



Public Support for School Security Measures

An Analysis of Public Perceptions of School Security Measures and their Regional Variants among Pennsylvania Residents

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OBJECTIVES

Groundwork: Public perceptions of school security measures and their differences, regional and racial, amongst particular groups of people cannot be understated in today's society. Currently, four mechanisms—physical, interactionist, legalistic, and preparedness—have been documented, but public input and opinion have yet to be assessed.

Questions:

- 1) What types of school security measures do members of the general population of Pennsylvania support?
- 2) Are there regional variants in public support for types of school security measures?
- 3) Are there racial variants in public support for types of school security measures?

Analysis: Cross-sectional survey data were acquired from 522 respondents in Pennsylvania.



Figure 1: Shows a school safety officer holding hands with young students¹

Figure 2: Depicts elementary students ducked and covered behind desks during a shooter lockdown drill²

Figure 3: Pictures high school students routinely passing through metal detectors to enter their school³

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SIGNIFICANCE TO FIELD

Research on Categories of Security: Past research examines specific measures rather than broad categories of safety.⁴ Few studies examine categories of safety; they include: (a) Preparedness; (b) Physical; (c) Legalistic; (d) Interactionist. This project is the first to examine and compare public support for these categories with state-wide data.

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SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

Data-Based Decision-Making on School Safety: Prior research suggests a lack of confidence in student safety on school grounds regarding school violence.⁵ As a result, general peace of mind in providing more defensible decisions may be obtained from gathering the public's perceptions of school safety.

Cost-Effective Investment in School Safety: Currently, a lot of stress is experienced by school administrators, faculty, and staff to create a safe environment for the nation's next generation. Policymakers and the Boards of Trustees, using this data, may supplement their funding decisions by understanding the public's needs in terms of school safety.

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METHODS

Study Subjects: Data were collected from a recruited sample of 522 English speaking residents of Pennsylvania aged 18 or older. A marketing research team at Qualtrics recruited a representative sample—in accordance with an a priori power analysis—of Pennsylvania residents.

Study Design: Results are based on Likert scale questions. The survey incorporated measures of public attitudes including school security measures, campus carry, and perceptions of the police. There were also basic demographic questions such as race and place.

Data Analysis: Data were analyzed in three main steps using SPSS version 27. First, data were cleaned and coded. Second, preliminary analyses assessed measures of central tendency and dispersion. Third, bivariate analyses assessed relationships between key variables of interest.

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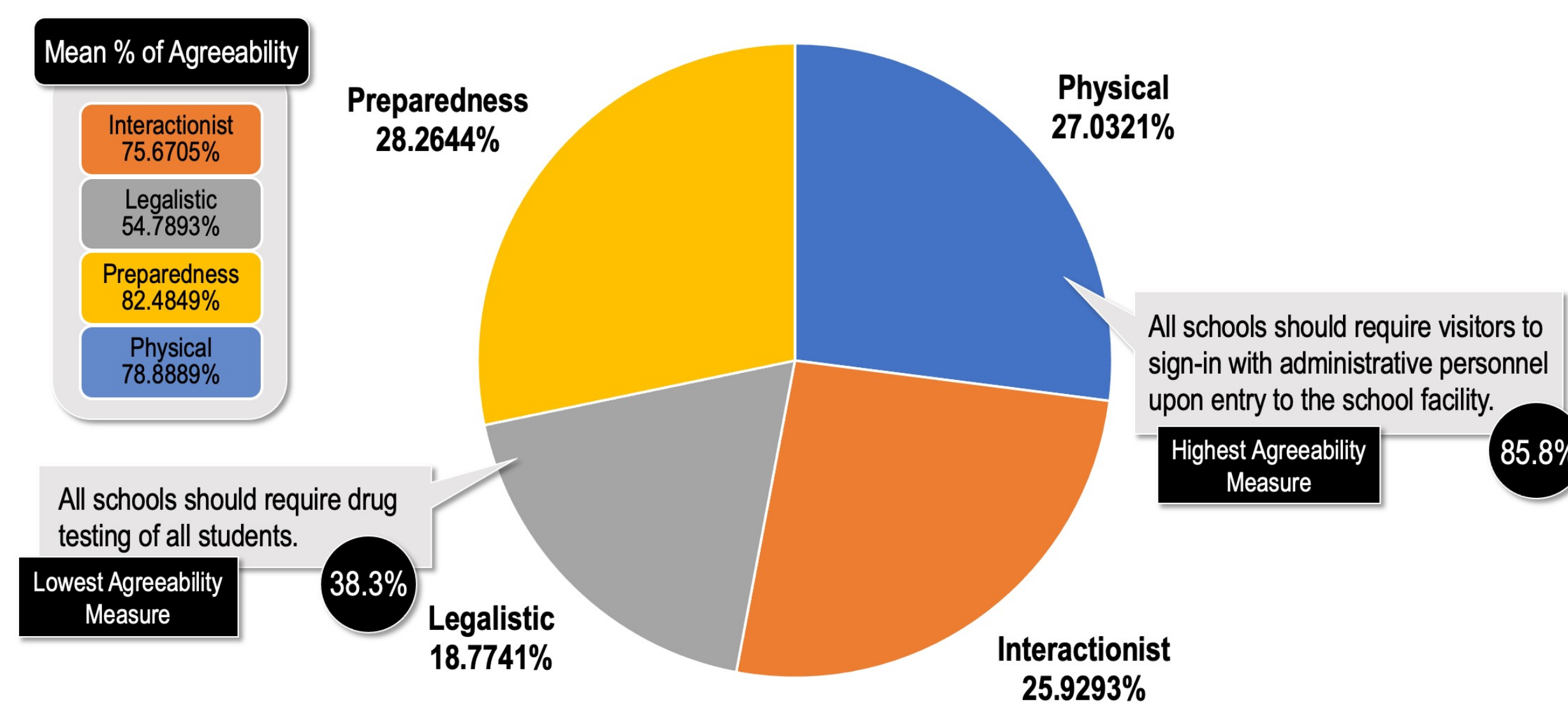
RESULTS

Public Support in Pennsylvania: Graph 1 shows public support for the legalistic, preparedness, physical, and interactionist mechanisms. Table 2 (see QR code) demonstrates that the public preferred preparedness over legalistic measures at a 7:0 ratio.

Regional Variants: Graph 2 depicts the variations between the urban and rural region populations of Pennsylvania residents significantly differ on legalistic school safety measures. Rural Pennsylvania residents display increased levels of support for the interactionist, legalistic, and preparedness mechanisms.

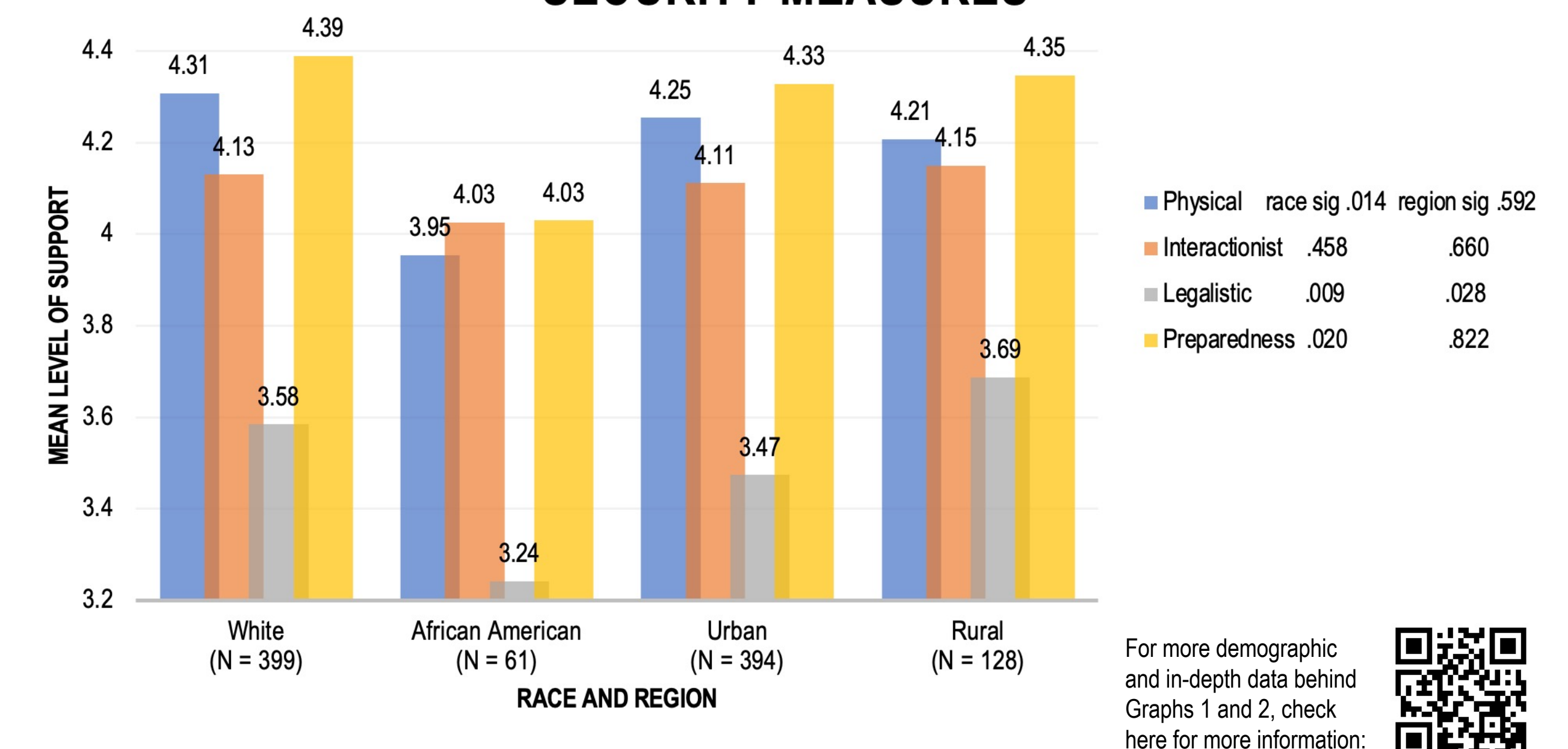
Racial Variants: The two groups of participants who identify as White and as African American were the only racial pairing with a statistically significant difference, seen in Graph 2, in level of support of the physical, legalistic, and preparedness mechanisms. White participants display higher levels of support in all four school safety mechanisms.

PERCENTAGE OF FAVORABLE PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS SCHOOL SECURITY MECHANISMS



Graph 1: The four mechanism category percentages, using the mean percentage of agreeability, represent how the number of favorable attitudes are divided up toward each school security mechanism. The highest and lowest agreed upon school security measures are included.

RACIAL AND REGIONAL PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL SECURITY MEASURES



Graph 2: The bar chart indicates the average level of racial and regional support of each school security mechanism including significance. The QR code contains the numerical breakdown of the represented data.

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INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSION

Overall Findings: The results indicate preparedness measures are the most supported mechanism by the general public, and legalistic mechanisms are the least supported. African Americans are significantly less in favor of legalistic measures than Whites. Furthermore, rural Pennsylvanians are more likely to be supportive of the school security mechanisms other than physical measures. Schools along with the public should work together to provide safe school environments by taking into consideration the specific needs of the surrounding community.

Limitations: The study consisted of participants from only one state, Pennsylvania. Therefore, these findings may not apply to the entire United States. Additionally, the median age of the study was 47, and the average age of the general population of Pennsylvania is 40.8 years old. Consequently, the study may not accurately represent Pennsylvanians.

Directions for Future Research: Future researchers could evaluate if these findings in Pennsylvania are generalizable for the entire country by selecting a nationally representative sample. Further studies should be instituted by employing longitudinal research designs and in-depth interviews.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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IRB APPROVAL

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