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# Are Florida's Universities Echo Chambers?

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## KEY FINDINGS

- **University faculty/staff donate to Democratic political committees at a higher rate than Floridians as a whole.**

While 51% of Florida residents' political donations are to Republican committees, university employee donations are heavily skewed in favor of Democrat committees.

- **University employee donation bias remains strong whether you examine number or dollar amount of donations.**

Different analyses looking at both number of donations and total dollars donated show consistent levels of Democrat bias in university employee political contributions.

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## INTRODUCTION

For decades, American higher education was an engine of economic and civic growth. It moved people from poverty to prosperity. It trained people in citizenship. Our universities were the envy of the world.

In recent years, however, many are asking whether that golden goose has become a white elephant. Universities are expensive and suffer declining public support. One recent report from Yale University argued that universities have become "echo chambers" in ways that damage their legitimacy and value and harm student success.<sup>1</sup> The report goes on to argue that "echo chambers do not produce the best teaching, research, or scholarship." In short, there are serious concerns about the direction of higher education.

To determine whether Florida's public

universities are part of this "echo chamber," we examine political contributions among faculty and staff at its five largest public universities during the 2024 federal election cycle. There are, of course, other methods to employ, such as examining departmental websites, analyzing faculty research, and more. We endorse subsequent analyses along those lines.

The results are stark. Nearly nine out of every ten dollars of faculty and staff political contributions went to Democrats, compared to just one in ten for Republicans.

## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

One way to measure the ideological leanings of a university is to evaluate faculty and staff political donations. To do so, one can turn to the Federal Election Commission (FEC). The Commission

maintains a public database of individual donors to federal candidates and committees. Federal law requires donors who contribute over \$200 (in the aggregate) per election cycle to disclose their occupations and their employers. These requirements allowed us to examine individual federal donations during the 2024 election cycle.

We analyzed individual donations from people employed at the five largest universities in Florida: Florida International University (FIU), Florida State University (FSU), The University of Central Florida (UCF), The University of Florida (UF), and The University of South Florida (USF). For comparison purposes, we also analyzed all individual donations from Floridians.

We conducted three specific analyses. First, we examined the *number of donations* made by university employees to the Democratic and Republican parties (and groups related to them). We also coded donations—such as donations to minor political parties, nonpartisan PACs, and nonpartisan organizations—as donations to “other.” Second, we analyzed the *total dollar amounts* contributed by faculty and staff. Third, we investigated *party focused givers*, which we define as faculty and staff who gave largely to one party.

### **NUMBER OF FACULTY AND STAFF POLITICAL DONATIONS**

Our first analysis focused on the number of donations faculty and staff

made to Democrats and Republicans. Among UCF’s and FSU’s faculty and staff donors, 89% and 88% of their donations went to Democrats. Among UF’s faculty and staff donors, 83% of donations went to Democrats. 75% of the donations from USF faculty and staff went to Democrats, while 71% of FIU’s contributions went to Democrats.

Conversely, among faculty and staff who donated politically, 27% of FIU donations went to Republicans, as did 22% at USF, 10% at UF, 8% at UCF, and 6% at FSU.

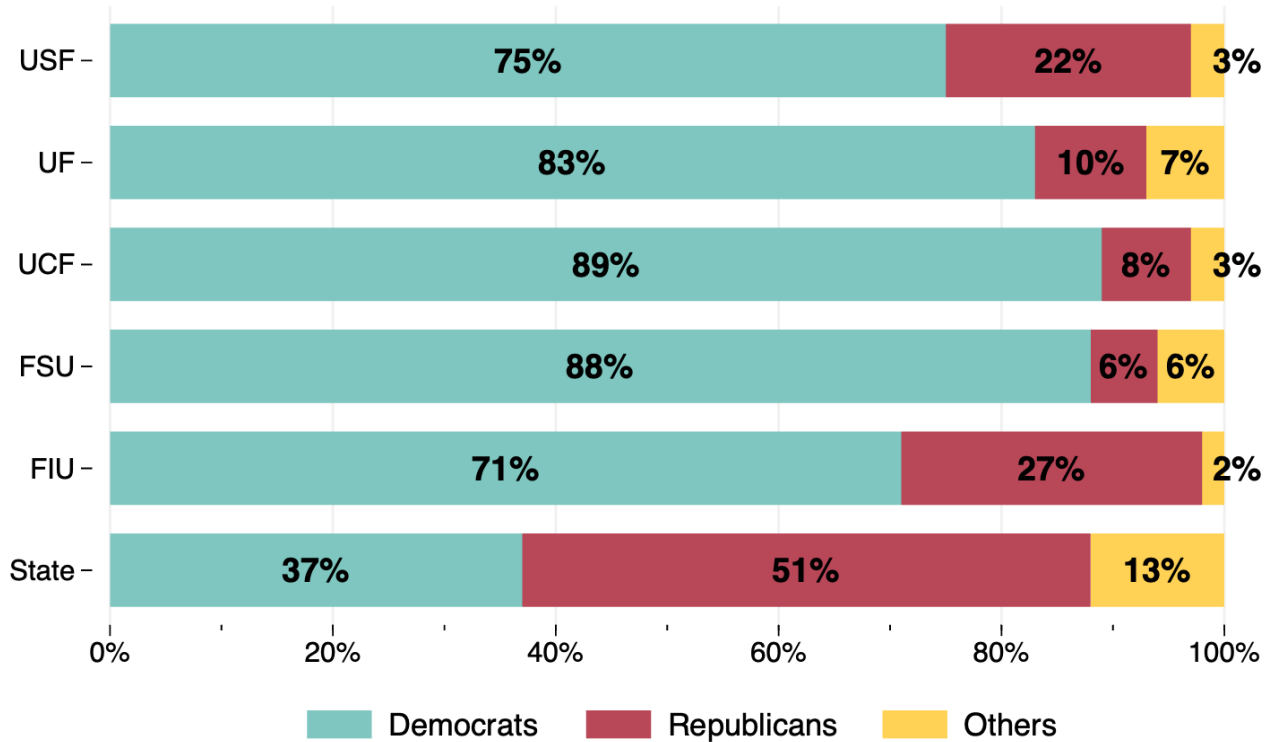
Not only did faculty and staff make far more donations to Democrats than to Republicans, they did so to a degree far different than FEC donors listing Florida addresses. University faculty and staff donated to Democrat-affiliated committees at more than twice the rate of all Florida donors. Florida’s donors sent 37% of their contributions to Democrats and 51% to Republicans.

### **DOLLARS DONATED BY FACULTY AND STAFF**

Of course, not all donations are equal. One donation may be small; another may be large. As such, we analyzed the dollars donated by faculty and staff.

At UCF, 85% of all faculty and staff dollars went to Democrats while 12% went to Republicans. At FSU and FIU, 84% of all faculty and staff dollars flowed to Democrats while 11% and 15% went to Republicans. (At FIU, the Democrat-affiliated percentage increased from 71%

**Figure 1. Number of Donations by Party Affiliation**



Note: Bars show the percentage of the number of donations by party affiliation of the receiving political committee for each of the featured universities and Florida as a whole. Percentages are derived from FEC records of individual donors during the 2024 election cycle. “Others” represent donations to minor parties and nonpartisan political committees.

of total donations to 84% of total dollars donated, which indicates that the Democrat-affiliated donations at FIU were larger than the Republican-affiliated donations and donations to other committees.) At UF, 80% went to Democrats and 13% to Republicans; and at USF, 74% of dollars from faculty and staff went to Democrats while 19% went to Republicans.

These contributions are different than donations from all other Floridians. Only 17% of Florida’s donated dollars went to Democrats; 23% went to Republicans. Faculty and staff donated about 4.5 times

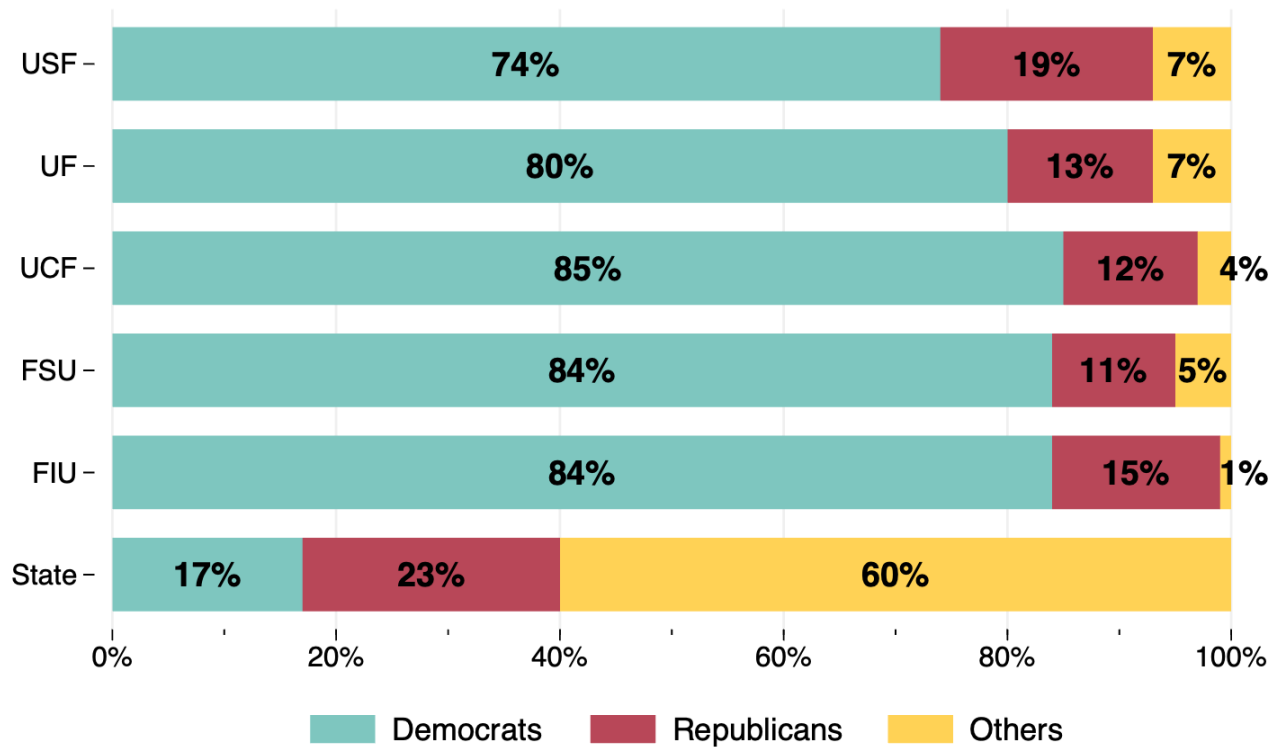
more to Democrats than did other Floridians. Also worth noting, whereas only 13% of Florida donations were made to “other” (nonpartisan groups) (Figure 1), those 13% of donations made up 60% of dollars donated.

**PARTY FOCUSED GIVERS AMONG FACULTY AND STAFF**

While the two previous analyses paint a clear picture, there is still the possibility that the donation patterns we see mask donors who contribute *both* to Democrats and to Republicans.

We collapsed each individual’s

**Figure 2: Dollars Donated by Party Affiliation**



Note: Bars show the percentage of the dollars donated by party affiliation of the receiving political committee for each of the featured universities and Florida as a whole. Percentages are derived from FEC records of individual donors during the 2024 election cycle. “Others” represent donations to minor parties and nonpartisan political committees.

donations into a single score which captured the percentage of the individual donations he or she made to each party. We coded an individual who contributed 65% or more of his or her donations to a single party as a “party focused giver.”

The results remain consistent with our previous findings. Among party focused givers who were faculty and staff, nearly all contributed to Democrats. At UCF, 88% of party focused givers contributed to Democrats; 11% gave to Republicans. At FIU, 85% donated to Democrats; 14% gave to Republicans. At FSU, 85% gave to Democrats while 14% gave to

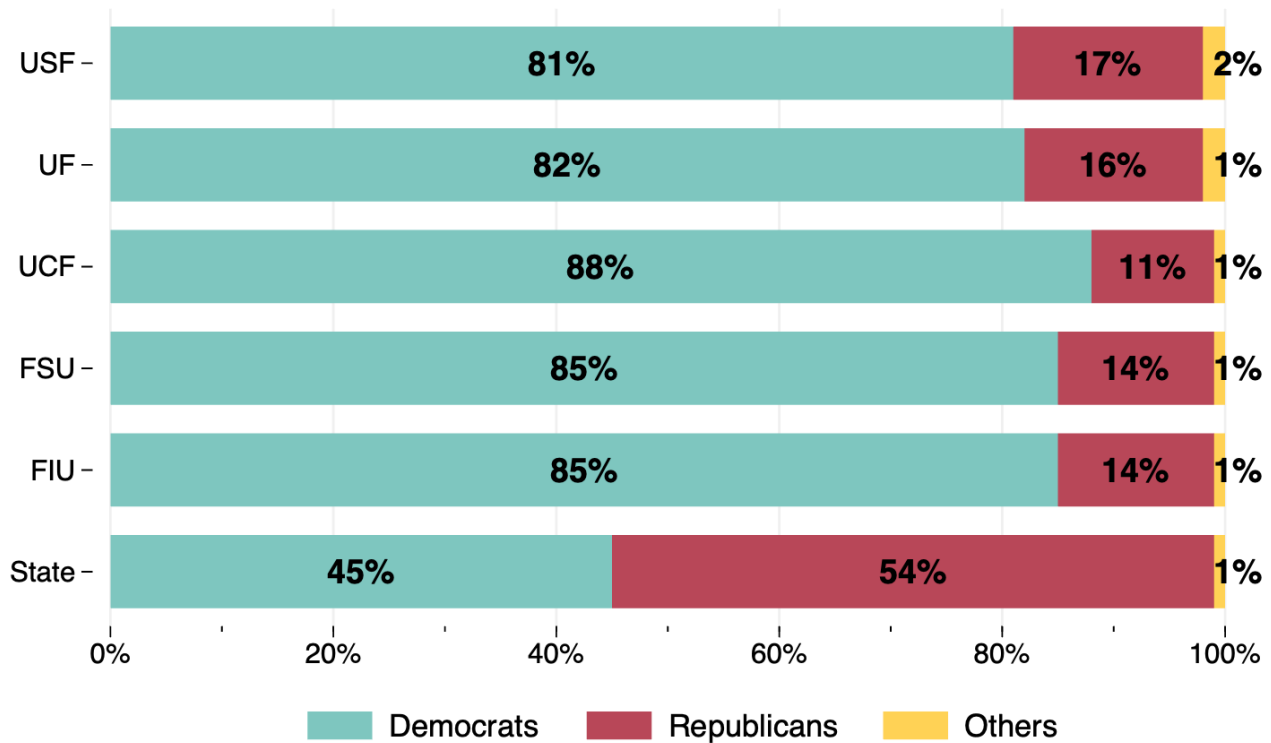
Republicans. At UF, 82% gave to Democrats and 16% to Republicans. And at USF, 81% gave to Democrats; 17% to Republicans.

Once again, these numbers contrast with the rest of Florida’s donors. Among party focused givers in Florida broadly, only 45% of contributions went to Democrats, while 54% went to Republicans.

**CAVEATS AND LIMITATIONS**

To be sure, these data are not without their limitations. First, we examined only the 2024 federal election cycle. It is

**Figure 3: Percentage of Individuals with Partisan Giving**



Note: Bars show the percentage of individuals who made 65% or more of their donations to a particular party determined by party affiliation of the receiving political committee for each donation. Percentages are derived from FEC records of individual donors during the 2024 election cycle. “Others” represent the percent of donors with less than 65% of their donations to Democrat or 65% going to Republican affiliated political committees.

possible that the 2024 election was non-representative of other recent federal elections, though we are skeptical. Second, the total amount contributed was just over \$212,217—a small part of all political contributions in that cycle. Third, this approach identifies only those faculty and staff who donated greater than \$200. Some ideologues may not contribute at all; others may contribute less than \$200. It is possible, then, that the data here do not capture all faculty and staff attitudes. Other analyses, such as reviewing faculty research and websites, or examining state political

giving, could be used to supplement the work.

It is also important to note that these results do not mean every faculty member is trying to inculcate his or her beliefs in students. There are numerous faculty (left and right) who can separate their political beliefs from teaching and research. That’s what faculty are supposed to do, and we know many who do precisely that.

Still, it is worth mentioning that these findings track other studies of ideological homogeneity in higher education. In an extensive analysis, Professors Jon Shields

and Josh Dunn found that only 5-17% of social science faculty and 4-8% of Humanities faculty considered themselves conservative.<sup>2</sup> University administrators were even more progressive. One study found that “liberal staff members outnumber their conservative counterparts by the astonishing ratio of 12-to-one.”<sup>3</sup> Another study of a Big Ten university found that when it comes to faculty in social sciences and the humanities, the odds of finding a Republican donor was just 1 in 530.<sup>4</sup> And, of course, the results track the numerous studies recently cited in the Yale Committee on Trust in Higher Education Report.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, while these results from Florida’s five largest public universities have their limitations, they appear to be like those in other universities.

### **WHY DOES THIS MATTER?**

There are significant negative consequences, even if unintended, from faculty and staff who are aligned ideologically.

To begin, “groupthink” can and often does stifle scholarship and the pursuit of truth. If academic freedom is to mean anything, surely it is about protecting vigorous debate and discourse. Florida’s universities should test ideas, encourage discussion, and spur competitive thought. That is less likely to occur when large majorities of faculty tend to think the same. Whether intentionally or not, a

lack of pluralism stifles scholarship and the pursuit of truth.

Groupthink also can limit those who enter higher education or choose to come to Florida. Conservative, center-right, and even moderate students may choose not to enter Florida’s universities—or all universities—if they believe they do not have a home there. Once a faculty hivemind reaches critical mass, it can create viewpoint dominance even without formal discrimination or intentional bad behavior. That can prevent pluralistic views from entering the academic marketplace.

A one-sided campus culture also limits student success. One Chief Human Resource Officer recently lamented the “lack of creative problem-solving” among new college graduates.<sup>6</sup> According to another report, 60% of businesses surveyed claimed that today’s college grads lack thinking skills, 56% said graduates lack attention to detail, 44% said they do not write well, and 39% reported that they cannot speak publicly.<sup>7</sup> These are all skills that civil discourse and debate strengthen. A proper focus on student success means that we expose students to a variety of viewpoints. That’s tougher to do when faculty tend to think similarly.

Finally, it should be noted that the peer-review process only works as intended when editors and reviewers allow studies that challenge existing

beliefs—and refuse to promote studies that conform to a predominant viewpoint. Remove those features and the peer-review process morphs from necessary gatekeeping into something that lacks legitimacy. If we are to follow “the science” (often a good general policy), we must ensure that those who create “the science” are open to challenge.

## **CONCLUSION**

The public has legitimate concerns about the value of higher education. They are watching us. If taxpayers see universities as mere “echo chambers”—rightly or wrongly—they will pull their support and their funding. If that happens, American higher education will become a husk of what it once was. And the ladder to prosperity for the middle and lower classes will disappear.

Florida’s public universities are remarkably strong on many metrics. They are affordable and highly ranked. And students are clamoring to get in. But we have a growing problem on our hands in terms of personnel.

The path forward will require soul searching and self-reflection. We must seek viewpoint-diverse hiring pools among faculty. This means changing how we think of the hiring process and opening up to broader views. In colleges that are hostile to opposing views, universities should consider

entrepreneurial ways of hiring and tenuring faculty. We must double down on civil discourse programming so that students can hear well-ventilated debates and learn to disagree agreeably. Perhaps as part of graduation requirements, students should engage in at least some discourse training in addition to their civic literacy requirements.

Let’s get creative to improve higher education and help our students succeed. Our future is worth it.

<sup>1</sup> Yale Committee on Trust in Higher Education. (2026, April 10). Report of the Yale Committee on Trust in Higher Education. Yale University. <https://president.yale.edu/sites/default/files/2026-04/Report-of-the-Committee-on-Trust-in-Higher-Education.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Shields, Jon A., and Joshua M. Dunn Sr., *Passing on the Right: Conservative Professors in the Progressive University* (New York, 2016; online edn, Oxford Academic, 24 Mar. 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199863051.001.0001>, accessed 20 May 2026.

<sup>3</sup> Abrams, S. J. (2018, October 16). Think professors are liberal? Try school administrators. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/16/opinion/liberal-college-administrators.html>

<sup>4</sup> Eichholz, W. (2024, August 8). Odds of political contribution from a UW-Madison humanities or social science prof going to Republican: 1 in 530. *Badger Institute*. <https://www.badgerinstitute.org/odds-of-political-contribution-from-a-uw-madison-humanities-or-social-science-prof-going-to-republican-1-in-530/>

<sup>5</sup> Yale Committee on Trust in Higher Education. (2026, April 10). Report of the Yale Committee on Trust in Higher Education. Yale University. <https://president.yale.edu/sites/default/files/2026-04/Report-of-the-Committee-on-Trust-in-Higher-Education.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Wilkie, D. (2019, October 21). Employers say students aren't learning soft skills in college. *SHRM*. <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/employee-relations/employers-say-students-arent-learning-soft-skills-college>

<sup>7</sup> Berr, J. (2016, May 17). Employers: New college grads aren't ready for workplace. *CBS News*. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/employers-new-college-grads-arent-ready-for-workplace/>