FSU | INSTITUTE FOR GOVERNANCE & CIVICS

Working Paper No. 1

Seeds of Support: How Experience and Exposure Shape Public Opinion on School Choice

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of school choice programs in the United States raises questions about the sources of growing public support. Drawing on policy feedback theory, this study examines whether personal experience with choice options and exposure to information about existing programs cultivate broader political backing. Using data from a nationally representative survey (N=1,447) fielded in September 2025, we find that individuals with direct or familial experience with vouchers, education savings accounts, charter schools, homeschooling, or open enrollment are significantly more likely to support expanding publicly funded school choice. Satisfaction with these experiences further strengthens support. A randomized survey experiment demonstrates that framing choice policies as already implemented in real states or countries modestly increases support, particularly among respondents initially skeptical or ambivalent, with effects varying by the perceived political alignment of the referenced location. These findings suggest that familiarity—through participation or visibility—generates positive policy feedback, contributing to the momentum behind school choice expansion.

Suggested Citation

Shuls, J.V., Goldberg, Z., & Woodworth, J.L. (2026). Seeds of Support: How Experience and Exposure Shape Public Opinion on School Choice. *IGC Working Paper No. 1.*

Introduction

The history of school choice is not one of linear growth. It is one that might more aptly be called a *slow burn*, building slowly over time. John Stuart Mill is said to have been a proponent of vouchers as early as 1859 (Frankel, 2024; Magness & Suprenant, 2019) and America's oldest voucher programs date to roughly the same time (EdChoice, 2025). Yet, vouchers are only one aspect of the broader fights for public funding of private schools (Shuls & McCluskey, 2025). Throughout the history of America, advocates pushed myriad reforms. These efforts picked up steam in the 1960s. Led by public intellectuals, like Milton Friedman (1955), education reformer Father Virgil Blum (Shuls, 2024) and the nation's first grassroots school choice organization, Citizens for Educational Freedom (Shuls, 2022), advocates sought, and sometimes won, direct appropriations for private schools, funding for textbooks, busing, and teacher salaries (Shuls, 2025).

In the 1970s, many prominent progressive academics joined the fight (Matus, 2025). Though advocacy yielded some policy victories, often these successes turned to legal losses. In *Lemon v. Kurtzman,* the U.S. Supreme Court developed the three-part "Lemon Test" to determine if a program violated the establishment clause. Using this doctrine, the court invalidated tuition reimbursement laws in Pennsylvania and Rhode Island. The Lemon Test spelled doom for school choice programs. For example, using the Lemon Test, the U.S. Supreme Court found New York's private school tuition reimbursement program unconstitutional in 1973 (Garnett, 2025).

For more than a hundred years, apart from the town-tuitioning (voucher) programs in rural Maine and Vermont, there was basically no expansion of voucher programs. This changed in 1990 with the passage of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), a voucher program limited to non-sectarian private schools. In 1995, the MPCP was expanded to include

religious private schools (Garnett, 2025). That same year, Ohio created the Cleveland Pilot Scholarship Program, which also allowed for voucher dollars to be used at religious schools (Garnett, 2025). As Garnett (2025) notes, "Both of these programs were challenged on Establishment Clause grounds, and the Court ultimately granted certiorari in the Cleveland case" (p. 189). In a clear shift from the earlier ruling on school choice programs, in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* the court upheld the voucher program.

In the years after *Zelman*, school choice saw slow but accelerating growth. Thirty private school choice programs were established between 2002 and 2011 (EdChoice, 2025). By 2024, there were more than 80. Moreover, the scope of these later programs changed. The early programs tended to be small, means-tested programs. By the 2020s, the programs were increasingly universal programs that were available to all students in a state. Bedrick (2025) put it this way, "For three decades, the choice movement made incremental progress, passing small programs with limited eligibility. But over the past four years, from 2021 through early 2025, the movement has achieved a series of stunning victories, passing universal education choice policies in more than a dozen states" (p. 199).

How do we explain this rapid change? Undoubtedly, changes to the Supreme Court and legal precedent paved the way for school choice programs. Still, there seems to also have been growth in support for school choice. In this paper, we test an idea known as *policy feedback theory*. Pierson (1993) is widely credited with systematizing the concept of policy feedback in his paper, *When Effect Becomes Cause: Policy Feedback and Political Change*, where he emphasizes that "policies produce politics" (p. 595). In essence, enacted policies create constituencies that mobilize to sustain or expand similar initiatives in the future. Here, we focus

only on the impact on the mass public as it relates to school choice. Specifically, we ask two related research questions.

1. Is personal experience with school choice programs—such as using vouchers, education savings accounts, charter schools, or open enrollment or having a family member who uses these programs—associated with support for school choice policies?
2. Does exposure to information about school choice programs in other states or countries influence individuals' support for expanding school choice policies in their own communities?

The first question touches on the "lock-in" effects experienced by people who have participated in school choice programs. We hypothesize that individuals who have participated in various choice programs will be more likely to support expansion of school choice programs. These effects may be moderated by overall satisfaction with choice programs. The second question touches on the interpretive effects on mass publics, as outlined by Pierson (1993). Visibility of school choice programs in other locations, particularly locations that fit the individual's ideological priors, may encourage support for choice programs.

We test these two questions using survey methods. Our first set of analyses are largely descriptive. We test whether people who have experienced choice are more likely to support school choice programs. We test the second question using an experimental approach whereby survey participants are randomly assigned a real scenario based on an actual school choice program, such as Colorado's open enrollment law, or a hypothetical school choice program. The hypothetical mirrors the real, the only difference is that we replace the real location with a hypothetical (Suppose your state…). We found the location specific questions raised support for school choice.

Literature Review

Much of the literature on school choice has rightly focused on outcomes, such as the effects of school choice on achievement outcomes for participants (e.g. Egalite & Wolf, 2016), the competitive effects of choice programs (e.g. Egalite & Mills, 2025), or the effect of school choice on integration (e.g. Marshall et al., 2025; Ritter et al., 2016). While these issues are important, they are not particularly relevant to the questions outlined in this paper except in that the results may shape the informational effects that individuals receive. If individuals trace positive or negative effects on outcomes to choice programs, it could impact support or opposition.

Generally, parents in choice-based schools have higher levels of satisfaction. In a 2024 survey of parents (Ritter et al., 2024), 79% of homeschool parents, 79% of private school parents, and 76% of charter school parents said they were “very” or “somewhat satisfied” with their child’s schooling experience. This number was 69% for public school parents. There are various reasons why this might be the case. It is possible that individuals expressing choice may be able to select better schools or schools of higher quality or that more closely align with values. It is also possible that simply having choices, as experimental survey evidence from Lee, Jilke, and James (2021) suggests, leads to higher levels of satisfaction. This seems to be borne out in field experiment data. Kisida and Wolf (2015) utilized a randomized field trial of the Washington D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program to assess the impact of the voucher on parental satisfaction and found a statistically significant (0.42 to 0.57 standard deviation) increase in parental satisfaction.

It makes sense then, if those who utilize school choice programs have higher levels of satisfaction that they may also be more likely to support expanding school choice programs. This

too seems to be the case in the polling data. In a survey of 1,165 Ohio homeowners, Brasington and Hite (2014) found the strongest support for choice among blue collar areas, those already using private schools, and African Americans. Conversely, opposition was highest among individuals with graduate degrees or those living in high-performing public school districts.

While Republicans are often thought, especially in recent years, to be more pro-school choice, the details of the choice program can have implications for support. In their national poll, Ritter et al. (2024) found differences based on program type; 77% of Democrats and 73% of Republicans supported Education Savings Accounts (ESAs). The roles were reversed for vouchers, with 75% of Republicans and just 60% of Democrats expressing support. In our survey, we attempt to avoid these programmatic differences by asking, "To what extent do you support or oppose expanding publicly funded school choice programs—such as charter schools, private school scholarships, or open enrollment—in your state?"

Academic quality tends to be a primary reason for choosing (Burgess et al., 2015; Catt & Rhinesmith, 2017). People tend to prioritize the personal effects of school choice over broader political concerns (Shuls, 2018). Academics alone, however, are not the only considerations. Parents care about the school's focus: whether they utilize or limit technology, focus on STEM or the arts, have strict discipline or more lax policies, or are faith-based or secular (McShane, 2024). These differences could also be a source of satisfaction for school choice programs. It is a foundational premise of school choice advocates that the choice marketplace can better meet the needs of families than can assigned district schools (e.g. Friedman, 1955).

We utilize a randomized survey experiment to test the effect of information on policy support. These sorts of randomized experiments have been used to test various aspects as it relates to school choice (Handerlein, 2022; Lee, Price, and Swaner; 2024). Relevant to our

analysis, Diperna (2025) randomly assigned their sample to six different framings of school vouchers modeled on the wording from prior surveys to test how the framing influenced support for vouchers.

Policy Feedback Theory

In this paper, we are applying a policy feedback theory lens to school choice. SoRelle and Michener (2022) state, "The goal of policy feedback research is to ask how policies can influence subsequent politics, and how that process ultimately affects future efforts at policy reform" (p. 80). Surveys are often a method for conducting policy feedback theory research, this includes national or longitudinal surveys as well as survey experiments (e.g. Koski & Manson, 2024; Merry & Payne, 2024; Phillipp et al., 2023). Policy feedback theory has also been applied to education policies. Jacobsen, Snyder, and Saultz (2014), for example, apply the theory to school accountability policies using a survey experiment.

Data

Data for our analyses come from the Institute for Governance and Civics (IGC) National Survey, fielded by SSRS from September 17–23, 2025. The survey was administered online to a national probability-based sample of 1,447 U.S. adults. Respondents were drawn from the SSRS Opinion Panel, a nationally representative web panel recruited through address-based sampling (ABS) and dual-frame random-digit-dial (RDD) telephone sampling. All interviews were self-administered in English (n = 1,393) or Spanish (n = 54). The questions used in this analysis were not the only questions included on the poll. Table 1 reports the demographic profile of respondents. The weighted sample was constructed to match national population benchmarks.[1]

[1] Population benchmarks used for weighting were drawn from the 2024 Current Population Survey and other sources listed in the SSRS methods report. For full benchmark tables, see pp. 7–10 of the Wave 2 SSRS Methods Report in Appendix B.

Table 1. Sample Descriptive Statistics

Category	Percent
Sex	
Male	49%
Female	51%
Age	
18 to 29	20%
30 to 49	34%
50 to 64	24%
65 or older	23%
Race/Ethnicity	
Non-Hispanic White	61%
Black	12%
Hispanic	18%
Asian	6%
Other	2%
Household Income	
Less than $50,000	40%
$50,000-$74,999	15%
$75,000-$99,999	14%
$100,000 and over	30%
Education	
Less than HS	9%
HS Graduate	29%
Some college	26%
BA Degree	20%
Postgrad / Prof. Degree	16%
Parent Status	
Parent	26%
Not a Parent	74%
Stated Party	
Democrat	30%
Republican	27%
Independent/ Something Else	43%
Political Ideology	
Liberal	26%
Moderate	43%
Conservative	31%

Dependent Variable: Support for Expanding School Choice

The dependent variable measures respondents' support for expanding publicly funded school-choice programs. Respondents were asked, "To what extent do you support or oppose

expanding publicly funded school choice programs—such as charter schools, private school scholarships, or open enrollment—in your state?" Responses were recorded on a seven-point scale from Strongly oppose (1) to Strongly support (7). For analytic clarity—and because responses are heavily skewed toward the supportive end of the scale (≈68%)—the measure is dichotomized: respondents selecting Somewhat support, Support, or Strongly support are coded as supportive (1), while all others (including neutral and opposing responses) are coded as not supportive (0).

Independent Variable: Experience and Satisfaction with School Choice Options

Respondents were asked whether they or anyone in their immediate family had ever used each of five educational options: an ESA, a private school using a state-funded scholarship or voucher, a charter school, homeschooling, and public school open enrollment. Each item was coded 1 ("yes") or 0 ("no"). Descriptive statistics for each category appear in Table 2. These items were combined into a three-category variable distinguishing respondents with no school-choice experience (45.8%), one form of experience (34%), or two or more (20.2%).

Because positive or negative experiences may influence attitudes more than exposure alone, respondents rated their satisfaction with each option they had used on a seven-point scale from Very dissatisfied (1) to Very satisfied (7). For analysis, these responses were collapsed into four categories: dissatisfied (1–3), neutral (4), satisfied (5–7), and no school-choice experience. Among respondents reporting multiple experiences (≈20% of the sample), the maximum satisfaction score was used as the summary indicator. This approach preserves the most favorable reported experience, while avoiding the interpretability problems created by averaging ordinal responses and the incompatibility of such averages with the large "no experience" group. Among

the 54% of respondents reporting any school-choice experience, 88.3% were satisfied with at least one option, 5.6% were dissatisfied, and 6.1% were neutral.

Table 2. Experience with alternative educational options

Have you or anyone in your immediate family ever used any of the following educational options?	Percent Yes
An Education Savings Account (ESA)	4.5% (0.62)
A private school using a state-funded scholarship or voucher	8.4% (0.81)
A charter school	14.6% (1.03)
Homeschooling	19.3% (1.16)
Public school open enrollment (choosing a school outside your assigned zone)	34.0% (1.42)
None of the above	45.8% (1.15)

Number of Options Reported	Percent of Sample
0	45.8% (1.5)
1	34.0% (1.4)
2	14.8% (1.1)
3	4.6% (0.6)
4	0.6% (0.02)
5	0.2% (0.01)

Note. Data (N=1,446) are weighted to be representative of the national U.S adult population. Cells report margins with robust standard errors in parentheses.

Independent Variable: Information Exposure

A final key predictor measures the frequency with which respondents encounter information about school choice programs. Respondents were asked, “How often do you come across information about school choice programs?” Response options ranged from Never (1) to Very often—at least once a week (5). The distribution is moderately right-skewed: 10.2% reported never encountering such information, 26.8% rarely, 39.8% occasionally, 17.3% often, and 6% very often. In the regression models, the variable is treated categorically. Categorical modeling avoids imposing linearity while enabling meaningful comparisons across exposure levels.

Covariates

All models adjust for a comprehensive set of sociodemographic and political characteristics that may confound relationships between experience, satisfaction, and support for school choice. These controls include age (continuous), gender, race and ethnicity, household income, educational attainment, census region, metropolitan status, homeownership, number of adults and children in the household, marital status, and employment status. Political predispositions are captured by both partisanship (Democrat, Republican, or Independent/other) and ideological self-identification on a five-category scale from very liberal (1) to very conservative (5), which are entered simultaneously as separate sets of indicators. Except for age, all covariates enter as categorical indicators with one omitted reference category per set. Cases with missing or refused responses on any covariates (n = 28, approximately 1.9% of the sample) were excluded from analytic models.

All analyses use the survey weights described earlier and employ robust standard errors. Our first analysis proceeds by estimating weighted logistic regressions examining the relationships among personal experience, satisfaction, information exposure, and support for expanding school choice. For interpretability, figures report both bivariate and covariate-adjusted predicted probabilities of support with 95% confidence intervals.

Results

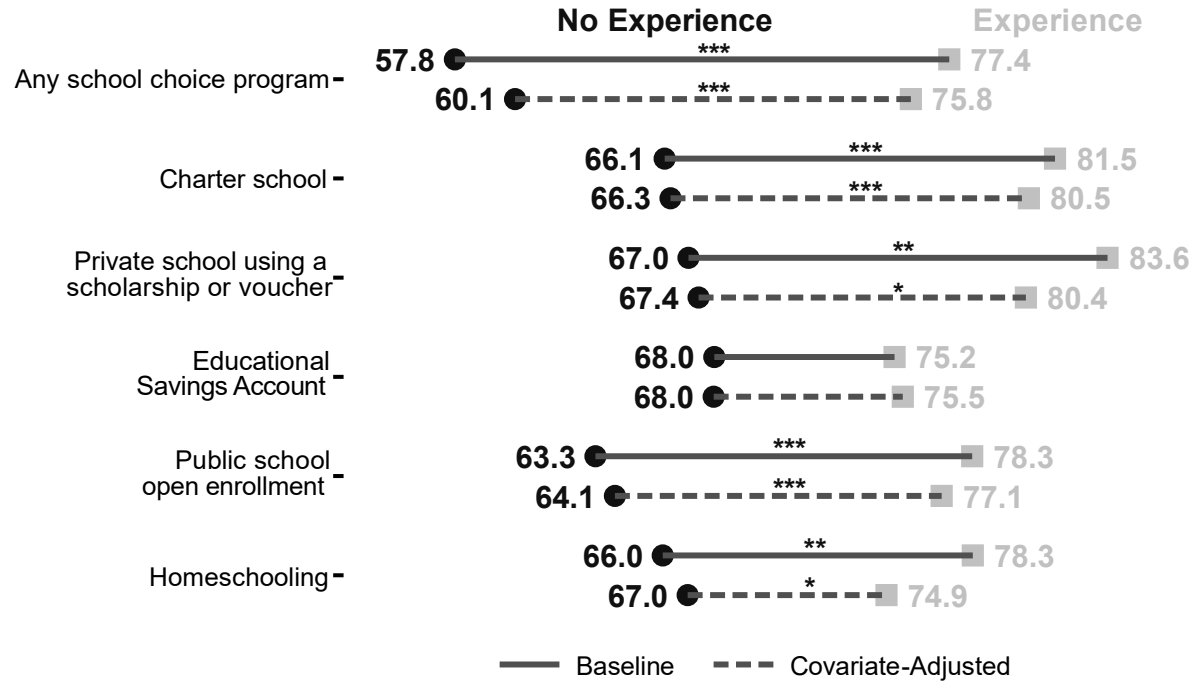
Question 1: Is personal experience with school choice programs—such as using vouchers, education savings accounts, charter schools, or open enrollment or having a family member who uses these programs—associated with support for school choice policies?

We begin by examining whether direct or familial experience with school choice programs is associated with support for expanding publicly funded school choice in one's state. Because only about 20% of respondents report more than one type of school-choice

experience—and because respondents with no experience cannot be meaningfully modeled alongside multiple experience indicators—we estimate separate models for each option. This approach isolates the association for each type of experience without introducing collinearity or forcing "no experience" respondents into incompatible reference categories. Moreover, a model including all five experience indicators simultaneously yields substantively similar results.

Figure 1 displays the predicted probability of support for respondents with and without each type of school-choice experience, estimated from weighted logistic regression models. Each model contrasts respondents who report using a particular option (e.g., a charter school or open enrollment) with those who do not and includes both a bivariate specification and a version adjusted for the full set of demographic and political covariates described above.

Figure 1. Predicted Probability of Supporting School-Choice Expansion, by Experience Type and Model Specification



Note. Data are weighted. N=1,419 across models. Covariate-Adjusted models control for age, gender, race/ethnicity, household income, education, region, metro status, homeownership, household composition, marital status, employment, party affiliation, and ideology.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

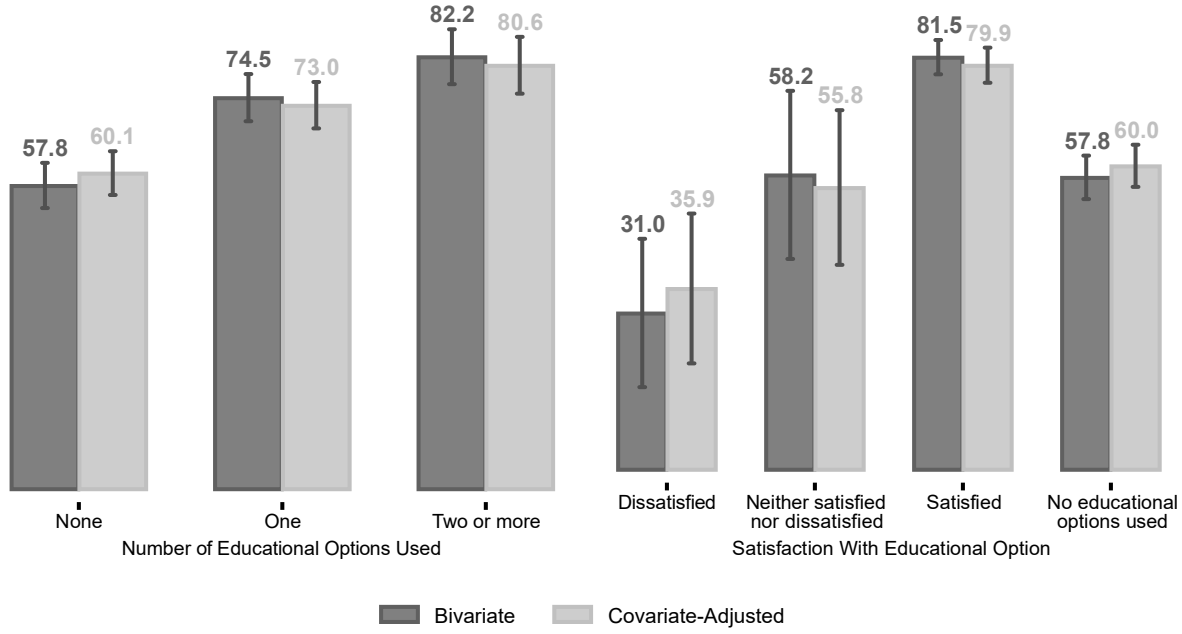
With one exception, individuals with personal or familial experience in school-choice settings are significantly more supportive of expanding such programs. In the baseline models, those reporting no experience with any choice option are markedly less supportive of expansion (60.1% vs. 75.8%), a gap of roughly 16 percentage points. By contrast, support is roughly 16 percentage points higher among those with charter-school experience (81.5% vs. 66%), 17 points higher among those with private-school scholarship or voucher experience (83.6% vs. 67%), and about 14 points higher among those familiar with public-school open enrollment (78% vs. 63%). After adjusting for demographic and political covariates, these gaps narrow only slightly. Respondents who have homeschooled also express greater support (78% vs. 66%), though the adjusted difference (74.9% vs. 67%) is somewhat smaller in magnitude. Only one experience—participation in an ESA, reported by roughly 4–5% of respondents—shows no statistically distinguishable association with support (75.2% vs. 63.3%, $p = 0.320$), reflecting both the limited prevalence of ESAs in the sample and the wider uncertainty around their estimated margins. These findings are not causal. It is possible individuals who support school choice are also more likely to use school choice programs.

Figure 2 suggests satisfaction with one's school choice experience may shape support for expanding such programs. Referring to the left panel, support rises steadily with the number of educational options used: from 57.8% among those with no experience, to 74.5% among those who have used one, and 82.2% among those reporting two or more. These relationships persist after covariate adjustment. The magnitude of these associations does not vary meaningfully by political orientation; support rises with experience across partisan and ideological groups.

Satisfaction with one's experience (right panel) appears to be the stronger of the two predictors. Among those dissatisfied with their school-choice experiences—which constitute 3%

of the total sample and nearly 6% of respondents with any experience—only about 31–36% favor expansion, compared with roughly 80% among the satisfied. Neutral respondents fall midway between these extremes (≈56–58%) and resemble those reporting no prior experience with school-choice options. Collectively, these patterns indicate that favorable personal or familial encounters with choice programs are closely linked to more expansive policy preferences, whereas negative or absent experience is associated with more restrained views.

Figure 2. Predicted Support for Expanding School Choice by Number of Options Used and Satisfaction with Experience

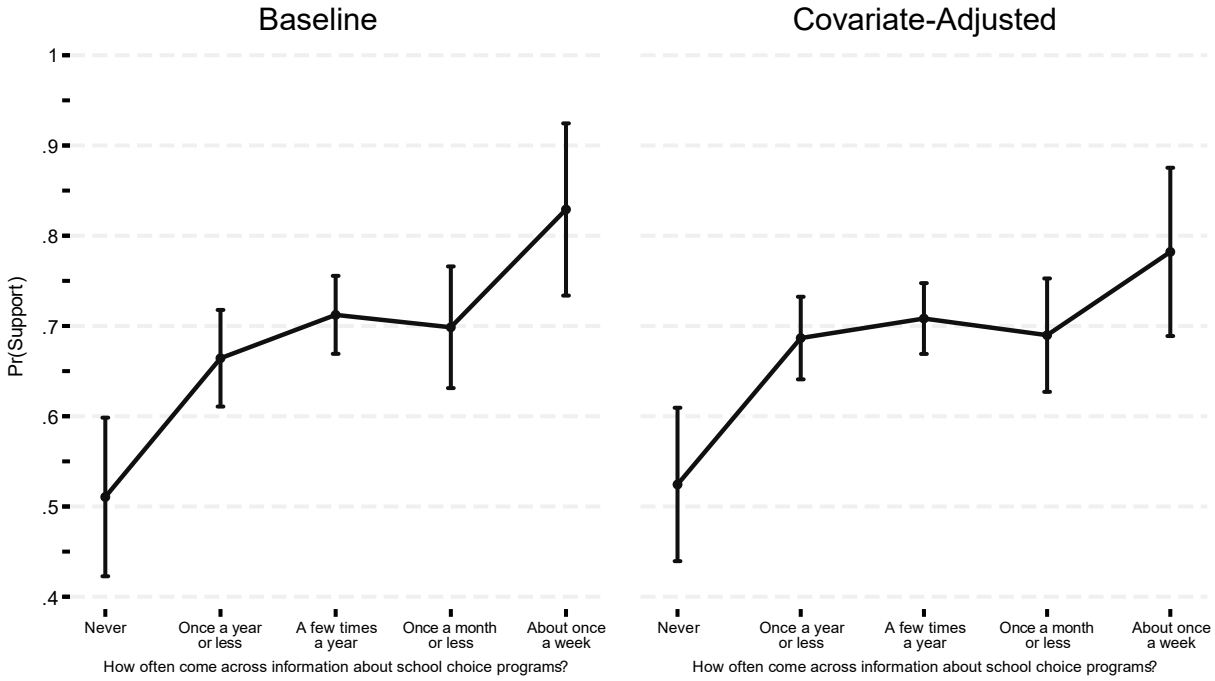


Note. Data are weighted. N=1,419 across models. Error bars are 95% confidence intervals. Panels represent results (predicted margins) from separate logistic regression models. Models in the left panel regress support for school-choice expansion onto the number of reported experiences with school choice options, while those in the right panel regress support onto satisfaction with one's experience with school choice options. Covariate-Adjusted models control for age, gender, race/ethnicity, household income, education, region, metro status, homeownership, household composition, marital status, employment, party affiliation, and ideology.

Figure 3 shows that the frequency of exposure to information about school-choice programs is positively associated with support for expanding them. In the bivariate model, support generally rises with exposure—from roughly 51% among those who never encounter

such information to 83% among those who report seeing it at least weekly. Even after adjusting for sociodemographic, political, and experiential covariates, the relationship remains both substantively large and statistically significant across exposure levels ($p \leq .01$ for all comparisons). Support among those reporting weekly exposure remains nearly 26 percentage points higher than among those who report never encountering such information (78% vs. 52%, $p < 0.001$). Importantly, this association persists even when satisfaction with personal or familial experiences are included in the model, suggesting that informational exposure may exert an independent influence on attitudes. As with satisfaction, self-reported informational exposure is partly endogenous; it may reflect general engagement or attentiveness as much as actual exposure. Accordingly, these results should be interpreted as descriptive rather than causal.

Figure 3. Predicted Probability of Supporting School-Choice Expansion, by Frequency of Exposure to Information about School-Choice Programs



Note. Data are weighted. N=1,419 across both models. Error bars are 95% confidence intervals. Covariate-Adjusted model controls for age, gender, race/ethnicity, household income, education, region, metro status, homeownership, household composition, marital status, employment, party affiliation, ideology, and the number of reported experiences with school choice options.

Research Question 2: Does exposure to information about school choice programs in other states or countries influence individuals' support for expanding school choice policies in their own communities?

Respondents evaluated five distinct education-policy scenarios, each describing a different form of school choice. The five experimental blocks corresponded to (1) statewide open enrollment modeled on Colorado, (2) universal private-school scholarships modeled on Florida, (3) universal ESAs modeled on Arizona, (4) publicly funded vouchers for tuition-free private schools modeled on Sweden, and (5) government-funded, privately operated schools modeled on Ireland.

Within each block, respondents were randomly assigned to one of two vignette versions. In the *real-world* condition, the policy was introduced as one already implemented in a named state or country (e.g., "In Colorado, families can send their children to public schools outside their assigned neighborhood…"). In the *hypothetical* condition, the same policy was described abstractly without reference to an existing locale (e.g., "Suppose your state allowed families to send their children to public schools outside their assigned neighborhood…"). Full wording appears in Appendix 1.

Each respondent viewed all five policy vignettes but was independently randomized within each block. As a result, most respondents received a mix of real-world and hypothetical versions. Because assignment was independent across blocks, receiving a real-world frame in one policy domain did not predict the condition received in any other domain. This design maximizes statistical precision and allows (a) within-respondent comparisons across policy types and (b) between-group comparisons within each policy domain while holding respondent characteristics constant. After each vignette, respondents rated their support on a seven-point scale (1 = Strongly oppose, 7 = Strongly support). For ease of interpretation, analyses use both

the full scale and a recoded three-category version (Oppose, Neither, Support).

Analyses draw on the same nationally representative SSRS survey described above. Respondents missing data on covariates were excluded (complete-case analysis; n = 1,419) to maintain comparability across models.

Analytical Approach

Analyses proceed in both pooled and block-specific form. Pooled estimates summarize the overall average effect of real-world framing across the five policy domains, first in bivariate form and then with covariate adjustment for demographics, partisanship, ideology, and the pre-treatment measures from RQ 1—respondents' school-choice experience (all five indicators), informational exposure, and general support for expanding school choice. Block-specific models are reported next to identify where these effects are concentrated.

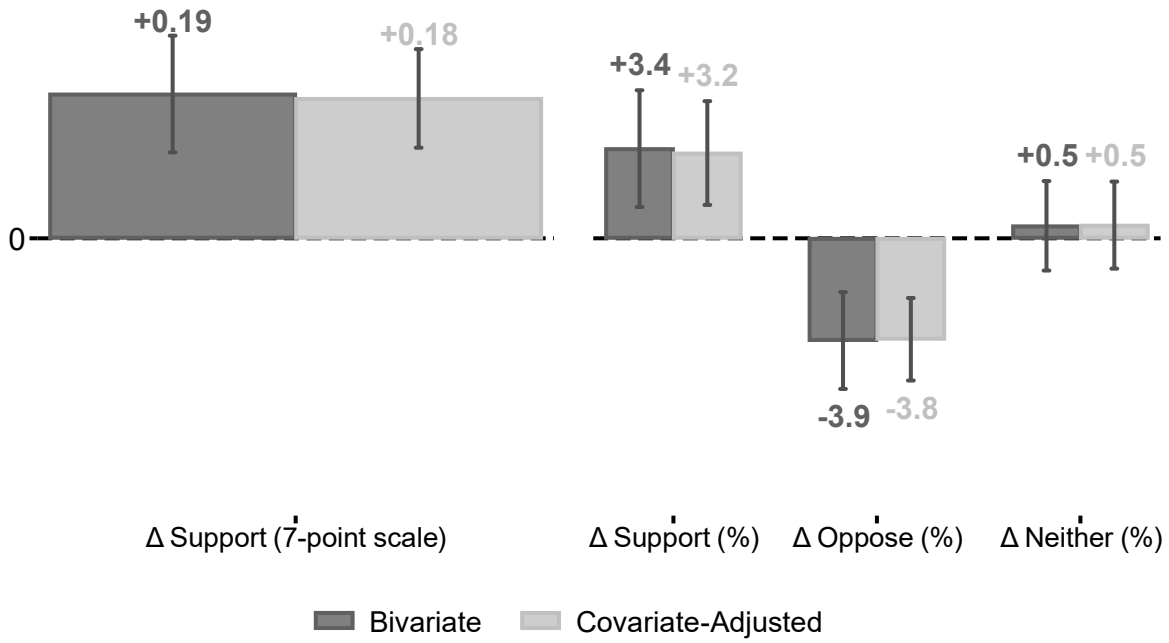
Supplementary models use the three-category outcome to examine shifts across substantive support categories. Interaction models then test whether treatment effects vary according to respondents' baseline support for expanding school choice in their own state. Together, these analyses evaluate whether describing policies as operating elsewhere increases domestic support relative to presenting the same proposals in purely hypothetical terms.

Results

As shown in the left panel of Figure 4, across the five policy vignettes, framing a policy as already operating in a U.S. state or another country—rather than describing it hypothetically—increased support on the seven-point outcome scale by about two-tenths of a response category, a modest effect equivalent to roughly 0.11 standard deviations. The pooled bivariate AME was +0.191 (95% CI = 0.113–0.268, $p < .001$) and remained virtually unchanged after covariate adjustment (+0.185, 95% CI = 0.120–0.250, $p < .001$). Turning to the right panel, which recodes the outcome into three broad response categories, real-world framing increases

the probability of expressing support by +3.4 percentage points bivariately (p = .003) and +3.2 percentage points with controls (p = .001), while reducing opposition by –3.7 percentage points (p < .001) and –3.8 percentage points (p < .001), respectively. The share selecting "neither" remains statistically unchanged (≈ +0.4–0.5 pp, n.s.). Overall, pooled models with respondent-clustered robust standard errors show that policies described as real and operational generate increases in support that, while modest in magnitude, are statistically robust.

Figure 4. Effect of Real-World Policy Framing on Support for School-Choice Proposals



Note. Data are weighted. N=1,419 across models. The left panel displays pooled average marginal effects (AMEs) from OLS models on the seven-point post-treatment support scale; the right panel displays AMEs from logistic models for the recoded three-category outcome (support, oppose, neither). Error bars are 95% confidence intervals. Effects are pooled across five policy vignettes with block fixed effects. Robust standard errors are clustered by respondent. Covariate-adjusted models control for demographics, partisanship, ideology, prior school-choice support, informational exposure, and experience measures. Respondents with missing covariate data (n = 30) were excluded.

Although the pooled treatment effects were modest, their impact may depend on respondents' baseline attitudes toward school-choice expansion. If framing cues primarily increase perceptions of policy feasibility, they should matter most for those who have not yet

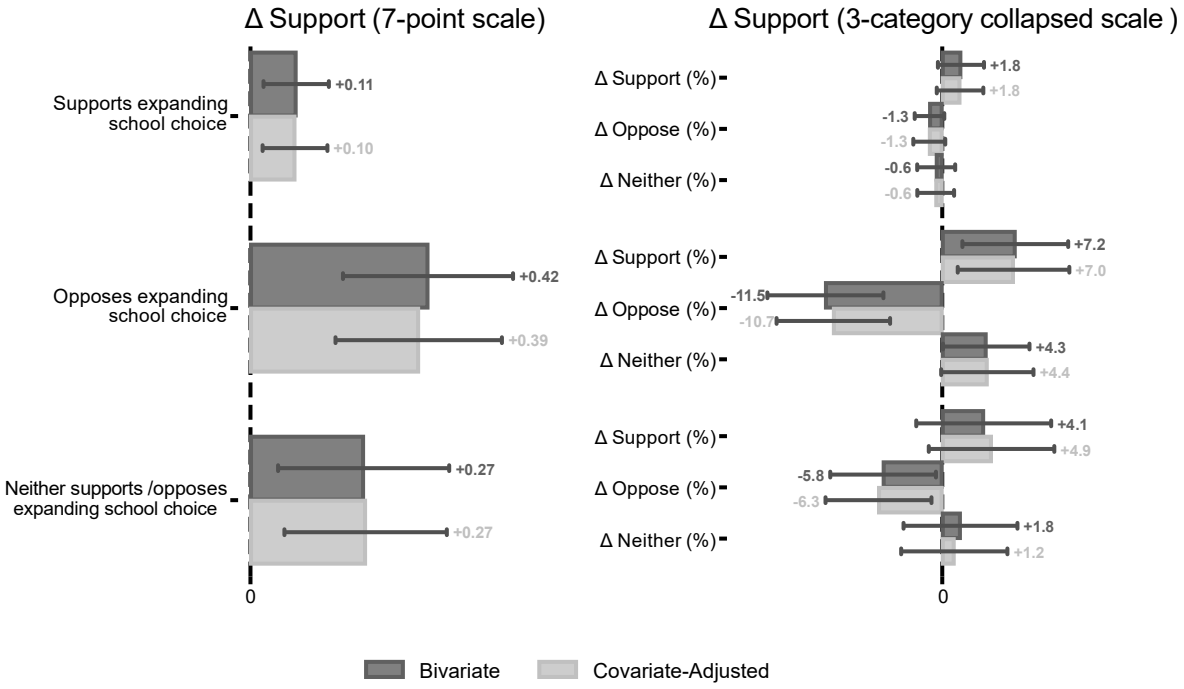
embraced such reforms and least for those already supportive—a pattern reflecting ceiling effects. As shown in Figure 5, the results align closely with this expectation.

In the left panel, the 'real-world' framing effect on the seven-point outcome scale is smallest among respondents who already supported expanding school-choice programs, with a bivariate AME of +0.107 (95% CI = 0.031–0.184, p = .006, SD = 0.065) and an adjusted AME of +0.104 (95% CI = 0.029–0.180, p = .007, SD = 0.063). This attenuated effect is consistent with the fact that a large majority of pre-treatment supporters already select values near the top of the 7-point scale, leaving limited room for upward movement. By contrast, the effects are largest among those who previously opposed expansion, with a bivariate average marginal effect (AME) of +0.416 (95% CI = 0.217–0.615, p < .001, SD = 0.245) and an adjusted AME of +0.394 (95% CI = 0.199–0.589, p < .001, SD = 0.234). For respondents who neither supported nor opposed expansion, the estimated effects fall in between: a bivariate AME of +0.265 (95% CI = 0.065–0.466, p = .010, SD = 0.157) and an adjusted AME of +0.270 (95% CI = 0.080–0.460, p = .005, SD = 0.161).

Turning to the right panel, which compares shifts across broad response categories, pre-treatment supporters of school-choice expansion exhibit only minimal and statistically insignificant changes. Specifically, their probability of expressing support increases by +1.8 to 1.9 percentage points (p = .135/.112 across models), while opposition and "Neither" responses decline by just –1.3 percentage points (p = .090/.111) and –0.6 percentage points (p = .530/.484), respectively. But among respondents who opposed expanding school choice prior to the experiment, the effects are markedly larger. Real-world framing increases the probability of expressing support by +7.0 to 7.2 percentage points (p = .012/.007 across models) and decreases opposition by roughly –10.7 to 11.5 percentage points (p < .001), with smaller and border-line

significant change in the share selecting "Neither" (+4.3–4.4 percentage points, p = .046/.056). For respondents who neither supported nor opposed school-choice expansion pre-treatment, the effects fall between those of the opposing and supportive groups. Real-world framing raises the probability of expressing support by +4.1 to 4.9 percentage points (p = .228/.124 across models) and reduces opposition by roughly –5.8 to –6.3 percentage points (p = .028/.018), while leaving "Neither" responses statistically unchanged (+1.2–1.8 pp, p = .44–.66).

Figure 5. Heterogeneous Effects of Real-World Framing by Pre-Treatment Support for School-Choice Expansion



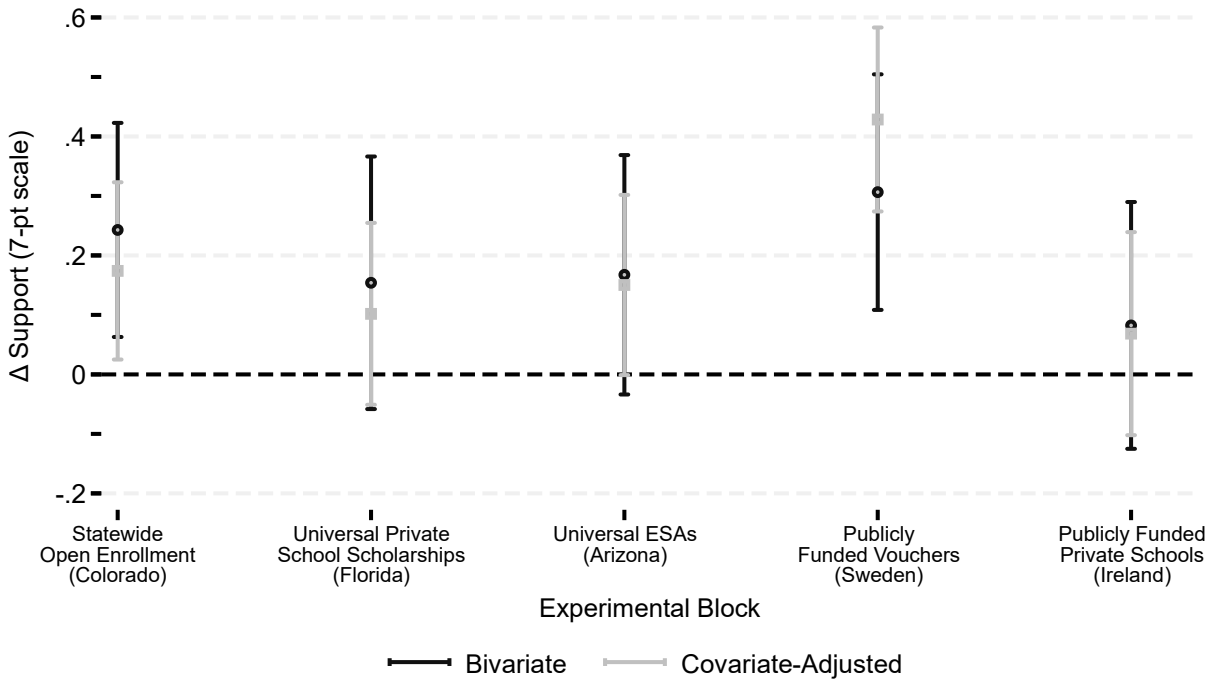
Note. Data are weighted. N=1,419 across models. The left panel displays pooled average marginal effects (AMEs) from OLS models on the seven-point post-treatment support scale by pre-treatment attitudes towards expanding school choice; the right panel displays AMEs from logistic models for the recoded three-category outcome (support, oppose, neither) by pre-treatment attitudes towards expanding school choice. Error bars are 95% confidence intervals. Effects are pooled across five policy vignettes with block fixed effects. Robust standard errors are clustered by respondent. Covariate-adjusted models control for demographics, partisanship, ideology, prior school-choice support, informational exposure, and experience measures. Respondents with missing covariate data (n = 28) were excluded.

Overall, these patterns suggest that informational cues emphasizing real-world implementation are most persuasive among respondents who are initially skeptical of school

choice, moderately influential among those who are ambivalent, and least consequential among those already supportive.

We next examine whether framing effects vary by policy domain (Figure 6). On the seven-point scale, the "real-world" framing yields statistically significant gains in two of five blocks: Statewide Open Enrollment (Colorado) and Publicly Funded Vouchers (Sweden). The bivariate AMEs are +0.243 (95% CI = 0.063–0.423, p = .008, SD = +0.144) and +0.306 (95% CI = 0.108–0.504, p = .002, SD = +0.181), respectively; after adjustment, effects remain at +0.174 (95% CI = 0.025–0.323, p = .022) for Colorado and +0.429 (95% CI = 0.274–0.583, p < .001) for Sweden—equivalent to roughly 0.10 and 0.25 standard deviations on the seven-point scale. The Arizona ESAs block is borderline significant after covariate adjustment (+0.150, 95% CI = –0.001–0.302, p = .052, SD = +0.089), whereas Florida universal scholarships (+0.102, p = .192, SD = +0.060) and Ireland's publicly funded private schools (+0.069, p = .431; SD = +0.041) are directionally positive but statistically indistinguishable from zero.

Figure 6. Framing Effects by Experimental Block: AMEs on 7-Point Oppose–Support Scale



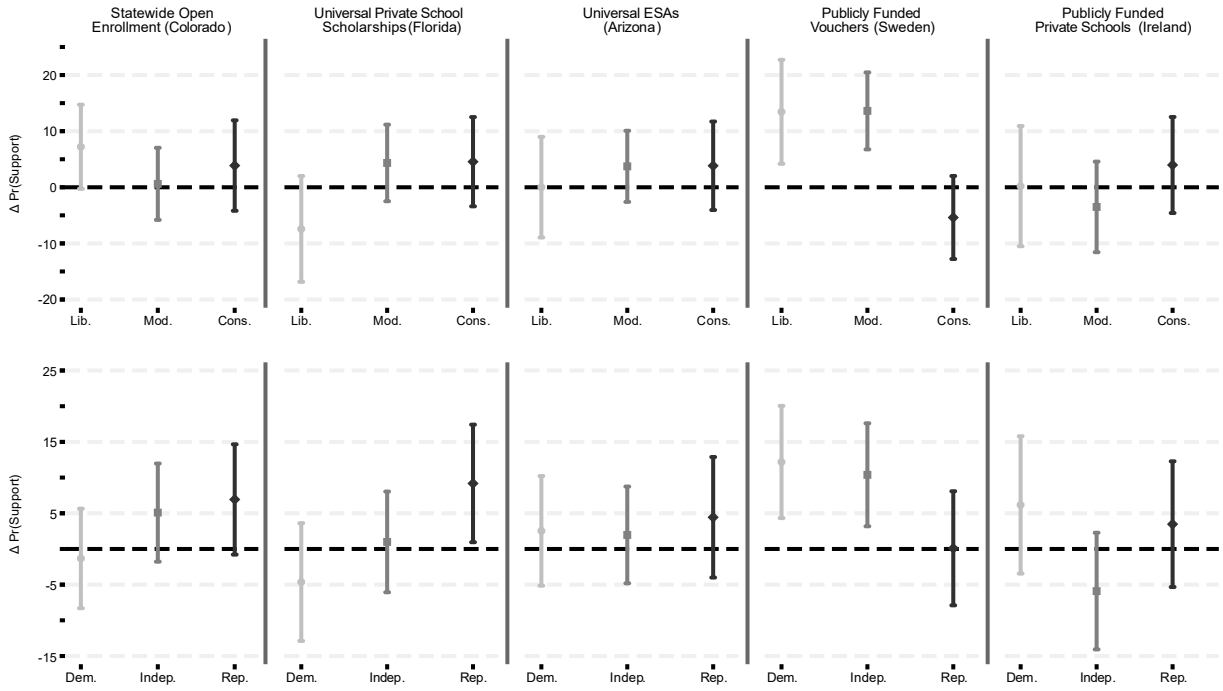
Note. Data are weighted. N=1,419 across models. Markers represent the average marginal effects (AMEs) from OLS models on the seven-point post-treatment support scale by experimental block. Error bars are 95% confidence intervals. Robust standard errors are clustered by respondent. Covariate-adjusted models control for demographics, party affiliation, ideology, pre-treatment school-choice support, informational exposure, and experience measures. Respondents with missing covariate data (n = 30) were excluded.

It is possible part of this heterogeneity may stem from how particular policy contexts or the framing of the question resonate with respondents from different political backgrounds. As shown in Figure 7, real-world framing effects vary systematically across both ideological and partisan subgroups (three-way interaction $p < .01$ for each). For instance, in the Sweden example—referencing a country commonly perceived as left-leaning and which mentioned that the private schools would be "tuition-free independent schools"—support increases by roughly +14 percentage points among liberals ($p = .004$) and +13 points among Democrats ($p = .002$), but declines by about –6 points among conservatives ($p = .11$) and remains near zero among Republicans ($p = .86$). By contrast, in the Florida block—referencing a state that has become reliably Republican in recent decades and potential cost-savings—support increases modestly among conservatives (+4.4 pp, $p = .281$) and more clearly among Republicans (+9.0 pp, $p =$

.033), while falling by roughly –7.6 percentage points among liberals (p = .110) and –4.9 percentage points among Democrats (p = .243

Although it is not clear whether people are responding solely to the location or the context of the reform, the asymmetric shifts suggest the possibility that respondents react more favorably when real-world examples originate from contexts they perceive as politically congenial with their views. The evidence we see here raises an interesting potential line of research for the future.

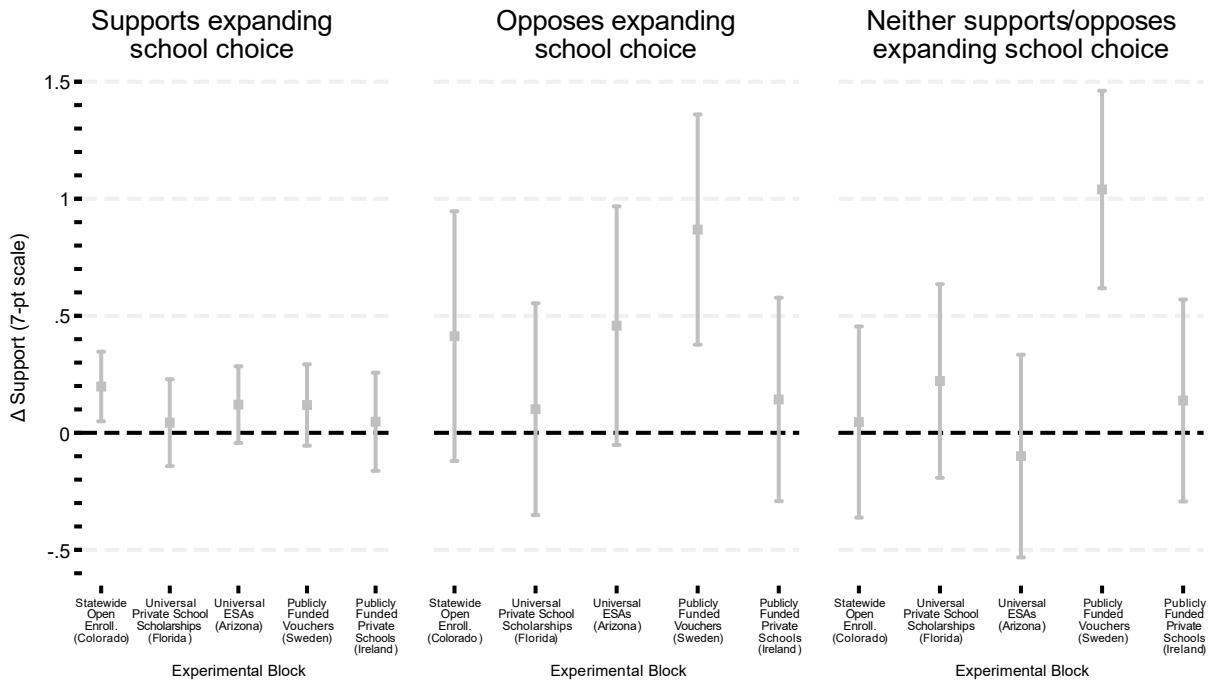
Figure 7. Heterogeneous Effects of Real-World Framing by Ideology (Top) and Party Affiliation (Bottom)



Note. Data are weighted. N=1,419 across models. Markers represent the average marginal effect of the treatment on the probability of supporting a given school choice policy by ideology and party affiliation. Error bars are 95% confidence intervals. Top and bottom row of panels represent separate models. Results in top row are derived from logistic regression models that regress post-treatment support dummies onto a 3-way treatment X experimental block X ideological group interaction. Covariate-Adjusted versions of these models control for demographics, party affiliation, and the pre-treatment school-choice support, informational exposure, and experience measures. Results in the bottom row are from logistic regression models that regress post-treatment support onto a 3-way treatment X experimental block X party interaction. Covariate-Adjusted models here have the same specification as those in the top row, but control for ideology instead of party affiliation. Respondents with missing covariate data (n = 28) were excluded.

As with political orientation, framing effects also vary according to respondents' prior attitudes toward expansion (treatment × block × pre-treatment attitude interaction $p < .01$), reflecting a ceiling-and-conversion dynamic. In the publicly funded vouchers (Sweden) block, real-world framing increases support by nearly a full response category on the 7-point outcome scale among pre-treatment opponents ($AME_{Adjusted} = +0.868$, 95% CI = 0.377–1.36, $p = .001$, SD = +0.514) and by slightly more than a full category among those initially neutral ($AME_{Adjusted} = +1.04$, 95% CI = 0.618–1.46, $p < .001$, SD = +0.615). Among pre-treatment supporters, however, the shift is marginal and statistically indistinguishable from zero ($AME_{Adjusted} = 0.119$, 95% CI = –0.055–0.293, $p = .180$, SD = +0.070). A similar, though weaker, pattern emerges in the Universal ESA (Arizona) block: support increases by nearly half a category among pre-treatment opponents ($AME_{Adjusted} = +0.458$, 95% CI = –0.052–0.968, $p = .078$, SD = +0.271) but by only about one-tenth of a category among prior supporters ($AME_{Adjusted} = 0.120$, 95% CI = –0.044–0.284, $p = .150$, SD = +0.071).

Figure 8. Heterogeneous Effects of Real-World Framing by Experimental Block and Pre-Treatment Support for School-Choice Expansion



Conclusions

In this paper, we apply a policy feedback lens to examine whether school choice functions as a policy domain in which experience and exposure cultivate broader political support. Our first set of analyses show that personal experience with school-choice programs is a powerful correlate of support. Individuals who have used charter schools, vouchers, open enrollment, or homeschooling express substantially stronger support for expanding school choice than those with no such exposure. Importantly, satisfaction with these experiences is an even stronger predictor than experience alone. Positive encounters with choice programs correspond to markedly higher support for expansion, whereas negative or absent experience is associated with more restrained attitudes. These patterns align with core expectations of policy feedback

theory, particularly the notion of "lock-in" effects among beneficiaries and the interpretive influence of policy experiences on mass publics.

Our second set of analyses extend these insights by demonstrating that even brief exposure to real-world school-choice programs, as opposed to abstract hypothetical, modestly increases support. Although these effects are small in absolute magnitude, they are statistically robust and concentrated among respondents who are initially ambivalent or opposed to school choice. These results reinforce the interpretive dimension of policy feedback theory—the idea that the visibility and framing of existing policies can alter political perceptions, particularly by reducing uncertainty about feasibility.

Taken together, our findings suggest school choice exhibits several hallmarks of a policy capable of generating meaningful feedback effects among mass publics. Personal experience appears to create durable reservoirs of support, while exposure may shift attitudes at the margins, especially among those not yet committed. Although our design does not permit strong causal conclusions, the patterns we document are consistent with the possibility that the expansion of school-choice programs in recent years has been aided, in part, by growing familiarity with such policies nationwide.

Future research should explore the durability of these effects, the mechanisms through which informational cues interact with partisan media environments, and whether similar patterns emerge in subnational contexts where policy implementation is more readily observed. For now, our results underscore a central insight of policy feedback theory: policies do not merely reflect public preferences—they help create them.

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Appendix A

The items listed below do not constitute the entirety of the survey, but are the relevant items used in this analysis.

1. Have you or anyone in your immediate family ever used any of the following educational options?

- Please select all that apply. If none apply, select "none of the above."
- A charter school
- A private school using a state-funded scholarship or voucher
- An Education Savings Account (ESA)
- Public school open enrollment (choosing a school outside your assigned zone)
- Homeschooling
- None of the above

2. Thinking about your and/or your family's experience with the following, how would you describe your overall satisfaction?

- A charter school
- A private school using a state-funded scholarship or voucher
- An Education Savings Account (ESA)
- Public school open enrollment (choosing a school outside your assigned zone)
- Homeschooling

3. To what extent do you support or oppose expanding publicly funded school choice programs – such as charter schools, private school scholarships, or open enrollment – in your state?

4. Generally speaking, how often do you come across information about school choice programs – such as charter schools, private school scholarships, or open enrollment?

- Very often: at least once a week
- Often: about once a month
- Occasionally: a few times a year
- Rarely: once a year or less
- Never

Participants were randomly assigned one of the two scenarios

Item	Scenario
5a	In Colorado, families can send their children to public schools outside their assigned neighborhood, including schools in other districts, through a statewide open enrollment policy. This allows parents to choose schools they believe are a better fit for their child. To what extent would you support or oppose a similar open enrollment policy in your state?
5b	Suppose your state allowed families to send their children to public schools outside their assigned neighborhood, including schools in other districts. Parents would be

	able to choose the school they believe is the best fit for their child. To what extent would you support or oppose a similar open enrollment policy in your state?
6a	In Florida, all students – regardless of family income - are eligible for a private school scholarship of about $8,000. State officials say this increases educational opportunity and lowers costs, since public education typically costs more than $8,000. To what extent do you support or oppose this type of policy?
6b	Suppose all students – regardless of family income - were eligible for a private school scholarship of about $8,000. Supporters say this would expand educational opportunity and reduce costs, since public education typically costs more than $8,000. To what extent would you support or oppose this type of policy?
7a	In Arizona, all students – regardless of income or background – can use Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) to pay for private tuition, tutoring, homeschool expenses, or other approved educational services. Families receive about $7,000 per child per year. To what extent do you support or oppose this type of policy?
7b	Suppose your state allowed all families – regardless of income or background – to use Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) to pay for private school tuition, tutoring, homeschooling expenses, or other approved educational services. Families would receive about $7,000 per child each year. To what extent would you support or oppose this type of policy?
8a	In Sweden, government funding follows students to the school of their choice – public or private. Families use publicly funded vouchers to attend tuition-free independent schools. These schools are regulated but operate independently of the government. To what extent would you support or oppose a similar program in the United States?
8b	Suppose there were a program in the United States that allowed families to use government-funded vouchers to attend tuition-free private schools. These schools would be regulated but operate independently of the government. To what extent would you support or oppose this type of policy?
9a	In Ireland, most students attend privately operated schools that are fully funded by the government. These schools often have religious affiliations but are required to follow national curriculum standards. To what extent would you support or oppose a similar education model in your state?
9b	Suppose your state allowed students to attend privately operated schools that are fully funded by the government. These schools might have religious affiliations but would be required to follow the state's curriculum standards. To what extent would you support or oppose this type of policy?