

FROM OFFICE TO OPPORTUNITY

ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION IN U.S. SWING STATES

Introduction & Theory

- Descriptive representation** influences political behavior - boosting voter turnout (Rocha et al., 2010), shaping candidate evaluations (Campbell & Cowley, 2013), and transforming political institutions and ambition (Barnes & Holman, 2020)
- “Role Model Effect”: extending this logic to candidates, we theorize that sharing race or gender with a legislator can motivate others from that group to run.

RQ & Hypothesis

- Research Question:** Does the presence of demographically diverse state legislators in one election positively influence the demographic diversity of the candidate pool in the subsequent election?
- Hypotheses:** Districts with a demographically diverse state legislator elected in Election(t) will have a higher percentage of demographically diverse candidates in Election(t+1).

Data and Methodology

- Sample:** state house districts in NV, GA, MI
- Covariate:** Binary indicator of whether a nonwhite/woman legislator served in 2022
- Outcome Variable:** % non-white and % woman legislators in 2024 candidate pool
- Confounders:** district % nonwhite voters, % women voters, 2022 margin of victory
- Genderize and WRU **algorithms** to infer race/gender
 - Random sample manually verified
- Ran **linear regressions** separately for race and gender using 1) a full sample, 2) a subsample excluding incumbents

Linear Regression Results

Full Sample

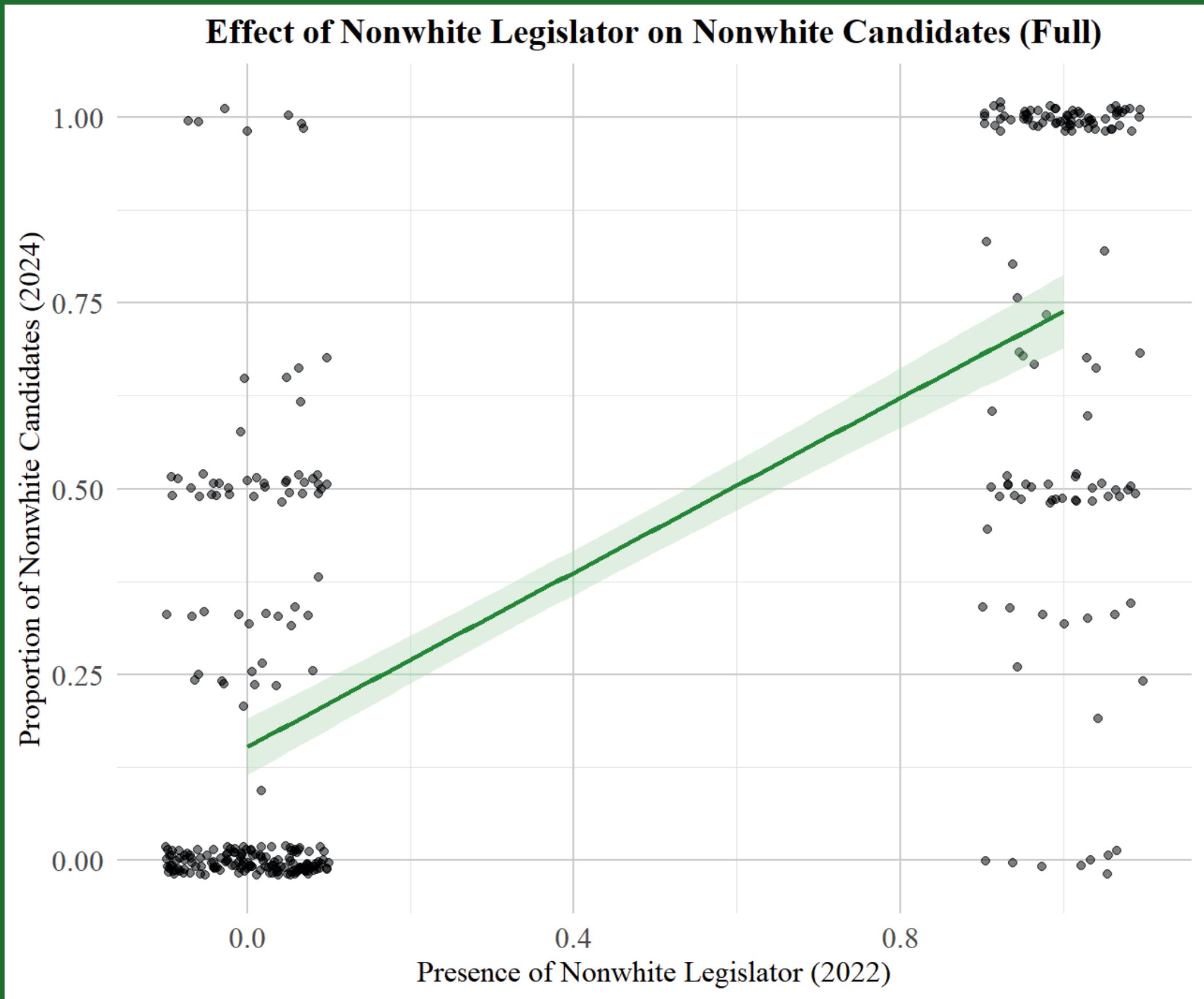


Figure 1A. Nonwhite Legislator → Nonwhite Candidates (Full)

Non-Incumbent Sample

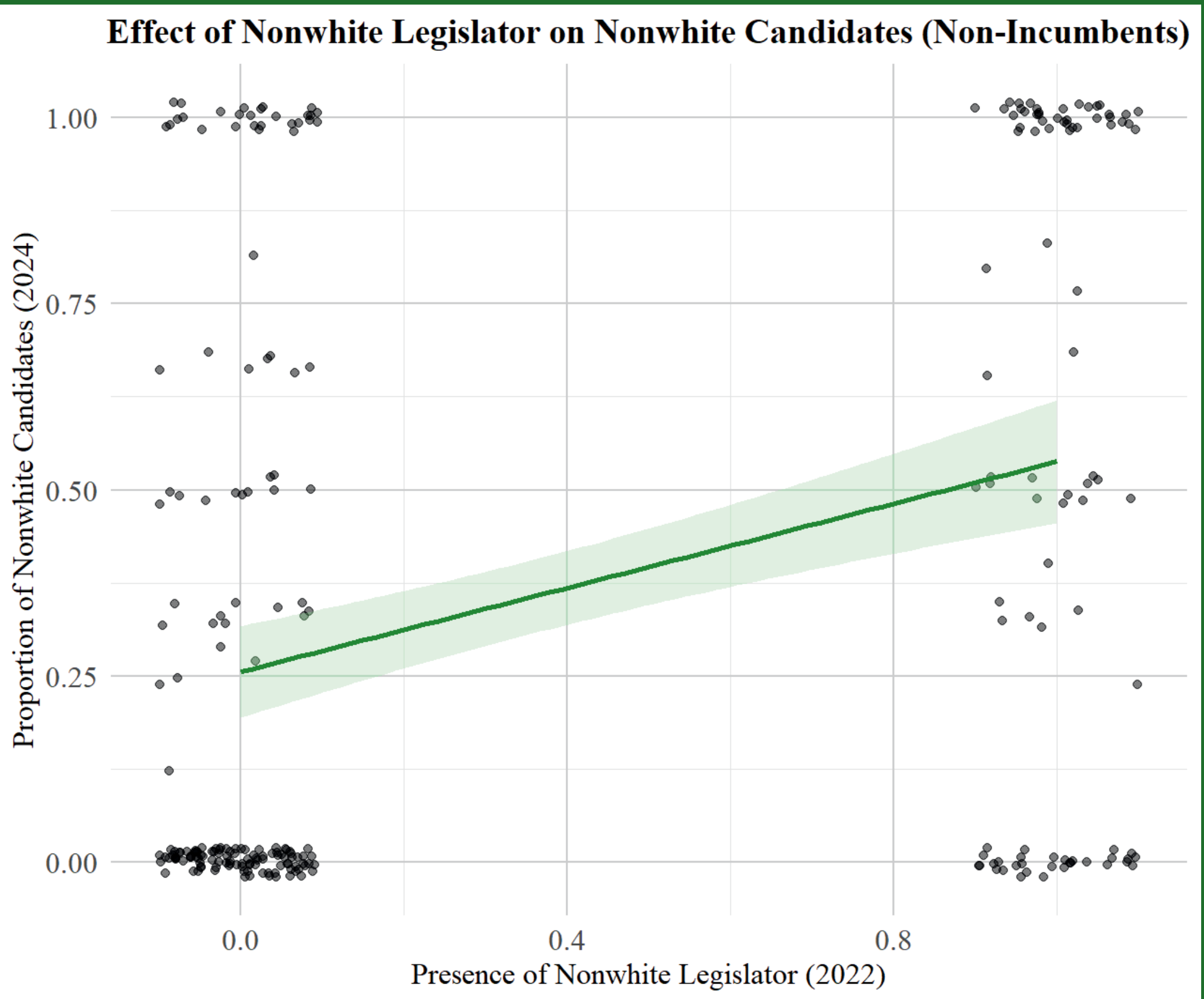


Figure 2A. Nonwhite Legislator → Nonwhite Candidate (Sample)

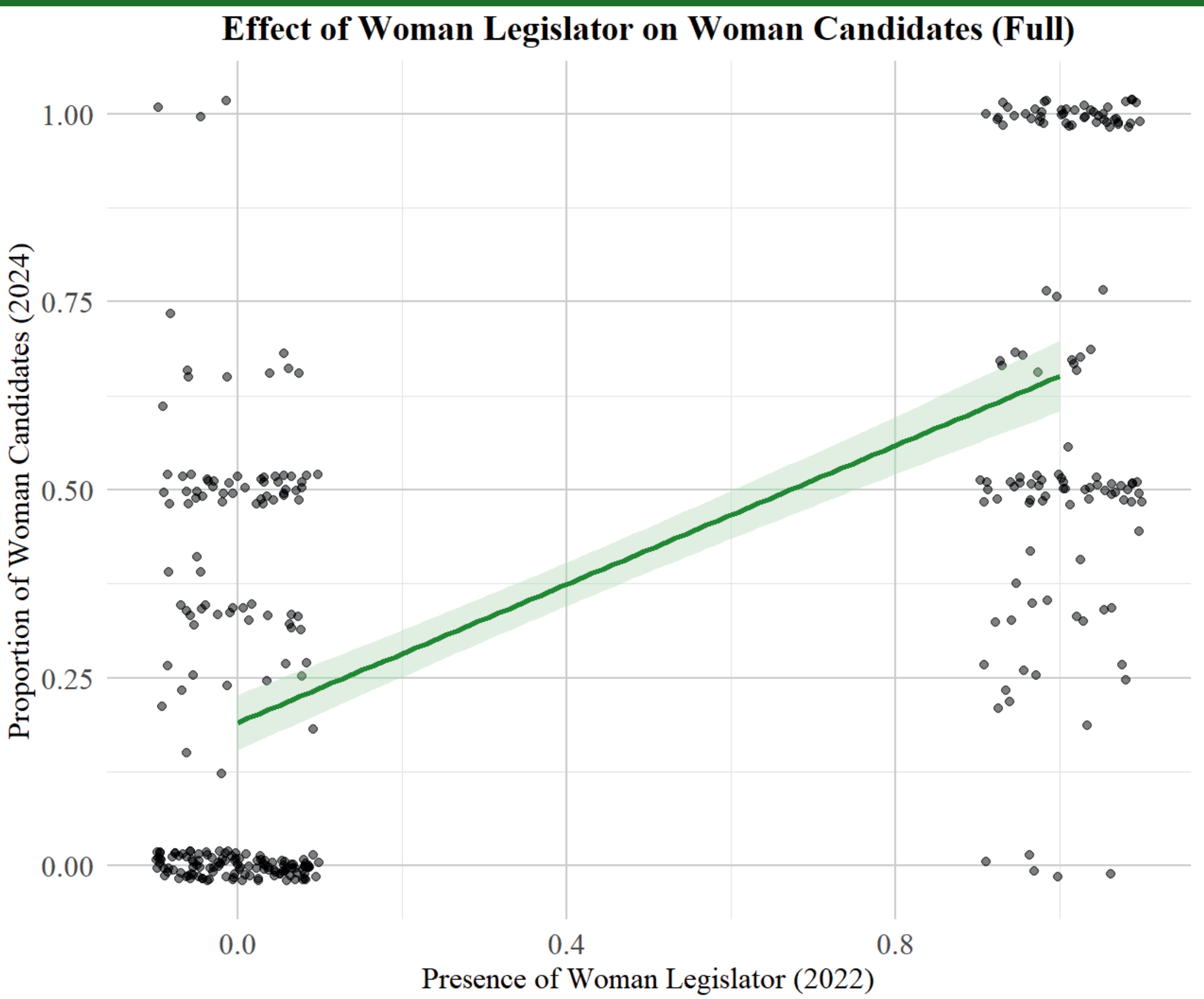


Figure 1B. Woman Legislator → Woman Candidates (Full)

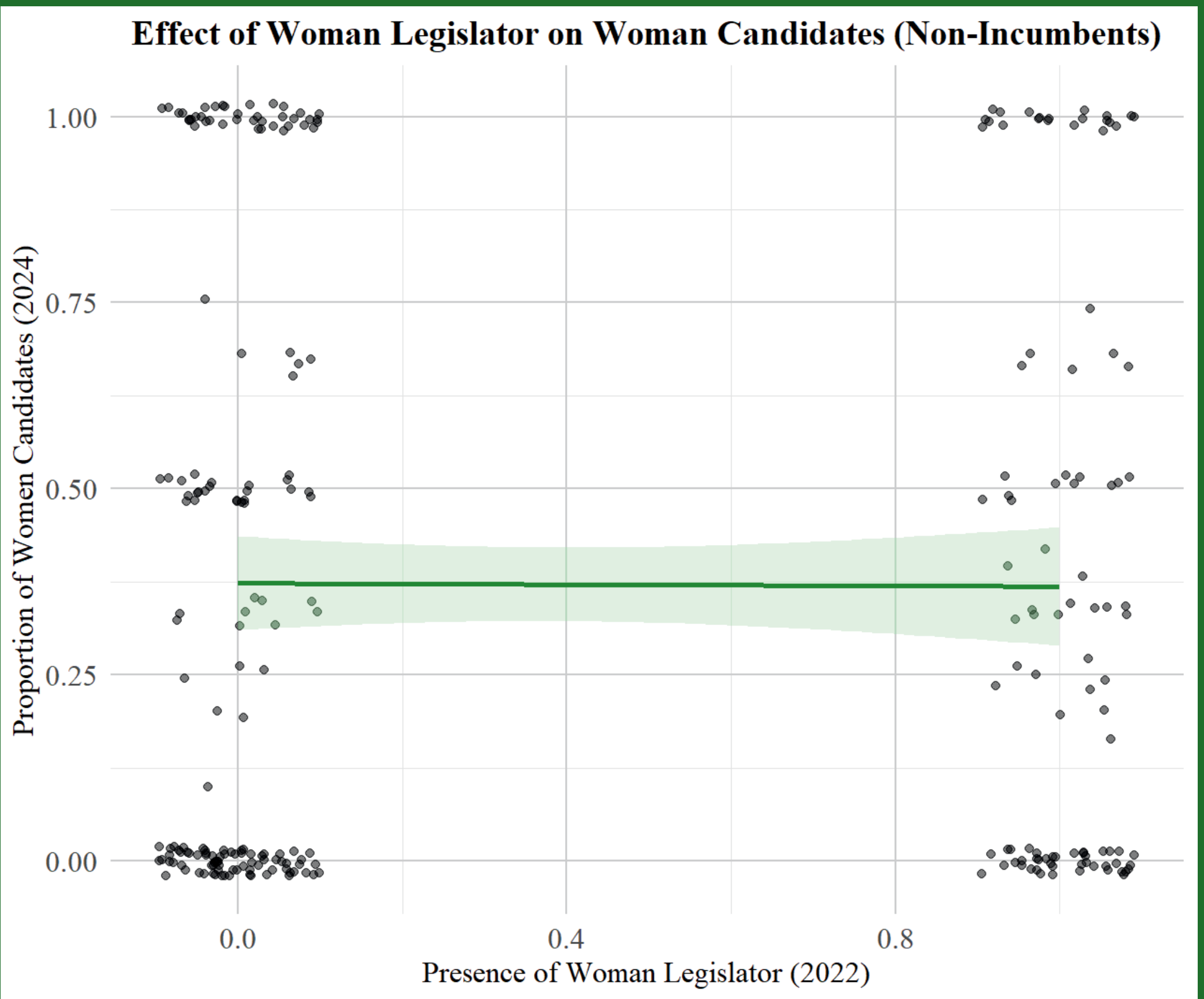


Figure 2B. Woman Legislator → Woman Candidate (Sample)

Table 1: Effect of 2022 Legislator Diversity on 2024 Candidate Pool - Full Sample		
	2024 Nonwhite Candidates	2024 Women Candidates
Nonwhite Legislator (2022)	0.429*** (0.038)	
% Nonwhite Voters	0.006*** (0.001)	
Margin of Victory	−0.001 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Woman Legislator (2022)		0.453*** (0.031)
% Women Voters		0.017+ (0.009)
Num.Obs.	336	335
R2	0.568	0.414
R2 Adj.	0.564	0.409

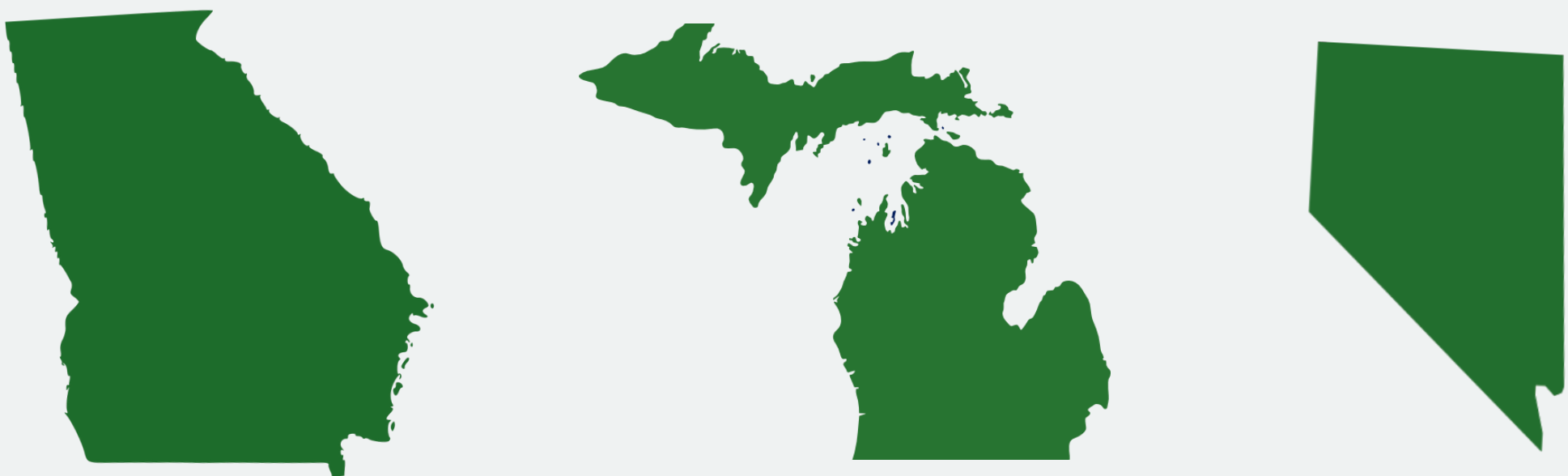
Table 1. 2022 Legislator Diversity → 2024 Candidates (Full)

Table 2: Effect of 2022 Legislator Diversity on 2024 Candidate Pool - Non-Incumbents		
	2024 Nonwhite Candidates	2024 Women Candidates
Nonwhite Legislator (2022)	0.047 (0.060)	
% Nonwhite Voters	0.009*** (0.001)	
Margin of Victory	−0.001 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)
Woman Legislator (2022)		−0.003 (0.052)
% Women Voters		−0.013 (0.016)
Num.Obs.	259	259
R2	0.239	0.003
R2 Adj.	0.230	−0.009

Table 2. 2022 Legislator Diversity → 2024 Candidates (Sample)

Interpretation of Results

- Nonwhite legislators in 2022 → **more** nonwhite candidates overall
 - No effect among non-incumbents** after adjusting for controls.
- Woman legislators in 2022 → **more** woman candidates overall
 - No effect among non-incumbents** after adjusting for controls.
- Race** effects are **more robust** than gender effects, pointing to identity-specific pathways for descriptive representation.
- In open-seat races, **district demographics** predict diversity better than prior representation, suggesting limited role model influence without incumbency.



Conclusion

- Descriptive representation** may help build diverse candidate pipelines.
- The importance of **incumbents** underscores the need to study how underrepresented groups **gain entry** into the political arena.
- Results are **correlational** and **limited** to three states, reducing generalizability and omitting party-level dynamics.
- Name-based inference and binary demographic categories **limit precision** and preclude intersectional analysis.
- Future work** should expand to more states, examine recruitment structures, and consider structural barriers (e.g., cost of campaigning).