore, losses of federal contracts for state and local governments to support services like housing, transportation, and education, among others, may also be explanatory. At the same time, there may be state and local factors warranting future research, such as equity practices in state and municipal hiring and personnel processes.

The joint labor market hits on Black women in declining employ

ment rates and Black men in rising involuntary part-time employment rates, combined with ongoing affordability issues ranging from housing to healthcare to debt burdens, issues which Black-Californians are more likely to report worrying about than other groups,²⁸ represent compounding hardship on Black households and communities. It also represents a loss of job benefits, such as good pay, health benefits, and pensions, to name a few, in Black households and communities. Similarly, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities argue that on a national level while the overall U.S. economy isn’t experiencing a downturn, weakening economic factors related to labor market and rising costs are “particularly harmful for Black households” and “[t]he implementation of the Republican budget law enacted last year will further exacerbate the harm and could weaken economic conditions for Black households.”²⁹

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

STRENGTHEN EMPLOYMENT REGULATIONS & SOCIAL SAFETY NETS

There are many potential policies to extend economic justice for Black Californians and improve labor market outcomes. As suggested by the PPIC, one recommendation California lawmakers might prioritize is to support workers in strengthening the safety nets for those who are unemployed, such as expanding the State Unemployment Insurance program.³⁰ The California Black Women’s Collective Empowerment Institute (CBWCEI), which produced the 2025 State of Black Women in California Report, and the California Budget & Policy Center have proposed multiple additional recommendations, including:

- ▶ Raising wages within the public sector and caregiving sectors in which Black women are overrepresented.
- ▶ Supporting unionization in caregiving sectors.
- ▶ Increasing wages to reflect regional costs of living.
- ▶ Strengthening protections against workplace discrimination.
- ▶ Mandating disaggregated pay transparency by race and gender and implementing sponsorship and mentorship programs to raise the promotion rate of Black women.³¹
- ▶ Supporting workforce development for high-growth and non-traditional industries like tech, health care, and green energy.³²

Notably, recently enacted CLBC legislation should allow for increas-

ing pay transparency. California Senate Bill 464, sponsored by Senator Lola Smallwood-Cuevas and introduced as part of the CLBC’s Road to Repair legislative package, was successfully signed into law on October 13, 2025.³³ SB 464 strengthens existing requirements for private employers and extends them to public employers, requiring employers with at least 100 employees – including those hired through labor contractors – to provide an annual pay data report to the Civil Rights Department (CRD). This pay data report is to include: the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) industry classification of the employers; the number of employees by race, ethnicity, and sex by job categories; annual earnings; median and mean hourly rate within job categories; total number of hours worked by each employee counted in each pay band, among others.³⁴ If employers do not provide this information, the bill also strengthens penalties for non-compliance.³⁵

Additional pay transparency data is critical for analysis of labor market conditions. Earlier in our discussion here, we utilized data from the California Pay Data Reporting System. We anticipate that with expanded data collection, further analyses can be deepened.

DIVERSIFY PATHWAYS TO QUALITY EMPLOYMENT

Proposed policy recommendations to support improved labor market outcomes for Black Californian men largely focus on expanding mentorship and pathways to quality employment that doesn’t require four-year education, like the aforementioned California Apprenticeship Council (CAC) Training Funds and the additional creation of paid service opportunities through the California Men’s Service Challenge.³⁶ However, policies that connect young Black men with employment while also providing opportunities for holistic support (e.g., mental health, social support, education, etc.) may be even more powerful.³⁷

CONTINUE TO INVEST IN CALIFORNIA’S PUBLIC COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

At the same time that diversifying pathways to quality careers that do not require college may support Black Californians, California’s public college and university systems also remain important pipelines for economic mobility. According to The Campaign for College Opportunity,³⁸ while the economic returns of higher education for Black Californians remain unequal relative to their peers, “[w]ages for Black graduates of both the University of California (UC) and CSU systems exceed the state’s median yearly earnings within five years of graduation.”³⁸ Maintaining and increasing investments in higher education, including support for Black students to access and matriculate through these systems,

can also support the economic well-being of Black Californians.

INVEST IN BLACK-LED ORGANIZATIONS & INITIATIVES SUPPORTING BLACK ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Finally, investing in Black-led institutions and cultivating entrepreneurship can also support the economic well-being of Black Californians. A 2025 study by the Nonprofit Finance Fund, which surveyed more than 200 California-based Black-led organizations (BLOs), concluded that “BLOs are vital lifelines in their communities,” often providing essential services on behalf of government funders and “support[ing] community wealth and well-being” (3).³⁹

For example, the California Black Women’s Collective Empowerment Institute partnered with Blue Shield of California Promise Health Plan and L.A. Care Health Plan to design SheWorks California, a workforce development program targeted towards Black women who are “underemployed, unemployed, or rebuilding their lives after incarceration.”⁴⁰ The SheWorks initiative encompasses resume building and interview preparation, financial literacy, access to hiring managers committed to career advancement, and wrap-around support such as childcare stipends and rideshare credits. Examples of additional Black-led programs cultivating the workforce and economic development of Black Californians include:

- ▶ The Bay Area Black Worker Center, which works “to eliminate Black poverty by increasing access to quality jobs, improving the quality of jobs in those industries that employ Black workers, and reducing employment discrimination against Black workers.”⁴¹
- ▶ The Southern California Black Worker Hub, which supports initiatives of Worker Centers in Los Angeles, Long Beach, Inland Empire, High Desert, and San Diego, among others.⁴²

Gains in Black Californian business ownership between 2000 and 2024 were one of the areas highlighted in the 2024 SOBC report (43).⁴³ According to the California Office of the Small Business Advocate, in 2023, minority-owned small businesses accounted for “45% of all businesses in the state, support[ed] 10.9% of all jobs in the state annually,” and generated \$192.8 billion – 3.5% of California’s economic output.⁴⁴ One hundred eighty-five thousand of those businesses were Black-owned.⁴⁵ Some research suggests Black business owners are more likely to hire Black workers and other workers of color and that increasing Black entrepreneurship may support the alleviation of Black unemployment.⁴⁶ Thus, supporting organizations and initiatives committed to Black entrepreneurs can foster the economic well-being of Black Californians.

In addition to local Black chambers of commerce (of which the California African American Chamber of Commerce maintains a directory),⁴⁷ small business development centers, and community development financial institutions (CDFIs), additional initiatives to support Black entrepreneurs and business owners include:

- ▶ The Alliance for Community Development, which supports underrepresented entrepreneurs in northern California through mentorship, identification of potential sources of capital, and, via a partnership with the California Office of the Small Business Advocate (CalOSBA), technical assistance to scale their businesses;⁴⁸
- ▶ The Black Funders Network of the Bay Area, a project of the 501(c)(3) Community Initiatives, which connects Black funders and philanthropy professionals to strategize about how to support Black communities and organizations;⁴⁹
- ▶ The Oakland-based Kapor Center, which engages in research,

advocacy, and venture capital investing to support diversity in tech entrepreneurship;⁵⁰

- ▶ The Black Cooperative Impact Fund (BCIF), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, which provides zero-interest microloans to Black entrepreneurs based in southern California;⁵¹
- ▶ PledgeLA, an initiative begun by the Annenberg Foundation and Office of the Mayor of Los Angeles, which research suggests has demonstrated consistent, albeit modest, impacts to expanding access to venture capital investment for tech entrepreneurs from underrepresented backgrounds in LA and beyond.⁵²

These recommendations represent just a sample of initiatives that policymakers, business leaders, labor organizers, and community advocates committed to economic advancement for Black Californians may consider and build upon in the ongoing pursuit of a stronger, more equitable, and prosperous California for all.

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APPENDIX

If necessary. Additional data and/or information on methodology.

TABLE A.1: DEMOGRAPHIC STATISTICS

	2024	2025
TOTAL	53,928	26,632
GENDER		
Male	26,386	13,233
Female	27,542	13,399
RACE		
2 or more Races	836	485
American Indian/Aleut/Eskimo	220	99
Asian or Pacific Islander	10,206	5,162
Black	2,092	1,083
Hispanic	22,751	10,697
White	17,823	9,106
2 or more Races	836	485
AGE CATEGORIES		
18–34	19,221	9,270
35–54	23,782	11,651
55–65	10,925	5,711
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT		
Less than High School or Unclear	6,016	2,508
High School	13,062	6,332
Some College	13,458	6,699
College Degree	21,392	11,093
BLACK + GENDER		
Male	965	558
Female	1,127	525
BLACK + AGE CATEGORIES		
18–34	707	361
35–54	879	496
55–65	506	226
BLACK + EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT		
Less than High School or Unclear	106	46
High School	472	295
Some College	741	354
College Degree	773	388

FIGURE A.1: EMPLOYMENT RATE BY RACE AND SEX, 2024-2025

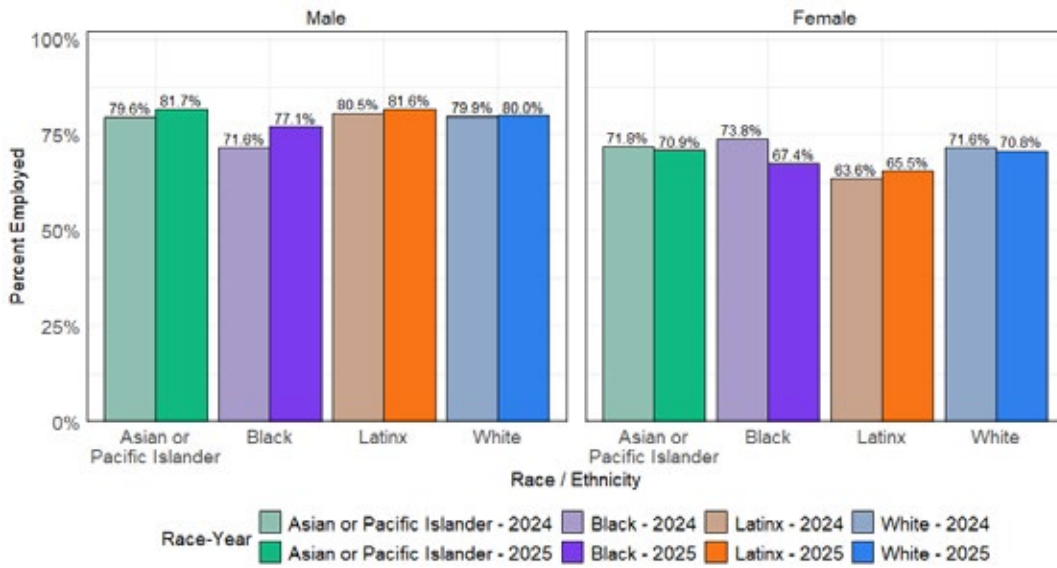


FIGURE A.2: EMPLOYMENT RATE BY RACE AND AGE, 2024-2025

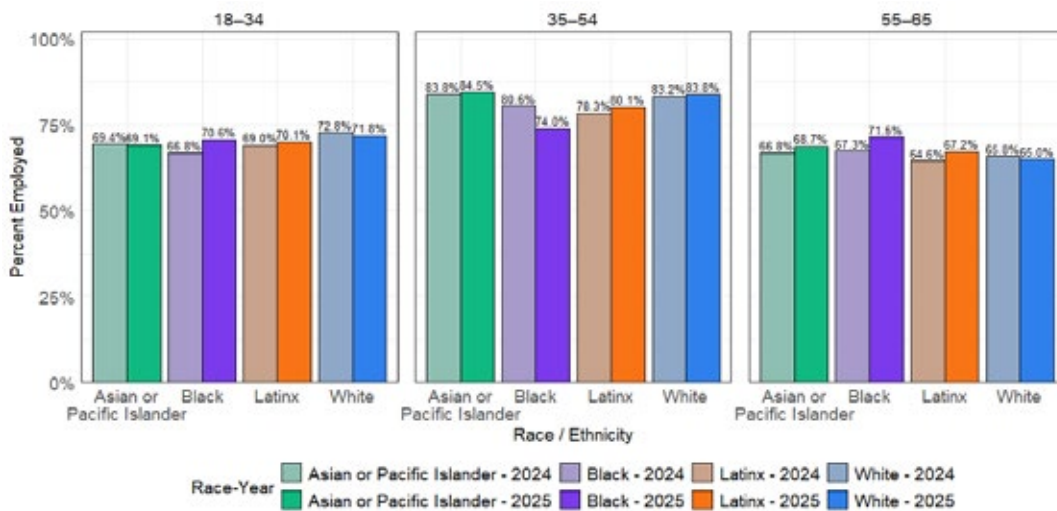


FIGURE A.3: EMPLOYMENT RATE BY RACE AND EDUCATION, 2024-2025

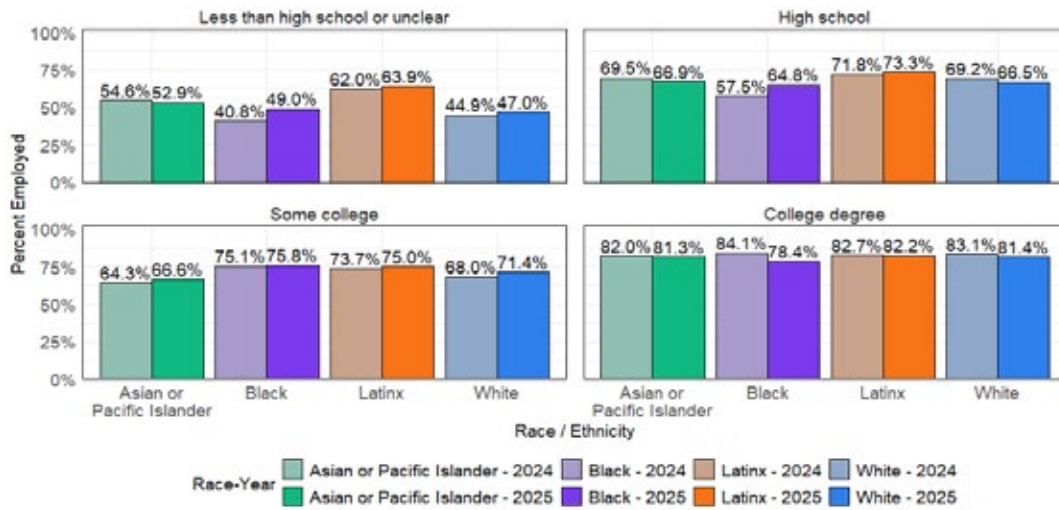


FIGURE A.4: INVOLUNTARY PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT RATE BY RACE AND SEX, 2024-2025

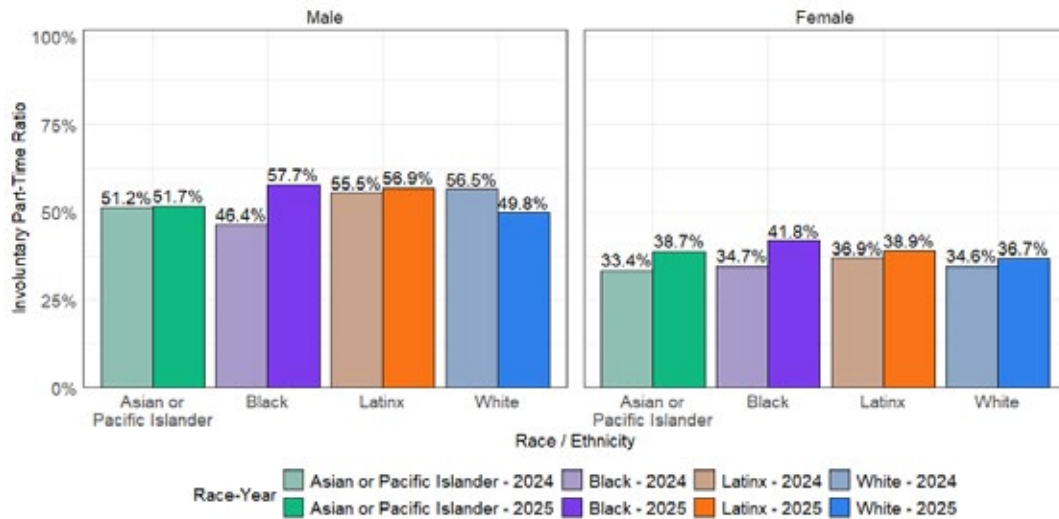


FIGURE A.5: INVOLUNTARY PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT RATE BY RACE AND AGE, 2024-2025

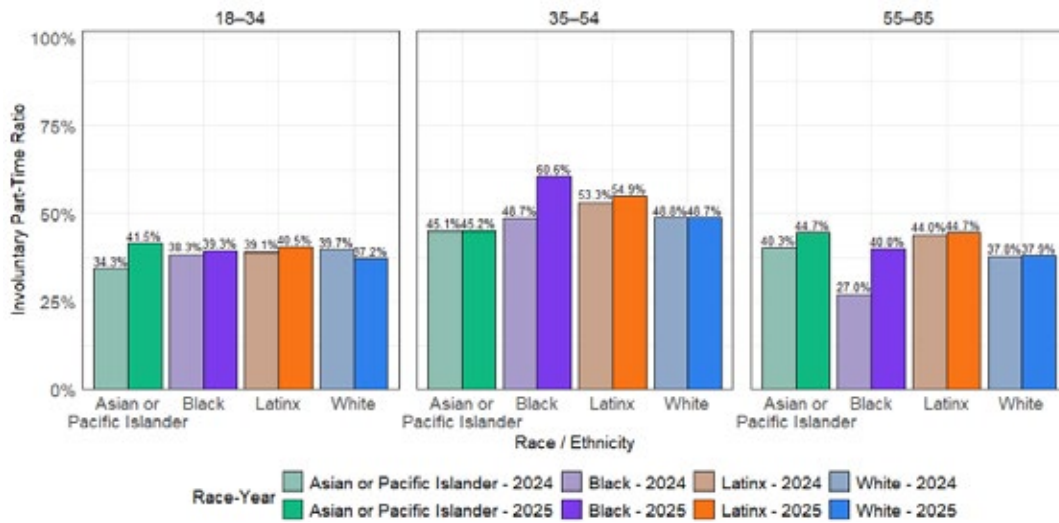


FIGURE A.6: INVOLUNTARY PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT RATE BY RACE AND EDUCATION, 2024-2025

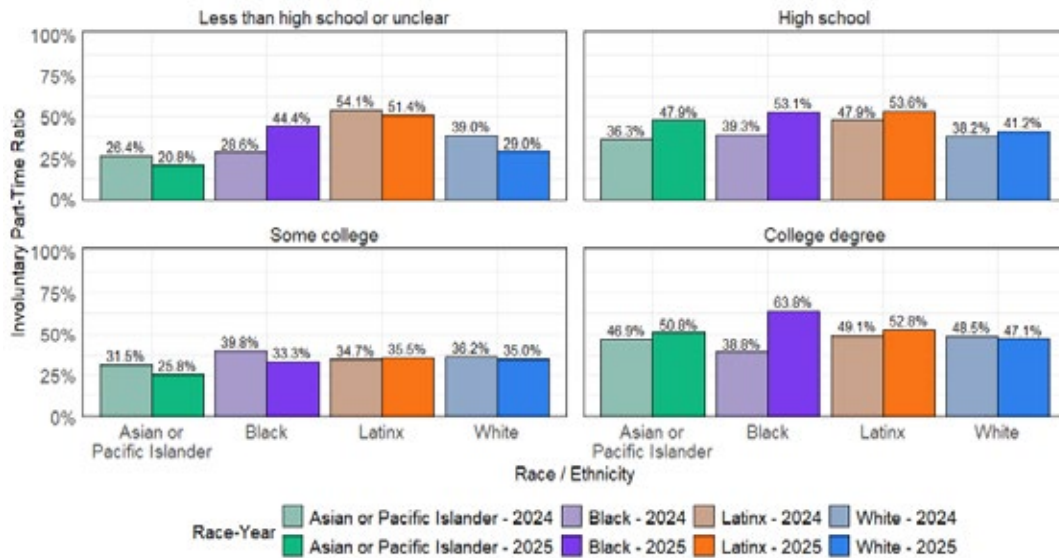


FIGURE A.7: PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT RATE BY RACE, 2024-2025

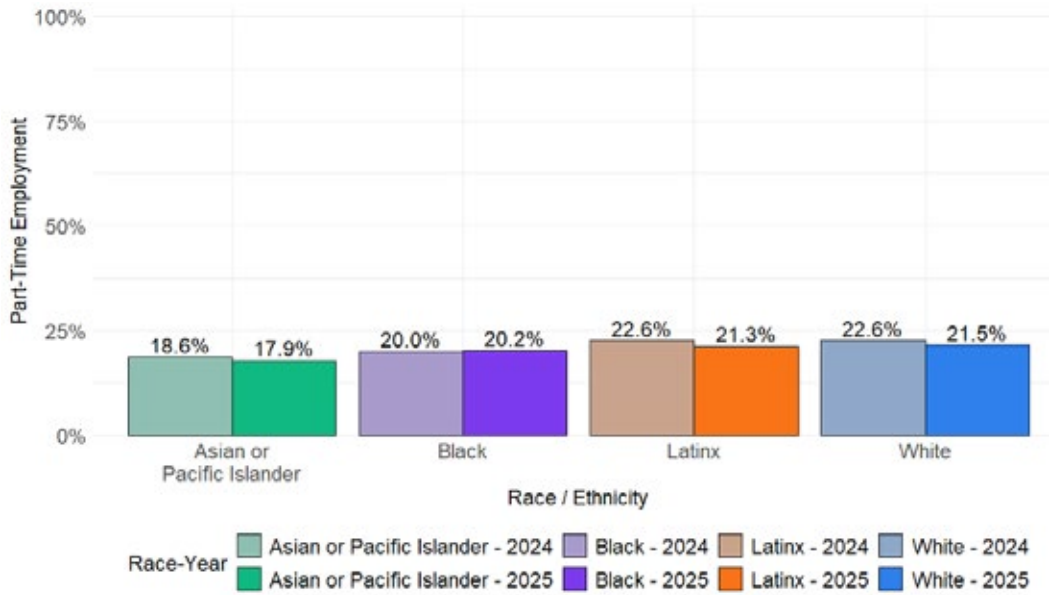


FIGURE A.8: BLACK WOMEN'S PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT RATE BY EDUCATION, 2024-2025

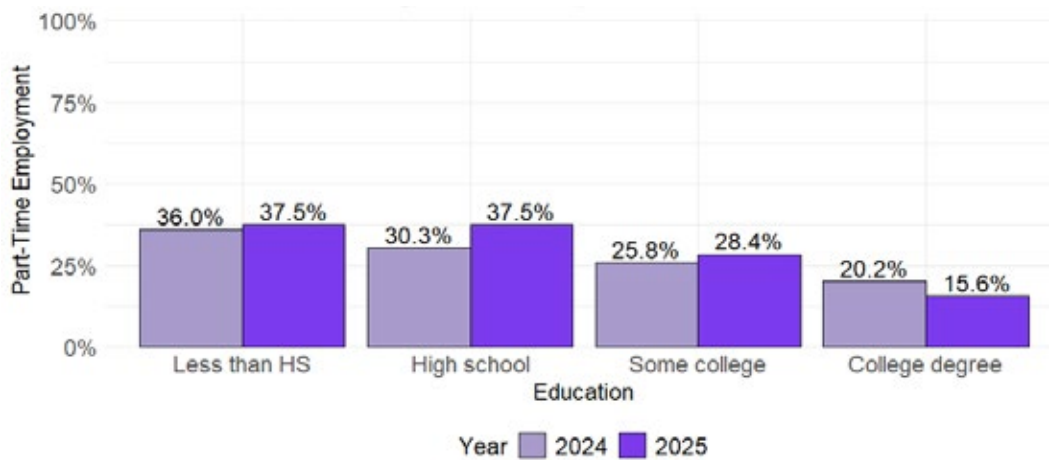


FIGURE A.9: BLACK MEN’S PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT RATE BY EDUCATION, 2024-2025

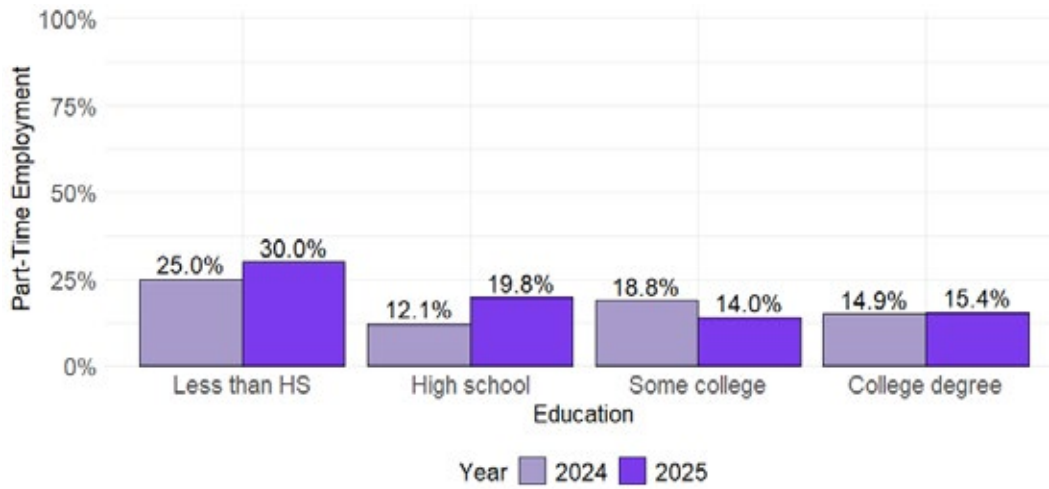


FIGURE A.10: WHITE WOMEN’S PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT RATE BY EDUCATION, 2024-2025

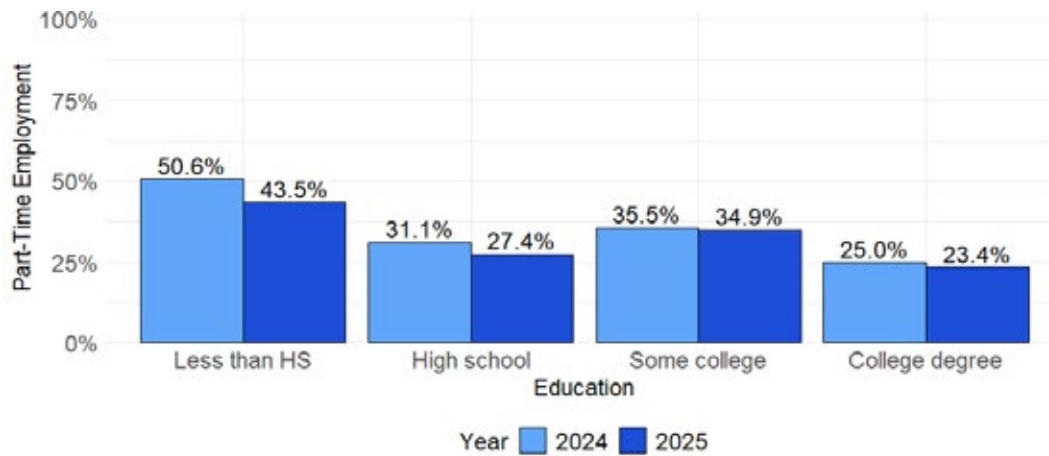
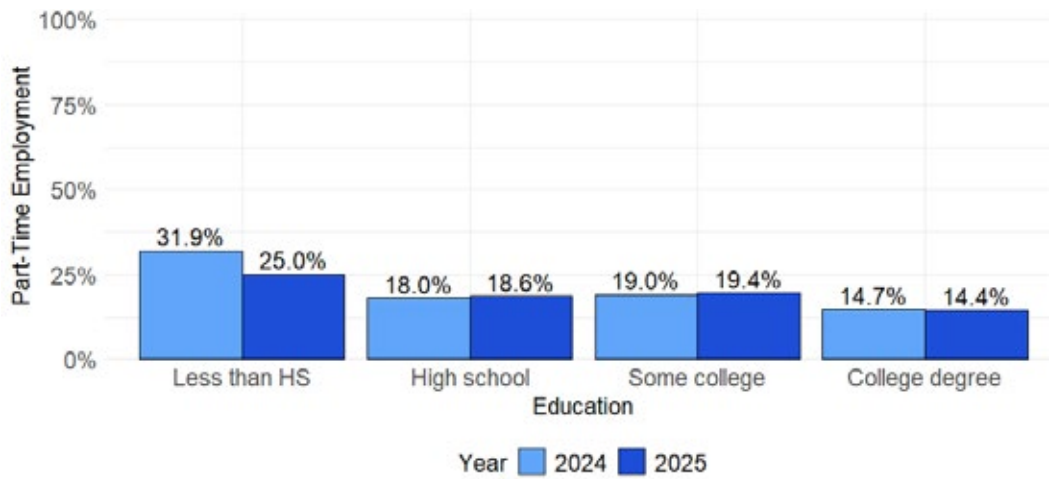


FIGURE A.11: WHITE MEN'S PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT RATE BY EDUCATION, 2024-2025



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