

APSA | Education Politics and Policy

The Organized Section in Education Politics and Policy of the American Political Science Association

Newsletter

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From the President

I am pleased to introduce the second issue of the APSA Education Politics and Policy Section's newsletter. This issue features two timely contributions about the future of public education after the pandemic, one focused on the United States and the other on African countries. **Lesley Lavery** (Macalester College) draws on insights from original interviews with education stakeholders to reimagine what public school governance and teacher-management relations could look like in the United States in the post-pandemic, post-George Floyd era. **Ken Ochieng' Opalo** (Georgetown University) places the new educational challenges brought about by the pandemic in broad historical context. Building on scholarship on education politics in Africa, he suggests how countries might address these new challenges moving forward.

Since our previous (and first) newsletter published in January of 2021, the Section implemented several efforts that are part of our goal to strengthen the intellectual community of scholars interested in education politics and policy. I summarize them below in reverse chronological order:

- We put together the Section's **program for the APSA 2021 Annual Meeting**. As is often the case, we received a larger number of submissions than we could accommodate given the number of panel slots that the Section was allocated. As Program Chair, I prioritized high-quality submissions that will be of interest to a broad audience and that contribute to the 2021 conference theme, *Promoting Pluralism*. The panels, co-sponsored by the Public Policy, the Race, Ethnicity, and Politics, and the Comparative Politics Sections, are listed below. I hope you will find them engaging!
 - o Tue, Sept 28, 10:00 to 11:30am PDT, virtual format (details [here](#)):
Plural Approaches to Education and Equality
 - o Wed, Sept 29, 6:00 to 7:30am PDT, virtual format (details [here](#)):
Enduring Lessons in Education Politics and Policy from the COVID-19 Pandemic
 - o Fri, Oct 1, 10:00 to 11:30am PDT, virtual format (details [here](#)):
U.S. Education Systems and Anti-Black Racism
 - o Fri, Oct 1, 4:00 to 5:30pm PDT, in-person (details [here](#)):
How the State Shapes Society: Comparative Education Politics
 - o Fri, October 1, 6:00 to 6:30am PDT, virtual format (details [here](#)):
iPoster "Subnational Resistance and the Uneven Geography of State Capacity"
- Three **award committees** reviewed the work that was nominated for the Section's Best Book, Best Dissertation, and Best APSA Paper. Awards will be announced at our Business Meeting later this summer. I am grateful to everyone who agreed to serve on an award committee:
 - o Best Book Award Committee: Ben Ansell (Chair, University of Oxford) and Diana Owen (Georgetown University)
 - o Best Dissertation Award Committee: Sarah Reckhow (Chair, Michigan State University), Mneesha Gellman (Emerson College) and Vladimir Kogan (Ohio State University)
 - o Best APSA Paper Award Committee: Linda White (Chair, University of Toronto), Jason Giersch (UNC Charlotte) and Ben Ross Schneider (MIT)
- The **1st Education Politics and Policy (Online) Winter Conference** was held on March 4-5. We received a large number of applications, of which we selected 15 for the conference. More than 90 people signed up to participate in the conference as presenters, discussants, or members of the

audience. The discussions were dynamic and productive despite the online format, and the feedback we received was overwhelmingly positive. If you missed the conference, you can access the program [here](#) and the papers that were presented [here](#).

Stay tuned for an email announcement about our **Business Meeting**, which will take place virtually on **September 23 at 2pm Pacific Time**. We will summarize the progress we made to consolidate the Section in the last year, transition to a new President and elect a new President-Elect, celebrate award recipients, and discuss proposals to amend our bylaws.

I hope you will enjoy the newsletter! If you have suggestions for future issues, please reach out to our Communications Officer **Emmerich Davies** (emmerich_davies_escobar@gse.harvard.edu), to whom I am grateful for putting together this wonderful issue.

Sincerely,

Agustina S. Paglayan

Assistant Professor, University of California San Diego

President and Chair, APSA Education Politics and Policy Section

www.agustinapaglayan.com

Moving Beyond the Staid Labor/Management Dichotomy

Lesley Lavery

Associate Professor and Chair
Political Science
Macalester College

As scholars of education politics and policy, we're all familiar with decades of research dedicated to decoding the mechanisms of U.S. public education's mediocrity. Emerging from the pandemic and entering a post-George Floyd era requires challenging a staid labor/management dichotomy and purposely building school governance systems that invest in and involve all stakeholders is crucial as we re-imagine the public education endeavor.

Throughout the 2000s, following widespread agreement that teachers are the [most important in-school predictor of education outcomes](#), education policy scholars developed an increasingly sophisticated array of tools to explore the relationship between [teachers' unions and student outcomes](#). Much of this work was interpreted by unions and the public as an attack on teachers, an attack also pursued in [statehouses](#) and [courthouses](#).

In 2012, Chicago teachers shook up the conversation when they went on strike demanding better learning conditions for the diverse students they served. This "bargaining for the common good" approach [caught on with several other urban unions](#). Then, in 2018, [West Virginia's teachers went on strike to highlight meager wages and draw attention to declining respect for and investment in the state's existing teacher workforce](#). West Virginia's teachers' calls were answered by wage increases and guarantees of stability in healthcare investments and similar actions followed in Oklahoma, Kentucky, Arizona and Colorado, giving way to what the National Education Association's president Lily Eskelsen Garcia called an "education spring" and a more nuanced understanding of teachers and the value of their work.

Then came the pandemic. In late March 2020, struggling through another day of virtual school alongside her young children, media network showrunner Shonda Rhimes [tweeted](#), "Teachers deserve to make a billion dollars a year. Or a week." Many parents echoed this praise for educators. But by fall 2020, as debates dragged on regarding whether, how and when to return to face to face instruction, teachers, many begging for detailed plans and expressing safety concerns, were critiqued as [obstructionists](#).

Adding to the complexity of the moment were attempts to gauge the best mode or model of instruction for students of color. Following George Floyd's murder in May 2020, both opponents and proponents of re-opening schools for in-person learning leveraged arguments about the interests of Black and brown kids. Those hoping to re-open schools more quickly reasoned that [keeping schools closed disproportionately negatively impacted Black and brown students](#). Those who urged a more cautious re-opening insisted that Black and brown students and families were at greater risk [in school buildings](#).

The reality is that no matter the mode of instruction, the same students are disadvantaged in public schools. If we're tired of the status quo and desperate for a post-pandemic, post-George Floyd reimagining of public education, we might start rethinking the staid labor/management dichotomy which fuels other black and white (pun intended) understandings of complex issues.

For at least two decades, divisions between key stakeholders, particularly teachers unions and management, have impeded school improvement. This year, as my colleague Sara Dahill-Brown and I interviewed teachers union leaders across the country to gauge the pandemic's influence on teachers' work, we realized just how

important shared decision-making can be. We heard again and again, in urban, rural and suburban districts, those with strong and weak unions and Democratic and Republican voters that even the best program or policy innovations are bound to fail if we ignore those who implement policy or fail to pick up on the diversity of a school community's needs. Union leaders who were invited to the table from the outset of the pandemic and treated as partners - relied on to gauge teachers' comfort levels and specific concerns - reported fear and anxiety in fall 2020 and overwhelm and overwork by the end of the year. But, in districts where superintendents and school boards encouraged teachers (and transportation, custodial, and clerical staff, and school parents) to share their expertise and work as partners in emergency management, these feelings were tempered. In these districts, though systems were strained, the trust and goodwill necessary to address trauma and disadvantage and actually reimagine school communities remains.

Many in our field believe that President Biden's priorities - greater investment in educators, families and communities - may lay the foundation necessary to re-invigorate the public education enterprise. [But we also understand that you can't just throw money and positive intent at long festering inequities](#). If we don't also work to build relationships between teachers, administrators, school board members, families and students, [perhaps by formalizing pathways for each stakeholder to engage](#), we'll waste a once in a generation opportunity to collectively imagine systems that work for the diverse populations our schools should actually serve.

Lesley Lavery

Associate Professor and Chair

Political Science

Macalester College

<https://www.macalester.edu/politicalscience/facultystaff/lesleylavery/>

The COVID Shock and Future Politics of Education in African States

Ken Ochieng' Opalo

Assistant Professor

Political Science

Georgetown University

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused both short-term and long-term disruptions to learning all over the world, and Africa has been no exception. Many countries either closed or restricted school operations over the last 18 months. According to the World Bank, as of March 2021 only four countries – Burundi, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, and Kenya – have fully reopened schools. This despite [reports from selected countries suggesting that parents in the region have been eager to see schools reopen](#), in part to avoid problems of attrition and learning loss. Short-term, [school closures have been shown to result in significant learning loss](#), with disadvantaged groups bearing the brunt. The long-term disruptions will likely come in the form of declining enrollment rates, widening gender and class gaps in education attainment, and reduced funding for education as governments deal with the fiscal consequences of stimulus spending during the pandemic.

This short article addresses the potential ways through which disruptions caused by the COVID pandemic will impact the politics of education in African states. It highlights how the incentive system associated with electoral politics may not adequately mitigate the disruptions to both school attendance and learning outcomes in African states. As a region, [Africa currently experiences a learning gap of about 20 percent](#) – a statistic that is likely to be made worse by COVID-related school closures.

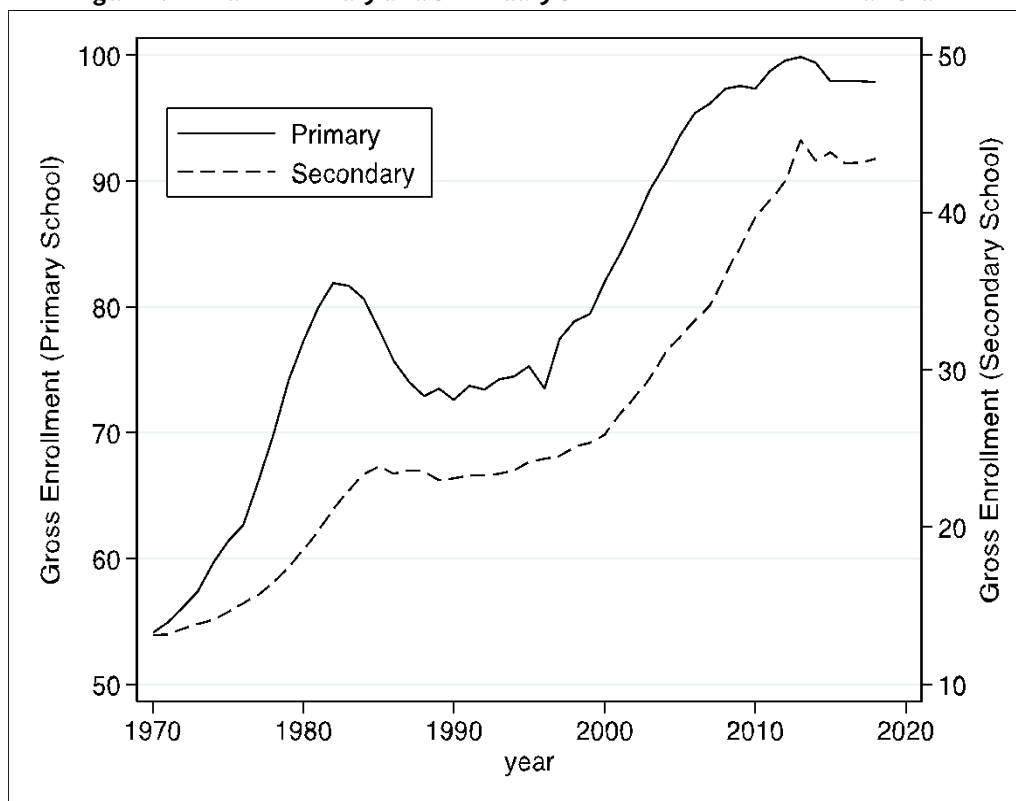
[The question of access to primary and secondary schooling has been at the forefront of policymaking in African states](#) as stagnating and declining enrolment rates in the 1980s and 90s have been reversed in more recent decades (see Figure 1). [Global compacts](#) such as the [Millennium Development Goals \(MDGs\)](#) and [the reintroduction of competitive politics](#) in many states [in the early 1990s generated additional momentum towards these efforts](#). As a result, Universal Primary Education (UPE) is now a reality in nearly all African states.

However, the successes at UPE raised two new concerns. The first one was related [to quality of education](#). It quickly became apparent that [schooling did not always translate into learning](#). This concern spawned a rich literature and an array of interventions designed to generate knowledge on how to ensure that schooling led to learning (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) for a small piece of that literature). Second, success at UPE generated enormous demand for secondary schooling. This reality [forced several African governments to implement universal secondary education](#). Increasing secondary school enrollment presents African governments with significant challenges related to both financing and learning outcomes.

Can Electoral Politics Address COVID-induced Schooling and Learning Losses?

The fundamental challenge is that [politicians are principally motivated to invest in easily visible and attributable public goods and services](#). Government provision of education comes in the form of a bundle of public goods and services with varying degrees of visibility and attributability. Schools, fees, desks, uniforms, and school feeding are easily attributable to politicians. However, learning outcomes may not always be attributable to politicians (e.g. parents may deem their children to be intrinsically gifted). Furthermore, the production function of learning outcomes involves multiple steps (teacher training, curriculum development, school-level management, and parental involvement) whose results are not only difficult to attribute to politicians, but also take time to materialize.

Figure 1: Trends in Primary and Secondary School Enrollment in African States



Notes: Figure shows trends in gross enrollment rates in primary (left axis) and secondary education in African states. Data are from the World Bank.

In addition to the above factors, education systems may not always be designed to maximize access and learning outcomes; [nor are episodes of expansion always responsive to \(democratic\) electoral politics](#). Therefore, African governments' COVID-19 mitigation efforts will most certainly vary conditional on their respective politics of education. Governments' ability to fund recovery efforts, the prevailing goals of education systems (e.g. skills development or nation-building), and the degree of politicization of education policy will shape outcomes.

Global compacts, cross-country competition, and policy diffusion may orient African governments and voters alike towards the twin goals of boosting access and learning outcomes. For example, by creating specific salient targets, [MDGs shaped government policy and strengthened political demand for UPE](#). In the same vein, [global performance assessments – such as the Program for International Student Assessment \(PISA\) – can create popular demand for improved learning](#). Given the deficiencies of electoral politics in generating sustained demand for both schooling and learning, global policy advocacy could potentially play an important role in ensuring that different African states make the necessary investments needed to weather the COVID shock. Importantly, as African economies recover from the economic toll of the pandemic, they may require additional fiscal resources in the form of loans or direct aid to finance education expenditures.

This short article has outlined the broad contours of the politics of education in African states and how they might be affected by the COVID pandemic. Overall, governments will likely respond more forcefully to declines in schooling compared to the erosion of learning gains. At the same time, global compacts may provide focal policy goals for governments in a manner that galvanizes popular support for investments in both schooling and learning. These developments will create interesting research opportunities for scholars of the politics of education. Future works should focus on articulating the logics of education in different states, map variations

in the sensitivity of education policy to electoral politics, and document how politicians and voters alike navigate the questions of visibility and attributability of different aspects of education as a public good.

Ken Ochieng' Opalo

Assistant Professor

Political Science

Georgetown University

<https://kenopalo.com>

Recent Books, Articles, and Notable Achievements from Section Members

Brow, Heath 2021. *Homeschooling the Right: How Conservative Education Activism Erodes the State*. Columbia University Press.

Cheng, A., Maranto, R., & Shakeel, M. D. 2021. Unionization, public school reform, and teacher professionalism. *Journal of Educational Change*, 22(1), 85-102.

Firchow, Pamina, & Gellman, Mneesha. 2021. Collaborative Methodologies: Why, How, and for Whom? *PS: Political Science & Politics*. 1-5.

Gellman, Mneesha. 2021. Collaborative Methodology with Indigenous Communities: A Framework for Addressing Power Inequalities. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 1-4.

Hartney, Michael T. & Leslie K. Finger. 2021. "Politics, markets, and pandemics: Public education's response to COVID-19." *Perspectives on Politics*. 1-17.

Kogan, Vladimir, Stéphane Lavertu and Zachary Peskowitz. Forthcoming. "How Does Minority Political Representation Affect School District Administration and Student Outcomes?" *American Journal of Political Science*.

Kogan, Vladimir, Stéphane Lavertu, Zachary Peskowitz. Forthcoming. "The Democratic Deficit in U.S. Education Governance," *American Political Science Review*.

Kogan, Vladimir. Forthcoming. "Jurisdictional Competition, Market Power, and the Compensation of Public Employees," *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy*

Paglayan, Agustina S. 2021. "The Non-Democratic Roots of Mass Education: Evidence from 200 Years." *American Political Science Review* 115(1): 179-198.

Ray, Brian D., M. Danish Shakeel, Fred Worth & Valerie Bryant. 2021. Four Key Barriers Affecting the Choice to Homeschool: Evidence from a Fragile Community. *Journal of School Choice*, 1-21.

Reichert, Frank. 2021. How do student and school resources influence civic knowledge? Evidence from three cohorts of Australian tenth graders. *Asia Pacific Education Review*

S. Mendoza, Mary Anne. 2021. "When institutions reinforce regional divides: Comparing Christian and Muslim colonial education policies in the Philippines." *Asian Politics & Policy* 13(1) 90-104.

Mneesha Gellman was awarded a 2021-2023 grant from the Sociological Initiatives Foundation to further her research on Indigenous language access in California and Southern Mexico.

Paul Manna was appointed Director of the Public Policy Program at William & Mary.

Frank Reichert won the 2021 Early Career Award of the Social Studies Research Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association

If you have work or a notable achievement to share with our section members, please reach out to our Communications Officer, Emmerich Davies, at emmerich.davies_escobar@gse.harvard.edu

Stay in touch!

- Follow us on twitter [@APSAEdPolitics](https://twitter.com/APSAEdPolitics)
- If you are interested in contributing a piece for a future newsletter, or for any questions or concerns, contact our Communications Officer, Emmerich Davies, at emmerich_davies_escobar@gse.harvard.edu

Upcoming Events and Deadlines

- **APSA Conference:** September 30-October 3, 2021
- **APSA Business Meeting:** September 23 at 2pm Pacific Time (online)