

Effect of Minority Opinion on State Public Policy: The Case of Education Funding Equity

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Abstract

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How much are U.S. state policies that affect minority residents influenced by the opinion of minority voters? Most prior research on representation of public opinion in state policies matches policy to a single overall state value for public opinion, whether it be liberalism versus conservatism or Democratic versus Republican, and then relies on indicators of minority population sizes to measure their influence on state policies. Pooling the state files from the media exit polls from 1996 to 2006 provides sufficiently large numbers of respondents from each state to subdivide state public opinion along racial and ethnic lines. This allows us to contrast the political orientation of African Americans and Latinos with those of whites to directly judge each group's influence on equity in school funding between high and low minority school districts in each state. Results demonstrate the importance of the partisanship of African Americans and white voters on education funding equity, while Latino public opinion appears to be excluded from this process. Additional results point to the racial composition and ideological orientation of state legislatures as the key route for education funding equity along racial lines.

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What is the effect of the opinions of minority group citizens on public policy in the 50 U.S. states remains largely an unanswered question. Previously, no reliable cross-state measures of the political orientations of ethnic and racial minority existed to test for the influence of minority preferences on state policies.² Instead, researchers relied on surrogates such as population percentages. Yet such percentages do not directly measure group preferences, nor do they indicate the relationship between one group's opinion and that of other state residents. This paper tests the influence of a new public opinion measure that relates both the size and direction of a minority group's political orientations in comparison to that of the remaining state residents. This new measure allows us to address the question of whether state policy incorporates minority group preferences, and thus speaks to the quality of the representative process in the U.S. states.

Studies concerned with policy outcomes demonstrate racial inequities persist in different policy venues including social welfare, criminal justice, health, and education (Yates and Fording 2005; Preuhs 2007; Hero 1998). Different theoretical approaches attribute these consistent and pervasive inequalities to variations between racial and ethnic groups in their ability to influence public policy. The most traditional of these perspectives postulates a racial threat hypothesis (Key 1949), whereby the presence of a large minority population leads to white fears over competition for economic and political resources. As a result, individual behavior and government policies combine to produce repressive actions with deleterious consequences for minority group members (Giles and Buckner 1993; Soule and Van Dyke 1999). Other research posits that as a minority group becomes larger and more influential on state political orientations,

¹ The authors wish to thank for their comments and assistance Laura Langer, Clive Thomas and Dan Wood.

² An exception is Griffin and Newman (2008) but their measure of state-level minority group opinion has considerably lower aggregate-level reliability and is available for fewer states than the measure used in this analysis.

elected officials are more inclined to see them as a significant component within their constituency. Electoral incentives may persuade public officials to accommodate minority voter preferences in more heterogeneous districts; yet they must do so without alienating white constituents (Yates and Fording 2005). Similarly, some have written about voter and elected officials working in coalition where whites and members of racial or ethnic minority groups share similar partisanship or ideology (Browning, Marshall and Tabb 2003). Finally, there are contrary arguments regarding the nature of political relationships among diverse minority groups. In some cases, researchers find Latinos and African Americans coalesce around common concerns (Estrada et al. 1981; Sonenshein 1993). Other studies underscore the point that minority groups diverge over interests perceived as group specific (Falcón 1988; Henry and Muñoz 1991) and may view each other with suspicion (McClain et al. 2006), or see themselves as economic and political rivals (Falcón 1988; Johnson and Oliver 1989; McClain 1993; McClain and Karnig 1990).

In this study, we explore minority group representation with respect to funding equity in public schools. Education equity is a subject that provokes normative debate, political strategizing and a plethora of academic research (see Thompson and Crampton 2002 for a review of this research). With its traditional reliance on local funding of schools, the United States' system of education provides for local control, matching public schools to local values. Yet reliance on local level funding allowed for school systems across the country, and even within states, to have widely differing levels of financial support. This variation in financial support for public schools is associated with significant disparities along racial lines, with African American and Latino students commonly situated in financially disadvantaged districts compared to their white counterparts (Education Trust 2006).

Stark inequalities in state policy and related outcomes present a puzzle for political scientists, and education funding is a case in point. Extensive evidence shows that state policy reflects and responds to the overall preferences of state residents (Burstein 2003; Erikson, Wright and McIver 1993; Hill and Hinton-Andersson 1995; Schneider and Jacoby 2006). At the same time, individual-level studies establish that racial and ethnic groups differ significantly from whites, and sometimes from one another, in their political preferences (Branton 2007; Lopez and Pantoja 2004; Kinder and Winter 2001; Tate 1994). How then, do complementary and sometimes oppositional opinions of state residents combined to be reflected in state policies? The aim of this study is to test the linkages between state-level racial group preferences, legislative representation and state education funding policies.

This analysis examines the relationships between diverse political preferences across ethnic and racial groups within states and education funding policy. Our study contributes to two strands of research literature: representation and inter-racial politics in America. We start with new, reliable indicators of the general partisan and ideological orientations of African Americans, Latinos and white voters in the 50 states. We argue that the influence of minority group opinion is through their ability to change the overall political orientation of the states' voters. Thus, we use a measure of minority group influence which demonstrates how much a minority group moves state public opinion in a Democratic direction. The magnitude of this movement depends on the size of the minority group but also on the pattern between minority group members' opinion and the opinions of other voters in the state. Finally, we present a representational model that links groups' opinions through state government composition and political orientations before influencing state policy outcomes.

Minority Group Opinion in the 50 States

Measures of citizen ideology and partisanship are derived from pooled media exit polls over a ten-year period, 1996 to 2006 (Voter News Service 1996, 1998, 2000; National Election Pool 2004 and 2006). The pooled VNS-NEP dataset contains 309,045 respondents across all 50 states. In addition, the VNS-NEP dataset is advantageous because it is based on state sampling frames rather than pooling from a national sample frame, resulting in more numerous sampling precincts within each state and more equal distribution of cases across the 50 states. Partisanship is measured with the question: “No matter how you voted today, do you usually think of yourself as a: Democrat, independent, Republican, something else?” We code answers as (-1) Democrat, (0) independent and (1) Republican. Ideology is measured with a question that asks “On most political matters, do you consider yourself: liberal, moderate, or conservative. Responses were recoded to (-1) liberal, (0) moderate and (1) conservative. Thus positive values of group and state means indicate conservative or Republican positions and negative values indicate liberal or Democratic tendencies. Finally, the racial identification item asks: “Are you: White, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, Other.” The pooled data produce aggregate measures that meet the highest thresholds of statistical reliability: O’Brien’s (1990) aggregate reliability coefficient for African American partisanship is .97 (n = all 50 states), African American ideology is .84 (n = all 50 states), Latino partisanship is .93 (n = 42 states), Latino ideology is .71 (n = 43 states), white partisanship is .99 and white ideology is .99 (Norrander and Manzano, forthcoming).³

Since this research is concerned with the linkages between diverse constituent preferences, representatives and policy outcomes, it is appropriate to use opinions derived from exit polls. It is true that turnout rates vary across ethnic and racial groups. However,

³. Values of .60 to .69 indicate moderate reliability, and values of .70 and above indicate high levels of aggregate reliability. O’Brien’s aggregate reliability values are the same as the estimated reliability as produced by STATA loneway procedure.

understanding the influence of voter opinions on policy is an important step in understanding the larger puzzle of representation. It is also worth noting that studies show that politicians pay more attention to voters than non-voters due to strong electoral incentives (Griffin and Newman 2005); as such, sampling minority voter preferences is entirely suitable for the research interests here.

The minority group public opinion variables used in the analyses are measures of a group's overall influence on the ideological or partisan orientation of a state's population. We devise measures that specify account for the impact African American and Latino voters have on overall state partisanship and ideology. To construct these opinion impact measures, an intermediary variable calculates the state ideological and partisan means excluding respondents from the specific minority group. The difference between state public opinion, which includes a minority group's members, versus state public opinion without this minority group's members is our measure of the group's impact on state public opinion. Thus, our opinion impact variables indicate how much overall state preferences shift in one direction or another absent a specific minority group in the electorate. This measure also accounts for the partisanship or ideology of a minority group within the context of the opinions of other state voters and reflects the size of the minority group within the state. A negative value on the opinion impact measure indicates that the group's presence in the state electorate makes state ideology more liberal or on partisanship more Democratic. Positive impact values indicate that the group makes state ideology more conservative or on partisanship more Republican.

A group's impact on state ideology and partisanship is of course dependent on both the distinctiveness of group opinions and the size of the group in the state. The impact measure quantifies the "clout" of a minority group by indicating overall influence on state public opinion.

There are a few cases where opinion impact scores are unavailable for Latinos (seven states for partisanship and eight for ideology), in these instances a zero score is substituted because the Latino electorate is too small to influence overall state ideology or partisanship. Using opinion impact scores as the measure of minority group political influence makes all 50 states available for analysis. While impact score measures are available for both partisanship and ideology, in the analysis of education funding equity partisanship is the stronger determinant.

Figure 1 about here

The impact of African Americans and Latinos on state partisanship is depicted in Figure 1, along with the overall mean partisanship figure for white voters. In most states, the average partisanship of white voters lies on the Republican end of the spectrum with an average score of .07 (standard deviation = .16). African Americans in most states move the partisan positions of a state's electorate in the Democratic direction (mean = -.07, standard deviation = .09), with the greatest movement in Mississippi (impact score = -.38) where African Americans are heavily Democratic (mean = -.85), whites are decidedly Republican (mean = .40) and African Americans are 33 percent of the state's citizenry. The influence of Latinos on state partisanship (mean = -.01) is between that of African Americans and the partisanship of whites. In addition, there is less cross-state variation in the impact of Latinos on state partisanship (standard deviation = .02). This arises from a less intensely Democratic orientation for Latinos than for African Americans and Latinos generally being a smaller proportion of the voting electorate. In New Mexico and Texas, however, Latinos exert a significant influence in moving state public opinion in the Democratic direction.

Education Funding Equity in the States

Concerns over education funding equity gained attention after the 1971 California Supreme Court decision that found unequal funding levels violated both state and federal constitutions (*Serrano v. Priest*). Two years later, the United States Supreme Court ruling in *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* determined that inequalities in school funding levels did not violate the U.S. Constitution.⁴ Consequently debate surrounding education funding disparities has remained highly salient in state and local politics since the 1970's (Meier 1991; Wood and Theobald 2003). Education equity is an elusive standard. Across-the-board equality in funding levels for school districts in a state would not guarantee equality in outcomes because race and class differences persist. White students are more frequently middle class and their families are more often able to support their education and academic performance with supplements such as books and technology in the home; private music, dance and art lessons; tutoring; and trips to museums. Such amenities are not as widely available to poor or minority students. In fact, it is estimated that adequate funding of education for students in poorer districts should be 40 percent higher to overcome such biases (Education Trust 2006). The costs of education vary by other factors as well. Rural districts have higher transportation costs, wealthier areas have higher payroll burdens, and some districts have more students with additional high cost needs, such as learning disabilities and limited English proficiency (Wood and Theobald 2003). Political realities also make education equity an elusive goal. Mintrom (1993) notes as state funding formulas are revamped to provide more funding to poorer school districts, residents of wealthier districts pressure state officials to allow them to use local resources to maintain higher levels of school spending.

⁴ *Serrano v. Priest*, 5 Cal.3d 584 (1971); *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 1 (1973).

Questions of financial equity may focus on different aspects of school districts. In many cases, the focus on funding inequalities considers disparities between wealthier and poorer districts, but these questions may be posed along racial lines as well. School districts with large proportions of minority students do not have the same level of financial resources as those with fewer minorities. The Education Trust (2006) calculates that on average the 25 percent of school districts in each state with the highest percentage of minority students receive 908 fewer dollars than the 25 percent of school districts with the fewest minority students. Furthermore, their study finds the minority-funding gap can be up to three times larger than the poverty-funding gap. No wonder education is a serious concern for many minority voters. Latinos in particular identify education as the most important issue facing the country or their community (Griffin and Newman 2008; Uhlaner and Garcia 2002).

Political efforts for greater equity in public school finance come primarily from changes in state policy. States play an increasingly greater role in financing elementary and high school education. In earlier eras, states provided one-quarter of school financing. Today, states on average provide 45 percent of revenues but with considerable variation from 7 percent in New Hampshire to 74 percent in New Mexico (Augenblick, Myers and Anderson 1997). The federal government provides only 8.9 percent of the funding for public schools (Education Trust 2006). An increase in state education funding or targeting of funds to poor or minority districts can reduce inequities across school districts. Equity also can be addressed by poorer districts imposing a higher tax rate, a factor a GAO report found to be most important for equalizing funding. However, to do so a poorer district may have to impose twice the tax burden as a wealthier district to garner the same level of financial support for its schools (Augenblick, Myers and Anderson 1997; GAO 1997).

State court cases are a common venue for reforming state educational funding programs (see Roelke, Green and Zielewski 2004 for a history of these court cases), though judicial mandates are not a necessary condition to reform education funding. For example, financial reforms were instituted in Georgia and Oklahoma despite the fact that their courts upheld existing state funding systems. Ohio's reform preceded the judicial decision, and Utah and Michigan passed reforms without any judicial action (Evans, Murray and Schwab 1997). By the 1990s, the legal arguments in many of the school funding decisions began to change. School districts and interest groups began to file educational adequacy lawsuits in state courts to address disparate outcomes in educational attainment for poor and minority students. These suits sought additional state funds to cover costs associated with implementing programs to diminish achievement gaps including reducing class sizes, attracting more qualified teachers and early childhood education programs (Lindseth 2002). By 2002, 43 states had been subject to lawsuits, with existing educational finance systems overturned in 17 cases and upheld in 20 states (Wood and Theobald 2003).

The effectiveness of these court decisions is highly debated in the research literature (for reviews of results see Burbridge 2002; Thompson and Crampton 2002; for an analysis that argues for effectiveness see Evans, Murray and Schwab 1997). Effectiveness of court decisions vary because it is up to the state legislatures to implement these policy rulings. A confluence of policy and political considerations factor into legislature-generated education equity solutions; among them are legislator and constituent preferences, competition for funds from other state programs, the range of viable policy options and program implementation. Wood and Theobald's 2003 study illustrates this point, where they find judicial mandates increased educational equity overall by only a small margin, but more substantial effects were found in

states with a more liberal public. Indeed, when we tested a measure of the political orientation of the states' highest courts on educational funding equity for minorities, we found this factor to be statistically insignificant and dropped it from the model.⁵ Thus, our representational model focuses on the role of state legislators and governors, instead.

State funding for public schools has become part of the discourse regarding education equity for minority students. By the 1980s, the unpopularity of forced busing led policy makers to seek alternatives that would encourage white students to voluntarily remain in urban public school systems and enroll at specific schools with large minority student populations. The proliferation of magnet schools and other specialized educational enhancement programs are among the familiar outcomes of such efforts. These solutions however, required additional funding, which was often sought from state government. Desegregation orders often came from federal, rather than, state courts.⁶ A 1977 U.S. Supreme Court ruling, most commonly referred to as *Milliken II*, allowed states and districts to use additional funding to address desegregation issues.⁷ Individual school district desegregation rulings may include requirements for state governments to provide additional funding to these school districts for desegregation purposes or allow school districts to raise additional local funds on their own beyond statewide limits. An example of the former was a requirement for the state of Arkansas to provide additional funding to the Little Rock school system for desegregation purpose, and a case of the latter was the ability of the Tucson, Arizona school district to exceed state limits for property taxes to address desegregation issues. Yet, federal courts have recently been retiring these older desegregation

⁵ We used the measure of each state's high court's ideology (Langer 2006; Brace, Langer and Hall 2000) averaged for 1992-2002.

⁶ We were unable to locate any systematic listing of school districts or state funding policies that address desegregation issues that could be used in the state-level analysis. Many larger school districts have formal desegregation plans, with about half of these the result of court orders (Armor 1995: 166, 213).

⁷ *Milliken v. Bradley* ("Milliken II"), 433 U.S. 267 (1977).

orders, declaring school districts have reached “unitary status.” The school district is no longer subject to court supervision, but the district in some cases may lose the additional funds obtained for desegregation policies and goals (Armour 1995: 215).⁸ Further, Supreme Court rulings in 2007 limited the ability of school districts to use race as a factor in assigning students to specific schools.⁹

Despite the fact that state-level institutions determine education funding formulas, questions regarding financing and equity are usually studied at the district level (for a review see Burbridge 2002; for an example see Wood and Theobald 2003). Since policies designed to increase funding equity are adopted at the state level it is appropriate to evaluate the influence of these reforms with state-level data and analysis (Smith and Meier 1995). Thus, it is ironic that relatively few cross-state studies attempt to quantify and explain school funding equity (Augenblick, Myers and Anderson 1997). The state-level analyses that do exist often ignore political factors altogether (Burbridge 2002) or attempt to analyze political conditions using only surrogate measures of interest group and public preferences. Demographic traits of constituencies are presumed to indicate various levels of support for education (Burbridge 2002; Garms 1986; Miller 1996). For example, greater support for state-level spending on education is assumed to come from parents of school-age children, while the elderly are expected to exhibit less support for such increases (Miller 1996). Yet, these are mere assumptions about constituent preferences, as opposed to actual measurements of preferences by age groups and locality.

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⁹ *Parents Involved in Community Schools, Inc. v. Seattle School District* decided together with *Meredith v. Jefferson County (Ky.) Board of Education* 551 U.S. 701 (2007).

Research Design and Measurements

Public support for educational funding measures should vary foremost by party.

Democrats are more likely to place a value on equity issues; Republicans may balance concerns of equity with preferences for local control (Wood and Theobald 2003). To date, studies of state support for education have used surrogate measures of public opinion: Burbrige (2002) used ADA Scores on members of Congress, Wood and Theobald (2003) used the Berry et al. (1998) surrogate measure of citizen ideology, and Miller (1996) used partisan voting patterns. Our direct measures of African American, Latino and white voter partisanship within the states allows us to estimate the extent to which these groups influence education funding equity.

The dependent variable is The Education Trust's (2006) measure of equity in funding for minority school districts. It measures the differences in per pupil revenue for districts in the top and bottom quartiles for numbers of minority students (American Indian, Asian, Black, and Latino) in 2004.¹⁰ This indicator adjusts for cost of living and special need students in the districts. On average, The Education Trust finds that minority districts receive \$908 fewer dollars than school districts with few minority students. In 27 states, minority districts receive fewer dollars, but in 22 states, minority districts receive more funding. The greatest deficits are in New Hampshire at -\$2,371, New York at -\$2,239 and Montana -\$1,787. Expenditures are highest for minority districts in Alaska, \$4,955, and New Jersey, \$1,730. The Alaska value is more than four standard deviations above the mean for spending on school districts with high minority student populations. Alaska has rural, Native American communities that are widely

¹⁰ Our measures of minority and white public opinion (pooled across 1996-2006) extend slightly beyond the 2004 date for the education equity scores. While ideally we would prefer a dependent variable measured after the date of the independent variable, 2004 is the latest year for which the minority education equity scores are available. We find this to be less of a problem, however, because research on state public opinion finds considerable stability in these opinions over time. Further, most of public opinion's relations to state policies are due to significant and continuing cross-state variation in public opinion (Erikson, Wright and McIver 2007).

dispersed, some without road access and others located on islands more than 100 miles off shore. In addition, the number of school-age children in each village may be quite small. The 1976 Alaska state court ruling, *Tobeluk v. Lind*, required the state to provide public high schools to rural Native Alaskan populations, replacing Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools or religious schools.¹¹ At the same time, the state legislature, in part due to lobbying by Native Alaskans, reorganize rural Alaska into school districts based on geographic and racial characteristics (Hirshberg, Joseph and Hill, forthcoming). Thus, Alaskan politics produced a policy specifically designed to address disparate educational outcomes in small rural regions and districts where the minority student population and marginal costs of education are high. To compensate for these unique characteristics and funding levels, we have excluded Alaska from the analysis. In addition, Hawaii is excluded from the analysis because it has a single, state-wide school district. As a result, we model the influence of minority group opinion on educational funding equity in the other 48 states.

Beyond our measures of public opinion and minority group presence, we add in additional independent variables that represent the politics of education funding. Battles over education funding often pit large, inner cities, with a student body that is poor and disproportionately minority, against smaller cities and suburban areas of the state. Rural areas and small towns also often make demands for funding assistance from the states in order to compensate for higher costs and lower tax bases. Thus, we expect less equitable funding for high minority school districts in states with either a higher percentage of citizens residing in central cities or rural areas. We measure the percent of each state's voting electorate that lives in predominantly large cities (population sizes over 500,000) and the percent that lives in rural

¹¹ *Tobeluk v. Lind*. 1976. C.A. No. 72-2450. Alaska Superior Court, 3rd District, October 27, 1976.

areas (no town or towns of less than 15,000) from the exit polls.¹² Most alternative measures of urbanization, such as the percent living in urban areas or population density, do not sufficiently separate central city populations from other types of urban residents. Beyond the geographic battles over school funding, conflict also exists between high and low income areas in a state. While higher per capita incomes normally mean potentially more money for supporting schools, high income areas of a state often fight to protect their funding advantages even when states provide more of the education funding dollars (Mintrom 1993). State income levels are measured by the per capita income in 2003. Finally, to depict descriptive representation, we use indicators of the proportion of state legislative seats held by African Americans and Latinos (Bositis 2001; NALEO 2002). In addition we use the Berry et al. (1998) measure of the ideological orientation of state government actors in the legislatures and governorships. In that education reform policy enactments occurred over a number of years, we average the Berry measure across 10 years (1992 to 2002).

Empirical Findings

We began by modeling education funding equity between high and low minority school district with demographic factors and secondly with two different measures of minority group opinion. In the former, we explore the relationship between overall state public opinion and the percentage of blacks and Latinos within a state's population to explain state levels of education funding inequity. This is the type of model used in the past when direct measures of minority group preferences were not available. We present models where minority populations are represented by their percentage among a state's citizenry, though measures of minority

¹² The 2000, 2004 and 2006 exit polls contain a variable providing the size of place for each respondent: a) cities with more than 500,000 residents, b) cities with 50,000 to 500,000, c) suburb d) towns with 10,000 to 15,000 residents, and e) rural. Category A is used for central cities and categories D and E are combined for rural areas.

percentages within a state's overall population produce the same results. The two political orientations are the contributions of African Americans and Latinos to overall state partisanship and ideology.

*** Table 1 about here***

The left-side columns of Table 1 show that a demographic model does not tell us much about the influence of minorities on education funding equity. The coefficients for both African Americans and Latinos are statistically insignificant. Instead, one would conclude that overall state partisanship influences education funding equity, with states with more Democratic voters spending money more equally across school districts with high and low levels of minority students. In addition, the geographic battles over school funding are present, with less funding equity in states with higher percentages of residents in large cities or in rural areas. Income levels in a state appear not to have a significant influence on education funding equity.

The middle two columns in Table 1 present a model in which the influence of African Americans and Latinos on overall state partisanship is contrasted with the partisanship of white voters. The model shows that as African Americans move state partisanship in a Democratic direction the more equity is found in funding levels for schools with high percentages of minority students. The presence of a large percentage of white Democrats also contributes to this pattern. However, we find no evidence of influence for Latino voters. Thus, the influence of state partisanship on educational funding equity is divided between that portion of state partisanship due to white citizens and that which is due to African American voters. The final two columns in Table 1 show that ideological orientations are less relevant to education funding equity than are partisan orientations.

Returning to the equation using group partisanship indicators, a number of tests were performed on the robustness of the results. One concern would be that states with few minority students may have different patterns of funding equity questions than do states with more minority students. First, the Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test for heteroskedasticity found no evidence of divergence in error variances across the 48 states (chi square = .01, significance = .92). Second, restricting the analysis to states with at least 5 percent minority students also did not alter the conclusions. The regression equation for these 41 states is given in the appendix in Table A, and while the significance levels are reduced, the general pattern holds. Finally, a leverage test found New Mexico had the strongest influence on the original equation for the 48 states. Thus the equation was rerun excluding New Mexico, and similar results were produced as shown by Table A in the appendix. These tests confirm the robustness of our results.

Finally, we tested the procedural mechanism by which minority and white partisanship influences equity in funding for high minority school districts. The model we test links minority partisanship to descriptive representation in state legislatures, links this descriptive representation to the overall political orientation of the state government, and lastly links the orientation of state government to equity in funding for high minority school districts. We employed a simultaneous equation model to test these linkages.¹³ Descriptive representation is simply the proportion of state legislative seats held by African American and Latino representatives. Parts A and B of Table 2 reveal a strong and significant effect for the influence of minority group members on state partisanship and their descriptive representation. Black impact on state partisanship significantly increases the number of African American state legislators and Latino impact on state partisanship significantly increases the number of Latinos

¹³ For the simultaneous equation model we used STATA's "reg3" procedure employing 3-stage least squares regression.

in the state legislature. What is not present is any evidence of minority coalitions: black impact on state partisanship is not linked to the number of Latino state legislators and Latino impact on state partisanship is not linked to the number of African American state legislators. In part, this results from concentrations of African American and Latinos in different geographic locations. We do find evidence that a more Democratic white population increases the number of African American state legislators, but not the number of Latino legislators.

Next we link descriptive representation to the overall ideological orientation of the state government. Here we use the Berry et al. (1998) measure of state government ideology, which measures the orientation of the state legislatures and governors. Results in Table 2, part C, show that African American legislators and white partisanship leads to a more liberal state governments. The presence of Latino legislators, however, appears to be insignificant. This is due to the lower presence of Latinos in most state legislatures. Finally, we demonstrate how government ideology is linked to the policy outcome of equity in education spending for high minority school districts. In part D of Table 2, government ideology is shown to have a significant influence on education funding equity. In addition we see a repeat of the previous geographic patterns: less funding equity exists in states with a greater number of large city residents and larger number of rural residents. The core of the representation model confirms the importance of descriptive representation of African Americans and the ideological orientation of state officials in the adoption of policies that equalize education funding across high and low minority school districts. In turn, this descriptive representation and state government ideological orientation is the result of a combination of a sizeable African American population that moves state partisanship in a Democratic direction and a Democratic leaning among a state's white residents.

Discussion

While minority students in America still are more likely to be educated in school districts that have lower funding levels than districts with fewer minority students, states have different levels of inequity across these districts. Today, 22 states provide more funding to high minority school districts, while 27 states provide less funding to these districts. We are able to show that variations in these funding patterns are linked to the political orientation of minority and white voters in the states, and the racial composition and political orientations of state government officials. Our results suggest that African Americans have been successful in redirecting more funding to high minority school districts, while Latinos have not. We expect these divergent patterns lie in differing levels of descriptive and substantive representation, and also in the politics of education funding in the states which often pit different demographic and geographic groups against one another.

African Americans exert a greater influence on overall state partisanship than do Latinos. In many states, African Americans move state public opinion in a more Democratic direction. This will change the signals that election results send to state politicians. Second, it also can change the outcome of those elections resulting in the election of more Democratic officials. Third, the significant Democratic presence of African Americans in the state electorates will result in the election of more blacks to state legislatures and relevant local offices, such as school boards. In contrast, Latinos are less well represented in state legislatures (Donovan, Mooney and Smith 2009: 213-16), and underrepresented in school boards, as well (Leal, Martinez-Ebers and Meier 2010).

Our findings of less efficacy for Latinos than African Americans on the education funding equity issue echo previous findings in other political areas. Differences exist in the

patterns of representation provided by African American and Latino elected officials. For example Preuhs (2006) finds African American state legislators are more responsive to constituent opinion and better able to influence welfare policies. Tate (2003) finds black members of Congress are substantially different than their white and Latino colleagues in terms of their voting patterns and sponsored legislation. Latino legislators tend to support and initiate policy agendas that are less oriented toward an ethnic specific agenda compared to African American legislators. When there is a relationship between Latino opinion and policy, it is often indirect at best, mediated through partisanship (Hero and Tolbert 1995, Preuhs 2005). Meanwhile, we find a significant role for white partisanship in distributing educational funding across school districts with varying levels of minority enrollment.

Education funding equity has been an elusive goal over the past quarter century. A large number of court cases have been heard, but their substantive impact on education funding equity is often minimal (Wood and Theobald 2003). Some educational reforms came from the state legislatures and from ballot propositions, and states often had multiple sources of reforms over a number of years (Cann and Wilhelm 2008; Roch and Howard 2008). The key to greater funding equity, according to our evidence, is the willingness of state legislatures to act alone or in conjunction with court orders. In Kentucky, for example, the state legislature in response to the Kentucky Supreme Court's 1989 *Rose v. Council for Better Education* ruling embarked on a policy to revamp the entire statewide education policy as well as address education funding issues.¹⁴ The reform measure created new standards for schools and provided increased and more equalized state support for local school districts. The 2004 Education Trusts figures show Kentucky is one of the states where expenditures are higher in both poor and minority school

¹⁴ *Rose v. Council for Better Education*, 790 S.W. 2d 186, 60 Ed. Law Rep. 1289 (1989), Supreme Court of Kentucky.

districts. New Jersey also has greater spending in poor and minority school districts but the pathway to this result was more contentious with several court decisions (beginning in 1976), policy adoptions that were not implemented, and opposition from various interest groups. Cycles of tight state budgets and uneven economic growth within the state also played havoc with policies attempting to equalize funding. Finally in 1997 the state government provided sufficient funding to address the inequity issues between wealthy and poor school districts (Hoschild and Scovronick 2003).

As our model confirmed, geographic battles often pit one area of a state against others in the quest for more education funding from the state government. Here too the actions of state legislatures are central. Kansas provides an example of de facto segregation by urban – rural residency and one where state education finance formula traditionally favored smaller rural school districts. Legislation from the 1990s provided additional funding to schools with higher levels of students living in poverty or students with limited English proficiency. Yet, additional state aid available for rapidly growing school districts benefited mostly suburban schools, and the traditional assistance for low enrollment (e.g. mostly rural schools) remained in place (Baker and Green 2005). As a result, Kansas in 2004 had a disparity of \$1,514 between high and low minority school districts according to the Education Trust figures. However, a 2005 Kansas Supreme Court decision found fault with the level and patterns in state funding for education and order the state legislature to adopt changes. In July 2006, after rejecting earlier legislative action, the state court ruled that an increase in state funding and the directing of one-third of these funds to students at risk satisfied their concerns.¹⁵

¹⁵ Education Law Center, Starting at 3, State Laws, Kansas. http://www.startingat3.org/state_laws/StatelawKSdetail.htm. Accessed July 30, 2009.

Education funding equity issues speak to the quality of representational politics in the United States and to the economic opportunities afforded to all Americans. Our findings best fit theories that stress the potential for coalitional politics between liberal whites and a specific minority group (Browning, Marshall and Tabb 2003). In contrast, our empirical evidence does not lend support to the racial threat hypothesis. Indeed, separating the Education Trust figures by regions shows that on average, high minority population school districts in southern states receive \$138 more in per pupil revenue than low minority population districts. Outside the South the figure is \$187 less per pupil. Finally, our evidence fails to find a coalition of minorities in either the election of minority members to state legislatures or in the creation of policies for equity in education funding. Geographic separation of African Americans and Latinos across the 50 states provides fewer opportunities for such political alliances at the state level.

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Table 1: Explaining Levels of Disparity in Funding for Minority School Districts.

Variable	Demographic Model: Citizenship Percentages		Opinion Model: Partisanship		Opinion Model: Ideology	
	Coefficient (St. Error)	Significance Level	Coefficient (St. Error)	Significance Level	Coefficient (St. Error)	Significance Level
Income	-.05 (.03)	.20	-.04 (.04)	.24	-.04 (.04)	.36
Large City	-3236.02 (1537.19)	.04	-3054.61 (1536.17)	.05	-2580.03 (1763.16)	.15
Rural	-1642.06 (724.46)	.03	-1663.58 (704.53)	.02	-1703.42 (729.98)	.03
State Partisanship	-2273.83 (1036.91)	.03				
Black %	15.43 (14.60)	.30				
Latino %	-3.86 (20.29)	.85				
White Opinion			-2342.59 (1011.84)	.03	-1439.16 (1724.21)	.41
Black Impact on State Opinion			-4111.56 (1636.37)	.02	-9686.40 (5228.41)	.07
Latino Impact on State Opinion			-1077.78 (6071.52)	.86	13881.79 (27385.30)	.62
Constant	1823.35 (1293.45)	.17	1783.32 (1312.33)	.18	1901.91 (1666.05)	.26
Equation F	3.13	.01	3.25	.01	2.37	.05
Adjusted R ²	.21		.22		.15	

N = 48, excluded states are Alaska and Hawaii.

Table 2: Simultaneous Equations Model Linking Minority Public Opinion with Descriptive Representation, Government Ideology and Education Funding Equity.

A. African American Descriptive Representation in State Legislatures			
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Significance
Black Impact on State Partisanship	-83.04	5.22	.00
Latino Impact on State Partisanship	-9.93	18.30	.59
White Partisanship	-9.28	3.21	.00
Constant	2.45	.57	.00
R ²	.86		.00
B. Latino Descriptive Representation in State Legislatures			
Latino Impact on State Partisanship	-314.33	17.51	.00
Black Impact on State Partisanship	-7.22	5.04	.15
White Partisanship	-4.06	3.09	.19
Constant	-.46	.54	.40
R ²	.87		.00
C. Minority Representation and Government Ideology			
Black Legislators	1.80	.39	.00
Latino Legislators	.37	.37	.31
White Partisanship	-94.35	18.98	.00
Constant	37.50	4.10	.00
R ²	.31		.00
D. Government Ideology and Education Funding Equity			
Government Ideology	22.94	8.08	.01
Income	-.05	.03	.11
Large City	-3028.16	1358.00	.03
Rural	-1814.32	618.88	.00
Constant	1154.89	1056.16	.27
R ²	.22		.00

N = 48, excluded states are Alaska and Hawaii. Coefficients are from simultaneous equations using 3-stage least squares regression.

Appendix

Table A: Explaining Levels of Disparity in Funding for Minority School Districts for Two Subsets of States.

	For States with Minimum 5% Minority Students		Excluding New Mexico	
	Coefficient (St. Error)	Significance Level	Coefficient (St. Error)	Significance Level
Income	-.02 (.04)	.49	-.04 (.04)	.31
Large City	-3349.59 (1487.33)	.03	-2409.53 (1829.44)	.20
Rural	-1492.19 (747.94)	.05	-1695.95 (711.11)	.02
White Partisanship	-2047.07 (995.61)	.05	-2107.50 (1079.27)	.06
Black Impact on State Partisanship	-3594.79 (1588.57)	.03	-3867.57 (1688.65)	.03
Latino Impact on State Partisanship	-432.37 (5854.86)	.94	4903.09 (10926.95)	.66
Constant	1259.82 (1302.62)	.34	1648.98 (1337.02)	.23
Equation F	2.92	.02	3.22	.01
Adjusted R ²	.21		.22	
Number of States	45		47	

Excluded states in minority student model are Alaska and Hawaii. Excluded states in second model are New Mexico, Alaska and Hawaii.

Figure 1. Black and Latino Impact on Partisanship

