

Understanding the Drivers of Vocational School Availability and Popularity Across the
United States

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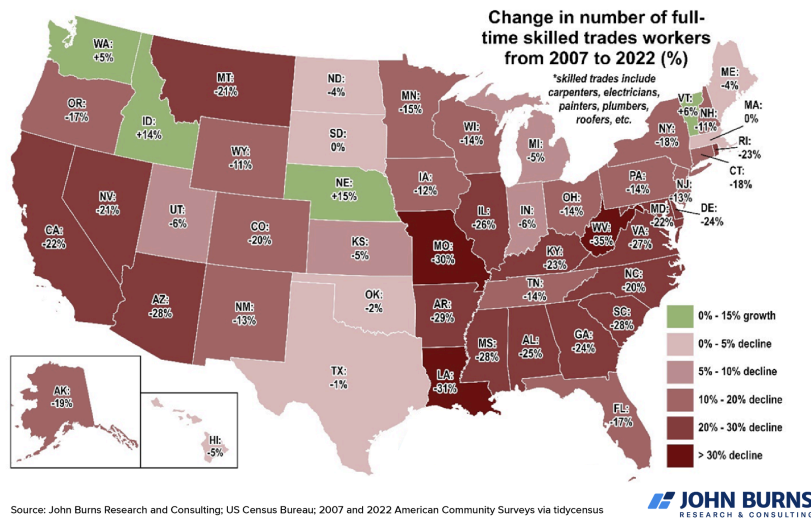
Presented to Chengzhi Yin, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Syracuse University

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1. Introduction:

Background:

Have you ever wondered why your highschool, compared to others, did or did not offer vocational/trade school programs? After decades of declining enrollment in vocational programs, an urgent skilled labor shortage has slowly been hurting society. Vocational education plays a



Research Question:

What is the primary factor explaining the variation in vocational school availability and popularity across the U.S.?

Research Objectives:

1. To analyze the extent of variation in vocational school availability and popularity across U.S. states.
2. To investigate the role of societal perceptions in influencing vocational education trends.
3. To identify other contributing factors to the variation, such as state-funding, nationwide-funding, and labor demands.

Significance of the Study:

Understanding the primary factor, or factors, surrounding the lack of vocational school availability around the U.S. can help lawmakers and school administrators redirect resources to solve the problem. We can compare these structural factors to student opinion to discover whether the underlying problem is systemic or a changing in societal viewpoints.

Research Hypothesis:

Variations in vocational school availability and popularity across the U.S. is primarily driven by a societal stigma of choosing vocational skills over traditional education.

Arguments:

There is a lack of public school funding and lack of knowledge surrounding wages/job security of vocational work. In terms of state and national level funding, states with more centralized education systems and coherent policies are more likely to have consistent and accessible vocational programs. Opposingly, more decentralized systems will lead to more variation in program availability, as local districts and counties will have more freedom on how to implement vocational education reforms. This could lead to deviations from a prior national program with a set structure that was supposed to be followed. On the social and behavioral science side, there is a political and academic stigma around not going to university created by parents with generational differences.

2. Methodology:**Research Design:**

A mix of quantitative and qualitative methods will be used for this study. This will allow for broader analysis across regions and demographics by identifying patterns and correlations. Using both methods will provide different but complementary perspectives, allowing for a deeper understanding surrounding all aspects of the research.

Data Collection:**1. Quantitative Data:**

- Public opinion (high school and college aged individuals) data from surveys and reports about the perception of choosing vocational tracks.
- Employment rates, industry growth, and labor market/workforce demand data.

- State level data on the number and distribution of vocational schools across the U.S.

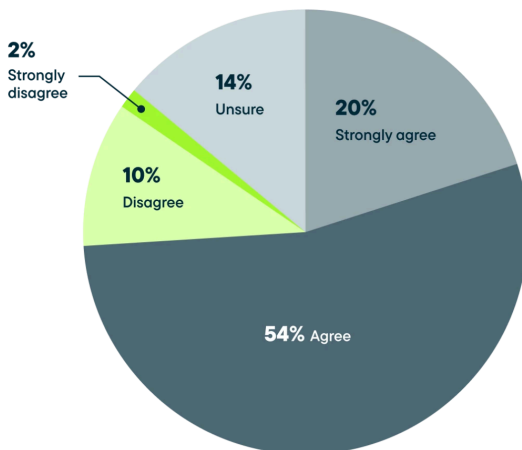
2. Qualitative Data:

- Use of social media and academic literature to analyze societal consensus/discussion around vocational education.
- State policy, legislature documents, and funding reports to understand priorities of educators and state administrators/lawmakers. Then compare states with high and low vocational school availability to uncover key differences.

Expected Outcomes:

Please rate the degree to which you agree with the following statement:

"There is a stigma associated with going to a vocational school over a traditional four-year university."



Jobber. (2023). Blue Collar Report: Gen Z and the Uncertain Future of the Trades.

1. Identification of societal, economic, and policy-driven factors contributing to variations in vocational school availability and popularity.
2. Evidence showing the impact of societal stigma on vocational education trends.
3. Practical recommendations for states to address stigma and promote vocational education as a viable career pathway

3. Materials:

Quantitative and Qualitative Data Sources:

- One Wisconsin Institute report on the impact of student loan debt on the national economy. Contains the average repayment time of student debt (One Wisconsin Institute, n.d.).
- Association of Public Land Grant Universities data on the average debt at graduation from a four-year college (APLU, n.d.).
- Impact of federal and state policies on the quality of vocational education in secondary schools by Cathleen Stasz and Susan Bodilly. The case study from this article discusses how federal/state policies, particularly the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act (Perkins III), have impacted vocational education in the U.S. The study focused on the implementation of Perkins III in seven states, analyzing how federal funds were used to support vocational education, the accountability measures introduced, and the challenges states faced in complying with these policies (Stasz, n.d.).
- The Value of Vocational Education in the U.S. High Schools by Daniel Kreisman and Kevin Strange. This case explores the connection between vocational/technical education and high school graduates' success in college/the workforce. Using data from around 4,000 adults, the research challenges the belief that weaker students are funneled into vocational classes (Kreisman & Stange, 2019).
- Vocationalism of secondary education by John H. Bishop & Ferran Mañe. This discusses/examines the economic benefit/return of going to vocational school along with the societal effects and benefits it has (Bishop & Mañe, 2005).

- Jobber's 2024 Blue Collar Report which provides quantitative data on societal perceptions and industry trends.
- State-level funding and policy reports.
- Labor market demand reports from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

4. **Conclusion**

This research will provide a wide understanding of the factors influencing the availability and popularity of vocational schools across the United States, with a particular focus on societal perceptions. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the study will uncover systemic barriers and stigmas that are contributing to the declining vocational school trends. These findings will hopefully offer insight to policymakers and educators on the correct future course of action. Ultimately, this work seeks to support the revival of vocational schools as a respected and viable pathway for students nationwide.

5. **References:**

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