Backtracking :

When do Early Adopters Renounce to a Reform They Endorsed?

Aurélie Cassette[1] Etienne Farvaque[2]

Abstract:

This paper studies the determinants of the decision to go back from an adopted reform. We use the quasi-natural experiment of the changes in the school week schedule in France. The government first offered the municipalities to implement quickly or further in time a reform of the school schedule, and then - 4 years later - offered the possibility to come back to the pre-reform schedule. Our results are based on a unique, very detailed, database of school-week schedules. They indicate that, even if there is a strong level of path dependency in policy decisions, political and budgetary variables are fundamental in explaining backtracking decisions.

JEL Classification: D78, H70, H73, I29

Keywords: Reforms, Municipalities. Education.

[1] LEM - CNRS (UMR 9221) – Université Lille 1 Sciences et Technologies, Cité scientifique – Bâtiment SH2 – 59655 Villeneuve d'Ascq Cedex (France). Contact: aurelie.cassette@univ-lille1.fr

[2] LEM - CNRS (UMR 9221) – Université Lille 1 Sciences et Technologies, Cité scientifique – Bâtiment SH2 – 59655 Villeneuve d'Ascq Cedex, and CIRANO (Québec, Canada). Contact: etienne.farvaque@univ-lille1.fr.

1. Introduction

According to Oates (1999), decentralization offers the possibility to experiment various policies on a given territory, developing what he has termed "laboratory federalism". As a consequence, when a government offers the possibility to sub-governmental jurisdictions to endorse (or not) a new policy, it is expected that the best practices will diffuse over the territory. Over time, this can lead to two types of equilibrium: One in which diversity subsists over the whole territory, if local preferences and constraints are strong enough to forbid the convergence towards the second equilibrium, in which there is a convergence to the best policy.

What happens if the government backtracks, and modifies its policy, pulling back to the pre-reform policy? Do the first adopters stick to the option they favored, or follow the government's pull and return to the pre-reform solution? Do the past reluctant reformers, who embraced the reform lately on, follow suit or stay affixed to the choice they finally made? In other words, are reforms sticky?

In this paper, we use a quasi-natural experiment to assess the degree of stickiness of a policy reform. In 2013, the French government decided a reform of the school week, starting from the elementary school level. This reform was strongly decentralized, each city being offered many possibilities in shortening the daily number of hours spent in the class, lengthening school week to 4.5 days (against 4 days previously). A city could, for instance, end the school week by Friday noon (with classes on the Wednesday), while the neighboring municipalities could choose to shorten every day by 1 hour, say (with the possibility to have Saturday classes). The objective of the reform was to improve the pupils' experience and pleasure to be in school, the ultimate goal being to make progress on their performance (and on the relative ranking of the country in the PISA assessments). As such, the reform can be considered as going in the "right" direction (pedagogical, at least), with some leeway given to municipalities to adapt the reform to their idiosyncratic locational constraints and populations' needs. One national election later, however, the government has chosen to backpedal on the reform, offering municipalities to come back to the pre-reform state.

The question thus arises to know why some municipalities, we had been able to choose the school week schedule that was the most adapted to their needs, follow the impetus given by the national government. They then end up with a new school week schedule based on 4 (long) days, instead of 4.5 shorter days.

Our contribution is thus to analyze the determinants of the choice to backtrack from a Pareto-improving reform (as municipalities could tailor the school week to their needs and constraints) and return to a previous, inferior, state. Although this paper can be considered as a sequel to Cassette and Farvaque (2014, 2016), it focuses on a very different question, profiting from the specific French experiment to analyze if the laboratory federalism can survive to political bickering and electoral alternation.

To our knowledge, if the literature has considered the possibility of laboratory federalism experiences (following Oates, 1999, Kotsogiannis and Schwager, 2006, or Cai and Treisman, 2009), it has not looked at the type of situations we just described, when local governments can opt-in and out of a policy reform. In more general contexts, several papers have studied the option to reform earlier or later. For example, Callander and Hummel (2014) propose a model of experimentation and learning in policymaking when control of power is temporary, in which they show that an early office holder implements preemptive policy experiments, if only to shape future policy choices (a strategy that is, in some ways, reminiscent of Persson and Svensson' 1989 stubborn conservative). Along the same lines, Buisseret and Bernhardt (2017) analyze the policy to refrain from reforming, if only by anticipating the potential subsequent attrition of support in case a policy-maker would move "too far, too soon" in the first move. However, the frameworks in these studies do not allow considering a move back from an already implemented reform.

The structure of the paper is the following. The next section details the reform and the backtracking process and timeline. Section 3 presents the methodology and data, while section 4 analyzes the results. Section 5 concludes.

2. The reform, and its disbanding

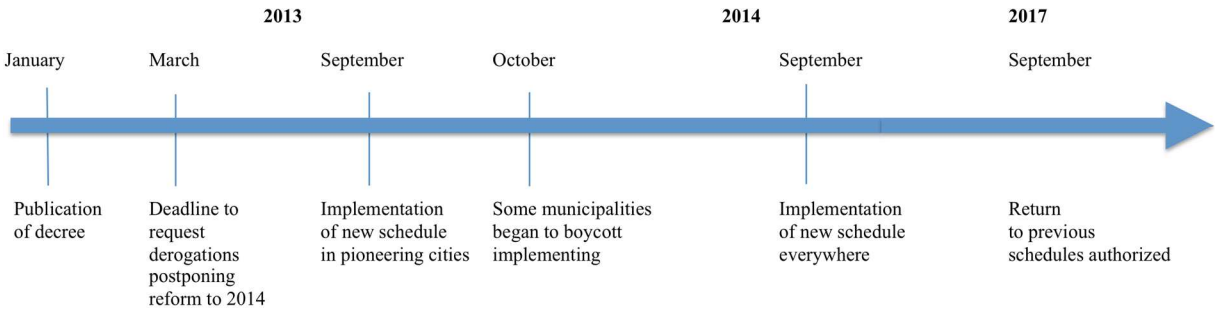
The implemented 2013-2014 reform intended to modify the school week. In fact, since the institution of universal public education in the late 19th century in France, schoolchildren have benefited from a weekly day off (for a long time on Thursdays, for religious reasons, then on Wednesdays - since 1972). To make up for the lost teaching times, schools opened their doors on Saturday mornings but, in 2008, under Conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy, it was decided to compress the school week into a four day schedule and Saturday has become a no-school day. However, shortly after the 2012 Presidential election – won by the Socialist François Hollande -, the government announced a reform of the school week schedule, to shorten the day for primary school pupils, which is currently deemed as too long to allow for effective learning. Teaching hours would be spread out over the week to make up the hours by extending the current system of 4 days of classes per week to 4.5 days. Importantly, it has to be noted that municipalities could implement immediately or postpone the implementation of the reform.

The reform essentially concerns kindergartens and elementary schools, hence directly impacting the municipalities, in the following ways. First, given the reduced educational time, municipalities may have to organize more extracurricular activities, which has a direct financial impact (if only for petty stuff – paper, pens, balls, etc.). Second, if they ask (or request) the teachers to take care of the extracurricular activities, the extra-hours will have to be paid by municipalities (although the teachers are civil servants paid by the Ministry of Education for the normal time spent in class). Of course, municipalities can decide relying on extra staff, which they will nevertheless have to pay. The transition period can also be costly, as they have to recruit and (potentially learn to) manage new workers (in particular, specialized helpers in pre-school and after-school activities and extra canteen staff). Third, and important, the school transportation system will have to adapt, with an extra day of transport to be organized. The municipality may nevertheless share this last impact with its neighbors, if it belongs to an inter-municipal structure (“intercommunalité”), or if the transportation system is managed by the upper-level of government (the “département”). The presence of such vertical links with the departmental council may in turn affect the diffusion of the reform.

However, shortly after the Presidential and Parliamentary elections of 2017, the new Minister of Education announced a new decree, offering the municipalities to come back to the previous (pre-2013) stage. Among the municipalities with more than 3500 inhabitants (the sample we use hereafter), 13% of those who had adopted the reform in 2013 moved back to the 4-days regime in 2017, against 38% of the municipalities that had postponed the adoption to 2014. Looking at the larger municipalities (more than 10 000 inhabitants), the respective statistics are 12% and 34%. There is thus no significant difference between the smaller and larger municipalities, but the proportions are large enough to deserve investigating the determinants of the choice to backtrack.

To sum up the sequence of events (see Figure 1): The official launch of the reform is a decree (dated 26th, January 2013) stating that municipalities had to decide upon the adoption of the reform before the 31st, March 2013. If the mayor refuses to answer or to ask the council to take a formal vote (as they have done in a majority of cases), the Ministry would consider the refusal as an obligation to implement the reform in 2013. From September 2013, some mayors decided to boycott the reform and not to implement it, even in 2014. From September 2014, however, the reform was compulsorily enforced, meaning that all municipalities had to implement a new week school schedule. The situation was smooth up to 2017, where the new government of Emmanuel Macron backpedalled on the reform, and let municipalities to come back to a 4 days-week.

Figure 1. Timeline of the reform and counter-reform



Source: authors.

3. Method

To control for selection issues related to the choice of an early implementation of the reform, we follow a two-step procedure. In the first step, the choice of backtracking is our first binary dependent variable. This observed decision takes the value 1 if the municipality decided to give up the four days and half school week in 2017 and 0 otherwise. This choice depends on the difference in utilities between the two alternatives (4 days vs. 4,5 days): $U_{1;i} - U_{0;i}$. The probit model assumes that this difference ($U^* = U_{1;i} - U_{0;i}$) follows a normal distribution. However, U^* is not observable, as only the real choices are known, which is reflected in:

$$Backtracking_i = 1 \; if U^*_i \geq 0$$
$$Backtracking_i = 0 \; if U^*_i < 0$$

In the model, we consider the impact the characteristics of the municipality *i* that we have described over the net utility of the mayor, and thus on the probability to backtrack. The Probit decision model is thus:

$$Backtracking_i = 1 \; if \; U^*_i = c + \alpha \Omega_i + REFORM2013 + e_i > 0,$$
$$Backtracking_i = 0 \; otherwise,$$

where U^*_i is the unobservable latent dependent variable, *c* is the intercept, Ω_i is the set of relevant (school, financial and political) characteristics of the municipality, and $e_i \sim N(0,1)$ is a disturbance term. In addition to the standard White correction for heteroskedasticity, we correct for clustering at the departmental level using the Froot's correction (Froot, 1989).

Note that introducing the variable *REFORM2013* induces to estimate a bivariate Probit. This is because the choice of implementing the reform early on is in fact endogenous in our main equation estimating the determinants of backtracking, as only the municipalities with strong educational preferences and / or with specific characteristics (including the parents' support, for instance) made the choice in 2013 (Cassette and Farvaque, 2014). Contrariwise, a late implementation (in 2014) reveals some reluctance (either for logistical or financial reasons, or for other, non-measurable, factors, such as a mayor's opposition to the reform, for example).

REFORM2013 is thus a lagged endogenous variable, describing the inertia of a municipality's preferences with regard to the reform. Hence, a first equation has the following structure:

$$REFORM2013_i = 1 \text{ if } V_i^* = \delta_1 + \theta_1 \Omega'_i + \varepsilon_i > 0 \qquad (2)$$

$$REFORM2013_i = 0 \text{ otherwise}$$

where V_i^* is the unobservable latent dependent variable.

The two Probit equations (1) and (2) can be viewed as a system, and a recursive bivariate Probit model can be set up (see Heckman, 1978, Maddala, 1983, or Greene, 1998). The choice of an early implementation the reform is an endogenous independent variable in the backtracking equation. This endogeneity does not, however, modify the likelihood of the standard bivariate Probit (Greene, 1998, 2003). Then, the probability of each event is given by the value of the bivariate normal cumulative distribution function, like in a standard bivariate Probit model without endogeneity. The error terms from both equations are assumed to be correlated and thus should be jointly estimated using maximum likelihood method.

4. Data

Our sample includes all the municipalities with more than 3,500 inhabitants. This threshold is mainly induced by the absence of school in many of the smaller municipalities, meaning that they often share the school with several other municipalities (often belonging to the same inter-communal structure). In such a case, municipalities must cooperate to determine if they wish to implement the school rhythm reform in 2013, which makes it more difficult to identify the determinants of the choice. Applying the threshold avoids a selection bias in the estimations. Table 1 summarizes the data sources and descriptive statistics.

4.1. Data common to both equations

As stated above, municipalities could adopt the reform early, or postpone its adoption. To analyze this year-of-implementation decision, our first dependent variable, $Reform2013_{i,t}$, is thus the choice to implement the reform in September 2013. This dummy takes the value 1 if municipality *i* has chosen to implement the reform in 2013, and 0 if a derogation has been

requested to delay its implementation to 2014. Nearly 23% of the municipalities from the sample chose to implement the reform in the first year. Four groups of explanatory variables have been gathered to explain this choice.

The first set of variables relates to the local school context itself. First, it has to be acknowledged that practical and budgetary difficulties may arise when applying the reform to larger numbers of school-age children and public schools. The larger the number of schools in the municipality is, the larger the global cost of extracurricular activities to be financed. The large number of schools can create problems to hire and manage group leaders able to organize games, cultural and sporting activities during extracurricular activities. Moreover, school directors and parents could have conflicting preferences on the new organization of the school week between educational institutions, which may complicate the municipal choice and delay the implementation of the reform. Moreover, 80% of municipalities have 10 public schools at most. We thus introduce a dummy variable, equal to 1 if there are less than 10 public schools in the municipality.

Also, it has to be signaled that privately funded schools do exist in France. Even if only 5% of them have adopted the reform in the first year of its implementation, the proportion reaches 15% the year after. And, as the governmental subsidies to adopt the reform are delivered to the municipalities (and not to the schools), the privately funded schools that implement the reform have the right to ask the mayor to receive their share of those subsidies. We thus include the presence of private schools in the estimates.

It is a common sense argument that long school days can result in a lower performance of pupils, with the worst impact to be experienced by children living in deprived urban areas. The literature so far has, to our knowledge, not proved the point. However, existing results show that extending the length of a school day is at best neutral and could even be detrimental, if the end of the week interruption is too long (see, Delvolvé and Jeunier, 1999, for the latter point, and De Cicca, 2007, Mayer and Klaveren, 2013, Taylor, 2014, for results in different contexts and levels).[1] Schools in those areas belong to a Priority Education Network whose objective is to attenuate the impact of socio-economic inequalities on learning

[1] The consequences of a long school day are different from those of a longer school year, the latter tending to benefit the pupils and students (as shown by, e.g., Kikuchi, 2014, Parinduri, 2014, Agüero and Beleche, 2013, in very different contexts).

performance. We introduce a dummy variable that takes the value 1 if some schools in the municipality belong to a priority education network, and 0 otherwise. Children in these municipalities would greatly benefit from a reform whose aims are to improve learning and to foster educational success and we can expect mayors to be more inclined to quickly implement the reform there.

We also take into account existing vertical links between layers of government that come from their respective competencies relative to pre-schools and primary schools. As explained above, inter-municipal structures can be endowed with competencies over extracurricular activities and school transportation. Thus, we introduce two variables that capture, respectively, if competences on extracurricular activities and school buses have been devolved to the inter-municipal structure. There are several levels of local government in France, but this inter-municipal structure is the relevant one, as all municipalities have to belong to one such structure, and they are de facto a regular discussion and decision-taking forum.

The second set of variables deals with budget data. As municipalities are endowed with competence over primary school, they must finance the after school activities generated by the reform. The government has created a specific subsidy ("fonds d'amorçage") and has budgeted 250 millions euros to cover the transition costs for the fast-adopters. Viewed as an incentive to adopt the reform in 2013, this subsidy aims at rewarding municipalities for the signal they send in adopting the reform in 2013. However, municipalities and their representative bodies have denounced the cost of the reform, providing various estimates of the per-pupil cost of it. This not only suggests that budgetary concerns are an important determinant of the willingness to implement the reform, but that municipalities may have to raise local taxes to finance the reform, which they may be reluctant to do (especially right before an election and even more so in municipalities where the tax burden is already high). By the same reasoning, the level of municipal debt should also affect mayors' choices. We thus assume that local choices by mayors are constrained by the structure of their municipal budget. Debt is expressed in thousands of euros per capita, while the tax effort – a proxy of the tax burden computed by the government - is calculated by dividing the amount of taxes collected by the municipality on households (property tax on developed and undeveloped property and housing tax) by an estimate of how much tax the municipality should be able to collect given its tax bases. This measure enables the comparison of the actual taxes and the

expected taxes if the municipality applied the average national tax rates. 2012 data are used as the choice to implement the reform has been taken between January and March 2013.

Besides, poorer municipalities receive additional grants from the State to implement the reform (atop from the "fonds d'amorçage", a lump-sum grant which amounts to 50€ per pupil and an additional grant of 40€ per pupil if the municipality is located in a poor surrounding). The additional State aid is dedicated to the poorest municipalities, the ones that receive the targeted urban solidarity grant ("*DSU-cible*") or the targeted rural solidarity grant ("*DSR-cible*"). To analyze if the additional State aid has an incentive effect on the probability to implement the reform in 2013, we introduce two dummy variables: the first one ("aid to poor urban municipalities") is equal to 1 if the municipality receives the targeted urban solidarity grant and 0 otherwise, while the second one ("aid to poor rural municipalities") is equal to 1 if the municipality receives the targeted rural solidarity grant. We also include the benefit of a specific subsidy ("fonds de soutien majoré", which municipalities can obtain if they ask for it explicitly) to explain the decision to backtrack in 2017, as well as a variable indicating if a municipality explicitly decided not to ask for this subsidy (which they could if they expect, for instance, that they may be too rich to be excluded from its benefit).

A third set of data is related to the mayor's personal and political characteristics. Even if the municipal council is the decision-making body, power is centralized in the hands of the mayor, who has authority over the municipality's civil servants and takes all decisions relative to the implementation of its budget. Moreover, the literature has shown that a decision-maker's characteristics influence her propensity to undertake important reforms (see, e.g., Dreher et al., 2009, or Kotsogiannis and Schwager, 2006). The explanation in particular relies on two facts. The first is that exercising certain professions can distort the views of decision-makers on the need to undertake a reform, and the second is that education helps solving problems and overcoming crises (i.e., making it easier to implement reforms, however essential one judges the reform). As a consequence, personal characteristics of the mayor could affect the probability of an early implementation of the reform.

Detailed information on personal characteristics of mayors is provided through the national directory of elected officials (French Interior Ministry). First, we account for the age of the mayor. The literature analyzing the demand for education states that older people may follow their personal interest and thus prefer to spend public money on health or social security,

rather than on education (see, e.g., Cattaneo and Wolter, 2009, or Sørensen, 2013). In our case, however, younger mayors (more susceptible to have school-age children) may be more reluctant to embrace the reform, while older mayors could feel nostalgia for school weeks that run on four and a half days, as this was the norm up to 2008, and thus the regime they have gone through during their own education period. We have introduced the mayor's age as a continuous variable.

Second, and even though the proportion of women mayors is still extremely low in France (11%, see Table 1), a dummy variable accounts for gender. On the one hand, the experimental economics literature on gender differences acknowledges that women are more risk averse than men when facing a risky situation (see, for example, Croson and Gneezy, 2009). Implementing a controversial reform can be considered as such a risky move, and we thus expect a negative sign for this variable. On the other hand, literature states that women, whatever their degree of implication in local decision-making, are more likely to demand more school spending (Ahlin and Johansson, 2001). In Sweden, Svaleryd (2009) establishes that the spending on childcare and education - relatively to elderly care - increases with the share of women on local councils. As a consequence, women can be expected to have a particular taste for policies directed to children, and female mayors could be more prone to adopt a reform dedicated to improve education.

Third, to reflect the impact of some professions of the propensity to adopt reforms, four specific socio-professional categories are used as proxies of the mayors' sense of public service and of their capacity to focus on the children's interests. Teachers (from preschool teachers to higher-education teaching personnel) are first considered. On the one hand, with a significant knowledge of how schoolchildren and students learn best, they should be the best motivated to an early implementation of the reform. On the other hand, they could be unfavorable to a reform that increases the spread of weekly working hours of their fellows without pay compensation. Civil servants (other than teachers) and workers in public enterprises should bear in mind – at least, to some extent - the public service values and the will to ensure quality education to children. Finally, physicians should be responsive to the impact of the school time schedule on children's health. They are in a position to promote a reform directed towards the interests of children, not their parents'. We create a dummy variable for each professional category.

Fourth, another subgroup of political variables is considered to account for the links between the local and national political contexts. As the literature has established, the choices mayors make on educational policies have a partisan bias (see, for example, Busemeyer, 2009, or Merzyn and Ursprung, 2005). We thus include a dummy equal to 1 if the incumbent mayor belongs to the Left (here restricted to "Parti Socialiste", the party supporting the President at the time of the reform). Mayors from the governmental coalition should be more prone to support the reform and to undertake it without delay. Moreover, we take into account the score locally obtained by the elected (socialist) President at the preceding (2012) election, as this may reflect a partisan bias (left-leaning) in the municipality, whatever the political leaning of the mayor herself.

4.2. Other variables (main equation of interest)

In the main equation, we obviously have to take into account the year in which any municipality *i* will have implemented the initial school week reform (*REFORME2013*).

We add to this the set of time-schedules that are chosen by each municipality. First, we consider if time-schedules include a school-free afternoon. The justification for this is that some configurations of the schools' newly-adopted time schedule could induce complexities that would favor backtracking. The reference for this variable will thus be the time schedule that includes one school-free afternoon, which induces simplicity in the organization of extra-curriculum activities. We also consider the presence of school activities on Saturdays, as well as several indicators detailing the intricacy of the chosen school-week schedule (several short-afternoons followed by a longer one, or the opposite, long mornings and shorter afternoons, or the opposite).

Second, we include a measure of the number of different time-schedules in any municipality (as each school can potentially define its own schedule). The expected sign related to this variable is however unclear: either this variable is another indicator of the complexities related to the reform, which would increase the probability to backtrack, or the diversity indicates a better match between the preferences of the parents and teachers, which would reduce the incentives to backtrack. In the same way, we include the number of change of the

school-week schedule, as a way to reflect the adaptation to the local specificities and / or the management of the complexities related to the reform.

Finally, we include two variables that reveal a financial link between the reform and the municipalities' budget. The first one indicates if the municipality benefits from an increased governmental support fund ("fonds de soutien majoré"), attributed to the poorest cities. The second variable is related to the possibility that some municipalities have not even requested the increased support fund. If the former variable could indicate a support for the reform, the latter, on the opposite, would indicate reluctance with regard to the reform, and thus a predisposition to come back to the pre-reform situation as soon as possible.

5. Results

We display our results in Tables 2 and 3. Table 3 incorporates budget variables, while Table 3 also includes variables from our detailed database on school-week schedules, the aim being to check if the ways the municipalities have implemented the reform have a role in explaining backtracking decisions.

As can be seen from Table 2, a first striking result is that he cities that voluntarily adopted the reform early on (in 2013) are much less susceptible to backtrack than the ones who first showed reluctance. This reveals that the most enthusiasts have clearly embraced the reform, as well as the fact that forcing upon the adoption may not be welfare-enhancing (a result thus confirming Oates' 1999 intuition). This interpretation is both confirmed and refined by sign and significance of the next variables: first, the fiscal effort as well as the debt level do increase the probability to backtrack, revealing that the reform was probably costly to implement, and that as soon as the possibility to cancel its impact was offered, the municipalities in the worst budget situations seized it. Second, the 2012 level of school-related operating expenditures impacts negatively on the probability to backtrack (at both at the city and inter-municipal levels). This reveals that the municipalities with the highest concern for school issues have, on the opposite, embraced the reform. This is confirmed by the fact that the variation in school-related operating expenditures is not significant.

Other notable results from Table 2 include the fact that the presence of privately-funded schools in the municipality reduces the probability to backtrack. This is an indication of the competition between the two (public and private) schooling systems: as the privately-funded schools have only marginally adopted the reform, parents with preferences for the related week schedule have probably shifted their children from the public to the private, reducing the need for municipalities to change their tack once the decisions have been taken. Also, most of the variables related to the mayor's background are not significant. More determinant here is the fact that the mayor is from the same political side in 2013 and 2017. As shown by Cassette and Farvaque (2016), as the mayors from the Left were more susceptible to adopt the reform (promoted by a Left-side government) early on, this reveals that where the election has not been lost, the incentives to backtrack have been reduced. Finally, it has to be noticed that the results are qualitatively comparable when the sample is reduced to the municipalities with a number of residents superior to 10,000 (see the right-hand side of Table 2).

Including the intricacies of the various school-week schedules that have been adopted in the regression does not change the baseline results, as can be seen by comparing Table 2 and Table 3. However, Table 3 also reveals that some of the adopted school-week schedules have a strong influence on the policy decision. Specifically, it appears that schedules including Saturday morning classes have positively influenced the decision to backtrack, which we interpret as revealing the influence of the opposition by parents and teachers to an extended schedule (even though it can be argued, on educational grounds, that reducing the week-end interruption is beneficial to the pupils with difficulties and / or from the poorest backgrounds). Moreover, the week-schedules that are probably the more in line with the aims of the reform (i.e., in particular, the more regular ones) do reduce the probability to backtrack. Here too, this reveals that the municipalities that have embraced the reform with the strongest enthusiasm, probably because they consider that the reform goes "the right way", are the less prone to change their minds, and to revert to the pre-reform situation.

6. Conclusion

We study the determinants of policy-makers "changing their minds", i.e., going back from an adopted reform. We show that budgetary and organizational constraints play a strong role in

explaining decisions to backtrack. We also show that when a reform lies in conformity with the policy-makers' (and, one can infer, from the citizens') preferences, then the opportunity to remove the reform is more rarely seized upon.

References

Ahlin A., and Johansson E., 2001, "Individual Demand for Local Public Schooling: Evidence from Swedish Survey Data", *International Tax and Public Finance*, 8, 331–351.

Agüero J. M., Beleche T., 2013, "Test-Mex: Estimating the effects of school year length on student performance in Mexico", *Journal of Development Economics*, 103, 353-361.

Buisseret, P. and Bernhardt, D., 2017, "Dynamics of Policymaking: Stepping Back to Leap Forward, Stepping Forward to Keep Back", *American Journal of Political Science*, 61: 820–835.

Busemeyer, M. R., 2009, "Social democrats and the new partisan politics of public investment in education", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 16(1),107-126.

Cai H., Treisman D., 2009, "Political decentralization and policy experimentation", *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 4(1), 35-58. http://dx.doi.org/10.1561/100.00008039

Callander, S. and Hummel, P., 2014, "Preemptive Policy Experimentation", *Econometrica*, 82: 1509–1528.

Cassette A., Farvaque E., 2014, "In consideration of the children", really? Adoption of the school-rhythm reform by French municipalities", *French Politics*, vol. 12, n° 1, 164-176.

Cassette A., Farvaque E., 2016, "A dirty deed done dirt cheap : Reporting the Blame of a National Reform on Local Politicians", *European Journal of Political Economy*, 43, 127–144.

Cattaneo, M. A., and Wolter, S. C., 2009, "Are the elderly a threat to educational expenditures?", *European Journal of Political Economy*, 25(2), 225-236.

Croson, Rachel, and Uri Gneezy, 2009, "Gender Differences in Preferences", *Journal of Economic Literature*, 47(2): 448-74.

De Cicca P., 2007, "Does full-day kindergarten matter? Evidence from the first two years of schooling", *Economics of Education Review*, 26, 67–82.

Delvolvé N., Jeunier B., 1999, "Effets de la durée du week-end sur l'état cognitif de l'élève en classe au cours du lundi", *Revue Française de Pédagogie*, 126, 111-120.

Dreher A., Lamla M.J., Lein S.M., and Somogyi F., 2009, "The impact of political leaders' profession and education on reforms", *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 37, 169–193.

Froot, K. A., 1989, "Consistent covariance matrix estimation with cross-sectional dependence and heteroskedasticity in financial data", *Journal of Financial and Quantitative Analysis*, 24, 333–355.

Greene, W.H., 1998, "Gender Economics Courses in Liberal Arts Colleges: Further Results", *Journal of Economic Education*, 29 (4), 291-300.

Greene, W.H., 2003, *Econometric Analysis*, Fifth Edition, Prentice Hall.

Heckman, J. J., 1978, "Dummy endogenous variables in a simultaneous equation system", *Econometrica*, 46 (6), 931-959.

Kikuchi N., 2014, "The effect of instructional time reduction on educational attainment: Evidence from the Japanese curriculum standards revision", *Journal of the Japanese and International Economies*, 32,17-41.

Kotsogiannis, C., Schwager, R., 2006. "On the incentives to experiment in federations". *Journal of Urban Economics,* 60, 484–497.

Maddala, G.S., 1983, *Limited-dependent and Qualitative Variables in Econometrics*, Cambrige University Press.

Merzyn, W. and Ursprung, H. W., 2005, "Voter support for privatizing education: evidence on self-interest and ideology", *European Journal of Political Economy*, 21(1), 33-58.

Oates W.E., 1999, "An Essay on Fiscal Federalism", *Journal of Economic Literature*, 37(3), 1120-1149

Parinduri R. A., 2014, "Do children spend too much time in schools? Evidence from a longer school year in Indonesia", *Economics of Education Review*, 41, 89-104.

Persson T., and L. E. O. Svensson, 1989, "Why a Stubborn Conservative Would Run a Deficit: Policy with Time- Inconsistent Preferences", *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 104, no. 2, 325–345.

Sørensen, R. J., 2013, "Does aging affect preferences for welfare spending? A study of peoples' spending preferences in 22 countries, 1985−2006", *European Journal of Political Economy*, 29, 259-271.

Svaleryd, H., 2009, "Women's representation and public spending", *European Journal of Political Economy*, 25(2), 186-198.

Tommasi M., Velasco A., 1996, "Where are we in the political economy of reform?", *Journal of Economic Policy Reform*, 1(2), 187-238.

Table 2. Probability of backtracking – Budget variables

VARIABLES	Backtracking	Reform in 2013	Backtracking	Reform in 2013
	All municipalities		>10 000 inhabitants	
Reform adopted in 2013	-0.584***		-0.614***	
	(-16.21)		(-19.88)	
Fiscal effort	0.196***	0.057	0.159**	0.016
	(3.42)	(1.07)	(2.47)	(0.23)
Debt (t-1)	0.027*	0.032**	0.001	0.006
	(1.82)	(2.27)	(0.07)	(0.28)
School-related operating expenditures per pupil, municipality (2012)	-0.028*	0.005	-0.044*	-0.038*
	(-1.86)	(0.33)	(-1.71)	(-1.92)
School-related operating expenditures per pupil, inter-municipal structure (2012)	-0.123***	-0.048	-0.096	-0.069
	(-2.73)	(-1.14)	(-1.35)	(-1.42)
Variation of chool-related operating expenditures per pupil, municipality (2012-2016)	-0.022		-0.049*	
	(-1.15)		(-1.92)	
Variation of school-related operating expenditures per pupil, inter-municipal structure (2012-2016)	0.029		-0.112	
	(0.62)		(-1.35)	
Specific subsidy obtained ("Fonds de soutien majoré")	-0.004		0.012	
	(-0.17)		(0.40)	
Specific subsidy not requested	0.123***		0.100*	
	(4.22)		(1.78)	
Subsidy to poor urban municipalities		-0.032		-0.067***
		(-1.61)		(-2.68)
Presence of privately-funded schools	-0.070***	0.023	-0.066***	0.012
	(-2.77)	(1.14)	(-2.67)	(0.42)
Inter-municipal structure manages extra-curricular activities	-0.074	0.019	-0.060	0.111***
	(-1.60)	(0.71)	(-1.15)	(4.95)
Inter-municipal structure manages school-related transports	-0.007	-0.072***	-0.021	-0.068***
	(-0.30)	(-3.26)	(-0.81)	(-2.74)
Share of schools in Priority Education Network	0.000	-0.001**	0.000	-0.000
	(1.12)	(-2.25)	(0.35)	(-0.65)
Less than 10 public schools in the municipality	0.085***	0.076***	0.081***	0.105***
	(2.61)	(2.85)	(2.88)	(4.62)
Same mayor (2017 and 2013)	-0.010		-0.020	
	(-0.50)		(-0.80)	
Mayor of the same political side (2017 and 2013)	-0.094***		-0.112***	
	(-3.94)		(-4.53)	
Mayor is a woman	0.024	0.015	-0.003	0.028
	(1.11)	(0.69)	(-0.09)	(0.83)
Mayor's age	0.002**	0.001*	0.002*	0.001
	(2.33)	(1.75)	(1.84)	(0.72)
Mayor is a teacher	0.040	0.048**	0.027	0.031
	(1.22)	(2.52)	(0.62)	(1.06)
Mayor is a civil servant	0.021	0.065***	0.059*	0.106***
	(1.00)	(4.31)	(1.75)	(4.67)
Mayor works for public entity	-0.003	0.072**	0.004	0.091*
	(-0.10)	(2.26)	(0.10)	(1.66)
Mayor is a physician	0.015	0.059	0.001	0.042
	(0.51)	(1.61)	(0.01)	(0.68)
Mayor from the Left	-0.025	0.171***	0.009	0.236***
	(-1.04)	(8.29)	(0.33)	(8.19)
Seaside municipality	0.078**	-0.005	0.127**	0.012
	(2.41)	(-0.13)	(2.27)	(0.29)
Touristic municipality	0.036	0.070*	0.019	0.057
	(0.79)	(1.94)	(0.34)	(1.23)
Mountain municipality	-0.074*	-0.049	-0.146**	-0.159**
	(-1.94)	(-0.98)	(-2.13)	(-2.48)
François Hollande share of vote (2012 Presidential election, 2nd round)		0.010***		0.008***
		(7.46)		(5.57)
Observations	2,544	2,544	911	911

Table 3. Probability of backtracking – School week schedules variables

VARIABLES	All municipalities		>10 000 inhabitants		All municipalities		>10 000 inhabitants	
	Presence of schools with each school week configuration		Presence of schools with each school week configuration		Share of schools with each school week configuration		Share of schools with each school week configuration	
Reform adopted in 2013	-0.547***		-0.599***		-0.551***		-0.588***	
	(-13.68)		(-17.01)		(-14.05)		(-18.12)	
School-related operating expenditures per pupil, municipality (2012)		0.018		-0.006		0.019		-0.004
		(1.43)		(-0.62)		(1.51)		(-0.30)
School-related operating expenditures per pupil, inter-municipal structure (2012)		-0.002		-0.036		-0.001		-0.036
		(-0.06)		(-0.77)		(-0.03)		(-0.72)
Saturday morning school class in 2016-2017	0.373***		0.307***		0.378***		0.326***	
	(5.37)		(6.21)		(5.36)		(6.76)	
Several school-week schedules in the municipality in 2016-2017	0.004		0.011		-0.021		-0.017	
	(0.17)		(0.37)		(-1.09)		(-0.68)	
Number of schedule changes since 2013	-0.009		-0.015		-0.007		-0.018	
	(-0.55)		(-0.73)		(-0.42)		(-0.88)	
C2/2 afternoon	0.049*		0.047		0.000		0.000	
	(1.85)		(1.29)		(1.34)		(0.14)	
C2/2 noon	-0.095*		-0.073		-0.002**		-0.003	
	(-1.77)		(-1.27)		(-2.37)		(-0.44)	
3 short afternoons, 1 long	0.060		0.118		0.001		0.001	
	(1.38)		(1.45)		(1.25)		(0.64)	
1 short afternoon; 3 long ones	-0.079**		-0.011		-0.001***		-0.001	
	(-2.18)		(-0.26)		(-3.22)		(-1.52)	
Regular with long mornings and short afternoons	-0.063***		-0.088***		-0.001***		-0.001***	
	(-2.94)		(-3.52)		(-3.09)		(-3.71)	
Regular with short mornings and long afternoons	-0.067***		-0.041*		-0.001***		-0.001**	
	(-3.35)		(-1.87)		(-3.15)		(-2.15)	
Fiscal effort	0.183***	0.058	0.141*	0.026	0.182***	0.059	0.137*	0.030
	(3.65)	(1.11)	(1.93)	(0.39)	(3.63)	(1.12)	(1.91)	(0.43)
Debt (t-1)	0.022	0.031**	-0.001	0.007	0.021	0.031**	0.000	0.008
	(1.62)	(2.19)	(-0.05)	(0.33)	(1.58)	(2.23)	(0.00)	(0.31)
Specific subsidy obtained ("Fonds de soutien majoré")	-0.001		-0.000		0.000		-0.002	
	(-0.03)		(-0.01)		(0.02)		(-0.08)	
Specific subsidy not requested	0.139***		0.119*		0.138***		0.119*	
	(4.44)		(1.85)		(4.45)		(1.87)	
Subsidy to poor urban municipalities		-0.029		-0.061**		-0.029		-0.055*
		(-1.46)		(-1.99)		(-1.48)		(-1.86)
Presence of privately-funded schools	-0.081***	0.021	-0.088***	0.009	-0.080***	0.021	-0.087***	0.012
	(-3.18)	(1.05)	(-3.83)	(0.33)	(-3.12)	(1.03)	(-3.80)	(0.43)
Inter-municipal structure manages extra-curricular activities	-0.088**	0.016	-0.057	0.101***	-0.087**	0.016	-0.041	0.101***
	(-2.16)	(0.62)	(-1.28)	(3.22)	(-2.14)	(0.60)	(-0.75)	(3.51)
Inter-municipal structure manages school-related transports	-0.007	-0.071***	-0.026	-0.067*	-0.008	-0.069***	-0.029	-0.071**
	(-0.33)	(-3.14)	(-0.89)	(-1.88)	(-0.37)	(-3.10)	(-0.99)	(-2.08)
Share of schools in Priority Education Network	0.000	-0.001**	0.000	-0.000	0.000	-0.001**	0.000	-0.000
	(1.20)	(-2.27)	(0.70)	(-0.63)	(1.22)	(-2.22)	(0.55)	(-0.73)
Less than 10 public schools in the municipality	0.087**	0.076***	0.078***	0.107***	0.087**	0.076***	0.080***	0.107***
	(2.47)	(2.86)	(2.66)	(4.38)	(2.48)	(2.86)	(2.71)	(4.20)
Same mayor (2017 and 2013)	-0.006		-0.017		-0.007		-0.012	
	(-0.31)		(-0.53)		(-0.39)		(-0.37)	
Mayor of the same political side (2017 and 2013)	-0.098***		-0.109***		-0.097***		-0.113***	
	(-4.29)		(-2.91)		(-4.38)		(-2.95)	
Mayor is a woman	0.027	0.014	-0.023	0.018	0.026	0.015	-0.031	0.020
	(1.23)	(0.66)	(-0.62)	(0.57)	(1.21)	(0.72)	(-0.88)	(0.53)
Mayor's age	0.002**	0.001*	0.001	0.001	0.002**	0.001	0.001	0.001
	(2.03)	(1.65)	(1.14)	(0.60)	(1.98)	(1.60)	(1.27)	(0.56)
Mayor is a teacher	0.045	0.048**	0.039	0.025	0.047	0.047**	0.050	0.020
	(1.30)	(2.46)	(0.79)	(0.98)	(1.39)	(2.45)	(1.25)	(0.64)
Mayor is a civil servant	0.017	0.064***	0.052	0.103***	0.017	0.063***	0.046	0.104***
	(0.82)	(4.16)	(1.48)	(3.76)	(0.80)	(4.13)	(1.17)	(3.83)
Mayor works for public entity	0.002	0.069**	0.006	0.068	-0.000	0.069**	-0.004	0.066
	(0.06)	(2.15)	(0.10)	(1.58)	(-0.01)	(2.16)	(-0.08)	(1.16)
Mayor is a physician	0.018	0.059	-0.025	0.044	0.019	0.059	-0.018	0.043
	(0.59)	(1.61)	(-0.67)	(0.68)	(0.63)	(1.60)	(-0.47)	(0.64)
Mayor from the Left	-0.037	0.174***	-0.004	0.231***	-0.032	0.174***	-0.008	0.233***
	(-1.56)	(8.76)	(-0.13)	(7.71)	(-1.33)	(8.68)	(-0.22)	(7.17)
Seaside municipality	0.058	-0.008	0.104*	0.018	0.059*	-0.008	0.099*	0.021
	(1.64)	(-0.19)	(1.81)	(0.41)	(1.69)	(-0.21)	(1.66)	(0.53)
Touristic municipality	0.040	0.066*	0.022	0.058	0.039	0.067*	0.017	0.057
	(0.90)	(1.89)	(0.41)	(1.33)	(0.90)	(1.91)	(0.32)	(1.19)
Mountain municipality	-0.075*	-0.049	-0.132*	-0.162**	-0.074*	-0.050	-0.131*	-0.157**
	(-1.94)	(-0.98)	(-1.94)	(-2.32)	(-1.90)	(-1.00)	(-1.86)	(-2.08)
François Hollande share of vote (2012 Presidential election, 2nd round)		0.010***		0.008***		0.010***		0.008***
		(7.13)		(4.74)		(7.14)		(4.05)
Observations	2,548	2,548	911	911	2,548	2,548	911	911