

Survey with Placebo

A Method for Evaluating the Influence of Advocacy

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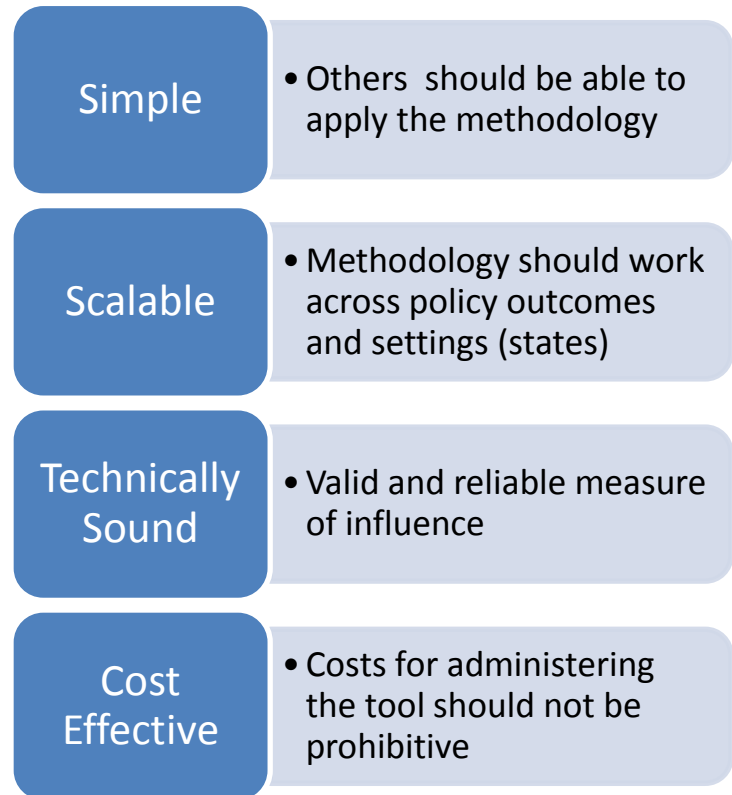
Why this study?

- Rise of a new generation of advocacy organizations, fueled by philanthropic dollars
- Critical questions for funders: Do their investments in advocacy make a difference?
- Extant literature offers a lot of advice on how to influence policy, but little empirical evidence linking actual tactics to outcomes
- The first step to building the evidence base on advocacy is to establish common units of measurement for influence.

Research Objectives

1. Design and validate a methodological framework for measuring the influence of advocacy organizations on education policy
2. Develop a cost-effective tool that can be used by funders to evaluate their advocacy investments

Design Requirements of the New Measure



Proposed Solution: Survey with Placebo (SwP)

Overview of the SwP

1. Identify policy of interest (e.g., passage of reform bill)
2. Survey legislators and political insiders after policy outcome is known
3. Ask respondents to rate the influence of specific advocacy groups and tactics on policy outcome (1-7 Scale)
4. Include “Placebo” organization known to have had zero influence on policy outcome
5. Estimate the influence of each advocacy group by comparing their average influence rating to the placebo’s average rating.

The Louisiana Pilot

How much influence did advocacy groups have on the passage of Louisiana's 2012 school choice bill?

Policy Outcome: *HB 976 (Act 2: School Choice Act)*

- Signed into law April 2012
- Statewide expansion of Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence program (vouchers)
- Gave the state board authority to approve additional charter authorizers
- Parent trigger and course choice

Research Stages

Stage 1: Intelligence gathering

- Interviews with target advocacy groups
- Inventory groups' advocacy tactics
- Identify key players



Stage 2: SwP Administration

- Hard copy and online options
- Follow-up phone calls
- Office visits to key legislative agents
- Short form option for non-respondents



Stage 3: Critical path analysis

- Look inside the black box
- Verify advocacy groups' hypothesized links between tactics and the policy outcome

The Louisiana SwP

Advocacy Groups

Proponents

Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO)

Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools (LAPCS)

Louisiana Federation for Children (LFC)

Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI)

Opponents

Louisiana Federation of Teachers (LFT)

Louisiana School Boards Association (LSBA)

Placebo

[De-identified]



Personal communication with representatives from *Louisiana Federation for Children (LFC)*

Advocacy Activities

Personal: Personal communication, Political support

Indirect: Grassroots campaign, Media outreach

Informational: Research material, Seminars and events

Survey with Placebo (SwP)

Instructions: “Please sort the activities according to their influence on the outcome of House Bill 976 (choice legislation).”

Least Influential → Most Influential

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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Findings: Response rates

Table A4. SwP response rates by respondent group

Respondent Group	Sampling Frame	Long Form Respondents	Short Form Respondents	Total Respondents	Overall Response Rate
General Legislative Agents	107	3	13	16	15.0%
Key Legislative Agents	35	9	4	13	37.1%
Political Insiders	52	22	21	43	82.7%
Overall	194	34	38	72	37.1%

Note: Table A4 shows total survey response rates. Response rate is calculated as the percentage of sampling frame that formally declined or completed the long or short.

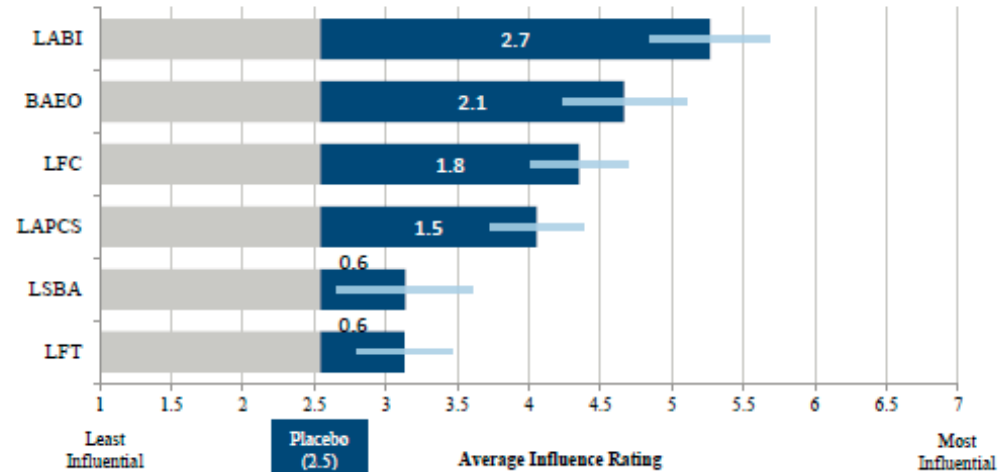
Source: Survey results. Author's calculations

Findings: Overall influence of advocacy groups

Takeaways

- All six advocacy groups received significantly higher average influence scores than the placebo
- Opposing groups receiving the lowest.
- Significant discrimination in advocacy scores between groups

Figure 2. Advocacy group influence ratings relative to placebo



Note: Figure 2 shows the mean influence ratings for each advocacy group, highlighting the difference between the group's mean rating and the placebo mean rating. Thin light blue bars show the 95% confidence interval around each mean. The gray bars indicate the placebo mean rating. Means presented are means used in paired t-tests, thus observations without ratings for all groups, including the placebo, are excluded. Colored segments (and corresponding label) highlight the difference between group mean and placebo mean. (n=61)

Source: Survey results. Author's calculations.

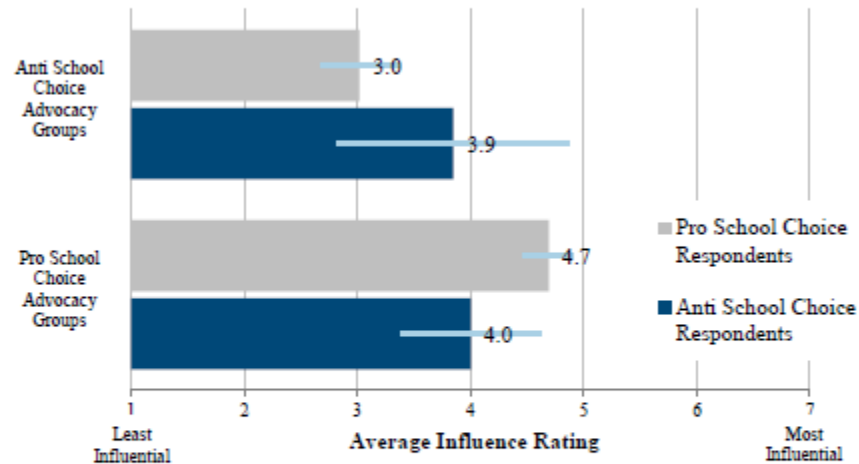
Findings: Influence rating by respondents' position on the reform

Takeaways

Advocacy groups garner significantly higher ratings from respondents with similar positions on the legislation.

While “anti” respondents attributed more influence to “anti” advocacy groups than their “pro” respondent colleagues, they still attributed more absolute influence to “pro” advocacy groups.

Figure 3. Influence ratings by respondent and advocacy group position on school choice



Note: Figure 3 shows pooled means for all pro-HB 976 advocacy groups (LABI, BAEO, LFC, LAPCS) and anti-HB 976 advocacy groups (LFT, LSBA), according to respondent position, “Pro” or “Anti”, on HB 976. Mean ratings are indicated in label outside bar. Thin light blue bars show 95% confidence intervals around each mean. Nine respondents did not have readily identifiable positions on HB 976 and are excluded from the calculation shown in Figure 3. (“Pro” n = 45, “Anti” n = 10).

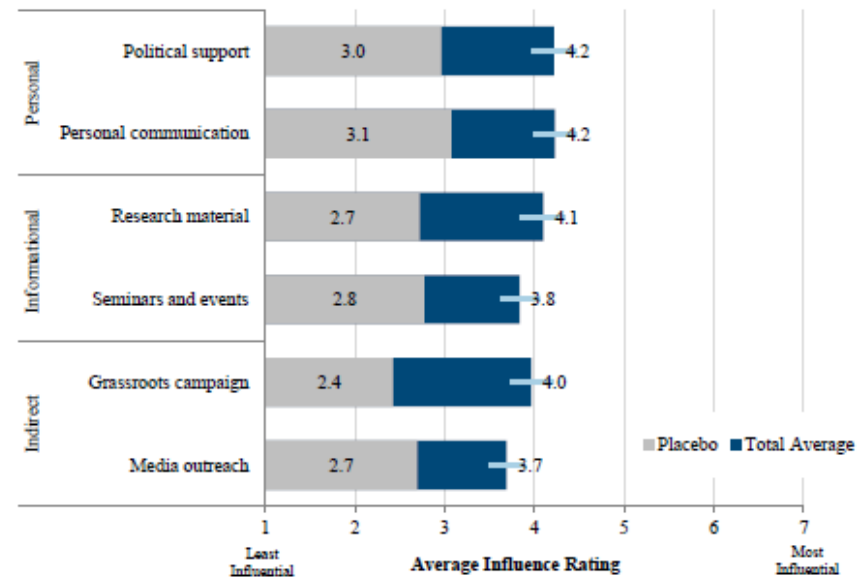
Source: Survey results. Author’s calculations.

Findings: Influence rating by advocacy tactic

Takeaways

- Personal advocacy tactics were attributed more influence than informational and indirect tactics.
- Most of the variation lies between advocacy groups rather than between tactics

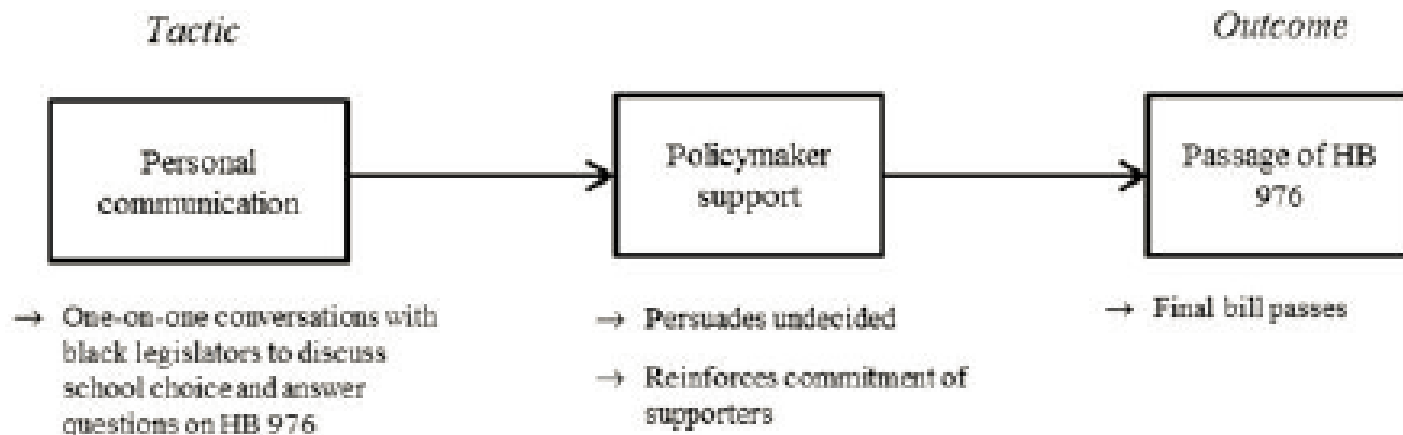
Figure 4. Average influence rating by advocacy tactic



Note: Figure 4 shows mean influence rating by advocacy tactic. Results calculated from long form survey responses. Total bar indicates mean tactic rating for all organizations. Gray segment of bar indicates mean tactic rating for placebo organization. Navy blue segment highlights difference between placebo mean and total mean. Thin light blue bars show 95% confidence intervals around each mean. Tactics are grouped by their influence channel, identified in the rotated, group label. (n=27)
Source: Survey results. Author's calculations.

Critical Path Analysis: “Inside the Black Box”

Figure 5. Influence path of BAEO personal communication



Critical Path Analysis: “Inside the Black Box”

Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO)

*Front of the House,
Represent and Persuade*

Key issue(s):

Vouchers

Critical Paths:

- Personal communication
- Grassroots advocacy
- Grasstops advocacy

Louisiana Federation for Children (LFC)

*Back of the House, Finance
and Cover*

Key issue(s):

Vouchers

Critical Paths:

- Campaign contributions
- Providing cover

Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools (LAPCS)

*Out of the Way,
Inform and Cooperate*

Key issue(s):

Charters, Accountability

Critical Paths:

- Information
- Coalition building

Key Learnings from the Louisiana Pilot

- SwP was able to detect significant differences in influence ratings between advocacy groups and the placebo and between advocacy groups.
- Placebo had the lowest average rating of all advocacy groups, but not all respondents assigned the placebo the lowest possible influence rating.
- Hard copies are a must for getting responses from legislators, but concern that long form SwP was too burdensome and discouraged participation.
- Short form had higher response rate and found comparable overall advocacy group ratings to long form SwP.

Key Learnings from the Louisiana Pilot

- LABI was identified as most influential advocacy group. Pro school choice groups rated more influential than anti-school choice groups.
- Governor Bobby Jindal was identified as dominant force behind passage of HB 976. Advocacy groups influenced legislators, but may not have been the decisive factor.

Next Steps

- Administering the SwP in North Carolina and Tennessee in 2014 (voucher policies in both locations)
- Focus on building a scalable tool to share with field (comparing traditional Likert survey to card sorting tool)

Q&A Discussion