

THE POLLS—TRENDS SCHOOL INTEGRATION POLLS

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Abstract Dating back to the mid-1950s, questions regarding school integration have become a staple of public opinion polls. As the United States transitions to an era where virtually all integration efforts must be voluntarily adopted by school boards, public support for integration is more important than ever. To understand the public's shifting view on this topic, we review poll questions in three broad areas: public support for school racial integration, public preferences for an ideal school composition, and beliefs about the outcomes of school integration. Additionally, we consider the public's opinion relative to Supreme Court cases. The variety of question types, formats, and nature of the topic make interpreting the public's views challenging, but some generalizations are possible: widespread support for the ideal of integration is consistent, but more ambiguity emerges about the specifics of accomplishing desegregation.

Introduction

Dating back to the mid-1950s, questions regarding school integration have become a staple of public opinion polls. Schools are one of the few public institutions that provide opportunities for persons of different races/ethnicities to work together regularly. As the United States transitions to an era where virtually all integration efforts must be voluntarily adopted by school boards, public support for integration is more important than ever. But how well have we understood the public's views about school integration?

The variety of question types, formats, and nature of the topic make interpreting the public's views challenging, but generalizations are possible: Widespread

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support for the ideal of integration is consistent, but more ambiguity emerges about the specifics of accomplishing desegregation. This review discusses the sometimes paradoxical opinions on school desegregation, paying particular attention to question wording. Further, the small subset of options and the terms under which the public has been asked to evaluate school desegregation leave other possibilities relatively unexplored, demonstrating that there is still much not known.

Support for School Racial Integration

Somewhat surprisingly, the importance of school integration for the public is not easily ascertained. The most basic of questions—whether achieving school integration is an important issue—has not been consistently asked. A few years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, over half of respondents (52%) selected school integration as the most important problem facing the nation from a list of hot-button issues, such as atomic testing and the “middle Eastern situation” (Roper 1958). The question wording shifted in 1981 to focus on busing to achieve racial integration, and just under one-third (31%) of the public agreed it was the most important issue, compared to abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment (NBC and Associated Press 1981). In 1989, respondents were asked yet another version of this question, and only 30% of the public thought school integration should be a top national priority (NBC 1989). Whether this indicates that its importance has declined in the public’s mind is difficult to say.

More often, the public was asked how it felt about school integration through several different questions. Even in the earliest polls, when media portrayals of public outrage against integration efforts were commonplace (Patterson 2001), the public often expressed approval of school integration, at least in the abstract.

The public was consistently asked whether it believed black and white students should attend the same schools. This question was first asked in 1942 and has been asked consistently through 2007.¹ The question wording has remained nearly identical, producing a trend that shows a steady and significant increase in the percent reporting that students of different races should attend the “same schools.” While only one-third of white respondents believed that black and white students should go to the same schools in 1942 (Schuman et al. 1997), 95% of all respondents did in 2007 (table 1).²

Further illustrating support for school integration are questions about whether enough is being done. The percentage reporting that more should be done has grown since the early 1970s, starting at just 30% in 1973 and reaching 59% in

1. This question was sometimes asked only of white respondents. Since 1972, this question has been asked of respondents of all races/ethnicities. The overall trend lines for whites and for all races remain consistent.

2. Because of consistently high support for black and white students attending the same schools, NORC dropped this question in 1995 (Schuman et al. 1997). Other polls have continued to include this question, but with less frequency.

Table 1. General Attitudes Toward Black and White Students Attending the Same School. Do you think white students and Negro/black students should go to the same schools or to separate schools?

	NORC ^a Apr-56 (%)	NORC ^a Jun-56 (%)	NORC Sep-56 (%)	NORC ^a Apr-63 (%)	NORC Nov-63 (%)	NORC ^a Dec-63 (%)	NORC ^a Jun-65 (%)	NORC ^b Apr-68 (%)	NORC Feb-70 (%)	NORC Feb-72 (%)
Same schools	49	49	48	63	65	63	67	71	74	86
Separate schools	47	49	49	32	29	35	30	26	24	12
Don't know	4	2	4	5	6	2	3	3	3	2
N	1,114	1,275	1,263	1,515	1,384	1,557	1,469	1,482	1,490	1,613

	NORC Feb-76 (%)	NORC Feb-77 (%)	NORC Feb-80 (%)	NORC Feb-82 (%)	NORC Feb-84 (%)	NORC Feb-85 (%)	NBC Aug-89 (%)	PSRA/ NEWS- WEEK Feb-95 (%)	PSRA/PEW ^c Sep-07 (%)
Same schools	84	85	87	89	91	92	94	92	95
Separate schools	14	13	11	9	8	7	3	4	2
Don't know	3	2	2	2	2	1	3	4	3
N	1,499	1,530	1,468	1,506	1,473	1534	1,500	758	3,086

^aAsked of subpopulation of whites only.

^bAsked of subpopulation of non-blacks only.

^cThe sample included an oversample of blacks. Results are weighted to be representative of the national adult population.

Table 2. Beliefs about Doing More or Less to Achieve Integration. Do you believe more should be done—or less should be done—to integrate the schools throughout the nation?

	GALLUP May-73 (%)	GALLUP/PDK ^a Apr-88 (%)	CNN/USA Apr-94 (%)	GALLUP/CNN/USA Jul-99 (%)
More	30	37	56	59
Less	38	23	30	28
No change	22 (vol.)	31	9 (vol.)	7 (vol.)
Don't know/No answer/Refused	9	9	5	6
<i>N</i>	1,567	2,118	1,246	1,031

^aThe sample included an oversample of black adults. Results are weighted to be representative of the national adult population.

1999 (table 2).³ Since this question was asked during decades when there were many stable, effective desegregation plans being implemented (Clotfelter 2004), it is an even stronger finding that the majority of the public wanted *more* done.

Another way to measure early support for school desegregation is to probe the public's views about the speed of integration. Two questions related to the pace of school integration were asked and evoke different perspectives than those above. The first question, asked shortly after *Brown*, found strong public endorsement for “gradual” integration, with over two-thirds of the public favoring this option and just one-quarter favoring school integration occurring in the “near future” (table 3.1). In 1969 and 1970, a plurality of people each time replied that school integration was going “too fast” (table 3.2).⁴

In sum, somewhat paradoxically, polls found that while the public was growing more supportive of integrated schools in principle, a majority also felt that the country was moving too quickly toward them.

Ideal Composition of Schools

The question of which type of school, racially diverse or not, provides the best environment for children has been posed consistently. At first glance, the public's views on this topic appear unstable, even erratic. But these disparate results

3. Comparing the three years should be done with some caution. In 1973 and 1999, respondents were given just two answer options: more and less. However, significant numbers volunteered the response “no change”—22% and 7%, respectively. The choice of “no change” was offered in 1988, and nearly one-third of respondents selected this. Providing this option certainly impacted the outcome of this poll. However, the change between 1973 and 1999 remains significant.

4. Variations of these questions included asking about whether different presidential administrations were pushing integration fast enough (table 4).

Table 3.1. Beliefs about Pace of Integration I. Do you think integration—that is, bring Negro and white children together in the schools—should be brought about gradually or do you think every means should be used to bring it about in the near future?

	GALLUP Dec-56 (%)	GALLUP Jul-57 (%)	GALLUP May-61 (%)
Gradually	69	68	61
Near future	24	26	23
No opinion	7	6	7
Never (vol.)	n/a	n/a	9
<i>N</i>	1,543	1,534	1,502

appear to be artifacts of question wording, and responses vary based on the methods for achieving integration that respondents are asked to consider.

An early version of this question was whether respondents would send their child to a school where a few, half, or more than half of the children are of the opposite race of the respondent (black or white). From 1969 to 1997, there have been significant fluctuations in the percent objecting to schools where more than half of the students are from a different race, reaching a high point in 1973 when over half (56%) stated that they would object to such a school environment. By 1997, the percent objecting reached its low, at 22%. With no clear trend, these numbers appear highly unstable. The percent who object to “just a few” of the students being from the opposite race, on the other hand, steadily declined from 1968 to 1997 when it reached just 2% (table 5).⁵ Sometimes this question was asked only of white respondents. In the earliest poll in 1958, 24% of white

Table 3.2. Beliefs about Pace of Integration II. What is your opinion—do you think the racial integration of schools in the United States is going too fast or not fast enough?

	GALLUP Jul-69 (%)	GALLUP Feb-70 (%)
Too fast	44	48
Not fast enough	22	17
About right (vol.)	25	21
Don't know	9	14
<i>N</i>	1,517	1,430

5. Similar questions have been asked in the housing context; in the early 1990s, less than 40% of whites felt comfortable in a neighborhood with a majority of blacks (Charles 2005).

Table 4. Views on the Presidency and School Integration. Do you think the Kennedy (1962–1963)/Johnson (1964–1968) administration is pushing racial integration too fast or not fast enough?

	GALLUP May-62 (%)	GALLUP Oct-62 (%)	GALLUP May-63 (%)	GALLUP Jun-63 (%)	GALLUP Aug-63 (%)	GALLUP Sep-63 (%)
Too fast	32	42	37	41	50	50
Not fast enough	11	12	18	14	10	13
About right (vol.)	35	32	32	31	26	26
Don't know	22	14	13	14	14	11
<i>N</i>	1,503	1,644	1,658	1,606	1,588	1,550

	GALLUP Oct-63 (%)	GALLUP Nov-63 (%)	GALLUP Jan-64 (%)	GALLUP Mar-65 (%)	GALLUP Apr-65 (%)	GALLUP Jun-65 (%)
Too fast	46	47	30	34	45	40
Not fast enough	12	11	15	17	14	13
About right (vol.)	31	31	40	38	32	38
Don't know	11	11	16	11	9	9
<i>N</i>	1,589	1,635	1,631	1,541	1,531	2,534

	GALLUP Jul-65 (%)	GALLUP Aug-65 (%)	GALLUP Jun-66 (%)	GALLUP Sep-66 (%)	GALLUP Oct-66 (%)	GALLUP Apr-68 (%)
Too fast	43	46	46	52	53	39
Not fast enough	13	8	7	10	9	21
About right (vol.)	34	33	34	29	28	25
Don't know	10	13	13	9	11	15
<i>N</i>	2,407	1,586	1,562	1,554	2,417	1,504

	GALLUP May-68 (%)	GALLUP Sep-68 (%)
Too fast	45	54
Not fast enough	20	17
About right (vol.)	22	21
Don't know	13	8
<i>N</i>	1,507	1,500

Table 5. Attitudes Toward the Concentration of Students of Other Races in Your Child's School. Would you yourself have any objection to sending your children to a school where a few/half/more than half of the children are (Negroes/blacks)?

Respondents of All Racial Backgrounds									
	NORC Feb-72 (%)	NORC ^a Feb-75 (%)	NORC Feb-77 (%)	NORC ^c Feb-78 (%)	NORC ^c Feb-82 (%)	NORC ^c Feb-83 (%)	NORC ^c Feb-85 (%)	NORC ^c Feb-86 (%)	NORC ^c Feb-88 (%)
Would object to a few	7	7	7	5	6	5	4	5	4
Would object to half*	17	22	19	18	17	18	16	18	16
Would object to more than half**	39	37	45	36	37	43	40	42	37
<i>N</i>	1,368	1,361	1,346	1,532	1,506	1,599	1,534	1,470	986

	NORC ^c Feb-89 (%)	NORC ^c Feb-90 (%)	NORC ^c Feb-91 (%)	NORC ^c Feb-93 (%)	NORC ^c Jan-94 (%)	NORC ^c Feb-96 (%)	GALLUP/ CNN/USA TODAY ^{a,c} May-97 (%)
Would object to a few	4	3	3	4	4	3	2
Would object to half*	17	16	15	14	12	15	9
Would object to more than half**	40	40	34	36	35	29	22
<i>N</i>	1,025	1,372	1,011	1,071	1,994	968	252

Continued

Table 5. Continued

White Respondents Asked about Colored/Black Children								
	GALLUP ^b Sep-58 (%)	GALLUP ^b Feb-59 (%)	GALLUP ^b May-63 (%)	GALLUP ^b Apr-65 (%)	GALLUP ^b Jun-65 (%)	GALLUP ^b Feb-68 (%)	GALLUP ^b Jul-69 (%)	GALLUP ^b Mar-70 (%)
Would object to a few	24	19	23	14	18	10	11	7
Would object to half*	31	31	29	27	26	28	24	22
Would object to more than half**	30	40	37	38	40	22	38	43
<i>N</i>	636	630	580	548	560	547	561	504

	GALLUP ^b Apr-70 (%)	GALLUP ^b Aug-73 (%)	GALLUP ^b Sep-75 (%)	GALLUP ^b Jul-78 (%)	GALLUP ^b Dec-80 (%)	GALLUP ^b Jun-90 (%)
Would object to a few	9	8	6	5	5	1
Would object to half*	23	23	23	24	24	10
Would object to more than half**	38	56	35	41	44	31
<i>N</i>	552	454	509	498	465	1,233

^aAsked of those with children under 18 in kindergarten through high school.

^bAsked only of whites with children in grade school/high school.

^cQuestion variation “. . . (if respondent is white, ask:) black, (if respondent is black, ask:) white?”.

*Asked of those who said they had no objection to sending their children to a school where a few of the children were from the opposite race or who didn’t know.

**Asked of those who said they had no objection to sending their children to a school where half of the children were from the opposite race or who didn’t know.

respondents objected to “just a few,” but by 1990 only 1% of whites objected to such a school environment.

Similarly, when asked what type of school respondents would prefer in 2004, the overwhelming majority (83%, data not shown) selected a school where the students are “mostly mixed” (Associated Press/IPSOS 2004). When no other qualifiers were included in survey questions, the vast majority selected a diverse school.

When other considerations, such as requiring some students to travel to create diverse schools, are added to the decision-making process, preference for diverse schools plummets. Examining these trends is more challenging because each question varied the wording somewhat. While we might expect that such variation would result in disparate opinions, instead we find that question wording appears to have a limited effect on public opinion regarding this topic; people consistently express less support for diverse schools when transporting (busing) students is mentioned. While the percent of respondents who support transferring students for integration crept upward—starting at just 3% in 1980—the majority of respondents (59%) in 2007 stated that they preferred that students attend local schools, even if it meant that most of the students would be of the same race (tables 6.1–6.4).

Initially, questions on this topic specified busing as the way in which students would travel. However, after the backlash toward busing for integration (Orfield and Eaton 1996, chapter 4), this term was dropped, and polls in the 1990s simply referred to “travel.” Substituting the term “travel” had little effect on the

Table 6.1. Views on School Integration—Neighborhood Schools or Busing I. There is much discussion about the best way to deal with racial problems. Some people think achieving racial integration of schools is so important that it justifies busing children to schools out of their own neighborhoods (Point 1). Others think letting children go to their neighborhood schools is so important that they oppose busing (Point 7). Where would you place yourself on this scale or haven’t you thought much about this?

	CPS/UM Nov-80 (%)	CPS/UM Nov-84 (%)
Point 1—Bus to achieve integration	3	3
Point 2	3	2
Point 3	3	3
Point 4	6	7
Point 5	5	9
Point 6	16	19
Point 7—Keep children in neighborhood schools	57	48
Haven’t thought much about it	6	2
Don’t know	1	7
<i>N</i>	1,408	1,989

Table 6.2. Views on School Integration—Neighborhood Schools or Busing II. As I read a couple more pairs of statements, please tell me if the first statement or the second statement comes closer to your view, even if neither one is exactly right. . .Some people say it is more important that children attend schools near their homes, even if it means that most students are of the same race. Others say it is more important that children attend schools with students of other races, even if it means busing children some distance from their homes. Which of these views comes closer to your own?

	PSRA Oct-99 (%)
More important that children attend schools near their homes, even if most students are of the same race	66
More important that children attend schools with students of other races, even if that means busing them some distance from their homes	28
Neither (vol.)	3
Don't know/Refused	3
<i>N</i>	1,206

public's response. It cannot be determined whether this is because any mention of movement of students evokes images of busing, but the public does not appear to want to abandon their affection for their local, neighborhood school, possibly due to our American "public school ideology" (Moe 2001, p. 90).

From these data, we might conclude that while the public favors diverse schools, they oppose actual efforts to create such schools. However, most questions present the public with only one option for achieving diverse schools—busing/transportation—and fail to probe the public's support for other policy options. A few questions asked the public about their support for alternative methods of achieving integration. Twice during the 1970s, a plurality of respondents selected changing boundaries to assign diverse students to schools as their preferred way of integrating schools (table 7). More recently, majorities of respondents favored more far-reaching efforts to achieve integration instead of busing: consolidating school districts, low-income housing development in middle-class communities, controlled choice assignment plans, and magnet schools (table 8). Further, black respondents more strongly favor the option of developing housing for lower-income families in middle-class neighborhoods than did white respondents (84% versus 63%, respectively). Public views on such efforts have been less studied, making direct comparisons impossible. However, these findings suggest the need for broadening how polls ascertain the public's support of diverse schools and of policies needed to actually implement integration.

Table 6.3. Views on School Integration—Neighborhood Schools or Busing III. In your view, which of the following is better?...Letting students go to the local school in their community, even if it means that most of the students would be of the same race, or transferring students to other schools to create more integration, even if it means that some students would have to travel out of their communities to go to school?

	GALLUP/CNN/USA ^a	GALLUP/CNN/USA	AP-IPSOS
	Apr-94 (%)	Jul-99 (%)	Apr-04 (%)
Letting students go to the local school in their community, even if it means that most of the students would be of the same race	85	82	78
Transferring students to other schools to create more integration, even if it means that some students would have to travel out of their communities	12	15	19
Not sure		3	3
<i>N</i>	1,246	1,031	1,000

^aThe sample included an oversample of black adults. Results are weighted to be representative of the national adult population.

Integration Outcomes

Scholars have tended to evaluate school desegregation by focusing narrowly on academic achievement outcomes of minority students in desegregated schools (Orfield and Eaton 1996; Schofield 1995; Wells 2001). In this vein, the public was asked to assess the benefits of school desegregation on academic quality. Unlike scholarly emphasis on the benefits of desegregation for minority students, however, the public was asked whether it “improved the quality of education received by black students” and whether it improved *white* students’ education. Particularly when first asked, the inclusion of both racial groups was substantially ahead of desegregation research, which only recently broadened its focus to include white students (Perry 2002; Kurlaender and Yun 2007).

There are several noticeable trends in response to these questions: increasing support for the idea that integration improves the quality of all students’ education and more support for the notion that integration improves black students’ education. Since 1988, a majority of respondents have believed that integration improves black students’ education, reaching 72% in 2004, while it wasn’t until

Table 6.4. Views on School Integration—Neighborhood Schools or Busing IV. Which is more important—to have students go to racially mixed schools even if many of the students don't live nearby or to have students go to local community schools even if it means most students are of the same race?

	PEW ^a Sep-07 (%)
To have students go to racially mixed schools even if many of the students don't live nearby	29
To have students go to local community schools even if it means most students are of the same race	59
Neither/Both (vol.)	4
Don't know/Refused	8
<i>N</i>	2,931

^aThe sample included an oversample of blacks. Results are weighted to be representative of the national adult population.

1999 that 50% of respondents believed the same for white students' education (table 9). Most of this increased support for improving the quality of education for both blacks and whites comes from the decline of those answering "don't know." The percentage of those who think integration has *not* improved the quality has declined only slightly, suggesting a small but stable opposition to the idea that integration improves education quality (table 10). Responses about desegregation generally are more positive among those with desegregation experience (Hochschild and Scott 1998; Orfield 1995), which may partially explain these trends as desegregation experiences have become more widespread among adults.⁶

Two other questions, two decades apart, asked about the effect of integration on *students'* education. Unlike above, the percentage of respondents believing that integration had a negative effect on students' education dropped sharply. In 1978, 25% felt that integrated schools had a negative effect, while in 1998, only 8% of white respondents and 5% of black respondents believed that students received a worse education in diverse schools (table 11). However, much larger percentages of black and white respondents thought that integration made little difference (72% and 51%, respectively) in 1998, whereas only 33% of the

6. Most research about public opinion regarding school integration has found significant differences by race, although it usually examines only whites and blacks (Erskine 1968; Hochschild and Scott 1998; Schuman et al. 1997; Orfield 1995). Higher percentages of both white and black respondents reported that integration improved the educational quality for black students. There was a larger increase among whites evaluating the effect of integration for black students over time. Yet, a much lower share of whites than blacks believed that integration improved white students' education in 1994 (table 10).

Table 7. Views on School Integration—Neighborhood Schools or Busing V. Which, if any, of these ways do you think would be best to achieve integration in public schools in terms of different economic and racial groups?

	GALLUP Aug-73 (%)	GALLUP Sep-75 (%)
Create more housing for low-income people in middle-income neighborhoods	22	18
Change school boundaries to allow more persons from different economic and racial groups to attend the same schools	27	31
Bus schoolchildren from one school district to another	5	3
Do something other than above to integrate the schools	22	19
I oppose the integration of schools	18	17
No opinion	17	11
<i>N</i>	1,513	1,592

public believed it had no effect in 1978. Perhaps due to the answer choices—allowing a middle option (“little difference”/“no effect”), which has shown to dramatically alter the percentage of people who agree with a policy (Asher 2001; Converse and Presser 1986; Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwarz 1996)—the percentage reporting that integration improves education is lower than in questions described above that specify the race of students.

Academic quality has not always been the primary reason advocates have challenged school segregation. Plaintiffs in *Brown* described how segregation harmed the “hearts and minds” of black and white students in being able to learn with and from one another. In reviewing school desegregation questions, however, few polls asked about other kinds of outcomes—just twice for race relations and once for society in general.

Taken together, these societal outcome questions suggest increasing support for the benefits of integrated schools. A much higher percentage of the public expressed “don’t know” in 1971 than during the 1990s (tables 12.1 and 12.2). There was a modest decline from 1971 to 1994 in the percentage of white respondents who thought that integration works against improved race relations (from 37% to 29%). By 1994, a sizeable majority of respondents (64% of whites and 78% of blacks) believed that integration has improved race relations and has been good for the country. We see that higher percentages of both whites and blacks in 1994 believed that integration helped race relations than believed this in 1971, yet a slightly higher percentage of black respondents in 1994 believed that integration worked *against* improving race relations than in 1971; 16% and 13%, respectively. But overall, only 9% of all respondents in 1999 felt that school integration had been a “failure and hurt the country” (table 12.2).

Table 8. Views on School Integration—Neighborhood Schools or Busing VI. I'm going to read you some ways to achieve integrated schools and ask if you favor or oppose each one. (If Favor/Oppose, ask:) Is that strongly or somewhat favor/oppose? How about . . .

	PUBLIC AGENDA ^a		
	Apr-98		
	Strongly/Some- what Favor (%)	Strongly/Some- what Oppose (%)	Don't Know (%)
White Respondents			
Encouraging the development of housing for lower-income families in middle-class neighborhoods	63	32	5
Redrawing district lines to combine mostly black and mostly white districts into one school district	60	33	7
Letting parents choose their top 3 schools, while the district makes the final choice, with an eye to racial balance	61	35	4
Relying on magnet schools that attract high-achieving white kids to mostly black schools by offering talented and gifted programs	59	31	10
Busing children to achieve a better racial balance in the schools	22	76	2
Black Respondents			
Encouraging the development of housing for lower-income families in middle-class neighborhoods	84	15	1
Redrawing district lines to combine mostly black and mostly white districts into one school district	69	28	3
Letting parents choose their top 3 schools, while the district makes the final choice, with an eye to racial balance	65	34	1
Relying on magnet schools that attract high-achieving white kids to mostly black schools by offering talented and gifted programs	60	32	8
Busing children to achieve a better racial balance in the schools	55	42	3

^aThe sample included 800 African American and 800 white parents with children in grades K–12.

Table 9. Views on Improved Schooling Due to Integration I. How do you feel about school integration? Do you feel it has improved the quality of education received by ... (black students/white students)?

	GALLUP/PDK Apr-88 (%)	GALLUP/CNN/USA ^a Apr-94 (%)	GALLUP/PDK May-96 (%)	GALLUP/CNN/USA Jul-99 (%)	AP/ISOS Apr-04 (%)
For black students					
Yes	55	65	61	68	72
No	29	28	27	26	25
Don't know	16	7	12	7	3
<i>N</i>	2,118	1,246	1,329	1,031	1,000
	GALLUP/PDK Apr-88 (%)	GALLUP/CNN/USA ^a Apr-94 (%)	GALLUP/PDK May-96 (%)	GALLUP/CNN/USA Jul-99 (%)	AP/ISOS Apr-04 (%)
For white students					
Yes	35	42	45	50	50
No	47	50	44	42	45
Don't know	18	9	11	8	5
<i>N</i>	2,118	1,246	1,329	1,031	1,000

^aThe sample included an oversample of black adults. Results are weighted to be representative of the national adult population.

Table 10. Views on Improved Schooling Due to Integration II. How do you feel about school integration? Do you feel it has improved the quality of education received by... (black students/white students)?

White Respondents		
	GALLUP/CNN/USA Apr-71 (%)	GALLUP/CNN/USA ^a Apr-94 (%)
For black students		
Yes	43	65
No	32	29
Don't know	26	6
<i>N</i>	1,473	859
	GALLUP/CNN/USA Apr-71 (%)	GALLUP/CNN/USA ^a Apr-94 (%)
For white students		
Yes	22	36
No	53	56
Don't know	24	8
<i>N</i>	1,473	859
Black Respondents		
	GALLUP/CNN/USA Apr-71 (%)	GALLUP/CNN/USA ^a Apr-94 (%)
For black students		
Yes	50	71
No	24	25
Don't know	25	4
<i>N</i>	135	324
	GALLUP/CNN/USA Apr-71 (%)	GALLUP/CNN/USA ^a Apr-94 (%)
For white students		
Yes	38	62
No	25	28
Don't know	26	10
<i>N</i>	135	324

^aThe sample included an oversample of black adults. Results are weighted to be representative of the national adult population.

Table 11. Views on Improved Schooling Due to Integration III. CBS wording: Does racial integration of the schools have a good effect, a bad effect, or no effect at all on the education most children receive?

	CBS Jun-78 (%)
Good effect	23
Bad effect	25
No effect	33
Depends (vol.)	7
No opinion	12
Not applicable	n/a
<i>N</i>	1,622

Time to Move On wording: Do you think that kids get a better education in a racially integrated school, that the education they get is worse, or that it makes little difference?

	PUBLIC AGENDA ^a Apr-98	
	White (%)	African American (%)
Better	15	41
Worse	8	5
Little difference	72	51
Not applicable	0	1
Don't know	5	3
<i>N</i>	800	800

^aThe sample included 800 African American and 800 white parents with children in grades K–12.

In sum, these “outcome” questions suggest the sensitivity of support for integration to the options offered to respondents, but a majority of the public believes there are educational and societal benefits to school integration.

Court Decision Questions

We see a sharp increase in the frequency of polls on this topic when court decisions are pending, immediately after decisions are issued, or on the anniversaries of decisions. For example, a common time for integration questions was every five years after *Brown*, continuing through the 50th anniversary in 2004, when media attention focused on the decision and assessed its legacy. One of the few repeated questions is whether the public approves of the Supreme Court's ruling that all children, regardless of race, must be allowed to attend the same schools. As expected, approval rates have increased steadily, from just 55% in 1954 to

Table 12.1. Views on Improved Social Relations Due to School Integration I. (Next, I have a few questions about school integration—that is, bringing black and white children together into the same schools.) Do you feel that school integration has improved relations between blacks and whites or has it worked against better relations?

	GALLUP/CNN/USA Apr-71 (%)	GALLUP/CNN/USA ^a Apr-94 (%)
Improved	39	64
Worked against	34	28
Don't know/Refused	27	8
<i>N</i>	1,625	1,246
White Respondents		
	GALLUP/CNN/USA Apr-71 (%)	GALLUP/CNN/USA ^a Apr-94 (%)
Improved	38	64
Worked against	37	29
Don't know/Refused	25	8
<i>N</i>	1,473	859
Black Respondents		
	GALLUP/CNN/USA Apr-71 (%)	GALLUP/CNN/USA ^a Apr-94 (%)
Improved	64	78
Worked against	13	16
Don't know/Refused	22	6
<i>N</i>	135	324

^aThe sample included an oversample of black adults. Results are weighted to be representative of the national adult population.

88% in 1994 (table 13). More recently, the public has been asked to consider the recent federal court ruling regarding using race as a factor in student assignments.⁷ In summer 2007, approval of the decision that limited school districts' use of race as a factor in student assignments varied significantly in two polls: from just 40% of the general public to 71% of eligible voters (table 14). Perhaps

7. On June 28, 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision about two districts' voluntary integration policies, *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District #1*.

Table 12.2. Views on Improved Society Due to School Integration II. Do you think racial integration in public schools: has been mostly successful and good for the country; has been somewhat successful and done a little good for the country; has not, on balance, improved, or harmed the country; or has been a failure and hurt the country?

	TIME/CNN Jun-99 (%)
Has been mostly successful and good for the country	26
Has been somewhat successful and done a little good for the country	44
Has not, on balance, improved, or harmed the country	16
Has been a failure and hurt the country	9
Not sure	6
<i>N</i>	1,031

this suggests that immediately after a decision, public opinion is variable and reflects a lack of understanding about the decision's impact.

Although the courts often used the term "desegregation," we find that most polling questions used the term "integration." Fewer questions used "desegregation" even though most of the cases during the post-*Brown* era were commonly referred to as desegregation cases. Only recently have advocates more commonly used "school integration" terminology, drawing on the distinctions made by Martin Luther King, Jr., about the "eliminative and negative" nature of desegregation, whereas integration was the "welcomed participation of blacks into the total range of human activities" (King, Jr., 1986, p. 118). Although the lack of questions using "desegregation" makes it impossible to know the effect of this wording choice, to the extent that "desegregation" invokes legalistic struggles over student assignment, it is possible that the use of "integration" in questions reviewed here helps more accurately ascertain the public's feelings about diverse schools.

Conclusion

A few conclusions are relatively clear: The public increasingly supports the notion of racially diverse schools and believes they have had important outcomes for students (particularly blacks) and society. Yet the importance of the issue and the willingness to adopt measures to create such schools is less distinct. Similar to the *Brown* decision, which was pivotal but is notable for what it did not say, namely *how* to remedy segregation, public opinion reflects a good deal of ambivalence about the *how*: widespread support for the ideal of integration but much more ambiguity when asked about what desegregation entailed.

While some surveys have discontinued asking questions on this topic because of widespread "socially correct answers," there is much we still don't

Table 13. Attitudes Toward Court Decisions. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that racial segregation in the public schools is illegal. This means that all children, no matter what their race, must be allowed to go to the same schools. Do you approve or disapprove of this decision?

	GALLUP May-54 (%)	GALLUP Jun-54 (%)	GALLUP Dec-54 (%)	GALLUP Apr-55 (%)	GALLUP Nov-55 (%)	GALLUP Dec-56 (%)	GALLUP Jul-57 (%)	GALLUP Sep-57 (%)	GALLUP May-59 (%)	GALLUP May-61 (%)	GALLUP/ CNN/USA TODAY ^a Apr-94 (%)
Approve	55	53	52	56	57	63	58	57	60	63	88
Disapprove	40	41	44	39	49	31	36	38	35	32	11
No opinion/ not sure	5	5	4	5	4	6	6	5	5	5	2
<i>N</i>	1,416	1,435	1,446	1,531	1,545	1,543	1,534	1,530	1,536	1,502	1,246

^aThe sample included an oversample of black adults. Results are weighted to be representative of the national adult population.

Table 14. Views on Race Considerations for School Assignment. ABC/WP: As you may know, the Supreme Court recently restricted how local school boards can use race to assign children to schools. Some argue that this is a significant setback for efforts to diversify public schools; others say race should not be used in school assignments. On balance, do you approve or disapprove of this decision? QUINNIPIAC: As you may know, the Supreme Court recently ruled that public schools may not consider an individual's race when deciding which students are assigned to specific schools. Do you agree or disagree with this ruling?

	ABC/WP ^a	QUINNIPIAC ^b
	Jul-07 (%)	Aug-07 (%)
Approve/Agree	40	71
Disapprove/Disagree	56	24
Don't know/No answer/No opinion	4	5
<i>N</i>	1,125	1,545

^aThe sample included an oversample of blacks. Results were weighted to be representative of the national adult population.

^bThe sample included only registered voters.

know about people's preferences. Schools today include students from multiple races and ethnicities, a change that question wording has yet to reflect.⁸ Understanding whether and to what extent the public supports policy efforts that result in integrated schools is more important than ever, as virtually all new integration efforts will be those voluntarily adopted.

Appendix

ABBREVIATIONS

ABC/WP: ABC News/*Washington Post*

AP: Associated Press

AP/ISOS: Associated Press/IPSOS-Public Affairs

CBS: CBS News

CNN/USA: Cable News Network/USA Today

CPS/UM: Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan

GALLUP: Gallup Poll

GALLUP/CNN/USA: Gallup/CNN/USA Today

GALLUP/PDK: Gallup Poll for Phi Delta Kappa

8. The exception was the inclusion of Hispanic and other racial/ethnic groups in a 2004 AP/IPSOS question about ideal school racial composition (Associated Press/IPSOS 2004).

HARRIS: Louis Harris & Associates
 NBC: NBC News
 NBC/AP: NBC News/Associated Press.
 NORC: National Opinion Research Center
 PEW: Pew Hispanic Center
 PSRA: Princeton Survey Research Associates
 PSRA/Newsweek: Princeton Survey Research Associates and
Newsweek
 PSRA/Pew: Princeton Survey Research Associates and Pew Hispanic
 Center
 QUINNIPIAC: Quinnipiac University
 ROPER: Roper Commercial Survey
 TIME/CNN: *Time* and Cable News Network

Unless otherwise indicated in the table notes, all surveys involved national adult samples. Where oversamples were involved, results were weighted to represent the national adult population. Data were collected through personal interviews or via the phone (see below). When conducted via the phone, respondents were located via random digit dialing.

Survey modes were as follows:

Personal Interviews—**CBS**: 6/78; **CPS/UM**: 11/80; **Gallup**: 5/54 to 2/70, 8/73, 9/75, 12/80

Gallup/CNN/USA: 4/71, 5/97, 7/99

Gallup/PDK: 4/88; **NORC**: 4/56 to 2/96

Telephone—**ABC/WP**: 7/07; **AP-IPSOS**: 4/04, **CNN/USA**: 4/94; **Gallup**: 5/73, 6/90; **Gallup/CNN/USA**: 4/94, 7/99; **Gallup/PDK**: 4/88, 5/96; **NBC**: 8/89; **Pew**: 9/07; **Public Agenda**: 4/98; **PRSA**: 10/99; **PSRA/Pew**: 9/07; **PSRA/Newsweek**: 2/95; **QUINNIPIAC**: 7/07; **TIME/CNN**: 6/99

Personal Interviews and Telephone Interviews—**CPS/UM**: 11/84
 (Note: Half the sample was interviewed in person, and half was interviewed via the phone.)

Survey response rates were as follows:

ABC/WP: 7/07 35.8%, AAPOR COOP1 (calculated using sample disposition provided)

CPS/UM: 11/80 87.2%, 11/84 88.1%

Gallup/CNN/USA Today: 4/94 36.8%, 5/97 28.5%, 7/99 24.0%, AAPOR RR3; rates for other dates were unavailable.

NORC: 2/75 76%, 2/76 75%, 2/77 77%, 2/78 74%, 2/80 76%, 2/82 78%, 2/83 79%, 2/84 79%, 2/85 79%, 2/86 76%, 2/88 75%, 2/89 78%, 2/90 74%, 2/91 78%, 2/93 82%, 1/94 78%, 2/96 76%, AAPOR RR5; rates for other dates were unavailable.

PSRA/PEW and PSRA/Knight Foundation: 10/99 41%, 9/07 24%, AAPOR RR3; rate for other date was unavailable.

Quinnipiac: 8/07 58 percent, AAPOR COOP1

Survey response rates for CBS, Gallup/PDK, NBC, and Public Agenda were unavailable. Attempts were made to elicit response rates from Harris (administered CNN's polls) and AP/IPSOS, but they were not made available to the authors.

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