

The public choice of educational choice*

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Abstract. The very small literature explaining (1) how citizens have voted in two California voucher referenda, (2) how legislators have voted on voucher bills in the State of Florida and the US Congress, and (3) the variation across states in charter school provisions is summarized. New empirical evidence documenting the cross-state variation in the success of voucher referenda and voucher bills is examined. Voucher bill characteristics and state characteristics play important roles. Voucher bills have been passed only in the more conservative Republican states, and almost all of the successful voucher programs have been targeted at large, struggling school districts.

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1. Introduction

Eighty percent of the US population lives in a metropolitan area, and in most of these metro areas families have some choice of school districts across which to sort, as Tiebout (1956)

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envisioned. In a sample of 161 metro areas in 1990, the number of separate school districts ranged from one to 117 (Husted and Kenny 2002) . Eighty percent of these metropolitan areas had at least five school districts, 63% had at least ten school districts, 31% had at least 20 school districts and 21% had at least 30 of them. Having more districts produces a better matching of desired school quality with offered school quality and makes it easier for parents to judge whether some school districts are inefficient. Homeowners in underperforming school districts, facing potential capital losses, are expected to take steps to improve the quality of the local public schools (Fischel 2001). There is indeed evidence that the public schools are more efficient (i.e., test scores are higher, holding various inputs into learning constant) in metropolitan areas where there are more school districts. But, as in the private sector, not many “firms” are needed to produce a fully competitive educational market. Zanzig (1997) finds that no more than five districts per county were needed to reap the full efficiency benefits of competition among school districts.

Even though there clearly is some Tiebout-competition among public school districts in many metropolitan areas, some economists claim that public education in the United States suffers from insufficient competition, reducing incentives on the part of local school boards, principals and teachers to deploy available resources cost-effectively and causing the public schools to perform more poorly than otherwise. Vouchers have been proposed to foster more competition between public and private schools. Magnet schools, charter schools and affording parents and students a choice of schools have all been touted as means to bring about more competition among public schools within individual school districts. But surprisingly there has been little concern about the limited competition among school districts in states that restrict the

formation of school districts.¹ There have been few calls for more public school districts.²

Most of the research by economists on educational choice has been on the effects of vouchers, charter schools and the like on school performance. There have been very few studies of the factors that explain the observed geographical variation in the level of political support for educational choice. Brunner et al. (2001) studied precinct returns from Los Angeles County in California's 1993 referendum on vouchers (Prop. 174), and Brunner and Sonstelie (2003) utilized individual responses to survey questions assessing voucher support for California's 2000 referendum on the same issue (Prop. 38). Gokcekus et al. (2004) examined the 2001 vote on amendment 57 to H 1 in the US House of Representatives that would have allowed federal Title IV funds for disadvantaged children to be used for financing private school vouchers. In addition, there are several unpublished student papers that explain (1) voting in the Florida legislature on a bill that bundled vouchers with several other educational "reforms" (Gonzalez 2003; McDade 2003) and (2) why some states allow charter schools and others do not (Alvarez 2003).³

In this paper, I summarize the findings of this small literature as background for describing and explaining the pattern of overall success of voucher proposals. Ideology is found to play an important role. Conservatives expect that the additional competition between public and private schools generated by voucher programs will produce more efficient public schools and welcome some shift of the educational function from the public sector to the private sector. The analysis shows that Republicans, especially conservative Republicans, provide the strongest support for vouchers and charter schools. Voucher features also matter. Successful voucher programs do not give vouchers to parents whose children are already enrolled in private schools

and generally are targeted to specific large, struggling urban school districts. There also is evidence that a voucher proposal fares better in precincts with fewer teachers and that charter schools are more likely to be allowed in states with weak teachers' unions.

2. Vouchers

2.1. Background and evidence in the literature

What are the factors that affect voter and legislator support for vouchers? As Brunner and Sonstelie (2003) note, families with school-age children are a minority in the typical statewide referendum on vouchers. Other voters, who are single or in households with no children present, are thus pivotal. Under what circumstances do vouchers make these other voters better off? Brunner et al. (2001) and Brunner and Sonstelie (2003) stress the voucher's impact on the housing market. Houses in neighborhoods with "good" public schools command a premium.⁴ Since a voucher reduces the cost of private alternatives to good public schools, property owners who live in districts with good schools face capital losses if vouchers are approved. Brunner and Sonstelie (2003) found with survey data that support for vouchers fell among homeowners without children as perceived public school quality rose, while for renters with no children (and no potential for capital gains or losses), perceived school quality had no impact on support for the voucher. Brunner et al. obtained similar results with precinct voting data. These findings are consistent with the authors' capital gain/loss scenario where the consequences of approving voucher proposals are more salient for homeowners.

A traditional voucher providing \$X to parents who enroll their children in a private school defrays only part of the cost of private schooling in many cases and may be used by any

family choosing the private-school option. This is effectively a transfer of wealth to parents whose children already attend a private school. As expected, Brunner et al. (2001) find greater support for traditional vouchers in precincts where private schools enroll larger percentages of school-age children.

Private schools offer religious or moral training that is not available in the public schools and provide higher quality schooling than may be obtained in public schools due to limited public school options or restrictions imposed by state government. Private schools thus tend to service religious and rich families (Hamilton and Macauley 1991; Schmidt 1992). By reducing the cost of attending private school, vouchers are expected to lead to greater utilization of that option by religious and wealthy families. This helps to explain why the Catholic Church has been an active supporter of vouchers in some voucher referenda (e.g., Michigan's Prop. 1 in 2000). Surprisingly there has been no statistical analysis of the effect of religious composition on voucher sentiments. Support for vouchers also is expected to come from relatively rich families that would take advantage of the then-cheaper private school alternative. But both California voucher studies find that support falls as income rises and that race has no consistent effect on support for these proposals.

In the traditional voucher system, the voucher can be used by any family sending a child to private school. Families with children already in private school will take advantage of vouchers, which raises taxes and makes other families worse off. But this traditional voucher is worth much less than the amount typically spent per pupil in the public schools. As a result, the cost savings for each child who leaves public school to attend private school offsets the loss associated with payments to children already in private school, and taxes could fall if enough

students abandon public school. There seems to have been considerable uncertainty about how many students would take advantage of vouchers, thus making it difficult to predict the net impact of the voucher on taxes (Brunner and Sonstelie 2003, pp. 241–42). There was even more uncertainty surrounding Michigan’s proposal H, which did not specify the dollar value of the voucher and did not offer a financing mechanism as an alternative to the property taxation the proposal would have eliminated. Fiscal uncertainty is expected to lead many risk-averse households to support the status quo by voting against vouchers.

Most of the more recent voucher proposals deal with the potentially adverse impact on taxes by limiting vouchers to students in failing public schools, which guarantees that families that already have children in private school cannot receive vouchers. A second recent provision limiting vouchers to poor families also reduces the overlap with those already in private school. Some recent voucher proposals also are more generous, offering private-school vouchers that approximate per-pupil public expenditure if the private schools agree to not charge any additional tuition. This facilitates utilization of vouchers by poor families. These targeted voucher programs should be supported by the poor or minority families that would be expected to benefit from them.

Although many would label schools with very low test scores as failing, some of these schools may be doing the best they can with students whose parents are themselves poorly educated, uninvolved with their children’s education, or both. A more appropriate measure of whether a school is inefficient would take into account the raw student material the school has to work with. South Carolina, for example, divides its schools into deciles based on the fraction of students who qualify for a free or reduced-price school lunch program. Schools are then graded

on the basis of performance within their decile group. In South Carolina's "value added" system, poorly performing schools can be found in every income stratum, and consequently support for vouchers would not be confined to the poor and minorities. It is clear that any uncertainty over how "failing" will be defined will reduce support for vouchers.

The Florida voucher was restricted to students in failing public schools.⁵ Florida legislators appear to have expected "failing" to be equated to low test scores, which generally are found in poor communities. Gonzalez (2003) and McDade (2003) show that legislators from rich counties were less likely to vote for vouchers than legislators representing poor counties. McDade finds that Republicans from counties with high test scores were more likely to break party ranks and vote against vouchers, whereas Democrats from counties with low test scores were more likely to defy their party's principles by voting for vouchers.

Amendment 57 to H 1, considered by the US House of Representatives in 2001, would have allowed funds appropriated under Title IV of the Innovative Grants for Disadvantaged Students program to be used to finance vouchers for students attending low performing schools. Poor minority families should have benefitted from this proposal, and Gokcekus et al. (2004) find that support for the amendment was greater in districts with higher percentages of African-Americans, but was unrelated to district income.

Public schools have been found to be less effective in areas with little competition among public school districts (Zanzig 1997) and in states that leave voters with little latitude to determine education spending or that meddle in local decisions (Husted and Kenny 2000). There should be more support for vouchers among those who are served by inefficient public schools, but this hypothesis has not yet been tested.

Certification requirements for public school teachers have protected them from easy entry into teaching by private sector workers, and teachers' unions often have done away with performance-based incentives and established work restrictions that make teaching easier. Vouchers would cause some public school teachers to be thrust into the private non-unionized sector, where wages are lower, there are no certification requirements, merit-pay systems are more common, and there are no union-imposed work restrictions. As a result, public school teachers are staunch opponents of vouchers. Brunner et al. (2001) report less support for the voucher in precincts with larger percentages of the workforce employed in education services (i.e., public school teachers and administrators). Gokcekus et al. (2004) find that legislators receiving contributions from teacher PACs were much less likely to vote for vouchers.

Ideology plays an important role in the debate over vouchers. Republicans and conservatives tend to support vouchers because they believe that more competition would make education more efficient and that private schools are likely to be more effective in carrying out their educational missions than public schools. Democrats and liberals, on the other hand, tend to oppose vouchers because they have a stronger faith in the public sector and are aligned politically with teachers' unions. Empirically, there is greater support for vouchers in precincts in which larger fractions of voters are registered as Republicans (Brunner et al. 2001), among conservative voters (Brunner and Sonstelie 2003), and among Republican legislators (Gokcekus et al. 2004).

Let us now examine and attempt to explain the variation across states in voter support for voucher proposals in referenda as well as the success of legislative roll-call votes on voucher proposals. Referenda or bills to allow public funding of religious schools (Oregon 4 in 1972,

Maine LD 182 in 2003) are not analyzed because such proposals dealt only with the separation of church and state. Michigan's proposal H in 1978 also is not included in the dataset because that voucher proposal was tied to eliminating property tax funding of public schools. A "peripheral" vote on vouchers for special education (Hawaii HB 1678 in 2001) is not analyzed either.

2.2. Referenda on vouchers

In the past four decades there have been ten statewide referenda on public support for private schools. These are listed in Table 1. The entries there include proposals to provide transportation for private school students, to prohibit public funds from being used to support private schools, and to establish voucher programs. Some proposals were quite vague, while others were very specific. Only one proposal, Michigan proposal 1 in 2000, contemplated a targeted voucher program. It would have required that a small number of school districts with low high-school graduation rates (30 out of 555 districts) offer vouchers and would have allowed other districts to offer vouchers if there was sufficient sentiment for vouchers.⁶

None of these referenda, even Michigan's targeted voucher proposal, produced a majority in favor of public support for private schools. The greatest support came in Maryland's proposal 18 in 1972, in which 45% favored establishing a voucher. There was stronger support for public funding of private schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s than in the 1990s. Proposals for vouchers and other forms of support garnered 42% to 45% of the vote in the early period, but only 29% to 36% of the vote in the past decade. This evidence is consistent with newly formed teachers' unions being less powerful than the established teachers' unions are

now. Unreported regressions provide no support for other hypotheses that public funding of private schools gets more votes in conservative states or in states with larger shares of students in private school.

2.3. Roll-call votes on vouchers in legislatures

Table 2 examines the success in Congress and in state legislatures of various bills or amendments that would establish vouchers. The votes are grouped according to their success – panel A: winning a majority in both legislative chambers; panel B: garnering a majority in one chamber; and panel C: failing to get a majority in the one chamber in which there was a roll call vote. State governments have enacted vouchers in Colorado, Florida, Ohio, and Wisconsin, and Congress has approved vouchers for the District of Columbia.

Vouchers were first approved in 1989 in Wisconsin, when the state legislature authorized a voucher program for poor families in the City of Milwaukee. The bill restricted the number of voucher slots and required that no more than 49% of a private school's enrollment consist of pupils using vouchers. Over the years, the latter restriction was lifted and the number of voucher slots has steadily increased.

In 1995, Ohio passed a voucher program for low-income families in Cleveland as part of the biennial budget bill. The bill provided for a voucher worth \$2,250 and required that parents pay 10% to 25% of the private school's tuition charge. The Ohio Supreme Court ruled in 1999 that attaching the voucher program to the biennial budget bill violated the state's single-subject rule, and the state legislature rectified this situation by passing a distinct voucher bill one month later.

Florida was the first state to pass a bill authorizing vouchers statewide. This measure was passed in 1999, the first year in which the Republicans controlled the governor's office and both chambers of the state legislature. Vouchers were bundled with a number of other educational "reforms" in Florida's "A+ Plan for Education" plan. Students attending a school that had received an "F" in two of the last four years were eligible for a voucher worth at least \$4,000.

Colorado passed a voucher bill in 2003 that provided for vouchers in 11 (out of 180) districts with at least eight schools characterized as "low" or "unsatisfactory" in the 2001–02 school year; vouchers equal to 75–85% of the district's per-pupil revenues would be available only to children eligible for a free or reduced-price school lunch. The 11 targeted districts are large urban districts in the Denver, Colorado Springs and Pueblo metropolitan areas. Participation was capped at 1% of the district's enrollment in 2004–05, rising to 6% in 2007–08. The Colorado Supreme Court ruled in 2004 that the voucher bill was unconstitutional because the program was partially funded with local tax dollars, stripping school boards of their authority.

Bills granting vouchers to poorer residents of the District of Columbia have twice gotten a majority in both chambers of Congress. In 1995, amendment 891 to H.R. 2546 passed in the House by a vote margin of 241 yeas to 177 nays. The amendment provided for vouchers and a number of other "reforms" for the D.C. public schools. The bill was filibustered in the Senate. A cloture vote got a majority (56 votes), but not enough to end the filibuster. In 2003, a voucher amendment (368) to H.R. 2765 that established a voucher worth up to \$7,500 was more successful. The amendment passed the House in a very close vote (205 to 203). The final bill was approved by the Senate and signed by President Bush.

Panel B shows that voucher bills passed the lower chambers in Arizona and New Hampshire, and won majorities in the upper chambers in New Hampshire and Wyoming. In both instances, however, the bills were bottled up in the legislature's other chamber and never made it to the floor for a vote.

Voucher success depended in part on the proposal's specific features. It was noted earlier that allowing families with children already in private school to receive vouchers creates uncertainty about whether the voucher program will raise taxes. All of the voucher programs that passed deal with this by restricting vouchers to students in poor families, to failing schools, or both. Several of the less successful voucher proposals did not have these limitations. In Kansas's HB 2217 bill in 1995 and two of the three New Hampshire bills, any family could utilize a voucher to send their child to private school.

Wisconsin and Colorado dealt with uncertainty about the demand for vouchers and the related adjustment costs by limiting voucher participation and allowing that limit to increase slowly over time. One of the New Hampshire bills that passed one chamber also limited voucher eligibility. But there is a danger in limiting participation too much. Other bills may have failed because there were almost no prospective beneficiaries to lobby for the bill's passage. For the three pilot study bills considered in Wyoming, the state superintendent would be given the authority to select 100 to 200 student participants. Given that restriction, there were few obvious participants and thus no well-defined decisive coalition of beneficiaries. In 1999, New Hampshire's lower chamber failed to pass HB 701, which provided for a voucher equal to 10% of local per-pupil public school spending. This was the least generous voucher proposal that went to a roll-call vote.

Many very large school districts appear to be inefficient. This may be because there is little effective competition facing districts covering large geographic areas or because there is less parental monitoring of large school districts due to low incentives to be politically active. There should be more support for vouchers that would help students in large inefficient schools, and that is indeed so. Florida's voucher program is the only one to be approved that is not specifically targeted to large, struggling urban school districts.⁷ Ohio's voucher program is limited to Cleveland, and Wisconsin's is restricted to Milwaukee. Colorado's is limited to 11 large urban districts with eight or more schools receiving poor evaluations. Congress barely approved a voucher program for the District of Columbia in 2003, but a proposal to allow the use of Title IV funds to finance vouchers for disadvantaged students in schools nationwide received only 36% of the votes cast in the House only two years earlier. The greater success of geographically targeted vouchers also can be explained by strong teacher opposition emerging only in the districts of representatives where the public schools will be directly affected by the proposal.

Given the sharp differences between political parties in support for vouchers, it is not surprising that most voucher activity has occurred in states in which the Republicans controlled both chambers of the legislature. Republicans dominated the legislature in each instance in which one chamber passed a voucher law, and in six of the seven instances in which both chambers voted for vouchers. The only exception is the 1989 bill to establish vouchers in Milwaukee, where a voucher program was approved despite Democratic majorities in Wisconsin's house and senate. And five of the seven failed floor votes on vouchers occurred in states with Republican majorities in the state legislature. Finally note that every legislatively

successful voucher law was signed by a Republican governor or president.

Although virtually all of the roll-call votes on vouchers took place in states in which the Republicans controlled the state legislature, voucher proposals nevertheless were successful in only a minority of Republican-controlled states. Thus, Republican control of state government appears to be an almost-necessary but not a sufficient condition for vouchers to have some success. An explanation of voucher success must start with Republican states, which comprise the set of states for which vouchers have some prospect of approval. A state is included in the set of “Republican” states if at some point in the election cycles of 1990–2000 the Republicans controlled state government, with a Republican governor and Republican majorities in the state house and senate. Eighteen states meet this criterion.⁸ These states accounted for all but two of the votes listed Table 2. It is not surprising that the only roll-call votes not occurring in states defined as “Republican” here took place in Georgia and Louisiana, states where Democrats are more conservative politically than usual. A voucher proposal did not garner a majority in either vote.

Two variables measure voucher success. PASS is a dummy variable that equals one for the four states that enacted vouchers (Colorado, Florida, Ohio and Wisconsin) and equals zero otherwise. Alternatively, 1–2 CHAMBERS equals one for these states as well as for the three other states in which voucher proposals garnered a majority in only one legislative chamber (Arizona, New Hampshire, Wyoming); this variable also equals zero otherwise. Which factors make some “Republican” states more favorable to vouchers than others?

Conservative Republicans are hypothesized to be more likely to support vouchers than moderate Republicans because the conservatives generally have greater faith in markets and

other private institutions. Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) has for decades assessed the voting records of members of the US Congress. Its widely used measure of political ideology equals the percentage of a legislator's votes that agree with the liberal position taken by the ADA on key bills selected by the ADA. The ideology of a state's legislators is measured here by the average ADA score for the state's Republican US senators in 1979–1997.⁹ In Table 3 it can be seen that voucher programs were established only in states in which Republicans were relatively conservative. In fact, even though average state ADA scores for Republican US Senators were as high as 48.3 (Pennsylvania), Republican ADA scores were no higher than 12.3 in the states that enacted vouchers. This was also the case for the seven states in which vouchers cleared at least one legislative chamber.

Private schools emerge to satisfy a demand for religious instruction or in response to dissatisfaction with the public schools. Thus, states with larger percentages of students enrolled in private school (PRIVATE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT) are expected to view vouchers more favorably. A larger private school enrollment also can reflect a higher population density, which makes it easier for private schools to take advantage of economies of scale (Husted and Kenny 2002). The relationship between private school enrollment and voucher success is summarized in Table 4. The hypothesis is supported when success is measured in terms of a voucher plan being enacted. In none of the states that enacted vouchers did fewer than 8% of students attend private schools, and between a third and a half of states in the categories with higher private school enrollment enacted voucher programs. On the other hand, there is little apparent relationship between private school enrollment and success in getting a voucher bill through at least one chamber of the legislature.

Most of the successful voucher proposals have targeted large failing school districts. This strategy obviously is impossible if there are no large school districts in the state to target. BIG CITY is a dummy variable that equals one if the largest city in the state had at least 400,000 people in 1990 (Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin); it equals zero otherwise. BIG CITY's relation with voucher success is shown in Table 5. All of the states that enacted voucher plans had a city with a population of at least 400,000. The presence of a large city also has a strong impact on the other measure of voucher success, 1–2 CHAMBERS. A voucher proposal passed at least one chamber in only 20% of the states with no big city and in 63% of states with one.

Linear probability regressions using these three variables to explain voucher success are reported in Table 6. The regressions using all three variables explain 44% of the variation in PASS and 30% of the variation in 1–2 CHAMBERS. BIG CITY is excluded from the second and fourth regressions, which causes a sharp drop in the adjusted R^2 s. The null hypothesis of no overall significance is rejected in the first three regressions, but not the fourth.

As expected, the most conservative “Republican” states are the most likely to establish voucher programs and to pass voucher proposals in at least one chamber. That is, voucher support falls as the average ADA score for the state's US Republican senators increases. A one standard deviation (13 point) rise in the average ADA score among Republican states is estimated to reduce the probability of adoption of vouchers by 0.22 to 0.27, and to reduce the probability of passing at least one chamber by 0.24 to 0.29.

Targeting vouchers to poor children in large struggling school districts makes vouchers more acceptable, but this can be done only in states with large cities. The BIG CITY dummy

variable has the predicted positive sign and is statistically significant. States with at least one city with more than 400,000 people are estimated to have a 0.44 higher probability of enacting vouchers, and a 0.53 greater probability of a voucher bill passing at least one legislative chamber.

The fraction of school age children attending private school has the hypothesized positive sign in three of the four regressions, but the variable is significant only in the voucher passage regression that excludes BIG CITY. In that regression, a one standard deviation rise in PRIVATE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT (0.05) is estimated to lead to a 0.27 increase in the probability that a state establishes a voucher.

3. Charter schools

Charter schools operate within the public school system but are not shackled by some of the regulations that are claimed to make public schools less efficient. Charter schools have spread rapidly since Minnesota became the first state to authorize them in 1991. Forty-five states now have charter schools, which account for 1.5% of public school enrollment nationwide.

Alvarez (2003) explains the cross-state pattern of charter school approval as well as the differing strengths of charter school laws. Economies of scale for alternatives to traditional public schools, such as private schools and charter schools, are easier to realize in densely populated jurisdictions and in large metropolitan areas (Husted and Kenny 2002). As the share of the population living in metro areas rises, charter schools should be more feasible and Alvarez indeed finds that states with high urban population percentages are more likely to allow charter schools. States with larger Republican majorities in the state house also are more likely to

authorize charter schools and to have stronger charter school laws. Not surprisingly, charter schools are less likely to be approved in states with strong teachers' unions.

Wong and Shen (2004) studied the adoption of 16 charter-school law provisions in 39 states that have allowed charter schools. Their empirical results are not very revealing insofar as only one independent variable typically is found to be statistically significant in each of the 16 logit regressions they report.

4. Conclusion

Political ideology plays a powerful role in explaining the success of educational choice proposals. Conservative and Republican voters are more likely to support vouchers in referenda. Similarly, Republican legislators tend to view vouchers more favorably than Democrat legislators. With very few exceptions, voucher proposals have come to a vote in the state legislature only in "Republican" states, defined herein as states where Republicans have controlled both the executive and legislative branches of government sometime in the past decade. But voucher bills passed at least one chamber in only seven of the 18 states identified as "Republican" states. Differences in ideology within the Republican Party explain some of differences in legislative voting on voucher proposals across Republican states. Empirical analysis reveals that voucher proposals have had more success in conservative Republican states than in moderate Republican states. Ideology played the same role in determining observed political support for charter schools. As expected, Republican control of the state legislature increased the likelihood of success of bills authorizing charter schools as well as in strengthening charter school laws.

All but one of the voucher plans that have been enacted have targeted vouchers at large urban school districts, where schools appear to be less efficient. The availability of a large school district to target helps explain voucher success in Republican states. Republican states with large cities have been more likely to approve voucher plans than Republican states with no large cities. Additional analysis is needed to fully understand why proposals that target vouchers to large school districts have been so much more successful than other voucher proposals.

Under traditional voucher plans, in which vouchers are available to all children in private school, there is fiscal uncertainty. Taxes rise if few students switch to private school and fall if many students do. Recent voucher proposals have eliminated this risk by limiting vouchers to poor families, to families with children in failing schools, or both, and consequently have had more success than traditional voucher proposals. The traditional voucher also transfers wealth to households with children already attending private school. As such, traditional voucher proposals fare better in precincts with proportionately higher private-school enrollments.

Homeowners living in districts served by good public schools, facing capital losses if vouchers pass, rationally will oppose vouchers. Studies of California voucher proposals support this prediction.

As expected, legislators representing low-income and minority constituents standing to benefit from newer proposals that limit vouchers to the poor or to students in failing schools are more likely to support vouchers. But poor voters surprisingly also are more likely to support traditional vouchers, which should benefit the rich. Further empirical analysis is needed to unravel the effect of income on support for vouchers.

Teachers' unions, which emerged in the 1960s, have been powerful foes of educational

choice. These organizations appear to have been much less effective in opposing vouchers in the early 1970s than they have been recently. Voucher proposals typically have garnered less support in precincts with more teachers and from legislators receiving contributions from teachers' unions. Furthermore, states with strong teachers' unions are less likely to authorize the creation of charter schools.

The research described herein has been confined to educational choice in the United States. Vouchers and charter schools of various forms are allowed in Belgium, Canada, Chile, Columbia, France, Ireland, Japan, the Netherlands and Sweden. Studies explaining why vouchers and alternatives to public schools are found in some countries but not others would be a valuable addition to this literature.

Endnotes

1. Hawaii has one statewide district, and six states (Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, Nevada, Virginia, West Virginia) mandate countywide school districts. In several other states the number of school districts exceeds the number of counties only slightly.
2. Over the years, some Florida legislators have expressed an interest in allowing multiple county school districts, but a bill authorizing this has never progressed to a floor vote.
3. Sandy (1992) utilized survey responses from individuals who voted in Michigan's referendum H in 1978, which would have established vouchers of unspecified value and eliminated the use of property taxes to fund public schools. The bundling of these two issues makes it difficult to interpret his results, which accordingly are not summarized below.

4. Note that the *Serrano* decision mandated that spending per pupil be the same in each California public school district, eliminating the usual link between district wealth and spending.
5. Florida's history of assessing schools is illuminating. Initially schools were evaluated on the basis of raw test scores. Subsequently, schools were judged on their "value added". This change appears to have caused considerable confusion (Figlio 2004).
6. The proposal also required testing of teachers in their academic subjects areas both in public schools and in private schools redeeming tuition vouchers.
7. Nevertheless note that Florida has seven of the 21 largest school districts in the country.
8. These are Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Utah, Wisconsin and Wyoming.
9. These data are taken from Francis and Kenny (2000, pp. 88–89).

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Table 1. Referenda results on vouchers

State	Year	Referendum	Vote share (%)	Description
Nebraska	1966	6	43	transportation for private school students
Michigan	1970	C	43	(vote against prohibiting) public funds for private schools
Nebraska	1970	12	42	tuition reimbursement for private school students (up to one-third of per-pupil public school costs)
Maryland	1972	18	45	state scholarship program for students in approved private schools
Maryland	1974	14	43	transportation for private school students, among other provisions
Colorado	1992	7	33	vouchers worth at least 50% of per-pupil public school costs, redeemable at any public or private school
California	1993	174	30	\$2,600 voucher for private school students; at least 50% of per-pupil public school costs
Washington	1996	173	36	\$3,400 voucher for private school students
California	2000	38	29	voucher for private school students, worth the greatest of \$4,000, 50% of US per-pupil public school costs, or 50% of California per-pupil costs
Michigan	2002	1	31	vouchers for private school students in districts with low high-school graduation rates and for families in other districts approving voucher use

Table 2. Legislative roll call votes on vouchers

a. Bills passed in both chambers

State	Year	Bill No.	Outcome	% Republican		Chief Executive	Description
				House	Senate		
Colorado	2003	HB 03 1160	H 35–29 S 18–17 <i>enacted</i>	57	51	R	11 districts with 8+ schools with poor grades poor residents < 6% of students
DC	1995	HR 2546 ^a amendment 891	H 241–177 S 56–44 <i>filibuster</i>	55	54	D	poor residents only residents of DC
DC	2003	HR 2765 amendment 368	H 205–203 S no roll call <i>enacted</i>	53	52	R	poor residents only residents of DC
Florida	1999	H 751 ^b	H 70–48 S 25–15 <i>enacted</i>	53	58	R	failing schools
Ohio	1995	HB 117 ^c	H 82–16 S 29–3 <i>enacted</i>	57	61	R	poor residents only residents of Cleveland
Ohio	1999	HB 282	H 87–11 S 31–2 <i>enacted</i>	61	63	R	poor residents only residents of Cleveland
Wisconsin	1989	AB 601	H 62–35 part of Senate's biennial budget bill <i>enacted</i>	43	39	R	poor residents only residents of Milwaukee < 3% of students

Table 2 (cont'd)

b. Bills passed in one chamber

State	Year	Bill No.	Outcome	% Republican		Chief Executive	Description
				House	Senate		
Arizona	1999	HB 2279	H 31–27 S no vote	63	60	R	poor residents
New Hampshire	1998	SB 456	H no vote S 16–8	64	63	D	any families in districts (up to five) allowing vouchers
New Hampshire	1999	HB 633	H 172–171 S no vote	63	63	D	school test scores in bottom one-third poor residents < 5% of school's students
Wyoming	2002	sf0002 s2040	H no vote S 16–14	77	67	R	200 sixth grade students selected by state superintendent (two-year pilot study)

Table 2 (cont'd)

c. Bills failing in both chambers

State	Year	Bill No.	Outcome	% Republican		Chief Executive	Description
				House	Senate		
Georgia	1999	SB 68	S 23–31	43	39	D	poor residents in failing schools
Kansas	1995	HB 2217	H 23–98	64	68	R	all families
Louisiana	1999	SB 964	S 14–22	26	36	R	first to eighth grade students in failing schools
New Hampshire	1999	HB 701	H 78–283	63	63	D	all families; 10% of per-pupil costs
Wyoming	2000	sf0002 s2036	S 13–16	72	70	R	100 third-grade students selected by state superintendent two-year pilot study
Wyoming	2001	sf0001 s2010	S 12–18	77	67	R	100 seventh-grade students selected by state superintendent one-year pilot study
US	2001	HR 1 amendment 57	H 155–273	51	50	R	failing schools use of Title IV funds to finance vouchers for disadvantaged students

^a There were other items in the amendment dealing with reforming public schools in the District of Columbia.

^b The bill also addressed making schools more accountable, improving student learning, raising standards, improving training for educators, improving school safety and reducing truancy.

^c Part of the biennial budget bill.

Table 3. Political ideology and voucher success

US SENATE REPUBLICAN ADA SCORE	PASS		1-2 CHAMBERS	
	NO (0)	YES (1)	NO (0)	YES (1)
0-10.0	4	2 (33%)	3	3 (50%)
10.1-20.0	5	2 (29%)	3	4 (57%)
20.1-30.0	2	0 (0%)	2	0 (0%)
30.1-40.0	1	0 (0%)	1	0 (0%)
40.1-50.0	2	0 (0%)	2	0 (0%)
Totals	14	4	11	7

Table 4. Private school enrollment and voucher success

PRIVATE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT	PASS		1-2 CHAMBERS	
	NO (0)	YES (1)	NO (0)	YES (1)
0.001–0.040	3	0 (0%)	2	1 (33%)
0.041–0.080	4	0 (0%)	3	1 (25%)
0.081–0.120	4	2 (33%)	3	3 (50%)
0.121–0.160	1	1 (50%)	1	1 (50%)
0.161–0.200	2	1 (33%)	2	1 (33%)
Totals	14	4	11	7

Table 5. Large cities and voucher success

BIG CITY	PASS		1-2 CHAMBERS	
	NO (0)	YES (1)	NO (0)	YES (1)
NO (0)	10	0 (0%)	8	2 (20%)
YES (1)	4	4 (50%)	3	5 (63%)
Totals	14	4	11	7

Table 6. Linear probability regressions explaining voucher success^a

Independent variables	Dependent variables:		1-2 CHAMBERS	
	PASS			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
US SENATE REPUBLICAN ADA SCORE	-0.0172 (2.32)	-0.0204 (2.46)	-0.0187 (1.93)	-0.0225 (2.13)
BIG CITY	0.439 (2.35)		0.525 (2.14)	
PRIVATE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT	2.556 (1.17)	5.408 (2.63)	-0.094 (0.03)	3.317 (1.26)
Intercept	0.067 (0.43)	0.040 (0.21)	0.477 (2.23)	0.445 (1.87)
Adjusted R ²	0.438	0.269	0.298	0.130
Root mean squared error	0.321	0.366	0.420	0.468
N	18	18	18	18

^a Absolute values of *t*-statistics in parentheses.