

2023

# TEXAS LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

## School Choice



Hobby School of Public Affairs  
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON



## Texas Legislative Issues 2023 School Choice

The Hobby School of Public Affairs at the University of Houston conducted an online survey of Texans ages 18 and older to assess their preferences and opinions regarding legislation that will be considered by the Texas Legislature during the 2023 legislative session. The survey was fielded between January 9 and January 19, 2023, in English and Spanish, with 1,200 YouGov respondents, resulting in a confidence interval of +/-2.8%. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race/ethnicity, and education and are representative of the population of Texas adults.

This is the third of seven reports. The first report examined the saving and spending preferences of Texans related to the state's current \$33 billion budget surplus, support for legislation to reimburse universities and colleges for tuition benefits provided and expand Medicaid's postpartum coverage, and support for a series of proposed sales tax exemption bills. The second examined support for gambling legislation presently under consideration in the Texas Legislature. This report examines support for two forms of proposed school choice legislation, vouchers and tax incentives for donations to support attendance at private schools. Future reports will examine support for legislation regulating marijuana, abortion, firearms, elections, immigration, and energy.

### Executive Summary

61% of Texans support (and 39% oppose) a policy which would provide low-income Texas parents with tax-funded vouchers that they can use to help pay for their children to attend private or religious schools of their choice.

- 78% of Black, 64% of Latino and 55% of white Texans support vouchers for low-income Texans.
- 67% of Independents, 64% of Republicans and 57% of Democrats support vouchers for low-income Texans.
- 73% of Black Democrats, 71% of Latino Republicans, 58% of white Republicans, 57% of Latino Democrats, and 48% of white Democrats support vouchers for low-income Texans.
- 73% of Texas born-again Christians support vouchers for low-income Texans compared to 56% of Texans who are not born-again Christians.
- 64% of Texans living in large urban counties, 59% living in rural counties, and 56% living in suburban counties support vouchers for low-income Texans.

53% of Texans support (and 47% oppose) a policy which would provide tax-funded vouchers for all parents in Texas, which they can use to help pay for their children to attend private or religious schools of their choice.

- 65% of Black, 54% of Latino and 50% of white Texans support vouchers for all Texans.
- 60% of Republicans, 59% of Independents and 44% of Democrats support vouchers for all Texans.
- 68% of Black Democrats, 64% of Latino Republicans, 61% of white Republicans, 45% of Latino Democrats, and 31% of white Democrats support vouchers for all Texans.
- 63% of Texas born-again Christians support vouchers for all Texans compared to 49% of Texans who are not born-again Christians.
- 62% of Texans living in rural counties, 53% living in suburban counties, and 50% living in urban counties support vouchers for all Texans.

53% of Texans support (and 47% oppose) a policy which would provide low-income Texas parents in populous urban counties (1 million plus) with tax-funded vouchers that they can use to help pay for their children to attend private or religious schools of their choice.

- 74% of Black, 58% of Latino and 43% of white Texans support vouchers for low-income Texans in populous urban counties.
- 54% of Republicans, 54% of Independents and 51% of Democrats support vouchers for low-income Texans in populous urban counties.
- 72% of Black Democrats, 62% of Latino Republicans, 48% of Latino Democrats, 41% of white Republicans, and 41% of white Democrats support vouchers for low-income Texans in populous urban counties.
- 64% of Texas born-again Christians support vouchers for low-income Texans in populous urban counties compared to 49% of Texans who are not born-again Christians.
- 60% of Texans in urban counties, 50% in suburban counties, and 43% in rural counties support vouchers for low-income Texans in populous urban counties.

65% of Texans support (and 35% oppose) the provision of state tax credits for individual and corporate donations to help low-income Texas parents send their children to private or religious schools.

- 79% of Black, 63% of Latino and 63% of white Texans support tax credits for donations to help low-income Texas parents send their children to private or religious schools.
- 72% of Republicans, 64% of Independents and 62% of Democrats support tax credits for donations to help low-income Texas parents send their children to private or religious schools.

- 82% of Black Democrats, 71% of Latino Republicans, 70% of white Republicans, 60% of Latino Democrats and 53% of white Democrats support tax credits for donations to help low-income Texas parents send their children to private or religious schools.
- 72% of Texas born-again Christians support tax credits for donations to help low-income Texas parents send their children to private or religious schools compared to 60% of Texans who are not born-again Christians.
- 69% of Texans in rural counties, 66% in urban counties and 64% in suburban counties support tax credits for donations to help low-income Texas parents send their children to private or religious schools.

61% of Texans support (and 39% oppose) the provision of state tax credits for individual and corporate donations to help all Texas parents send their children to private or religious schools.

- 68% of Black, 59% of Latino and 59% of white Texans support tax credits for donations to help all Texas parents send their children to private or religious schools.
- 67% of Republicans, 65% of Independents and 54% of Democrats support tax credits for donations to help all Texas parents send their children to private or religious schools.
- 72% of Black Democrats, 69% of white Republicans, 62% of Latino Republicans, 55% of Latino Democrats and 43% of white Democrats support tax credits for donations to help all Texas parents send their children to private or religious schools.
- 72% of Texas born-again Christians support tax credits for donations to help low-income Texas parents send their children to private or religious schools compared to 56% of Texans who are not born-again Christians.
- 69% of Texans in rural counties, 61% in suburban counties and 60% in urban counties support tax credits for donations to help all Texas parents send their children to private or religious schools.

52% of Texans in rural counties, 43% in urban counties and 39% in suburban counties believe their ISD is very important to their local community's identity.

46% of Texans in rural counties, 38% in urban counties and 35% in suburban counties believe their ISD is very important to their local community's sense of togetherness.

44% of Texans in urban counties, 36% in rural counties and 34% in suburban counties believe their ISD is very important to their local community's economic well-being.

45% of Texans in urban counties, 44% in rural counties and 39% in suburban counties believe their ISD is very important to their local community's ability to attract and retain residents.



## Survey Population Demographics

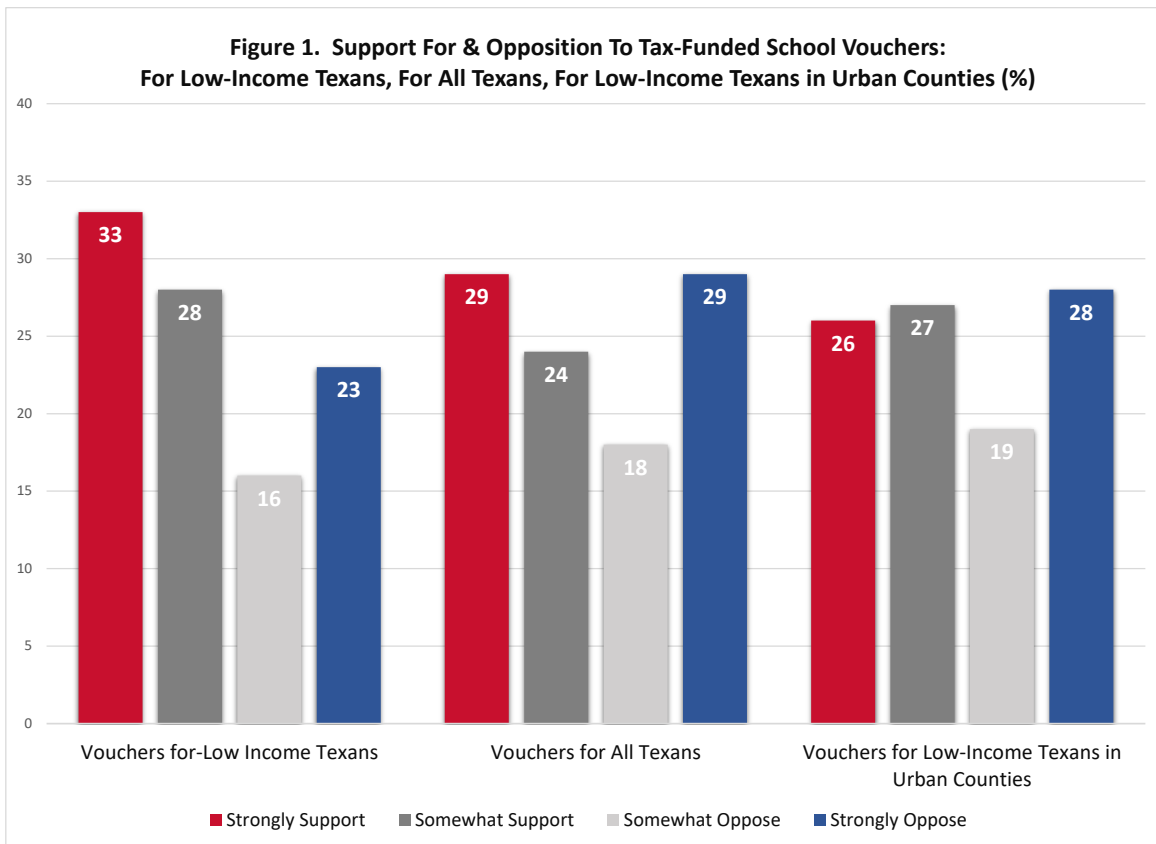
Whites account for 45% of this survey population of Texans 18 and older, Latinos 37%, Blacks 12%, and others 6%. Women account for 51% of the population and men for 49%. Regarding generations, 29% of the population belongs to the combined Silent Generation (born between 1928-1945) and Baby Boomer (1946-1964) cohort, 25% to Generation X (Gen-X, 1965-1980), 30% to the Millennial (1981-1996) generation and 16% to the Generation Z (Gen-Z, 1997-2014) cohort. The highest educational attainment of 40% of the population is a high school degree or less, while 29% have either a two-year degree or have attended some college, and 31% have a four-year college degree or post-graduate degree as their highest level of educational attainment. Almost one-half (46%) live in households with a household income that is less than \$50,000, 30% live in households with an income of between \$50,000 and \$99,999, and 24% live in households with a household income that is \$100,000 or more. One in four (25%) of these Texans is a born-again Christian while 75% are not. One in four (27%) of these Texans have a child under the age of 18 in their household while 73% do not. Two-fifths (39%) of the population identifies as Democrat, 36% as Republican, 20% as Independent and 5% are unsure about their partisan identification. Geographically, half (50%) of these Texans reside in one of the state's five populous urban counties (Bexar, Dallas, Harris, Tarrant, Travis) while 17% reside in the suburban counties surrounding these five populous urban counties (e.g., Collin, Denton, Fort Bend, Guadalupe, Montgomery, Williamson), 13% reside in counties which serve as regional hubs for the surrounding areas (e.g., Bell, Jefferson, Lubbock, McLennan, Nueces, Smith), 8% reside in populous border counties (Cameron, El Paso, Hidalgo, Webb), and 12% reside in the state's more sparsely populated rural counties.

## Public Opinion on Tax-Funded Vouchers to Help Pay for Private School Tuition

The survey respondents were asked the following three questions related to vouchers: "Do you support or oppose the following proposed public K-12 school related policy reforms?"

- Give low-income parents tax-funded vouchers they can use to help pay for their children to attend private or religious schools of their choice instead of public schools.
- Give low-income parents, only in Texas counties with more than one million residents (Bexar, Collin, Dallas, Harris, Tarrant, Travis), tax-funded vouchers they can use to help pay for their children to attend private or religious schools of their choice instead of public schools.
- Give all parents tax-funded vouchers they can use to help pay for their children to attend private or religious schools of their choice instead of public schools."

Figure 1 provides the proportion of Texans who strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, and strongly oppose each of the three proposed voucher policy reforms (the 11% to 13% who responded “don’t know” are excluded from this analysis).



More than six out of ten (61%) Texans support a policy which would provide low-income Texas parents with tax-funded vouchers they can use to help pay for their children to attend private or religious schools, with 33% strongly supporting this reform and 28% somewhat supporting this reform. Conversely, 39% of Texans oppose this reform, 23% strongly and 16% somewhat.

Slightly more than half (53%) of Texans support a policy which would provide all Texas parents with tax-funded vouchers they can use to help pay for their children to attend private or religious schools, with 29% strongly supporting this reform and 24% somewhat supporting this reform. Slightly less than half (47%) of Texans oppose this policy, 29% strongly and 18% somewhat.

Slightly more than half (53%) of Texans support a policy which would provide all low-income Texas parents in counties with a population greater than 1 million with tax-funded vouchers they can use to help pay for their children to attend private or religious schools, with 26% strongly supporting this reform and 27% somewhat supporting this reform. Slightly less than half (47%) of Texans oppose this policy, 28% strongly and 19% somewhat.

Table 1 provides the proportion of Texans belonging to a wide range of socio-demographic sub-groups that support the provision of tax-funded vouchers to low-income Texans, all Texans, and low-income Texans living in counties with a population greater than 1 million.

**Table 1. Support for Vouchers Among Different Texas Socio-Demographic Sub-Groups - Proportion of Support (%)**

Group	Sub-Group	Low-Income Texans	All Texans	Low-Income Urban Texans
Overall	Overall	61 (33)	53 (29)	53 (26)
Ethnicity/Race	White	55 (29)	50 (28)	43 (20)
	Latino	64 (35)	54 (31)	58 (28)
	Black	78 (40)	65 (30)	74 (36)
Gender	Women	61 (33)	54 (28)	53 (27)
	Men	61 (33)	52 (29)	53 (24)
Generation	Silent/Boomers	52 (30)	54 (31)	40 (20)
	Generation X	57 (34)	55 (30)	51 (24)
	Millennials	65 (34)	54 (28)	57 (29)
	Generation Z	78 (36)	47 (23)	74 (32)
Partisan ID	Democrat	57 (32)	44 (23)	51 (27)
	Independent	67 (33)	59 (32)	54 (27)
	Republican	64 (34)	60 (34)	54 (24)
Religion	Born-Again Christian	73 (44)	63 (37)	64 (37)
	Not Born-Again Christian	56 (30)	49 (25)	49 (22)
Region	Urban Counties	64 (33)	50 (24)	60 (27)
	Suburban Counties	56 (32)	53 (33)	50 (24)
	Regional Hub Counties	57 (33)	55 (34)	40 (20)
	Border Counties	59 (33)	55 (27)	51 (29)
	Rural Counties	59 (32)	62 (37)	43 (22)
Children Under 18 in Home	Yes	66 (39)	57 (29)	57 (31)
	No	59 (31)	52 (29)	52 (24)
Household Income	Less than \$50,000	66 (38)	53 (28)	58 (27)
	\$50,000-\$99,000	58 (28)	53 (28)	50 (25)
	\$100,000 +	57 (33)	55 (31)	46 (25)
Educational Attainment	High School or Less	67 (37)	52 (27)	58 (25)
	Some College/2-Yr Degree	62 (32)	54 (30)	54 (26)
	4-Yr Degree/Postgrad	54 (29)	53 (29)	47 (25)

Proportion strongly in support in parentheses.

Black Texans are significantly more likely than Latino and white Texans to support vouchers for low-income Texans (78% vs. 64% and 55%, respectively), to support vouchers for all Texans (65% vs. 54% and 50%, respectively), and, especially, to support vouchers for low-income Texans in the state’s most populous counties (74% vs. 58% and 43%, respectively), with Latinos also being significantly more likely to support vouchers for low-income Texans in urban areas than whites.

While there are not any salient generational differences in regard to support for vouchers for all Texans, members of Generation Z are significantly more likely than members of the other three generations (Millennials, Generation X, Silent/Boomer) to support vouchers for all low-income Texans (78% vs. 65%, 57% and 52%, respectively) as well as for low-income Texans only in the large urban counties (74% vs. 57%, 51% and 40%, respectively). In addition, Millennials are significantly more likely than members of the Silent/Boomer cohort to support vouchers for all low-income Texans (65% vs. 52%) and for low-income Texans in large urban counties (57% vs. 40%).

Relatively comparable proportions of Independents (67%), Republicans (64%) and Democrats (57%) support vouchers for low-income Texans, with even more comparable proportions of Independents (54%), Republicans (54%) and Democrats (51%) in support of vouchers for low-income Texans in the state's large urban counties. In contrast, significantly more Republicans (60%) and Independents (59%) than Democrats (44%) support the provision of vouchers for all Texans.

Texans who are born-again Christians are significantly more likely than Texans who are not born-again Christians to support vouchers for all low-income Texans (73% vs. 56%), for low-income Texans in urban counties (64% vs. 49%), and for all Texans (63% vs. 49%).

There are only three statistically significant regional differences in support for these three reforms, the first two for the reform which would limit access to vouchers to those with a low-income living in one of the state's six counties with a population greater than one million. While 60% of residents of the state's five populous urban counties support this reform, the same is true for only 43% of rural county residents and 40% of regional hub county residents. The other statistically significant difference is in regard to support for vouchers for all Texans, with 62% of rural residents supporting this reform compared to 50% of urban residents, with 37% of the rural Texans and 24% of the urban Texans strongly supporting this reform. That is, Texans living in rural areas of the state are significantly more likely than Texans living in urban areas of the state to support giving all Texas parents tax-funded vouchers they can use to help pay for their child's private school tuition.

It is important to note that there do not exist any significant differences in support for the provision of vouchers for low-income Texans between rural (59%) and urban (64%) and between rural (59%) and suburban (56%) counties or for the provision of vouchers for all Texans between rural (62%) and suburban (53%) counties.

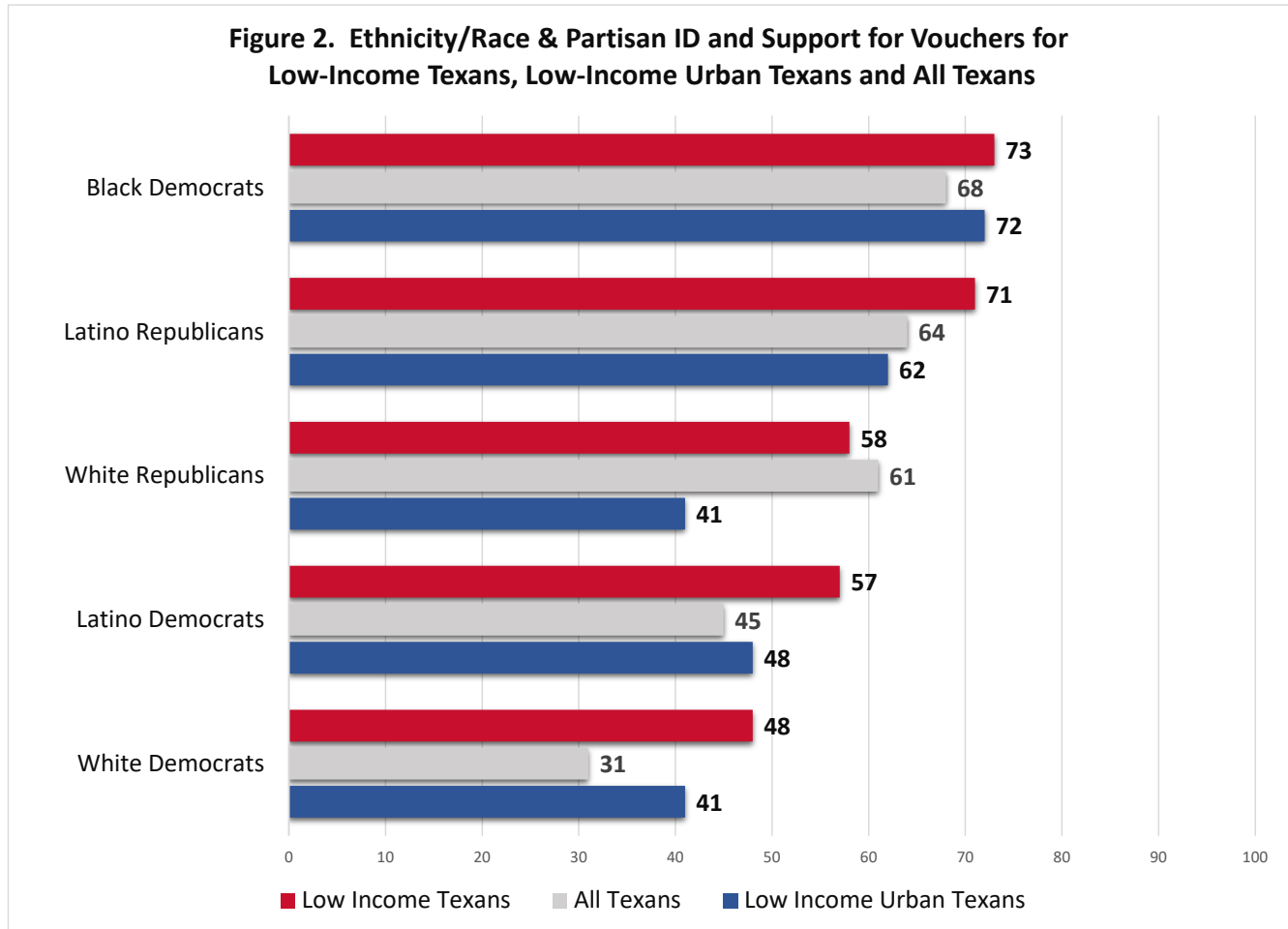
Income differences in support for the three voucher reforms are relatively modest, with however Texans with a household income of less than \$50,000 somewhat more likely than Texans with an income of \$50,000 or more (\$50,000-\$99,99; \$100,000 and more) to support vouchers for low-income Texans (66% vs. 58% and 57%, respectively) and for low-income Texans in urban counties (58% vs. 50% and 46%, respectively). There are no noteworthy household income differences in support for vouchers for all Texans.

Texans whose highest level of educational attainment is a high school degree or less are significantly more likely than Texans whose highest level of educational attainment is a four-year degree or postgraduate degree to support vouchers for low-income Texans (67% vs. 54%) and to support vouchers for low-income Texans in urban counties (58% vs. 47%). There do not exist any noteworthy educational attainment differences in support for vouchers for all Texans.



No salient gender differences are found regarding the support for these three voucher reforms. Similarly, while respondents with children under the age of 18 living at home were more likely to support the three voucher reforms than those respondents without children under the age of 18, these differences are not statistically significant.

Figure 2 contains support for vouchers for low-income Texans, for all Texans and for low-income urban Texans broken down into five distinct ethnic/racial-partisan groups: Black Democrats, Latino Democrats, Latino Republicans, white Democrats, and white Republicans (there are too few Black Republicans in the survey population to analyze this sub-group).



The level of support for vouchers for low-income Texans ranges from highs of 73% among Black Democrats and 71% among Latino Republicans to lows of 48% among white Democrats and 57% among Latino Democrats. In the middle are white Republicans at 58%.

The level of support for vouchers for all Texans ranges from highs of 68% among Black Democrats and 64% among Latino Republicans to lows of 31% among white Democrats and 45% among Latino Democrats. In the middle are white Republicans at 61%

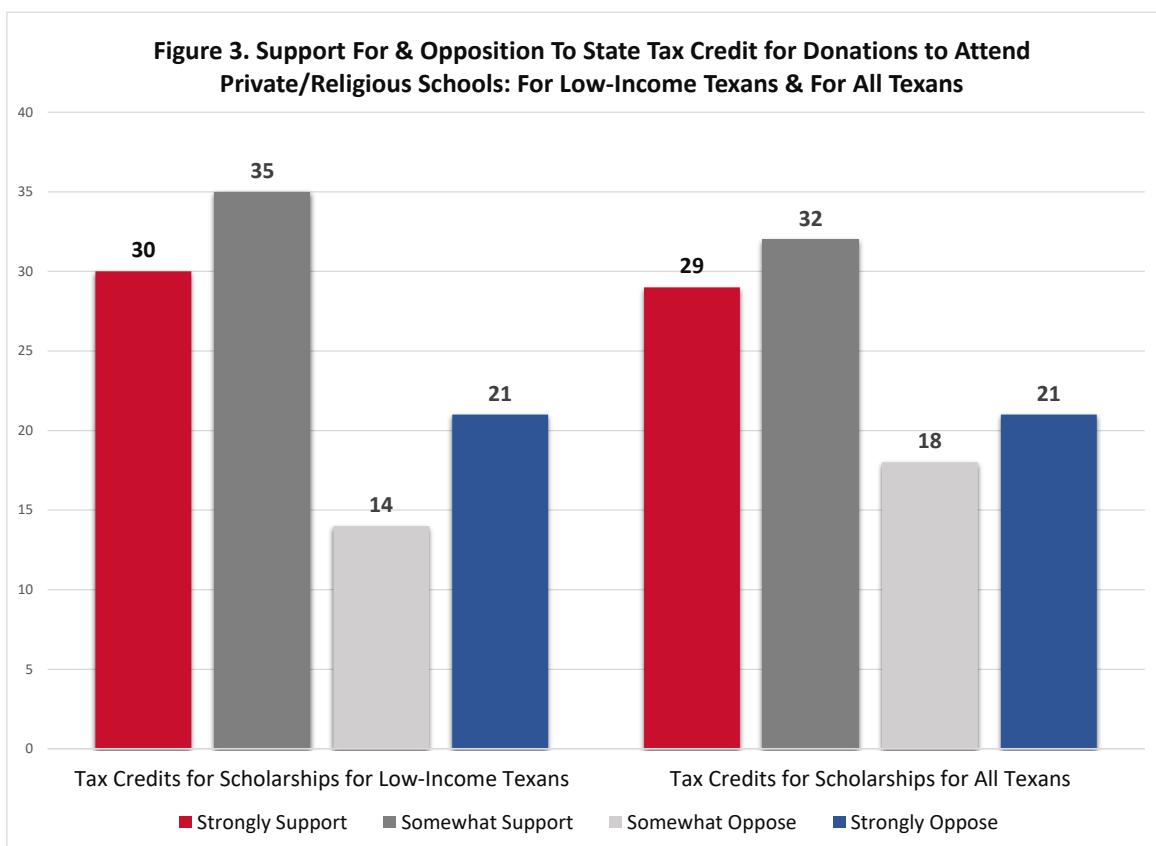
The level of support for vouchers for low-income Texans in urban counties ranges from highs of 72% among Black Democrats and 62% among Latino Republicans to lows of 41% among white Republicans and 41% among white Democrats. In the middle are Latino Democrats at 48%.

## Public Opinion on State Tax-Credits for Scholarships to Pay for Private School Tuition

The survey respondents were asked the following two questions: “Do you support or oppose the following proposed public K-12 school related policy reforms?”

- Provide a state tax credit for individual and corporate donations that pay for scholarships to help low-income parents send their children to private or religious schools.
- Provide a state tax credit for individual and corporate donations that pay for scholarships to help all parents send their children to private or religious schools.”

Figure 3 provides the proportion of Texans who strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose and strongly oppose the two tax credit policy reforms.



Two out of three (65%) Texans support the provision of state tax credits for individual and corporate donations to help low-income Texas parents send their children to private or religious schools, with 30% strongly supporting and 35% somewhat supporting this reform. One in three Texans (35%) opposes this reform, 21% strongly and 14% somewhat.

Three out of five (61%) Texans support the provision of state tax credits for individual and corporate donations to help all Texas parents send their children to private or religious schools, with 29% strongly supporting and 32% somewhat supporting this reform. Two out of five Texans (39%) oppose this reform, 21% strongly and 18% somewhat.

Table 2 provides the proportion of Texans belonging to a wide range of socio-demographic sub-groups that supports legislation that would create state tax credits for donations to help pay for low-income Texans and for all Texans to attend private or religious schools.

**Table 2. Support for State Tax Credits for Donations for Private School Among Texas Socio-Demographic Groups - Proportion of Support (%)**

Group	Sub-Group	Low-Income Texans	All Texans
Overall	Overall	65 (30)	61 (29)
Ethnicity/Race	White	63 (27)	59 (28)
	Latino	63 (31)	59 (30)
	Black	79 (39)	68 (33)
Gender	Women	65 (30)	62 (29)
	Men	66 (30)	60 (29)
Generation	Silent/Boomers	65 (30)	60 (29)
	Generation X	63 (27)	59 (27)
	Millennials	65 (32)	63 (30)
	Generation Z	70 (30)	62 (29)
Partisan ID	Democrat	62 (29)	54 (25)
	Independent	64 (28)	65 (31)
	Republican	72 (33)	67 (33)
Religion	Born-Again Christian	72 (42)	72 (41)
	Not Born-Again Christian	60 (25)	56 (25)
Region	Urban Counties	66 (29)	60 (26)
	Suburban Counties	64 (33)	61 (32)
	Regional Hub Counties	63 (27)	61 (31)
	Border Counties	60 (28)	49 (24)
	Rural Counties	69 (32)	69 (37)
Children Under 18 in Home	Yes	69 (32)	65 (31)
	No	64 (29)	59 (28)
Household Income	Less than \$50,000	69 (32)	61 (32)
	\$50,000-\$99,000	64 (29)	61 (26)
	\$100,000 +	63 (30)	61 (28)
Educational Attainment	High School or Less	67 (31)	61 (30)
	Some College/2-Yr Degree	67 (32)	64 (31)
	4-Yr Degree/Postgrad	63 (27)	59 (27)

Proportion strongly in support in parentheses.

Black Texans are significantly more likely than Latino and white Texans to support state tax credits for donations to help pay for low-income Texans (79% vs. 63% and 63%, respectively) and for all Texans (68% vs. 59% and 59%, respectively) to attend private or religious schools.

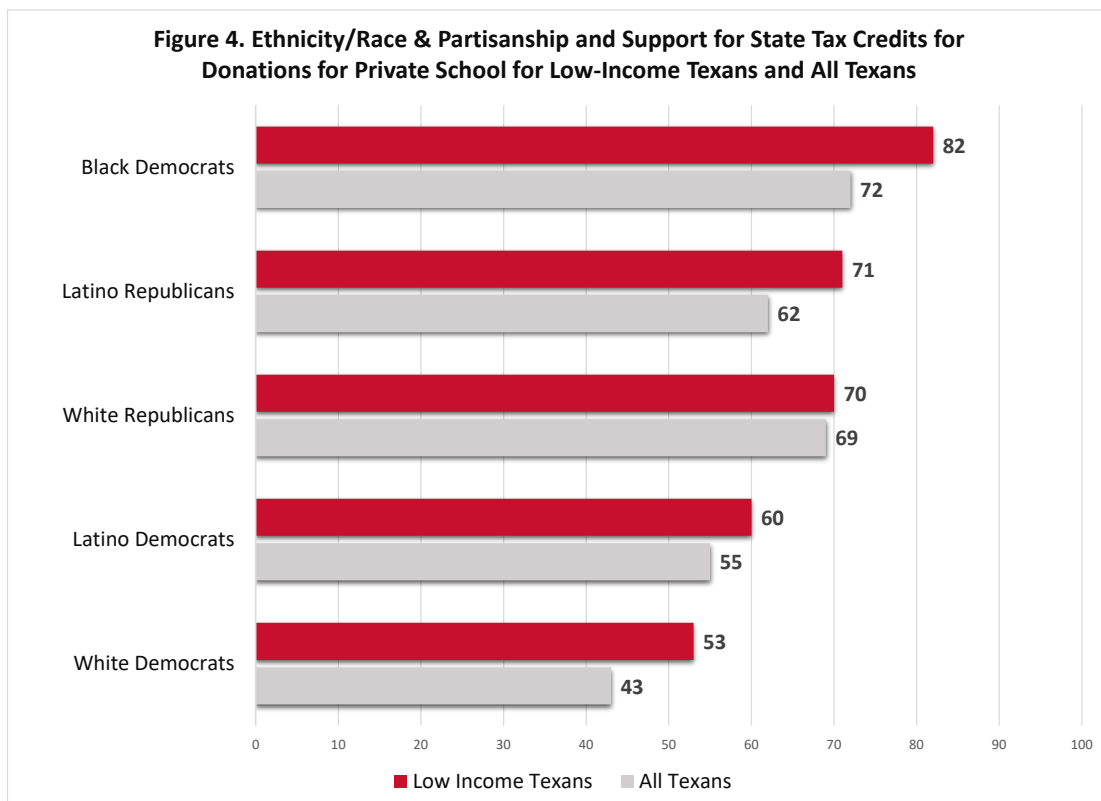
Texas Republicans are significantly more likely than Texas Democrats to support state tax credits for donations to help pay for low-income Texans (72% vs. 62%) and for all Texans (67% vs. 54%) to attend private or religious schools, although a majority of Democrats do support each reform.

Texans who are born-again Christians are significantly more likely than Texans who are not born-again Christians to support state tax credits for donations to help pay for low-income Texans (72% vs. 60%) and for all Texans (72% vs. 56%) to attend private or religious schools.

There do not exist any regional differences in regard to support for state tax credits for donations to help pay for low-income Texans to attend private or religious schools, and only one salient difference in regard to support for tax for state tax credits for donations to help pay for all Texans to attend private or religious schools. The one significant difference involves the 69% of rural county residents who support the reform compared to 49% of border county residents. Of note, while not statistically significant, a higher proportion of residents of rural counties support these two reforms (69% and 69%) than residents of any of the other four county groups.

No salient gender, generational, income or educational attainment differences are found regarding the support for these two reforms. Similarly, while individuals with a child under the age of 18 living in their household are more likely to support each reform (69% vs. 64% and 65% vs. 59%, respectively), these differences are not statistically significant.

Figure 4 contains support for state tax credits for donations for private school for low-income Texans and for all Texans broken down into five distinct ethnic/racial-partisan groups: Black Democrats, Latino Democrats, Latino Republicans, white Democrats, and white Republicans.



The level of support for state tax credits for donations for private school tuition for low-income Texans ranges from highs of 82% among Black Democrats and 71% among Latino Republicans to lows of 53% among white Democrats and 60% among Latino Democrats. In the middle are white Republicans at 70%.

The level of support for state tax credits for donations for private school tuition for all Texans ranges from highs of 72% for Black Democrats and 69% for white Republicans to lows of 43% for white Democrats and 55% for Latino Democrats. In the middle are Latino Republicans at 62%

### Public Opinion on ISD Importance for the Local Community

The survey respondents were asked the following four questions: “How important is your Independent School District (ISD) to:

- Your local community’s identity?
- Your local community’s sense of togetherness?
- Your local community’s economic well-being?
- Your local community’s ability to attract and retain residents?”

Table 3 provides the proportion of respondents who consider their ISD to be very important, somewhat important, not too important and not at all important to their local community’s identity, sense of togetherness, economic well-being, and ability to attract and retain residents.

**Table 3: Importance of Local ISD for Community Identity, Sense of Togetherness, Economic Well-Being & Attracting/Retaining Residents (%)**

Area of Concern	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Too Important	Not At All Important
Community Identity	44	40	11	5
Sense of Togetherness	38	41	13	8
Economic Well-Being	41	36	15	8
Attract/Retain Residents	43	37	14	6

More than eight out of ten (84%) Texans believe their ISD is either very important (44%) or somewhat important (40%) to their local community’s identity, compared to 16% who believe their ISD is either not too important (11%) or not at all important (5%) to their local community’s identity.

More than three out of four (79%) Texans believe their ISD is either very important (38%) or somewhat important (41%) to their local community’s sense of togetherness, compared to 21% who believe their ISD is either not too important (13%) or not at all important (8%) to their local community’s identity.

More than three out of four (77%) Texans believe their ISD is either very important (41%) or somewhat important (36%) to their local community’s economic well-being, compared to 23% who believe their ISD is either not too important (15%) or not at all important (8%) to their local community’s identity.



Eight out of ten (80%) Texans believe their ISD is either very important (43%) or somewhat important (37%) to their local community’s ability to attract and retain residents, compared to 20% who believe their ISD is either not too important (14%) or not at all important (6%) to their local community’s ability to attract and retain residents.

Table 4 provides the proportion of Texans who consider their ISD to be very important for their local community’s identity, sense of togetherness, economic well-being, and ability to attract and retain residents broken down by region of residence: rural, border, regional hub, suburban, urban.

**Table 4: Proportion of Residents By Region Who View ISD as Very Important For Local Community's \_\_\_\_\_. (%)**

Area of Concern	Rural	Border	Regional Hub	Suburban	Urban
Identity	52	36	49	39	43
Sense of Togetherness	46	32	45	35	38
Economic Well-Being	36	34	47	34	44
Ability to Attract & Retain Residents	44	31	48	39	45

Residents of rural counties are significantly more likely than residents of suburban counties to believe that their ISD is very important to their local community’s identity (52% vs 39%) and sense of togetherness (46% vs. 35%).

There do not exist any significant differences among the rural and urban and suburban counties in regard to the proportion of residents who believe their ISD is very important to their local community’s economic well-being (36% vs. 44% vs. 34%) and ability to attract and retain residents (44% vs. 45% vs. 39%).

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