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Article

State Politics & Policy Quarterly
2018, Vol. 18(1) 61–92
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DOI: 10.1177/1532440017748569
journals.sagepub.com/home/spa
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The Politics of Choice Reconsidered: Partisanship, Ideology, and Minority Politics in Washington's Charter School Initiative

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Abstract

Charter schools enjoy support among Republican and Democratic lawmakers in states and Congress, but little research has examined their support among the electorate. We take advantage of Washington's 2012 charter school ballot initiative—the first voter-approved charter initiative in the United States—to shed light on the politics of school choice at the mass level. Because in-depth, individual-level voter data are often unavailable in state-level elections, we leverage extensive precinct- and district-level data to examine patterns of support and opposition toward the charter school initiative, focusing on how partisanship, ideology, and demographic factors serve to unify or divide voters. Our analysis reveals that the coalition of supporters cut across usual partisan and demographic cleavages, producing somewhat strange bedfellows. This finding has important implications for the strategies advocacy groups may consider as they seek to expand or limit school choice programs via ballot initiatives as opposed to the statehouse, and provides suggestive evidence regarding the evolving shapers of voter support for school choice and ballot initiatives more generally.

Keywords

direct democracy, political behavior, racial and ethnic politics, identity/group politics, education policy, public policy, GIS/spatial analysis, methodology, voting and elections

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Introduction

The political realities of school choice in the United States are complicated. While the scholarly debates tend to focus on whether and to what extent school choice benefits participants (Center for Research and Education Outcomes [CREDO] 2009; 2013; Holyoke et al. 2009), the political debate among policy elites has centered on a wide variety of rationales. Depending on the context, school choice can be an effort to empower parents, enrich school operators, improve opportunities for disadvantaged children, or limit teacher voice.

Among supporters, charter schools have emerged as a popular, if controversial, option to expand school choice. Charter schools are independently operated schools that are publicly funded. They may not charge tuition and typically offer admission via lottery. Charter schools are free from a wide variety of state and district regulation and usually operate outside of traditional collective bargaining agreements for teachers. Charter schools enter into contracts with authorizers, which specify performance expectations and minimum health and safety requirements.

What explains support for school choice at the mass level when the usual partisan cues are unclear? We take advantage of the 2012 approval of a charter school initiative in Washington state to address this question. Using precinct- and district-level voting data, we model the likelihood of initiative support using a range of political, demographic, and education data. Our findings suggest that among voters, school choice is not structured by partisanship and, instead, produces a coalition of strange bedfellows. We find evidence that ideology, and to a lesser degree, race, structures voting on school choice—at least in the context of Washington state. Precincts and districts that are more ideologically conservative (as measured by support for Tim Eyman's 1185 initiative—a measure that required a legislative supermajority to raise taxes), and areas with higher percentages of African American, Latino, and Asian Americans of all political stripes are more likely to support charter schools. In addition, voters living in higher income districts are significantly more supportive of charter schools than are voters living in lower income districts. Thus, at least in Washington state, it appears that support for charter schools at the mass level cuts across standard partisan cleavages and, instead, forms along other characteristics.

This article contributes new evidence around what drives mass-level support for school choice especially in contexts in which the usual coalitions of political elites provide mixed, and at times conflicting, cues to voters. Our results also provide suggestive evidence around how the politics of choice among the electorate have evolved, especially as it relates to the weakening of partisan cleavages that have shaped previous referenda on charter schools in Washington state (see Corcoran and Stoddard 2011). Our findings reveal how the initiative process can bring together political coalitions that are notably distinct from typical left-right political arrangements evident in most aspects of American politics (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2004). Methodologically, we also bring a geospatial approach to the study of school choice political behavior, which previous studies have not done, and examine all school districts and precincts within the state.

Our findings are especially relevant given that the Trump administration seeks to advance school choice policy initiatives nationally and within states. With President Donald Trump's selection of charter school proponent Betsy DeVos as the secretary of the Department of Education, the debate around charter schools is likely to sharpen in the coming months and years. How this plays out will depend in large part on whether advocates and opponents of school choice can win the support of the electorate.

The Complicated Politics of School Choice

One of the most visible and controversial education reforms of the last decade has been the expansion of charter schools (CREDO 2009; 2013; Holyoke et al. 2009). Nationwide, there are 6,716 charter schools serving more than 2.6 million students (National Association of Charter School Authorizers [NACSA] 2015), and since 1991, when the first charter school law was enacted in Minnesota, 42 states and the District of Columbia have authorized the creation of charter schools.

Research on the politics of school choice has focused almost exclusively on the debate unfolding among elites, including interest groups and policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels. On the right, charter schools are often favored by those who see traditional public school districts as monopoly providers and believe that market competition will spur school system improvement (Henig 1995). These advocates argue charter schools put pressure on traditional public schools to improve by forcing them to compete for students and funding (Chubb and Moe 2011); for a critique, see Smith and Meier (1995). Although partisan divisions among elites over school choice have evolved over time, Hassel (2011) and Wong and Shen (2002) find that Republican governors are more likely to support charter school initiatives in states.

Support for public school choice on the left, however, is more complex and fraught with uncertainties. Because charter schools operate outside of traditional governance arrangements, they tend to threaten traditional power bases in education like teachers unions and school boards, interests long aligned with the Democratic Party. But charters can also be viewed as a way to improve access to educational opportunities for historically underrepresented populations. Vergari (2007) discusses how the coalition in support of charters can actually cross traditional Democratic and Republican party lines and include many advocates working on behalf of low-income and minority families residing in underperforming school districts. As DeBray-Pelot, Lubienski, and Scott (2007) discuss, "many liberals support choice on equity grounds, arguing that choice extends options to disadvantaged communities, encourages empowerment in such communities, and can lead to a greater range of education options better suited to meeting the needs of diverse learners." Many "new" civil rights organizations, including the Black Alliance for Educational Options, have made the coalitions supporting the expansion of choice more complex (also see Rhodes 2012).

In considering the passage and implementation of school choice laws, researchers suggest that the partisan basis of school choice is ambiguous at best. Renzulli (2005) finds that Republican-led states are more likely to enact charter school legislation and increase the number of charter schools in the state, but Wong and Shen (2002) find

limited evidence that party control shapes the likelihood of charter policy adoption. Likewise, in testing whether the ideological contours of state legislatures shape the expansion of school choice, Wong and Langevin (2007) find no evidence that conservative legislatures are more likely to expand public forms of school choice. However, they did find that states led by Republican governors were significantly more likely to pass charter school legislation than states led by Democratic governors. Making things more complicated, Zhang and Yang's (2008) analysis of district-level data in Florida suggests Democratic districts are more likely to expand access to charter schools, but this effect reverses as Democrats achieve supermajority status (>80%). Mintrom's (1997) consideration of the expansion of school choice points to the opposition of teachers unions, a key Democratic ally, but traditional measures of partisanship were unrelated to the expansion of school choice in a given state.

Support for Charter Schools in the Electorate

Despite a robust literature examining the politics of charter schools among the elites, little research addresses how the debate has unfolded among the electorate. The use of the initiative process to advance education policy is growing, as advocates turn to the electorate to advance reform proposals. As Bali (2008) shows, voting on statewide education initiatives is on the rise. This fits well with what Nicholson (2005) calls voting the agenda—elites increasingly turn to the initiative as a way to push their policy and political agendas.

While the debate over school choice among elites has focused on the influence of key stakeholder groups affiliated with the Republican and Democratic parties, voter support for school choice may be shaped by a variety of factors. First, given the complexity of most policymaking issues, voters often rely on elites (policymakers, interest groups, and other public figures) to form opinions about policy initiatives and candidates for public office (Bowler and Donovan 1998; Karp 1998; Lupia 1994; Zaller 1992). Previous research has shown that proposition elections often lack traditional heuristics of partisan identification, with the persuasive impact of partisan elite cues or signals playing a relatively minimal role in affecting election outcomes (Cronin 1999; Lewkowicz 2006; Magleby 1984). However, this is not to say that individual voter party identification plays no role in structuring ballot initiative vote choice as Branton (2003) shows that party identification influences voting on a variety of statewide initiatives, including on taxes, budget, health care, lottery, insurance, and school taxes. Instead, as referenced above, voters may rely on cues from other sources, such as cues from initiative campaigns themselves, elites, or the mass media—that is, political advertising (Banducci 1998; Bowler and Donovan 1994; Bowler, Donovan, and Tolbert 1998; Karp 1998).

But from a signaling perspective, in the case of charter schools, voters are confronted with a potentially confusing array of signals. As discussed above, support for charter schools come from both Democrats and Republicans. At the same time, teachers unions have been powerful opponents to the expansion of school choice, and may play an influential role in shaping public opinion on charter schools. In their

examination of previous charter school referenda in Washington state, Corcoran and Stoddard (2011) find that Republican-leaning districts and precincts were more likely to support initiatives authorizing the creation of charter schools in Washington state. However, in the next section, we show that the political stakes and debates surrounding charter schools had changed in Washington state and also nationally by 2012.

While cues from political elites or the two major parties may not provide clear-cut voting signals in the case of ballot initiatives (Lewkowicz 2006), mass opinion on school choice initiatives, in specific, may be influenced by political ideology. School choice can be framed as an ideological issue, pitting the merits of markets against those of public-sector provision. Recent research by Reckhow, Grossmann, and Evans (2015) demonstrates—via a survey experiment—that ideology better structures opinion on school choice than does party identification. Although political ideology can be difficult to measure with aggregate election data, the 2012 ballot included a Tim Eyman backed antitax initiative (I-1185) that serves as a reasonable proxy for political ideology. Tim Eyman is a well-known conservative political activist in Washington state who has spearheaded numerous statewide ballot initiatives since 1999 intended to lower various taxes and fees (Smith 2013).[1] While I-1185 is a contemporaneously measured variable in our forthcoming analysis, it plausibly captures views about the role of government in taxation, regulation, and free-market competition, enabling us to assess the impact of ideology on school choice.

A second set of concerns—contextual in nature—relates to the quality of existing public schools. By design, charter schools delink the connection between residential location and schools. It seems sensible then that parents dissatisfied with their existing schools are more likely to favor the introduction of new school options while those who already have access to high-quality schools will be less likely to favor the introduction of new providers. For example, we might expect greater support for school choice in areas with higher student-per-teacher ratios, or areas where teachers—in general—have less education and are less credentialed (i.e., fewer teachers with master's degrees). Consistent with this notion, Renzulli (2005) finds an association between low-performing schools and an increase in the number of charter school applications. In contrast, Zhang and Yang's (2008) investigation of why there are more operating charter schools in some school districts than in others suggests that school performance may be a major concern for parents but not the guiding principle as low school performance is not associated with the implementation of more charter schools in the state of Florida.

It is important to keep in mind that many of the aforementioned studies only focused on the *implementation* of charter schools in a given district rather than *support* for the policy among the electorate in states where charter school laws do not exist. Certainly, when it comes to passing laws through the initiative process, parents are not the only ones who may favor or oppose school choice. Voters without school-age children also have something at stake in that high-quality schools could translate into higher property values. Brunner and Sonstelie's (2003) examination of California's 2000 voucher initiative seems to suggest that homeowners without schoolchildren living in areas with superior public schools voted to protect their property values. Similarly, Brunner,

Sonstelie, and Thayer (2001) find that voters living in high-performing school districts broadly opposed a 1993 California school voucher initiative. Although this finding is somewhat dated, we nevertheless might expect that voters living in high-performing districts might disproportionately oppose school choice initiatives as a way to "protect" their interests and relative advantages.[2]

Third, the extent to which a locality has invested in public education may also shape the extent of support. This investment may take the form of dollars, as when local property tax levies supplement state and federal aid for education. Alternatively, it may take the form of human capital, as when the district employs more teachers or teachers that are highly qualified. To the extent that localities make these resource investments, they may be less likely to welcome competition from alternative providers who will compete for a limited number of students, thereby siphoning resources away from the traditional public school system.

Finally, public opinion typically diverges on domestic policy initiatives across demographic lines, and these concerns are especially relevant around the issue of school choice. School choice is frequently described as a way to enhance educational opportunity for historically marginalized groups, especially African Americans and Latinos. In public education in the United States, schools that serve large numbers of minority children are less likely to be high performing and more likely to be underresourced (Lee 2002). Because these communities have benefited the least from public investments in education, they may be particularly sympathetic to arguments in support of charter schools. In addition, charter schools are more likely than traditional public schools to enroll African Americans and Hispanics (CREDO 2013). Corcoran and Stoddard (2011) find that districts with larger Hispanic populations are more likely to favor charter schools and that the "demand" for charters increases as the district becomes more African American. Leal (2004) and Bali (2008) find that African Americans and Latinos, respectively, are more likely to support school vouchers, which enable families to use public funding to attend private schools.[3] But race and housing segregation has also been leveraged by opponents of charter schools, who worry that the expansion of school choice will serve to further exasperate racial and ethnic segregation in schools (Tedin and Weiher 2004; Weiher and Tedin 2002).

In addition to race-specific interests, we might expect to see some vote cleavage by districts and precincts varying in racial diversity and economic inequality. Branton (2004) and Tolbert and Grummel (2003) find that racial diversity can have an influence on white voting behavior on ballot initiatives with a clear racial/ethnic component (i.e., English-only language laws; service restrictions on undocumented immigrants; ending affirmative action). Fitting with Key's (1949) racial threat hypothesis, whites living in racially and/or ethnically diverse areas are more supportive of anti-minority ballot initiatives. However, Branton (2004) finds that this racial threat voting is less wedded to voting on race-neutral initiatives. In the present arrangement, charter schools would be considered race-neutral initiative (especially as they are often promoted by conservative intellectuals), so we do not anticipate a large effect for racial/ethnic diversity (which we measure via Herfindahl–Hirschman index). That said, voters in both very racially and economically diverse (which we measure via

Gini coefficient) areas may slightly favor charter schools because it allows for the possibility of crafting a smaller, more homogeneous education environment for children.

Like race, public opinion on school choice may also be divided along household income. Reardon (2011) documents that economic segregation in the schools is on the rise and achievement gaps between low-income children and their more affluent peers have grown, even as the racial achievement gap has grown smaller. But the relationship between household income and support for charter schools is ambiguous. Lower income households may be sympathetic to the claims made by teachers unions, and more likely to be union members themselves. Furthermore, higher income households may be more receptive to market-based arguments and more likely to view choice as an end to itself, as these families typically have better access to private educational alternatives.

It is important to note that these factors—elite cues, local school performance, local investments in education, and demographic characteristics—are not rival hypotheses. Any or all of them could shape voter's preferences for charter schools. We will evaluate support for charter schools within the context of a Washington state initiative election in 2012 to shed light on the potential influence of the aforementioned factors.

The Washington Context

Washington is the first state to authorize charter schools via a voter-approved initiative and presents an important opportunity to understand the politics of school choice among mass publics. Washington state has considered charter school initiatives or referenda on four separate occasions in addition to legislative efforts. The first initiative campaign to legalize charter schools began in 1996 (I-177) and failed by large margins (36–64 in opposition). In 2000, a second initiative was placed on the ballot (I-729), receiving 48% of the vote. In 2004, voters considered a referendum put on the ballot by the legislature (R-55). This measure lost with 58% of voters against it. As described by Corcoran and Stoddard (2011), voter approval varied across localities, with rural areas, small towns, and the city of Seattle providing the weakest support.

Over time, however, the political stakes of the charter school debate in Washington state increased. The campaign for I-777, Washington's first initiative for charter schools, raised nearly US $1 million (White 1996). By the early 2000s, supporters of charter schools received lucrative backing from the business community, with Paul Allen donating US $3 million to the I-729 campaign alone (Shaw 2000). But I-1240 upped the ante, with more than US $10 million in play by supporters. In this way, I-1240 is distinct from previous school choice measures, in that initiative proponents conducted a more serious and well-funded campaign. Furthermore, while the research is somewhat mixed, scholarship indicates that well-funded ballot initiative campaigns can increase the likelihood of passage (Broder 2000; Ellis 2002; Schrag 2004; Smith 2013; Stratmann 2006).

Based on voting outcomes for the two initiatives and one referendum, Corcoran and Stoddard (2011) conducted a pooled-cross-sectional time-series analysis of voter support for charter schools at the district level, with additional precinct-level analyses in

the state's largest county (King County). Their analysis suggests that the performance of local public schools is a consistent predictor of voter support for charter schools but other factors including school resources, student heterogeneity, and Republican vote share are often stronger predictors than test results. Indeed, their analysis suggests that despite significant intradistrict heterogeneity in student achievement, effects of student performance on standardized tests actually dissipates when one shifts from the district to the precinct level.

However, public attitudes toward school choice and charter schools had changed nationally by 2012. According to the Phi Delta Kappa (PDK)/Gallup poll, fewer than half of Americans supported charter schools in 2002, 10 years after the nation's first charter school law passed in Minnesota (PDK/Gallup 2002).[4] By 2012, two-thirds of Americans favored charter schools, including more than half of Democrats (PDK/Gallup 2012).[5]

Washington's new school choice measure (I-1240), which called for the creation of 40 charter schools around the state, was distinct in that the mix of supporters was varied. For instance, Bill Gates, the League of Education Voters, Democrats for Education Reform, Republican gubernatorial candidate Rob McKenna, the *Seattle Times*, *The Tacoma News Tribune*, *The Spokesman Review*, and the majority of the state's newspapers endorsed the initiative. Seattle's alternative, but well-regarded newspaper, *The Stranger*, Democratic gubernatorial candidate Jay Inslee, and Washington state teachers unions, though, were opposed to the initiative. In the end, the initiative eked out a victory by a margin of 50.7% to 49.3%.

A glance at the official county-level votes reported by Washington's Secretary of State suggests that mass-level support for the initiative is complicated, with no clear east-west pattern that is usually evident in the state. This is best illustrated by Figure 1, which compares total votes by county for the 2012 presidential race and the 2012 charter school initiative. The county-by-county results show that usual alignments are not at play for the initiative. Many western counties that are considered strong Democratic strongholds, such as Snohomish, Pierce, Thurston, and Kitsap, voted for Obama but also voted to approve the charter school initiative. In all the aforementioned counties, Obama won by a margin of 10 to 17 percentage points. In Pierce county, for example, Obama received about 54% of the total votes cast, and the charter school initiative received a nearly identical percentage of votes—55%. Results in King County, a traditionally very liberal county, are also revealing. Obama carried King County by a margin of 69% to 29%, but the initiative only lost by about 4 percentage points.

Traditionally, Republican counties were not immune to these changes between the presidential vote and the initiative vote. Romney performed very well in counties such as Chelan, Douglas, and Grant, and in those counties, the majority of voters supported the initiative. Yet, in counties such as Stevens, Lincoln, and Adams, the voters soundly rejected the initiative while strongly supporting Romney. Overall, the county-level votes suggest that the typical partisan alignments may not be at play when it comes to the 2012 charter school initiative. However, drawing any inferences from county-level votes can be deceiving as counties are very large and heterogeneous electoral units. To make a more reliable inference about the politics of school choice and to better understand what other factors besides party impacted levels of opposition and support,

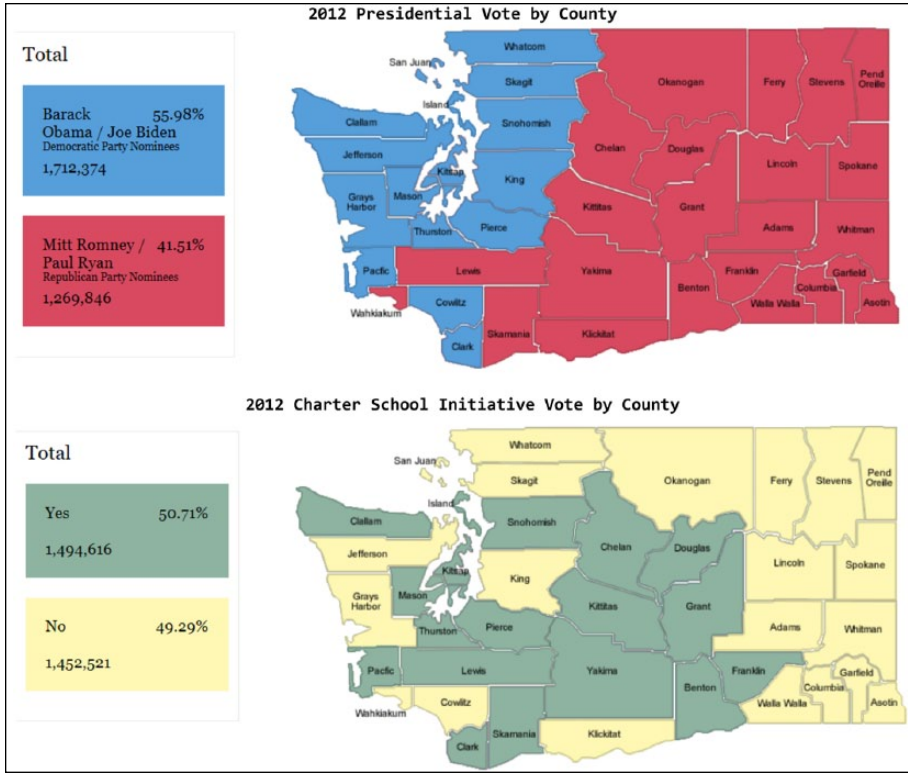

Figure 1. Official 2012 vote outcomes by county.
Source. Washington Secretary of State http://results.vote.wa.gov/results/20121106/President-Vice-President_ByCounty.html http://results.vote.wa.gov/results/20121106/Initiative-Measure-No-1240-Concerns-creation-of-a-public-charter-school-system_ByCounty.html

we turn to school districts and precincts, which are much smaller geographic units of analysis.

Precinct and School District Datasets

We are interested in understanding which blocs of people—who they are, where they live—and what political and educational factors are predictive of support for the 2012 Washington charter school initiative. Because we lack individual-level voter data and factors that may be relevant to their support for school choice, we constructed both precinct- and school-district-level data using a variety of sources to assess predictors of support and opposition to charter schools. The data collection is extensive and consists of multiple parts; however, given data availability, we are unable to include the exact same variables in both analyses. First, from more than 7,000 precincts around the state, we gathered returns for the I-1240 vote as well as other candidates and measures on the

ballot, including presidential, gubernatorial, and an income tax initiative (I-1185). We use the latter as our primary measure of political ideology, capturing attitudes about the role and size of government. Because precinct data are unavailable at the state level, we collected this information from each individual county auditor. Second, we compiled 2010 Census block data on a variety of demographic variables—ranging from race, ethnicity, and age to education and income levels—and spatially joined these Census data with the precinct data using geographic information system (GIS) software. Finally, we replicated the data-gathering process at the school district level ($N = 295$), where a variety of education variables were available from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). These variables include district reading and math proficiency, five-year graduation rate, percent of students qualifying for free/reduced-priced lunch, student-per-teacher ratio, and teacher qualifications. For this level of analysis, precinct vote totals were aggregated to school districts based on unique district identifiers. Detailed summary statistics for each variable are provided in Table 1.

Both levels of analysis offer a useful perspective on a variety of community and political variables related to support for charter schools. However, each has some shortcomings that must be noted. First and foremost, grouped data estimated effects cannot be interpreted as estimators of individual behavior as they are descriptions of differences in voting across jurisdictions (Collingwood et al. 2016; King 2013). For example, this type of analysis cannot tell us whether individuals with a high income are more or less likely to vote for the charter school initiative as opposed to those with a low income. It only can tell us if support or opposition comes from jurisdictions with more higher income residents, which should not be confused with individual assessments of the vote.

As for each specific dataset, the advantage of precinct-level data—as opposed to district-level data—is that precincts are relatively small, homogeneous, and roughly correspond with neighborhoods. As such, a relatively close correspondence between election outcomes and community characteristics can be obtained at this level of analysis. The disadvantage, however, is that we do not have measures of school performance and background at the precinct level, which is available only at the school district level. In addition, we do not incorporate measures of inequality such as Gini coefficient at this level. While our district-level dataset contains important school-specific information, the drawback is that districts are often large and heterogeneous. This means that voters may be more concerned with the quality of their local schools rather than with the performance of their district at large. As Corcoran and Stoddard (2011) correctly point out, this may be particularly true for voters primarily concerned with their property values, which could be impacted by the quality of the local school rather than the school district.

Despite the shortcomings, taken together, our varying degrees of geographic detail will provide a relatively clear and reliable portrait of how voting patterns on the charter school I-1240 relate to the systemic characteristics of local populations, districts, and schools.[6] To tease out the independent effect of each covariate on the dependent variable of vote choice, we use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression for the precinct-level data and spatial regression for district-level data. In each case, we conducted several spatial modeling tests to determine whether specific spatial modeling techniques were necessary or whether a simple OLS regression was appropriate. The next section of the article will provide more details on our modeling techniques and will provide a detailed

Table 1. Summary Statistics.

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Median	*M*	*SD*
Percent Yes I-1240	38.40	60.29	51.05	50.53	3.89
Percent Stein (Green)	0.16	2.91	0.56	0.64	0.34
Percent Johnson (Libertarian)	0.28	3.65	1.40	1.43	0.38
Yes I-1185 (Eyman)	37.10	82.00	72.74	71.15	7.15
Herfindahl–Hirschman Index	1.00	3.49	1.47	1.62	0.50
Gini Coefficient (Equal–Unequal)	0.21	0.68	0.41	0.41	0.05
Percent Hispanic	0.00	0.82	0.05	0.11	0.16
Percent Black	0.00	0.17	0.00	0.01	0.02
Percent Other Race	0.00	0.93	0.05	0.08	0.12
Median Age	16.90	60.90	39.90	40.51	7.28
Percent Female	0.19	0.54	0.50	0.49	0.03
Percent College Graduate	3.30	75.40	19.00	21.51	11.32
Median Household Income	22,991.00	118,017.00	47,562.00	50,203.99	14,507.84
School District Reading Proficiency	13.50	91.30	69.20	67.62	11.40
School District Math Proficiency	6.10	89.80	57.20	57.44	12.58
Five-Year High School Graduation Rate	47.30	100.00	83.58	83.58	8.95
Percent Free School Lunch	3.75	100.00	50.14	51.49	19.87
Students per Teacher	3.00	43.00	17.00	16.16	4.77
Percent Teachers with MA	0.00	100.00	67.61	65.87	13.47
Average Years of Teacher Education	3.10	31.50	12.70	12.84	2.82
Local Tax Revenues per Student	83.10	10,080.40	2,016.70	2,135.57	1,333.23
Transportation Cost per Student Trip	0.00	33.34	2.57	3.51	2.88

discussion of our findings. We will first present the results for the school district analysis, and then will compare those findings with our precinct analysis.

Empirical Techniques and Results

School District Analysis

We begin the school district analysis with a spatial lag regression model, where our dependent variable is percent support for I-1240 by school district. This variable is then regressed on a host of independent variables, the coefficients of which are displayed in Table 2. The spatial analysis uses a similar framework as the standard OLS

Table 2. Predictors of School District Support for I-1240 (Spatial Lag Regression Model).

	Dependent variable
	Yes I-1240
	Spatial Lag
Percent Stein (Green)	−0.058
	(0.600)
Percent Johnson (Libertarian)	−0.458
	(0.379)
Yes I-1185 (Eyman)	0.291***
	(0.035)
Inverse Herfindahl–Hirschman Racial Diversity (Least–Most)	0.456
	(0.362)
Gini Coefficient (Equal–Unequal)	5.514*
	(3.016)
Percent Hispanic	−0.098
	(1.353)
Percent Black	26.068***
	(8.629)
Percent Other Race	−0.067
	(1.436)
Median Age	0.013
	(0.026)
Percent Female	−5.285
	(5.715)
Percent College Graduate	0.039*
	(0.024)
Median Household Income	0.0001***
	(0.00002)
School District Reading Proficiency	−0.029
	(0.027)
School District Math Proficiency	−0.001
	(0.021)
Five-Year High School Graduation Rate	−0.039**
	(0.016)
Percent Free School Lunch	0.018
	(0.013)
Students per Teacher	0.104***
	(0.040)
Percent Teachers with MA	−0.032***
	(0.012)
Average years of Teacher Education	−0.083
	(0.060)

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

	Dependent variable
	Yes I-1240
	Spatial Lag
Local Tax Revenues per Student	0.00001
	(0.0001)
Transportation Cost per Student Trip	−0.131**
	(0.061)
Constant	−0.761
	(5.554)
Observations	284
Log likelihood	−620.293
σ^2	4.216
AIC	1,288.586
Wald test	204.471*** (*df* = 1)
LR test	117.018*** (*df* = 1)
ρ	0.626

Note. I-1240 = Initiative 1240; AIC = Akaike information criterion; LR = likelihood ratio; standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < .1$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

regression, except it controls for systematic dependencies such as space/geography (Bivand, Pebesma, and Gómez-Rubio 2013). The argument is that OLS estimators may be biased because each observation (the school district) is not independently distributed. Rather, observations are more similar to those close to them compared with those farther away. This violates an underlying assumption of linear regression—that observations are independently distributed. As such, the spatial lag model is more appropriate and should be preferred to the OLS model. Furthermore, the Akaike information criterion (AIC) is lower for the spatial model (1,288.586) compared with the simple linear model (1,403.604), indicating a superior model fit (Bozdogan 1987). This is because more of the variance in the dependent variable is explained when we take geographic distribution into consideration.

Our model selection was based on both theory, and a series of diagnostic tests (e.g., testing for the presence of multicollinearity), one of which is the Bayesian Model Averaging scheme where we include many theoretically relevant variables in a series of iterated models (Hoeting et al. 1999). The variables that reached statistical significance in at least 10% of the models were included in the final regression model. It is important to note that indicators of partisanship did not meet this criterion. That is, taking into account other model variables, Obama vote share per district was not a statistically significant predictor of support for I-1240. We also conducted a factor analysis on candidate vote share to measure latent indicators of precinct/district

Democratic Party identification—percent Obama, percent Inslee, percent Cantwell, percent Owen, percent Drew, percent Goldmark, percent McIntire, percent Kelley, percent Ferguson, percent Kreidler, and percent Obama 2008 vote—to produce one factor. This factor correlated at .04 (essentially zero) with I-1240 vote. These findings comport with our theoretical expectations that party cues are not reliable indicators of mass support for school choice.

Although we provide coefficients, standard errors, and fit statistics in our regression tables, understanding the results can be challenging as many of the variables are coded on different scales. To aid in the interpretation of the regression results, we include a rope ladder plot in Figure 2. This plot graphically presents changes in the expected vote on I-1240 to assess both the statistical and substantive impact of each predictor. Using a standard simulation technique known as first difference, we calculated the first difference predicted probabilities (effects) by changing the independent variables under analysis from minimum to maximum value while holding all the other covariates at their central tendency (King and Zeng 2001).[7] In sum, the plot clearly reveals key subgroups of support and opposition to charter schools. We divide the discussion of the findings into three parts to provide a more detailed explanation of how each of the political, demographic, and education variables are related to support or opposition to I-1240 at the school district level.

Political determinants. Out of the three political variables that we specified in the school district spatial lag model, only one is statistically associated with the vote on 1-1240. Although we could plausibly expect Green party supporters (ideologically, very liberal voters) to oppose the initiative and libertarians to be more supportive, we found no such relationship at the district level. This is likely because these voters are relatively few in number. However, support for the Tim Eyman–backed antitax initiative—I-1185—is significantly linked to support for I-1240. Given the text of the initiative and Eyman's reputation around the state as an antitax crusader (Smith 2013), this measure is a sensible proxy for political ideology. Specifically, the initiative reads,

> This measure would restate existing statutory requirements that legislative actions raising taxes must be approved by two-thirds legislative majorities or receive voter approval, and that new or increased fees require majority legislative approval. Should this measure be enacted into law?[8]

In other words, this variable captures political ideology insofar as economics are concerned. Setting all the model covariates at their respective means, school districts with the most support for I-1185—for example, Benge, Paterson, and Mansfield—were about 13 percentage points more supportive of I-1240 than districts that gave the Eyman initiative its lowest vote shares. Moving from 1 *SD* below the mean to 1 *SD* above the mean on the Eyman initiative—a more plausible and numerically conservative movement—a district is expected to shift about 4 percentage points in favor of school choice. Thus, although we find little to no evidence of party structuring voter support, we find strong evidence that ideology is at play, consistent with Reckhow,

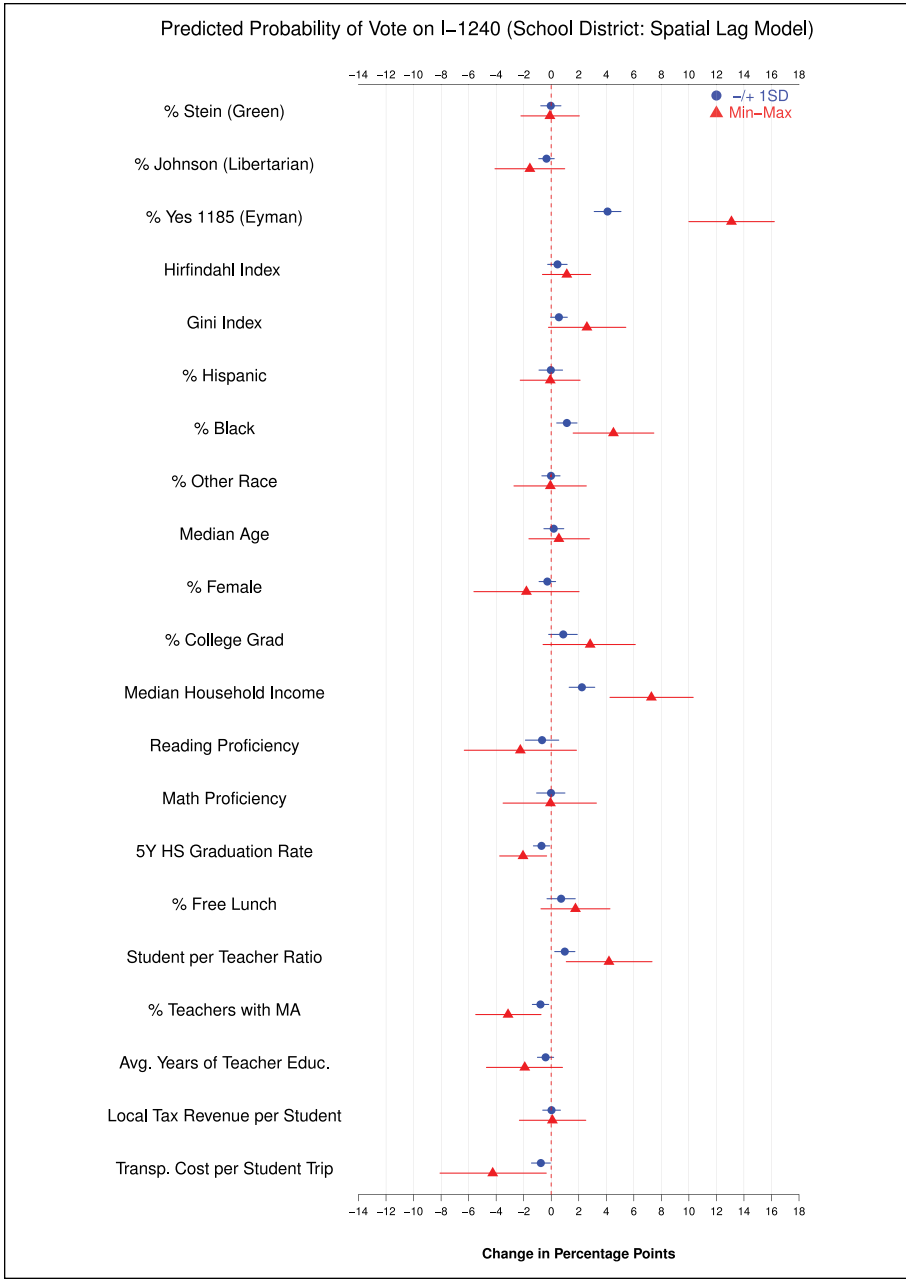

Figure 2. Symbols present the substantive impact of each independent variable on the outcome variable with 95% confidence bands.

Note. Estimated effects were obtained from Table 2. Triangle denotes minimum–maximum effect; circle denotes ±1 *SD* effect.

Grossmann, and Evans (2015). As the Eyman initiative (I-1185) received most of its support from strong Republican voters, one could contend that those who strongly identify with the Republican Party may be more supportive of the school choice initiative. However, this interpretation is potentially misleading, as our more direct party measures were not associated with the vote on I-1240. As such, the relationship between the Eyman initiative and the charter initiative appears to suggest ideology over party as the explanatory factor.

Demographic determinants. As for the demographic indicators, four variables are statistically significant at $p < .1$. These include income inequality (as measured by Gini coefficient where a positive coefficient indicates that more unequal places are associated with greater support for the charter school initiative), percent black, percent college graduate, and median household income. While income inequality (Gini) is statistically significant, its substantive impact is relatively small, as the change in standard deviation below and above the mean (blue dot) is smaller than 1 percentage point. Nonetheless, it may be that people living in districts with greater economic inequality disproportionately support school choice in an attempt to craft smaller schools with a more homogeneous school attendee makeup. Likewise, the effect for education (% college graduates in 2009) is also substantively and statistically small. In sum, these variables play supporting roles in understanding support for school choice—at least in Washington state.

Following previous research, we include several racial indicators, as racial context has been shown to influence voting behavior in a variety of contexts (Branton 2004; Lublin 1999). Perhaps not surprisingly, some racial differences emerge in our inquiry. While we do not see large effects for percent Hispanic or percent other race (i.e., Asian, Pacific Islander, or Native American), relative to districts with no African Americans, districts with the highest proportion of African Americans are about 4.5 percentage points more supportive of I-1240. We find no evidence that heavily Hispanic districts are more likely to support the initiative; however, to provide a little foreshadowing, the precinct analysis shows fairly strong effects for Hispanics as well as other minority groups. That is, some of these present race results are "watered" down because the unit of analysis is large, thereby masking much heterogeneity (see Table 3).[9]

The variable with the most obvious influence in the district analysis is median household income, which is positively associated with casting a ballot in favor of I-1240. All else equal, districts with the highest median household incomes (>US $100,000) such as Mercer Island, Riverview, and Snoqualmie Valley are about 7 percentage points more receptive to charters than the least wealthy districts (<US $25,000), such as Mansfield, Oroville, and Pullman. The standard deviation change leads to about a 2% vote bump. Overall, while these effects may appear relatively small, the overall vote was extremely close, so a collection of small shifts in demographic composition in districts across the state would be enough to determine the outcome of the election.

Education determinants. There are four education variables that had significant impacts on voter support for charter schools, though we observe variability in their substantive

Table 3. Predictors of School District Support for I-1240 Robustness Checks (OLS Regression Model).

	Dependent variable:				
	Yes I-1240				
	Baseline OLS	No small districts	Exclude Seattle	Weight pop	Weight enroll
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Percent Stein (Green)	0.650	0.065	0.568	0.465	0.033
	(0.804)	(0.822)	(0.799)	(0.879)	(0.912)
Percent Johnson (Libertarian)	−0.909*	−1.056**	−0.903*	0.779	0.772
	(0.508)	(0.521)	(0.504)	(0.710)	(0.674)
Yes I-1185 (Eyman)	0.350***	0.341***	0.331***	0.480***	0.431***
	(0.045)	(0.046)	(0.046)	(0.044)	(0.045)
Inverse Herfindahl–Hirschman Racial Diversity (Least–Most)	0.756	0.466	0.850*	0.300	0.280
	(0.483)	(0.486)	(0.482)	(0.463)	(0.447)
Gini Coefficient (Equal—Unequal)	3.938	4.481	4.463	3.018	3.804
	(4.032)	(4.069)	(4.009)	(6.517)	(6.398)
Percent Hispanic	−0.763	−1.688	−0.937	3.708	3.104
	(1.809)	(1.851)	(1.797)	(2.311)	(2.210)
Percent Black	35.818***	39.042***	36.049***	29.247***	32.505***
	(11.490)	(11.410)	(11.404)	(8.199)	(8.187)
Percent Other Race	−1.320	−0.527	−1.555	10.390***	8.926***
	(1.923)	(1.914)	(1.911)	(3.464)	(3.218)
Median Age	−0.018	−0.012	−0.021	0.050	0.019
	(0.034)	(0.035)	(0.034)	(0.038)	(0.040)

(continued)

Table 3. (continued)

	Dependent variable:				
	Yes I-1240				
	Baseline OLS	No small districts	Exclude Seattle	Weight pop	Weight enroll
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Percent Female	−8.841	−20.091**	−9.368	5.641	−1.942
	(7.654)	(9.908)	(7.600)	(12.313)	(12.996)
Percent College Graduate	0.021	0.029	0.020	0.031	0.011
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.031)	(0.036)	(0.037)
Median Household Income	0.0001**	0.0001***	0.0001**	0.0001**	0.0001**
	(0.00002)	(0.00002)	(0.00002)	(0.00002)	(0.00002)
School District Reading Proficiency	−0.037	−0.024	−0.038	0.038	0.048
	(0.036)	(0.037)	(0.036)	(0.051)	(0.051)
School District Math Proficiency	−0.010	−0.011	−0.010	0.021	0.025
	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.027)	(0.038)	(0.038)
Five-Year High School Grad Rate	−0.055**	−0.051**	−0.052**	−0.054**	−0.051**
	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.025)	(0.025)
Percent Free School Lunch	0.019	0.032*	0.020	−0.009	−0.007
	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.027)	(0.027)
Students per Teacher	0.159**	0.170**	0.164**	0.081	0.049
	(0.054)	(0.055)	(0.053)	(0.081)	(0.074)
Percent Teachers with MA	−0.047**	−0.023	−0.046**	−0.086**	−0.070**
	(0.016)	(0.019)	(0.016)	(0.027)	(0.028)

(continued)

Table 3. (continued)

	Dependent variable:				
	Yes I-1240				
	Baseline OLS	No small districts	Exclude Seattle	Weight pop	Weight enroll
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Average Years of Teacher Education	−0.086	−0.096	−0.093	−0.097	−0.093
	(0.081)	(0.096)	(0.080)	(0.128)	(0.128)
Local Tax Revenues per Student	0.0002	0.0002	0.0002	0.0002	0.0002
	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0004)	(0.0004)
Transportation Cost per Student Trip	−0.262***	−0.414***	−0.241***	−0.940***	−0.897***
	(0.081)	(0.101)	(0.081)	(0.173)	(0.177)
Constant	30.114***	33.752***	31.249***	12.625	19.428*
	(7.120)	(7.830)	(7.085)	(9.811)	(9.956)
Observations	284	270	283	284	284
R^2	.535	.572	.531	.822	.747
Adjusted R^2	.498	.536	.494	.808	.727
Residual *SE*	2.750 (*df* = 262)	2.670 (*df* = 248)	2.729 (*df* = 261)	322.135 (*df* = 262)	129.111 (*df* = 262)
F statistic	14.379*** (*df* = 21, 262)	15.782*** (*df* = 21, 248)	14.090*** (*df* = 21, 261)	57.804*** (*df* = 21, 262)	36.906*** (*df* = 21, 262)

Note. I-1240 = Initiative 1240; OLS = ordinary least squares; *df* = degrees of freedom; standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < .1$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

impacts.[10] As indicated by the negative coefficient in Table 2, districts with the highest five-year high school cohort graduation rates are slightly less supportive of charter schools on average. Voters in school districts where students are perceived to do better may be less receptive to arguments in favor of introducing more choice and competition into public school systems.

Other school-district-level variables that drive opposition to charter schools relate to human capital investments that school districts make. As human capital investments go up—that is, increases in the number of teachers with master's degrees and average years of teacher education—support for I-1240 decreases (although in the case of teacher education, the result does not quite reach statistical significance).

We also find that districts with higher transportation costs per student trip are less supportive of I-1240. We speculate that this variable may capture the effect of rurality on support for the initiative, as rural areas tend to have higher transportation costs per student given the long distances traveled by bus drivers to bring students to school.

Regarding teacher-to-student ratio, school districts with the highest number of students per teacher (≥40:1) are 4 percentage points more supportive of charter schools than those with the lowest ratio (≤4:1). Like teacher qualifications, teacher-to-student ratios are an important proxy for how parents might perceive the quality of their local public schools. Where perceived quality is low, our analysis suggests that voters are slightly more willing to buck the status quo and support charter schools.

The analysis also shows (see Figure 2) that several education variables are statistically insignificant. Student reading and math proficiency per district and local tax revenue per student have no bearing on the I-1240 vote. This finding stands in contrast to Corcoran and Stoddard's (2011) analysis of prior Washington state referenda on charter schools—which found that student achievement accounted for about a third of the overall standard deviation in charter support—as well as our own, albeit weak, results related to high school graduation rates. It is possible that voters are becoming less sensitive to the results of statewide assessments over time, as they have become more common as part of state and federal reforms to educational accountability. We also examined several other school-related attributes in a separate model but found no significant associations.

Finally, we include several robustness checks in Table 3 to assess how susceptible our model of Washington school choice voting is to outliers. Our initial estimation strategy employed a spatial lag autoregressive model, which is necessary given some spatial dependence between units. However, to perform our robustness checks, we excluded some districts in some models based on population and student enrollee size. When subsetting data, and incorporating weights for district size and for geographic proximity, we are unable to estimate a spatial lag model. Therefore, the robustness checks employ an OLS estimation strategy. Model 1 in Table 3 presents the baseline model, which reveals very similar substantive findings as the initial lagged model. Model 2 presents findings from larger districts with less than $N = 50$ student districts being excluded. Model 3 removes Seattle, potentially the most influential district in the whole state given its size. Models 4 and 5 weight the data to district population size (4) and to district student enrollee size (5). Overall, the results change little from the

baseline spatial lag or OLS model, further supporting our overall thesis of strange bedfellow voting.

Precinct Analysis

With only one exception, we analyzed the precinct-level data employing the same statistical techniques used in the district-level analysis. Because we did not have unique identifiers at the precinct level, we were unable to create appropriate spatial weights to run a spatial lag model. As such, we had to rely on OLS regression, which does not take into account systematic spatial dependencies. While this is a limitation, we do not expect it to significantly change our findings, as our analysis of the school districts revealed similar results between the OLS and spatial lag models.

The precinct OLS model analysis (see Table 5) reveals three sets of variables that, consistent with the district-level results, are strong predictors of the I-1240 vote. Figure 3 aids in the interpretation of the results as it presents all the variables on a standardized scale. All else equal, precincts that gave Eyman's antitax initiative its greatest share of votes are nearly 42 percentage points more supportive of charter schools than those precincts that were most unfavorable toward the tax initiative. This provides strong support for the argument that ideology is a substantively important driver of school choice voting behavior.

We should also note that the two other political variables—percent Stein (Green Party), and percent Johnson (Libertarian)—do comport with our theoretical expectations. This is something we expected to see at the district level but did not observe because of the low number of observations and variation in the percent support for Stein and Johnson in geographically large school districts (as compared with precincts). Here, precincts where the Green Party performs especially well tend to oppose the initiative whereas precincts where the Libertarian Party candidate performs well tend to support the initiative. However, the realistic average effects (change in standard deviation) are notably small compared with the Eyman initiative variable.

Likewise, although not as substantively important as ideology, we find evidence that heavily minority precincts are more favorable toward charter schools than heavily white precincts. Specifically, precincts more populated with Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans are about 13, 4, and 11 percentage points more supportive of charters, respectively. It is important to note that some race variables that were not statistically significant at the district level are now significant at the precinct level. This is because precincts are smaller units of analysis and thus more homogeneous. In other words, more precincts will have significant shares of minority voters compared to school districts. With greater variation at the unit of analysis, coupled with an increase in sample size, we can more clearly observe the effects of race.

In addition, the influence of percent black, while still positive, is no longer statistically significant at the precinct level. Part of the explanation for this is the inclusion of the Herfindahl index, which is correlated with minority population. In Model 2, Table 6, we present estimates of the model with the Herfindahl–Hirschman index removed, and see that percent black is both statistically significant and substantially similar in

Table 4. Predictors of School District Support for I-1240 Robustness Check (Spatial Lag Regression Model, without Herfindahl).

	Dependent variable
	Yes I-1240
	Spatial lag
Percent Stein (Green)	−0.005
	(0.600)
Percent Johnson (Libertarian)	−0.484
	(0.380)
Yes I-1185 (Eyman)	0.293***
	(0.035)
Gini Coefficient (Equal–Unequal)	5.616*
	(3.021)
Percent Hispanic	−0.120
	(1.355)
Percent Black	32.463***
	(7.009)
Percent Other Race	0.170
	(1.427)
Median Age	0.011
	(0.026)
Percent Female	−3.280
	(5.508)
Percent College Graduate	0.042*
	(0.024)
Median Household Income	0.0001***
	(0.00002)
School District Reading Proficiency	−0.027
	(0.027)
School District Math Proficiency	−0.001
	(0.021)
Five-Year High School Grad Rate	−0.038**
	(0.016)
Percent Free School Lunch	0.022
	(0.013)
Students per Teacher	0.108***
	(0.040)
Percent Teachers with MA	−0.033***
	(0.012)
Average Years of Teacher Education	−0.089
	(0.060)
Local Tax Revenues per Student	0.00000
	(0.0001)

(continued)

Table 4. (continued)

	Dependent variable
	Yes I-1240
	Spatial lag
Transportation Cost per Student Trip	−0.130**
	(0.061)
Constant	−1.581
	(5.530)
Observations	284
Log likelihood	−621.088
σ^2	4.235
AIC	1,288.176
Wald test	208.190*** (*df* = 1)
LR test	118.067*** (*df* = 1)
ρ	0.629

Note. I-1240 = Initiative 1240; AIC = Akaike information criterion; *df* = degrees of freedom; LR = likelihood ratio; standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < .1$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

Table 5. Predictors of Precinct Support for I-1240 (OLS Regression Model).

	Dependent variable
	Yes I-1240
Percent Stein (Green)	−0.335***
	(0.106)
Percent Johnson (Libertarian)	0.484***
	(0.069)
Yes I-1185 (Eyman)	0.439***
	(0.009)
Herfindahl–Hirschman Racial Diversity (Least–Most)	0.020***
	(0.003)
Percent Hispanic	0.038***
	(0.004)
Percent Black	0.014
	(0.010)
Percent Asian	0.023***
	(0.007)
Percent Native American	0.063***
	(0.019)
Median Age	0.0002
	(0.0002)

(continued)

Table 5. (continued)

	Dependent variable
	Yes I-1240
Percent Female	−0.004
	(0.024)
Percent Married Household	−0.113***
	(0.009)
Percent High School or Less	−0.043***
	(0.015)
Percent Some College	−0.030**
	(0.015)
Percent Four-Year College	−0.050**
	(0.021)
Median Household Income	0.000001***
	(0.00000)
Precinct Size Control	0.00001***
	(0.00000)
Constant	0.183***
	(0.020)
Observations	6,625
R^2	.464
Adjusted R^2	.463
Residual *SE*	0.060 (*df* = 6608)
F statistic	357.802*** (*df* = 16, 6608)

Note. I-1240 = Initiative 1240; OLS = ordinary least squares; *df* = degrees of freedom; standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < .1$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

impact as two of the other minority population measures. These results are broadly consistent with the findings from the school district analysis, in that racial minorities are more supportive than not of school choice.

As with the district-level results, income also plays a powerful role in understanding the charter school vote. Precincts with the highest median household income are 32 percentage points more favorable toward changing the status quo on charter schools than are precincts with the lowest median household incomes. Overall, then, an electoral coalition of groups that do not often align such as racial minorities, upper-income voters, and ideologically conservative voters appears to be the winning formula for school choice passage at the mass level—at least this appears to be the case in Washington state.

Other variables that are associated with I-1240 support are marital status and education. Precincts most populated with married households are about 10 percentage points less supportive of charter schools than precincts heavily populated with male-only or female-only head of households. With education, relative to precincts with

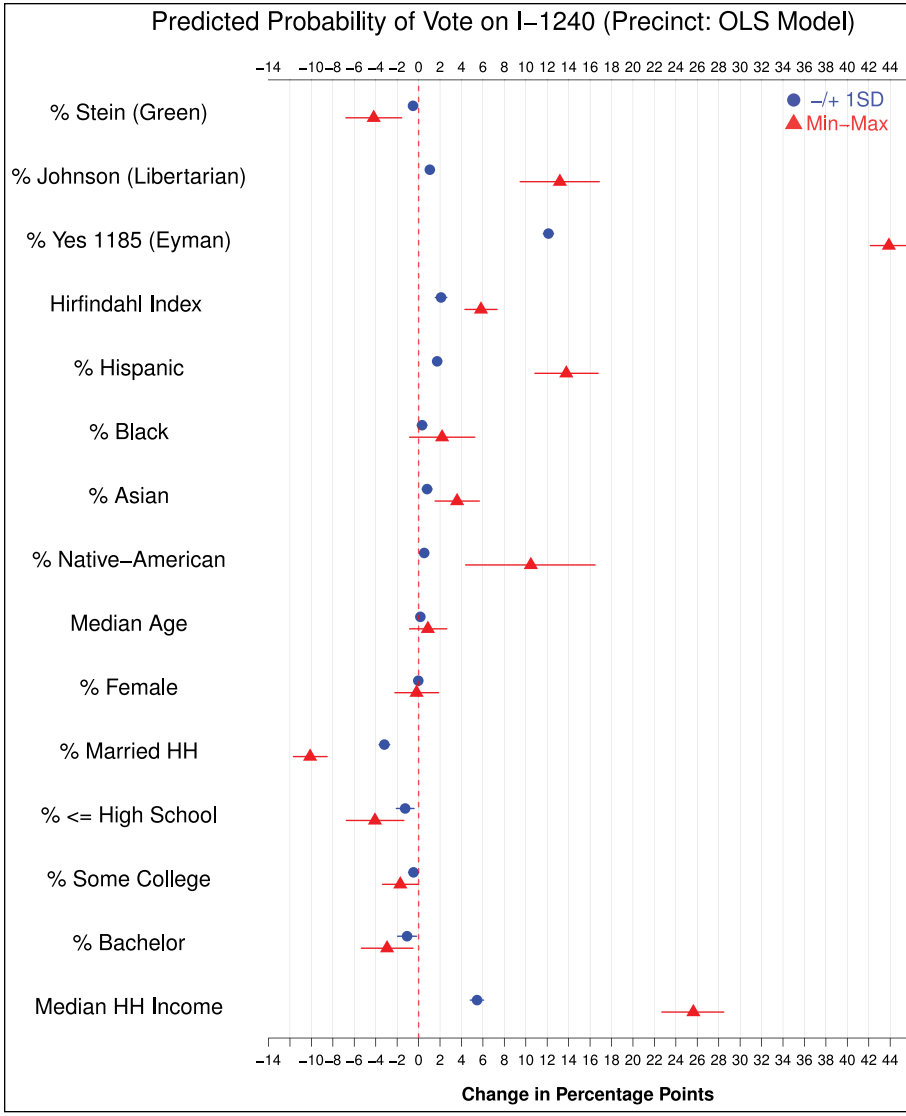

Figure 3. Symbols present the substantive impact of each independent variable on the outcome variable with 95% confidence bands.
Note. Estimated effects were obtained from Table 5. Triangle denotes minimum–maximum effect; circle denotes ±1 *SD* effect.

overall higher shares of professional degrees, precincts with less overall education tend to be slightly more opposed to charter schools, indicating a weak negative relationship between education and charter school support. In general, these results

Table 6. Predictors of Precinct Support for I-1240 (Weighted OLS to Voter Population Model; Herfindahl Excluded).

	Dependent variable	
	Yes I-1240	
	Weighted	No Herfindahl
	(1)	(2)
Percent Stein (Green)	−0.328***	−0.374***
	(0.105)	(0.106)
Percent Johnson (Libertarian)	0.391***	0.457***
	(0.080)	(0.069)
Yes I-1185 (Eyman)	0.484***	0.437***
	(0.008)	(0.009)
Herfindahl–Hirschman Racial Diversity (Least–Most)	0.015***	
	(0.002)	
Percent Hispanic	0.044***	0.044***
	(0.003)	(0.004)
Percent Black	0.032***	0.046***
	(0.007)	(0.009)
Percent Asian	0.028***	0.047***
	(0.005)	(0.006)
Percent Native American	0.063***	0.078***
	(0.013)	(0.019)
Median Age	0.001***	−0.0001
	(0.0002)	(0.0002)
Percent Female	−0.059***	−0.003
	(0.020)	(0.023)
Percent Married Household	−0.111***	−0.125***
	(0.008)	(0.009)
Percent High School or Less	−0.069***	−0.030**
	(0.012)	(0.014)
Percent Some College	−0.037***	−0.026*
	(0.013)	(0.015)
Percent Four-Year College	−0.023	−0.043**
	(0.018)	(0.020)
Median Household Income	0.000001***	0.000001***
	(0.00000)	(0.00000)
Precinct Size Control		0.00001***
		(0.00000)
Constant	0.181***	0.224***
	(0.017)	(0.019)
Observations	6,625	6,667
R^2	.547	.458

(continued)

Table 6. (continued)

	Dependent variable	
	Yes I-1240	
	Weighted	No Herfindahl
	(1)	(2)
Adjusted R^2	.546	.457
Residual *SE*	1.112 (*df* = 6609)	0.060 (*df* = 6651)
F statistic	532.727*** (*df* = 15, 6609)	374.711*** (*df* = 15, 6651)

Note. I-1240 = Initiative 1240; OLS = ordinary least squares; *df* = degrees of freedom; standard errors in parentheses.
*p < .1. **p < .05. ***p < .01.

parallel the findings from our school district analysis. While there are some minor differences, such differences are likely due to the variation in case size—about 7,000 precincts compared with about 300 districts.

Implications and Conclusion

Washington's 2012 charter school initiative succeeded as a result of coalition of strange bedfellows: minority voters and high-income Eastside suburbanite voters on one hand, against Seattle liberals and Eastern Washington rural residents on the other hand. While we have not yet been able to capture all the political dynamics given the challenging nature of data collection and manipulation, the present analysis produces several interesting findings.

First, minority groups are more likely to support school choice, consistent with other findings. This suggests that the civil rights rhetoric that charter school proponents have used may be effective at mobilizing these voters' support for charter school initiatives. Second, in contrast to previous examinations of Washington's charter school referenda (Corcoran and Stoddard2011), we found little evidence that party identification (i.e., support for partisan candidates) is related to public support for charter schools in year 2012. Instead, we found ideological leanings (as measured by I-1185) to be a far more powerful predictor of voter support for charter schools. This finding is particularly important given the mixed partisan cues that voters received during the election, with Democratic lawmakers' and progressive interest groups' support for the initiative divided, and offers a fruitful area for further research. Furthermore, the finding that ideology so strongly cleaves the electorate fits with the mainstream pro-charter school argument that education can be enhanced by market solutions—an argument that has been forcefully advanced in recent years. Third, we found that precincts with higher household incomes were more likely to support charter schools. This is somewhat perplexing, given that charter schools are often marketed as a way to improve access to quality schools among lower income families, who cannot buy

into a better alternative. Fourth, we identified some evidence that voters in school districts with higher student-to-teacher ratios are more likely to support charter schools. This suggests the quality of public-service provision may offer yet another cleavage that divides voter support for expanding school choice.

To be sure, more research is necessary to further tease out the dynamics of school choice. While the present analysis, to our knowledge, is the only in-depth analysis of the first successful school choice initiative, other efforts can yield further insights. After all, we rely on aggregate-level data with a somewhat limited set of political, demographic, and school performance variables. As such, our findings are limited in at least two significant ways. First, we are unable to make any individual-level inferences. Second, we could not measure the influence of other important factors, including how elites framed the argument in support for and against charter schools. Some have argued that charters were successful the fourth time on the ballot in Washington because proponents were able to craft a simple and straightforward message. This indicates that framing may explain part of the larger puzzle, and should be considered in future research.

Our analysis reveals the complexity of electoral support for school choice and suggests that coalitions may build up along nontraditional voting blocs, perhaps unifying along ideological and identity-based political considerations, rather than partisan ones. Importantly, it also suggests issue-specific electoral coalitions can evolve over time. Corcoran and Stoddard(2011) find partisanship to be the largest predictor of previous referenda efforts in Washington state; our results indicate this effect has weakened considerably, suggesting a shift in the coalitions that support and oppose school choice over time.

Whether these strange bedfellows represent a durable coalition in support of charter schools or a more fleeting alignment among disparate groups remains to be seen. With the election of Donald Trump and his selection of Betsy DeVos as secretary of education, it seems likely that debates among groups and the electorate over school choice will continue. DeVos, a strong proponent of school choice in her home state of Michigan, could act to maintain the diverse coalition that has emerged in states like Washington over school choice or, instead, serve to further polarize voters along partisan and ideological lines.

Finally, it is important to note that while Washington voters made charter schools a reality through I-1240, opponents have continued to mobilize to fight the law's implementation. About a year after the passage of the initiative, a coalition of opponents challenged the law in the courts based on the claim that the new law improperly diverts public school funds to private organizations that are not subject to local voter control. In the end, the state Supreme Court agreed by a 6-3 vote, ruling that charter schools violate the state constitution. That ruling prompted a response from the state legislature that diverted funds from the state's lottery account to address the constitutional issues raised by the court. These tactics suggest that the debate over charter schools in Washington—and elsewhere—is far from over.

Authors' Note

Authors are listed in alphabetical order; authorship is equal. The authors are grateful to the insightful feedback received by the editors and annonymous reviewers at State Politics & Policy Quarterly.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. For additional information, see https://ballotpedia.org/Tim_Eyman.
2. But Brunner and Imazeki (2008) suggest that in areas with little or no choice, high socioeconomic status (SES) voters may support voucher systems, presumably because such voters do not have to worry about movement of individuals from poorer areas into high-performing, high SES districts/areas.
3. Although Leal (2004) notes that Catholicism helps explain voucher support among Latinos.
4. http://www.pdkmembers.org/members_online/publications/GallupPoll/kpoll_pdfs/pdkpoll34_2002.pdf.
5. http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/transforming_learning/2012/08/the_seven_most_surprising_findings_of_the_2012_pdkgallup_poll_on_public_schools.html.
6. Another potential issue is that of voter fatigue whereby lengthy ballots such as those in California—for example, 12 propositions on the 1990 ballot—can slightly decrease voter's awareness of each ballot proposition (Nicholson 2003). While voter fatigue may be a possibility, we do not think it possesses a serious threat to our overall findings. During Washington's 2012 election, there were only two other initiatives (I-1185 and I-502) and only one referendum (R-74) on the ballot. Furthermore, compared with previous charter school measures on the ballot in early 2000s, campaign spending in 2012 was significant (an estimated US $7–US $9 million more), potentially subsidizing voters' information costs and raising awareness of the initiative (Bowler, Donovan, and Happ 1992).
7. We also present effects of a first difference ±1 *SD* simulation.
8. Reed, Sam. "Proposed Initiatives to the People—2012." Washington State Secretary of State. Retrieved August 17, 2012.
9. To guard against racial multicollinearity, we also calculated variance inflation factor (VIF) scores, which all fell substantially below 8. The racial variables all scored in the 2–3 range, which is perfectly acceptable. However, to be sure, we estimated and include a model with the Herfindahl–Hirschman index variable dropped, presented in Table 3
10. Local tax revenue per student and proficiency in math and reading are not statistically significant predictors of vote outcomes at $\alpha < .1$.

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