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American Politics Research published online 18 August 2008

DOI: 10.1177/1532673X08320843

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Put to the Test

Understanding Differences in Support for High-Stakes Testing

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Despite the importance of high-stakes tests in education policy, relatively little is known about opinion on this issue. We examine racial and socioeconomic differences in support for high-stakes testing. Given the achievement gaps between racial minorities and Whites and between the lower and higher status, it would be reasonable to expect that those whose children are most likely to do well on high-stakes tests would support the policy, whereas their counterparts would oppose them. However, these groups have different histories with and optimism about the public education system as well as different perceptions about how high-stakes tests will affect their children. We find that Latinos strongly support these measures, whereas African Americans and Whites oppose them primarily because African Americans are pessimistic about improving public schools and Whites are concerned about how resources will be redistributed. We also find that those of higher status are more likely to oppose high-stakes testing.

Keywords: *education policy; no child left behind; high-stakes testing; standardized testing; public opinion; Latinos; African Americans*

Standardized tests play a significant role in contemporary education policy. State-imposed standardized tests have long been administered to students in elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the United

Authors' Note: The authors would like to thank Christopher Muste who served as our discussant when we presented the original version of this paper at the American Political Science Association meeting in 2005. In addition to the anonymous reviewers, the authors wish to thank Karen M. Kaufmann, Andrew Smarick, Ray Block, Jr., and Melissa O. Neal for their helpful comments and advice. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to J. Celeste Lay, 316 Norman Mayer Building, New Orleans, LA 70118; phone: 504-812-7392; e-mail: jlay@tulane.edu.

States. Many in the education community agree that test scores provide information about a “student’s academic strengths and weaknesses, areas that need work, and areas of particular promise” (Phelps, 2003, p. 225). Until recently, standardized tests have primarily been used to provide this type of diagnostic information about student, teacher, and school performance. Over the last decade, however, many public officials and educational administrators have increasingly called for the use of these tests to make high-stakes decisions such as whether a student will advance to the next grade level or graduate with a diploma, whether a teacher will earn tenure, and as punishments or rewards to individual schools and school systems for performance. For example, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the most recent and expansive federal education reform legislation, passed in 2002, punishes schools that fail to meet state-imposed performance standards. In addition, nearly half of all states require high school students to pass an exit exam to graduate (Center on Education Policy, 2007).

Supporters of high-stakes testing believe holding schools accountable for test scores is one of the best ways to ensure that all students receive an equitable education (Grissmer & Flanagan, 1998; Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson, & Koschoreck, 2001). In addition to narrowing achievement gaps, many contend that high-stakes tests also result in increased rigor on the part of both teachers and students (Bishop, 1998; Phelps, 2003). Opponents argue that high-stakes tests fail to improve student learning (Amrein & Berliner, 2002) and are discriminatory to racial and ethnic minorities (Haney, 1993; Hood, 1998; Jencks, 1998). They also argue that these tests result in a reduction of time for ordinary instruction, that they limit students’ instructional opportunities, that they negatively affect teacher morale, and that they cause a great deal of anxiety for students (Smith & Rottenberg, 1991; Valenzuela, 2000).

Despite the widespread use of high-stakes standardized testing, there has been little systematic research on public opinion about standards-based education reform. Some polls suggest that the public at large supports testing, even some high-stakes uses (Phelps, 2005; Rose & Gallup, 2005). Yet these data overlook how and why opinion on this issue varies across demographic groups, especially racial and socioeconomic groups. Racial and ethnic minorities agree that education should be a top political priority (Hochschild & Scott, 1998) and are similarly disadvantaged within the current public education system, especially with regard to scores on standardized tests. Significant achievement gaps also remain between poor and rich students (Peske & Haycock, 2006).

Given these disparities in test scores and achievement, one might expect racial minorities and lower-status individuals to voice similar opposition to high-stakes standardized testing because of perceptions that reliance on test scores may place their children at a greater disadvantage. Yet we suggest that on this issue, opinions are shaped by these groups' different histories with the public education system. Their divergent experiences with public education lead to differences both in perceptions of the current status of public schools and in support for equality in education resulting in distinct beliefs about the appropriate uses of high-stakes testing.

Our results show that because Latinos tend to be more optimistic about government policies than either African Americans or Whites, Latinos are highly supportive of high-stakes testing, much more supportive of these measures than are African Americans and Whites. African Americans are more skeptical about the quality of public education and are frustrated with failed education reforms, leading them to oppose high-stakes testing. Among Whites, support for high stakes testing is greatly influenced by concerns about the redistribution of resources across school districts. We also find that across all racial groups, those who are highly educated tend to oppose high-stakes testing.

Racial and Ethnic Differences in Attitudes About High-Stakes Testing

African American and Latino children face a variety of ills in public schools such as greater disciplinary problems, lower college attendance rates, and tracking into remedial courses (Meier & Stewart, 1991a). African Americans and Latinos have lower graduation rates and are more likely to attend failing schools than are Whites. According to a Manhattan Institute study, 78% of Whites, 55% of African Americans, and only 53% of Latinos graduated from high school in 2003 (Greene & Winters, 2006). Despite decades of educational reforms aimed to reduce the gaps in achievement between racial minorities and Whites, "Millions of minority students . . . attend schools that are segregated, inequitably financed, vapid in curricula delivery, teacher-centered and generally hostile in any sense of a learning environment" (Valencia, 1997, p. 1).

It is often assumed that African American and Latino interests are closely related or even identical because they share similar objective circumstances. However, even though African American and Latino students both perform poorly on standardized tests compared with White students, Latinos may

view high-stakes testing differently than African Americans. Latinos and African Americans often find themselves on opposing sides of policy debates, especially when competing for scarce resources (McClain, 1993; McClain & Kamig, 1990; Meier & Stewart, 1991b; Meier, McClain, Polinard & Wrinkle, 2004). For example, although Latinos are overwhelmingly supportive of bilingual education, African Americans and other native English speakers generally oppose it (Hajnal & Baldassare, 2001; Huddy & Sears, 1995; Lee, 1999; Uhlaner, 1991). Latinos are also more supportive of voucher programs than African Americans (Leal, 2004; Moe, 2001). Differences in African American and Latino opinion may exist in large part because the Latino population has diverse national origins and generally lacks a strong panethnic identity (DeSipio, 1996; Jones-Correa & Leal, 1996). Panethnic identity is a strong predictor of African American or Latino commonality such that Latinos who identify strongly with their own national origin subgroup generally do not “identify, in any meaningful way, with the more general cause of minorities and minority politics” (Kaufmann, 2003, p. 206).

In addition to competition over scarce resources, African Americans and Latinos’ attitudes diverge, particularly on education policies, because these groups have different histories with and subsequently different expectations about public education in the United States. The focus within the African American community has been on equal access to quality public schools. Throughout the 20th century, African Americans struggled for the desegregation of public schools, believing that dismantling this system would provide a level playing field and greater educational opportunities for their children. Many African Americans remain discouraged by persistent achievement gaps and resource inequalities and believe that their struggle for educational equity is far from over (Wells, Holme, Atanda, & Revilla, 2005). After decades of policy attempts “supposedly designed to alter White privilege” in education, many African Americans are suspicious of new policy attempts, believing them to be “rooted in the advantages that Whites have and fight to maintain” (Apple & Pedroni, 2005, p. 2070).

When the first high-stakes tests were implemented in the 1970s, they came under fire especially from African Americans who worried about whether their children had equal opportunities to learn the material on which they would be tested and compared with Whites (Futrell & Brown, 2000). Since that time, inequality has grown between predominantly African American schools and largely White schools. Although few argue that schools should not set high standards for all students, there is reluctance about the accountability movement, including high-stakes testing, among

many African Americans. Many do not believe their children are in school environments that enable them to learn effectively and do not have faith that the current education system has or will improve. A recent study shows that African Americans are much more skeptical about the meaningfulness of a high school diploma for their children with nearly 40% saying that getting a diploma is no guarantee that a student has learned the basics. Only one-quarter of White and Latino parents feel this way (Johnson, Arumi, & Ott, 2006). After decades of disappointing outcomes from other reform attempts, their frustration may lead them to doubt whether high-stakes testing will accomplish anything more than other failed policies.

Latinos, like African Americans, have long been disadvantaged in the public education system. Rather than exclusively concentrating on issues of educational equity, however, Latinos have focused much of their energy on the fight over bilingual education (Orfield, 1986). Although Latinos have been involved in court cases and protests on a variety of educational measures, they were "not central participants in desegregation efforts . . . to the same extent as African Americans" (Sidney, 2002, p. 256). Latinos have also been dissatisfied with the lack of cultural awareness and acceptance in public schools (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999).

In addition to different concerns about education, Latinos, more so than African Americans, remain highly optimistic about their children's education and are strongly supportive of public schools. This may be due in part to a constant influx of Latino immigrants in the United States (Cohen, Baldassare, & Rodriguez, 2003). Latinos generally possess more optimistic and positive views of government than African Americans largely because almost half of the Latino population in the United States is foreign born (Abrajano & Alvarez, 2007). Immigrants are generally more optimistic about the opportunities that await them in their host country. As such, their views and attitudes toward government and their expectations about the success of government policies tend to be more positive compared with those who have the experience and, in large measure, the cynicism that comes with decades of disappointing policy outcomes.

In summary, despite similarly low levels of achievement on standardized tests, we suggest that African American and Latino opinion on high-stakes testing is influenced not only by their common desires to close achievement gaps but also by the lingering effects of the groups' histories with the education system, notably their optimism about improvements in public schools. We hypothesize that African Americans will be suspicious of high-stakes tests because they are pessimistic about public schools and frustrated with failed policy attempts. Latinos, on the other hand, are more optimistic

about government and the potential of its policies and will be more supportive of high-stakes testing.

Socioeconomic Status and High-Stakes Testing

Significant achievement gaps also remain between poor and rich students. In Minnesota, only 42% of low-income students are proficient in reading, compared with 77% of higher-income students (Mueller, 2005). As they progress in school, low-income students tend to fall behind higher-income students. By the end of 8th grade, poor students are three levels behind in reading and mathematics. This gap widens as students reach the 12th grade (KnowledgeWorks Foundation, 2008). In California, reports show that affluent students are twice as likely to reach proficiency in English Language Arts and are three times as likely to reach proficiency in mathematics as are their low-income peers (Education Trust-West, 2006). Low-income children also tend to be concentrated in high-poverty schools with scarce resources.

Given the observed disparity in educational achievement between students from high- and low-status families, one might expect parents whose children can more easily pass the tests to support high-stakes testing, whereas those who are most disadvantaged in the system can be expected to oppose them. Children whose parents are highly educated and/or affluent have long had significant advantages within public schools. Their experiences as the more advantaged groups no doubt shape their opinions on a variety of education policy measures. These students are more likely to be enrolled in higher-performing public (or private) schools and tend to score highly enough on standardized tests to meet basic standards. Yet even though higher status children can pass standardized tests with relative ease, these parents have other reasons for opposing high-stakes tests.

Some White, middle- or upper-class parents view new teaching practices as a threat to their kids' future prospects and a danger to their long-held advantages within the education system (Shepard & Bliem, 1995). These parents, often referred to as Volvo Vigilantes, are against the removal of tracking systems, prefer teaching techniques that emphasize competition, and are opposed to programs designed to help underachieving students largely because they view these programs as taking resources away from programs that benefit their own children (Oakes, 1985). One study examined the attitudes of self-described liberal, educated middle-class White mothers on a variety of educational issues. These women were generally committed

to the principles of equity, tolerance, and justice, but when the questions became more specific about changes that would affect their children, their responses changed dramatically. They supported “segregated and stratified school structures that mainly benefit students of the middle class” (Brantlinger, Majd-Jabbari, & Guskin, 1996, p. 590). Highly educated and affluent parents oppose standardized tests primarily because they are concerned about the redistribution of resources such as teachers focusing on at-risk children at the expense of gifted children (Wells & Oakes, 1996).

Some suggest that higher status individuals believe standardized tests measure memorization and test-taking skills, rather than actual knowledge or ability. They also tend to believe that they draw educators away from teaching valuable critical thinking skills in favor of factual knowledge. Some of these parents have even participated in revolts against standardized testing, such as the one in Scarsdale, New York in 2001. In this affluent area, parents kept their children home on test-taking day not because they wanted to make a statement about the injustice of standardized tests on disadvantaged students nor because they worried their children would fail the tests, but rather because they viewed the tests as dumbing down the curriculum and lowering academic standards (Zernike, 2001).

Data and Methods

In our efforts to better understand public attitudes toward the use of standardized tests, particularly high-stakes testing, we use the 2003 National Survey of Latinos on Education, collected by the Pew Hispanic Center or Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. The survey was conducted by telephone between August 7 and October 15, 2003, and yielded responses from 3,421 adults. The sample design employed a highly stratified disproportionate random digit dialing (RDD) sample of the 48 contiguous states.

The dependent variables are based on a series of questions about how standardized tests should be used. Respondents were asked whether standardized tests should be used for largely uncontroversial goals such as identifying areas where students need help and areas in which teachers need to improve as well as high-stakes goals such as determining the level of funding for schools and governing student promotion or graduation. The question wording can be found in Table 1. Each of these variables is dichotomous, so we use logistic regression (Table 2). In the last set of models, we create an additive index to get at the general level of support for high-stakes testing and use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression (Table 3). The scale has a standardized Cronbach's alpha of .76.

Table 1
Racial and Socioeconomic Differences in Attitudes About the Use of Standardized Tests

	All	Latino	African American	White	High School	Some College	College Grad+	Income	
								Income < US\$30K	Income > US\$30K- US\$50K
Standardized tests: Do you think standardized tests should be used for the following purposes?									
... to determine the level of funding each local school receives?									
Should be used for this purpose	36.9	64.1	38.2	32.5	46.9	30.1	25.1	49.6	33.7
Should not be used for this purpose	63.1 (3071)	35.9 (357)	61.8 (387)	67.5 (2327)	53.1 (1562)	69.9 (875)	74.9 (809)	50.4 (916)	66.3 (822)
... to determine whether students are promoted or graduate?									
Should be used for this purpose	55.8	79.1	53.7	52.6	63.3	50.5	46.9	62.5	57.6
Should not be used for this purpose	44.2 (3145)	20.9 (368)	44.2 (393)	46.3 (2385)	36.7 (1614)	49.5 (889)	53.1 (815)	37.5 (942)	42.4 (816)
... by employers when a student applies for a job?									
Should be used for this purpose	36.0	57.2	37.4	32.5	43.7	29.9	28.1	45.4	35.7
Should not be used for this purpose	64.0 (3122)	42.8 (362)	62.6 (390)	67.5 (2369)	56.3 (1591)	70.1 (890)	71.9 (808)	54.6 (932)	64.3 (814)

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

	All	Latino	African American	White	High School	Some College	College Grad+	Income < US\$30K	Income US\$30K-US\$50K	Income > US\$50K
... to ensure that all students meet national academic standards?										
Should be used for this purpose	71.8	86.3	69.2	69.9	78.3	66.7	63.6	76.3	70.6	69.1*
Should not be used for this purpose	28.2 (3139)	13.7 (365)	30.8 (396)	30.1 (2379)	21.7 (1605)	33.3 (888)	36.4 (818)	24.7 (932)	29.4 (823)	30.9 (1236)
... to rank or rate schools?										
Should be used for this purpose	55.2	73.5	51.3	53.0	60.6	51.7	48.9	60.5	53.7	51.8
Should not be used for this purpose	44.8 (3094)	26.5 (362)	48.7 (388)	47.0 (2343)	39.4 (1570)	48.3 (884)	51.1 (809)	39.5 (910)	46.3 (810)	48.2 (1234)
... to identify areas where students need extra help?										
Should be used for this purpose	86.0	92.9	84.3	85.3	87.9	84.6	82.9	87.2	83.7	86.4*
Should not be used for this purpose	14.0 (3154)	7.1 (365)	15.7 (401)	14.7 (2387)	12.1 (1614)	15.4 (896)	17.1* (818)	12.8 (943)	16.3 (822)	13.6 (1248)
... to identify areas in which teachers need to improve?										
Should be used for this purpose	81.9	90.4	82.4	80.5	87.3	79.9	71.2	86.1	79.9	78.4
Should not be used for this purpose	18.1 (3141)	9.6 (366)	17.6 (397)	19.5 (2377)	12.7 (1612)	20.1 (892)	28.8 (810)	13.9 (948)	20.1 (821)	21.6 (1238)

Note: Differences measured within categories (race/ethnicity, education level, and income) with Pearson's chi-square. All relationships significant at $p < .0001$ except those marked with *. All don't know and no opinion responses excluded. Data are weighted to represent the racial distribution in the U.S. population.

* $p < .05$.

Table 2
Multivariate Analyses of Support for Standardized Testing

	Determine Funding	Determine Graduation/ Promotion	Be Used by Employers	Ensure Students Meet National Standards	Rank or Rate Schools	Identify Where Students Need Help	Identify Where Teachers Need to Improve
Black	0.100 (.196)	-0.084 (.182)	.156 (.194)	0.141 (.194)	-.089 (.179)	-0.077 (.236)	0.111 (.218)
Latino	1.112*** (.164)	1.210*** (.159)	.795*** (.162)	0.772*** (.173)	.680*** (.161)	0.905*** (.220)	0.608** (.183)
Income	-0.269** (.102)	-0.173 (.093)	-.186** (.102)	0.026 (.093)	-.044 (.093)	0.234* (.109)	-0.038 (.110)
Education	-0.135** (.039)	-0.113** (.038)	-.169*** (.040)	-0.173*** (.039)	-.116** (.036)	-0.135** (.044)	-0.278*** (.045)
Schools gotten worse	-0.161* (.067)	-0.057 (.061)	-.092 (.066)	-0.109 (.065)	-.066 (.059)	-0.141 (.081)	-0.158* (.077)
Support equal funding for schools	0.149 (.262)	0.266 (.232)	.215 (.264)	0.508* (.243)	.252 (.224)	0.169 (.320)	0.263 (.262)
Urban	0.228 (.157)	0.258 (.153)	.211 (.162)	0.108 (.152)	.087 (.144)	0.004 (.196)	0.227 (.171)
Democrat	0.117 (.166)	-0.049 (.155)	-0.213 (.164)	-0.202 (.163)	-.084 (.150)	-0.140 (.200)	-0.020 (.175)
Female	-0.257 (.152)	-0.604*** (.142)	-.859*** (.153)	-0.560*** (.151)	-.591*** (.138)	0.050 (.185)	-0.162 (.171)
Age	0.017*** (.004)	0.028*** (.004)	.024*** (.004)	0.006 (.004)	.014** (.004)	0.002 (.006)	0.012* (.005)
Parent	-0.181 (.167)	-0.034 (.152)	-.278 (.167)	-0.099 (.161)	.077 (.149)	0.060 (.209)	0.038 (.187)
Constant	-0.245 (.468)	-0.321 (.435)	-.247 (.480)	1.608** (.464)	.328 (.426)	2.494*** (.595)	2.550*** (.544)
<i>N</i>	1839	1841	1826	1841	1838	1850	1853
Pseudo <i>R</i> ²	0.09	0.09	.10	0.05	.05	0.02	0.07

Note: Logistic regression coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses. Models exclude don't know or no opinion. Data are weighted to represent the racial distribution in the U.S. population.

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

Table 3
Support for High-Stakes Uses of Standardized Testing, by Race, Ethnicity, and Education

	Model 1: Whites	Model 2: African Americans	Model 3: Latinos	Model 4: High School or Less	Model 5: Some College	Model 6: College Grad or More
Schools gotten worse	-0.042 (.047)	-0.270* (.111)	-0.139 (.116)	-0.207*** (.081)	-0.110 (.081)	-0.022 (.086)
Support equal funding for schools	0.747*** (.166)	0.774 (.465)	0.201 (.419)	1.103*** (.225)	0.660* (.276)	-0.068 (.275)
Urban	0.135 (.112)	0.614* (.272)	0.156 (.269)	0.362*** (.139)	0.091 (.189)	-0.143 (.194)
Democrat	-0.179 (.107)	-0.144 (.335)	-0.081 (.275)	-0.027 (.131)	-0.192 (.191)	-0.080 (.203)
Female	-0.825*** (.102)	0.221 (.279)	-0.311 (.276)	-0.473*** (.124)	-0.671*** (.178)	-0.903*** (.186)
Age	0.024*** (.003)	0.021* (.009)	0.013 (.010)	0.022*** (.004)	0.031*** (.006)	0.011 (.006)
Parent	-0.004 (.113)	-0.041 (.281)	0.064 (.272)	-0.001 (.138)	-0.185 (.188)	-0.186 (.203)
Income	-0.012 (.066)	-0.060 (.182)	-0.374* (.184)	-0.001 (.009)	-0.029* (.012)	0.011 (.013)
Education	-0.215*** (.025)	-0.254** (.076)	-0.203** (.072)	—	—	—
Black	—	—	—	0.258 (.196)	0.152 (.286)	-0.390 (.358)
Latino	—	—	—	1.283*** (.197)	1.156*** (.329)	0.843 (.465)
Constant	3.851*** (.310)	4.193*** (.744)	6.149*** (.662)	3.155*** (.352)	3.081*** (.486)	3.490*** (.576)
N	1339	200	159	780	503	508
R ²	0.17	0.20	0.17	0.18	0.13	0.08

Note: OLS regression coefficients. Standard Errors in parentheses. Models exclude don't know or no opinion. Data are weighted to represent the racial distribution in the U.S. population.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Our key independent variables are the respondent's race or ethnicity, income, and education level. Of the total number of adults interviewed, the unweighted sample includes 1,508 Latinos, 610 African Americans, and 1,193 non-Hispanic Whites.¹ The sample is weighted to represent the actual racial distribution of adults throughout the United States. The weighted sample includes 387 Latinos, 406 African Americans, and 2,430 non-Hispanic Whites. All analyses and distributions reported in the paper use the weighted sample. About 31% of this sample earned less than US\$30,000; another 27% earned US\$30,000–US\$50,000; and 41% earned more than US\$50,000 per year. And slightly less than half (49%) had a high school education or less, whereas 26.7% had some college and 24.3% had at least a college degree.²

We include indicators for optimism about public schools and support for the redistribution of resources. We hypothesize that differences between African Americans and Latinos are due to their experiences with the public education system which lead to different levels of optimism about the public schools and their ability to alleviate the disparities that plague the educational success of their children.³

To measure optimism in the performance of public schools, we use a question asking respondents, "Compared to 5 years ago, would you say that in general, schools have improved or gotten worse?" This variable is measured on a five-point scale from *improved a lot* to *gotten a lot worse*. We also expect that because of their long-held advantages in the public schools Whites and those who are highly educated and/or affluent oppose high-stakes testing because they are concerned that resources may be distributed to poorer schools or disadvantaged students. To assess beliefs about whether these tests redistribute resources inequitably, we use a dichotomous variable based on the question, "Do you support or oppose measures to ensure that an equal amount of money is spent on each student regardless of whether they live in a rich or poor school district?"

Finally, we include several demographic variables that act mainly as controls. First, we include partisanship. The issue of education has long been considered owned by Democrats despite Republican attempts to co-opt or trespass on this issue of ownership (Norpoth & Buchanan, 1992). Many Democrats have come out against certain aspects of No Child Left Behind including the use of high-stakes tests. We also control for parental status, gender, age, and whether the respondent lives in the central city. We would have liked to include other indicators that may help explain attitudes about education policy such as whether the respondent has a child on an honors, average, or remedial track or whether the respondent has a child in a failing

school or a high-performing school. Unfortunately, none of these questions were included in the survey and thus although far from perfect, urbanicity is the best proxy for the likelihood that a respondent has a child in an *advantaged* or *disadvantaged* school.⁴

Results

Table 1 shows the bivariate results of opinion on each use of standardized tests by race, ethnicity, income, and education. It should first be noted that there is significant support for many uses of standardized tests. Significant majorities of all respondents support using these tests to assure that students meet national standards (71.8%), to identify areas where students need extra help (86.0%), and identify areas where teachers need to improve (81.9%). A majority of respondents oppose two of the high-stakes uses: determining school funding and allowing employers to use the test scores when students apply for jobs. Although testing is controversial within the educational establishment, these results show that the American public is generally supportive of standardized tests, including some (but not all) high-stakes uses.

The results also show significant racial differences in attitudes on the use of standardized tests. These differences are driven almost exclusively by Latinos. For each of the questions, the statistically significant differences between racial and ethnic groups are between the attitudes of Latinos on one hand and African Americans and Whites on the other. Among these questions, the only statistically significant difference between Whites and African Americans is with funding local schools ($p < .05$). Majorities of Latinos are supportive of each of the uses of standardized tests including high-stakes purposes. In comparison, only about one third of African Americans and Whites support using tests to determine school funding or allowing employers to use them when students apply for jobs.

The results of bivariate tests for socioeconomic status and attitudes about the uses of standardized tests suggest that the most affluent and well-educated groups are more opposed to testing compared with those in the lowest income and education groups. The differences are especially stark on the high-stakes issues. More than 70% of affluent and highly educated respondents oppose using tests to determine school funding although nearly a majority of the poorest and least educated respondents support this use. Similarly, more than 70% of high-income and college-educated individuals oppose allowing employers to use test scores when students apply for jobs;

about 45% of low-income individuals and high school graduates oppose using tests in this way.

Each of these questions is used as a dependent variable in the multivariate analyses in Table 2. These results show that controlling for a host of other indicators, Latinos are significantly more supportive of all uses of standardized tests than are Whites, whereas the attitudes of African Americans are similar to Whites. In substantive terms, Latinos are 26% more likely than Whites to support using tests to determine school funding, 27% more likely to support using tests to determine graduation or promotion, and 18% more likely to support allowing employers to use tests when students apply for jobs.⁵ Income is significant in three of the models with higher-income individuals less likely to support using tests to determine school funding and student employment. Education level is highly significant and negatively related to support for all uses of standardized testing.

The measure of optimism in public schools is significantly related to two of the uses of standardized tests. Those who believe that public schools have gotten worse over the last five years are less likely to support utilizing tests to determine school funding and to identify where teachers need to improve. Support for equal school funding is only related to support for using tests to ensure students meet national standards. Men and older respondents are more supportive of many uses of standardized testing. Finally, partisanship, urbanicity, and parental status are unrelated to support for testing.

In the final set of results, the dependent variable is an additive index of each of the questions about the uses of standardized tests (Table 3). Higher values indicate greater support for the use of standardized tests. These models allow a closer examination of the sources of racial and socioeconomic differences in support for high-stakes testing. The results show that among African Americans, those who believe that the public schools have gotten considerably worse are much less likely to support high-stakes testing. This indicates that negativity among African Americans about the state of public education is a driving force behind their attitudes on how tests should be used. The same cannot be said of either Whites or Latinos. A cross tab shows that more than 34% of African Americans said schools had gotten worse or a lot worse, compared with 30% of Whites and 20% of Latinos ($p < .001$). Latinos are fairly positive about public schools with more than 45% saying that schools had either improved a lot or a little compared with 25% of Whites and 31% of African Americans ($p < .001$).

Among Whites, one of keys to their support for standardized tests is whether they support equal school funding. Those who oppose measures that ensure an equal amount of money is spent on each student regardless

of whether they live in a rich or poor district are significantly less supportive of high-stakes testing. Although this does not necessarily demonstrate that Whites are concerned that an emphasis on testing and accountability will redistribute resources away from their children, it suggests that Whites have a tendency to see education policies as zero-sum. As the more advantaged racial group, Whites are not only less supportive of equality in funding schools but this opposition also plays an important role in their attitudes about high-stakes testing.

As expected, among all three racial groups higher-status individuals are significantly less supportive of high-stakes standardized tests than their counterparts. The last three models in Table 3 closely examine the effect of education on support for standardized testing. Among those with the least education, beliefs about the state of public schools are significantly related to their attitudes about high-stakes tests. Just as is the case with African Americans, among the least educated those who believe that schools have gotten considerably worse are less supportive of testing. Beliefs about whether schools have improved are not related to support for testing among respondents with a higher level of education.

Interestingly, among those with lower levels of education support for equal school funding is directly and significantly related to support for testing. We had expected to find that, like the most advantaged racial group (Whites), those who are more highly educated would be more opposed to equal school funding and that this opposition would contribute to opposition to high-stakes testing. However, among those with at least a college degree, support for equal school funding is unrelated to their attitudes about testing.

Finally, these results show that across all education levels, women are more opposed to high-stakes testing. And unlike those with less education, highly educated Latinos are not more supportive of testing than their similarly educated White peers. Thus among Latinos, most of the support for high-stakes testing comes from less educated Latinos. Latinos' overall high levels of support for testing is indicative of the fact that only 9.4% of Latino respondents had a college degree or higher (compared with 14.9% of African Americans and 27.2% of Whites).

Conclusions

One goal of this research has been to explore an understudied but very important education policy issue. Standardized tests have been on the nation's education agenda for decades. Nearly all students are subject to

standardized tests. Education policy at the federal, state, and local levels is concentrated on standards and accountability as measured by standardized tests. However, opinion on this issue has not been studied nearly to the extent that many other education reforms have been.

Furthermore, many believe that racial minorities and lower-status individuals have overlapping interests because their children suffer from similar problems within the public education system. Our evidence shows that although children of these groups are less likely to perform well on standardized tests and would be similarly affected by high-stakes testing, their opinions diverge on the appropriate uses of testing. Across each of the suggested uses of standardized tests, Latinos are significantly more supportive than both African Americans and Whites. We find that Latinos differ from African American and White respondents regarding high-stakes testing because they tend to be more optimistic about government policies than either of the other racial groups. After decades of involvement in fighting against educational inequality, African Americans believe that the schools are not getting better and are frustrated about the lack of progress in closing achievement gaps. Their pessimism about the state of public schools contributes significantly to their suspicions about high-stakes testing. The same pattern holds for those who are the least educated; their negative assessments of the public schools play a part in their opposition to testing. It should not be surprising that after countless failed policy attempts disadvantaged groups would begin to doubt the effectiveness of new policies.

Our results also show that attitudes about high-stakes testing are related to concerns about the redistribution of resources. Whites who oppose equal funding for public schools are considerably less supportive of high-stakes testing, indicating perhaps that they are worried about a redistribution of resources that would place their children at a disadvantage. Our results do not indicate that the same is true of higher-status individuals; however, we do find that across all racial and ethnic groups the more highly educated are less supportive of high-stakes tests. Unfortunately, these data do not allow us to directly test other common hypotheses that would explain differences based on socioeconomic status such as concerns that tests contribute to a lack of rigor or that standardized tests dumb down the curriculum. Recognizing the limitations of our study, we encourage more fine-tuned data collection so that scholars can more directly test the sources of attitudes about the standardized testing, accountability, and standards movement.

High-stakes standardized tests are a critical part of federal and state initiatives. This research indicates that the public is far from united in their views about the current reform agenda. Even groups that would be similarly

affected by these policies—African Americans, Latinos, and those of lower status—have divergent opinions on high-stakes testing. Although not the focus of this study, the differences between these groups on the uses of standardized tests are unlikely to be an isolated case. Rather this may be indicative of more substantial disagreement on the accountability and standards movement in general. It is important to understand the sources of these attitudes. African Americans are skeptical of high-stakes testing for different reasons than are upper-status Whites. Unless policymakers understand the reasons for opinions on this issue, they are unlikely to be successful in their attempts to reform the education system and close persistent achievement gaps.

Notes

1. The remaining respondents self identified as Asian (29), some other race (68), and those who refused to respond (13). These respondents were excluded from the analysis.

2. We recoded this variable to ease the presentation of results; we ran both the bivariate and multivariate models with the original variable and found no significant differences from this three-category variable. The original variable showed that 17% of the sample had less than a high school education, 32% had a high school diploma (or its equivalent), 26.7% had some college, 16.4% were college graduates, and 7.9% had postgraduate education.

3. The data do not include a measure of general trust in government.

4. Checks for multicollinearity showed no large correlations between any two variables used in the equations throughout the paper. In addition, we also examined Latino-specific variables—national origin, language, and nativity. Given the great diversity among Latinos, we expected these to prove fruitful; however, there were no differences in opinion between Mexican Americans, Puerto Rican Americans, or Cuban Americans. There were also no differences between those who took the survey in English and those who chose to take it in Spanish or between the foreign born and the native born.

5. The predictions are based on the predicted probabilities, or the marginal change from the lowest to the highest value (0-1) while holding all other variables at their mean.

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