Education Governance as a Macrosocial Influence on School Segregation

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Most accounts of contemporary school segregation feature two factors: the tendency of members of distinct social categories to sort unevenly across neighborhoods and schools, and education policies designed to prevent or constrain such sorting. Education governance—the manner in which decision-making power is distributed among actors and institutions—is usually overlooked. Here, I make the case that features of education governance can have an important impact on school segregation. From a sociological perspective, governance systems are *macro-level structures* that shape the *opportunity structure* of segregation. Put simply, the nature of education governance in a society provides a set of opportunities and incentives that actors navigate when forming education policies, and that individuals navigate when choosing schools. Governance is thus a critical feature of the social system, and it bears a major influence on segregation's pervasiveness across places and its persistence over time.

Governance is likely so overlooked because it is so easily taken for granted. Governance systems are often enshrined in constitutions and can seem more resistant to change than specific educational goals or policies. In the United States, the past 150 years have seen vast expansion of secondary and post-secondary education (Goldin and Katz 2008; Meyer et al. 1979); fluctuation between an emphasis on education's mission as a vessel of democratic equality, an engine of social mobility, and a machine sorting individuals according to merit (Labaree 1997); and the widespread implementation and recent retrenchment of school desegregation policies (Clotfelter 2004; Orfield and Lee 2007). Yet those frustrated with failed education reforms often bemoan the intransigence and chaos of the system's governance structure— a federalist system based on state-specific constitutions and local school district autonomy (Manna et al. 2013). In this context, governance hardly seems like a variable relevant to changes in segregation.

This is a mistake for two reasons. First, there have been impressive changes in education governance as education has evolved in the U.S. (Tyack 1974). Second, even with stable governance in the short term, we can see hints of the role governance plays in segregation when the limitations it imposes on actors and institutions clash with efforts at change, such as policies designed to desegregate schools. Moreover, governance does not affect segregation alone, but in interaction with other social factors that affect the way social groups sort (or are sorted) across schools. Even stable features of governance may play an important role in amplifying or mollifying the effects of other forms of social change on segregation. Convincing empirical assessments of these issues would likely require cross-national and historical comparisons, but such research is scarce, and I will not pursue it here.

My goal is to sketch a theoretical account of the relations between features of education governance and the segregation of social groups across schools. My argument is largely based on general sociological theory and research on racial and ethnic school segregation in the United States, but I expect it to generalize to segregation among other social categories and in other societies. I argue that education governance influences segregation in three ways. First, governance determines who makes decisions that affect segregation. This, in turn, delimits the distribution of possible segregation outcomes across school systems and over time. Second, by allocating authority across actors and institutions at various levels of government, governance systems create boundaries that shape the opportunities for social groups to sort systematically across schools. Third, the centralization or decentralization of educational authority also shapes the incentives for groups to sort unevenly across schools by determining how differentiated schools are in quality or cultural orientation. Finally, I emphasize that the ultimate influence of these governance features depends on the surrounding social context.

Causes of Segregation

I began thinking about issues of education governance when developing a sociological theory of school segregation grounded in Max Weber's (1978) notions of social closure and status competition (Fiel 2013, 2015). Put simply, under certain conditions, members of distinct social categories become status groups in competition for symbolic, social, or material resources. Schools are among the most important social locations that can confer many of these ends, including prestige or learning opportunities. When schools differ in these respects, there is competition to gain access to more advantaged schools, and group membership can help determine the winners and losers. The result is often segregation.

In the case of racial and ethnic segregation, this can happen if widespread prejudices or status beliefs cause a school's racial or ethnic composition to directly influence its perceived status or desirability. Schools, like other associations, can confer status on their members, so individuals from high-status groups tend to avoid schools with individuals from lower-status groups to preserve their own status. In the context of school segregation in the U.S., the empirical evidence is remarkably consistent with this sort of process, where whites avoid or flee schools with higher black populations, even when these schools are similar in attributes related to quality and safety (Goyette et al. 2012; Saporito and Lareau 1999).

Status competition can also drive school segregation if schools differ in quality or desirability for reasons unrelated to the types of students enrolled (e.g., financial resources, special programs, teacher quality), as members of disparate groups may differ in their means to gain access to the most desirable schools. Because access to schools is typically contingent on one's residence, the housing market becomes a market in which families compete to purchase schools (Hoxby 1996; Tiebout 1956). Socioeconomically disadvantaged families, often including

disproportionate numbers of racial and ethnic minorities, are likely less able to afford residences in the attendance zones or districts that include the schools most in demand.

So what does governance have to do with this? Weber (1978) noted that institutions and laws play a critical role in regulating these sorts of competitive processes. This has drawn most attention in the economic realm, where regulations dictate how "closed" different jobs or occupations are with respect to requirements for entry (Parkin 1979; Weeden 2002). In the context of school segregation, explicit policies either requiring or forbidding segregated schools are obvious examples (Fiel 2015). These legal and institutional forces are more closely related to policies than governance per se. But governance is critical in determining who creates and enforces these sorts of policies and how effectively they are implemented. It is also critical in determining how these legal and institutional factors vary across contexts in ways that influence segregation. I focus on three mechanisms by which governance affects school segregation. First, it determines who makes decisions relevant to segregation and who these decisions affect. Second, it provides families and schools a set of opportunities and constraints that determine how families of different social groups can sort across schools. And third, it provides a structure of incentives that influence the way students become distributed to schools.

Who Makes Decisions, and Why It Matters for Segregation

The most direct way governance affects school segregation is by delimiting who makes decisions about which students attend which schools. There are two dimensions to this problem. First, are such decisions prescribed by law, or are they delegated to individuals or organizations? Second, at what level of governance are such decisions made?

Legislate or Delegate?

The significance of the first dimension is the rigidity of segregation patterns over time. The greater the extent to which decisions about school assignments are codified into law, the more persistent segregation (or the lack thereof) is likely to be. An extreme example is racial segregation throughout the U.S. South in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Southern states enacted laws requiring separate school systems for black and white children (Franklin 1956), and there was no recourse until the U.S. Supreme Court declared that such dual systems violated the U.S. constitution. One could also imagine an alternative extreme, where a law eliminated segregation by requiring that students be randomly assigned to schools within some geographical area. South Korea experimented with this sort of policy in several cities during the in the 1970s and 1980s (Byun et al. 2012). In such arrangements, educational authorities enforce the law, limiting their ability to change the way students are assigned to schools.

My understanding is that this sort of explicit legal intervention into school assignments is rare, at least currently. Issues of school assignment and choice are usually delegated to local authorities such as school boards or school system administrators. Even when school assignments are rigidly determined by one's residence, the drawing of district boundaries or school attendance zones is often left to the discretion of local political leaders (Siegel-Hawley 2013). Because these decisions are delegated to educational authorities rather than legislated, these authorities can change school assignment policies to suit their preferences. Such change is likely as old authorities are replaced by new ones, and as incumbents respond to political pressure.

The Level of Decision-Making

The significance of the second dimension, the level at which school assignment decisions are made, is the consistency of segregation patterns across places. The higher the level

of decision-making, the more uniform segregation patterns are likely to be across school systems. This is simply a result of the fact that decentralized governance, where authority is located at more local levels, vests authority in more decision-makers and inevitably leads to more variability in decisions relevant to school segregation.

Referring again to the U.S. in the "Jim Crow" era spanning the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, segregated schooling was remarkably uniform across southern school systems. In 1954, fewer than 1 in 100,000 black students attended majority white schools (Orfield and Lee 2007). This is not surprising, given that segregated schooling was legislated at the state level, which not only made segregation resistant to change over time, but also eliminated the possibility of variation across school systems within states. In comparison, most states outside the South did not legislate segregated school systems. To be sure, segregation was highly problematic throughout the U.S., but many school systems outside the South had at least some degree of integration and a few made significant efforts at desegregation (Clotfelter 2004; Wish 1964). One could take these facts and argue that decentralization can reduce segregation, while centralization can heighten it. With respect to the former, placing authority at the state rather than national level allowed for at least some desegregated school systems outside the South; with respect to the latter, placing authority at the state rather than district level eliminated the possibility for desegregation within southern school systems.

Of course, we could also make the opposite argument. After all, the U.S. Supreme Court's edict in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) that segregated school systems violated the U.S. constitution was a shift in the direction of centralization. The nature of this shift is complicated. The federal government did not simply seize the power to make decisions about school assignment—its ability to do so is dubious given that the U.S. constitution does nothing to

assert national authority over education. Instead, each state has its own constitution establishing its own public education system and specifying its own governance structure. The federal government's authority is ultimately limited to instances in which school systems violate students' rights as delimited in the U.S. constitution.

Nonetheless, *Brown* signaled an era in which the national government would emerge as an educational authority with which state and local governments would have to contend. Because the judiciary had no obvious way to enforce their desegregation rulings, orchestrating desegregation was a tricky endeavor. Many southern states staunchly resisted it, and it took almost two decades and several more federal court decisions before many segregated school systems were eliminated (Clotfelter 2004). A common tactic of resistance was to create sham "freedom of choice" assignment policies that replaced formal legal segregation with segregation via intimidation and coercion (Bolton 2005). A few cases in which desegregation did occur required extreme measures, including the assistance of federal marshals or armed troops (Wilkinson 1978).

Ultimately, the federal government found more successful ways to exert its influence via "carrots and sticks" (Cascio et al. 2010). This required further shifts toward centralization. One that had occurred previously was President Eisenhower's unilateral creation of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) in 1953, the predecessor of the U.S. Department of Education. Another was the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964, which gave the U.S. Justice Department the authority to sue school systems that refused to desegregate schools and enabled federal officials at HEW to withhold funding from segregated schools. A third was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which committed substantial amounts of federal funding to school districts serving low-income students. This was a boon to many school

systems with large minority populations, but it also gave the federal government leverage to enforce desegregation. Threats to withhold these funds were a powerful if not decisive force in the ultimate desegregation of many school systems (Cascio et al. 2010; Walters 2001).

History shows that particular aspects of education governance in the U.S. have supported segregated schooling at times while facilitating school desegregation at others. The specific implications of power being located at a given level depended on who held power. It also shows that the relationship between governance and segregation operates in both directions. Although I will focus on the way that governance influences segregation, the record also shows that problems related to school segregation became a powerful impetus for more centralized education governance in the desegregation era. A more complex governance structure has since emerged. Partly due to dissatisfaction with the ability of centralized systems to meet the needs of ethnically and socioeconomically diverse constituencies, there has been a return to more decentralized governance in many school systems (Tyack and Cuban 1995).

As I will argue below, it is not only decisions about school assignments or school choice that influence segregation, but also decisions about cultural differentiation and resource allocation across schools. With respect to these types of decisions, the same argument applies. The more such decisions are codified into law rather than delegated to authority figures, the more persistent their effects on segregation will be over time. And the higher the level at which such decisions are made, the more consistent their effects on segregation will be across places.

The Unpredictable Effects of Governance on Segregation

If advocates of integrated schooling were developing or overhauling a governance system, what does this tell us about who should make decisions relevant to segregation? The preceding discussion makes it clear that this is complicated. Consider the common emphasis on

equity among advocates of more centralized governance. Among other things, it is often argued that decentralized governance permits segregation and inequality across school systems (Hess and Meeks 2013); I have made similar arguments (Fiel 2015). But what if southern states in the U.S. had not mandated segregated school systems, but had instead delegated authority to school districts? It is plausible that some districts would have provided integrated schools— otherwise why the need for state laws? Or what if segregationists had gained power and passed federal laws mandating segregated school systems nationwide? Clearly, it is possible for more centralized systems to create more segregation than more decentralized systems.

Assuming we value some degree of integration—and setting aside issues of efficiency and productivity—if we knew what decisions would be made, we could easily construct optimal governance systems. Unfortunately, the decisions of actors in the future are unpredictable, and we must consider the possibility of unforeseen political changes that may bring undesirable results. How might we construct governance systems amid such unpredictability? This is an interesting decision problem. The answer depends on the information at hand and how averse we are to different levels of segregation.

We could construct a system that minimizes the risk of persistent, complete segregation. If we deem it plausible that a pro-segregation government might take power, it might make sense to opt for a decentralized structure with authority over school assignments located at the local level and delegated rather than legislated. This approach makes it likely that some school systems will be quite segregated at times, but also makes it likely that at least a few others will be quite integrated. Thus, despite the common assumption that decentralized systems are ripe for segregation and inequality, they may also be the safest way to avoid extreme and pervasive segregation in the population.

Alternatively, we could construct a system that maximizes the expected level of integration in the population. If we deem it very unlikely that a pro-segregation government would take power, or very likely that a pro-integration government would take power, it might instead make sense to opt for a centralized structure that legislates decisions about school assignments. This approach would make it likely that our society would have widespread and persistent integration in all of its school systems. But if we were wrong and a pro-segregation government did take power, we would likely see pervasive and extreme segregation.

Obviously, those concerned with governance have many concerns other than segregation and may not consider segregation at all. The point here is merely to show that who makes decisions about school assignments can have a powerful influence on segregation patterns, but also that this influence is difficult to predict.

The Opportunity Structure for School Segregation

The previous section argued that there is no clear relationship between segregation and the centralization or decentralization of decision-making consequential to school segregation. In a prior article, I oversimplified this relationship, hypothesizing that decentralization heightens segregation (Fiel 2015). Here I will refine this argument, claiming that decentralization *within schooling markets* is very likely to heighten segregation through one particular mechanism. This is by creating organizational boundaries—such as those between school districts or between the public and private sectors—that provide avenues of segregation for individuals choosing schools. "Within markets" is key here, as it is racial imbalance across schools within the same area that is most consistent with sociological interpretations of segregation (James and Taeuber 1985).

Markets are difficult to delineate, but theoretically they should include all the schools a student has to choose from. Most work in the U.S. uses large metropolitan areas, including their

surrounding suburbs, as schooling markets; counties are a typical alternative for nonmetropolitan areas. The assumption is that the behaviors relevant to segregation—avoiding schools populated with certain groups, unequal access to certain residential areas—lead to sorting within these markets but not between them. Between-market sorting is presumably due to larger-scale historical and demographic processes related to migration, fertility, etc. (Fiel 2013).

Boundaries as Opportunities

With respect to the opportunity structure, governance systems delineate boundaries within schooling markets that shape the ways students can sort across schools and the ways schools may select students. Theoretically, we can think of school segregation as the alignment of social boundaries and organizational boundaries. The key organizational boundaries dictate who has the opportunity to attend which schools. The relevant social boundaries are those that maintain the social importance of membership in different categories, such as racial and ethnic groups, social classes, etc.

This is closely related to sociologist Charles Tilly's theory of *Durable Inequality* (1998). Tilly claimed that many instances of persistent inequality between social categories can be thought of as "a maze in which clusters of people wander separated by walls they have built themselves, not always knowingly" (2005, p. 71). Many of these walls arise in and between organizations as they evolve. The focus here is how they arise as governance is decentralized. Delegating authority to lower levels of a school system requires installing organizational boundaries between the lower-level units. These boundaries may have little to do with social boundaries, but they will very often promote segregation between social groups.

One instance of decentralization is the allowance and autonomy of private schools. Private schools in the U.S. are usually loosely regulated by states but not subject to the authority

of local education agencies (school districts). They have largely escaped intervention relevant to segregation, although those accepting public funds to support enrollment (e.g., vouchers) typically must commit not to discriminate against students according to race, national origin, etc. (U.S. Depatment of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2009). The relevant organizational boundaries here are those between the public and private schools within the same schooling market, as well as those between different private schools within the same market. When governance systems limit the authority of public actors to intervene in private school systems, they limit the means for the government to address segregation that involves private schools. This made private "segregation academies" a popular and often effective last resort for whites resisting desegregation in the U.S. South (Andrews 2002). Others have noted, both in the U.S. and elsewhere, that because private schools are often costly to attend, they tend to promote socioeconomic segregation between the public and private sectors (Betts and Fairlie 2001; Narodowski et al. 2016).

Probably the most important instance of governance creating organizational boundaries is the delineation of local education agencies. In the U.S., these are school districts, which are fairly autonomous and retain substantial authority over education decisions. Students are typically limited to the schools within the boundaries of the district in which they reside, although some districts have partnered to allow inter-district choice to students (Hermann et al. 2009). Generally, however, if multiple districts exist in the same schooling market, there are limitations on governmental efforts to address segregation between school districts.

The autonomy of school districts in this regard was affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court in its *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) decision. The case focused on whether metropolitan Detroit, which had 53 districts and substantial levels of segregation between them, could use cross-

district busing plans to desegregate schools. The court ruled that, unless district boundaries were created for the explicit purpose of segregating students of different races, neither the school systems nor the state were responsible for between-district segregation, which was largely a result of individual choices and the consequent residential segregation. Hence, cross-district desegregation plans violated district autonomy. This effectively ensured persistent if not increasing between-district segregation during a period of middle-class white suburbanization (Ayscue and Orfield 2015; Clotfelter 2004).

These autonomous districts are actually the product of about a century's worth of centralization. From the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s, there was a steady movement toward the consolidation of community schools and small ward-based districts into larger city-wide districts with a centralized power structure (Tyack 1974). Although data for comprehensive segregation analyses are lacking, this almost certainly helped reduce segregation along various social dimensions. This shift was motivated in part by bringing children of immigrants from diverse ethnic backgrounds into the same schools to provide a more uniform curriculum and "Americanize" them (Tyack 1974). More recently, many school systems have reverted to slightly more decentralized structures with more fragmented districts (Tyack and Cuban 1995).

With respect to the fragmentation of schooling markets in the contemporary U.S., the evidence is clear. A greater number of districts coincides with increased residential segregation (Bischoff 2008) and between-district school segregation (Ayscue and Orfield 2015), which now accounts for the majority of racial school segregation (Fiel 2013). Schooling market fragmentation also weakens the effectiveness of desegregation policies—this is why segregation was much more successful in the South, which has large county-wide districts, than elsewhere in the U.S., where districts are often smaller and more fragmented (Clotfelter 2004). Consequently,

despite its more troubling history with racial segregation, schools in the South became the least segregated in the U.S. by the 1990s (Logan et al. 2008).

Must Organizational Fragmentation Heighten Segregation?

I believe there are grounds to hypothesize that, all else equal, decentralization within schooling markets will *almost* always increase segregation. This is because the organizational boundaries that accompany decentralization create new opportunities for or avenues of segregation. If one group wishes to avoid another, it can monopolize schools protected by one or more of these boundaries. Or if a particular bounded group of schools is desirable for other reasons, a more advantaged social group may be able to gain access to it by purchasing residences within its attendance zone boundary or by paying for private school tuition. In short, groups seeking to avoid outsiders can find havens in schools protected by organizational boundaries, even when those boundaries were created for other purposes.

Yet one could imagine cases where competition for schools in a fragmented schooling market reduces a particular form of segregation. I suspect that this is most likely when it does so by replacing one form of segregation with another. If memberships in social categories along two different dimensions intersect, an increase in the salience of one dimension may reduce the salience of the other (Brewer 1999). To take a specific example, a reduction in racial housing discrimination might allow middle-class minorities to purchase housing in the neighborhoods of more desirable schools. This would decrease the salience of race in the competition for schools and increase the salience of class—similar consequences would likely arise from a reduction in economic inequality among racial groups. Amid this sort of change, competition for unequal schools might reduce racial segregation but increase economic segregation.

Nonetheless, I would stop short of arguing that the fragmentation of schooling markets always heightens segregation. One could imagine private schools becoming a haven for integrated schooling for those wishing to avoid a segregated public school system. Or one could imagine between-district fragmentation having a similar effect if one district was heavily segregated and another was integrated. Theoretically, it seems important to acknowledge these possibilities. Practically, however, I am not aware of many of these types of exceptions. Instead, decentralization within schooling markets seems to promote organizational fragmentation, which creates an opportunity structure favorable to segregation.

The Incentive Structure for School Segregation

Education governance may also influence segregation by shaping the extent to which schools differ in ways that incentivize segregative choices. This is another mechanism by which I expect decentralization within schooling markets to usually, but not uniformly, promote segregation. Here I will distinguish two dimensions of such differentiation: differences in perceived school quality, and differences in cultural orientation.

Between-school differences in perceived quality entail disparities in schools' financial resources, the quality of facilities, teacher experience, advanced curricular programs, etc. Which of these attributes actually matters to schools' quality in terms of causally promoting desirable student outcomes is less important than their association with *perceived* quality, which makes some schools more desirable than others. I previously alluded to the mechanism by which this promotes school segregation. Between-school disparities promote competition for more desirable schools, which drives up their prices, either via housing prices in schools' attendance zones, tuition costs, or other means by which some families can gain an advantage in access to preferred schools. Whatever the means, socioeconomic disparities between social groups will often lead

members of disadvantaged groups to be less able to afford access to preferred schools. There is evidence that such between-school resource disparities do increase segregation and that funding equalization reduces it (Chakrabarti and Roy 2015; Fiel 2015).

Whereas between-school differences in perceived quality concern who has access to the most preferred schools, differences in cultural orientation concern who prefers which schools. Cultural differentiation might entail strong ties to a well-defined local community or a mission rooted in values tied to specific religious, ethnic, or other social groups. Historically, schools have served an important role as social and cultural hubs of small communities and have ensured the socialization of children from particular ethnic, religious, or other groups into their status cultures (Collins 1979; Durkheim 1977; Meyer et al. 1979; Tyack 1974).

There is no doubt that such cultural differentiation has diminished by historical standards. Education systems worldwide have become more secular and rational as they have expanded and evolved to play an important role in building and unifying modern nation-states (Boli et al. 1985). But there is also no doubt that some cultural differentiation persists. Religious private schools are obvious examples. Some charter schools in the U.S. have also had cultural orientations that clearly align with ethnic differences (Wells et al. 1999). The mechanism by which cultural differentiation promotes segregation is by appealing to and attracting specific groups of students while repelling others. Whether viewed as a way for schools to select students or as a way to help students sort more efficiently, this is very likely to promote segregation.

Must Decentralization Increase Differentiation?

Decentralization is conducive to these types of differentiation. The lower the level at which governments distribute resources among schools, the greater the inequality in perceived quality is likely to be. Inequality in decentralized education finance systems is a much-maligned

example. In the U.S., there are substantial disparities in per-pupil expenditures across states, across districts within states, and even across schools within districts (Brown 2013; Condron and Roscigno 2003; Walters 2001). There are surely financial disparities between private and public schools as well. These expenditure disparities are also related to the unequal distribution of skilled and experienced teachers, another important aspect of school quality (Brown 2013). The lower the level at which teacher allocations to schools are governed, and the more autonomy granted to teachers in selecting schools, the more unequal teacher quality is likely to be across schools. The best teachers tend to be attracted to the best-regarded schools, which tend to be the schools with the highest-achieving students, which tend to come from the most advantaged social groups and neighborhoods (Jackson 2009).

Decentralization, especially with respect to curricular decisions, likely facilitates cultural differentiation as well. Granting autonomy to private schools allows them to maintain their own religious missions or status cultures. The autonomy of charter schools in the U.S. allows them to distinguish themselves in terms of culturally-oriented missions (Wells et al. 1999). And even within districts, traditional public schools are often differentiated according to special programs or curricula (Gamoran 1996).

Yet history suggests that centralization has also been accompanied by differentiation at times. Tyack (1974) notes that this was true of the progressive movement in the U.S., between 1870 and 1930. Alongside the centralization of urban school systems and the placement of professionals atop these hierarchies, this movement took a scientific approach to reform, with a major theme being differentiated education. In some cases, this meant special schools for specific types of students. In others it meant special classrooms or programs for different students. I would not attribute these forms of differentiation to centralization, however, but

instead to the particular form of specialization that coincided with the expansion of the rational bureaucratic model of governance. Hence, I think there are grounds to expect decentralization to be consistently linked to differentiation.

Must Differentiation Increase Segregation?

The foregoing discussion predicts that differentiation among schools within markets will increase segregation. Again, this is because differentiation creates an incentive for actors to monopolize the most desirable schools, and social boundaries or resource disparities among social categories often ensure that these processes create segregation. I expect that this will generally be the case, but "magnet schools" present a challenge. A popular and somewhat successful way to reduce racial segregation in the U.S. was to attract whites and socioeconomically advantaged students to magnet schools in low-income and minority neighborhoods by providing special programs or advanced curricular options (Rossell 1988).

How can we account for this? It is worth noting that magnet schools, and other schools in desegregated systems, often experienced substantial within-school segregation between racial or socioeconomic groups across programs, academic tracks, and classrooms as they experienced increasing diversity (Mickelson 2001; West 1994). I have kept my focus on between-school segregation here, but a more thorough understanding of segregation would need to account for smaller-scale processes as well. Nonetheless, it seems that there are ways to use differentiation strategically to reduce segregation. Schools likely to attract students of one particular group for some reason (residential location) can differentiate themselves in ways to attract students of another group (special programs). Even with problems of within-school segregation, any reduction in segregation between schools should at least increase the potential for more intergroup contact. Hence, the link between differentiation and segregation is not absolute.

The Importance of Context

A recurring theme throughout has been that although there are many reasons to expect education governance to affect school segregation, the exact nature of these effects depends on the context. Segregation depends on how governance systems interact with other social processes. Whether decentralized decision-making heightens or lessens segregation, for instance, depends on who is making relevant decisions. Who makes these decisions depends on who gains power, which depends on elections, political appointments, or other political processes. The decisions they make also depend on political processes. And these political processes depend on social and economic conditions.

An equally important condition is the nature of social group relations in general, apart from political or governance issues. If racial and ethnic boundaries are very salient in a society, then these governance issues can be expected to weigh heavily on racial and ethnic segregation patterns. If racial and ethnic boundaries are weak, however, there is no reason to expect features of education governance to have much impact on racial and ethnic segregation. The same would hold for any potential axis of social differentiation such as gender, social class, etc. Governance systems can amplify or mollify segregation between differentiated social groups involved in processes of status competition. They do so by shaping the opportunities and incentives to segregate across schools.

I explored some of these contingencies in my own work on segregation in the U.S. in the 1990s and 2000s (Fiel 2015). I was most interested in how the salience of racial and ethnic boundaries in different schooling markets altered the extent to which features associated with organizational fragmentation and differentiation related to school segregation between whites, blacks, and Hispanics. It is very difficult to measure the salience of boundaries, but I followed

prior work in the "racial competition" or "racial threat" literature and used measures based on the composition of the student population (Blalock 1967; Taylor 1998). The more evenly represented two groups (e.g., whites and blacks) are, the more salient the group boundary is thought to be in social and political action. I estimated regression models predicting segregation that included interactions between measures of white-minority representation and the number of districts per market, the number of schools per district, and the share of private and charter schools in the market to assess the role of organizational fragmentation. All of these aspects of fragmentation heightened the association between white-Hispanic representation and segregation, and most of them did for white-black segregation as well. The same was true for measures of differentiation based on differences between schools in per-pupil expenditures and pupil-teacher ratios. It is worth noting that the evidence was less conclusive when using low levels of interracial marriage as a measure of racial/ethnic salience. Overall, however, the findings suggest that organizational fragmentation and between-school differentiation facilitate segregation where racial/ethnic boundaries are salient.

In sum, the point is that governance does not directly affect segregation. Instead, it operates by creating an environment that sets constraints on how segregative processes unfold. When social conditions are ripe for a certain form of segregation, governance structures shape the opportunities and incentives for this to occur.

Conclusion

I expect that education governance can have a large impact on school segregation, but one that is likely to be overlooked. This is because governance tends to change slowly if at all, and we tend to take it for granted, whereas we see many other social and political changes that seem to affect segregation obviously and directly. But I suspect that the impact of these more

obvious factors depends on the features of governance systems. As we ponder ways to change or improve existing governance systems, or ways to address school segregation, it is important to keep these effects in mind.

A convincing empirical case for these governance effects will likely require comparative studies involving countries with sufficiently distinct governance structures. If some of these countries also experienced abrupt changes in governance, cross-time comparisons would be informative as well. Such efforts will face the challenge of compiling comparable data across countries and time periods and of engaging collaboration among scholars with expertise in different countries. It will also face the challenge that the most salient social boundaries and the particular groups of interest will vary substantially across societies. Nonetheless, I think such efforts would be possible and worthwhile. I would like to review and clarify a few hypotheses developed here that might inform these types of investigations.

First, when and where decisions about student assignment to schools are legislated rather than delegated to individuals and organizations, patterns of segregation will be much more persistent over time. Second, when and where authority over educational policies relevant to segregation is more centralized—located at higher levels of government—segregation will vary much less across local school systems than when and where authority is more decentralized. Note that these hypotheses are about *variation* in segregation and not the absolute levels of segregation. This is because it is difficult to predict exactly how these governance features will affect segregation without knowing who makes the relevant decisions.

Third, when and where governance within local schooling markets is more decentralized—for instance, when and where markets are organizationally fragmented—segregation will be more pronounced than when and where within-market governance is more

centralized. There may be some exceptions where decentralization creates pockets of desegregated schools within otherwise segregated schooling markets, but I suspect that such cases are rare. Fourth, when and where governance within markets is more decentralized, schools will be more differentiated in quality and cultural orientation and, in turn, more segregated than when and where governance within markets is more centralized. For the latter hypothesis, I also anticipate some exceptions when policymakers explicitly use differentiation as a way to provide incentives for families to make choices that reduce or prevent segregation.

Finally, the effects related to these hypotheses should be most pronounced for segregation between the particular social categories separated by the most salient social boundaries. They should be also more pronounced when and where a given boundary is more salient and less pronounced when a given boundary is less salient.

Before closing, I should address some reasons for skepticism about my argument. Although I have strived to make it as general as possible, it is admittedly informed mostly by research on racial and ethnic segregation in the United States. There is likely some parochialism here that causes some shortcomings. Nonetheless, there are reasons expect this argument to hold fairly well across societies and with respect to other social categories. For one, the theoretical approach rooted in status group competition is very general, and though racial and ethnic boundaries may stand out as distinct in their salience, I see no reason for the nature of competition across these boundaries to differ from that across others. For another, educational systems characteristic of Western countries like the U.S. have spread rapidly throughout the world, becoming part of the fabric of modern democracies (Boli et al. 1985). Some have argued convergence in governance as well, with the U.S. becoming slightly more centralized and other countries becoming more decentralized (Astiz et al. 2002; Lundahl 2002). I expect there is

enough variation in these governance structures to explore their relationships to segregation, but likely enough overlap to justify attempts at general theoretical propositions. I hope that future work will shed some light on these hypotheses, both to provide an improved understanding of segregation and a greater appreciation for the myriad effects of education governance.

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