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Privatizing Education with the Public's Purse: An Analysis of the 2012 Georgia Constitutional Amendment on Charter Schools

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PRIVATIZING EDUCATION WITH THE PUBLIC'S PURSE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE 2012 GEORGIA CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT ON CHARTER SCHOOLS

ABSTRACT

Charter schools have recently become a hot topic of debate in the United States. For parents who cannot afford private schooling or moving to another school district, charter schools seem to be an attractive option. These schools, which are often argued to outperform traditional schools, offer an alternative path to public education which allows teachers more flexibility to employ innovative strategies in the classroom. In order to expedite the creation of such schools, Republicans in the Georgia General Assembly called for the amending of the Georgia Constitution which would allow the state to approve charters by circumventing the publicly elected local school board. This study analyzes the more recent political history of the Commission, the debate surrounding the amendment, and ultimately the vote itself for Amendment 1.

INDEX WORDS: Georgia politics, Charter schools, Ballot propositions, Voting behavior

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1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, charter schools have recently become a popular alternative to traditional public schooling. Charter schools generally receive federal and state funding but are not subject to the same regulations and standards as their traditional counterparts. With more autonomy for creativity and teaching innovations, families in failing school systems began flocking toward the idea of charter schools. In 2009, President Obama's initiative "Race to the Top" sweetened the deal even more, granting federal money to states that created robust and innovative strategies that addressed major challenges facing their educational systems (White House 2013). The study presented here analyzes Georgia's race towards charter schools**.**

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the vote for Amendment 1, a ballot proposition from the 2012 Georgia General Election that would enable the state to create charter schools. Not only is this study relevant to understanding the growing support for charter schools; we can also draw many inferences about the relationship between charter school advocacy and voting behavior by analyzing the vote. On November 6, 2012 Georgia made history as the first state to amend its constitution in favor of state-sponsored charter schools (O'Sullivan 2012). Therefore, analyzing the vote for Amendment 1 in Georgia not only leads us to a better understanding of the dynamic support networks for charter schools but also serves as a model for prospective states looking to enact similar educational policies. The study begins by offering a detailed account of the recent charter schools debate in Georgia followed by an analysis of the campaign for and against the Amendment. Secondly, several camps of literature on voting behavior are introduced to serve as a roadmap for the model employed in this analysis. Lastly, by examining a host of

demographic, educational "need" and political variables, we make several general claims about the public's attitude towards charter schools in the state of Georgia.

1.1.1 Georgia Charter Schools Commission

Should parents have the right to choose an alternative public school for their children if they feel that the existing system is underperforming? On the surface, the charter schools debate in Georgia focused primarily on the issue of school choice. For those who could not relocate to another school district or could not afford private schooling, charter schools seemed to offer a solution to parents desperately looking for change in their child's education. But with local school boards not granting charter applications as fast as the Georgia legislature would have liked, politicians decided to step in. The idea was to create a state commission that would speed up the charter granting process and finally give parents and students an option for school choice. But once the commission actually began signing charters, the solution was not as promising as some may have hoped.

In 2008 the Georgia House Education Committee endorsed House Bill 881 which essentially created a "back door for the state to divert local dollars to fund charter schools that the local school boards did not want" (Downey 2011a). When then-governor Sonny Perdue signed HB 881 into law on May 13, 2008 he authorized the creation of the Georgia Charter Schools Commission, the bill's prized progeny. This law allowed charter-seeking applicants to directly present their case to the GCSC for approval, an autonomous state-level entity, even if the request had been previously dismissed by the school board (Georgia General Assembly 2007-2008).

As one may predict, any time a governing body grants itself power (especially when that particular power was solely overseen by some other entity) problems naturally arise. The case of charter schools in Georgia was no exception. One such problem first and foremost usually con-

cerns money. If we want to build new schools how shall they be funded? Before the GCSC, state-chartered schools were only authorized to receive federal and state funding (unlike traditional schools which receive federal, state and local monies); however, under the GCSC, commission-chartered schools would receive funding at all three levels, even if the local board opposed the charter mandate in the first place (Downey 2011a).

In June 2009 state-charted schools strapped for cash and on the verge of closing their doors became eligible to receive local funding contingent upon GCSC reauthorization (Dodd 2009). Though this was great news for existing state-chartered schools like the Ivy Preparatory Academy in Norcross and the Scholars Academy State Elementary in Riverdale who were in dire need of economic stimulus, local districts soon realized they had lost the power over their own purse (Dodd 2009).

The GCSC's authority to approve charters and divvy up local dollars irrespective of the localities themselves represented legal loopholes at their finest. For many, the legislature was sending a message to local districts to "pay more, say less" (Downey 2011a). The issue of funding schools is especially concerning for many considering the frequency with which pundits and politicians often refer to the destitution of the educational system in America. On average, local districts provide about "45 percent of what it now costs to educate a child"; charter schools are hard-pressed to survive without it, and local districts cannot afford to save them (Downey 2011a).

Local boards losing their voice as a result of the 2008 Act leads us to another problem, perhaps the most disputed, regarding the variety of constitutional and egalitarian oversights by the legislature. When Gwinnett Schools lost nearly $850,000 as a consequence of the Ivy Preparatory Academy of Norcross receiving local matching funds when it reestablished its charter with

the GCSC, the rumors of lawsuits quickly became a reality (Dodd 2009b).

In 2010, seven school systems filed a case with the Fulton County Superior Court arguing that the state did not have the constitutional authority to grant local dollars to commission-chartered schools.[1] The arguments aligning on each side of the debate were fairly simple in theory. The GCSC either was or was not operating within the confines of the Georgia Constitution. Thomas Cox, who represented DeKalb and Atlanta public schools during the case argued that the "Constitution specifies that public education is under the management and control of county boards of education," not by state-created commissions (Dodd 2010). Conversely, Bruce Brown, an attorney representing the charter schools claimed that "nothing in the Georgia Constitution gives the local district a monopoly on public education" (Dodd 2010). In the end, Judge Wendy Shoob sided with the charter schools upholding the mechanism of local funding and maintaining the constitutionality of the GCSC.

Dissatisfied with the ruling, the public school systems appealed their case to the Georgia Supreme Court. The state high court focused primarily on the constitutionality and legitimacy of the GCSC (Downey 2011b). Chiefly, does the state have constitutional authority to create and fund charter schools "over the objection of local school boards?" (Downey 2011b). Lawyers representing the state and the GCSC argued that the authority to create such schools was covered under the "special schools" provision in the state Constitution; however, state-run "special schools" have historically referred to institutions for the blind and deaf (Downey 2011b)[2] or more recently, as vocational trade schools, schools for exceptional children, or schools for adult education (Gwinnett County School District 7). Fundamentally, the majority of the Georgia Su-

[1] The seven school systems include Gwinnett, Atlanta, DeKalb, Bulloch, Candler, Henry, and Griffin public schools.
[2] The Georgia Supreme Court majority disagreed with the state's argument that the "special schools" provision in the Georgia Constitution of 1983 applied to charter schools because of the reasons outlined above and also because no charter schools existed in Georgia in 1983 (Gwinnett County School District 8, 2011).

preme Court rejected the argument that merely labeling a commission-chartered school as "special" was enough to distinguish it as such. With the charter school defense unable to prove that such schools qualified as "special schools" the Georgia Supreme Court, in a 4-to-3 decision, reversed the Fulton County Superior Court decision and struck down the GCSC as unconstitutional. The ruling basically left 16 commission-chartered schools with illegal charters and some 15,000 students without a school to attend (Dodd 2011).

1.1.2 Campaign for a Charter School Amendment

In the face of the Georgia Supreme Court's ruling and the now defunct GCSC, the Georgia General Assembly began working to propose a constitutional amendment to voters that (if approved) would essentially give itself the power the state high court said it did not have. In the beginning of 2012, Senate Republicans asserted that amending the Constitution to "require local school boards to pass on local money to state-sponsored charter schools" was among its top priority (Torres 2012). In January, 2012 the amendment, House Resolution 1162, was introduced and contention quickly grew. Most of the controversy surrounding the charter school amendment centered on efforts to uncover the true purpose of the amendment.

Proponents of the GCSC and the amendment frequently claimed that a state commission was necessary to implement charter schools as the process was often stymied by local boards, despite the fact that Georgia charter schools grew from 35 to 119 in just a seven year period; furthermore, the GCSC only chartered 8 operational schools during its less than 3 year existence (Downey 2012a). Others, like Tim Callahan of the Professional Association of Georgia Educators, claimed that the real purpose of the amendment was about "tapping into local funds without the local board having approved the charter school" (Downey 2012a). Opponents feared that the amendment would allow the state to essentially create its own "parallel K-12 system" and fund it

though voiceless local systems under the guise that charter schools equal success, for which little empirical evidence exists (Downey 2012a). As a whole, the opposition to the charter school amendment is most easily classified as a coalition of interest groups. Professional educational and civil rights groups came out in overwhelming numbers to voice their disapproval for Amendment 1 including the Georgia Association of Educational Leaders (GAEL), the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA), The League of Women Voters of Georgia, and the NAACP (Robinson 2012; Blau 2012).

From a partisan perspective, the charter school debate highlights an even more fervent dynamic between state Republicans and Democrats. Firstly, the charter school amendment was one of the top legislative priorities among a Republican-dominated legislature which drew little support from Democrats (Wingfield 2012). Secondly, the burgeoning movement toward charter schools since 2008 enjoyed great support from both Republican Georgia governors; in May, present governor Nathan Deal even went as far to promise state funding to a few schools who lost their charter (as a result of the state Supreme Court's ruling) contingent upon the passage of the amendment in the 2012 General Election in November (Thornton 2012). On the other hand, the State Democratic Party outright opposed the amendment, financial provisions from out-of-state wealthy Republicans were heavily scrutinized, and "civil-rights icon" Rev. Joseph Lowery "slammed [the proposed amendment] in a radio ad…as a precursor to resegregation" (Wingfield 2012).

However, partisan affiliation does not predict support or opposition for either side. For example, Georgia State Schools Superintendent Dr. John Barge, a Republican, outlined the reasons he opposed the amendment in a statement three months prior to the election: "I cannot support the creation of a new and costly state bureaucracy that takes away local control of schools

and unnecessarily duplicates the good work already being done by local districts" (Downey 2012b). All things together, this suggests that the rallying forces for and against charter schools consisted of broad, diverse coalitions rather than restrictive partisan groupings.

Attempting to draw a line for amendment support down party lines is even messier when we take the disjointed Tea Party into consideration. Throughout the debate, the Georgia Tea Party struggled to find a unified voice in the face of the charter school amendment. For example, the Savannah Tea Party strongly endorsed the amendment claiming that there was nothing but positive benefits to be gained, while Atlanta Tea Party activists agreed with the opposition movement that such an amendment was an unnecessary expansion of government power (Barrow 2012a). Interestingly, "both tea party camps say their position is rooted in tea party principles, like small government, local control and market competition" (Barrow 2012a). But despite all of the lawsuits and rulings, the contention between politicians and the school board, and the ardent activism between Democratic and Republican leaders, the only thing that mattered now was how Georgia citizens would vote in the November election.

1.1.3 Voting Behavior

The heart of this study analyzes the percent "yes" vote for Amendment 1 across all 159 counties of Georgia. The purpose of this analysis is to estimate which demographic, political, and/or educational "need" variables most likely led to the 58 to 42 percent victory of the charter school amendment. Georgia's Amendment 1 is a superior case for charter school analysis, not only because it provides insight into a nationwide political and educational trend, but also because Georgia was the first state to amend its constitution in support of charter schools (O'Sullivan 2013). Secondly, analyzing the voters who are and are not receptive to charter schools could serve as a very useful tool for other states looking to make charter schools a bigger

part of their educational environment. Lastly, a general analysis of this rather unique piece of legislation provides invaluable information on the democratic process, checks and balances in state government, and sheds new light on voter behavior on charter school state ballot propositions.

Because there is no specific literature which solely focuses on voting behavior on state charter school ballot propositions, the theoretical model for this study consists of an amalgamation of voting behavior, state ballot proposition, and tax initiative literature. Most studies on voting behavior in ballot measures identify several key demographic and political variables that drive support and participation including race, persons aged over 65, college education, income, homeownership, and party identification (Sears and Citrin 1982; Button 1993; Jung 2002; Branton 2003; Dyck 2010). Therefore, we should expect these variables to have some type of influence in the model for this analysis. According to James Button's (1993, 38) study on racial cleavages in local voting, he found that African Americans more consistently supported educational ballot measures than Whites. Building off Button, this study recognizes that strong racial cleavages have the capacity to divide regions along the traditional sense of a "color line" which can significantly impact voter preferences. Therefore, we should expect to see substantial variance in support for the charter school amendment between rural and metropolitan areas especially considering that nearly 70 percent of the entire African American population in Georgia reside in the state's three largest metropolitan areas: Atlanta, Augusta, and Columbus.[3]

Several studies analyzing voting behavior on SPLOST (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) initiatives in Georgia are also relevant to this analysis because one of the chief concerns by amendment opponents is that a state charter school commission, which aims to reappor-

[3] This hypothesis is also in accordance with Sanders and Lee's 2009 analysis of 398 ESPLOST initiatives where the authors find significant variance in ESPLOST support between metro and rural counties.

tion local dollars, could put an unnecessary burden on taxpayers. This anti-tax sentiment is often operationalized in SPLSOT studies by examining the percentage of persons aged over 65 while more general economic self-interest variables analyze percentage of homeowners and household income per county (Jung 2002; Sanders and Lee 2009; LaPlant and LaPlant 2012). In accordance with these previous works, this study also expects to find a significant relationship between these economic self-interest variables and support for Amendment 1.

Lastly, this study incorporates a handful of sociological and educational studies to develop "educational need" variables for the purposes of this analysis; the "need" for charter schools is most frequently operationalized by graduation rates, drop out rates and standardized test scores (Archbald 2004; Lauen 2009; Davies and Aurini 2011). This study exclusively analyzes graduation rates in order to avoid problems with collinearity instead of assessing graduation and drop-out rates together. Together, the political history leading to the charter school aendment and the literature on voting behavior guides a set of expected results.

1.2 Expected Results

According to the most relevant political science literature associated with this analysis and the history of the charter schools debate in Georgia we can expect certain variable directionalities in our dataset. First in terms of our demographic variables, if the statements were true that the Georgia electorate was fearful that the passage of Amendment 1 would increase property taxes and create an unnecessary tax burden then we would expect counties with a higher percentage of persons aged 65 and over to have a negative impact on the "yes" vote for the amendment, which would be in accordance with all of the aforementioned SPLOST studies in Georgia. Conversely, counties with a higher percentage of persons aged 18 and younger may represent a demographic "need" for better schools. As the youth percentage increases among counties we ex-

pect support to increase for Amendment 1. Race is another key issue in this analysis. Recalling Button's work, we would expect counties with a higher African American population to vote yes for the amendment as well. Household income is another variable we expect to vary in interaction with other variables. To one extent we expect more affluent areas to support charter schools because they have the capacity to spot local funding; while on the other hand, less affluent areas may also support charter schools as a means to improve the educational system. We should expect support to change among race and partisanship as the levels of household income vary as this is one of the best self-interested economic variables in the dataset.

Second, if the premier argument for charter school advocacy rests upon the "need" for educational reform, then there are several variables that should elucidate this claim. One of such variables includes graduation rates. The lower the graduation rate by county, the more support we should expect for Amendment 1. Per pupil spending (PPS) is another measure that should validate the claim that charter schools will assuage failing systems. School systems with low PPS may contribute to underperformance, leading parents to seek charter schools as an alternative educational path for their children. We should also approach the issue of PPS with a caveat. More money does not always equal more success. As a matter of fact, comparing PPS to the most recent Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report from the Department of Education indicates that some of the worst school systems in Georgia receive the most funding. Therefore, counties with higher PPS may also be more inclined to support Amendment 1. Lastly, we examine the average score on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) by county to assess performance. Again, counties with lower aggregate SAT scores may be inclined to support Amendment 1.

Lastly, we will examine several political predictors of the Amendment 1 "yes" vote. The primary political predictor for this study is the percentage of Republican voters in the county.

Since the amendment was almost singularly a Republican initiative in the Georgia legislature, we would expect Republican constituents to vote in favor of the amendment. Keeping in mind that Georgia republicans were also divided on the amendment, especially differing Tea Party coalitions, we have also incorporated a variable which measure factionalism by county. The precursory idea is that support for the amendment will be greater in counties where the Republican party is more unified. Turnout is another measure that we expect to capture voting sentiment on the amendment. According to Jung's (2002, 26) SPLOST referenda study, he uncovered an inverse relationship between the "yes" vote and turnout. If the "yes" vote decreases while turnout increases, it should speak to the magnitude of support for the amendment. Finally, we examine a geopolitical measure which examines the "yes" vote among rural and metropolitan areas in Georgia. Because charter schools are often associated with affluence, we expect the "yes" vote to increase in metropolitan areas.

2 METHODOLOGY

The dependent variable of this study is the percent "yes" vote by county across all 159 Georgia counties. The dependent variable is coded as a percentage rather than a dichotomous variable so we can obtain the most precise results possible. Considering the characteristics of the data we employ the use of an Ordinary Least-Squares Regression Model. In order to account for heteroskedasticity among the 11 key independent variables of analysis, the model also uses robust standard errors. The remainder of this section explains in depth how the independent variables of analysis were obtained, measured, coded and also displays the general characteristics of each variable.

2.1 Data and Variables

This study examines the "yes" vote for Amendment 1 in the November 2012 General Election in Georgia as the dependent variable across all 159 counties. Each county was coded with its respective percentage "yes" vote for Amendment 1. The independent variables of this study consist of demographic, educational "need" and political variables which are theoretically expected to predict the outcome of the election. Since the dependent variable unit of analysis is a county-level measure, all independent variables are coded as aggregate county measures. The following sections explain the operationalization of variables in detail.

2.1.1 Demographics

As suggested from a broad literature on voting behavior, tax initiative referenda, and ballot propositions, this study analyzes five major demographic predictors. Percentage of persons aged 65 and older, percentage of persons 18 and under, percentage with a Bachelor's degree, percentage African American, and average household income were all obtained from the Census Bureau State and County QuickFacts for the year 2012. All independent variables in this section are measured as aggregate percentages while the household income variable is reported as an average measure for each county.

2.1.2 Educational "Need"

To test whether educational "need" was a significant factor in the "yes" vote for Amendment 1 we analyze three variables: graduation rates, per pupil spending, and composite SAT scores. Four-year graduation rate data for the 2012 school year was obtained to assess "need" for alternative school choice options.[4] This measure captures the percentage of students in each county who are expected to graduate "on time" or within 4 years. Per pupil expenditures

[4] Data obtained from the Atlanta Journal Constitution online database http://www.myajc.com/news/ga-grad-rates-2012/

were obtained from the financial reports of the Georgia Department of Education for 2012.[5] Lastly, composite SAT scores were collected for each county in 2012. This measure includes the average composite score among students for the entire county. [6]

2.1.3 Political Predictors

The last group of variables examine four political predictors of the "yes" vote. First, the average GOP vote in presidential elections from 2000-2012 was calculated as a proxy for Republicanism in each county.[7] For all four elections, the total number of votes cast for the GOP presidential candidate was calculated as a percentage of the entire vote from each county. Percentages for each year were then averaged to yield a comprehensive measure of Republicanism for each county.

Capturing party dynamics at the county level can be difficult to measure. In association with the GOP measure, another variable has been created which aims to account for divisions (or factionalism) within the Republican Party. Since votes cast in a presidential election might not have the capacity to illuminate the nuances of local politics, a gubernatorial measure aims to capture the degree of factionalism in the GOP by county. Analyzing the 2010 Republican Gubernatorial Primary races by county may paint a more accurate picture of party dynamics in Georgia. For each county, the Republican gubernatorial candidate who received the second-most votes was subtracted from the candidate who received the most votes in that county.[8] Therefore, smaller values on this measure indicate there was a greater deal of competition, or that the GOP may have been factionalized. Larger values of this measure are interpreted to indicate cohesion

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[5] Values refer to the Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) student expenditures. Data obtained from the Georgia Department of Education online financial report database. http://app3.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fin_pack_revenue.display_proc

[6] Data obtained from AJC online database: http://www.myajc.com/news/ga-sat-scores-2013/

[7] Election results available for all years available at the Georgia Secretary of State website.

[8] 2010 Republican gubernatorial primary election results can be found at the Georgia Secretary of State Website.

(unifactionalism) in the party. This measure is intended to illuminate not only divisions within the GOP itself, but also the lack of unity between the two Tea Party camps positioned on each side of the charter school debate.

Turnout percentages were obtained from the election returns of the 2012 General Election from the Georgia Secretary of State.[9] Lastly, the model also accounts for whether each county is part of a metropolitan statistical area (MSA). Rural counties are coded 0 and metropolitan counties are coded as 1.[10] Variable characteristics including minimum, maximum, and mean values can be found in the appendix.

3 RESULTS

The following sections present the preliminary results of the OLS model and offer several explanations for the findings. In particular, this section examines how county-level dynamics, interactions between key independent variables, and the ballot language of the amendment influenced the "yes" vote.

3.1 Preliminary Results

The table below represents the preliminary results of our model. Notice that Table 3.1 consists of two separate models. Two of our independent variables, "Republican" and "Percent Black", are highly correlated; for this reason two models have been created to adequately show the significance of each variable in the model.[11] Model 1, which includes the GOP measure, returned with six statistically significant variables.

[9] Data obtained from: www.sos.ga.gov
[10] Data from the Census Bureau on Metropolitan Statistical Areas
http://www.census.gov/population/metro/data/defhist.html
[11] Independent variables "Republican" and "Percentage Black" were correlated at -0.9011, indicating that both are nearly identically inverted measures of one another. Therefore, running two separate models demonstrates the predictive power of both variables.

Table 3.1 OLS Regression of "Yes" Votes on Amendment 1

Model 1 Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	p-value	**Model 2** Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	p-value
Demographics				***Demographics***			
Percent Over 65	.548	.250	**.030**	Percent Over 65	.459	.243	.061
Percent 18 and Under	-.035	.272	.897	Percent 18 and Under	-.182	.280	.518
Percent with Bachelor's	-.069	.138	.619	Percent with Bachelor's	.077	.128	.550
Percent Black	--	--	**--**	Percent Black	.169	.048	**.001**
Household Income	.000	.000	**.000**	Household Income	.000	.000	**.000**
Educational Need				***Educational Need***			
Graduation Rate	-.115	.058	**.051**	Graduation Rate	-.115	.062	.066
Per Pupil Spending	-.000	.001	.955	Per Pupil Spending	.000	.000	.663
Average SAT	.003	.009	.772	Average SAT	-.003	.009	.716
Political Predictors				***Political Predictors***			
Republican	-.315	.067	**.000**	Republican	--	--	--
Faction	.012	.042	.771	Faction	.031	.043	.470
Turnout	-.203	.076	**.009**	Turnout	-.265	.087	**.003**
Metro Area	3.120	1.247	**.014**	Metro Area	4.010	1.285	**.002**
N=152 F-14.02 r^2=.052				N=152 F=15.19 r^2=0.50			

Percent over 65, household income and metropolitan areas all had positive coefficients. We can interpret these results as following: counties with higher percentages of persons aged over 65, with higher household incomes, in metropolitan areas were most likely to vote "yes" for the amendment. On the other hand, graduation rates, how Republican a county is, and magnitude of turnout were all negative predictors of the "yes" vote. Some of these results counter our original

expectations. The remainder of this section aims to explain these results and offer supplemental models.

First, we will talk about the directionalities we correctly predicted for Model 1. Household income was correctly predicted to have a significant impact on the percent "yes" vote for Amendment 1. Again, this most likely captures the reality that charter schools thrive in more affluent areas because of the need for financial donations.

The relationship between graduation rates and support for Amendment 1 were also correctly predicted. According to the model, as graduation rates increase, which aim to serve as a proxy for successful educational systems, support for the amendment decreases. Therefore, Georgians in school districts with higher graduation rates may have not seen a "need" for educational improvement and voted against the amendment.

Turnout was also a significant predictor in the model and reaffirmed the Jung's findings on SPLOST referenda. In regards to Amendment 1, counties with higher turnout rates were significantly less likely to vote "yes" for the amendment. As Jung suggests, it may be the case that charter school legislation is more likely to pass in special elections which typically have lower turnout than general elections (Jung 2002, 27).

Lastly, metropolitan areas were a strong predictor of support for the amendment as expected. Support in these areas is likely attributable to higher affluence and the black vote. This relationship is highlighted in Model 2, which incorporates the African American variable, where the p-value for metropolitan areas increases from .014 to .002. This result also confirms Button's work that African Americans are much more likely to support educational ballot propositions.

Shifting to our variables which yielded counter-intuitive results, percent over 65, was a positive predictor, which was unexpected. It may be the case that older Georgians were more

knowledgeable about the amendment, or that this group is more likely to have children/grandchildren and are more invested in the issue. Following tables will examine interactions effects to determine if any such relationships exist.

However, what is perhaps most interesting about the results is that the GOP average measure has a negative coefficient. What this means is that as a county becomes more Republican, the likelihood it will support Amendment 1 decreases. This is a striking result because the amendment itself was largely a Republican effort in the Georgia legislature, and according to the literature, Republicans tend to support charter schools more than Democrats. Interpreting these results in the same manner as above, for every 1 percent increase in the Republican measure the "yes" vote for Amendment 1 decreases by .31 percent. The following section aims to clarify these counter-intuitive results.

3.1.1 The County-Level Dynamic

Since our model does not show support for Amendment 1 among the Republican electorate this leads us to first think that perhaps the GOP measure we have created does not adequately capture the nuances of local politics. Therefore, the following tables try to account for these shortcomings. Theoretically speaking, we should see differences between rural and metropolitan Republicans in Georgia (Gimpel and Karnes 2006).[12] Therefore, each county's metropolitan status has been designated by our metropolitan variable (1=metro 0=rural). Juxtaposing metro and rural areas, we can see a clearer image of county-level dynamics. Table 3.2 shows the results for Models 1 and 2 in metropolitan counties only.

Notice when we control for metropolitan counties the percent of the population with a Bachelor's degree becomes statistically significant with a negative coefficient. In other words,

[12] Gimpel and Karnes' "The Rural Side of the Urban-Rural Gap" argue there are major differences in voting behavior between rural and urban residents even within the same state. Their data shows that the rural American vote is becoming increasingly Republican while more populous areas appear markedly less so.

for every 1 percent increase in persons with a Bachelor's degree support for Amendment 1 decreases by .46 percent.

Table 3.2 OLS Regression of "Yes" Votes on Amendment 1 in Metropolitan Counties

Model 1 Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	p-value	**Model 2** Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	p-value
Demographics				***Demographics***			
Percent Over 65	-.382	.397	.340	Percent Over 65	-.665	.335	**.052**
Percent 18 and Under	-.560	.435	.204	Percent 18 and Under	-.957	.389	**.017**
Percent with Bachelor's	-.461	.159	**.006**	Percent with Bachelor's	-.373	.145	**.013**
Percent Black	--	--	--	Percent Black	.309	.057	**.000**
Household Income	.000	.000	**.000**	Household Income	.000	.000	**.000**
Educational Need				***Educational Need***			
Graduation Rate	-.010	.089	.906	Graduation Rate	-.037	.069	.588
Per Pupil Spending	-.000	.001	.558	Per Pupil Spending	-.000	.001	.811
Average SAT	.002	.010	.823	Average SAT	.006	.011	.550
Political Predictors				***Political Predictors***			
Republican	-.412	.082	**.000**	Republican	--	--	--
Faction	.011	.054	.838	Faction	.003	.056	.961
Turnout	-.134	.086	.125	Turnout	-.250	.087	**.006**
N = 66 F=13.62 r^2 = 0.61				N = 66 F=16.06 r^2 = 0.66			

The negative relationship between education and support for Amendment 1 is also elucidated in a public opinion poll by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution from October 2012. According to the poll, persons with no college education supported the amendment by 45 percent, while those with a college education only supported the amendment by 38 percent; furthermore, 53 percent

of those with a college education favor strengthening public schools while those with no college education only support strengthening schools by 49 percent (Charter School Amendment Poll 2012). When it comes to supporting more options for school choice, college educated and non-college educated support is 37 and 41 percent respectively (Charter School Amendment Poll 2012). Educated persons likely oppose the amendment because they believe that the best way to strengthen schools is by improving the preexisting educational infrastructure. More educated persons may also be aware of how the amendment would negatively affect local school funding.

Household income and the Republican measure remain significant predictors in Model 1. Table 3.2 shows that Republicans in metropolitan areas are still less likely to support the amendment, but what is most fascinating are the results from Model 2. When we control for metropolitan areas in Model 2 every single demographic variable is significant. Again, this speaks to the importance of the black vote for the amendment. Demographics may have a greater explanatory power than partisanship when it comes to analyzing who is most likely to support the charter schools amendment in metropolitan areas. Below, Table 3.3 breaks down the models by rural counties. Interestingly, Model 1 (GOP Model) does a much better job at predicting the "yes" vote in rural counties than it does in metropolitan counties. These tables reaffirm Gimpel and Karnes' (2006) findings that there in fact appears to be a wide gap between rural and urban voting behavior. Most directionalities of independent variables are consistent through each model, except for the education variable. Notice, when we reduce the model to rural counties only, percent with a Bachelor's degree becomes a *positive* predictor of the "yes" vote for both the GOP Model and the Black Model. Persons from rural counties clearly have a different attitude about charter schools.

Table 3.3 OLS Regression of "Yes" Votes on Amendment 1 in Rural Counties

Model 1 Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	p-value	**Model 2** Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	p-value
Demographics				***Demographics***			
Percent Over 65	.644	.270	**.020**	Percent Over 65	.437	.275	.117
Percent 18 and Under	-.205	.278	.464	Percent 18 and Under	-.386	.308	.214
Percent with Bachelor's	.490	.228	**.035**	Percent with Bachelor's	.623	.232	**.009**
Percent Black	--	--	--	Percent Black	.108	.076	.160
Household Income	.000	.000	**.039**	Household Income	.000	.000	.157
Educational Need				***Educational Need***			
Graduation Rate	-.203	.076	**.009**	Graduation Rate	-.186	.089	**.041**
Per Pupil Spending	-3.19	.001	.998	Per Pupil Spending	.000	.001	.467
Average SAT	.011	.012	.354	Average SAT	-.000	.001	.467
Political Predictors				***Political Predictors***			
Republican	-.353	.093	**.000**	Republican	--	--	--
Faction	.086	.065	.184	Faction	.086	.074	.246
Turnout	-.379	.149	**.013**	Turnout	-.399	.171	**.023**
N=86 F=8.25 r^2=0.38				N=86 F=5.39 r^2=0.31			

We can draw several distinctions about the charter school amendment from these models. First, race is more important in metropolitan areas than rural areas. The Black Metro Model from Table 3.2 yielded six statistically significant variables as opposed to the three significant variables yielded from the GOP Metro Model. Second, every single demographic predictor was significant in the Black Model. Third, no educational or political predictors were significant in the Black Metropolitan Model, expect for turnout. Therefore, we can be confident that demographics

played a major role influencing the "yes" vote in metropolitan counties. On the other hand, the Rural Model tells a different story. With completely inverse results, the GOP Rural Model yielded six statistically significant variables while the Black Rural Model only yielded three. The GOP Rural Model shows significant predictors in all three categories (demographic, educational "need", and political). Fascinatingly, percent African American was not even statistically significant in the Black Rural Model. This may lead one to conclude that support for Amendment 1 was based more on race and demographics in metropolitan areas while support in rural areas was more political or "need" based.

Below, Figure 3.1 highlights the percent "yes" vote by county type. Of the 159 counties in Georgia, 83 voted in favor of Amendment 1 (52 percent). Majority of "yes" votes came from metropolitan areas while nearly 75 percent of the "no" vote came from rural counties. Only a quarter of metropolitan counties voted against the amendment.

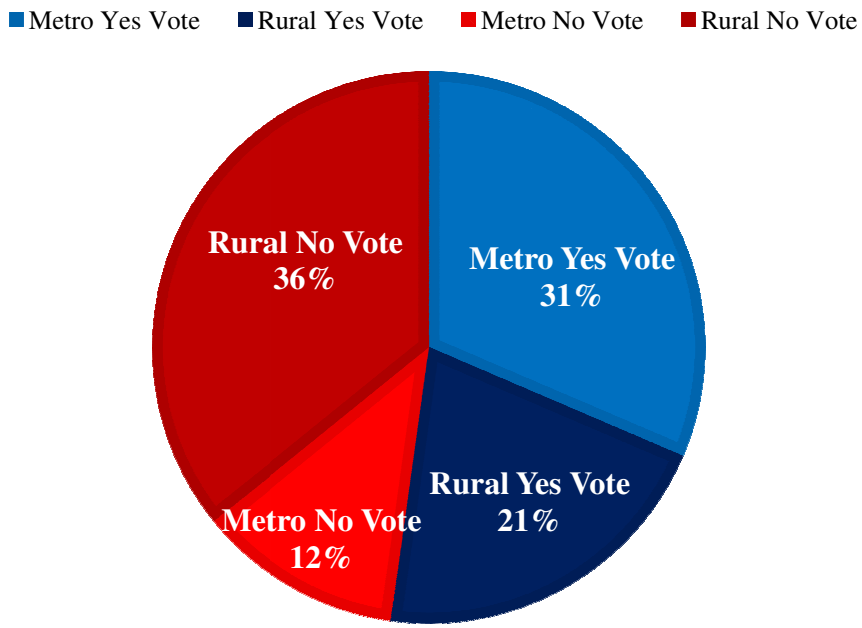

Figure 3.1 Percent "Yes" Vote by County Type

3.1.2 Interaction Effects

The previous sections have argued that county-level dynamics, such as whether a county is rural or metropolitan may have influenced voters' support for Amendment 1. This section argues there are key ways in which the main independent variables of interest interact with one another that may also influence the "yes" vote.

Below, Table 3.4 examines three different types of interaction effects between the average GOP measure and percent African American. Here we are interested in determining how both models react when interacted with other significant variables. In the GOP Interaction Model we have interacted the average Republican vote variable with percent with a Bachelor's degree, percent 65 and over and turnout. Percent 65 and over was chosen as an interaction term because we originally expected this variable to yield a negative coefficient. Interacting this variable with the average Republican vote may shed light on why both variables produced counter-intuitive findings. Percent with a Bachelor's degree was chosen because the directionality of coefficients shifted when controlling for metropolitan and rural areas. Lastly, the turnout measure is used an interaction term to test for consistency in its significance and directionality. The Black Interaction Model tests the same three interactions with the percent African American variable.

The GOP Interaction Model from Table 3.4 yields seven statistically significant results. When controlling for the GOP interaction terms, the percent over 65 coefficient becomes negative, as we originally expected. Furthermore, the interaction terms between the average Republican vote and percent with a Bachelor's degree *and* percent over 65 are significant with positive coefficients. These interactions tell us a lot about the effect of how "Republican" a county is and its effect on the "yes" vote for Amendment 1. Without taking interaction terms into account, the "Republican" proxy for counties had a negative relationship with the dependent variable.

Table 3.4 OLS Regression of "Yes" Votes on Amendment 1 with Interaction Variables

Model 1 Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	p-value	**Model 2** Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	p-value
Demographics				***Demographics***			
Percent Over 65	-2.091	.920	**.024**	Percent Over 65	1.068	.286	**.000**
Percent 18 and Under	-.025	.271	.925	Percent 18 and Under	-.079	.297	.791
Percent with Bachelor's	-.698	.267	**.010**	Percent with Bachelor's	.095	.186	.611
Percent Black	--	--	--	Percent Black	.302	.350	.390
Household Income	.000	.000	**.000**	Household Income	.000	.000	**.000**
Educational Need				***Educational Need***			
Graduation Rate	-.135	.057	**.019**	Graduation Rate	-.136	.063	**.034**
Per Pupil Spending	-.000	.000	.841	Per Pupil Spending	.000	.000	.740
Average SAT	-.000	.009	.932	Average SAT	-.008	.008	.356
Political Predictors				***Political Predictors***			
Republican	-.228	.382	.551	Republican	--	--	--
Faction	-.011	.046	.800	Faction	.005	.044	.902
Turnout	.481	.450	.283	Turnout	-.343	.152	**.025**
Metro Area	3.56	1.239	**.005**	Metro Area	3.870	1.304	**.004**
Interactions				***Interactions***			
GOP*Bachelors	.010	.005	**.034**	Black*Bachelors	-.002	.004	.586
GOP*65	.039	.013	**.003**	Black*65	-.029	.008	**.000**
GOP*Turnout	-.011	.007	.152	Black*Turnout	.004	.006	.460
N = 152 F=21.32 r^2 = 0.54				N = 152 F=16.01 r^2 = 0.53			

However, when we examine how "Republican" a county is respective to the percentage of Bachelor degrees within that county, the model yields a positive and highly significant relationship.

The same is true for the relationship between the average Republican measure and the percent of the population aged 65 and over. The more "Republican" a county becomes is a significant predictor of support for Amendment 1 when interacted with the percent of the population aged over 65. In the Black Interaction Model we see that the percent over 65 variable coefficient is positive and significant, as it has been in most models; however, when percent over 65 is interacted with percent African American, the term yields a negative coefficient. The results from this table may indicate that age plays a significant role in the charter school debate. If we treat the average Republican vote and percent African American measures as proxies for conservatism and liberalism respectively, then we might conclude that older conservative s were more likely to support the amendment while older liberals were less likely to support the amendment. Furthermore, considering that the Georgia Democratic Party outright opposed Amendment 1 may have signaled hardcore democrats, especially blacks aged 65 and over who grew up during the Civil Rights movement, may have simply followed that State Party's lead, even though African Americans are more likely to support educational ballot propositions. Overall, the Interaction Models contribute to our understanding of which types of coalitions were most likely to support or oppose the amendment.

3.1.3 Ballot Language

The last area to examine regarding Amendment 1 is the ballot language itself. It would not be much of a stretch to say that for many Georgians, the first time they had heard or even read about the propositions for Amendment 1 may have been when they deciding whether or not to vote "yes" at their polling place. For those who may have been unfamiliar with the amendment, the ballot language itself seemed rather innocent. The official ballot language for Amendment 1 read as follows: *Shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended to allow state or local ap-*

proval of public charter schools upon the request of local communities? Notice that nowhere is any mention made to the extraneous State Commission that would be created (or reinstated) to override decisions made by local school boards. Nor is there any mention made on the fact that the approving the amendment would allow the state to take public money away from local school systems and give that money to the same charter schools that had previously been denied application by the local system.

Opponents of the amendment argued that the ballot language was "intentionally misleading" and was likely the chief reason why the amendment passed by such a large margin of 58.5-42.5 (Bailey-Covin 2012). Even State Senator Vincent Ford (D-Atlanta) accused proponents of "using vague ballot language…to confuse voters about the real intent of the proposal" (Barrow 2012b). It is certainly a fact that out of the nearly 3.8 million votes cast for Amendment 1 there were at least a few voters who had never even heard of the charter school amendment until they were already casting their votes. Bearing this in mind, it is certainly true that a large number of Georgia voters were likely hoodwinked into voting "yes" for a constitutional amendment they knew little about. As a matter of fact, after the election there were a flurry of reports from Georgia voters who claimed they were unsure of what the amendment would actually do. This may also explain why the amendment passed with 58.5 percent electoral support, 11 percentage points higher than a local poll just weeks before the election (Huddleston 2012). The ballot language for the amendment should not be overlooked as a major component that lead to the 17 point margin of victory.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In sum, this research has presented a handful of models which aimed to predict support for the charter schools amendment. First, the research has shown that there are vast differences

among voters and their perception towards charter schools in rural and metropolitan areas. The Metropolitan Model showed that demographics including age, race, income and education were the best predictors of support for the amendment while the rural vote was more influenced by political and educational "need" variables. The research also shows that rural counties overwhelming voted against the amendment, but the tremendous support from metropolitan counties ultimately led to the amendment's passage on Election Day. It makes sense that the amendment gained major support from metropolitan counties considering that the bottom five performing high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools for the entire state are found exclusively in the Atlanta, Fulton, and Cobb County school systems (Best, worst schools 2013).

The Interaction Models also demonstrated that age and partisanship were major predictors of support. If we treat the interaction of the average Republican vote and percentage of persons over 65 as a coalition of conservatism and the interaction of percent black with percent over 65 as a coalition of liberalism, there are clear divisions of support and opposition respectively. Lastly, examining the ballot language itself explains why the amendment passed by such a large margin of victory. Together, this research paints an intricate picture of charter school support by examining county-level dynamics, key interaction effects, and the actual substance of the amendment itself.

Even though most of the models incorrectly predicted support for Amendment 1 among Republicans and seniors, we may have simply misclassified their positions. It may be the case that Republicans in the electorate captured anti-tax sentiment, not Georgia seniors, which would have made the model more accurate. As mentioned earlier, counties with more persons aged over 65 may represent more individuals with children and grandchildren, causing this demographic group to be more invested in the quality of education. However, no one model presented in this

research was able to show a positive significant relationship between percent over 65 and percent under 18 at the same time.

This study raises several important questions regarding the future of charter schools in the United States. Are charter schools really the answer to failing traditional school systems? There exists an impressive literature relating successful movements towards charter schools linked with the revitalization of traditional community structure (Warren 2005). The author argues that the most successful initiatives towards educational reform are complimented by strong community structures. Simply implanting a charter school into a dysfunctional community provides no guarantee for success just like transplanting failing democracies in a war-torn counties. Then there is the debate over whether or not charter schools are more successful than traditional public schools. Despite the persistent rhetoric that charter schools are the solution to failing public schools, a recent study out of Stanford University shows that only 17 percent of charter schools actually outperform their traditional counterparts (Cox 2011).

Lastly, this analysis makes clear that the charter school debate in Georgia was far more complicated than a Republican legislature pushing through conservative legislation in a red state. On the contrary, this study demonstrates that the charter school debate was contested most in partisan counties.[13] The charter school debate should be understood not as a battle between ideologues, but rather as a broad coalition of the college educated, seniors, African Americans, the affluent, rural and metropolitan citizens alike fighting to improve the future of the educational system for Georgia students. Georgia received national attention as a result of the Amendment 1

[13] Though the "Faction" variable was not a significant predictor of support in any of the models there are some interesting facts that should be observed. The mean faction score for Georgia counties was 9.08, or that the average Gubernatorial candidate won by 9 points. When we examine faction scores below the mean, which range all the way to .14, we end up with 78 "factionalized" to "highly factionalized" counties. From these 52.6 percent voted against Amendment 1. Even when we examine factionalism scores above the mean which range all the way to "unifactionalism" 43.2 percent of those counties also voted against the amendment. This is powerful evidence that Amendment 1 was not a singularly partisan issue.

victory, becoming the first state to amend its constitution to support charter schools (Klein, 2012). Only time will tell what kind of precedent Georgia has set for the rest of the nation.

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APPENDIX

Variables, Characteristics and Sources

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	Source
"Yes" Vote for Amendment One (Nov 6, 2012)	25.75	71.44	50.53	8.80	GA Secretary of State Elections Division
Percent of population over 65 (2011)	3.7	30.9	13.95	3.70	Census Bureau State and County QuickFacts
Percent of the population 18 and under (2012)	14.6	29.7	12.89	2.95	Census Bureau State and County QuickFacts
Percent with a Bachelor's Degree (2006-2010)	4.7	47.6	15.81	8.48	Census Bureau State and County QuickFacts
Percent Black (2011)	.7	73	28.35	17.23	Census Bureau State and County QuickFacts
Average GOP vote in Presidential Elections (2000-2012)	20.44	81.05	60.88	12.47	GA Secretary of State Elections Division
Factionalism (July 2010)	.14	57.03	13.09	11.60	GA Secretary of State Elections Division
Metropolitan Area (2003)	0	1	.433	.497	Census Bureau Metropolitan Statistical Areas
Population by County (2010)	246	949599	61654.65	129950.5	Census Bureau State and County QuickFacts
Median Household Income (2006-2010)	22188	87605	40222.14	11348.45	Census Bureau State and County QuickFacts
High School Graduation Rate Percentage (2012)	45.3	93.3	73.10	9.08	Atlanta Journal Constitution Online Database
Per Pupil Spending (2012)	4307.76	10535.48	5758.80	695.4158	Georgia Department of Education
Average SAT Scores	1027	1580	1347.9	96.67	Atlanta Journal Constitution Online Database
Turnout	36.25	85.82	72.78	5.93	Georgia Secretary of State

					Elections Division