

# APSA | Education Politics and Policy

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

## Newsletter

### Volume III Issue 2, Fall 2023

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## From the President

Greetings!

As new section president, I would like to start by thanking the dedicated outgoing leadership team – Sarah Rekhov, Kate Destler and Leslie Finger. Under their leadership, the section held a successful virtual conference in March 2023 and put together another excellent program at the APSA conference in Los Angeles. Despite all the disruptions around the APSA meeting, section members presented a range of exciting papers in both the hybrid and in-person panels. The section remains a place for both American and Comparative scholars of all career stages to come together to constructively exchange ideas about education politics.

Congratulations to the 2023 section prize winners. The section awarded Emily Dunlop the best dissertation prize for “Education Access and Perceived Inequality After War: Continuity and Change in Post-War Burundi.” The best book award went to Daniel Moak for *From the New Deal to the War on Schools: Race, Inequality, and the Rise of the Punitive Education State* (UNC Press). We also awarded an honorable mention to Akshay Mangla for *Making Bureaucracy Work: Norms, Education and Public Service Delivery in Rural India* (CUP). Finally, we had co-winners for the best paper prize: Jared Clemons for “Education as human capital” and Roland Kappe for “The causal effect of foreign language learning on political attitudes.” Well done!

Awarding prizes would not be possible without the hard work of our excellent prize committees. Thank you to Elizabeth Sharrow, Christopher Chambers-Ju, Michael Hartney, Anja Giudici, Paul Manna, Julian Garritzmann, Sara Dahill-Brown, and Melissa Arnold Lyon.

As we look ahead to 2024, I would like to welcome our new officers, Vlad Kogan and Ursula Hackett. We will soon be circulating a call for papers for our 2024 virtual conference, planned for March 14th and 15th. We are also excited about the [2024 APSA conference in Philadelphia](#). APSA submissions close on January 17th, so make sure to submit your education papers and panels to this section. We are also gearing up for the 2024 section prizes. Please consider nominating a colleague, student or yourself for the book, dissertation or APSA paper prizes. [Prize committees are listed on our section website](#), and the paper and dissertation awards can be submitted through the following [nomination link](#).

Finally, thank you to Jason Giersch for organizing this newsletter, and to Melissa Lyon Arnold and Thomas Kang for their tremendous contributions to it. This newsletter is a critical part of our growing community of scholars. If you have suggestions for future issues, please reach out to Jason Giersch ([jgiersch@charlotte.edu](mailto:jgiersch@charlotte.edu)).

Sincerely,  
Jane Gingrich  
Professor of Comparative Social Policy at the University of Oxford  
President and Chair, APSA Education Politics and Policy Section

## Essay

**By Melissa Arnold Lyon**

Assistant Professor of Public Policy

Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, University at Albany

### **The Effects of State Takeover on Education Spending and Fiscal Health**

The state of Texas assumed control of the Houston Independent School District (HISD) this school year, affecting the governance of schools educating approximately 200,000 Texas students. This “state takeover”—a form of political centralization that shifts decision-making power from locally elected leaders to the state—has elicited significant criticism from local stakeholders and outside observers. Much of the criticism has centered on state officials' assertions that the takeover aimed to address academic concerns, despite HISD not being the lowest-performing district in the state. HISD met the official criteria because just one of its over 250 schools was considered consistently low performing.

The events in Houston draw attention to a relatively rare, but nevertheless increasing, shift in education governance. Over the past three decades, state takeovers have influenced millions of students across approximately 100 districts, including major urban centers such as New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, Cleveland, El Paso, and Newark. Takeovers are usually for fiscal reasons (75% of takeovers), though they can occur for multiple reasons, and about half of takeovers occur for academic reasons.

The increasing prevalence of state takeovers poses a puzzle, particularly given prior research indicating that they do not, on average, benefit students, at least in terms of standardized test scores. Moreover, state takeovers are known to elicit resistance from targeted communities, which tend to be home to disproportionate numbers of low-income residents of color. In a new paper I have co-authored with Josh Bleiberg (Assistant Professor of Education Policy at the University of Pittsburgh) and Beth Schueler (Assistant Professor of Education and Public Policy at the University of Virginia), we investigate a possible explanation that has not yet been considered empirically: state takeovers may persist because they achieve their purported goals of improving fiscal condition.

We use an event study approach with an original dataset tracking all state takeovers of school districts from 1990-2019 combined with district-level finance information from the National Center for Education Statistics' Common Core of Data and the U.S. Census. The relatively detailed finance data in F-33 surveys allow us to comprehensively examine district expenditures and financial condition. Because there is no agreed upon measure of fiscal health for local school districts, we use extant public finance literature to undergo a three-pronged approach involving cash solvency, budgetary solvency, and long-run solvency.

Our analysis reveals that political centralization in the form of state takeover increases expenditures and improves local fiscal condition, although not uniformly nor without cost. Specifically, takeover increased annual per-pupil spending by over \$2,000 per student after five years and led to substantial improvements in both budgetary solvency and long-run solvency.

The new spending is concentrated in legacy costs (employee benefits and debt retirement), and the revenues are primarily coming from states, which is suggestive of a fiscal bailout. Nonetheless, takeovers may be an undesirable form of bailout, as the extra funding comes at the cost of local political autonomy. This is especially true in majority-Black communities, where takeovers are less effective than in communities with lower concentrations of Black students. We find that takeover did not have a positive impact on school expenditures or long-run solvency in districts that serve a majority-Black student population. This corroborates a growing trend in takeover research, which suggests that takeovers in majority-Black communities are the least effective in terms of boosting academic performance for students, as Beth Schueler and Joshua Bleiberg have found, and that they disempower Black communities, as Domingo Morel has established. We build on this growing consensus by demonstrating that they also do not change per-pupil expenditures and generate fewer improvements to fiscal condition.

We explore potential explanations for this differential effect and find suggestive evidence that it is related to partisan mismatch, related to the historical ties between the Democratic party and Black communities. Specifically, we find that state takeovers in majority Black districts are much more likely to happen when a state is governed by a Republican. Republicans govern only 42% of takeovers in districts where less than 25% of the students are Black, compared to 76% of diverse districts (25-75% Black) and 67% of districts that are more than 75% Black. Additionally, when we account for governor party, we find no differential effects of takeover in majority Black districts. Partisanship seems to be an important mediator for the effect of takeover.

In short, we find that state takeovers of local school districts achieve the purported goal of improving fiscal health, on average. This comes at a significant cost to both states and localities. States incur material costs in that, on average, they end up providing a fiscal bailout. Localities incur political costs, as they lose their locally elected school board's decision-making power. These political costs are particularly acute in majority Black districts where takeovers do not result in fiscal bailouts and lead to fewer improvements to fiscal condition.

Mimi's website is <http://melissa-lyon.com/>

## Essay

**By Thomas Kang**

Assistant Professor (Professor Adjunto)

Department of Economics and International Relations

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS, Brazil)

### **Education under Military Rule in Brazil**

Brazil is a notable case of rapid industrialization coupled with a sluggish expansion of mass schooling. Over several decades, the nation pursued a strategy of import-substitution industrialization (ISI), deemed successful by some in terms of per capita economic growth. However, from a broader perspective of development, Brazil lagged behind in various aspects, particularly education, even when compared to neighboring countries.

Despite a continuous process of industrialization since the late 19th century, Brazilian census data indicated that only half of the adult population was literate in 1950. The eighth-grade level reached universal coverage for the population aged 7 to 14 years only in the late 1990s. Some assessments suggested that Brazil trailed about 80 years behind the United States in terms of the widespread expansion of education.

Early literature on the expansion of mass education focused on the extension of suffrage or patterns of decentralization to explain why certain countries led this expansion in the late 19th century. However, recent studies have highlighted mass schooling as a tool for establishing political order. In essence, homogenization (or perhaps indoctrination) could be the primary driver behind early mass education initiatives. If that is the case, dictatorships might have more incentives to expand schooling than democracies.

The Brazilian military regime (1964-1985) provides an important context to explore the connections between political regimes and education policies. Amidst rising Cold War tensions, a coup organized by the military and civilian supporters led to the downfall of the democratic regime in 1964. After over two decades under military rule, the country underwent democratization in the mid-1980s. Bureaucrats supporting the regime were aware of the educational backwardness of the country. Initially, military administrations seemed committed to increasing enrollments in primary education. However, a shift occurred in the mid-1970s, marked by nearly stagnant growth in education spending and enrollment ratios in non-tertiary education. Why did this happen?

In a forthcoming paper in the *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Economic History*, my co-authors and I argue that levels of centralization in different institutional aspects may

significantly impact the expansion of schooling. In Brazil, an increase in fiscal capacity led to higher spending on education during the first decade under military rule. However, after the First Oil Shock in 1973, the military government depleted the financial capacity of subnational governments, the primary providers of non-tertiary education.

To substantiate our claims, we utilized a revised dataset of gross enrollment ratios and education spending at the state level. Our quantitative tests offer some evidence that state tax revenues and education spending stagnated in the mid-1970s, subsequently affecting enrollments. The most affected states were the more industrialized ones in the southern and southeastern regions of the country.

To make things worse, a reform enacted in 1971 extended compulsory education from fourth to eighth grade and integrated academic and professional education at the secondary level. Consequently, precisely when states needed additional resources, their fiscal capacity weakened.

An industrial and macroeconomic issue underlies the relative impoverishment of subnational governments. The autocratic 1967 Constitution allowed federal intervention in subnational tax policies. During the Brazilian military regime, the presidential chair rotated among top generals. After the oil shock, the newly chosen president Geisel represented a more moderate faction among the military, aiming for a gradual political opening. However, this project could not withstand a standard adjustment to the shock. Instead, the government launched the II National Development Plan (II PND), a massive push program to increase the production of energy, intermediate and capital goods.

Faced with the oil shock, this ambitious plan required external financing. To combat the shortage of dollars, the central government did not depreciate the currency or increase taxation levels. Instead, the chosen policy was to stimulate exports through tax exemptions and incentives. These policies decreased the revenues of state governments, the primary funders of non-tertiary education. The richer states were particularly affected because they exported more. In other words, social policies such as education footed part of the bill for the big push program after the international crisis.

As mentioned earlier, the literature offers substantial evidence that mass education policies are linked to nation-building objectives of autocracies. However, our study draws attention to other variables that might influence the decisions of different types of dictatorships under varying institutional and macroeconomic contexts - such as levels of financial centralization, domestic politics, and the international macroeconomic environment.

In my ongoing research (a draft version of which was presented at the last APSA Annual Meeting), I am working to identify why the military dictatorship in Brazil prioritized the tertiary

education system. Some scholars suggest that this choice was driven by the need to address issues of political order in universities, which were considered strongholds of leftist movements. However, a more comparative approach seems beneficial. In Brazil, the dictatorship's response involved a substantial administrative reform and a significant expansion of enrollments in tertiary education. These measures diverged markedly from the approaches taken by governments in other autocratic regimes, such as Chile and South Korea. In Chile, the autocratic government reduced funding to the higher education system, while the South Korean dictatorship prioritized primary and secondary levels. The literature on different types of dictatorships may provide insights into these issues.

Thomas's website is <https://sites.google.com/site/kangthomas>

## Recent Articles from the Section

Bass, S.A. (March/April 2023). "Redesigning College for Student Success: Holistic Education, Inclusive Personalized Support, and Responsive Initiatives for a Digitally Immersed, Stressed, and Diverse Student Body." *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 55, (3), 4-13.

Borwein, Sophie, James Farney, Iryna Khovrenkov, and Linda A. White (2023). "Not Hidden but Not Visible: Government Funding of Independent Schools in Canada." Research Note. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne De Science Politique* 56, 3: 698-714.

Carvalho, Shelby, and Sarah Dryden-Peterson (2024). "The Political Economy of Refugees: How responsibility shapes the politics of education." *World Development*.

Hodge, E. M., Rosenberg, J. M., & López, F. A. (2023). "'We Don't Teach Critical Race Theory Here': A Sentiment Analysis of K-12 School and District Social Media Statements." *Peabody Journal of Education*.

Kraus, Neil. (2023). "Mythical Labor Markets and Demographic Crises of the Education Reform Movement" [Review of the book *The Agile College: How Institutions Successfully Navigate Demographic Changes* by N. D. Grawe.] *Academe*.

Reikosky, Nora (2023). "Pipeline Philanthropy: Understanding Philanthropic Corporate Action in Education During the COVID-19 Era and Beyond." *Educational Policy*.

## Recent Books from the Section

Kraus, Neil (2023). *The Fantasy Economy: Neoliberalism, Inequality, and the Education Reform Movement*. Temple University Press.

Portz, John (2023). *Educational Accountability and American Federalism*. Routledge.

## Recent Awards in the Section

**Sarah James** (Gonzaga) received APSA's Leonard D. White Award for the best dissertation in the field of public administration. The title is "When is Hindsight 20/20? The Politics of Acknowledging and Revising Failed Policies."

**Agustina S. Paglayan** (UCSD) received APSA's Neinz I. Eulau Award for the best article published in *APSR*. The title is "Education or Indoctrination? The Violent Origins of Public School Systems in an Era of State-Building."