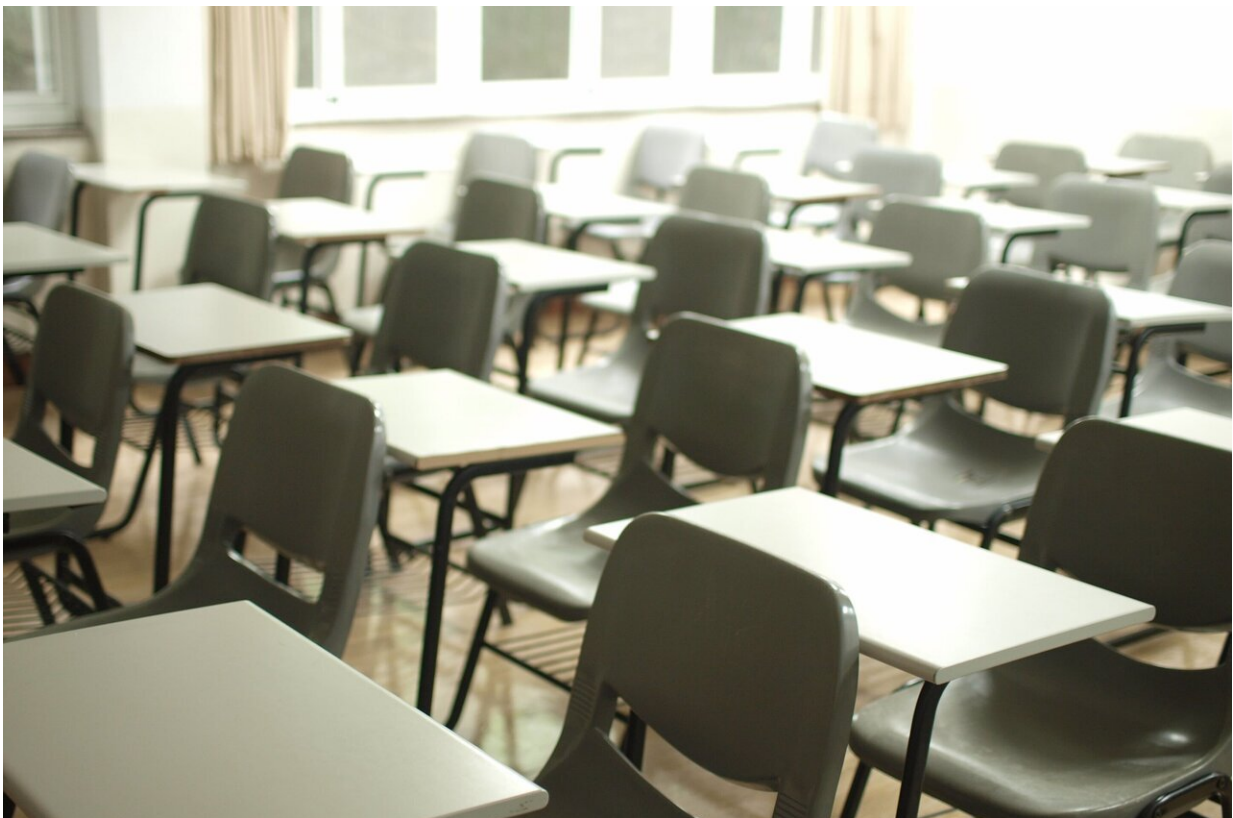


Unpopular political proposals affect electoral outcomes even if not implemented, finds study

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Political proposals to close schools can negatively affect voter support. A study from the University of Gothenburg shows that the leading party in

Swedish municipalities with threatened school closures lost voters. This was true both in electoral districts where schools were closed and in districts where closure proposals were withdrawn.

The research is [published](#) in the journal *Political Behavior*.

Politicians often face situations where they must present a proposal that meets resistance from [voters](#), who in turn demand that the proposal be withdrawn. Politicians can then either choose to implement the proposal against the voters' will or listen to the voters and withdraw it.

Simon Gren and Elena Leuschner are Ph.D. candidates in [political science](#). They have investigated what happens when politicians present unpopular proposals such as closing schools, and whether potential declines in electoral support can be avoided if the proposal is withdrawn.

The study is based on analyses of municipal election results for around 6,000 electoral districts in Sweden between the years 2002 and 2018. In the study, the [political scientists](#) compared how voters who lived close to a school threatened with closure voted, compared to those who lived further away from such a school.

"The results show that the proposal itself affected how voters voted in the next election. In both districts where schools were closed and in districts where the proposal was withdrawn, the leading party in the municipal council lost an average of one percent of the voters," says Gren.

The study indicates that Swedish voting behavior can be influenced by political proposals even if they never become reality, at least at the municipal level.

"For politicians, this poses a challenge—once they have put forward an

unpopular proposal, it is unlikely that they can avoid losing voters in the next election by withdrawing the proposal," says Leuschner.

To isolate the causal effect of either implementing or withdrawing a school closure proposal, the researchers took into account variation across municipalities, events that affect all electoral districts in a municipality equally, and differences between electoral districts that existed even before any school closure proposal was made.

More information: Simon Gren et al, Outcome Isn't Everything: Electoral Consequences of Implementing or Withdrawing Unpopular Policies, *Political Behavior* (2024). [DOI: 10.1007/s11109-024-09936-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-024-09936-8)

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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