Public attitudes toward private education in global perspective

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Abstract

The emerging comparative research field on public attitudes toward education policy has devoted little attention to private education and market governance of education systems. This chapter takes an initial step in filling this void by examining public opinion across 41 countries, primarily using data from the International Social Survey Program. While the results show that a substantial proportion of people believe that private schools should have a role in the education system, the vast majority in most countries still prefer that the government should be the primary provider of school education. Moreover, we find relatively strong public consensus in most countries that it is unjust for those with higher incomes to purchase better education. However, consistent with policy feedback theory and previous case studies indicating that public education is inadequate and unable to meet the increasing demand for high-quality education in many developing countries, we find that countries characterized by less universal access to education tend to display greater popular support for private education. To gain further insights and draw more general inferences regarding these matters, we conclude that extending comparative studies to lower-income countries of the Global South is an urgent task for future research.

Introduction

Education is widely held to be a cornerstone of human and economic development on a global scale. Consequently, the national structure and institutionalization of mass education systems are a matter of substantive public concern in high-, middle-, and low-income countries alike (Barro and Lee, 2015; Meyer et al., 1992). Public attitudes toward education policy have historically remained an underexplored area of research. However, recent scholarship has begun to illuminate this topic (Ansell, 2010; Busemeyer et al., 2020). Despite these advancements, the burgeoning field has yet to significantly address public opinion regarding private education and the quasi-market governance of education systems. Comparative studies covering more than a few countries are particularly rare. This chapter takes an initial step in filling this void by examining public attitudes toward private education and quasi-market governance across a total of 41 countries.

Public opinion is important for understanding both policy change and policy inertia. On the one hand, elected officials and policymakers frequently factor in public opinion when formulating and implementing policy agendas. In a similar vein, organized interests (e.g., political parties, trade unions, business actors) often leverage public sentiments to promote their cause. On the other hand, public opinion is shaped by economic incentives and social norms that are vested in existing policies. In this process, organized interests have a key role as transmission belts between policy and public opinion. This dynamic can result in "positive feedback" where policies gain in popularity, or "negative feedback" where public support for instituted policies erodes over time (Beland et al., 2022; Jacobs and Weaver, 2015; Kumlin et al., 2021; Pierson, 1993).

Prior research suggests that private school actors and business organizations play a particularly important role as advocates for privatization and market-oriented education reforms (Busemeyer and Thelen, 2020; Svallfors and Tyllström, 2019). However, this business

commitment to privatization and marketization may not necessarily be matched by equally positive attitudes among the general population (Edlund and Johansson Sevä, 2013; Edlund and Lindh, 2013).

Our study into these matters builds on the conceptual distinction between privatization and marketization within the realm of education (Whitty and Power, 2000; see also Lubienski and Malin in this volume). Related to privatization, we both examine attitudes toward private provision of education and private funding of education. As for marketization, we focus on attitudes toward market-like governance practices: free school choice; competition between schools; and decentralization of education systems.

We address the following questions: first, to what extent do people want private education and/or market-like governance of education? How large is the share of citizens that support such policies – do they constitute a potential political force in numbers? Second, to what extent do attitudes toward education policy vary between political constituencies and/or economic groups? Third, does public support for private education vary across countries depending on the degree of *de facto* universal access to education?

A strength of this study is that our data permit analyses of differences between advanced Western economies and less advanced economies elsewhere in the world. Despite a growing body of literature indicating that public education is often precarious and seemingly unable to meet the increasing demand for education in many countries of the Global South (Härmä, 2011; Verger et al., 2016), systematic cross-national studies on public attitudes toward private education covering countries from both the Global North and the Global South are, to say the least, too rare.

Recent advancements in international data collection have substantially expanded the possibilities of country-comparative studies dealing with the above questions. First, the

research project *Investing in Education in Europe: Attitudes, Politics, and Policies* (INVEDUC), headed by Marius Busemeyer, fielded a survey in 2014 specifically dedicated to education (Busemeyer et al, 2018). Although limited to eight West European countries, the survey includes a relatively large number of questions related to private education and market-like governance practices. In addition, while featuring fewer tailored survey questions, the 2016 and 2019 waves of the *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP, 2018; 2022) allow us to expand the analysis to a larger set of countries, enabling a more global assessment and exploration of whether, and if so, how attitudes toward private education vary between different countries and institutional contexts. While these surveys provide us with a rather comprehensive understanding of the subject, we nonetheless conclude the chapter by discussing the limitations of our study and how future research may address them.

Public attitudes toward education policy: A growing research field

The study of attitudes toward education policy is an emerging field that overlaps with a longstanding larger literature at the intersection of sociology and political science on public support for the welfare state. Following a few pioneering studies in preceding decades, this broader field of comparative research took off in the nineties in tandem with the expansion of multiple international social survey projects (for a recent literature review, see Kumlin et al., 2021).

Traditionally, the predominant focus in this literature has been on economic redistribution and the social insurance functions of the welfare state. Consequently, research on public opinion has mainly centered on issues like taxation, income transfers, social benefits, and/or insurance policies that explicitly protect against insecurities due to ill health, old age, or unemployment.

The social service dimension of the welfare state – including education – has received less attention (Kumlin et al., 2021).

However, new perspectives on social policy have gained prominence, particularly the concept of the "social investment state", which complements the traditional emphasis on redistribution and social insurance. These perspectives stress not only how the state protects and compensates those who are unable to participate in the labor market, but also highlight its role in promoting equality of opportunity and lifelong labor market participation (Hemerijck, 2012; Morel et al., 2011). Within this framework, the education system holds paramount importance, alongside social care services and active labor market policies (Bonoli, 2013; Busemeyer, 2014; Garritzmann et al., 2022).

In addition, in recent decades, many countries have implemented substantial reforms toward privatization and marketization in various sectors, including social services (Gingrich, 2011; Mares and Carnes, 2009). As stressed throughout this book, the appropriate role of private education and market-like governance in contemporary education systems is a contentious issue. On the one hand, proponents argue that such reforms promote individual freedom and resolve institutional inefficiencies associated with public provision. On the other hand, opponents view such reforms as undermining the very idea, and function, of education as a universal social right by introducing elements based on market logic and/or purchasing power (Gingrich, 2011).

A growing amount of research approaches these issues from a citizen perspective, seeking insights from the general population on their normative views regarding these matters. In short, how do people think that national education systems *should* be organized? Within this research field, it is customary to address this overarching question based on a general distinction between the funding and the delivery of education services (Busemeyer et al. 2020; Edlund and Lindh, 2021). While the former incorporates attitudes toward spending, the latter comprises

beliefs about the environment within which education should take place; which societal actor is best suited for providing school education: the government, private companies, non-profit organizations, religious organizations, or families?

Most previous works on popular support for public spending on education study advanced Western economies. Collected evidence from these studies suggests that support for public spending on education is robust. When asked whether public spending on education in general should be increased, stay the same, or decreased, a large majority – above 60% in most countries – prefers to increase spending. Only a few percent prefer that spending on education should be decreased. Public support for increased spending on education is typically higher compared to other policies (Edlund and Lindh, 2021). The evidence provided by Busemeyer et al. (2020) underline this finding and provide additional insights. First, support for education spending remains relatively high when explicitly forcing respondents to weigh such policy efforts against higher taxes, increased public debt, and/or cutbacks in pensions (pp. 72–74). Second, when forced to prioritize one of eight potential areas of additional spending, education is the most frequently chosen option in their pooled sample, with 28% of the respondents choosing this option (pp. 70–71). Third, there are notable differences between different levels and sectors of education. Public support for increased public spending on general school education and vocational education/training (both receive 62% in favor) is stronger compared to preschools (50%) and higher education (47%) in their pooled sample (pp. 82–83).

Extensive country-comparative studies on the relationships between public attitudes and *de facto* education policy are rare. Garritzmann (2015) examines support for targeted subsidies to low-income university students in 22 OECD countries. Drawing on policy feedback theory (for a recent overview, see e.g. Béland et al., 2022), he finds that attitudes co-vary with existing policies in the sense of positive influence and feedback; support for tuition subsidies is, on average, higher in countries with more generous subsidies already in place. Lindh (2015)

studies 17 Western countries, finding a similar attitude-policy dynamic: in countries with less actual private spending on education and health care, more people find it unjust that those with higher incomes can buy better education and health care. However, since this research is restricted to highly developed economies, previous works do not offer clear guidelines about the extent to which public attitudes in countries elsewhere in the world and at other stages of development are similar or markedly different.

Exploring attitudes towards education privatization and marketization

For the remainder of this chapter, we explore public attitudes toward private education and quasi-market governance. We begin with an empirical examination of the INVEDUC[1] survey, covering eight West European countries. Despite its narrow geographical scope, it serves as a valuable starting point given its comprehensive set of relevant attitudinal indicators. Moreover, these indicators facilitate nuanced analyses of attitudinal divisions by economic status and political ideology. Following this, we extend the analysis globally, covering a larger and geographically more diverse set of countries, using ISSP data.

Western Europe

Table 1 provides the complete question wordings and responses to the seven attitude indicators related to privatization/marketization broken down by country. Indicators *a-c* pertain to various aspects associated with market-like governance of education systems: (*a*) free school choice (average public support of 74% across countries), (*b*) competition between schools (54%), and (*c*) decentralization of education systems (69%). Public support for these policy measures is relatively high, although it varies significantly across countries. However, it should be noted that indicator *a* explicitly states that freedom of choice is unrelated to income, thereby ensuring

that private funding and purchasing power do not influence the actual ability to choose in this scenario. Moreover, while bureaucratic decentralization may at times facilitate the marketization of public services (Blomqvist 2004), indicator *c* does not explicitly reference market governance or identify it as the main goal of decentralization. In sum, it seems somewhat unclear whether these responses reflect support for market-like governance *per se*, or rather a demand for greater individual efficacy and local influence in the education system.

The indicators listed in the lower section of Table 1 are related to private education. Statement *d* does not explicitly inquire about private education; it posits that only the government should be responsible for the financing and provision of education. Except in Denmark, a majority of respondents in all countries support this statement, indirectly suggesting that only a minority favors private elements. The subsequent two indicators explicitly ask about support for private education. The proportion of respondents endorsing that private schools should play an important role in the national education system is below 50% in all countries, and particularly low in France, Germany, and Sweden. A similar pattern is found for private universities, although there is slight majority support in Ireland, Spain, and the UK. The last indicator, *g*, addresses public funding of private schools, revealing widespread disapproval across all eight countries. This strong opposition is somewhat surprising, considering that in many countries with a growing presence of private schools, such as Ireland, Spain, and Sweden, both public *and* private schools remain predominantly financed by public resources (Blomqvist, 2004; Gingrich, 2011).

Table 1 *Public support for private education and market-like governance in eight West European countries (percent)*

	Denmark	France	Germany	Ireland	Italy	Spain	Sweden	UK	Average
a) Families should be able to choose freely between public and private schools, independent of income and place of residence.	*62*	*83*	72	72	*80*	*81*	70	72	74
b) Promoting competition between schools is beneficial for the education system as a whole.	60	*44*	56	56	*61*	*64*	*35*	56	54
c) Too many decisions about education are taken at the national level; more should be decided by parents and teachers at local level.	*59*	*76*	*61*	*80*	*66*	*86*	*43*	*80*	69
d) The state alone should be in charge of financing and providing education at all levels.	*38*	58	55	58	*70*	*67*	50	58	57
e) Private schools should play an important role in the education system of [COUNTRY].	36	*32*	*21*	*49*	36	*46*	*14*	*48*	35
f) Private universities should play an important role in the education system of [COUNTRY].	*29*	35	*24*	58	38	*52*	*16*	*53*	38
g) The government should provide public funding to private schools.	*33*	*34*	22	20	*16*	*19*	19	*14*	22

Note: Calculated from the original 5-point scale: “Strongly agree,” “Agree,” “Neither agree nor disagree,” “Disagree,” “Strongly disagree.” Cell entries exhibit the share of respondents per country answering “Strongly agree” or “Agree” on each statement. Note that all statements, except (d), are phrased in favor of private education/market-like governance. Markers in italics denote that the 95 percent confidence interval does not overlap with the overall average in the rightmost column.
Source: Busemeyer et al. (2018).

Divisions by economic status and political ideology

There is a long research tradition of studying how social tensions and associated political institutions are anchored in the social and economic structures of society. A common theoretical assumption is that those in weak economic positions should be supportive of the welfare state, while those in stronger economic positions should favor a stronger role for market-based governance and allocation of resources/opportunities (Korpi, 2006; Meltzer and Richard, 1981). Such conflicts are mainly manifested in divisions between socio-economic groups concerning attitudes toward economic redistribution. However, universal social services and insurance that are provided to a vast majority tend to draw strong support among citizens in all echelons of society: the rich, the poor, and those in between (Lindh and McCall, 2020). To measure *economic status*, we categorize household income (country-specific quintiles) into *Low* (first and second quintile), *Middle* (third quintile), and *High* (fourth and fifth quintile).

Turning to political ideology, contemporary research identifies two main dimensions. The socioeconomic dimension concerns ideas/attitudes regarding what should be the relative weight of state and market forces, while the sociocultural dimension concerns the tension between liberal and conservative values on issues like gender, sexuality, ethnic/racial equality, and environmental issues. Those who lean more toward the Left on socioeconomic issues tend to be more in favor of public education than people who lean more toward the Right on such issues. Similarly, those who lean more toward the socially liberal Left tend to be more in favor of public spending on education than those who lean more toward the socially conservative Right (Busemeyer et al., 2020; Edlund and Lindh, 2021). *Political ideology* is measured by respondents' self-placement on a 0-10 scale. Responses are recoded into: *Left* (0-4), *Center* (5), and *Right* (6-10).[2]

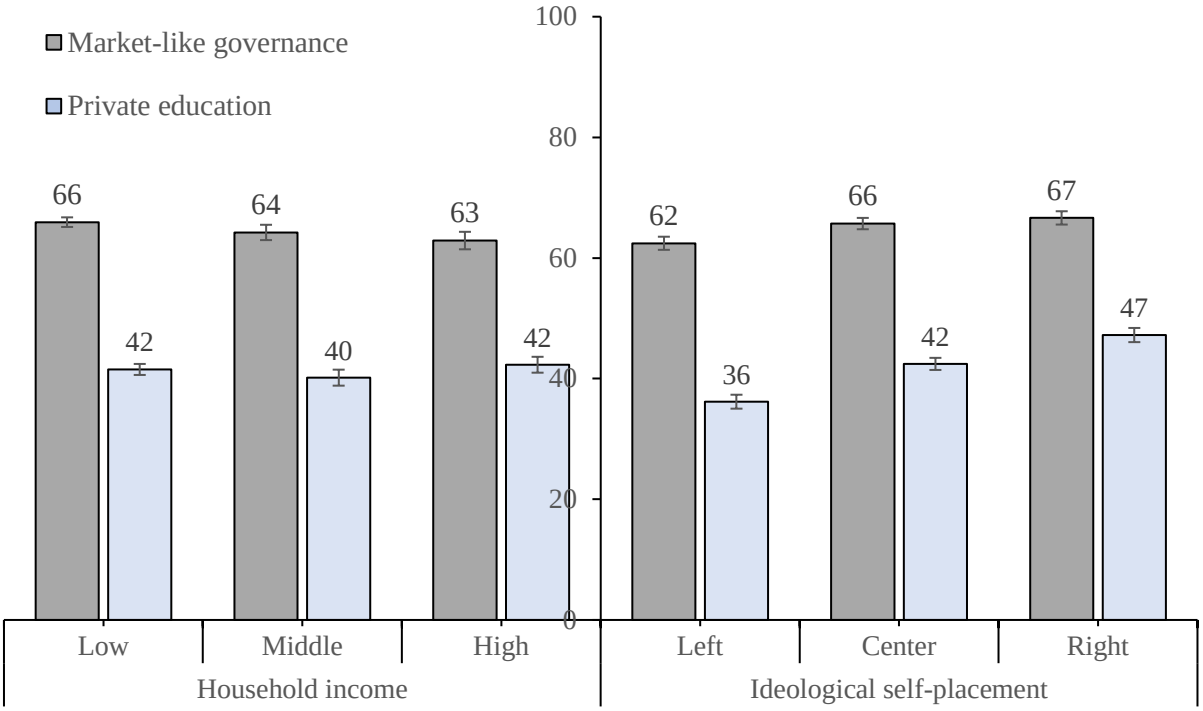
Moving to the dependent variables, we note that some of the attitudinal indicators are somewhat ambiguous. Therefore, our strategy is to create composite additive indices, thereby reducing potential measurement errors and influences of ambiguities in question-wording. Both of our indices range from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating stronger support for market-like governance and private education, respectively. The first index, *attitudes toward market-like governance*, is based on indicators *a-c*. The second index reflects *attitudes toward private education* and is based on indicators *d-g*. Both indices are based on the original 5-point ordinal scales for all indicators.[3]

The results are presented in Figure 1, showing predicted values for the level of support for market-like governance (grey bars) and private education (blue bars), categorized by economic status (left panel) and political ideology (right panel). These predictions are based on the pooled sample and OLS regressions including country-fixed effects and robust standard errors. All regressions include the following control variables: age, education, gender, and place of residence.

Three main results stand out from this analysis. First, results reaffirm the pattern that market-like governance (mean index score of 65.0) is more popular than private education (41.7). Second, while household income has minimal impact on both indices, those who self-identify to the Right are significantly more supportive of private education and market-like governance compared to those who lean toward the Left. Third, the attitudinal divide between Left- and Right-leaning respondents is more pronounced regarding private education, showing an 11-point difference compared to the difference for market-like governance, which is 5 scale points.

In sum, this analysis of public opinion in Western Europe indicates that the privatization of education lacks widespread support and is more ideologically contentious than the concept of education marketization. Carrying this insight, we now turn to the second, more globally oriented, part of our empirical analysis.

Figure 1 *Predicted levels of public support for market-like governance (scale 0–100, dark bars) and private education (scale 0–100, light bars) by household income (left panel) and ideological self-placement (right panel) in eight West European countries*



Notes: Based on a pooled sample of eight West European countries. OLS regressions with robust standard errors and country-fixed effects. Numbers represent adjusted predicted values while holding control variables at their means. Whiskers signify 95% confidence intervals.
Source: Busemeyer et al. (2018).

A global perspective

To the best of our knowledge, the ISSP is the single available database encompassing attitudes toward private education that covers both developed and developing economies. Specifically, we focus on the 2016 and 2019 waves of the survey, which included questions related to private education.[4] In total, these two ISSP waves contain 100,303 individual respondents distributed across a total of 40 countries spanning seven world regions.[5]

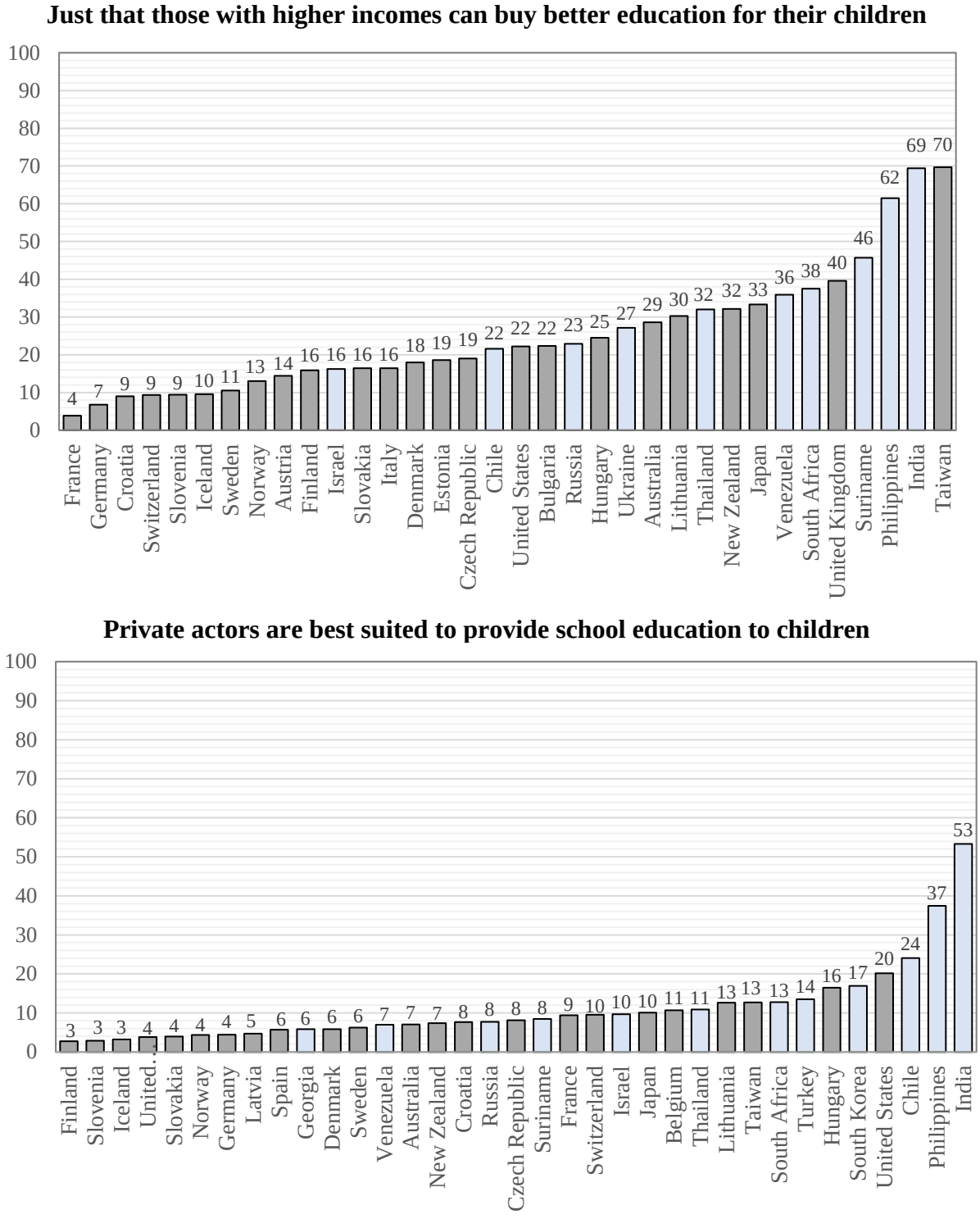
The ISSP includes two questions that capture attitudes toward private education. The first question (2019 survey) concerns private financing of education: "Is it just or unjust – right or wrong – that people with higher incomes can buy better education for their children than people

with lower incomes?" Response options: "Very just, definitely right"; "Somewhat just, right"; "Neither just nor unjust, mixed feelings"; "Somewhat unjust, wrong"; "Very unjust, definitely wrong".

The upper panel of Figure 2 shows the share of respondents in each country that support such an arrangement (i.e., answer either "Very just, definitely right" or "Somewhat just, right").[6] Public support varies extensively between the 34 observed countries, ranging from 4% in France to 70% in Taiwan. In most countries, however, a large majority view societal solutions where education is financed through private sources as unfair. This finding corroborates evidence provided by previous research suggesting that citizens' support for public spending on education is compact in most countries. Nevertheless, as further discussed below, there are individual countries where public opinion differs markedly from this overall trend.

The second question pertains to the delivery of education (2016 survey): "People have different opinions on who should provide services in [country]. Who do you think should primarily provide school education for children?" There are five response options, and within parentheses, we report the results from the pooled sample for each option: "Government" (88.8%), "Private companies/for-profit organizations" (2.8%), "Non-profit organizations/charities/ cooperatives" (1.9%), "Religious organizations" (0.6%), or "Family, relatives or friends" (5.9%). Public support for government provision of education is solid, and it is worth noting that public support for private provision of education is lower than support for private provision of health care and elderly care.[7]

Figure 2 *The public share (in percent) in each country that supports "It is just that those with higher incomes can buy better education for their children" (upper panel) and "Private actors are best suited to provide school education to children" (lower panel)*



Note: Dark bars denote developed economies and light bars developing economies.
Source: ISSP (2018, 2022). Weighted data.

The lower panel of Figure 2 shows the public share in each country that supports private provision, operationalized as those who do *not* respond "Government" to this question. In most of the 35 countries observed, this belief constitutes a small minority. However, a few countries deviate from this general pattern. In the United States, Chile, the Philippines, and India, support for private actors is above 20% – not high in absolute terms, but still noteworthy. In three of these four countries, the most popular private alternative to the government is "family, relatives or friends". India stands out as the only country where support for institutional private providers (for-profit and non-profit) outweighs support for family provision, coming relatively close to matching support for government delivery of school education.

At the country level, there is a relatively strong correlation between the two statements in Figure 2: Countries with stronger (weaker) public support for private funding tend to exhibit higher (lower) public support for private provision of education (n=29, Pearson's R=0.63, $p<0.001$). In addition, public support for private education tends to be stronger among developing economies (blue bars) compared to developed economies (grey bars). Among the developing economies, only Israel, which arguably is an atypical institutional case, ranks in the bottom half concerning the level of public support for private funding. Among developed economies, the average share of public support for private funding is 22.5%, a figure notably influenced by exceptionally high support in Taiwan (the median is 17%). In contrast, the average support among developing economies is higher, at 37.0% (median: 34%).

Similarly, developing economies tend to be overrepresented among the countries displaying relatively strong support for private delivery. Among developed economies, average support for private provision is 7.8% (median: 7%), while it is 17.3% among developing economies, with India serving as a strong outlier that boosts this average (median: 12%).

The relatively strong support for private education observed among developing economies may be further understood based on previous theory and research. While it is beyond the scope of

this chapter to pinpoint causal relationships, theory and previous research suggest that attitudes tend to co-evolve with actual policies and institutional systems, due to the norms and incentives embodied in these policies (Béland et al., 2022; Kumlin et al., 2021; Pierson, 1993).

Verger et al. (2016) suggest that public schooling is generally inadequate in large parts of the Global South, including high student-teacher ratios or poor teacher qualifications. Among the surveyed countries in this chapter, India is a typical example, where the public educational system suffers from several shortages, and private actors play an extensive role in the provision of basic education (Härmä, 2011). In such societal contexts, norms emphasizing equality of opportunity and social rights to education may be rather weak at the expense of norms promoting that access to education should be determined by private funds, and/or that children from more resourceful families are entitled to better educational opportunities through private schools.

In summary, empirical observations and theory suggest that the national context influences the organization and provision of education. The quality of public educational systems and the prevalence of private providers of education are critical aspects, where low values on the former and high values on the latter are expected to promote positive attitudes toward private education. In the following analysis, we use the *de facto* universal access to education as an indicator of such cross-national variability in school systems. To what extent does the degree of *de facto* universal access to education account for cross-national differences in support for private education?

To measure the degree of universal access to education, we use the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) inequality-adjusted education index (hereafter the IAE index). This standardized index, ranging from 0 to 1, is based on two components. The first is derived from the mean years of schooling and of expected years of schooling. The second component relates to the degree of (un)equal access to education, and it explicitly recognizes

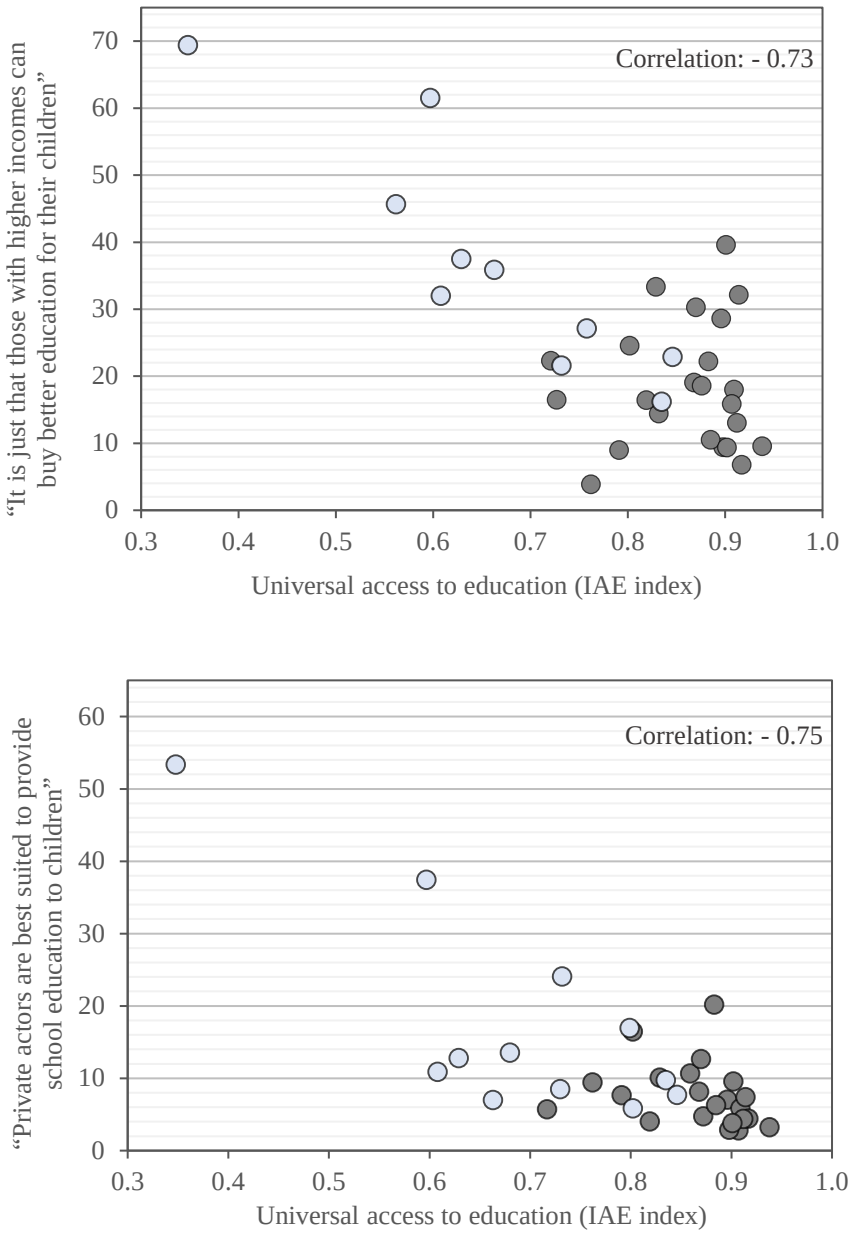
the extent to which the education provided is universally accessible for all children or a select few. The higher the IAE index score the higher the degree of universal access to education (Saisana, 2014).

The IAE index, based on 2021 data, shows substantive cross-country variations in educational access and opportunities worldwide (UNDP, 2023). Among the countries in our sample, scores vary between 0.94 in Iceland to 0.35 in India, representing a broader pattern of developed economies (average score of 0.85, n=26) having higher scores compared to developing economies (average: 0.69, n=13).[8]

Figure 3 illustrates how the IAE index (measured on the horizontal axis) correlates with the two types of attitudes toward private education (vertical axis). The upper panel shows the proportion of respondents agreeing that it is "Just that those with higher incomes can buy better education for their children" in each country. The lower panel covers the public share that thinks that "private actors are best suited to provide school education to children" in each country. The results reveal statistically significant negative correlations between the IAE index and public support for both private funding (Pearson's R= -0.73, $p<0.001$) and private delivery (Pearson's R= -0.75, $p<0.001$). The higher (lower) the degree of universal access to education, the lower (higher) the support for private education in terms of funding and provision.

These correlations largely reflect differences *between* developing and developed economies. Moreover, among different developing economies, the IAE index effectively captures variations in attitudes toward private funding (Pearson's R= -0.90, $p<0.001$) and private delivery (Pearson's R= -0.78, $p=0.003$).[9] Again, the higher (lower) the degree of universal access to education, the lower (higher) the support for private education in terms of funding and provision. Among the developed economies, however, corresponding correlations are weak and non-significant.

Figure 3 *Country-level correlations between the degree of de facto universal access to education (IAE index) and public support for the statements that: "it is just that those with higher incomes can buy better education for their children" (upper panel) and "private actors are best suited to provide school education to children" (lower panel).*



Notes: Pearson correlation coefficients: upper panel, n = 33, Pearson's R = -0.73, p<0.001; lower panel, n = 34, Pearson's R = -0.75, p<0.001. Dark dots denote developed economies and light dots developing economies.
Sources: Survey data (weighted): ISSP (2018, 2022); IAE index: UNDP (2023).

In summary, the results in this section add further evidence that public support for private education is comparatively greater among developing countries. A plausible, but not exhaustive, explanation of this pattern could be the lower levels of universal access to high-quality public education observed in many developing economies compared to developed ones. We will revisit this topic in the following concluding section.

Discussion and conclusions

The emerging comparative research field on public attitudes toward education policy has devoted little attention to private education and market governance of education systems. This chapter has begun to bridge this research gap by studying public attitudes toward education privatization and marketization in 41 countries, using the most sophisticated comparative survey datasets available to date.

The results show that while a sizeable proportion of respondents believe that private schools should have an important role in the education system, the vast majority in most countries still prefer that the government should be the primary provider of school education. Furthermore, we find relatively strong public consensus in most countries that it is unjust for those with higher incomes to have an advantage in purchasing better education for their children. These results suggest that in most observed countries, the overall support for private education as a comprehensive *substitute* for public education is low, suggesting that political strategies aiming to move the education system closer to the private-market nexus may face severe obstacles in receiving support from large segments of the public, particularly when it comes to issues related to private funding for education.

So, if one overall conclusion is that public support for a comprehensive private education system is generally low, we also found evidence suggesting that a substantial share of

respondents supports private schools playing a *supplementary* role alongside public providers.[10] Moreover, policy aspects associated with education marketization, including free school choice, decentralization, and to a lesser extent, between-school competition, are popular policy options among a large proportion of the citizenry. However, data limitations only allow us to study these attitudes towards marketization in a subset of West European countries, which of course restricts the generalizability of these findings from a global perspective. Therefore, future research on how people view the public-private mix should strive to cover a more geographically and institutionally diverse range of countries (more on this below).

Moving on to socio-political cleavages, our results suggest that attitudinal divides within countries are more rooted in political (Left-Right) ideology than economic status (Busemeyer et al., 2020; Edlund and Lindh, 2021). High-income groups disproportionally enroll in private schools, while also being core constituents of political actors with close ties to business interests that often stand out as primary proponents of education privatization and marketization (Busemeyer and Thelen, 2020; Svallfors and Tyllström, 2019). Therefore, it is somewhat surprising that higher-income groups do not provide stronger support for private education compared to lower-income groups. However, we anticipate that future research developing more rigorous theoretical and methodological approaches will provide further insights into these matters.

Moreover, political ideology is found more strongly related to attitudes toward private funding and provision of education than to support for market-like governance practices. The weak association observed between political ideology and attitudes toward marketization, as reflected by the widespread support for free school choice and decentralization, may stem from a perception that such policy measures enhance individual efficacy in the education system, rather than being mainly motivated by Right-leaning (pro-market) ideology. We welcome future research that seeks to study in greater detail how education privatization and

marketization interrelate with socioeconomic *and* sociocultural ideological divisions, particularly from a broad cross-national perspective.

Building on recent initiatives in comparative social policy research (Ferrarini et al., 2016; Garritzmann et al., 2022; Mares and Carnes, 2009) and the expanding literature on education privatization and marketization globally (Verger et al., 2016), we have taken initial steps toward extending the scope of analysis beyond the Western hemisphere to include countries of the Global South as well.

Our results show that in a minority of countries, predominantly developing countries, a substantial share of citizens prefer private education. In line with previous case studies suggesting that public education tends to be inadequate and unable to meet the increasing demand for high-quality education in many developing countries (Härmä, 2011; Verger et al., 2016), we find that developing countries with less universal access to education display greater support for private education. Although the relatively low number of included countries makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions, these findings are consistent with policy feedback theory emphasizing how inadequate public policies may erode their popular legitimacy, especially when apparent private alternatives exist (Beland et al., 2022; Hacker, 2004; Jacobs and Weaver, 2015). Theoretically related, our results also fit well with previous empirical research indicating that public acceptance of private funding of education positively correlates with the actual rate of private spending on education among affluent economies of the Global North (Garritzmann, 2015; Lindh, 2015).

Lastly, a significant limitation of our study is the lack of survey data for countries classified by the UN as having "lower levels of economic and human development". This limitation is particularly noteworthy when considering our results for the deviating cases of India and the Philippines. Could the relatively high levels of support for private education in these countries signal that people in developing countries, in general, are more positive toward private

education because of deficiencies in the public school system? Drawing on policy feedback theory and this study, we might expect this to be the case, especially in countries where universal access to high-quality education is more limited.

However, to gain further insights and draw more general inferences regarding these matters, more research is needed in these parts of the world that are seldom in focus in comparative policy research – either because of theoretical neglect or lack of adequate data. From both a theoretical and a global human development perspective, extending theoretical inquiry and data collection to lower-income countries of the Global South should be one of the most urgent tasks for future research.

Endnotes

[1] For detailed information on survey methodology and substantive themes covered, see Busemeyer et al. (2018). For a slightly different and more exhaustive analysis of these data, see Busemeyer et al. (2020, Ch. 4).

[2] We have performed sensitivity analyses applying different coding schemes of these variables. Irrespective of categorization scheme applied, we obtain similar results as those reported. For additional analyses that align with our findings, see Busemeyer et al. 2020, chapter 4.

[3] Originally, all indicators were coded 1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree. For the index constructions, we have reversed the coding for all indicators, except *d*. For comparability, both indices were standardized to vary 0-100.

[4] For detailed information on survey methodology, see ISSP (2018; 2022). For more details on substantive themes covered, see Edlund and Lindh (2019) and Roberts et al. (2023). Note that some of the countries participated in one survey only. Details on survey participation are shown in Figure 2.

[5] Included countries are listed below by level of economic development as categorized by the United Nations *Developed economies* (27 countries): Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, New Zealand, Norway, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Developing economies (13 countries): Chile, Georgia, India, Israel, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, South Africa, Suriname, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, and Venezuela. The UN categorizes Georgia, The Russian federation, and Ukraine as "economies in transition", while we classify them as "developing economies". Given the few countries in the data that is not part of the "developed economies" cluster, we believe that this classification

is justified. Moreover, the UN database lacks data for Taiwan. Based on the classification from the World Bank ("high-income economy") and the International Monetary fund ("advanced economy"), we categorize it as a developed economy. Ireland is the only country in the first part (based on the INVEDUC survey) that is not included in this second part of the analysis (based on the ISSP).

[6] This dichotomization of the response scale does not substantively change comparative patterns/rankings, as the correlation between a dichotomous and full-scale measure is 0.97 at the country level.

[7] A comparison with public responses to the other social services items in the 3-item battery of the ISSP 2016 survey: "care for older people" and "health care for the sick" shows the following. While both social services also exhibit strong public support for government provision in the pooled sample, responses vary more compared to education. For (elderly care) [health care] public support in percent for the different alternatives are the following: "Government" (70.1) [83.2], "Private companies/for-profit organizations" (5.9) [5.6], "Non-profit organizations/charities/ cooperatives" (7.6) [4.2], "Religious organizations" (1.1) [0.5], and "Family, relatives or friends" (15.3) [6.5]. Thus, when compared to public support for private provision of elderly care and health care, education ranks the lowest.

[8] The UN database lacks data for Taiwan, therefore n=39 for this part of the analysis.

[9] It should be noted that the strength of these correlations is sensitive to individual cases, due to the low number of included countries.

[10] A telling example is provided by the results observed for the UK. While 48% of the respondents indicated that "private schools should play an important role" (INVEDUC), only 4% prefer private actors when asked who "should primarily provide school education for children" (ISSP). A similar finding applies to Spain. Such discrepancies underscore the need to interpret survey responses carefully and keeping precise question framing in mind.

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