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## Racial Composition of School District on School Leaders' Responses to State Takeover: A Field Experiment on the Application of Michigan's Emergency Manager Law

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Doi:10.5901/jesr.2017.v7n2p31

### Abstract

*Michigan's Public Act 436, commonly referred to as the Emergency Manager Law, has provided for state installed emergency managers to oversee financially distressed municipalities as well as school districts. Given that a number of Michigan school districts, suburban, rural, and urban, have been operating at a deficit for several years and yet only the financial status of majority Black school districts (Detroit, Highland Park, Muskegon Heights) have triggered this takeover law, this field experiment investigated the effect of school district's racial composition on both the level of support for state-installed emergency managers in districts and the level of support for politically material resistance to the application of that remedy. Implications regarding policy and critical policy research are forwarded in light of the results.*

**Keywords:** urban school reform, emergency management, educational policy, racism

### 1. Introduction

State takeovers in U.S. school districts can be triggered for a number of reasons, from academic problems to financial distress (Institute on Education Law and Policy, n.d.). With respect to financial distress, more and more states, from California to New Jersey, have districts that are experiencing fiscal insolvency, placing these districts in jeopardy of state intervention. And in this instance, some states, like Michigan, have arguably more extreme provisions where state-appointed emergency managers oversee the entire operations of a district, from academic to fiscal operations (Arsen & Mason, 2013; Lu, 2014). That being the case, school takeovers can become problematic when they are seen by citizens as eroding local school governance, and particularly with respect to urban school districts where state intervention policy seemingly collides with the equal protection clause (Oluwole & Green, 2009).

This statewide field experiment investigates the effect of race, that is, the racial composition of a school district, on support for and political mobilization against a specific totalizing variant of state takeover, i.e., emergency management. Though field experiments note the salience of race on labor market discrimination (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Pager, Western, & Bonikowski, 2009), rental housing discrimination (Ahmed & Hammarstedt, 2008; Carpusor & Loges, 2006; Hanson & Hawley, 2011), healthcare discrimination by care providers (Burgess et al., 2008; Schulman et al., 1999), and even politicians' likelihood of responding to constituencies (Butler & Broockman, 2011), to date, no experimental studies have measured the effects of race of school district with respect to the support for or political resistance to state-installed emergency management in financially distressed school districts.

As Pager and Shepherd's (2008) exhaustive review of racial discrimination studies in employment, housing, credit, and consumer markets argued, "...the problem of racial discrimination remains an important factor in shaping contemporary patterns of social and economic inequality" (p. 20). And it has often been through the use of audit studies (field experiments on racial discrimination) that racially discriminatory practices have been identified and policy critique and remedies advanced.

And on that note, the position of this research fully recognizes that "[t]he technical choices made in investigating politically charged phenomena bear addressing" (Vang, 2015, p. 202), and that our techniques and accompanying rubrics of (theoretical) precision, are arguably as contested as the phenomena we attempt to tame and dissect. There is

no such thing as a “perfect” experiment or a “perfect” study. Far from sanitized perfection, which privileges the production and dissemination of certain kinds of investigations that reify epistemological normativity, this exploratory effort recognizes that the role of the public researcher is to trouble the bounds of political and technical imagination to tackle controversial issues, and to, in the process, respect the complexity and contradictions that result from such efforts. Toward that end, this investigation was continuously informed by the words of Newman (2002), who argued for the value of research that positions itself at the frontline in order to tackle “questions that matter to a broader audience” rather than simply retreat because “we cannot come up with perfect answers” (p. 129).

In that vein, the objective of this experimental field study was to investigate the salience of racial composition of school district on both the level of agreement/disagreement with state administration of a particular takeover remedy, i.e., emergency management, and the likelihood of political mobilization against this takeover condition in financially distressed school districts given the racial composition of the prospective takeover district in Michigan. Rather than recruiting paid volunteers to participate in laboratory conditions or undergraduate students enrolled in psychology courses, this study recruited from a very specific subset of the electorate, active school principals. The decision to recruit principals as experimental subjects rest on their knowledge of the realities of education reform politics in Michigan and on their ability to act politically not only as individual members of the polity but also collectively as members of their respective professional education organizations. Just as analyses of education policy formulation and policy implementation are important, so too are investigations of how racially charged policy instruments and their application are understood and politically processed by field actors.

## 2. Context of the Study

The state of Michigan was chosen for a very specific reason. Arsen and Mason’s (2013) preliminary analysis of state-imposed emergency management in Detroit Public Schools (DPS) concluded that simply installing an emergency manager to fix and hold the school district accountable for fiscal insolvency was not only not enough, but that on the contrary, doing so further eroded “most standards of district accountability” (Arsen & Mason, 2013, p. 250). Indeed, documented accounts of the failure to achieve fiscal solvency (Campbell, 2012) as well as improve student achievement under the years of state-imposed emergency management (Pedroni, 2013) draw into serious question the performance of this state mechanism [state-imposed emergency management] as a tool of technical, fiscal, and democratic accountability (Arsen & Mason, 2013).

Despite all this, however, what is particularly arresting and provoked this investigation is the underexamined role of district’s racial composition with respect to the support of state takeover policy while using an experimental method of investigation, and this study addresses the need to empirically disentangle the effects of race on support for implementation of such a problematic policy tool (state emergency management). While the Michigan Department of Education lists some 55 majority white districts as financially distressed, none have triggered state emergency management (McGuire & Lenhard, 2015). On the other hand, only three school districts have state-imposed emergency managers, and all three are exclusively located in majority Black communities (Detroit Public Schools, Highland Park, Muskegon Heights). Moreover, Muskegon Heights, again under a state-imposed Emergency Manager, saw its entire school system transferred to a charter company (Higgins, 2012).

Given the seemingly uneven application of emergency management, a former Michigan State Board of Education member charged that emergency management of schools (again, a particularly totalizing variant of state school takeovers) was racially applied and thus, in practice, discriminated against Black school districts (McGuire & Lenhard, 2015). Immediately following are sections reviewing the various iterations of Michigan’s takeover legislation as applied to Detroit Public Schools (DPS) and the theorizing of antiblackness in educational policy respectively.

## 3. Historic-Legal Adaptations

For some time now, Detroit Public Schools (DPS) has served as the “proving grounds” for experiments on state regulation of Black municipal and/or other local governing bodies. Signed into law by former Governor Engler in 1999, Public Act 10 ushered in the first iteration of gubernatorial intervention. This “school takeover bill” effectively dissolved Detroit’s elected school board and created a seven-member reform board consisting of six mayoral appointees and the state superintendent of public instruction. The reform board was tasked with selecting a chief executive officer (CEO) whose charge it was to oversee the operations of the district (Meinecke & Adamany, 2001). What has not been widely disseminated, both in establishment scholarship and in the mainstream media, is the rationale proffered for this first state

takeover, which had little to do with debt or fiscal malfeasance, but in actuality was a response to the district being flush with bond money and yet perceived as not spending quickly enough on infrastructure improvements (See OIG report commissioned by Robert Bobb). Despite immediate challenges ("School Reform Stalled," 1999), the state reform board appointed Kenneth Burnley as the new schools chief of DPS (Nichols & Harmon, 2000).

Important to note is that Public Act 10 established a five year check to assess the structural and programmatic changes implemented by the reform legislation, providing Detroit voters the choice to return to an elected school board or to continue with the reform board and CEO (Meinecke & Adamany, 2001). Following a state-installed Burnley tenure that saw the school budget deficit balloon to \$198 million, more layoffs, more school closures, and more students leaving DPS (MacDonald, 2004), Detroit citizens returned to the polls in November of 2005 to choose "who they want[ed] at the helm of their struggling school district as it maneuvers through some of the toughest challenges in its history" (MacDonald, 2005, p. 1D).

This stay was interrupted just a few years later, when in 2009, then Governor Granholm invoked Public Act 72 of 1990, known as the Local Government Fiscal Responsibility Act (LGFRA). This pre-existing statute was used to appoint Broad Academy alumnus Robert Bobb, the first of four successive financial emergency managers (EM), to take control of all DPS financial operations (Mrozowski, 2009).

Under Public Act 72, "State officials are authorized to intervene in units of local government that experience serious financial problems, or financial emergencies" ([www.michigan.gov/documents/treasury/FiscalEmerg\\_271926\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/treasury/FiscalEmerg_271926_7.pdf)). And in an April 2010 editorial in *The Detroit News*, Governor Granholm argued:

*Emergency Financial Manager Robert Bobb is pursuing dramatic reforms to repair the district's finances and academics, for the two are inextricably bound. But student learning cannot improve as long as the adults who benefit from the system are fighting to preserve the status quo. (p. A15)*

And yet again, what has rarely been reported by establishment scholarship and media analyzing the string of takeovers is that the very debt Granholm used to trigger the 2009 re-taking of DPS was none other than the roughly \$200 million debt that the state itself had incurred and then left Detroiters in 2005 (McGuire & Lenhard, 2015).

And so similar to earlier state-driven reforms, Granholm's educational management of DPS met legal challenges when the Detroit Board of Education brought suit against appointed EM Bobb for violating "state law by not consulting members on finances and ordering academic reforms on his own" (Chambers, 2011, p. A15). Indeed, in *Adams v. Bobb* (2010), Wayne County Third Circuit Court Judge Wendy Baxter ruled in favor of the Detroit Board of Education and cited Bobb's systemic violation of state law in the following *Opinion*:

*Robert Bobb put on the identity of DPS to the exclusion of the Board. He rendered the elected Board a nullity existing in name only, yet totally disempowered to effectuate any decisions the electorate authorized it to make... This is irreparable harm. He was empowered to figure out how to pay for education fashioned by the Board. Instead he created education products he proposed to implement. (p. 33)*

Some several months after the *Adams v. Bobb* (2010) decision, then newly-sworn Governor Snyder signed into law Public Act 4 of 2011 (PA-4), yet another iteration of the Local Government and School District Fiscal Accountability Act. Replacing its legislative predecessor, PA-4 afforded sweeping new powers to emergency financial managers:

*Under the new law, the 'financial' in emergency financial managers is dropped to match their authority beyond financial matters. Emergency managers can now void union contracts, dismiss employees, and dissolve elected councils and boards in communities and school districts that are operating at a deficit. (French, 2011, p. A1)*

Furthermore, in stating that "the 'financial and operating plan' means a written financial and operating plan for a local government under section 18, including an academic and educational plan for a school district [emphasis added]" (MCL Act 4 §5(d), 2011), the language of PA-4 (2011) pointedly overruled Judge Baxter's injunction against EFM Bobb's foray into academic programming and effectively voided any remaining powers entrusted the duly elected school board by the voters of Detroit.

As with previous state efforts to deconstitutionalize Detroiters, citizens resisted and a challenge to PA-4 was launched. Stand Up for Democracy, a coalition comprised of unions, citizens, and activist groups successfully petitioned to place a referendum on the November 2012 ballot to repeal PA-4, prompting Roy Roberts, the second emergency manager of Detroit Public Schools, to express in a written communique to Governor Snyder that he would resign should PA-4 be overturned. Despite voters' eventual statewide rejection of PA-4, State Attorney General Schuette quickly

revived in the interim PA-4's predecessor, PA-72 (Oosting, 2012), leaving EM Roy Roberts in place and Detroit Public Schools yet again under state emergency management.

Shortly after the repeal of PA-4, Michigan's lame-duck legislature would pass Public Act 436 (PA-436). Under PA-436, municipalities and other local governing units, such as school districts, under state control would be ruled by emergency managers afforded a schedule of even more expansive powers, including but not limited to:

- the power to act in place of elected bodies by ignoring municipal charters and other existing local governing structures
  - the power and sole discretion to enact local law by decree (and dismiss existing ordinances)
  - the power to terminate collective bargaining agreements and contracts
  - the power to unilaterally privatize city/department services
  - the power to dissolve municipalities and other local governing units with Governor and Treasurer approval
  - the totalizing power to govern all matters, including matters unrelated to finances
- (Sugar Law Center EM Lawsuit Documents, n.d.)

Despite a number of challenges (Bukowski, 2013), PA-436 remains Michigan's current emergency management law, and again, the few school districts that have been subject to this totalizing take over law have been all majority Black districts—Detroit Public Schools, Muskegon Heights, and Highland Park.

#### 4. The Salience of Antiracism

Their analysis of state takeovers published in the *Indiana Law Review* left Oluwole and Green (2009) noting, "[t]he overwhelming majority of school district takeovers across the country are minority districts" (p. 52). Despite their own tally, Oluwole and Green concluded that since each district in state custody was under fiscal stress, the peculiar matter of these districts just happening to be almost exclusively "minority" (majority Black urban districts) failed to present, in and of itself, sufficient evidence of racial animus. For critical race scholars, however, racialized policy (mis)fortunes due to "happenstance" are anathema to a racial order (Gilborn, 2005).

Critical race and legal scholar Bell (1992, 2004) argued that the permanence of racism in American society maintained a racial order that naturalizes white advantage. Drawing from the work of Bell and other critical legal scholars who employed critical race theory (CRT) to analyze social inequality, critical education scholars Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued for the use of CRT in framing a critical analysis of racism, education policy and educational inequality, and in particular the need to recognize in detailed breadth and depth Black experiences with racial reforms in education. A decade later, Dixson and Rousseau's (2005) review of CRT research would resound the clarion call to reconnect the growing body of CRT research in education to a material project on racial justice.

And many critical race scholars argue that foundational to racial justice is the requirement to confront antiracism, the very historical and continuing project leveraged again and again to reify whiteness's systemic hold on institutional power, resources, and dominant social and political thought, indeed what Nakagawa (2012) termed the "fulcrum of white supremacy" (para. 5). Although varying currents exist, the work of critical race scholar Dumas (2015) informs this study because he theorizes anti-blackness and its implication on education. Dumas (2015) states:

*Antiracism is the central concern and proposition within an intellectual project known as Afro-pessimism. Afro-pessimism theorizes that Black people exist in a structurally antagonistic relationship with Humanity. That is, the very technologies and imaginations that allow a social recognition of the human-ness of others systematically exclude this possibility for the Black. (p. 3)*

As a consequence of that structurally induced social death, Dumas (2015) clarifies, "[t]he Black cannot be Human, is not simply an 'Other' but is--and this must not be lost--'other than Human' (p. 3). Dumas poses that so complete is the partitioning of the Black from Human that personhood, and the rights thereof to political agency, to petition, to mobilize for remedies against anti-Black violence—all become notions that are essentially, for the Black, *made ontologically out of reach*.

In that "slavery marks the ontological position of Black people," it is from this relational position that "non-Black people—and particularly whites—assert their right to freedom, and right to the consumption, destruction and/or simple dismissal of the Black" (Dumas, 2015, p. 5). Given the weight of what Dumas advances, informed by the long critical tradition of Afro-pessimist scholarship, as well as the fiction that policy is "racially disinterested" (Dumas, 2013, p. 123), one must account for (and confront) the salience of antiracism, and more specifically, anti-Black racism in education policy, implementation, and discourse (Dumas, 2015).

What is pointedly argued, then, is the critical recognition of "education policy as a site of antiblackness" (Dumas, 2015, p. 6), and for critical educators, scholars, and policy analysts alike, to center and interrogate antiblackness in underwriting policies that consign Black children and Black communities to educational and social death. In so doing, Dumas (2015) proffers:

*...any racial disparity in education should be assumed to be facilitated, or at least exacerbated, by disdain and disregard for the Black. Differences in academic achievement, frequency and severity of school discipline, rate of neighborhood school closures, fundraising capacity of PTAs, access to arts, music and unstructured playtime--these are all sites of antiblackness. That is to say, these are all policies in which the Black is positioned on the bottom...(p. 7)*

That is also to say, then, that the racially "uncomplicated" posture of school district takeover policies and implementation, given the racial disparity between the number of majority Black school districts relative to the number of majority White school districts under state control, demands interrogation.

## 5. Objectives of the Study and Advancement

The primary objective of this statewide field experiment was to assess for the effects of racial composition of a school district on the level of agreement/disagreement with state-installed emergency management in a financially distressed school district and the likelihood of pushing for political mobilization against a takeover decision. First, it is predicted that given identical conditions (same operational deficit and projected budget shortfall), racial composition/makeup of a school district (Majority Black vs. Majority White) will systematically affect participants' level of agreement/disagreement with a school takeover decision ("Emergency management" vs. "No emergency management"), such that support for the imposition of emergency management will be greater for majority Black school districts than for majority White school districts.

Second, it is predicted that the likelihood of taking action against emergency management, again given identical conditions while only manipulating racial composition of school district, will be greater for majority White school districts than for majority Black school districts. In empirically disentangling the effects of race on the support for emergency management of districts, this study squarely tackled the racial salience of school district composition on political actors' responses to the seemingly racialized application of a policy remedy that has thus far deconstitutionalized only majority Black school districts in Michigan.

## 6. Method

### 6.1 Participants

Current names and working email addresses for active public school principals/head administrators in the state of Michigan were accessed from the Michigan Department of Education's publicly available database directory. Solicitation emails with an anonymous embedded Qualtrics survey link were sent to principals (N=2,873) in late December. Three hundred thirty-five participants responded to the unsolicited recruitment email. Of those 335 respondents, 290 completed the entire study. One individual was identified as a multivariate outlier and removed from analyses, the final sample consisted of 289 individuals (Race: 91.3% White, 5.6% Black, 1% Latino/Hispanic, 2.1% other; Gender: 52.8% Male; Type of School District Employed at: 45.7% Rural, 38.8% Suburban, 13.5% Urban, 2.1% Other; Age:  $M=48.08$ ,  $SD=8.34$ ).

### 6.2 Procedure

A web-based field survey experiment employing a 2 (Racial make-up: Majority Black school district vs. Majority White School District) x 2 (Decision type: Emergency Management Takeover vs. No Emergency Management) between subjects ANOVA design was conducted. The independent variables were type of district ("majority Black at 93%" vs. "majority White at 93%") and takeover decision ("emergency management" vs. "no emergency management") respectively. The 93% racial threshold used in this study reflects Oluwole and Green's (2009) finding that many of the districts taken over in their respective states were frequently 90% minority (students of color) in composition. Thusly, in this experiment, participants were presented with case scenarios in which districts were either majority Black at 93% or the exact reverse, majority White at 93%.

After answering a few demographic questions, each participant was randomly assigned to a condition and prompted to read a scenario depicting one of the following four outcomes:

1. Condition A: Financially distressed majority Black district resulting in a state appointed emergency manager
2. Condition B: Financially distressed majority White district resulting in a state appointed emergency manager
3. Condition C: Financially distressed majority Black district resulting in NO state appointed emergency manager
4. Condition D: Financially distressed majority White district resulting in NO state appointed emergency manager

Briefly, careful attention was taken to reflect real world conditions in these scenarios, not only with respect to racial thresholds of district composition as described earlier, but also with respect to the operating budget deficit (\$850,000) and the expected shortfall (\$5.4 million) assigned to the financially distressed district in all of the conditions. Both figures were comparable to those documented in news media reports highlighting a majority White district in danger of being the first to face state emergency management in Michigan (Lewis, 2015). That said, the district has since avoided emergency management and been provided opportunities to make further cutbacks, opportunities which McGuire and Lenhard (2015) argued were not afforded majority Black districts like Detroit Public Schools.

The two dependent variables were *level of agreement/disagreement with a takeover decision* and the *likelihood of supporting political action against a takeover decision*. After reading their scenarios, participants rated their level of agreement with a takeover decision using a 7-point likert type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) regarding the outcome ( $M=4.51$ ,  $SD=1.95$ ). Participants then followed this by rating their likelihood of politically mobilizing against a decision, again using a 7-point likert type scale (1 = extremely unlikely, 7 = extremely likely;  $M=3.10$ ,  $SD=1.99$ ).

## 7. Results

Survey responses were examined using SPSS 21. A 2 (Racial make-up: Majority Black vs. Majority White) X 2 (Decision: Emergency Management vs. No Emergency Management) factorial ANOVA were conducted, for each dependent variable, *agreement with takeover decision* and *likelihood of politically organizing against a decision*.

### 7.1 Agreement with takeover decision

There was no significant interaction between *Racial Make-up* and *Decision* condition, ( $F(1, 285)= .03$ ,  $p=.85$ ;  $\eta_p^2=.000$ ). There was however a significant main effect of *Decision* condition ( $F(1, 285)= 157.06$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $\eta_p^2=.36$ ), such that participants were more likely to agree with a decision when *no emergency manager* ( $M=5.69$ ,  $SE=.13$ ) was assigned compared to when an *emergency manager* was assigned ( $M=3.36$ ,  $SE=.13$ ). There was no main effect of *Racial Make-up* condition ( $F(1, 285)= .14$ ,  $p=.71$ ;  $\eta_p^2=.000$ ).

### 7.2 Likelihood of political organization

There was no significant interaction between *Racial Make-up* and *Decision* condition on the likelihood of political mobilization, ( $F(1, 285)= 2.11$ ,  $p=.15$ ;  $\eta_p^2=.007$ ). There was however a significant main effect of *Decision* condition ( $F(1, 285)= 42.78$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $\eta_p^2=.13$ ), such that participants were more likely to indicate that they would engage in political action against the takeover decision when an *emergency manager* ( $M=3.81$ ,  $SE=.15$ ) was assigned compared to when *no emergency manager* was assigned ( $M=2.38$ ,  $SE=.16$ ). There was no main effect of *Racial Make-up* condition ( $F(1, 285)= .56$ ,  $p=.46$ ;  $\eta_p^2=.002$ ).

## 8. Exploratory Analysis

Also examined were if there were any differences based on the type of district participants were employed at. Due to the low number of participants who worked in urban districts, only effects among participants from suburban and rural districts were examined.

### 8.1 Suburban District Participants

#### 8.1.1 Agreement with takeover decision

The results were the same as the larger sample. There were no significant interaction between *Racial Make-up* and

Decision condition,  $(F(1, 108) = 1.01, p = .32; \eta_p^2 = .01)$ . There was a significant main effect of Decision condition  $(F(1, 108) = 81.70, p < .001; \eta_p^2 = .43)$ , such that participants were more likely to agree with the takeover decision when *no emergency manager* ( $M = 5.70, SE = .20$ ) was assigned compared to when an *emergency manager* was assigned ( $M = 3.14, SE = .20$ ). There was no main effect of Racial Make-up condition  $(F(1, 108) = .09, p = .77; \eta_p^2 = .001)$ .

### 8.1.2 Likelihood of political organization

There was a significant main effect of Decision condition  $(F(1, 108) = 29.66, p < .001; \eta_p^2 = .22)$ , such that participants were more likely to indicate that they would engage in political action against a decision when an *emergency manager* ( $M = 4.12, SE = .23$ ) was assigned compared to when *no emergency manager* was assigned ( $M = 2.32, SE = .23$ ). There was no main effect of Racial Make-up condition  $(F(1, 108) = .28, p = .60; \eta_p^2 = .003)$ . There was, however, a significant interaction between Racial Make-up and Decision condition on the likelihood of organizing against a takeover decision  $(F(1, 108) = 5.48, p = .02; \eta_p^2 = .05)$ .

Pairwise comparisons revealed that there was a significant effect of Racial Make-up in the *no emergency manager* condition,  $F(1, 108) = 4.09, p = .046; \eta_p^2 = .04$ , such that participants were significantly less likely to report they would engage in political action against the *no emergency manager* decision when the school was *majority Black* ( $M = 1.85, SE = .34$ ) than when it was *majority White* ( $M = 2.79, SE = .32$ ). As for the *emergency manager* condition, participants were equally likely to engage in political action regardless of Racial Make-up,  $F(1, 108) = 1.65, p = .20; \eta_p^2 = .02$  (Majority White:  $M = 3.82, SE = .30$ ; Majority Black:  $M = 4.42, SE = .35$ ).

## 8.2 Rural District Participants

### 8.2.1 Agreement with takeover decision

The results here were also the same as the larger sample. There were no significant interaction between Racial Make-up and Decision condition,  $(F(1, 128) = .49, p = .49; \eta_p^2 = .004)$ . There was a significant main effect of Decision condition  $(F(1, 128) = 44.32, p < .001; \eta_p^2 = .26)$ , such that participants were more likely to agree with the takeover decision when *no emergency manager* ( $M = 5.49, SE = .20$ ) was assigned compared to when an *emergency manager* was assigned ( $M = 3.60, SE = .20$ ). There was no main effect of Racial Make-up condition  $(F(1, 128) = .02, p = .90; \eta_p^2 = .000)$ .

### 8.2.2 Likelihood of political organization

The results were the same as the larger sample. There was no significant interaction between Racial Make-up and Decision condition,  $(F(1, 128) = .13, p = .72; \eta_p^2 = .001)$ . There was a significant main effect of Decision condition  $(F(1, 128) = 10.08, p = .002; \eta_p^2 = .07)$ , such that participants were more likely to indicate that they would engage in political action against the takeover decision when an *emergency manager* ( $M = 3.66, SE = .25$ ) was assigned compared to when *no emergency manager* was assigned ( $M = 2.57, SE = .24$ ). There was no main effect of Racial Make-up condition  $(F(1, 128) = .32, p = .57; \eta_p^2 = .002)$ .

## 9. Discussion and Implications

*There is apathy and I wonder if that is because the districts that have gone down are predominantly black. I wondered if the staff thought this wouldn't happen because Garden City is predominantly white. Nobody seems to care about the predominantly black schools. The people in the audience didn't seem to believe we could go under. Is that because we are predominantly white?—Garden City Superintendent Michelle Cline (Lewis, January 21, 2015, The Detroit News)*

*Currently in Michigan, there are 55 predominately white districts in deficit. When the districts are mostly white, they are given two, three, four or more chances to make things right. So, Cline and others needn't worry too much about being taken over by the state...In Detroit's case, the state (governor, Legislature, state superintendent and Department of Education), from 2006 to 2009—the only years since 1999 that DPS has not been in takeover mode, used the \$200M deficit it left DPS in 2005 as reason for retaking the district in 2009. Emergency managers have failed wherever they've been in power...Garden City will never have to bear the ignominy of such heartless people in charge of their district...These things don't happen in predominately white districts.—Former Trustee, Michigan State Board of Education Marianne McGuire. (McGuire & Lenhard, February 10, 2015, The Detroit News)*

Beyond policy autopsy, this exploratory study takes the position that critical education policy analysis must be as troubled and politically *live* as the shifting policy projects it attempts to analyze. Central to that assignment is exploring how a state instrument and its aims move through and are politically processed (and either reified or contested) by a segment of the polity within the material moment of state emergency management of Black school districts and by default Black bodies in Michigan. Accordingly, active principals who have the capacity to resist politically as individuals and collectively as part of their professional lobbying organizations were recruited for this field experiment on the salience of racial composition of school districts on political support for state emergency management of districts and on political mobilization against such state-installed emergency management.

While both Superintendent Cline of Garden City Unified (“There is apathy and I wonder if that is because the districts that have gone down are predominantly black”) and Former Trustee McGuire of the Michigan Board of Education (“These things don’t happen in predominately white districts”) pointedly acknowledged the racialized policy discourse, particularly the discourse (*and project*) of anti-blackness and of white exception in the application and response to state emergency management of Black districts, the results from this experiment failed to detect a statistically significant relationship between racial makeup of a district and agreement level with a takeover condition. And, this appeared to be the case as well when examining for the effects of racial makeup on agreement with a takeover condition when just looking at participants from suburban and from rural districts respectively. There was, however, an effect of decision type on level of agreement such that principals were more agreeable to an outcome where no emergency manager was installed than where there was one installed, regardless of the racial composition of the distressed district, and this appeared to be the case when also examining responses from participants in suburban districts and in rural districts.

Moving from political attitudes to *political mobilization against a takeover condition*, there was an effect of decision type on the likelihood of taking action such that principals indicated greater commitment to politically *organizing against an outcome with an emergency manager* than an outcome where none was assigned. And again, this appeared to be the case when examining participants from suburban districts and rural districts respectively. And interestingly, for just the participants from suburban districts, an interaction emerged between racial composition of school district and takeover decision, such that suburban principals indicated a greater likelihood to engage in political action against a “no emergency manager” assignment when the fiscally distressed district was *majority White as opposed to majority Black*. As for the condition when an emergency manager was assigned, however, principals indicated that engaging in political action was equally likely regardless of the district’s racial composition.

In sum, it appears that regardless of district demographics of the potential takeover district, principals in general were less likely to agree with placing emergency managers in financially distressed school districts, and stated that they were more inclined than not to take political action if emergency managers were installed. The only occasion that racial composition of school district affected responses concerned suburban principals reporting that they would be more likely to protest (organize politically against a decision) *when a White district under fiscal distress escaped emergency management than when a Black district did*. What could explain for these responses?

Given experimental research on controversial issues, and the principals who volunteered and completed the survey, there is the possibility that those who chose to participate held more racially liberal views, and perhaps volunteer effects (Vogt, 2007) could help account for what appeared to be generally consistent views expressing greater disagreement with state imposed emergency management *regardless of a district’s racial profile* for both the total sample and when examined by district type (rural and suburban). Yet this racially neutral posture is breached when we look at the *commitment for political action against a takeover decision* for participants from suburban districts, who comprised the second largest subgroup in this sample at 38.8% (45.7% Rural, 38.8% Suburban, 13.5% Urban, 2.1% other), with the surprising and racially non-neutral finding that they were more likely to protest when a racial in group (i.e., White District) was spared emergency management than when a racial out group (i.e., Black District) was.

In light of this contradiction, one cannot discount how respondents may consciously or subconsciously respond to racial priming in experimental research designed to assess race effects on political attitudes and behaviors. Indeed, respondents’ masking of racial attitudes is a real concern for researchers who investigate the political impact of racial prejudice (Huddy & Feldman, 2009), and thus the need to minimize social desirability distortion, or what Richman, Weisband, Kiesler, and Drasgow (1999) explain as “the tendency by respondents, under some conditions and modes of administration to answer questions in a more socially desirable direction” (p. 755) is paramount, and especially when dealing with racially charged policies, where social desirability “can inhibit people from honestly reporting their views and opinions...in...racial matters” (Huddy & Feldman, 2009, p. 424). And though this study adhered to design recommendations to forgo face to face administration of paper surveys, to administer the survey experiment electronically to minimize the masking of racial attitudes, and to only manipulate race in each condition (Huddy &



Feldman, 2009; Richman et al., 1999), the author's multisyllabic, and very nonstandardized name was not doctored in the recruitment email itself, and despite the anonymous survey design, not doing so has *possible* implications for the censorship of responses as the race of interviewer, whether face-to-face or by phone, has been shown to effect respondents' answers in political polling (Shepard, 2012).

Most provocatively, and with implications for further understanding why principals in this experiment responded in the manner that they did to an arguably injurious remedy that they have only witnessed deployed in Black school districts in Michigan, Huddy and Feldman's (2009) review of political experiments on racial ideology and policy responses concluded that survey experiments are more apt to capture "white opposition to policies **experimentally altered to help blacks** [emphasis added]" (p. 424). And this possibly explains why white racial antagonism to policies such as affirmative action is easier to assess for than the kind of "racial negativity" (Huddy & Feldman, 2009) against majority Black school districts that is being assessed here relative to the support for and complicity in maintaining a policy remedy (i.e., emergency management of school districts) that *disenfranchises*. In other words, because this experiment dealt specifically with an arguably draconian policy instrument that *did not advantage* Black school districts in the least, as corroborated by prior research (Arsen & Mason, 2013; Campbell, 2012; Pedroni, 2013), racial negativity (Huddy & Feldman, 2009) toward majority Black school districts would be likely harder to assess. Furthermore, the data collection window for this study opened in late December 2015, just as the majority Black city of Flint, Michigan, under state emergency management, made national news for the lead poisoning of its children (Brush, Williams, Smith, & Scullen, 2015). If one were not previously aware of the risks inherent in one man rule through the deconstitutionalization of whole municipalities (and local governing units such as school districts), the Flint situation made the case abundantly clear. As such, in addition to the masking of racial attitudes through socially desirable responses and the emergency manager policy itself not advantaging Black districts over White districts, history effects (Vogt, 2007) could possibly have also shaped principals' responses.

Finally, while it is understood that experiments, like all studies, have limitations, and that as ethical researchers, we must acknowledge, as was done here, various factors that could have also explained for study results, I would like to conclude by revisiting Newman's (2002) provocation to push and complicate our methods and epistemological homes, especially where analyses of policy sponsorship, formulation, enactment, and reification are concerned. In trying to understand policy instruments, such as an emergency management law that has wrought the deconstitutionalization of entire Black municipalities and school districts, our methods and analyses must meet directly the questions posed by critical researchers like Gilborn (2005), who asks "Who and what is education policy for?" and Dumas (2015), who answers that one must pay attention to who is suffering to know who is culturally and materially accruing from this political violence.

As such, the generally post-racial responses of the principals, granted within the context of this experiment, leave much to consider when juxtaposed with the actual racial realities undergirding the implementation of this totalizing "remedy" and the lack of rearguard political opposition from leaders' professional education associations to its exclusive application in Black school districts despite the overwhelming majority of financially-distressed districts being White. Such a material disconnect signifies that the fight for justice in Black school districts in Michigan is harder and more eternal than ever imagined. And owing to this, we must view (racialized) policy as more than enactment but rather a shifting and temporal project that has been (in)actively "kept" and "sustained," and that *if*, on the grounds that our methods are deemed too clinically "imprecise" or frankly incongruent with the aims of critique and possibility, we fail to explore the very notion of "keeping," of how instantiations of anti-Black policy projects are, in part, (in)actively sustained and rationalized away by well-meaning institutional and civic actors, we truly dismiss out of hand the responsibility to provoke a larger turn toward an ever distal "justice." And it is no wonder then, as Dumas (2016) has pointedly argued, why anti-Black violence in education is historical and continuing practice, "[for] we must understand that, largely, the broader public is just fine with that" (para. 2).

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