Racial Inequality in Democratic Accountability: Evidence from California School Board Elections

Patrick Flavin
Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science
Baylor University
One Bear Place #97276
Waco, TX 76798
(254) 710-7418
Patrick_J_Flavin@baylor.edu

Michael T. Hartney
Assistant Professor
Department of Politics
Lake Forest College
555 N. Sheridan Road
Lake Forest, IL 60045
(561) 644-2523
hartney@lakeforest.edu

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Abstract

Democratic accountability might exacerbate existing societal inequalities if the outcomes for some groups of citizens are prioritized over others when voters evaluate their government’s performance. This paper investigates the possibility of racial inequality in democratic accountability using evidence from school board elections in California for 2004-2013. We find evidence that voters reward or punish incumbent board members based on learning outcomes for white students in their district while, in contrast, outcomes for African American and Hispanic students receive comparatively little attention at election time. We then complement these observational findings with a list experiment embedded in an original survey of California school board members and find that approximately 40% of board incumbents detect no electoral pressure to address the racial achievement gap in their district. These findings contribute to theoretical debates in several scholarly literatures including retrospective voting, racial inequality in political influence, intergovernmental policymaking, and education politics.

Keywords: racial inequality, education achievement gap, democratic accountability, local elections, retrospective voting, No Child Left Behind, performance federalism
To encourage efficient and effective government performance, democratic accountability requires citizens to monitor conditions during elected officials’ terms in office and reward or punish them accordingly at the ballot box (Downs 1957; Key 1966; Fiorina 1981; Ferejohn 1986). For example, a large literature finds that the reelection fortunes of incumbent presidents and state governors hinge on how well or poorly the economy performs during their tenure in office (Fair 1978; Lewis-Beck and Rice 1984; Erikson 1989; Atkeson and Partin 1995; Svoboda 1995; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Cohen and King 2004). Beyond economic factors, citizens also appear to hold city council members accountable based on general perceptions of government performance (Oliver and Ha 2007), mayors accountable for city crime rates (Arnold and Carnes 2012), and school board members accountable for student achievement (Berry and Howell 2007) during their terms in office. In sum, there is abundant empirical evidence that voters generally hold elected officials accountable for aggregated measures of government performance.

One important and, to date, overlooked component of democratic accountability is the extent to which it might exacerbate existing societal inequalities if the outcomes for some groups of citizens are prioritized over others when voters evaluate their government’s performance. For example, if outcomes for white and racial minority citizens differ, are incumbent officeholders more likely to be punished at the ballot box for substandard outcomes among whites than for substandard outcomes among racial minorities? This paper investigates the possibility of racial inequality in democratic accountability using evidence from school board elections in California. Non-partisan single-purpose school board elections provide an ideal arena to examine this possibility because voters have a very visible criterion upon which board member performance can be judged: student academic achievement in the district. Analyzing over 1,500 school board
elections for 2004-2013, we find evidence that voters reward or punish incumbent board members based on how well or poorly white students are faring in their district while racial minority students receive comparatively little attention. To complement our observational analysis of school board election outcomes, we also employ a list experiment embedded in an original survey of California school board members. The survey experiment reveals that approximately 40% of school board members in our sample report that their constituents do not hold them accountable at election time for addressing the racial achievement gap. It is therefore not surprising that when these same school board members were subsequently asked to rank the urgency of five issues facing their school district – (1) budget/finance, (2) teacher quality, (3) student learning across the board (4) the racial achievement gap, (5) implementing Common Core Standards – board members ranked “closing achievement gaps” as the least urgent item. Moreover, we show that board member concern about improving the performance of racial minority students relative to whites is unrelated to the size and significance of the actual achievement gap in a board member’s district. Taken together, these findings suggest that the stubborn persistence of the racial education achievement gap may, at least in part, be rooted in the lack of electoral pressure exerted on public officials.

**Contributions**

This study contributes to several literatures in American politics including: (1) retrospective voting, (2) political inequality, (3) intergovernmental policymaking, and (4) education politics. First, the general theory of retrospective voting is premised on the expectation that voters are able to match a specific electoral office with a relevant performance outcome and then reward or punish incumbent officeholders accordingly at the ballot box (Downs 1957; Key
1966; Fiorina 1981; Ferejohn 1986). However, this perspective tends to treat “outcomes” as being uniform across the population (i.e. unemployment is high or low for all citizens) when, in fact, conditions during an incumbent’s term in office may have improved for some demographic groups but worsened for others. When outcomes are not uniform across the population, then citizens might devote greater attention to, and hold elected officials more accountable for, the outcomes for certain groups as opposed to others. Therefore, it is possible that retrospective voting might exacerbate existing inequalities in society if groups that tend to fare poorly already also receive the least attention from voters when deciding whom to cast their ballot for at election time. Our study investigates whether this pattern occurs when voters consider the performance of incumbent school board members as it relates to student achievement outcomes in their school district of residence.

Second, this research is broadly consequential for our understanding of unequal political influence in the United States. A growing number of studies reveal significant political inequality along racial lines (Griffin and Flavin 2007; Griffin and Newman 2008), but fewer studies have attempted to identify the roots of these inequalities. Our investigation of racial inequality in democratic accountability (i.e. whether voters hold elected officials equally accountable for the performance of both white and racial minority students) provides one possible explanation for the persistence of the racial achievement gap in education; namely, the lack of any significant political pressure on incumbent officials for failing to boost racial minority student achievement.¹ By providing evidence that democratic accountability in local education politics

¹ As evidence of this at the policymaking level, previous research (Hartney and Flavin 2014) finds that state elected officials enact dramatic teacher quality reforms when white students are performing poorly, but there is no comparative response when African American students are performing poorly.
exhibits racial bias we thus highlight one overlooked reason why political inequality between whites and racial minorities persists: unequal educational outcomes. Because schools are expected to equip citizens with the tools and motivation necessary to participate in American democracy (Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996; Gutmann 1999; Campbell 2006; Levinson 2012), the persisting education achievement gap between white and racial minority students that is exacerbated by voter inattention to the needs of struggling racial minority students can serve to perpetuate and even exacerbate existing inequalities in rates of political participation (Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 2003) and, by extension, inequalities in political influence (Griffin and Newman 2008). In sum, we provide some of the first empirical evidence that highlights the reciprocal relationship between educational inequality (along racial lines) and political inequality.2

Third, evidence that local electorates largely ignore (or outright dismiss) information about the performance of racial minority students at the ballot box would seem to undermine much of the logic of accountability under the federal No Child Left Behind law. This fact is, we think, applicable to scholars’ efforts to understand the role of “performance federalism” in intergovernmental policymaking more generally (Kogan, Lavertu, and Peskowitz 2014).

Consider that prominent theories of American federalism emphasize the distinct advantage the federal government holds (over sub-national governments) in “redistributive” policymaking

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2 As Mettler and Soss (2004, 56) note, “Studies of political behavior rarely mention government policy as an important factor influencing observed outcomes. And policy studies that focus on social and economic outcomes say almost nothing about how education policies affect the political process. In the overlooked space between these subfields, one finds the crucial question of how education policies create, sustain, and challenge political inequalities...”
(Peterson 1981; Peterson and Wong 1986). Not surprisingly, the most significant efforts to address educational equity have originated at the federal, rather than sub-national levels of government, despite the fact that school governance is traditionally a local affair in the United States (Wirt and Kirst 1997). Yet, scholars have documented an array of challenges that arise when federal policy reforms must be implemented by local political authorities who do not necessarily share the same political or policy objectives (Pressman and Wildvasky 1984; Manna 2006, 2011). Since both research and practice suggest that states and localities will rarely take the lead in enacting redistributive policies aimed at ameliorating societal inequalities (Peterson 1981), federal political authorities should be aware of the limitations of using performance management reforms that emphasize accountability through transparency to solve such principal-agent dilemmas in intergovernmental policymaking. The implicit assumption of performance management reform is that “external accountability of the government to the public changes accountability because the public now has greater information available on the level of performance of the government…” (Moynihan 2008, 35). However, evidence that voters are selective in in their use of only certain aspects of performance information is significant for understanding how much (or little) leverage federal authorities can gain over redistributive

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3 Indeed, President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act and President Obama’s Race to the Top initiative have leveraged variants of fiscal federalism as a strategy to compel (in the former case) or entice (in the latter) states to enact a variety of reform policies aimed at reducing the education achievement gap – reforms which prior research shows have little promise of receiving attention on the sole basis of a state’s internal political environment (Hartney and Flavin 2014).
policymaking when they rely on performance measurement transparency to improve the fidelity of implementation at lower levels of government.⁴

Fourth, recognition by political scientists that public schools are “open systems” that respond to the environmental demands of democratic politics has provoked a longstanding and ongoing debate about whether public schools should be organized primarily by “politics” or “markets” (Chubb and Moe 1988, 1990; Smith and Meier 1994; Henig 1995; Meier, Polinard, and Wrinkle 2000). Evidence that democratic accountability in school board elections is driven by white, but not racial minority student well-being contributes to this larger debate over politics and markets in the education politics research literature. After all, skeptics of market-based approaches to schooling have long invoked concerns about equity; namely, that school choice threatens to exacerbate racial segregation, and, in turn, weaken equal educational opportunities (Henig 1995; Hochschild and Scovronick 2003; Orfield and Frankenberg 2012). Although we do not seek to adjudicate those claims here, we simply note that our findings demonstrate that democratic control of schools can also enable and sustain serious inequalities when voters are not concerned enough about racial minority student performance to hold their elected officials responsible for it.

In summary, by examining whether citizens are more likely to hold elected officials accountable for the performance of white students as compared to African American or Hispanic

⁴ As Kogan, Lavertu, and Peskowitz (Forthcoming) note, “Researchers have examined extensively how such ‘performance management’ reforms are transforming public administration, but little research has focused on the unintended political implications, electoral impacts, and distributional consequences of these reforms.”
students, we contribute to debates in the literatures on retrospective voting, racial inequality in political influence, intergovernmental policymaking, and education politics.

**Evaluating Racial Inequality in Democratic Accountability Using School Board Elections**

Public education represents the largest investment in social mobility and equal opportunity in the United States. However, pitted against this democratic ideal of universal public schooling operating as American society’s “great equalizer” is a longstanding body of research documenting significant disparities in the high school graduation rates and standardized test scores of racial minority students when compared with white students (Coleman 1966; Rivkin 1995; Jencks and Phillips 1998; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2003; Neal 2006; Heckman and LaFontaine 2010). This racial “achievement gap” in education directly undermines the egalitarian role that public schools are expected to play in American social and political culture.

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5 “The idea that education, rather than explicit redistribution, is the key to fostering opportunity and equality remains a touchstone of American thinking” note the authors of a recent report commissioned by the American Political Science Association Taskforce on Inequality and American Democracy (Hacker, Mettler, Pinderhughes, and Skocpol 2005, 170). Equal access to quality public education, however, goes far beyond promoting economic mobility for individuals. Schools also serve important collective aims by cultivating norms of civic and political engagement among youth, which in turn influence the quality (and equality) of American democracy (Gutmann 1999; McDonnell, Timpane, and Benjamin 2000).

6 In the nineteenth century, Horace Mann (1848) famously referred to universally accessible common schools as “the great equalizer.” Hochschild and Scovronick (2000, 209) conceive of public education as, “America’s answer to the European social welfare state…and to demands for the abolition of structures of immobility based on race, class, or gender.”
First and foremost, racial disparities in education outcomes translate directly into social inequalities later in life including future earnings, employment status, and incarceration rates (Lochner and Moretti 2004; Heckman and Masterov 2007; Fryer 2013). Moreover, given the special role that schools play in equipping citizens with the tools and motivation necessary to participate in American democracy, racial disparities in education likely perpetuate and even exacerbate existing inequalities in rates of political participation for future generations (Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 2003).

For over forty years – at least since James Coleman (1966) penned his widely influential *Equality of Educational Opportunity* report – social scientists have debated both the dynamics that perpetuate the achievement gap and the policy solutions most likely to eliminate it (Shen and

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7 Rouse (2007) finds that high school graduates earn approximately $260,000 more in lifetime earnings than non-graduates. Notably, earnings related “returns to schooling” are equally distributed across racial and ethnic groups (Barrow and Rouse, 2005). Returns to schooling appear to be especially advantageous to African Americans in reducing some forms of social inequality, however. For example, African American students (but not whites) who complete high school are significantly less likely (3.4 percentage points) to be incarcerated later in life (Lochner and Moretti, 2004).

8 To mention just one prominent example: disparities in educational attainment have been shown to explain almost the entire gap in political participation between African Americans and whites (Bobo and Gilliam, 1990; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995). In other words, when differences in educational attainment are taken into account, African Americans are just as likely to participate in politics as white citizens.
After decades of inaction by state and local political authorities, in 2002 the federal government took unprecedented steps to address the achievement gap when it enacted the bipartisan No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law. Specifically, NCLB’s “theory of action” was based on holding local governments accountable by measuring and making transparent student academic achievement outcomes with the requirement that information on racial student

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9 Apart from a few notable exceptions (Hochschild 1984; Meier, Stewart, and England 1989; Meier and Stewart 1991; Hochschild and Scovronick 2003; Meier and Rutherford 2014), political scientists have paid little attention to the interplay between educational, racial, and political inequality. The fact that students of American politics have had little to say about the reciprocal relationship between educational and political inequality is particularly surprising given the increased attention national policymakers have given to the racial achievement gap in federal education policymaking (Rhodes 2011, 2012).

10 As Rhodes (2011, 529) notes, “In the absence of vigorous federal oversight, state implementation of the IASA [Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994 and NCLB’s precursor] was slow and uneven…Rather than hold all schools and students to the same high standards, many states established different, usually less rigorous, accountability systems for schools serving concentrations of disadvantaged students. This development dashed the hopes of CROSAs [Civil Rights Organizations for Accountability and Standards] who had anticipated that the IASA would improve outcomes for disadvantaged students. Indeed, the experience reconfirmed the CROSAs’ long-held view that states and localities would not work to raise the achievement of disadvantaged students unless the federal government took a more muscular role.”

11 NCLB explicitly lists holding state education agencies accountable for “closing…the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students” among its main goals (Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Section 1001(3)). Indeed, Education Secretary Rod Paige said during the first year of NCLB’s implementation, “I could make the case that the whole $22 billion in [NCLB] is about closing the achievement gap” (Paige 2002).
subgroup performance be made available to parents and the public to “help advance the law’s equity objectives” (Manna 2006, 32).

Although state governments had previously publicized student test score results, many states were notorious for hiding racial achievement gaps by reporting only the aggregate performance of all students (thus obscuring performance disparities between whites and Hispanic and African American students). As Hess and Petrilli (2006, 23) explain, “[NCLB] is premised on the notion that local education politics are fundamentally broken, and that only strong, external pressure on school systems … will produce a political dynamic that leads to school improvement.” This is achieved, they explain, through NCLB’s “signature innovation … that states hold schools accountable not just for the overall performance of their students but also for the performance of individual subgroups: ethnic and racial groups” (Hess and Petrill 2006, 29). By making achievement gaps transparent to parents and the general public, NCLB is intended to put external pressure (including electoral pressure) on local political authorities by arming citizens with key information about inequities in the performance of their local schools. In short, local elected officials were expected to face greater political pressure under NCLB to raise the performance of all student subgroups (including racial minorities) as voters received more detailed performance information that could be used to sanction or reward school boards at election time. However, even after publicizing this newly available student performance.

12 Here the authors of NCLB were echoing concerns voiced nearly twenty years ago by Meier, Stewart, & England (1989, 148-149), in their seminal study of “second generation [racial] discrimination” in schooling: “We are skeptical… that internal reform will occur without external pressure. The primary source of external pressure on a school system comes from the political system…”
information under NCLB, it is still possible that voters privilege (or disregard) the achievement of some groups of students compared to others.\textsuperscript{13}

**Data and Empirical Strategy**

To test for the existence of racial inequality in democratic accountability, we examine the electoral performance of incumbent California school board members seeking re-election between 2004 and 2013. The vast majority of California school districts elect (as opposed to appoint) board members. Board members serve for terms of four years\textsuperscript{14} and most districts stagger board members’ terms so that at least some seats are contested every two years. Boards are comprised of three, five, or seven members and most (though not all) elections take place during November.\textsuperscript{15} A majority of board elections are held “on-cycle” (i.e. in even-years with other federal or state general elections), though a non-trivial number are held in November of odd-

\textsuperscript{13} For evidence that voters tend to reward or sanction incumbent school board members based on aggregated student outcomes (i.e. non-group specific performance) see Berry and Howell (2007), Joanis (2013), and Holbein (Forthcoming). Similarly, Chingos, Henderson, and West (2012) demonstrate that public accountability systems, like school report cards, can have a causal effect on citizens’ perceptions of school quality.

\textsuperscript{14} Although there are no formal state-imposed term limits, local districts may adopt term limits. While term limits do not appear to have been widely adopted, there is no central data mechanism for tracking term limit policies across the state’s nearly 900 districts.

\textsuperscript{15} Because student achievement data is made available to the public in late August or early September, we restrict our analysis to school board elections held in November (when fully 95% of school board elections in California occur).
numbered years. Although incumbents tend to perform well in California school board elections (approximately 75% of incumbents who seek another term win re-election), there is more than enough variation in incumbent performance across the state’s nearly 900 school districts to conduct a meaningful analysis of patterns in retrospective voting. Indeed, California is an ideal setting to assess whether voters hold elected officials accountable differently based on racial student group academic achievement because the state’s elementary and secondary student population is racially diverse and the state’s Department of Education has historically gone to great lengths to publicize student performance results to its citizens.

Consistent with the theoretical framework developed in the democratic accountability and retrospective voting literatures, our independent variables of interest are government performance measured as student academic achievement among white, African American, and Hispanic students in the school district. We use student achievement outcomes that are disaggregated by racial subgroup because we are interested in assessing whether the academic achievement of white students is a stronger predictor of the reelection fortunes of incumbent school board members compared to achievement among African American and/or Hispanic students. Specifically, to measure student achievement by racial subgroup, we tabulate (separately) the percentage of white, African American, and Hispanic students in the district who scored proficient on the English Language Arts and Math standardized exams required under the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) provisions of the 2002 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal education law.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{16}\) It is worth noting that all of the findings presented in this paper are robust to using the California Academic Performance Index (API) measure rather than proficiency rates under NCLB’s AYP provision.
When considering the use of AYP standardized exam proficiency data to measure student achievement (and, by extension, the performance of incumbent school board members), it is important to point out two aspects of the data. First, California strives to make this school performance information widely available to the public to allow voters to evaluate the quality of their schools and hold elected school leaders accountable for student learning outcomes. Specifically, data on overall student achievement and proficiency scores for different demographic groups in each school district is disseminated on the Department of Education’s website in late August or early September leading up to school board elections in November (roughly two months later).17 Second, California provides school district-level data on achievement for a particular student racial group only if that group has a minimum of 100 valid test scores in the district, so we have confidence that the student racial group measures meet minimum standards of statistical reliability. In practice, this also means that our statistical models will only include school districts where there are substantial numbers of all three student racial groups.

To evaluate whether racial inequality in democratic accountability occurs in these local school board elections, we estimate the following equation:

\[ Y_{idy} = \beta_0 + \text{Achievement}_{gdly} \beta_1 + \text{Competition}_{idy} \beta_3 + \mu_y + \epsilon_{tsy} \]

17 According to a 2013 national public opinion poll conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), one-third of parents report visiting state department of education websites to monitor the quality of their child’s school and nearly 70% visit the website of their local school district to make the same assessments. Moreover, well over half of parents said that in the past they have used reports from the state or school district that were mailed to their homes to help determine the quality of their kids’ education (Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research Poll: Parents' Attitudes on the Quality of Education in the United States, 2013).
where $Y_{idy}$ is an electoral performance outcome measure (e.g. vote share, victory or defeat) for incumbent $i$ in individual school district $d$ during election year $y$. $Achievement_{gdy}$ represents district-level measures of academic proficiency on state accountability exams for various student racial groups $g$ (White, African American, and Hispanic), $X_{cdy}$ is a vector of non-achievement related district-level covariates that may also influence incumbent candidate’s electoral performance, $Competition_{idy}$ captures the level of electoral competition facing incumbent $i$ in school district $d$ during a given electoral year $y$, and finally, $\mu_y$ account for individual year effects (2004-2013). Including year fixed effects allow us to account for events that might affect incumbent success in all districts uniformly in a given year. For all models, we report standard errors that are clustered by school district to account for the fact that school board incumbents nested within the same school district are not statistically independent from one another (Primo, Jacobsmeier, and Milyo 2007; Arceneaux and Nickerson 2009).\(^{18}\)

In all of our models, we also include a measure of the total number of candidates running in each contest with the expectation that incumbents will be less likely to get reelected and will earn a smaller share of the vote when there are more candidates in the race. In our models examining whether an incumbent is reelected (or not), we also include the number of board seats 18

\(^{18}\) All of the models that we present in this paper assess the electoral performance of individual incumbents as opposed to the aggregate performance of all incumbents (relative to all non-incumbents) within a given district during a particular year. However, we uncover substantively similar results if we instead change the unit of analysis to the electoral contest and instead model aggregate incumbent performance in a given district-year. In our view, focusing on the performance of individual incumbents makes interpretation more straightforward. Results of these aggregated (collapsed) estimations are available upon request.
up for election with the straightforward expectation that an incumbent is more likely to get reelected when there are more seats available. In addition, we include a series of covariates to account for other ways in which school districts are different from one another that might affect voters’ evaluations of incumbents running for reelection. These potential alternative explanations include the percentage of students in the district who are African American and Hispanic as well as the increase (or decrease) in teacher salaries over the previous school year. The racial demographic variables are included to account for the possibility that school board members may be less likely, in general, to get reelected in racially diverse school districts. The teacher salary variable is included to account for the powerful role that organized teacher union interests play in local elections such that board members may face more significant electoral opposition from organized interests if teacher salaries remained stagnant (Anzia 2011; Moe 2011; Hartney and Flavin 2011). By including these control variables, we are better able to isolate the extent to which incumbent school board members are rewarded or punished for student academic achievement in their districts after accounting for other factors (both within and outside the direct control of school board members) for which incumbents might also be judged.

19 Descriptive statistics for all variables included in the analysis are available in Table A-1 of the Appendix.

20 Our teacher compensation measure is drawn from the California Department of Education’s (CDE) Salary and Benefits Schedule for the Certificated Bargaining Unit (Form J-90). The specific measure that we use is the percent increase in the generosity of the district’s salary schedule during the year in which a school board incumbent is up for re-election relative over the generosity of the prior year’s salary schedule.
In general, we opt to report parsimonious models since – other than the well-documented political power of organized teacher interests – there is relatively little established theory in the existing literature on the electoral dynamics of school board contests (Howell 2005). Nonetheless, when we include additional district-level control variables for which we have unclear theoretical expectations (e.g., class size, poverty as measured by % of students who are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, spending, teacher certification credentials) we obtain nearly identical results to the more basic models we elect to present in the paper.

Analysis of California School Board Elections

We begin by modeling incumbent reelection (a binary measure) and vote share (a 0-100 continuous measure) as a function of proficiency rates on English and math exams for a school district’s white, African American, and Hispanic students as well as the covariates described above. The results of these estimations are reported in Table 1. Each student racial group’s proficiency measure is included separately in the model to allow them to “compete” for statistical influence on incumbent reelection/vote share. Looking first at Columns 1 and 2 with reelection as the dependent variable, we find that the coefficient for white student achievement is positive and statistically different from zero at conventional levels of significance (p<.05) in both models. Substantively, this indicates that, across districts, incumbents are less likely to get reelected as white student achievement rates decline. For English proficiency, an incumbent representing a district with white student achievement at the 25th percentile (i.e. low performing)

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21 As Howell (2005, 15) observed, “it is hardly an exaggeration to note that more is known about the operation of medieval merchant guilds than about the institutions [school boards] that govern contemporary school districts.”
is 5.8 percentage points less likely to win reelection compared to an incumbent representing a
district at the 75th percentile (i.e. high performing). For math proficiency, an incumbent in a
poorly performing district is 6.5 percentage points less likely to win reelection. By contrast, the
coefficient for Hispanic student achievement is statistically different from zero in only one of the
two models and the coefficient for African American student achievement is statistically
insignificant in both models. These results suggest that incumbent reelection fortunes are
strongly tied to white student achievement, less so to Hispanic student achievement, and
seemingly not at all to African American student achievement. However, as the bottom panels of
Table 1 indicate, while we can be confident that the coefficients for white and African American
students are statistically different from one another, we cannot be confident that the coefficients
for white and Hispanic students are statistically different.

As an additional, and arguably more fine-grained, measurement of incumbent electoral
success, we also model the share of the total vote (0-100%) earned by an incumbent board
member and report the results in Columns 3 and 4 of Table 1. For both English and math
proficiency, the coefficient for white students is positive and statistically different from zero,
indicating that incumbents earn a smaller share of the vote in districts where white student
achievement is low. Using the same comparison of districts at the 25th and 75th percentiles as

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22 Substantive effects are estimated using CLARIFY (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003) and holding all
other variables in the model at their mean value.

23 The p-values listed at the bottom of each table are from Wald tests that test whether the white and
African American and the white and Hispanic student proficiency coefficients are statistically different
from one another. A p-value of less than .05 allows us to reject the null hypothesis that the two
coefficients are statistically equivalent.
above, an incumbent earns 1.7 fewer percentage points of the vote share in a poorly performing district for English proficiency and 1.5 fewer percentage points in a poorly performing district for math proficiency. By contrast, neither of the coefficients for African American nor Hispanic student achievement are statistically different from zero, suggesting that incumbent vote share is unrelated to the academic performance of these two racial groups. In other words, incumbent school board members appear not to be rewarded (or punished) based on how well (or poorly) racial minority students perform in the district. Importantly, as the bottom panels of the table indicate, we can be confident in both models that the coefficient for white student achievement is statistically different from the coefficients for both African American and Hispanic student achievement. In short, democratic accountability appears alive and well for learning outcomes for white students while there is little evidence that incumbent school board members are electorally sanctioned for substandard learning outcomes for racial minority students.

[Table 1 about here]

One possible concern about the results reported in Table 1 is that, although California has a rather racially diverse student population, in many areas the student population remains racially segregated with some districts predominantly populated by white students and other districts.

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24 The results reported in Table 1 include school districts with both at-large elections and ward-based elections. We opt to use all possible elections to maximize the number of cases in the analysis and are confident that this is not biasing our results because student achievement rates are typically highly correlated across wards within a single school district. To confirm this assumption, we ran the same models reported in Table 1 and restricted the sample to only school districts that hold at-large elections and then (separately) to only school districts that hold ward elections and uncovered substantively identical results for both sets of models.
predominantly populated by racial minority students. Because of this reality, some districts have a very small proportion of African American and/or Hispanic students. In these districts, perhaps it is not surprising that white student achievement strongly predicts incumbent electoral success because that student group is a (sometimes overwhelmingly) numerical majority compared to racial minority students. To empirically evaluate if school board members’ reelection fortunes are almost exclusively tied to white student achievement even in districts where they are not the majority racial group, we run a set of models where the sample is constrained only to districts with less than 50% and less than 25% white students. If the results remain similar to those reported in Table 1, we can be confident that the findings are not simply a statistical artifact of white students being the numerical majority racial group in some school districts.

The results of these additional estimations are displayed in Table 2. We report only the three coefficients of interest (white, African American, and Hispanic student achievement), but all models include the full set of district control variables from Table 1. Looking at the results from these estimations, we find that the coefficient for white student achievement is not statistically different from zero for the reelection models when white students make up less than half of the population (Columns 1-4). However, in the estimations with vote share as the dependent variable (Columns 5-8), the coefficient for white student achievement remains positive and statistically different from zero when the sample is confined to districts where white students make up less than half and, rather strikingly, less than a quarter of the student population. By contrast, in none of the four vote share models are the coefficients for African American or Hispanic student achievement statistically different from zero. Moreover, the coefficient for white student achievement is statistically different from African American achievement in two of four models and different from Hispanic achievement in three of four
models. In summary, the results reported in Table 2 indicate that racial inequality in democratic accountability (as measured by incumbent vote share) occurs even in districts where white students make up a minority of the student population. Even though democratic theory and simple mathematics might lead us to expect otherwise, districts with large percentages of African American and/or Hispanic students appear no more likely to reward or punish incumbent school members based on racial minority student achievement in the district.

[Table 2 about here]

A second possible concern with the results reported in Table 1 is that the measures of white, African American, and Hispanic student achievement might correlate highly with one another across school districts. If so, including all three measures in a single regression equation might lead to inflated standard errors that would make it nearly impossible to statistically distinguish the three coefficients from one another. To probe this concern, we use the same model specification for Table 1 but run separate models with only white and African American student proficiency and (separately) only white and Hispanic student proficiency. One advantage of comparing only two racial groups in a model at a time is that it increases the number of districts we can include in the analysis (since we only require 100 valid test scores for two student racial groups instead of three). The results from these estimations are reported in Table 3. Looking first at the models that compare white and African American students (Columns 1-4), we find that in each model the coefficient for white student achievement is positive and statistically different from zero while the coefficient for African American student achievement is not. Moreover, in all four models, the coefficients for the two student racial groups are statistically different from one another. Turning to the models that compare white and Hispanic students (Columns 5-8), we again find that in each model the coefficient for white student
achievement is positive and statistically different from zero while the coefficient for Hispanic student achievement is not. As the bottom panel indicates, the coefficients for the two student racial groups are statistically different from one another in only one of the four models, but border on statistical significance for two others.

[Table 3 about here]

Taking stock of the results presented in this section as a whole, we uncover consistent evidence that the electoral fortunes of incumbent school board members are tied to the achievement of white students in their district such that incumbents that represent districts with substandard white student achievement are sanctioned at the ballot box. In contrast, we find that incumbent reelection fortunes bear, at best, an inconsistent relationship with the achievement of Hispanic students and no statistical relationship with the achievement of African American students. In short, voters appear to reward or punish incumbent officeholders based on how well or poorly white students are learning in their district while the learning outcomes for racial minority students receive comparatively little attention at election time.

**Do Elected Officials Perceive Racial Inequality in Democratic Accountability?**

To this point, we have shown that incumbent school board members are rewarded or sanctioned based upon the academic performance of white but not racial minority students in their district. Ultimately, however, we want to understand what the practical consequences of these findings are for how elected officials conduct themselves while in office. For example, do the patterns of voter apathy regarding minority citizens’ social outcomes signal feedback to elected officials that weaken or dilute the incentives for policymakers to prioritize the needs of racial minority constituents? To learn more about this possible dynamic, we conducted an
original survey of California school board members\textsuperscript{25} that includes several questions about their perceptions of the racial achievement gap and related electoral implications. Specifically, we are interested in documenting what amount of electoral pressure (if any) school board members feel to address the academic performance of racial minority students. Because there may be significant social desirability bias in asking board members to report how much their constituents care or do not care about racial minority students, we make use of a list experiment to estimate board member perceptions about constituent electoral concerns.

The setup of our list experiment is simple. First, the school board members were randomly divided into a treatment and a control group. Both groups received the same question and were shown response categories that differed only in the number (with the treatment group receiving one additional response item):

Q. School board elections give voters the opportunity to hold board members accountable for their in-office performance. Listed below are four [“five” for treatment group] criteria that voters may consider when deciding whether to support an incumbent school board member for re-election. I’d like you to tell me HOW MANY of these factors you believe are important to the

\textsuperscript{25} Our sampling frame includes all school board members who represent unified school districts in California. Unlike many states, California has many school districts that are solely responsible for high schools or elementary schools. In contrast, unified districts are much more common in other states. To make our sample as generalizable as possible and given the practical limitations of building an e-mail list of school board members in such a large state we made the decision to focus our sample on board members in unified districts only. In terms of response rate, we invited the 1,231 board members who had published e-mail addresses to participate in a short online survey (fielded in May 2015). We received 325 responses (for a 26% response rate), of which, 290 were suitable for use for our list experiment (board members who gained a seat to the board via appointment were not included in the experiment since the experiment asks about electoral pressures).
voters in your district. I don’t want to know which of these criteria you think that voters use to judge incumbents, just HOW MANY?

School board members assigned to the control group were presented with the following four criteria:

- Ensuring that students graduate prepared for college and career
- Promoting school safety and student discipline
- Maintaining adequate administrative staffing to oversee standardized testing
- Ensuring that sports teams are competitive and well-funded

School board members in the treatment group were shown these same four criteria with the additional fifth criterion placed in the third response position:

- Closing the achievement gap between white and racial minority students

Note that the experiment provides board members with a great deal of anonymity since they are only asked how many of the presented criteria factor into their constituents’ voting decisions which, in theory, reduces any disincentive for respondent board members to tell the truth about a sensitive topic like race. Moreover, because board members are randomly assigned to treatment and control categories, the two groups are identical on all observable and unobservable traits.\(^\text{26}\)

\(^{26}\) Table A-2 in the Appendix presents randomization checks and show, with one exception, there is strong balance between control and treatment groups. The one exception, the size of the racial achievement gap, might intuitively seem cause for concern. Fortunately, however, the differences are both substantively trivial and offsetting. Specifically, board members assigned to the treatment group represent districts where the achievement gap between white and African American students is two percentage points smaller than board members assigned to the control group. However, treatment group board members also
Therefore, any difference between the control and treatment groups in terms of the mean number of items they identify can be directly attributed to the one additional item presented to the treatment group. For our purposes, by taking one minus the difference in means we can arrive at a point estimate on the percentage of California school board members who do not feel electoral pressure to do something about closing the achievement gap between white and racial minority students in their district.

The results of the list experiment confirm our earlier takeaway from the observational analyses of a decade’s worth of California school board elections. The treatment group of board members listed an average of 4.18 criteria as important electoral concerns to their constituents whereas the control group listed 3.58 items as important (the difference between the two groups is statistically different from zero at p<.05). Substantively, that difference of .60 suggests that fully 40% (1 - .60) of school board incumbents do not report feeling any electoral pressure from their constituents to make progress on narrowing the racial achievement gap in student learning.27 The fact that such a sizable proportion elected officials detect little electoral pressure represent districts where the achievement gap between white and Hispanic students is one percentage point larger.

The 95% confidence interval shows the lower bound as 17% of school board members and the upper bound as 63% who report that voters in their community are not concerned with narrowing the racial achievement gap. Although this range is less than ideal due to the difficulties of amassing a large quantity of elected official respondents, we have also replicated this list experiment on a national sample of school board members and uncovered very similar point estimates. Specifically, nearly 50% of board members in our national sample report that the performance of racial minority students is not an issue that factors into their ability to win reelection.
to address the needs of their racial minority constituents raises several important questions about the link between democratic accountability, representation, and political equality. Although we are unable to offer a complete analysis of the likely consequences that occur when elected officials perceive little constituent pressure to address the needs of their racial minority constituents, the results from one of our other survey items is provoking. Near the end of the survey, we asked our sample of California school board members to rank the urgency of addressing five common education issues that are facing elected board members across the country. Specifically, we asked board members, “How urgent are the following issues facing your board and district right now?” Respondents were then asked to rank each issue’s relative urgency from the most urgent issue (ranked #1) to the least urgent issue (ranked #5) in the school district they represent. The issues they were asked to rank are: (1) Budget/finance, (2) Improving teacher quality, (3) Improving student learning across the board (4) Closing achievement gaps between racial subgroups of students, (5) and implementing Common Core Standards.

[Table 4 about here]

As Table 4 reports, school board members ranked “closing achievement gaps” among the lowest priorities facing their district. Just over 45% of board members ranked the achievement gap near the bottom of their priority list (either as their 4th or 5th priority). More troubling, perhaps, is the fact that board member concern about improving the performance of racial minority students relative to whites did not appear to be related to the actual magnitude of the racial achievement gap or the performance of minority students in a board member’s district. For example, board members who said the achievement gap is a high priority (those who said closing gaps was their 1st or 2nd priority) represent districts where 52% of African Americans were proficient on the state’s English exam. Comparatively, board members who ranked closing the
achievement gap as less urgent (those who said it ranked 3rd, 4th, or 5th) represent districts where a near identical 53% of African American students scored proficient in English. Similarly, the difference in the achievement gap between African American and White students in districts where board members ranked closing the gap as an urgent priority compared to districts where board members downplayed the issue’s urgency is less than 1%. That is, school board members representing districts with a large achievement gap between African American and White students were no more likely to rank closing the gap as a top priority.

**Discussion**

In this paper, we uncover evidence of racial inequality in democratic accountability by demonstrating that voters reward or punish incumbent school board members based on how well or poorly white students are faring in the district while, in contrast, the achievement of African American and Hispanic students receives little attention. Using a list experiment from a survey of California school board members, we also find that approximately 40% of school board incumbents report that their constituents do not hold them accountable for addressing the racial achievement gap at election time. Moreover, when asked to rank the importance of various issues facing their district, school board members select closing racial achievement gaps as the least urgent item and this selection is unrelated to the size and significance of the actual achievement gap in a member’s district. When considered together, these findings suggest that the persistence of the racial education achievement gap in American education may, in part, be tied to the lack of electoral pressure exerted on public officials.

This study contributes to important theoretical debates in several scholarly literatures including retrospective voting, political inequality, intergovernmental policymaking, and
education politics. Retrospective voting theory posits that citizens hold elected officials in
government accountable for their performance and visible outcomes while in office (Fiorina
1981). However, an important and overlooked component of retrospective voting is the extent to
which it may exacerbate existing inequalities if the outcomes for some groups are given greater
attention than others when voters make their decisions at the ballot box. Our finding that voters
in local school board elections disregard certain key information about incumbents’ job
performance while seizing on other information helps improve our understanding of “how
different institutional frameworks and the availability of information on incumbents’ job
performances contribute to, or detract from, retrospective voting” (Berry and Howell 2007, 857).
Moreover, our findings open the door for future researchers to investigate other ways in which
differential retrospective voting occurs by, for example, investigating whether the well
documented relationship between economic growth and vote share for incumbent presidents
(Fair 1978) is driven by the economic fortunes of some groups of citizens compared to others. In
doing so, scholars interested in retrospective voting and democratic accountability might begin to
wrestle with the sort of empirical realities documented by Harris-Lacewell and Albertson (2005,
662) who note that “between 1970 and 1996, the average income of the poorest fifth of Whites
rose by $351 [while] the average income of the poorest Blacks, which began as nearly half that
of the poorest Whites, declined by $838.” Simply put, when outcomes vary for different
demographic groups, unequal democratic accountability is a distinct possibility.

This research is also consequential for our understanding of political inequality. Clashing
against the longstanding belief that public schools can equip citizens with the tools and
motivation necessary to participate in American democracy is the distressing fact that the
persisting education achievement gap between white and racial minority students likely serves to
perpetuate and even exacerbate existing inequalities in rates of political participation (Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 2003). By providing evidence that there is racial inequality in democratic accountability for school board elections, our findings suggest that popular control of school governance may, in fact, serve to even further entrench existing racial inequalities in political influence (Griffin and Newman 2008). As Terry Moe (2000, 142) aptly notes: “This is one of the ironies of democracy: the schools have difficulty contributing to the quality of democratic government precisely because they are democratically controlled.” Because racial minority students tend to receive the least attention from voters at election time despite well documented racial disparities in student achievement, this paper casts doubt on the premise that popularly controlled public schools are capable of promoting greater equality in political participation and influence among future adult citizens.

In addition, one important policy tool in the No Child Left Behind law was to provide parents and voters with more detailed information about the performance of their local schools. This, in turn, was intended to spur school administrators to seek rapid improvement or risk being sanctioned at the ballot box at election time by dissatisfied voters. This accountability mechanism only works, however, if voters actually do hold underperforming incumbents accountable. Despite evidence from previous studies that suggests citizens are aware of and respond to information provided to them about local school quality (Chingos, Henderson, and West 2012; Holbein Forthcoming), our findings clearly suggest that some information is weighted more than others when voters use that information at election time. Given that reducing racial disparities in educational achievement was one of the primary objectives of NCLB, these results call into question whether disseminating achievement data that is disaggregated by student racial group is ultimately having its intended effect. More broadly, our findings call for
future research by advocates of “performance federalism” to delineate under what conditions and arrangements citizens are most effectively able to acquire and use the accountability information provided to them.

Finally, this paper has important implications for debates about how much or little control citizens should exert in the policymaking process for education and other public services. One of the fundamental reasons for having voters select leaders to oversee the provision of public goods is the belief that democratic control will promote greater accountability and, in doing so, enhance both efficiency and equity. However, whether this actually occurs or not in practice is an open question. Previous research on the racial education achievement gap finds that state governments enact sweeping reforms to enhance teacher quality in response to sagging performance outcomes among white students, but finds no corresponding response to sagging performance among racial minority students (Hartney and Flavin 2014). Our findings in this paper provide evidence that this lack of responsiveness among policymakers can be attributed to a breakdown in democratic accountability; namely, elected officials do not face sanctions from voters when they fail to deliver educational improvement among racial minority students. Lacking any electoral incentive for action, it is perhaps not surprising that local elected officials do not spend precious political capital enacting often controversial education reforms in response to substandard outcomes for racial minority students. Therefore, our study ultimately calls into question whether voter control of public school governance is a viable avenue to correcting the persisting racial inequalities in education that can have important and enduring effects on democratic citizenship and political equality.
References


Table 1: School Board Incumbent Reelection and Vote Share Linked Almost Exclusively to White (But Not Racial Minority) Student Achievement

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Unit of analysis is incumbent school board member running for reelection. Dependent variable is listed above each column. Cell entries are probit (Columns 1 and 2) and OLS regression (Columns 3 and 4) coefficients with standard errors clustered by school district reported beneath in brackets. * denotes p<.05 using a two-tailed test.
Table 2: Restricting Sample to Districts Where White Students are the Minority

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Unit of analysis is incumbent school board member running for reelection. Dependent variable is listed above each column. Cell entries are probit (Columns 1-4) and OLS regression (Columns 5-8) coefficients with standard errors clustered by school district reported beneath in brackets. Models include all district covariates from Table 1 and year effects. * denotes p<.05 using a two-tailed test.
Table 3: Comparing Only Two Student Racial Groups at a Time

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</tbody>
</table>

Unit of analysis is incumbent school board member running for reelection. Dependent variable is listed above each column. Cell entries are probit (Columns 1, 2, 5, and 6) and OLS regression (Columns 3, 4, 7, and 8) coefficients with standard errors clustered by school district reported beneath in brackets. Models include all district covariates from Table 1 and year effects. * denotes p<.05 using a two-tailed test.
Table 4: Distribution of School Board Members’ Priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Budget/Funding</th>
<th>Teacher Quality</th>
<th>Learning Gains</th>
<th>Achievement Gaps</th>
<th>Implementing Common Core</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cell entries are the percentage of California school board members who rank the issue/problem listed at the top of the column in a given priority position from most important (1<sup>st</sup>) to least important (5<sup>th</sup>).
Online Appendix

Table A-1: Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent Reelected?</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent Vote Share</td>
<td>27.72</td>
<td>11.82</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>90.57</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of White Students Proficient in English</td>
<td>62.19</td>
<td>13.70</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of African American Students Proficient in English</td>
<td>44.49</td>
<td>14.32</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Hispanic Students Proficient in English</td>
<td>40.60</td>
<td>12.57</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of White Students Proficient in Math</td>
<td>61.15</td>
<td>13.05</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of African American Students Proficient in Math</td>
<td>41.87</td>
<td>13.71</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Hispanic Students Proficient in Math</td>
<td>44.15</td>
<td>11.29</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Candidates Running</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Seats Up for Election</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% African American Students in District</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Hispanic Students in District</td>
<td>37.52</td>
<td>29.15</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Salary Increase</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>10.23</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Descriptive statistics for the data used to estimate the models in Columns 1 and 3 of Table 1. N = 2,767.

Data sources:

(1) California Elections Data Archive ([http://www.csus.edu/ISR/reports/california_elections/](http://www.csus.edu/ISR/reports/california_elections/))
(2) California Department of Education School and District Data ([http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/Pages/faq-data.aspx](http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/Pages/faq-data.aspx))
Table A-2: Randomization Check for School Board Member List Experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Treatment Condition</th>
<th>Baseline Condition</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Level Characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat (7-point scale)</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberalism (5-point scale)</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income (7-point scale)</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in office</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Member has 4-year degree</td>
<td>85.1</td>
<td>88.1</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BM is a teacher</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BM has school-aged children</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BM is white</td>
<td>82.6</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years since BM’s last election</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement gap “urgent”</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District Level Characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off cycle election</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-Hispanic gap</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-Black gap</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent free lunch</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Hispanic</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent African-American</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil rights groups “active”</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** This table reports the results of balance tests for a number of individual and school district-level characteristics. The last column reports the p-value for the associated difference in means tests between board members (or board members’ districts) that were either assigned to the baseline or treatment conditions of the list experiment.