

School voucher adoption affected by political decision-making

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In many countries, school vouchers have come to be a controversial policy which allows parents to pay for the education of their children at a school of their choice, rather than the public school to which they are assigned. A new study in the journal *Governance* shows how the success of governments in introducing vouchers is highly correlated with these countries' different political institutions and traditions.

Michael Baggesen Klitgaard of the University of Southern Denmark made a comparative study between both the United States and Sweden in regards to school policy-making since the 1980s in an effort to explain why vouchers were more easily adopted in Sweden than in the USA.

Klitgaard found that American federal government, which divides power in many ways, have been a major obstacle to the adoption of vouchers, and worked to the advantage of voucher-opponents. He further observes that this institutional design is responsible for relatively low reform activity in other areas of public policy in the United States.

Swedish governments were more efficient in transforming policy proposals into legislation because the only political requirement to enforce a new financial structure in school policy was to forge a sufficient parliamentary coalition. Developments in the Swedish school system fit into a general pattern of such reforms conducted during the period of study.

"This article shows why it is reasonable to analyze the politics of school

reform vouchers from a welfare state perspective, and how insights from research into the 'new politics of the welfare state' provide a fruitful hypothesis for explaining the differences between the two countries," Klitgaard concludes.

Source: Wiley

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