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**Support for Preschool Expansion among Louisiana Adults**

**by**

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**Undergraduate Honors Thesis under the direction of**

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## Abstract

The concept of universal preschool in America is becoming increasingly bipartisan in nature. However, some research is beginning to demonstrate that support for education initiatives at the ballot box varies when different funding mechanisms and social factors are introduced. Using an experiment embedded in a Louisiana public opinion survey, this paper seeks to examine how support for universal preschool varies when the possibility of tax increases is mentioned. In addition, I examine how support varies across an individual's social, political, and economic characteristics along with characteristics of their parish of residence using a maximum likelihood estimator, probit. I find that across all demographic groups, policy prompts that mention a tax financing mechanism fare more poorly than the prompt with no tax mention yet no significant difference exists between preferences for the property tax versus the sales tax. Additionally, I find that Republicans are less likely to support all three variations of the universal preschool program presented than Democrats and Independents. Minorities are also more likely than non-minorities to support universal preschool, regardless of the tax mention made. Despite the prevailing consensus within the literature that low levels of social capital – typically attributable to high income inequality – would reduce the social and political trust necessary for program support, no such relationship was found.

## Introduction

Although governments have been attempting to provide educational resources and instruction to economically disadvantaged children since the 1800s (Karch 2010), the federal government firmly institutionalized its efforts to deliver education resources and instruction to low-income three- and four-year olds with the creation of the Head Start program in 1965 (Hoffman 2010). In the 1970s, states began to follow suit with their own programs in an attempt to reach more children. Since that time, universal preschool for those preparing to enter public school has become increasingly bipartisan in nature, with nearly seven in ten Americans supporting the notion of spending more federal funds to develop and expand access to early childhood education if the hypothetical proposal is deficit neutral (Jones 2014).

Education spending has consistently been more popular than most other types of spending. When given the option to pay more taxes for education or cut funding in a 2006 Fox/Opinion Dynamics poll, 74 percent of Americans opted for the tax increase - a stronger

response than any other program, including Social Security and public safety. In July 2009, a PSRA/Pew study found that Americans also supported increasing funding for their education system (57 percent) over reducing the budget deficit (38 percent) (Bowman and Rugg 2012). The General Social Survey revealed a boom in public support for higher education funding as well. In 1975, 51 percent of Americans believed the nation spent too little on improving the country's education system; by 2002, 74 percent of Americans shared a similar concern – a higher percentage than any other priority area on the survey (Pultzer and Berkman 2005).

Despite this popularity, a voter's socioeconomic, demographic, and ideological profile can drastically affect a person's perception of new school taxes and programs (Brown and Saks 1985; Sanders and Lee 2009; Chew 1992). In conjunction with these traditional indicators of support for government programs, perceived quality of local schools and one's sense of belonging in the community also mold voters' opinions on the viability and level of importance of education initiatives while in the voting booth (Chew 1992, Brown and Saks 1985, Davidson 1993). Additionally, community-level variables like parish-level inequality may also affect social cohesion and trust within a larger network of people. When interacted with individual characteristics, income inequality and social capital may fundamentally change voter preferences for tax hikes or additional government expenditures (Newton 2001, Putnam 2007).

While a substantial amount of literature has explored general attitudes toward increases in school taxes, little has been done to study voters' likelihood to adopt an entirely new program within the education system. A significant hole also exists in the body of literature exploring the relationship between regional-level income inequality, social trust, and their effects on voting preferences. This paper seeks to examine the factors associated with support for universal

preschool legislation at different social levels and the extent to which individuals are willing to be additionally taxed to support such an initiative.

### Literature Review

Although a conversation about temporary, targeted assistance for families with young children began taking place as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the serious consideration of a universal program did not begin until the reorganization of American life following World War II. The labor participation rate for married women with children under the age of six more than quadrupled between 1940 and 1970, from less than ten percent to 40 percent. This social and economic shift incentivized social scientists and policy analysts to examine the role of early childhood education. President Johnson and his Democratic Congress attempted to bring early education to the forefront during the late 1960s, but concerns over funding for private and segregated schools along with pushback from advocates of local control over school systems made the process difficult. However, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 changed the nature of education forever by creating a system in which states, local governments, and the federal government shared responsibility and influence over school matters. The initial rejection of federal involvement began to wane, and nearly two in three Americans supported federally funded day care centers by 1969 (Karch 2014).

The nature of the preschool debate has slowly evolved. While the issue of general childcare and education was discussed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the focus had become refined to education and related services by the 2000s. Due in large part to lobbying by special interest groups, the preschool market remains fractured and the creation of universal systems remain politically difficult (Karch 2014). Evaluating the willingness of Louisianans to curtail the

privatization of preschool services to establish a universal program is a critical component to the creation of future legislation.

In order to move beyond the simple question of ideology and begin the process of identifying funding mechanisms for such a preschool initiative, it is important to explore public attitudes toward various taxes. Although traditional schools obtain a sizeable percentage of their funding through local property taxes, emerging data indicate that this funding stream may be tapped out and alternative financing options may need to be considered. A 2009 Georgia paper examined continued support for a 1997 sales tax initiative called the Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (ESPLOST) and found that backing came from a variety of different groups. Surprisingly, the analysis found that per-capita income had an inverse relationship with approval for ESPLOST, potentially due to the fact that these residents feel that the existing school infrastructure in their district is adequate (Sanders and Lee, 2009). This suggests that while more affluent individuals may support the larger concept of universal preschool legislation (Brown and Saks 1985), support may drop significantly when particular financing mechanisms are introduced alongside a question gauging general support for the idea of universal preschool.

Additional aspects of the Georgia study are quite relevant to our examination of public opinion surrounding such a program. In fact, an additional sales tax set aside for the funding of a universal preschool program may encounter many of the same pitfalls associated with the ESPLOST tax. Because the hypothetical Louisiana “ESPLOST” tax would fail to relieve any existing property tax burden in the short run, support may fall among residents that perceive the tax as an additional burden. Data show that voters are less likely to support paying off projects not specifically outlined than specific capital investments, such as the construction of schools

(Sanders and Lee 2009), creating another hurdle for a tax seen as “continued-government expansion, endless construction, and more extreme expenditures (Sanders and Lee 281).”

While these taxes are initially viewed with skepticism, the Georgia study found that support for ESPLOST increased over time as the stigma of being a “new tax” dissipated. The negative relationship between ESPLOST and the burden of property taxes was only statistically significant when the ESPLOST tax was new – this same relationship failed to materialize when the tax was revisited for an extension. Conclusions drawn from this data indicate that such a sales tax would enjoy greater support among fast-growing metro areas and a Louisiana “ESPLOST” could serve as a long-term alternative to disliked property taxes (Sanders and Lee 2009).

The property tax is one of the most hated taxes levied for several reasons. Many perceive the tax as confusing and are concerned about fluctuating millage rates due to reassessments that can cause property taxes to rise despite stagnant incomes. The property tax is also largely viewed as an “inequitable” tax because countless exemptions exist for groups such as senior citizens, individuals that have owned their homes for an extended period of time, the disabled, and war veterans (Anderson and McMillen 2010). Most states also administer homestead exemptions that reduce the percentage of the home’s value that can be assessed. Because of the ability for multiple entities to levy a property tax on properties near one another, millage rates may differ dramatically within relatively small geographic areas. Many homeowners express significant concern over the timing of the assessment cycle as well (Anderson and McMillen 2010). However, utilizing funding from such a sales tax for a new program means that the likelihood of reduced property taxes is substantially smaller because no existing property tax is used to finance

a universal preschool program. This lack of a future tradeoff may hinder support, especially among the affluent.

Unlike many of the other contemporary economic issues facing America today, the number of school-age children in the household may significantly affect voters' opinions on school programs and appropriate taxation levels (Chew 1992); however, the relationship is still questionable. Saliba and Warren found that the number of school-age children living in the home and school tax support levels were correlated but unexpectedly discovered that a negative relationship existed between the two. Eligible voters that were also public school parents were actually less likely to support education tax increases than their peers, everything else held constant (2010). Some studies indicate a positive relationship but little influence on support for hypothetical tax increases. This same research indicates that parenthood exerts a smaller amount of influence on support for higher school taxes than ideology, with ideologically liberal nonparents displaying higher levels of support than ideologically conservative parents (Chew 1992).

Family income has been found to have an effect on attitudes toward school taxes as well. Surprisingly, Brown and Saks (1985) found that the relationship between income and demand for school spending was parabolic in nature; those on the ends were more likely to support raising additional revenue for school systems while the middle class was less likely to do so. Some believe the poor are more likely to demand higher funding because they may be exempt from paying for it through traditional means such as property taxes while others believe these individuals may view education as a vehicle through which they can escape poverty. Brown and Saks also suggest that the rich may be more likely to support higher taxes on themselves because they hope to safeguard the community and enrich the area in which they live and conduct



business (1985). However, other data suggest that discrepancies persist even after the income variable has been controlled, and this variable may prove to be statistically insignificant when examining willingness to adopt universal preschool legislation. Not only is the body of evidence examining the effect of income levels on support for universal preschool inconclusive (Chew 1992), but little has been done to examine the level of additional taxation voters are willing to accept to fund a universal preschool system.

The composition of the electorate in terms of age also merits attention. Some studies show that older voters are slightly more likely to oppose higher taxes for education and identify as politically conservative than their younger counterparts. However, it is important to acknowledge that this disdain for taxes could be influenced by aging itself, the time period in which they were primarily socialized, or their cohort of peers (Chew 1992). A study from the University of Florida yielded similar results, demonstrating that older Americans command a disproportionate advantage over younger voters due to their increasing percentage of the total voting population, higher turnout rates, and higher tendency to vote against school bonds in local referendum than younger cohorts, even when controlling for party, income, race, and social class. This older age group is also more likely to vote against local education tax increases than other tax proposals (Button 1992).

Because school taxes are largely linked to property taxes, which are seen as one of the most “unfair” taxes in the country due to their higher public profile (Saliba and Warren 2010), many scholars believe that seniors express a greater disdain for increased education spending because of the limitations of fixed incomes experienced by many senior adults (Button 1993, Tedin et. al. 2001; Saliba and Warren 2010). Although many seniors do not support increased spending for education at levels similar to their younger cohorts, Plutzer and Berkman found that

support for additional school taxes among the oldest Americans rose from 1975 to 2005. However, because local school districts seek to capitalize on referendum opportunities and seek the highest tax increase politically possible, many seniors may end up voting against such proposals. Plutzer and Berkman argued that this gap in willingness stemmed from a greater amount of conservative political socialization during their formative years, not self-interest (2005). As the share of American households headed by older adults continues to grow (“American Household are Getting Older, Census Bureau Reports” 2012), communities could experience shrinking support for increased sales or property taxes designed to bolster education budgets or create new programs unless threshold amounts are reevaluated by lawmakers.

Homeowners are also significantly more likely to support a sales tax increase over a property tax increase. When asked about increasing either the sales tax or property tax to increase funding for public education, renters were nearly 10-15 percent more likely to elect the hypothetical property tax increase over the sales tax increase (Brunner et.al 2014). This may be because higher property taxes suppress home values and therefore lower rents. However, these same renters appear to express indifference when asked about generic sales tax versus property tax increases. Regardless of the public good in question, homeowners consistently demonstrated greater opposition to higher property taxes than sales taxes. This is believed to be the case due to the high salience of the property tax and the relatively low visibility of the sales tax (Brunner et.al 2014) While some research fails to include a variable that reduces potential spuriousness caused by attitudes towards taxation by different levels of government, it appears that the external validity is strong enough to suggest that homeowners in favor of a new universal preschool program in Louisiana are more likely to support a sales tax increase over a property tax increase.

An individual's sense of belonging in the community also plays a very influential role in his/her decisions about local referendums, bonds, and taxes. According to work by Davidson and Cotter, this sense of community "refers to a strong attachment that people may experience toward others based on factors such as where they live, where they work, where they go to school, or with which groups they affiliate (1993 p.59)." Their data also indicates that although the number of Americans that believe the county spends too little on education has grown drastically in recent decades, many communities continue to reject bond referendums and higher school taxes. The study found that this psychological sense of community (PSC) had a significant impact on individuals' perceptions of their local schools but had no direct impact on one's intention to vote. In all, the researchers concluded that support for tax referendums was higher when the individual believed the additional funds were needed, the money would be spent wisely, and the benefits of the additional funds would proliferate to everyone in the community (1993).

While individual characteristics fundamentally shape one's attitudes toward redistributive policies and levels of taxation, community features may also create environments that impact aggregate levels of social trust and cohesion. Social capital, the resources derived from maintaining beneficial social networks with others, is built upon the maintenance of trust among group members through bridging and bonding. At the macro level, social capital is best measured through group levels of social trust (Ram 2013). Social trust is typically characterized by a sense of belonging and ease around others in the community. This trust is rooted in identity, which can be de-constructed and re-constructed as social environments change (Newton 2001). A growing body of literature suggests that social trust is mediated by the degree of income inequality within a community; further exploring this relationship and its effect on voter perceptions is paramount

if we seek to better understand public attitudes toward government and policy. A more holistic consideration of social trust may also shed additional light upon political trust. While no statistically significant relationship has yet been identified, Newton notes that, at the country level, levels of political trust tend to rise as levels of social trust rise. While social trust is characterized by a sense of belonging and ease around others in the community, political trust is held by societies that feel their governing bodies are functioning appropriately (Newton 2001). Putnam also posits that areas of low social trust are less likely to have faith in local government and officials to do the right thing or deliver positive results (2007).

Factors such as racial and religious composition affect social trust, but income inequality has emerged as the largest contributing factor to the deterioration of generalized trust (Uslaner 2002; Bjornskov 2006; Putnam 2007). Bjornskov found that neither the education level nor the average wealth of a country affected the level of social fragmentation to the same extent as income inequality (2006). Much of the literature suggests that heterogeneous communities – characterized by racial diversity, economic stratification, or both – are more likely to suffer from higher levels of social distancing than homogeneous ones (Putnam 2007, Alesina and La Ferrara 1999). This fracturing of social bonds and networks through the social isolating of certain groups from one another prevents individuals within a community from forming shared experiences or developing a sense of common values or fate (Alba and Nee 2003).

The effects of social trust and income disparity on political attitudes have not been thoroughly explored, but many have examined the likely relationship between racial and economic stratification on group involvement. Alesina and La Ferra found that, excluding church groups, school service groups had the strongest negative relationship with income inequality. As income disparities grow within a community, parents and leaders are more likely to have

disagreements about appropriate forms of education and the extent to which wraparound services should be offered in the traditional public school setting. Additionally, the duo found that participation rates in general have a positive relationship with social trust and a strong negative relationship with income inequality (1999). Research on the impact of income inequality on civic engagement reported similar findings: greater economic stratification has a negative effect on the amount of time individuals within a community spend volunteering (Uslaner and Brown 2005). Abroad, stratification appears to be just as salient - a 2000 study from Tanzania found that individuals living in rural villages characterized by high levels of economic inequality were less likely to join community groups. Wealthier individuals were also more likely to leave when inequality was high (La Ferrara 2000)

In his book, "Bowling Alone," Putnam notes that Americans, on the whole, have become less involved over time and removed themselves from many of the civic institutions at the cornerstone of civil society. Rebutting Putnam's claim that social capital has declined, Fukuyama argues that citizens continue to join civil and volunteer associations but these organizations are often built upon smaller "[radii] of trust." He argues that tighter bonding social capital likely still exists at the neighborhood level but may no longer be as powerful at the larger community level as this bridging social capital rests within weak ties from across the community (1999). The development of these weak ties could be hindered if communities continue to fragment and social remoteness grows in severity. Others find that individuals are more likely to form cohesive bonds and trust with members of their own neighborhoods without sacrificing trust in the larger community. In fact, building trust at the local level often results in additional trust at the larger community level (Hipp and Perrin 2006).

The characteristics of income inequality experienced by members of a particular community also fundamentally impact the types of social welfare policies they adopt. When this inequality is characterized by an expanding gap between average and median wages, voters are more likely to favor redistribution policies that “reward” workers over social insurance policies that provide income to the unemployed or otherwise non-working. While this finding holds self-interest constant across the income gradient, social insurance policies may become more attractive to high-income workers as they want to cushion the blow of a potential job loss (Moene and Wallerstein 2001). Individual perceptions of the role of education are likely important at this juncture - if the system is perceived as a tool that empowers hard-working, driven workers to realize their potential and benefit the community at large, the “redistributive” worldview may facilitate the expansion of policies characterized by redistribution rather than social insurance. Uslander finds that generalized trust typically generates greater generosity towards the poor and will likely lead to higher education spending as well (2002).

As discussed earlier, the way in which individuals view themselves in the context of their community impacts their perception of local institutions and the trustworthiness of administrators and elected officials. As social distancing exacerbates general trust deficiencies within communities, one’s psychological sense of community (PSC) deteriorates as he/she begins to lose his/her attachment toward others. PSC is reinforced through one’s interactions and experiences in neighborhoods, places of work, and public facilities. Voters with weak psychological senses of community are more likely to view their local school negatively, and this perception has been embodied in their votes against raising or maintaining public taxes used for school spending. Voters with low PSC may vote down such initiatives because they believe that there is no need for additional funds, administrators would squander the additional revenue, or no

substantive benefit would be experienced by the community as a whole (Davidson and Cotter 1993). However, Hipp and Perrin find that a strong sense of community does not inherently imply that the individual highly approves of the community in which they live. For example, one may feel a sense of cohesiveness with their community but acknowledge its shortcomings (2006).

Many social scientists have identified income inequality as the principal variable affecting levels of social trust, but others maintain that this phenomenon may be endogenous and simply part of a feedback loop. A 1997 study notes that directional causality is nearly impossible to identify in large cross-sectional analyses as low levels of social trust reduce confidence in local and state governments which then fail to adequately combat inequality in a manner necessary to rekindle a sense of popular legitimacy (Kawachi et al. 1997). Newton echoes this sentiment, suggesting that “social capital and a developed civil society help to make good government possible, and good government helps to sustain social capital and the conditions of society” (2001). Further examination may help to isolate the effect of income inequality on generalized trust and appreciate the impact of community-level variables on voter beliefs.

### Hypotheses

While many individuals might support universal preschool in theory, support may be affected by the costs of a program. In other words, support for universal preschool may decrease if individuals are asked about the mechanism used to fund the program. The Reason-Rupe Spring 2014 Millennial Survey provides some insight into the seemingly paradoxical views held by many Americans. When Millennials are asked about the size of government, most (54 percent)

favor “larger government with more services.” However, this support drops to just 41 percent when tax rates are introduced (Reason Foundation 2014). Therefore, I hypothesize that:

*H<sub>1</sub>: Support for universal preschool will be highest using a question that gauges support without mentioning a funding mechanism. Support will be lower among respondents who are asked about their support for universal preschool coupled with increased sales taxes and property taxes.*

Although the number of Americans supporting an increase in federal education spending is at an all-time high, those identifying as Democrats appear to express greater levels of support for the creation and expansion of government programs than their Republican counterparts. I believe that this general philosophy about the appropriate role of government, as well as the data collected about education preferences in general, indicate that those affiliating with the Democratic Party will be more likely to support the creation of a public universal preschool program as well. Thus, I hypothesize that:

*H<sub>2a</sub>: Republican respondents will be less likely to support universal preschool than Democrats and Independents when a tax increase is mentioned.*

According to a 2013 Rasmussen poll, more Americans find the sales tax to be a “more fair” tax (43 percent) than the income tax (26 percent), the property tax (6 percent) or the payroll tax (5 percent) (Pulse Opinion Research 2013). Many prominent congressional Republicans have expressed interest in eliminating the Internal Revenue Service, favoring a high national sales tax instead. Because Republicans are more likely to perceive the sales tax as “more fair” than the property tax, I hypothesize that:

*H<sub>2b</sub>: Republican respondents will be less likely to support universal preschool when a property tax is mentioned rather than a sales tax.*



Additionally, I believe that those that perceive their local schools and school boards as competent are more likely to trust elected officials with a greater share of taxpayer dollars.

Therefore, I hypothesize that:

*H<sub>3</sub>: Individuals that believe their local schools are of high quality are more likely to support the creation of a universal preschool system than individuals that believe their local schools are performing poorly..*

Community-level variables should affect individual support for universal preschool initiatives as well. The literature suggests that residents of parishes with high levels of social capital should feel a greater sense of belonging and exhibit higher levels of political trust in government to steward their taxpayer dollars well. Therefore, I hypothesize that:

*H<sub>4</sub>: Individuals living in parishes with higher levels of social capital index score will be more likely to support all variations of the universal preschool proposal than those than live in parishes with lower social capital index scores.*

Finally, Putnam argues that the most influential factor used to determine the level of social trust within a community is the level of income inequality present between its residents. Because income inequality and levels of social capital should share a negative relationship with one another, I hypothesize that:

*H<sub>5</sub>: Individuals living in parishes with higher Gini coefficients will be less likely to support all variations of the universal preschool proposal than those that live in parishes with lower Gini coefficients.*

## Data and Methodology

To measure support for universal preschool legislation for eligible four-year-olds in Louisiana, I utilized data from the 2015 Louisiana Survey of 980 adults conducted by the Public Policy Research Lab at Louisiana State University. In addition to capturing information about respondents' income levels, party affiliation, homeownership, racial minority status, and support for local schools, the 2015 Louisiana Survey contains a randomized experiment focused on

assessing support for universal preschool. By employing several different questions randomly, we will be able to capture support levels for universal preschool in Louisiana and further examine the willingness of Louisianans to pay additional sales or property taxes to fund the program.

Question 58 in the survey was comprised of three components, and each respondent was randomly assigned to one of the three prompts (Q58A, Q58B, or Q58C). The first question asked respondents about their support or opposition to an ambiguous and generic hypothetical universal preschool program: “Would you favor or oppose a proposal for state government to provide funding so that all 4-year-olds can attend a high quality pre-kindergarten program if their parents want them to?” The other two variations of this prompt presented the generic proposal coupled with potential tax increases that could be implemented to finance such an initiative. The second question included language about a hypothetical property tax increase: “Would you favor or oppose a proposal to raise property taxes in order to provide funding so that all 4-year-olds can attend a high quality pre-kindergarten program if their parents want them to?” The final variation of the question presented similar language that asked respondents about a hypothetical sales tax increase instead of a higher property tax: “Would you favor or oppose a proposal to raise sales taxes in order to provide funding so that all 4-year-olds can attend a high quality pre-kindergarten program if their parents want them to?” The variable was dichotomous as respondents were able to indicate a “favor” or “oppose” position.

In order to get a better sense of where the population parameters lie based on the data we collected and obtained, a maximum likelihood estimator was employed. This is done by taking the data available and finding the distribution that has the highest “goodness of fit” to the

reality presented in that data. Unlike other popular modeling techniques such as least square estimators, MLEs are much more efficient, consistent, and comprehensive (Myung 2002).

To assess the influence that partisanship, income level, home ownership, racial minority status, and sense of government competency exert on one's support for the establishment of a universal preschool system and one's level of willingness to be taxed to finance such a system, I compare respondents' answers to questions about the proposed early childhood education initiative with their personal characteristics using probit, a maximum likelihood estimator. A probit is appropriate because the dependent variable is a dichotomous variable coded 0 for opposition and 1 for support.

Partisanship is operationalized as a dichotomous variable – Republicans are identified with a 1 and Democrats and Independents are identified with a 0. In order to capture the effect of dramatically low or high incomes on support levels, another dichotomous variable is created in which incomes between \$20,000 and \$100,000 equal 0 and those under \$20,000 or over \$100,000 equal 1. This is done to capture the expected parabolic nature of income. In the 2015 Louisiana Survey, respondents were asked to assign a letter grade (A-F) to their local schools. These letters were translated into numbers in order to analyze the results – As became 1s, Bs became 2s, Cs became 3s, Ds became 4s, and Fs became 5s. These letter grades are used to operationalize their approval of their respective school systems and the perceived competency of local government, a perception that influences their voting behavior at the ballot box (Davidson and Cotter 1993). Assigning a 0 to those identifying as renters and assigning a 1 to those who reported owning a home was done to measure homeownership. All respondents identifying as white were assigned a 0 while all respondents identifying as a race other than white were grouped under the minority label and assigned a 1.

Data on social capital from each Louisiana parish was obtained from a 2009 analysis by Pennsylvania State University's Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development. The standardized social capital index produced took into account several factors, including the number of religious, civic, social, business, political, professional, and labor organizations in a parish in addition to the number of bowling centers, physical fitness facilities, public golf courses, and sport clubs, managers, and promoters present in the area. This aggregated number was divided by the population per 10,000 and then divided by 10. This final figure was combined with the parish's population, voter turnout, and Census response rate to produce a social capital index that allows me to compare the presence of social capital across parishes. The disparities between parishes are substantial – while some parishes like St. Bernard Parish (-1.8086) and West Feliciana Parish (-1.698) have very low levels of social capital, others like Concordia Parish (0.2997) and Jackson Parish (0.6024) enjoy relatively high levels of social capital within their communities. Aggregately, Louisiana parishes had an average social capital index score of -0.5372.

Believed to have a significant relationship with social capital, data on parish-level income inequality was also obtained from the American Community Survey. In order to produce a better picture of long-term economic disparities within parishes, the Gini coefficient was calculated and averaged over a five-year period (2008-2012). Largely regarded as the best indicator of income stratification, the Gini index will always fall on or between zero (perfect income equality) and one (at which the income inequality in the parish has reached its maximum). Some parishes like Vernon Parish (0.3946) and Cameron Parish (0.3988) have relatively high income equality while others such as Natchitoches Parish (0.5288) and Orleans Parish (0.5521) have relatively high income inequality. The average Louisiana parish has a Gini index of 0.4645.

## Results

Table One illustrates that support for universal preschool is highest when survey respondents are given the question that gauges support without mentioning the possibility of any tax increases. Nearly three out four (73.2 percent) of respondents who receive the generic support question indicate that they support the state providing funding for universal preschool. However, support falls precipitously when a funding mechanism is introduced. While the generic question enjoyed support from a majority of the respondents, more respondents expressed opposition to the hypothetical program when an increase in the property tax was mentioned (55.2 percent). When the prompt replaced the property tax with the sales tax, support rose, but not back to the levels of support seen in the generic question (55.6 percent).

Support for Preschool	No Tax	Property Tax	Sales Tax	Total
Oppose	80 (26.8%)	187 (55.2%)	156 (48.4%)	423 (44.1%)
Support	219 (73.2%)	152 (44.8%)	166 (51.6%)	537 (55.9%)
Total	299 (31.2%)	339 (35.3%)	322 (33.5%)	960 (100%)

In order to assess whether or not the differences in support across the various questions are statistically significant, a series of ANOVAs were run. An ANOVA is designed to assess whether or not there is a statistically significant difference in mean support across the three groups. The results, found in Table Two, suggest that there is a statistically significant difference in mean support for universal preschool across the three questions.

No Tax to Property Tax	F(1,636) = 52.24***
No Tax to Sales Tax	F(1,619) = 32.48***
Property Tax to Sales Tax	F(1, 659) = 2.99*
*p<.1 **p<.05 ***p<.01	

While the results of the experiment clearly demonstrate that support for universal preschool falls when the program's existence is tied to a tax mechanism, we do not yet know what factors are responsible for the decline. In order to assess what factors are responsible for the drop in support when one moves from the no tax mention to the property tax mention, when one moves from the no tax mention to the sales tax mention, and when one moves from the property tax to the sales tax mention, three probit analyses are conducted using variables suggested by the literature. Table One contains the results for the first scenario-explaining changes in support across the no tax mention and the property tax mention. The results reveal that the overall model is statistically significant and the types of question given to the respondent mattered, as the probit shows that respondents receiving the prompt with a property tax mention were less likely to support the proposal than those who received the prompt without a tax mention. Additionally, it appears that Republicans are also significantly less likely to support a universal preschool proposal with no tax mention than their Democrat or Independent counterparts. Minorities are also expected to support the proposals at higher levels than whites. Surprisingly, there is no evidence to suggest that either social capital or income inequality at the parish level affect individual attitudes toward the hypothetical legislation.

Table Two: Probit Results Predicting Universal Preschool Support Across No Tax and Property Tax Questions				
Number of Obs.	629			
Population Size	2229529.9			
Design df	628			
F (8, 621)	6.48			
Prob > F	0.000			
	Coef.	Std. Err.	T	P> t
Diff b/w NoTax&Prop	-.703	.152	-4.62	0.000***
Income	-.000	.000	-0.81	0.420
Republican	-.385	.175	-2.20	0.028**
Resp. School Grade	.000	.001	0.79	0.431
Homeownership	.000	.000	0.55	0.582
Minority	.546	.183	2.98	0.003***
Social Capital Index	.065	.188	0.34	0.731
Gini Coefficient	-1.611	2.542	-0.63	0.526
Constant	1.5308	1.26	1.22	0.225

Because the coefficients produced by a probit cannot be used directly to assess the substantive impact on the dependent variable, predicted probabilities were calculated using Clarify. These results can be found in Table Two. When no tax is mentioned, the probability of Republican support for universal preschool is .623 while support by Democrats is .773. When the property tax is mentioned, support falls regardless of partisanship. However, the fall is more precipitous for Republicans – support drops by over 30 points to just .321, confirming both components of the second hypothesis. While support among both whites and non-whites fall when the property tax mention is made, the probability of a minority expressing for universal preschool is higher than their non-minority counterparts for both types of questions.

Table Three: Predicted Probabilities of Support for Universal Preschool For Probit Results Predicting Support Across No Tax and Property Tax Questions			
		Oppose	Support
No Tax Mention	Democrat/Independent	.227	.773
	Republican	.377	.623
Property Tax Mention	Democrat/Independent	.510	.490
	Republican	.679	.321
No Tax Mention	Not a Minority	.227	.773
	Minority	.129	.871
Property Tax Mention	Not a Minority	.510	.490
	Minority	.360	.640

Table Three contains the results for the second probit model, which seeks to explain changes in support across the no tax mention and the sales tax mention. This overall model is also statistically significant and indicates that real differences exist in the levels of support and opposition documented when each question type was presented. As expected, the results indicate that respondents are significantly less likely to support a prompt with a sales tax mention than a prompt without a tax mention. Similar to the previous probit's results, no evidence exists to confirm the third, fourth, or fifth hypotheses as the social capital index score, parish-level Gini coefficient, and assigned school grade are nowhere near statistical significance. Republicans are again found to be less likely to support the preschool proposal with no tax mention than Independents or Democrats, lending additional credence to the second hypothesis.



Table Four: Probit Results Predicting Universal Preschool Support Across No Tax and Sales Tax Questions				
Number of Obs.	606			
Population Size	2173422.4			
Design df	605			
F (8, 598)	4.89			
Prob > F	0.000			
	Coef.	Std. Err.	T	P> t
Diff b/w NoTax&Sales	-.576	.148	-3.89	0.000***
Income	-.000	.000	-0.31	0.757
Republican	-.345	.177	-1.95	0.052*
Resp. School Grade	-.000	.000	-0.13	0.894
Homeownership	-.000	.001	-.041	0.682
Minority	.481	.191	2.52	0.012**
Social Capital Index	-.122	.192	-0.64	0.525
Gini Coefficient	.816	2.387	0.34	0.733
Constant	.274	1.200	0.23	0.819

Once again, we turn to predicted probabilities to gauge the substantive impact of the variables. These results can be found in Table Four. When no tax is mentioned, the probability of a Republican supporting universal preschool is .626 and for Democrats and Independents, the probability is .781. Support drops, regardless of partisanship, when a sales tax is introduced as the funding mechanism. For Republicans, the probability of support drops to .385. For Democrats and Independents, the probability of support drops to just .565. Again, hypotheses 2a and 2b are supported. Minorities continue to show higher levels of support for universal preschool than whites, even when the sales tax is mentioned.

Table Five: Predicted Probabilities of Support for Universal Preschool For Probit Results Predicting Support Across No Tax and Sales Tax Questions			
		Oppose	Support
No Tax Mention	Democrat/Independent	.219	.781
	Republican	.374	.626
Sales Tax Mention	Democrat/Independent	.435	.565
	Republican	.615	.385
No Tax Mention	Not a Minority	.219	.781
	Minority	.219	.781
Sales Tax Mention	Not a Minority	.435	.565
	Minority	.299	.701

Table Five contains the results for the third scenario-explaining changes in support across the property tax mention and the sales tax mention. While the overall model is statistically significant, the difference in support between the two types of questions is not statistically significant. The results found in this table falsify hypotheses four and five, which describe relationships between support for universal preschool and parish-level income inequality as well as amounts of parish-level social capital. The statistical significance of the homeownership variable, however, lends support to the third hypothesis – those who own their homes may be more likely to support a sales tax over a property tax. This probit model also demonstrates that Republicans are much less likely than Democrats and Independents to support a property tax financing mechanism than a program funded through an increase in the sales tax, confirming Hypothesis 2b. In contrast, minorities in favor of a universal preschool proposal appear to prefer a higher property tax over a higher sales tax.

Table Six: Probit Results Predicting Universal Preschool Support Across Property and Sales Tax Questions				
Number of Obs.	647			
Population Size	2300981.8			
Design df	646			
F (8, 639)	3.45			
Prob > F	0.001			
	Coef.	Std. Err.	T	P> t
Diff b/w Prop&Sales	.144	.150	0.96	0.338
Income	.000	.000	0.06	0.953
Republican	-.338	.170	-1.99	0.047**
Resp. School Grade	-0.001	.000	-1.75	0.081*
Homeownership	-0.001	.001	-2.12	0.034**
Minority	.437	.184	2.37	0.018**
Social Capital Index	-.060	.179	-0.34	0.736
Gini Coefficient	1.106	2.421	0.46	0.648
Constant	-.513	1.208	-0.42	0.671

The impact of the variables, again found through the use of predictive probabilities, are demonstrated in Table Six. When a property tax is mentioned, the probability of a Republican supporting universal preschool is .327 while the probability for Democrats and Independents is nearly one in two at .478. Support increases, regardless of partisanship, when a sales tax is mentioned as the funding mechanism. For Republicans, the probability of support grows to .398 while Democrat and Independents support grows to .553. This further solidifies the claims made in Hypotheses 2a and 2b. Both whites and non-whites support a hypothetical sales tax over a hypothetical property tax increase; however, minorities are more supportive of both than those that are not minorities. Minorities demonstrate a probability of support for the property tax mention of .630 while whites exhibit a probability of just .478. When the sales tax is mentioned instead, minority support grows to .698 while the probability among white supporters jumps to .553, contradicting the expected relationship implied by the third probit model. Interestingly, support among homeowners and non-homeowners was nearly identical with both slightly

preferring the higher sales tax. While the effect of a respondent's assessment of public school quality is statistically significant, it is substantively insignificant. The predicted probability of support for universal pre-K does not vary as the assessment of school quality increases or decreases.

Table Seven: Predicted Probabilities of Support for Universal Preschool For Probit Predicting Support Across Property Tax and Sales Tax Questions			
		Oppose	Support
Property Tax Mention	Democrat/Independent	.522	.478
	Republican	.673	.327
Sales Tax Mention	Democrat/Independent	.447	.553
	Republican	.602	.398
Property Tax Mention	Not a Minority	.522	.478
	Minority	.370	.630
Sales Tax Mention	Not a Minority	.447	.553
	Minority	.302	.698
Property Tax Mention	Not a Homeowner	.522	.478
	Homeowner	.522	.478
Sales Tax Mention	Not a Homeowner	.447	.553
	Homeowner	.447	.553

### Discussion and Conclusion

Although an existing body of literature exists detailing the relationship between communities, individual characteristics, and education finance, greater attention must be paid to public support for the creation and financing of public preschool systems. As the bipartisan call for increased funding grows, social scientists have a unique opportunity to study the influence of demographic and residential characteristics on voter attitudes and behaviors. This particular examination of both support for the creation of a new preschool initiative and the willingness of Louisianans to pay for the construction and maintenance of such a program will break new ground. This research explores the uniqueness of the Louisiana electorate but should provide insight into larger voter trends and attitudes.

As hypothesized, predicted probabilities indicated that Republicans were less likely to support universal preschool proposals of all stripes than Democrats and Independents. This proved to be true when no tax was mentioned as well as when both the property tax and sales tax were mentioned. However, it appears that Republicans have a more favorable view of sales taxes than property taxes, as they are more likely to support a proposal that finances a universal preschool program with an additional tax on purchases. This experiment indicates that partisanship does have a profound effect on support for universal preschool and various means of financing.

It appears that homeownership has little to no effect on support for a universal preschool program. While homeownership was statistically significant in the third probit model, indicating that homeowners had a preference for a higher sales tax than a property tax, the difference in support between the property tax mention and the sales tax mention was not significant. The predicted probabilities for the model found homeowners to share the same slight preference for the sales tax increase as their renting peers. The statistical significance of the variable in the third model is unsurprising as a higher property tax would fall disproportionately on homeowners unless landlords directly passed the cost on to their affected tenants. Some previous research has suggested that homeowners may feel more invested in their neighborhoods and feel a greater sense of “sociotropic belonging” resulting in a greater willingness to shoulder a greater property tax for the sake of community development (Kinder and Kiewiet 1981, Tedin et. al. 2000). However, my results challenge this theory and suggest that homeowners, like others, may practice “self-interest” political decision-making.

While no hypotheses concerning the racial minority variable were formulated, the variable proved to be statistically significant and should be revisited later for further study.

Those identifying as minorities demonstrate higher probabilities of support in each of the predictive probabilities. While trends in support were similar among whites and non-whites, the probability of support among non-whites was higher for the no tax, sales tax, and property tax mentions. Minorities also appeared to have a statistically significant preference for a property tax in the third probit model (although the difference between the two tax mentions is not significant). The statistical significance may be due to the regressive nature of the sales tax and the larger perception that the property tax is paid disproportionately by the middle and upper classes. However, these results must be arbitrary as the predicted probabilities suggest minorities would favor a higher sales tax like their white counterparts. In future research, it would be interesting to reintroduce the racial minority variable with a linear income variable.

The results also seem to indicate that the “margins” of the income gradient (those making less than \$20,000 or more than \$100,000) have no greater inclination to support a universal preschool proposal than middle class individuals. Future research should employ a linear income measure in order to examine support among high-income earners independent of low-income respondents. When this measure is utilized, one may come to find that those with greater amounts of resources are more inclined to accept higher taxes to finance an early education program due to the smaller burden of each additional tax dollar necessary to fund a hypothetical preschool initiative.

Contrary to the initial hypothesis, the perceived quality of local schools was found to be significant only once in the third probit model. This seems to suggest that those who give good marks to their local public schools prefer a higher sales tax to finance a universal preschool program to a property tax funding mechanism. Much like the homeownership variable, the larger implications of this statistical significance are also likely meaningless as a real difference in

support between the property tax mention and sales tax mention was not found. However, the lack of any real significance may be due to the low public school coverage in the state – nearly 1 in 5 K-12 students attend a private school, the second highest in the nation (Baker et al. 2014). The prompts given to respondents also made no mention of the structure of the hypothetical preschool initiative. Language that described the nature of the program (i.e. whether the program would be administered through public or private schools) may produce different results in a state with a vibrant voucher program.

Despite the overwhelming consensus in the literature that a negative relationship exists between the level of income inequality in a community and the level of social capital present, any increase in social isolation attributable to low social capital index scores at the parish level does not appear to have had any influence on respondents' preferences. To ensure that the significance of these two variables were not hidden inside relationships with other variables, various interactions were tested among the income, Gini, and social capital variables. No statistically significant relationships surfaced, demanding a reevaluation of the literature and the units of analysis utilized to rationalize this unanticipated outcome. Fukuyama's findings may shed some light on this issue; in his 1999 study, he finds that social capital is not falling apart but simply reorienting. He contends that people are not abandoning interaction with others but are participating in events and organizations that reinforce bonding social capital within smaller communities such as neighborhoods. Therefore, some individuals living in parishes characterized by high income inequality and low social capital may still live in socioeconomically homogeneous communities, enjoy adequate levels of local social capital, and demonstrate a greater sense of social and political trust. To better gauge the impact of these variables on

support for expanding government programs such as universal preschool, future studies should explore these variables at a smaller unit of analysis like the neighborhood.

Future research should utilize these results and further explore the thresholds at which voters willing to accept an additional tax burden to finance a universal preschool program are no longer willing to accept a tax increase. Quantifying an otherwise ambiguous tax proposal may provide researchers and policymakers with the data necessary to begin formulating policy. Additionally, subsequent research should seek to better understand the relationship between inequality and support for government programs that are redistributive in nature. Louisiana remains characterized by its relatively high levels of income stratification and more should be done to identify the role this disparity plays in public education policy and politics.



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