

# How Does Vladimir Kogan Spend ...hool Board Meetings, Of Course

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## SPEAKERS

Vladimir Kogan, Eva Dale, David Staley

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### V Vladimir Kogan 00:04

They care about partisanship, they care about culture wars, they care about employment, they care about whether their school in their community is open or closed. But, those things really are not about our kids learning, are they learning enough, are they on track to graduate with the skills that need to be successful?

### E Eva Dale 00:18

From the heart of the Ohio State University on the Oval, this is Voices of Excellence from the College of Arts and Sciences, with your host, David Staley. Voices focuses on the innovative work being done by faculty and staff in the College of Arts and Sciences at The Ohio State University. From departments as wide ranging as art, astronomy, chemistry and biochemistry, physics, emergent materials, mathematics and languages among many others, the college always has something great happening. Join us to find out what's new now.

### D David Staley 00:55

Joining me today in the ASC Tech Studios is Vladimir Kogan, Professor of Political Science at The Ohio State University College of the Arts and Sciences. His research focuses on the intersection of politics and public policy in areas including education and social policy. He serves on the editorial board of Urban Affairs Review and is affiliated with Ohio State's Institute for Democratic Engagement and Accountability, the Education Governance and Accountability Project, and the Translational Data Analytics Institute. Dr. Kogan, welcome to Voices.

### V Vladimir Kogan 01:28

Thanks for having me.

**D** David Staley 01:30

Well, and I'm very interested in the book project that you're engaged in right now. The working title is "No Adult Left Behind", I love that title. What are you arguing or what are you observing in the book?

**V** Vladimir Kogan 01:41

Yeah, thanks. So, the book is about education politics, and I've had kind of a long standing hobby of going to school board meetings, actually something that started in high school. So, in the same way that people watch sports, I watch school board meetings.

**D** David Staley 01:52

Interesting.

**V** Vladimir Kogan 01:53

And so, the book is really trying to understand education policy, education politics, and really the dilemma in how we govern schools, which in the United States is for the most part through elections, but kids don't vote, only adults vote. And it turns out that the kinds of adults that vote tend to be very different than the kids, and their interests are not always aligned. So, one of my arguments is that a lot of educational policy that we get is driven, really, by adult politics and by adult agendas that sometimes align with what's good for kids, but a lot of time is at best orthogonal, and maybe at worst in conflict with what kids need and the kind of educational experiences that is really necessary.

**D** David Staley 02:30

Is it just - and I'm going to dive more into what that means - but is it just kids? In other words, is it just education? There are lots of things where kids might have an interest different from adults, are we seeing this in other sorts of areas - nutrition, let's say, healthcare?

**V** Vladimir Kogan 02:43

Yeah, it's a good question. I think it's probably the case that, you know, there's always these questions, and certainly in criminal justice policy, right, it's mostly people who don't commit crimes that make policies that affect those who do. But I think education is unique, partly because of the scale, right? When you look at how much we spend on government services, education is just a massive chunk, we're talking about hundreds of billions of dollars per year. But I think second, it is very, very salient, and it tends to tap into the kinds of culture war issues and the kinds of things that really get adults fired up, and again, I think often in an unhealthy

way, in ways that leads to policies that are, in the long run, probably not optimal for kids, and of course, what happens to kids ultimately affects all of us, right? Because the quality of education affects poverty rates, it affects the economy, it affects national defense, so, to some extent, society as a whole has a vested interest in the outcomes. But again, I think there too the adult pressures and adult incentives aren't necessarily aligned with those broader societal goals.

D

David Staley 03:36

Well, say a little more about that, about this disconnect - what sorts of things you're talking about here? So, as you say, you spend a lot of time in school board meetings, which I find... I find a fascinating hobby. Tell us the sorts of things that you're observing, and I understand there are many, many, many thousands of school boards across the country - what sorts of things do you observe?

V

Vladimir Kogan 03:41

Yeah, you know, I think you can think about it in a variety of ways, so, you know, certainly in some of the more recent culture war debates about how we teach history, and the critical race theory arguments, I think there's elements of that in there. But, I think there's other dimensions, so for example, you know, a lot of educational policies deal with employment, and in many communities, public schools are one of the only sources of well paying jobs that have retirement benefits, and there becomes, I think, a real question of, you know, sometimes what's doing what's good for employees of public schools may not be what's good for kids and vice versa. And certainly where I think we've seen that recently, and will almost certainly see more of it, is regarding school closure, right? We've had in many communities shrinking enrollments, part of that is due to just demographic change, we have fewer school-aged kids, some of that's due to more options, families leaving for charter schools and private schools. But, we still have the same number of buildings. And one of the questions is, you know, at some point, you have to close some of these buildings, because there are real costs and there are real challenges of trying to run an effective school system by spreading your resources so thin. But one of the topics that comes up is, what about the jobs? What about the custodians, what about the cafeteria workers, what about the teachers? And I think in many cases, it's really those adult considerations that drive policy, the employment considerations, even if it means, on the margin, lower quality education for kids. Yeah, it's a great question. You know, we have this project that's not related to the book, but we tried and we had students actually watch just hundreds of school board meetings and code what the board members are spending time on, and this is kind of related to work that a friend of mine named AJ Crabill, who is a school board governance coach, is really passionate about. And one of the big things that comes out of that, I think, is how little time that's spent in school board meetings, how little of the things that get the most attention, the most argument, are actually related to learning and to student outcomes. Really, again, things related to employment, to collective bargaining, to buildings, to curricula, to, you know, passing symbolic resolutions on big national issues - that seems to be where much of the time is spent. Very little time is spent on, can kids read? If not, why not? Can kids do basic math? If not, why not? And when you think about what schools actually are, we think should be doing at minimum, right, it's those things. And so, there is the

same disconnect between what school board members mostly argue about, what community members come in and speak about, public comment, versus really the core fundamental goals of public education.

**D** David Staley 06:17

Are those other, what, academic or core issues - is that handled by some other entities, or they're just not discussed or handled at all?

**V** Vladimir Kogan 06:26

Well, yeah, I mean, it... ultimately it, they're handled by the school district, and that's, that's certainly when we think about levers of policy, levers of democratic control, it's really the school district for a lot of these decisions that are made, because the school board members set compensation policies, they set graduation requirements, they set student discipline rules, what happens if you misbehave. And so, if we're concerned about all of those things, at the end of the day, the buck stops with the school board. Now, you know, I will make a devil's advocate argument. So, you know, when I make this point, many people say, well, schools aren't just about education, right? They are communities, right? They're important institutions, alumni really care about their schools, you know, people care about marching bands, they care about football teams, they care about the space. They want to have, you know, they want to have the building in their community, and they care about the jobs as well, and all those are certainly legitimate and valid. But, I think that where we run into challenges is when there's trade offs, when we have to prioritize, when doing one thing means doing less of the other. And what I've noticed, I think is, we rarely accept the kinds of arguments we see in education. So, for example, if we had a public water system that was constantly causing cholera, and people said, well, you know, yeah, we want to clean water, we don't want cholera, but think about the jobs and think about the institution, think, this is a community organization. Nobody would say, yeah, well, we'll take a little bit of cholera so we can have more jobs, and so we can have, you know, a nice water plant that looks nice that the community feels good about. But in education, we accept those arguments all the time and we say, well, maybe it's okay to sacrifice some of the academic outcomes to get some of these other community goals.


**D** David Staley 07:55


Is some of this - well, I don't know how I want to phrase this. Does it have to do with who school board members are? In other words, has your research looked at, you know, who is a school board member? And again, I understand this is a, this is a difficult generalization to make.


**V** Vladimir Kogan 08:08

Yeah, it's a good question. So, we have some data on who school board members are, and yeah, it may be, it may be related to that. So, certainly, I think we run into two kinds of issues. One is it is, for the most part, an unpaid position with a few exceptions, so it's very much a volunteer position. And you obviously deal with a lot of crap, so it's like not, not a very fun job. And so, it tends to track I think, two kinds of people: one are kind of true believers, activists

that really, that have a passion and an agenda that they're pushing, and on the flip side, it's also kind of the bottom rung of a ladder to higher office, so it attracts people who have political ambition. And I think in both those cases, those are maybe not the optimal candidates, because, again, people who are agenda driven, it very much depends on whether that's actually the right agenda. And I think sometimes it isn't, sometimes it's not, and similarly, I think with candidates looking for high office. But, I think that's only one piece of it. I think when we think about elections, and that's how we pick school board members, you know, it's not just about who runs, but it's about who votes, right? It's about the voters. And there, we think we have a lot more evidence. So, we've done some really interesting work, because voter files are public records, so you can actually go and see who's voting in school board elections. And we worked with a company that's, that works with campaigns that takes the voter files, which are public record, and then buys a lot of proprietary commercial data, so we learned a lot by adding in this proprietary data, you know, what's their income, what's their occupation, et cetera. And one of things we learned is, do they have kids in the household, because it turns out that that commercial data is also available. And I think what you see is that the typical voter in a typical school board election, and certainly in Ohio, where we have odd year elections for school boards, where turnout is somewhere on the order of 15%.

 David Staley 09:45  
15, one five percent?

 Vladimir Kogan 09:48  
That's what you get in November of odd years, when there's nothing else on the ballot - that the average voter looks very different from the non-voter. So, you know, the average age is over 55, so it's for the most part people that no longer have school aged kids, so maybe their interest in education is somewhat different, it's maybe somewhat removed. And also, especially when you look at large urban districts, which tend to be the districts that serve the most disadvantaged students and also the districts that have the most academic struggles, in those communities, not only is there this age divide, but there's also a demographic divide. So, Columbus is about, you know, 80% not-white; the majority of voters are white. So, you have, you know, for the most part, elderly white voters without kids who are electing school boards, who make policy for the most part, low income kids of color, and there's really no reason to think that the interests of voters and those kids are aligned. And of course, democracy incentivizes responding to voters. So, I think a lot of it is not just who's on school boards, but what are the electoral and political incentives they face. And I think that's determined for the most part by who's voting and the fact that people who vote may not have the same interest as the kids I think is a big part of the story as well.

 David Staley 10:54  
Your study is national. I mean, you were just giving the examples for Ohio - are you looking at the nation?

 Vladimir Kogan 11:00

Yeah. So, we've done this in a number of states. Yeah, so this is this is a long running project and about eight years ago, we actually got a fairly large grant from the Spencer Foundation to go out and collect this data. And it turns out, it's actually really hard to get because election administration in United States is very decentralized, right? So we really have to go state by state, in some cases, school district by school district. In some cases, you know, we can, we can download things online, in most cases, we have to file records requests. So it really took years, it took thousands of dollars and paying record fees and having undergrads going through PDFs and coding this to actually put together the first kind of national data set of school board elections. So, a lot of, a lot of statistics are coming from that project.

D

David Staley 11:38

So you were talking about, for instance, demographic differences or demographic patterns in Ohio - in looking at the national picture, the national data, are there regional distinctions, what sorts of, what sorts of large scale patterns do you see?

V

Vladimir Kogan 11:52

Yeah, so the Ohio story, I think, is fairly representative, and certainly one thing we see, in general, on average, that majority non-white school districts in terms of students still have for the most part majority white electorates. And so, that's true in Ohio, that's true in the other states we look at. The main difference you see is really not not regional, it's really a has to do with election timing actually has to do with when the elections are held. And you see a lot of variation across states. So that said, Ohio, we elect school boards in November of odd years when turnout is very low. Some states have elections in November, even years, in particular, at the same time as a presidential election. And there you see very different stories of turnouts much higher, a much larger share of voters are parents. And it turns out that matters, and it matters in one particular dimension, which is how much do voters care about student learning? Do they reward school districts that are doing a better job at teaching kids academic skills and do they punish incumbents, do they not elect incumbents in school districts that are doing a worse job? And the only time you see that relationship, the only time you see electoral accountability, is actually in November, even year elections, at the same time as this presidential race. And we think that's partly because that's when actually there's more parents voting, and parents are probably the people that care most about, ultimately, the student outcomes that the districts are creating.

D

David Staley 13:06

You used the term education or educational politics at the beginning of this conversation. And I know there's certainly... my sense is that school boards are more in the news today than they were maybe even five years or so ago. Are the issues and debates today more political, or... maybe I should say it this way: are they more concerned with student learning outcomes? Whatever you might say, for people's politics, it strikes me that the debates right now are as much about what's being taught in the classroom, as opposed to, you know, are we hiring janitors and these sorts of things. Is, is this a misperception on my part, or...?

V

Vladimir Kogan 13:42

No, I think that's an accurate perception, and I think... I think the answer depends on how far back you go. If you look over the last 20 years, it is probably the case that these adult culture war issues are getting more attention, but it's also probably the case that, in some ways, our recent past is an anomaly, right? Between about 1988 and really 2008, we were kind of in this unusual period where we had a bipartisan consensus, and it started with President Bush and it continued under President Clinton, and then the younger President Bush and President Obama. We had this bipartisan reform coalition that believed in... believed in accountability, believed in annual testing. And if you look over the longer time period, that was actually kind of the exception, it was a historical accident. And some of this came about in the 1980s in response to a big report that said, you know, the state of American education is in crisis, the Soviet Union is going to win, things like that. But if you look over, you know, a hundred year span, I think where we are today is very, very typical. So, again, a hundred years ago, we had very passionate debates about evolution, we had actually many of the same debates about teaching history. So, in the 1930s, there was a textbook published by a guy named Harold Rugg, and people read it and said he's advocating for socialism, and the American Legion started this national campaign, and it was just as divisive as the debates today about critical race theory and slavery are. And then, if you kind of go a bit further, we had debates about prayer in school. In the 1990s, we had debates about sex education. So, I think these issues come and go, I think what's unusual today - and this is part of the argument I make in the book - is we've always been, I think, very divided, that these adult issues had been always been very salient, but they were, for the most part, not correlated with partisanship. So, if you look at evolution, that was not a Democratic or Republican issue, it was much more a religious versus less religious and urban versus rural. And in the last ten years, what's happened is, increasingly, this divide is also correlating with Democrats or Republicans. And I think that is where you see, maybe, it take on kind of an even more serious level of conflict. And it probably reflects some changes in the media environment, I think there's an important story there, but when these conflicts become correlated with partisanship, then I think in some ways they become even more intractable, and they become even more, you know, even... even harder to find common ground on. Because it's not just about education, it's really about which team is going to win. Well, you guess you sort of anticipated my next question: has education always mattered to the American electorate to the degree that it seems to matter right now? I don't know if matter is the right word, but. Yeah, I don't know... I don't know how much it matters. Certainly one way of asking does it matter is, does it predict voting behavior, right? Does it make or break who voters support? And I don't know that we we actually see much evidence of that, maybe there's been a few, you know, in Florida, in particular, a few school board elections. But it seems like, again, for the most part, when it comes to gubernatorial elections or presidential elections, education is not number one, or number two, or number three, and again, I think that's pretty typical. Again, I would say in the late 1980s, when there was a sense of crisis and when you did have prominent national officials really try to advocate for themselves as being the education president, I think we had kind of a period of time where politicians acted as though it mattered - again, to what extent that perception was accurate or not, I'm not not so certain. But really, for the most part, I think education is not the leading issue that decides whether people vote for a "D" or an "R" on Election Day, which is I think, again, where we get some some of these issues, because for the most part, politicians are not really focusing on on the median voter. In some ways, they really are focusing on particular interest groups, really vocal activists who care really passionately, and some of those might be activists like Moms For Liberty, but some of those might be, like, teacher's unions who have endorsements to give, who maybe are active in local politics, and then party endorsements, and may have some money to contribute as well. Yeah, do you wrestle with that at all? I mean, because this is, the argument is always

made that unions are very powerful, the teacher's union, especially in big cities - do you wrestle with this at all in their relationship with school boards? Yeah. So, this is, actually again, there's a lot of research on this topic, and I think it is the case that, that teacher's unions are very powerful in that candidates who are endorsed by teacher's unions win about 80 percent of the time. So, in terms of predicting school board elections...

**D** David Staley 17:51

Candidates to school boards?

**V** Vladimir Kogan 17:52

Candidates to school boards, correct, yeah. Now, what that means, I think it's hard to know, and what the mechanism is is hard to know. You know, are teacher's unions endorsing effective candidates, right? Is that why they're getting the endorsement? So, you know, walking through some of this research, so, you know, there was, for a long time, an argument that the reason why teacher's unions were so powerful was because of a low turnout, that nobody voted except for teachers, and of course, if teachers are the only ones who are voting - and they vote because their jobs are at stake, so they have, obviously, an incentive to vote - then that's how they're being so effective, by voting at higher rates. Now, we actually tested that hypothesis, and through this data, because in addition to getting the voter file, we actually got state licensure data, so we knew which voters were teachers who were not, and it turns out that story is incorrect. Even in the lowest turnout elections, a vast, vast majority of voters don't work for school districts. I think what we see more evidence is teacher's union endorsements have other benefits for candidates. Some of those are financial, but some of those are in the signals that they give to voters, and we've done some cool experiments where we give voters information about hypothetical candidates and then we tell them, you know, do they have kids or not? You know, what's their occupation, what's their demographics? And then, are they endorsed by different groups? And we go all the way from the Columbus Dispatch, the local newspaper, to the Chamber of Commerce, to the teacher's union. And when you do that kind of research, it turns out that the teacher's union endorsement is the biggest bang for the buck in voter behavior. So, voters trust teachers, and as a result, they trust teacher's unions, and so, if you tell them that somebody is endorsed by the teacher's union, that's a huge boost from regular voters, because they think that's a signal of quality. They think those candidates will not only increase teacher salaries, which it seems like that's what teacher's unions mostly care about, but they also think those are the candidates that will be most effective at improving student outcomes, even though I think the evidence for that latter claim is probably, at best... at best, mixed and probably not very strong.

**D** David Staley 19:43

Why did you decide to title the book "No Adult Left Behind"?

**V** Vladimir Kogan 19:47

Yeah, it's a play on "No Child Left Behind", which was a big national law that was passed in 2001 and the premise of the law was that every child should be proficient in math and reading



2001, and the premise of the law was that every child should be proficient in math and reading by the time they graduate. In fact, there was a goal, that by 2014, we would have 100% proficiency, and our goal was never reached. And I think the reason why is because, despite kind of the aspirational vision in the law, it really did not deal with a political reality, which is that if that's your goal, you want to make sure that the incentives are there to achieve it. And the incentives are driven, you know, a little bit by federal policy, but mostly they're driven by these local electoral pressures that we've been discussing. And my argument is that, for the most part, adults don't really care about student outcomes, you know, that is, you know, for a variety of reasons, they care about partisanship, they care about culture wars, they care about employment, they care about whether their school in their community is open or closed. But, those things really are not about our kids' learning, are they learning enough, are they on track to graduate with the skills they need to be successful? And so, really, we're in a world where it's not "No Child Left Behind", it's really where, it's adult interests that take center stage, and a lot of the politics is about making certain that the powerful adult coalition, that community gets what they want, which again, often is not, not what the kids need.

D

David Staley 20:58

Will you be proposing policy interventions in this book - the question I wrote to myself is, what is to be done? Is that something you're going to be addressing in the book?

V

Vladimir Kogan 21:06

Yeah, so yeah, it's a very good question. You know, in working on this project, I've read so much, and I've come away with, you know, I think a very, very frustrated take in that I think that in the education space, we have a lot of magical solutions that, you know, and part of the... part of the issue, I think, is that we go, we go from the flavor of the month, and people say, this is the magical solution to fix education, and next month it's something else. And almost none of them work, and to the extent they work, the impacts are very modest. So, I'm going to try to kind of not, not kind of fall for that trap and commit that same sin. I think it's those false promises that often contribute to some of this dysfunction. But, I do think there's things we can do on the margin. And, you know, I don't think they will be a cure all, I think they will have benefits, but pretty marginal benefits. But, I think there's three things we can do that would fundamentally help align those incentives. So, one is what we already mentioned, which is election timing, right, that all the evidence suggests that having school board elections in November of even years is just a win-win; turnout is higher, which is, you know, democracy, probably a good thing, and it's more representative electorate, and it is also the case that, again, it's more parents voting, and it's also the case that there seems to be more accountability. So, you put all this together, and to me, I think it's low hanging fruit. I think what's interesting about that reform is that it's got bipartisan support. So, you have states from California to Texas that have both pushed for more on cycle elections for their own kind of different political reasons. So, it's also pretty non-controversial, it saves money for local governments, so there's really very few arguments against having on cycle elections. So, I think that's, that's part one. I think part two, I, you know, I think one evidence we have is that the kinds of things voters care about is malleable, you can actually change the considerations that voters focus on, and one of the most important things is what's on the ballot. And so, right now, here in Ohio, we're having a debate about whether we should have party labels on the ballot in school board elections, because right now, they're nonpartisan. I don't think that's a good reform, I think it would actually distract from, from the student outcomes, I think it would

actually bring more focus on on adult politics. But what I would love to have is on the ballot, print the local school report card grades. So, here in Ohio, we have a one to five star system that tells you - again, I think it has some limitations, I would I would improve it as well - but it tells you, you know, how good of a job are local districts doing; I would love to have that printed on the ballot instead of party labels. And I think that would have the effect of encouraging voters to really focus on the student outcomes, if they're printed right there, it would put more weight on that and how they vote. And then the last part - so, that's controversial, and I...

**D** David Staley 21:51  
But really interesting.

**V** Vladimir Kogan 22:20  
I got some pushback. The last one, I think, you know, people have an even more controversial, which is, you know, elections are not the only way to make education policy, we have many alternatives as well. We have charter schools that are operated independently, we have private school vouchers. And again, I think there's issues in some of those policies, but in my view, I think school choice policies are another lever to pull. And not only because they directly allow parents to have more of a say, I think that's true, although we know that, you know, they tend to attract... those options tend to be used by the most advantaged parents. But, there's also this kind of competitive effect. So, what you see in, again, study after study, is that when local schools are exposed to competition, when their students have the option of leaving for private schools or for charter schools - we've seen this in Ohio, so my co-author here at the Glenn College, Stéphane Lavertu, has done some of the best research on this - is that not only the kids who leave benefit, sometimes sometimes not, but the kids who stayed behind benefit, because it changes the internal politics of the district, because now they have to compete. Now they have to worry about, hey, if we're not providing a great education, the parents have an outside option, and it's that outside options, that threat, that seems to actually impact the operations of school districts in ways that seems to improve student achievement. And not, not a lot, we're not talking about massive effects, but again, you know, these are all things on the margin that collectively, I think, add up to make things a little bit better than they are today.

**D** David Staley 24:54  
Do you argue in this book, is anybody arguing for the professionalization of school boards? I mean, you talked about, these are volunteers, or is that... is that too far out there of an idea?

**V** Vladimir Kogan 25:03  
Yeah. Some people argue for that, and you can think about professionalization in a couple of ways. One is to pay people more, make the job more attractive. Now, you know, the net effect of that is not clear to me, because you know, if it's more attractive, more people run, and more people running may mean even more divisive politics, it may mean more school board turnover. And school board turnover usually leads to superintendent turnover, it leads to administrative chaos, which is probably not best for students. So, it's not obvious to me

whether making it a more professional career will actually have positive impacts, you can tell stories, I think, either way. I think another, another direction, and this is something that, again, my friend AJ Crabill really pushes, which is training, right?

**D** David Staley 25:40  
Sure.

**V** Vladimir Kogan 25:40  
You know, having, providing, you know, some professional training for school board members to really get them to focus on how they use their time. And so, AJ calls this student outcomes focus governance, and he has, I think, this great catchphrase, he says, "Student outcomes don't change until adult behaviors change".

**D** David Staley 25:57  
Oh, interesting.

**V** Vladimir Kogan 25:57  
And by the behaviors, we talked about school boards and what they spend their time on. Now, whether it works or not, I think, to me, is an empirical question, whether having that training ultimately affects what boards do, whether they stick with some of these habits that he is trying to inculcate in them. But again, you know, it's worth trying, at least just to see see if it has an impact.

**D** David Staley 26:16  
So, you began by saying you attend school board meetings as sort of a hobby. How long have you been doing this?

**V** Vladimir Kogan 26:23  
Yeah, I started that, I started in high school. So, yeah.

**D** David Staley 26:25  
In high school?

**V** Vladimir Kogan 26:26

Yeah, I was the editor of my high school newspaper, and so I just decided one day to start going to school board meetings. And then...

D

David Staley 26:31

For your own school, or...?

V

Vladimir Kogan 26:32

For my own school district, yeah, this was in California. And then, after college, I worked as a journalist in San Diego for kind of a, at the time was, was an unusual organization. It's called the Voice of San Diego, which was the first online only nonprofit news organization kind of modeled on ProPublica at the local level. And I covered school board politics and school politics in San Diego as a kind of a journalist. So, I've been doing it, again, for a while now, and now more recently here in Columbus.

D

David Staley 26:57

Well, so I have to ask, how did you end up as a political scientist? Not journalism?

V

Vladimir Kogan 27:01

Yeah, you know, it was in some ways an accident, and actually completely unrelated to my interest in education. So, when I was in high school, I had a teacher in history, his name was Mr. Williams. And he said one day in class, you know, Vlad is gonna be political scientist. And so, when I had to apply for college - this was in California and this was the University of California application system - you have to put down a major, and I really had no idea what these majors were. So I said that, well, Mr. Williams said I should do political science, so I just put down political science. And so, that's what I majored in, in college. Yeah, well, we didn't... you know, University of California doesn't, doesn't teach practical skills, and turns out journalism is too practical. So, yeah, I was on my college paper, so I had some journalism, kind of practical experience, but I studied political science. And then, I went back to graduate school, never thinking I would do education or anything education related, and it really wasn't until I got here to Ohio State and I started working with Stéphane and another colleague, that we realized education was actually a great venue for testing some of our broader theories about politics, because education is one area we have really good data on outcomes. I think crime and education are unusual in that we actually measure the stuff we care about, and that's not true in most other policy areas. And so you can ask, I think, really kind of powerful questions and have really credible research designs to get at kind of some of these causal questions that we as political scientists were interested in.

D

David Staley 28:12

So your dissertation wasn't about the education?

V Vladimir Kogan 28:14  
Not at all.

D David Staley 28:14  
Well, what was your dissertation?

V Vladimir Kogan 28:16  
It was about local politics and some kind of, you know, big questions, local politics, unrelated to education.

D David Staley 28:21  
So, maybe in a way that you're still interested in local politics, just specifically around school boards, yes?

V Vladimir Kogan 28:27  
Exactly, yes. Yep.

D David Staley 28:28  
Well, tell us what's next after the book, once the book is finished, where are you looking to be researching next?

V Vladimir Kogan 28:34  
Yeah so, we still have a lot of projects going on, so, the teacher endorsement project I mentioned is not part of the book. And also, you know, since the early days of the pandemic, we've been working with the Ohio Department of Education in helping them provide some analytic capacity to look at student academic disruption during the pandemic and therecovery since then. And so, that's been I think, really important work and really rewarding work and so we hope to continue that as well.

D David Staley 28:58  
Vladimir Kogan, thank you.





Vladimir Kogan 28:59

Thanks for having me.



Eva Dale 29:02

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