

Correlates of Values and Identity-Based Conflicts in Public School Districts and States

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Abstract

A common concern about school choice is that it will “balkanize” society, making it easier for diverse people to separate into homogenous, and potentially hostile, groups. The inverse of this is a concern that public education that attempts to bring all people under one schooling umbrella will foster divisive conflict. It will force diverse people to fight with one another politically to determine such things as whose values, or ethnic histories, will be taught in the public schools for which all must pay. The goal of this paper is to identify district-level variables that predict the prevalence of values- and identity-based conflicts in public schools, including the presence of private options and charter schools; religious, linguistic, ethnic, and political diversity; and the size of the population served. I find that by far the most powerful predictor of the number of conflicts is, not surprisingly, district population size, while arguably only the number of charter schools significantly and with meaningful effect predicts conflicts with population size controlled. The analysis has many shortcomings, which I discuss.

Introduction

American public schooling—government-run schools intended to be accessible to all families—was established in large part to bring children and families of diverse backgrounds together and build a more unified society (Rush, 1786; Webster 1790; Mann, 1837). Supporters of “common schooling” broadly believed that public schools would bring diverse children together, teaching them common morals, and in so doing inculcate a shared national identity. It made intuitive sense to many people, especially elites who likely presumed that they would decide what a proper American would look like.

The problem with the basic public schooling model is that it assumes diverse people will gladly pay into, and enroll their children in, a system that seeks to standardize them, including in ways that may violate basic beliefs they hold or that place their personal identities—race, religion, culture—in negative lights. That this has, in fact, occurred throughout the history of public schooling in the United States and abroad, and is well documented (Sherrill, 1932; Glenn, 1983; Arons, 1983 and 1997; McCluskey, 2007; Maranto and van Raemdonck, 2015; Cato Institute, 2019). A major reason that values- and identity-based conflicts have not been more prevalent in American public schooling than they have been is likely that the public schools historically have not actually brought diverse people together. For most of American history, when public schools have existed they have served very small communities that have been ethnically and religiously homogenous, and sometimes broke up when they became diverse (NCES, 1993; Justice, 2005). Many also excluded African Americans for decades, and when they did accept them placed African Americans, and sometimes Asian- and Mexican-American students, in segregated schools (Tyack, 2003). In some cases when they have admitted diverse people and done so without segregation, they have failed to accommodate their, most glaringly

Roman Catholics, many of whom felt compelled to start their own schools rather than use the public schools they perceived as hostile. By their peak in 1965, Catholic school enrolled approximately 5.5 million students, or about 12 percent of all school-aged children (Convey, 1992). But as public schooling has become more centralized, heavily funded, and legally desegregated, it has become harder for diverse people to control their own educations.

The Cato Institute's Public Schooling Battle Map catalogues values- and identity-based conflicts in public schools. These are conflicts over the types of issues that are presumably most "personal" to people, including disagreements over religion, non-religious moral values, and the portrayals of one's ethnic group in history curricula or reading assignments. The purpose of this paper is to test whether districts that have the make-ups most in line with the public schooling ideal—diverse people all under one schooling umbrella—tend to produce more or less values- and identity-based conflict. It also assesses whether greater or lesser presence of choice schools—specifically private and charter schools—ameliorate tensions.

Literature Review

Historically, there has not been much research backing for the expectation that public schools would bring together diverse people, and in so-doing create new bonds among them, or what social capital theorists call "bridging capital." It appears to have largely just been assumed. This, however, is contrary to what research has shown about diverse people in contact, at least in the short run. As Phillips (2014) explains, diversity "can cause discomfort, rougher interactions, a lack of trust, greater perceived interpersonal conflict, lower communication, less cohesion, more concern about disrespect, and other problems." Putnam (2007) found that diversity can result in atomization, with people finding it difficult to find any group with which to bond.

Possibly reconciling the need for contact to build bridges and the inherent problems of such contact, in the 1950s Contact Theory was introduced by psychologist Gordon Allport (1954). Allport argued that key to creating positive affective bridges between people of different religious, ethnic, racial, or other “in” and “out” groups was interpersonal contact – people must come into physical contact and interact with people of different groups to either confirm negative stereotypes or, hopefully, dispel them. But unlike the simplistic “bring them together and they bond” assumption that seems to underlie common schooling theory as presented by Rush and Webster, and more recently public schooling defenders such as Barber (1997), Allport included four provisos for successful contact, two of which he viewed as critical. The first was that contact must be among people of “equal status,” and second that contact occur “in pursuit of common goals.” The lesser provisos were that contact be “sanctioned by institutional supports (i.e., by law, custom or local atmosphere)” and lead to the “perception of common interests and common humanity.”

Public schooling, especially efforts to engineer common beliefs with which some would disagree, or physical togetherness such as mandatory busing, often violates those provisos, especially the first two. Contact is not equal status, for one thing, if policy is intended to bring people in groups presumed to be of lower status into schools with higher status children for the good or conversion of the lower-status students, whether they be racial or religious minorities. More important, pursuit of common goals means that members of the groups come into contact for mutually beneficial ends that require teamwork to achieve. This is generally not the case with education—learning is a largely solitary undertaking. Worse, politically engineered schooling is often seen as zero-sum, with one group’s gain another group’s loss.

There has been very little empirical research conducted on what produces social conflict in schools, though what there is suggests that intergroup contact with Allport's provisos present is more effective at reducing "social distance"—helping to create affective connections between formerly separated groups—than when they are absent. Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) conducted a metaanalysis of 515 studies with 713 total samples and found that intergroup contact in numerous—not just educational—settings tended to lessen social distance, and the effect was greater when Allport's provisos were present, though the most firm conclusion was that all four provisos together were important, not just one or two.

Bolstering the idea that forced contact might build bridges, Pettigrew and Tropp's research suggested choice might not actually help with intergroup relations. With 78 of the 515 studies categorized as situations in which subjects had no choice but to experience inter-group contact, Pettigrew and Tropp reported that studies allowing no choice had greater effect sizes than those with choice. However, when their list of studies is reduced to those categorized as having no choice; that have been published; that deal with arguably the largest dividers—race, religion, and ethnicity—and that were not conducted in the very un-real-world confines of a laboratory; we are left with only sixteen studies. Of those, only 9 had sample sizes above 100 people, which would seem a reasonable minimum size to approximate large-scale programs. Only one had a sample size above 1,000, and it was from a 1949 study of combat units in World War II, a situation that would incorporate hellish bonding conditions no one would want to replicate in schools. Looking only at studies that were published, about race/ethnicity—the biggest divider—set in the United States, in schools, and dealing with children, the number is reduced to seven studies, and all but one involved "some" choice.

Studies of mandatory school desegregation are mixed at best (Webster, 1961; Silverman and Shaw, 1973; Shaw, 1973; Gerard and Miller, 1975; Morland, 1976), and suggestive that mandatory desegregation worsens relations a bit at worst (Armor, 1972; Stephan and Rosenfield, 1978). That said, the research has suffered from many methodological shortcomings such as an absence of pre- and post-testing of attitudes, and non-random assignment to segregated and desegregated settings (McConahay, 1978). Research has more reliably found a great deal of self-segregation in the form of white flight from districts, and within-school segregation by class and friendship group (Gottlieb and TenHouten, 1965; Moody, 2001). Overall, the research suggests that people of different groups will avoid integration rather than accept it and then grapple for control.

Of course, looking at social distance only obliquely captures conflicts. Presumably where there is decreasing social distance there is less conflict, but there is no systematic research connecting frequency of conflicts to diversity within a district. Certainly the observation has been made that, logically, public schooling forcing diverse people together would foster conflict, and anecdotally seems to do just that (Arons 1983 and 1997; McCluskey 2007). But no empirical assessment has been done on the antecedents of values- and identity-based public schooling conflicts.

The purpose of this paper is to begin to fill that hole. Specifically, using data from the Cato Institute's Public Schooling Battle Map—a database of values- and identity-based conflicts in public schools—and on ethnic, religious, linguistic, and political diversity, the paper will use regression analysis to identify factors predictive of conflict. It will also examine the effect of greater or lesser schooling options, in particular private and charter schools, on conflict.

Data

The Public Schooling Battle Map includes values- and identity-based conflicts placed in nine categories:

1. **Freedom of expression:** Conflicts typically pitting the speech rights of students against schools' needs to maintain order and create coherent cultures
2. **Religion:** Conflicts that pit explicitly religious values or expressions against school policies or curricula
3. **Curriculum:** Conflicts over what is taught based on disagreements about propriety or accuracy. These can include conflicts over morally controversial topic such as sex education if the objections to them are not explicitly religious or moral, such as being age-inappropriate
4. **Reading material:** Conflicts over books that are either present in school libraries or on school reading lists, either mandatory or suggested
5. **Race/Ethnicity:** Conflicts over the ability of people of different races or ethnicities to control their own schools or obtain instruction or treatment tailored to their group. It does NOT include accusations of racism or unequal treatment unless schools maintain they do it for arguably laudable reasons, such as remaining colorblind
6. **Moral Values:** Conflicts over what is "right" and "wrong" without an explicit religious connection, including conflicts over corporal punishment of students or condom distribution at schools
7. **Gender Equity:** Conflicts over the treatment of students by gender, including debates about proper attire for girls, and access to bathrooms for transgender students
8. **Sexuality:** Debates specifically about sexual behavior or orientation

9. **Human Origins:** Conflicts over the teaching of how life came to exist, and how it reached its current form. Typically battles over evolution and creationism or intelligent design theory.

These categories can, obviously, contain a lot of overlap—someone can object to a specific reading assignment for religious reasons, or a gender equity conflict could be largely about morals. Conflicts are categorized based on what element seems most important, but due to the significant gray area among categories, and due to limited time, this paper assess only the associations between numerous variables and total conflicts per district.

Conflicts in the Map have been collected in a somewhat nonsystematic way. The genesis of the Map was a 2007 Cato Institute Policy Analysis (McCluskey) that sought to explain, and illustrate with concrete examples, how public schools, rather than unifying society, might tend instead to spur conflict. That paper contained nearly 150 conflicts in all 50 states collected in the 2005-06 school year. After publication of the paper McCluskey continued to collect conflicts but did not launch the online database behind the Map until 2009, and consistent collection did not begin until about 2011. The sources of the conflicts are media reports discovered through Google alerts for “bullying,” “freedom of speech,” “banned books,” “creationism,” and “intelligent design.” It also contains conflicts found on the education news aggregating website ChoiceMedia.tv and any other conflicts reported by people directly to McCluskey or found on new sites apart from those found through Google alerts and ChoiceMedia.tv. This somewhat haphazard collection, as well as the reliance on media reports, means no doubt some, maybe many, values- identity-based conflicts between 2005 and 2018—the last year for the conflicts used in this paper—have been missed, either because they have never been reported, or those reports have come to my attention. Also, the Battle Map contains district and state-level

conflicts, but only district conflicts are included in this paper. The paper draws on 1,752 conflicts in 1,081 districts.

To put these data in perspective, there were 13,598 “regular” public school districts in the United States in the 2016-17 school year, which excludes “regional education service agencies and supervisory union administrative centers, state-operated agencies, federally operated agencies, and other types of local education agencies, such as independent charter schools” (NCES, 2019). The district data used in this analysis is drawn from the federal Common Core of Data (CCD) and includes 11,755 districts. The CCD excludes or suppresses data that appears to be flawed or is not reported in time (NCES, Slides), possibly explaining the absence of about 1,800 districts. When the battle data were scrubbed to ensure proper district placement, 79 battles from the original list took place in districts that were not in the CCD data set. 24 states had at least one district missing from the battle list, and most only had 1 or 2 missing. Outliers were Vermont, with 8 missing battle districts, and Missouri with 16. It is possible that the missing data coincides with the exclusion of “regional education service agencies and supervisory union administrative centers,” especially in Vermont, which appears to have a large number of such districts, and districts may have been taken over by states or reorganized. Districts with battles constituted 9 percent of all districts in the CCD, but 44 percent of total population, illustrating that battles are disproportionately found in higher-density areas.

The analysis uses many independent variables to attempt to explain differing prevalence of battles in districts. These include 2016 district populations taken from the U.S. Census’ Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, as well as median family income data and linguistic and racial demographic data from the National Center for Education Statistics’ 2012-2016 Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates. To estimate political diversity the analysis uses county-

level percentages of voters who voted Republican and Democrat in the 2016 presidential election. Such data on the school district level were not available. Data on the number of private and charter schools in a district were obtained from the 2016 US Census' TIGER/Line Shapefiles and adjusted on a school-per-district-resident basis to produce ascending scales of choice concentration. Finally, county-level data on religious shares of the population in 2010 were collected from the U.S. Religion Census, as well as data on the percentage of the population that adhere to a religious organization or not.

The analysis also includes “polarization” measures to assess the potential effects of having more or less even representation of groups that would be expected to be in opposition to each other. These were calculated for linguistic, racial, political, and religious diversity. The analysis uses the absolute value of the difference between the district or county share of the population of the following opposed groups in order to set up an ascending scale of evenness, with 0 being equal, and 100 completely one-sided:

- Language: |other language – English only|
- Political: |Republican – Democrat|
- Racial/Ethnic: |Black – White|
- Religion: |Adherent – nonadherent|

Table 1 presents the summary statistics for the data set. Note that data representing impossible outcomes—e.g., one religious group constituting more than 100 percent of a district's population—were removed.

Table 1. Summary Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
total	11,755	0.15	0.79	0.00	51.00
District population	11,755	27481.87	121172.50	1.00	8537673.00
County population	11,755	372427.70	1044669.00	82.00	9818605.00
Median family income	11,292	66777.90	25260.21	2499.00	250001.00
English only	11,748	88.55	15.01	0.00	100.00
Other language	11,749	11.45	15.01	0.00	100.00
White	11,749	85.54	16.52	0.80	100.00
Black	11,749	5.69	11.82	0.00	96.62
Native	11,749	1.90	8.29	0.00	98.49
Asian	11,749	1.96	4.57	0.00	66.89
Hawaiian	11,749	0.07	0.29	0.00	10.18
Other_race	11,749	2.40	5.01	0.00	67.47
Two or more races	11,749	2.44	2.31	0.00	35.59
Democrat	11,755	37.09	16.11	3.14	92.85
Republican	11,755	57.86	16.42	4.12	93.71
Private schools in district	11,755	1.90	9.15	0.00	593.00
Charter schools in district	11,755	0.46	4.31	0.00	271.00
Private schools per resident	11,755	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01
Charter schools per resident	11,755	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01
Evangelical	11,753	18.11	14.74	0.00	98.78
Black Protestant	11,755	1.00	2.25	0.00	31.56
Mainline Protestant	11,755	10.20	8.72	0.00	83.54
Catholic	11,755	17.76	14.48	0.00	99.96
Orthodox	11,755	0.20	0.68	0.00	22.67
Judaism	11,755	0.34	1.04	0.00	32.56
Islam	11,755	0.42	1.10	0.00	29.00
Other	11,754	2.16	5.76	0.00	89.02
Do not adhere	11,681	50.17	15.21	0.51	96.93
Adhere	11,681	49.83	15.21	3.07	99.49
Religious evenness	11,681	24.26	18.35	0.02	99.49
Racial evenness	11,749	81.21	21.62	0.02	100.00
Political evenness	11,755	32.65	20.47	0.04	90.57
Linguistic evenness	11,748	79.56	22.69	0.00	100.00

Districts range in population size from numerous small districts to New York City, with 8.5 million residents. Importantly, the data do not break out Hispanic as a category. Also of note,

both private schools and charter schools per resident show up as 0. That is because the total number of schools in a district are divided by total population, producing very small numbers.

Research design

I employ ordinary least squares regression to assess the association of all the variables above with total conflicts per district. I will present three models:

1. Standardized coefficients, all districts
2. Standardized coefficients, only districts with battles
3. Standardized coefficients, only population and evenness

The dependent variable is *Total*, which is simply the total number of conflicts recorded for a district. It will be regressed against most of the variables above, again using both standardized and unstandardized coefficients. The basic equation is:

$$T_i = \alpha + \beta \text{ District Population}_i + \cdots + \beta \text{ Linguistic Evenness}_i + \mathcal{E}_i$$

Basically, T for any given district is a function of all the explanatory variables, plus unobserved error \mathcal{E} . There are no doubt interactions between variables, but for the purposes of this simple, first analysis of the predictors of conflicts they are not explored. Also, the analysis includes models for all districts and only districts with battles because by far the most frequent value for T is zero, and while that is important—that most districts have zero conflicts is crucial to assessing what may or may not predict the presence of conflicts—it could also be of value to look just at district with conflicts. The Battle Map is a relatively new collection of data, and it could be that many districts prone to conflicts just happen to have not had them during the timeframe of the collection, or they were not reported. Examining districts with at least one battle can tell us at

least what variables may be predictive of the volume of battles within districts we know have had conflicts.

The last model will only regress T against the variables measuring evenness of religiosity, race, politics, and English language, as well as district population. This is specifically to test the effect of greater parity among different, presumably in-tension groups.

Results

We look first at basic correlations to get a sense for what variables may at least move with total conflicts. Table 2 shows only the correlations between total battles and the explanatory variables.

Table 2. Correlations with total battles

	Total
District population	0.79
County population	0.10
Median family income	0.06
English only	-0.10
Other language	0.10
White	-0.12
Black	0.09
Native	-0.02
Asian	0.15
Hawaiian	0.04
Other race	0.07
Two or more races	0.05
Democrat	0.15
Republican	-0.15
Private schools in district	0.75
Charter schools in district	0.55
Evangelical	-0.04
Black Protestant	0.02
Mainline Protestant	-0.06
Catholic	0.01
Orthodox	0.09
Judaism	0.06
Islam	0.08
Other	0.03
Do not adhere	0.03
Adhere	-0.03
Private schools per resident	0.01
Charter schools per resident	0.00
Religious evenness	-0.04
Racial evenness	-0.14
Political evenness	-0.03
Linguistic evenness	-0.14

The strongest correlations with total battles are, not surprisingly, variables measuring a total of something rather than a share. District population has the strongest correlation with a coefficient of 0.79, with the number of private and charter schools, respectively, coming in second and third.

All the other relationships are very small or zero. Among those with arguably a small but potentially important association, a greater share of Asian students is associated with a greater number of battles at 0.15, as is a greater share of a district's population having voted for the Democratic presidential candidate in 2016. (Voting for the Republican is the inverse.) Among evenness measures, less evenness correlates to more battles.

We now look at Model 1 -- standardized coefficients for all districts. The analysis drops one of any variable that is inversely related to another as revealed in the correlations. Specifically, I drop "Other language," "Republican," and "Adhere," while their inverses—"English only," "Democrat," and "Adhere" remain. I also dropped "two or more races and "Judaism," which created perfect collinearity, and "county population," relying on district population to adjust for population size. Table 3 provides the results.

Table 3. Results -- Standardized coefficients, all districts

Variable	Beta
District population	0.93***
Median family income	0.02***
English only	0.08***
White	0.01
Black	-0.01
Native	0.00
Asian	-0.01
Hawaiian	-0.05***
Other race	0.00
Democrat	0.05***
Private schools in district	0.01
Charter schools in district	-0.19***
Evangelical	-0.03
Black Protestant	-0.03
Mainline Protestant	-0.01
Catholic	-0.06
Orthodox	0.01
Islam	-0.01
Other	0.00
Do not adhere	-0.03
Private schools per resident	0.00
Charter schools per resident	0.01
Religious evenness	0.00
Racial evenness	-0.02
Political evenness	0.02***
Language evenness	-0.06***

***p < 0.01. **p < 0.05. *p<0.1; R² = 0.65

The first thing that is clear is that by far the strongest predictor of the number of battles a district will see is how many people the district serves. A one standard deviation increase in district population—roughly 121,000 people—is associated with an increase of about .75 battles per district. Several other variables are also statistically significant at the $p < 0.01$ level, but their effects are small. Perhaps the only one of note is that the higher the number of charter schools, the lesser the number of battles, with a one standards deviation charter increase—a little more than 4 schools—decreasing the number of battles by about .15 battles. There is also a positive

relationship between higher percentages of native English speakers and the number of battles, and two measures of evenness have significant—though very small—relationships with battles.

Table 4. Results -- Standardized coefficients, only battle districts

Variable	Beta
District population	1.05***
Median family income	0.01
English only	0.23***
White	-0.02
Black	-0.04
Native American	0.01
Asian	0.02
Other race	0.04
Hawaiian	-0.02
Democrat	0.07***
Private schools in district	0.03
Charter schools in district	-0.30***
Private schools per resident	-0.01
Charter schools per resident	0.06***
Evangelical	0.06
Black Protestant	-0.01
Mainline Protestant	0.05
Catholic	0.01
Orthodox	0.05***
Islam	0.02
Other religion	0.05
Do not adhere	0.05
Religious evenness	0.01
Racial evenness	0.01
Political evenness	0.05***
Language evenness	-0.16

***p < 0.01. **p < 0.05. *p < 0.1; R² = 0.75

When only districts with at least one battle are analyzed, district population is again by far the most powerful predictor of conflicts. Indeed, now a one standard deviation increase in population leads to a greater than one SD increase in battles. Interestingly, median family income now has no significant effect, unlike in the model that includes all districts. Meanwhile, the effect of greater shares of English-only speakers has increased from a coefficient of 0.08 to 0.23. Within districts that have experienced battles, a 14 percentage point increase in the share of district residents who are English-only speakers increases the number of battles by

approximately 3 battles. We also still see the share of voters in the 2016 election who were Democrats positively, though only mildly, associated with more conflicts, and a negative association between conflicts and the number and concentration of charter schools—but not private schools—in the district. We also still see an association between the evenness of partisan voters and English and non-English speakers, with less political evenness associated with more conflict, and more language parity associated with more battles. Finally, percentage of a district's population that is Orthodox Christian, such as Greek or Russian Orthodox, is now significantly associated with conflicts, though the effect is small. The variables included also explain more of the overall variation in districts with than with and without battles, with the r-squared rising from 0.65 to 0.75.

Table 5. Results -- Standardized coefficients, only population and evenness

Variable	Beta
District population	0.79***
Religious Evenness	0.00
Race evenness	0.01*
Political evenness	-0.01
Language evenness	0.01

*** $p < 0.01$. ** $p < 0.05$. * $p < 0.1$; $R^2 = 0.62$

Finally, examining just evenness—really, just district-level parity between religious adherents and non-adherents, blacks and whites, voters for the Democratic and Republican presidential nominees in 2016, and English-only and non-English speakers—seem to have little association with conflicts when population sizes are included. Only racial parity has a significant association, and the effect is tiny—a one standard deviation increase in the disparity between black and white students .01 SD increase in battles.

Discussion and Policy Recommendations

Public schooling is intended to bring people together and create harmony and social cohesion, but historically there is little evidence that it has done that. In large part that is because public schooling did not actually exist for much of America's formative years—the start of the common schooling movement is generally pegged at 1837, the beginning of Horace Mann's tenure as first secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education—and when and where it did exist districts were typically small and homogenous. Still, American educational history is pocked with values- and identity-based battles ranging from the Philadelphia Bible Riots in the 1840s, to the Scopes “Monkey” Trial in the 1920s, to the Kanawha County, WV textbook war of the 1970s. Today, as illustrated in the Cato Institute's Public Schooling Battle Map, such conflicts repeatedly pop up around the country.

The theory for why such battles occur is that forcing diverse people to fund a set of uniform, government-run schools requires citizens to engage in zero-sum political combat with each other when they differ in fundamental and irreconcilable ways, such as whether natural evolution or biblical creation explains the origins of human life. The purpose of the analysis has been to examine what variables are associated with the prevalence of these sorts of deeply personal conflicts in schools, and test how much diversity impacts them. It used the only database known to the author that collects data on such public schooling conflicts: the afore-mentioned Battle Map.

Unfortunately, the Battle Map is not ideally suited to empirical analysis, because it is not a random sampling of districts. It is essentially just a collection of conflicts gathered by sweeps of media reports. Not surprisingly, the first—and perhaps only—crystal clear predictor of the prevalence of battles in a district is the size of a district’s population. Logically, of course, more people creates the opportunity for more conflict. Also, media outlets are more likely to be located in places with more people, especially very large cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Washington, DC, and Chicago. That said, large metropolitan areas are also likely to have more diverse populations, though importantly we have seen repeatedly that people tend very much to cluster with people like themselves, even within districts and “integrated” schools (Brooks, 2003; Gottlieb and TenHouten, 1965; Moody, 2001). So even in places with large populations and major diversity, people may find ways to maintain homogeneity.

This powerful homogenization tendency may be why this analysis finds that, after controlling for population size, few variables one might expect to fuel conflict have significant, large associations with battles, especially when all districts—including the roughly 90 percent without any battles recorded—are included. Even the measures intended to explicitly capture

parity among groups likely to oppose one another, such as white and black people, or religious and non-religious, tend to have only small associations with battles. That said, two do have statistically significant associations. The further away from parity Democrats and Republicans in a district get, the slightly *more* likely districts are to experience conflicts. This is counterintuitive; we would tend to think greater parity would translate into more struggle for dominance. Consistent with that, the less parity there is between English and non-English speakers, this analysis found the less conflict there is. Diversity does seem to matter, but not a whole lot, at least when using the Battle Map to measure conflicts.

If requiring diverse people to fund, and for many people *de facto* attend, monolithic government schools fosters conflict, presumably allowing people more options that could be tailored to their values and needs would reduce conflict. These results offer some evidence for that, in particular finding that the more charter schools a district has, the less likely it is to have battles. And the effect size, while small, is much bigger than the other significant variables, with a one SD increase in charter schools associated with a 0.19 SD decrease in battles. This is not practically huge—it equates to about 15 percent of a battle—but considering that most districts with battles only have one, it is of some consequence.

If charters have an effect of decreasing conflict, it would seem plausible that private schools would as well. But that is not the case. Why? Presumably because charters are publicly funded and can be accessed on a fairly even basis with traditional public schools. Not so, in most cases, for private schools, for which someone has to be able to pay tuition, on top of “free” public schooling, to gain access. In most places, they may not be able to serve as a conflict relief valve at the same magnitude as charters. Looking only at results for districts with at least one battle, this is amplified, with charters having a 0.30 SD “relief valve” effect. It should be noted

that the variable that adjusts charter enrollment by population should be ignored, essentially doing what the regression already does.

Overall, the analysis suggests that the presence of diverse people in districts may increase the likelihood of values- and identity-based conflicts in public schools, but no diversity measures have clear, major impacts. Perhaps this is because people do not interact all that much through simple group-identities. It also possible that conflicts are often avoided by settling on lowest-common-denominator curricula and rules that offend as few people as possible. This was found by Berkman and Plutzer (2010) for the teaching of human origins. Their survey of high school biology teachers found that 67 percent either soft-pedalled evolution or skipped it entirely. It may also be, as we have seen, that no matter what the school-assignment policy, people find a way to congregate with others sharing their views or backgrounds. This is quite possibly enabled, as this analysis suggest, by charter schooling.

The policy recommendations proceeding from this analysis, to the extent it justifies any, are simple: to avoid conflict, increase choice. Increased charter schooling finds some warrant in the outcomes here, but if the “relief valve” effect is driven by the ability to choose an alternate school *on an equal funding basis*, then private school choice programs such as vouchers and scholarship tax credits could well have the same effects or better, enabling people even to access explicitly religious education. Charter schools, as public schools, cannot do that.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

The primary limitation is the Map itself, as already discussed. It is not a random sample and likely misses many conflicts, with a powerful bias toward districts with large populations and proximity to major media. It also only contains about eight years of consistent data, with

battles recorded as starting in years before 2011 not sought out and classified in necessarily consistent ways. And any battles listed as originating before 2005 are only in the Map because some update to conflicts starting in those years made the news after 2005, such as a development in on-going judicial activity. Finally, the passage of more time will almost certainly add more districts, likely improving how well the Map reflects the true stability or instability of districts.

In addition to the problems with the Map, the “evenness” variables used here were limited—essentially quick expedients to get some sense of how polarized a district might be. They just subtracted one group’s share of a population from another, presumably at odds, group. A simple but superior measure would be to at least count how many different groups have some significant presence in a district—maybe at least a 5 percent share—and create a variable with that number. Even better would be a measure of total diversity, such as Simpson’s Diversity Index. Unfortunately, time did not permit calculation of either such measure for this analysis.

Further research should use more sophisticated measures of diversity, as that is central to public schooling conflict theory. It should also take into consideration a factor for which the Battle Map has data, but would have added a layer of complexity to this analysis that time would not permit: state policymaking. While federal law for the past roughly two decades has mandated that all states have uniform mathematics and reading/Language arts curricula, different states have different degrees of curriculum and rules centralization. Different states also have different numbers of state-level values- and identity-based conflicts. This could have a considerable impact on district-level conflicts, with some states taking decisions—and hence conflicts—out of the realm of districts and placing them in state hands and forcing state-level conflicts. The version of the Battle Map dataset used for this analysis—from August 23, 2019—contained 343 state-level battles. They should probably be analyzed on their own to see what state-level factors

may be associated with them, and analyzed with districts, perhaps using hierarchical linear modeling techniques.

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