How Political Contexts Influence Education Systems: Patterns, Constraints, Entry Points

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Abstract

This paper synthesises the findings of a set of country studies commissioned by the RISE Programme to explore the influence of politics and power on education sector policymaking and implementation. The synthesis groups the countries into three political-institutional contexts:

- Dominant contexts, where power is centred around a political leader and a hierarchical governance structure. As the Vietnam case details, top-down leadership potentially can provide a robust platform for improving learning outcomes. However, as the case studies of Ethiopia, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Tanzania illustrate, all-too-often dominant leaders' goals vis-à-vis the education sector can veer in other directions.
- In impersonal competitive contexts, a combination of strong formal institutions and effective processes of resolving disagreements can, on occasion, result in a shared commitment among powerful interests to improve learning outcomes—but in none of the case studies is this outcome evident. In Peru, substantial learning gains have been achieved despite messy top-level politics. But the Chilean, Indian, and South African case studies suggest that the all-too-common result of rule-boundedness plus unresolved political contestation over the education sector's goals is some combination of exaggerated rule compliance and/or performative isomorphic mimicry.
- Personalised competitive contexts (Bangladesh, Ghana, and Kenya for example) lack the seeming strengths of either their dominant or their impersonal competitive contexts; there are multiple politically-influential groups and multiple, competing goals—but no credible framework of rules to bring coherence either to political competition or to the education bureaucracy.

The case studies show that political and institutional constraints can render ineffective many specialised sectoral interventions intended to improve learning outcomes. But they also point to the possibility that 'soft governance' entry points might open up some context-aligned opportunities for improving learning outcomes. In dominant contexts, the focus might usefully be on trying to influence the goals and strategies of top-level leadership. In impersonal competitive contexts, it might be on strengthening alliances between mission-oriented public officials and other developmentally-oriented stakeholders. In personalised competitive contexts, gains are more likely to come from the bottom-up—via a combination of local-level initiatives plus a broader effort to inculcate a shared sense among a country's citizenry of 'all for education'.

How Political Contexts Influence Education Systems: Patterns, Constraints, Entry Points

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I: INTRODUCTION

The Millennium Development Goal of universal access to primary education, when first proposed, seemed extraordinarily ambitious. Subsequent progress was remarkable, yet the fruits amounted to less than hoped. Schooling, it has become increasingly clear, need not necessarily translate into learning.

In seeking to account for this disconnect, a useful distinction is between proximate and underlying causes of learning shortfalls.[1] Proximate causes include the skills and motivation of teachers; the quality of school management; the availability of other inputs used in schools; and the extent to which learners come to school prepared to learn. Underlying these are the governance arrangements through which these inputs are deployed, and the broader political and institutional context within which the governance arrangements are embedded. Considered together, the proximate and underlying drivers of learning comprise an education system.

A focus on these systems is the point of departure of the ambitious RISE research programme.[2] Its aim is to use a systems approach to identify new ways of improving learning outcomes. As part of this effort, it commissioned a set of country studies (the Political Economy Adoption Team - 'PET-A' - papers) of the politics of education policy adoption. This paper synthesizes the findings of these studies.[3]

Taking systems seriously has some far-reaching implications for education sector reform. The education sector has been no exception to a longstanding pre-occupation in the development discourse with 'best practices' approaches to policymaking and implementation – both 'best practice' specialized education sector interventions , and 'best practice' institutional engineering. However, in many countries the underlying political-institutional realities fall short of the conditions necessary for implementing these 'best practices'. Given these realities, a promising way of identifying new possibilities for improving learning outcomes is to complement the familiar agenda with attention to some 'softer' aspects of governance – power, purpose, alliances, mission, and expectations. As this paper will show, incorporating these opens up promising new vistas of context-sensitive approaches to improving learning outcomes.

The paper proceeds as follows: Section II lays out a conceptual framework for the comparative analysis, organized around three distinctive political-institutional contexts, each with distinctive patterns of incentive and constraint for stakeholders. Sections III-V apply the framework. Section III focuses on five 'dominant' contexts (specific periods in Ethiopia; Indonesia; Nigeria; Tanzania and Vietnam); Section IV on four relatively 'impersonal competitive' contexts (Chile, India, Peru and South Africa); and Section V (which includes in its discussion the experience of countries outside the PET-A studies) on a variety of personalized competitive contexts. Section VI suggests some potential context-responsive ways forward for improving learning outcomes.

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[1] This distinction is elaborated in the 2018 World Development Report, *Learning to Realize Education's Promise* (World Bank, 2018).

[2] The Research Programme on Improving Systems of Education is a multi-country endeavor; its principal funder is the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, from where it has received 36.8 million pounds.

[3] Some of the RISE PET-A countries are ones for which the current author has in-depth knowledge; others are not. As per the terms of reference, this synthesis is entirely based (except where referenced) on the PET-A country studies. The interpretations in this paper are solely those of its author, and are not necessarily shared by the authors of the PET-A country studies.

II: GOVERNING EDUCATION – HOW CONTEXT MATTERS

This section lays out the conceptual framework for the paper's comparative analysis, and then uses global indicators of governance to group the PET-A countries into the sub-categories that will guide the analysis.

The conceptual framework. The PET-A focus on politics reflects a broader shift in the development discourse: Over the past four decades, efforts to explain and influence development outcomes have repeatedly moved upstream - from policy, to the institutions that shape policymaking and implementation, to the politics that shapes institutions.

Bringing politics into the mainstream of the development discourse has been helpful in explaining why all-too-often technocratic 'best practice' policies to improve learning outcomes fail to achieve their goal. Building on the individual PET-A studies, this paper aims to go beyond the general dictum that 'politics matters' in three ways: it organizes the analysis around a small group of political-institutional contexts; it explores the distinctive causal mechanisms that link each context to learning outcomes; and it suggests some context-responsive ways forward. Figure 1 summarizes the overall approach; the paragraphs that follow elaborate on its key elements.

Figure 1: Context, governance and development outcomes
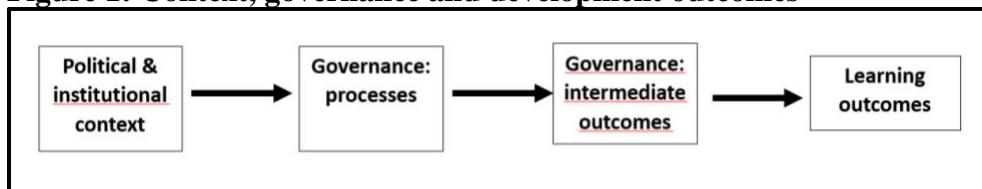
Learning outcomes have many determinants: along with politics and institutions, policy matters, as do socio-economic circumstances. Identifying the distinctive contribution of each goes way beyond the scope of the PET-A studies, and thus of the present paper. Rather, the focus is on the ways in which governance influences learning – distinguishing (as per Figure 1) between specific governance processes and, as intermediate outcomes, the workings of the governance system as a whole.

The World Bank's 2018 World Development Report, *Learning, to Realize Education's Promise*[4] suggests a way of characterizing intermediate governance outcomes for the education sector. The WDR distinguishes between two governance dimensions of an education system: whether the system is coherent, and whether it is aligned to learning. Using this distinction Figure 2 (adapted from the WDR) highlights three contrasting patterns:
- Systems that are both coherent and aligned to learning (pattern #1) – and thus are well-positioned to improve learning outcomes.
- Systems that are coherent, but pursue goals other than learning (pattern #2) – these systems are well-positioned to undertake logistical tasks such as enhanced access to education (which involves large-scale spending on construction and on staffing), but less well-positioned to address craft-based tasks such as teaching.
- Systems that are neither coherent nor aligned to learning (pattern #3)

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[4] World Bank, *Learning to Realize Education's Promise,* World Development Report 2018.

Figure 2: Governing education – some intermediate outcomes

The academic and policy literature on education has made major progress in identifying how specific pedagogy-related interventions can improve learning outcomes. These lessons can straightforwardly be applied in countries in the pattern #1 governance 'sweet spot'. However, in countries where education governance aligns more with patterns #2 and #3, specialist sector-specific interventions to support learning are less likely to add value; attention to processes of governance takes on heightened urgency. Further, as Figure 1 suggests, these governance processes are constrained in turn by political and institutional context.

Over the past fifteen years, distinguishing among political and institutional contexts has become something of a cottage industry. A useful point of departure for understanding their interactions is the notion of a "political settlement." Crystallizing multiple contributions,[5] Tim Kelsall and colleagues (2022) define a political settlement as…

> *"…an ongoing agreement (or acquiescence) among a society's most powerful groups over a set of political and economic institutions accepted to generate for them a minimally acceptable level of benefits, and which thereby ends or prevents generalized civil war and/or political and economic disorder."*

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[5] Tim Kelsall, Nicolai Schulz, William Ferguson, Matthias vom Hau, Sam Hickey, and Brian Levy, *Political Settlements and Development: Theory, Evidence, Implications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); Influential earlier contributions include Douglass North, John Wallis, and Barry Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Douglass North, John Wallis, Barry Weingast, and Stephen Webb (eds.), *In the Shadow of Violence—the Problem of Development in Limited Access Order Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Mushtaq Khan, "Political Settlements and the Governance of Growth-Enhancing Institutions," 2010, https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/9968/1/Political_Settlements_internet.pdf; Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail* (New York: Crown Books, 2012); William Ferguson, *The Political Economy of Collective Action, Inequality, and Development* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020); and World Bank, *World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2017).

Building on this definition (plus over a decade's worth of experience[6] in applying the approach to specific development challenges), the analysis that follows is organized around three contexts that vary radically from one another in the institutional arrangements through which power is exercised:[7]

- *Dominant contexts* – those where power has been consolidated around a well-defined principal.
- *Competitive and impersonal contexts* – those where power is multipolar, with multiple influential stakeholders, and with impersonal rules, impartially monitored and enforced, governing both contestation among stakeholders and the operation of the public sphere more broadly.
- *Competitive and personalized contexts* – those where power is multipolar with multiple influential stakeholders, with conflict resolution taking the form of personalized, self-enforcing deals among stakeholders.

A central goal of this paper will be to explore the distinctive influences of these divergent contexts on education sector governance and outcomes.

As per Figure 1, governance processes bridge political and institutional context on the one hand, and intermediate governance outcomes on the other. The World Bank's 2004 World Development Report, *Making Services Work for Poor People,[8]* 'long route' of accountability characterizes these processes as a chain of interactions that link citizens, politicians, politicians, policymakers, senior officials, managers and front-line providers. Three links in the long-route chain are especially relevant for this paper:

- The interface between political processes and policymaking;
- Policymaking processes;
- Implementation, including to the school-level.

As the paper will explore in depth, the way in which this linked chain functions (or not) varies radically across the three contexts.

The education sector bureaucracy and its relationship with other stakeholders features centrally in all three links. For the first link, the key relationship is between political leaders and top-level technocrats within the bureaucracy; for the second, the key relationships are between policymakers within the bureaucracy and non-government technical professionals and other national-level stakeholders; key for the third link are the relationships between public officials (including school-level staff) and

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[6] See Brian Levy, *Working with the Grain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) for a sustained effort to explore how 'good fit' policy options vary across different contexts. As elaborated there, the aim of the 'ideal-type' analytical approach is to delineate a middle ground, to identify *"a small number of 'ideal types' that each are very different from one another, with each capturing a distinctive set of characteristics that resonate with a subset of actual cases – and that, considered together, delineate a spectrum of patterns along which most real world examples could fairly straightforwardly be aligned".* pp. 8, 14.

[7] The dilemma of any effort to construct typologies is that as the number of variables increases, the number of possible types grows exponentially. The typology used in the present paper distinguishes among contexts according to the 'form' that power takes: hierarchical versus horizontal; underpinned by personalized versus impersonal institutions. A typology laid out in Kelsall et. al (2022) is organized around two variables that focus on the 'content' of power: 'power concentration' (PC), the robustness of agreements among stakeholders to co-operate (or acquiesce); and 'social foundation' (SF), the breadth of the range of 'socially salient stakeholders. Kelsall et. al. show empirically that both growth rates and the quality of social provisioning vary systematically with PC and SF. The institutional variables and the power variables are complementary: PC and SF – and thus development performance – both vary *within* each of the three institutional contexts around which the present paper is organized.

[8] World Bank, *Making Services Work for Poor People,* 2004 World Development Report (Washington DC: World Bank and Oxford University Press).

communities, parents and other local power brokers. This paper focuses principally (but not only) on the first two.[9]

Classifying the countries. Typological analysis is a useful way of distilling some overarching patterns, but in practice many countries are hybrid combinations of different types. Keeping that caveat in mind (and noting also that countries can vary over time as to which type they most approximate), this subsection uses three V-Dem governance indicators to group the ten PET-A countries that are the focus of the present analysis[10] (plus a few additional cases discussed in Section V) into the paper's three political-institutional types .

Table 1 uses the V-Dem electoral democracy measure to distinguish between dominant (low electoral democracy) and competitive (high electoral democracy) countries and periods (with an intermediate category in-between). Five of the ten PET-A countries fell into the dominant category for some period of time; three of these (Ethiopia, Vietnam and Tanzania) remained in that category for the entire period under study.[11] These five countries/periods are the focus of Section III.

Table 1: Positioning countries along the dominant-competitive spectrum

Low electoral democracy (Dominant)	Intermediate	High electoral democracy (Competitive)
Ethiopia (1941-2016) Vietnam (1970-) Tanzania (1970-2020) Indonesia (1971-1998) Nigeria (1970-1999)	Bangladesh (1991-2012) India (1977-1989; 2013-) South Africa (1994-1999) Ghana (1993-2000) Nigeria (2000-) Kenya (2003 -)	Chile (1990-) India (1990-2013) South Africa (1999-) Ghana (2001-) Indonesia (1999-) Peru (2001-)

Source: V-Dem electoral democracy index (0-1 scale)
Low (Dominant): elec <0.4; Intermediate: 0.4 <elec <0.7; High (Competitive): elec > 0.7
Notes: From 1992-2017, Tanzania's score was in the 0.4-0.5 range
From 2000-2020 Indonesia's score was in the 0.65-0.72 range

Among competitive and intermediate countries, the paper's typology distinguishes further according to whether the institutional rules of the game are personalized or impersonal – using, as per Table 2, the V-Dem 'rule of law' and 'clientelism' indices to make the distinction.[12] Two country cases (Chile since 1990 and South Africa since 1994) fall into the 'impersonal' category (relatively high rule of law, and relatively low clientelism); two more (India since 1978 and Peru since 2001) are mostly impersonal. Section IV focuses on these four 'impersonal competitive' contexts. Section V focuses on the remaining

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[9] For a sustained exploration of the third link, see Brian Levy, Robert Cameron, Ursula Hoadley and Vinothan Naidoo (eds.), *The Politics and Governance of Basic Education: A Tale of Two South African Provinces* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[10] PET-A studies also were conducted in Egypt and Pakistan. However, the focus of these two studies was sufficiently different from that of this paper that they could not usefully be included.

[11] Two additional countries, Chile and South Africa were non-democracies for periods prior to that covered in the PET-A studies.

[12] V-Dem defines the rule of law index as measuring "the extent to which laws are transparently, independently, predictably, impartially, and equally enforced, and the extent to which the actions of government officials comply with the law. It defines "clientelistic relationships to include the targeted, contingent distribution of resources (goods, services, jobs, money, etc) in exchange for political support."
 https://www.v-dem.net/data_analysis/VariableGraph/

countries/periods in Table 2 (including, as an addition to the PET-A studies, Ghana, Bangladesh, and South Africa's Eastern Cape province).

Table 2: Positioning competitive[a/] countries along the personalized-impersonal spectrum

Clientelism	*Low*			Chile (1990-) South Africa (1994-) [Western Cape]
	Medium		Ghana (1993-) Indonesia (1999-)	Peru (2001-) India (1978-)
	High	Bangladesh (1991-2012) Nigeria (2000-) Kenya (2003-2007)	Kenya (2008-) [Eastern Cape]	
		Low	*Medium*	*High*
		Rule of law		

Sources: V-Dem clientelism and rule of law indices (0-1 scale)
Clientelism: Low <0.4; Intermediate: 0.4<clientelism<0.7; high clientelism 0.7 and above
Rule of Law: Dominant: RoL <0.4; Intermediate: RoL 0.4-0.69; High : RoL 0.7 and above
Notes: a/ including countries/periods ranked 'intermediate' in Table 1.
Kenya's clientelism score was in the 0.64-0.69 range from 1975-1983 and 2013-2020;
Indonesia's clientelism score, from 2000-2020 was in the 0.6-0.7 range
Peru's RoL score has mostly been in the 0.67-0.72 range since 2001
Indonesia's RoL score was in the 0.6-0.7 range From 2000-2020

III: EDUCATION AND LEARNING IN DOMINANT CONTEXTS

In dominant contexts, power is centered around a well-defined principal – a political leader, and a hierarchical organizational structure. In some dominant contexts, leaders exercise power through a system of impersonal rules, in others power is more personalized. Dominant contexts vary from one another in the extent to which power is consolidated.[13] Insofar as it is consolidated, the leader's goals can cascade systematically downwards throughout the long-route chain of hierarchical principal-agent relationships. This section will first summarize the PET-A findings as to how top-down dominance works, and then explore comparatively some of the consequences of dominance for education sector performance.

How dominance works. Drawing on the PET-A analyses of five dominant contexts, this sub-section explores some distinctive ways in which dominant leaders exercise top-down power, and the distinctive preferences of each dominant country's political leadership vis-à-vis the goals of the education system. In two of the countries (Vietnam and Indonesia), both the character of the dominant leadership and the education sector's goals largely were stable (adapting incrementally) for long periods of time; in a third (Tanzania) leadership was stable, but the preference of that leadership as to what should be the orientation of the education system altered quite radically across sub-periods; in two others (Nigeria and Ethiopia) dominance was more sequential – with large shifts over time in both the character of the political leadership and the education sector's goals.

To begin with Vietnam – the country is a remarkable outlier globally, with both years of schooling and learning outcomes (as measured by global standardized tests) way in excess of expected levels given the

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[13] Kelsall et. al. (2022) show that the extent of "power concentration" varies among dominant contexts, both across countries and over time within an individual country. Strictly speaking, the analysis in this paper applies in those dominant contexts where power concentration is high. As power concentration declines, the challenges of goal formation increasingly resemble those of messier, multistakeholder contexts.

country's per capita income. As the PET-A study details,[14] the Vietnamese peoples' commitment to education is deeply rooted in the country's Confucian legacy. This commitment was embraced from the first by the Communist Party of Vietnam:

> *"From its earliest instantiation as the Communist Youth League in 1925 through to its maturation as a revolutionary insurgent force, the CPV seized on education and the promotion of literacy, nationalism, and class-consciousness as a dimension of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle" (p.32)*

Governance by the CPV is described in the PET-A study as "single party dominant corporatist", wherein:

> *the organization and operation of official government structures and service delivery units is interpenetrated by structures and organs of the communist party……Having both official government structures and a perpetual organized parallel political process within them makes "management" relationships within the bureaucracy more accountable to national political priorities than might be the case in a purely top-down government bureaucracy" (p.40)*

Box A, later in this section, details the multiple ways (beyond bureaucracy-party interactions) in which the governance of education in Vietnam is embedded in society.

The education-sector goals pursued by the CPV evolved over time, with a mid-1980s fiscal crisis, and the market-oriented *doi moi* reforms that came in its wake a major turning point:

> *[Since the mid-1950s] the party has placed education at the center of processes of state formation, state making, and the promotion of a nationalist vision of socialist modernity and citizenship. (p.10).... The development of a socialist citizenry as a and perhaps the primary aim of education is articulated in the Law on Education. Nevertheless, the concept of the socialist citizenship has been reconfigured with changes reflecting the country's social and economic transformations....Since the early 2000s, the CPV has stated its intent to improve learning and teaching, to create young citizens who are "independent, active and creative," and to provide a highly skilled, productive and adaptive workforce. (p.36)....In the current context, education policy [must navigate] tensions and contradictions stemming from the need to promote critical and independent thinking and the political imperative of maintaining social control and training normative conformity. (p.37)*

Both in its goals, and in its mode of top-down governance Indonesia was, of course, very different from Vietnam's – and its learning outcomes were nowhere near as impressive. However, as with Vietnam, education was central to the country's governing vision. Following a period of instability, General Soeharto and his New Order movement seized power in 1967, and remained in power for the subsequent three decades. Here is how the Indonesia PET-A study described how General Soeharto exercised his power:

> *"Political and bureaucratic authority was increasingly centralized in Jakarta and concentrated at the President's residential address. At his discretion, current and former military officials were handed senior positions.. They co-opted Islamic elites by granting them influence over key ministries such as Education and Religious Affairs…." (p.30)*

The education sector played a central role in Indonesia's New Order governance; however, improving learning outcomes was not a principal goal. Rather:

> *"Policies were designed to indoctrinate rather than educate, and to further enforce political control over the population…. (p.32) Priority was given to training students to be loyal and obedient to the Indonesian nation, the Indonesian state and, to some extent, their religion rather than promoting acquisition of basic skills in maths, science and literacy." (pp. 1-2) "Teachers were required to*

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[14] Except where otherwise footnoted, all the quotes in this study (and the accompanying page numbers) are from the respective (as per the quote's context) PET-A country studies; the specific page numbers referenced are from the PET-A drafts available at the time of writing this synthesis (which may not be the same as the final versions).

support Golkar, the New Order's electoral vehicle, and both take and teach compulsory courses in the state ideology, Pancasila". (p.32)…" "The new Order continued the efforts of previous governments to build national identity through the use of Bahasa Indonesia as the language of instruction" (p.33)

Tanzania, like Vietnam and Indonesia, has long had stable political leadership. That leadership has been provided by the CCM political party which has been in power throughout the six decades since the country became independent (formally as a one-party state from 1962 to 1992; since then as the consistent, electorally-dominant winner of multi-party elections). This seeming stability notwithstanding, as the PET-A study documents, the education sector's goals have varied radically over time. Thus:

- *1961-1967. Party-based pragmatism. "Manpower planning had a dominant influence on policy. The goals of schooling were to cultivate a civic identity and train a skilled workforce to Africanize the state bureaucracy and economy. The government explicitly targeted a ceiling of 50% primary enrollment rate." (p.3)*
- *1967-1982. Socialist developmentalism. "Education for Self-Reliance under socialism emphasized the acquisition of skills needed for rural agrarian development. The government rationed access to secondary schooling. Post-1974 universal primary education implemented Universal Primary Education by waiving fees in response to popular demand"(pp. 3-4)*
- *1982-1995. Early Reformist Era. "Skills development for a liberalizing economy."*
- *1995- present. Mass Education for a Modern Economy and Pluralist Politics. "Formally committed to a policy of universal primary and secondary education. Basic education as preparation for higher levels of schooling in the quest to produce skilled workers for a 21ˢᵗ century economy…..Not until 2006 that the government began to purposely invest in expanding secondary education. Universal secondary education formally introduced in 2015". (p.4)*

As the PET-A study concludes: *"Changes in the official policy objectives behind learning explain the observed stagnation in education quality. Learning has not always been the intended goal of schooling".*

Nigeria and Ethiopia have witnessed far-reaching changes over time in both the character of their leadership and the education goals pursued by each leader. From the beginnings of civil war in 1966 until 1999, Nigeria was ruled by a succession of military leaders: General Yakubu Gowon (1966-1975); General Murtala Mohammed (1975-1976); General Olusegun Obasanjo (1976-1979); General Muhammadu Buhari (1983-1985); General Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993); and General Sani Abacha (1993-1998). While the leaders changed, the approach to the exercise of authority largely[15] did not. As described by the PET-A:

> *"The personalized system in which power was concentrated in the hand of the members of the Supreme Military Council with the military leader as the arrowhead enabled power to be exercised without requisite consultation – not even with technocrats and bureaucrats in the education sector. The military political actors had no independent authorities that checked their actions and they were responsible to no one…The unilateral military approach created some tendency towards ambitious projects without due calculation of the cost and implications"* (p.88)

What did shift, though, were the goals Nigeria's military leaders brought to the education system. Different eras of military rule can be distinguished, each with distinct consequences for the governance of the education sector.

- *"Education played a leading role in [post 1966-1970 civil war] reconstruction and reconciliation mission and was seen as a hope for the country's national unification. This underpinned the prominence given to the Universal Primary Education programme…..Military governments*

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[15] General Obasanjo abolished the Supreme Military Council in 1976; it was re-established in 1983. In 1979, he handed over power to a short-lived elected government.

implemented educational reform programmes to win national recognition and acceptance from all sections of society. A takeover of schools from Christian missions and private owners led to the centralization of the education system....Survey respondents in [predominantly Muslim] northern Nigerian states where access to education [had been] limited were more motivated by the takeover than their counterparts in the south" (pp. 28-31; 46)

- In the early 1980s,*"the regime introduced a structural adjustment programme....economic diplomacy aimed at promoting Nigeria in the global market.... The implementation of SAP led to severe reductions in government spending on education. This resulted in unpaid teacher salaries, dilapidation of education facilities, strikes in public schools, and eventual decline in education quality and outcomes." (p. 53.) "State economic tutelage moved from a pattern of diffuse clientelism under comparatively stable (though weak) institutional auspices to more arbitrary and debilitating control by a single ruler".(p.93)[16]*

Between 1993 and1999, there was a third era of military rule one that "that plunged the country into an acute political and economic crisis…". However, the Nigeria PET-A paper reports that "limited information exists on the education policies and programmes" for that period. (p.59)

Even more than Nigeria, Ethiopia has been subject to far-reaching shifts in the character of its authoritarian leaders – both in the way they exercised power, and in their visions for the education system. Emperor Haile Selassie ruled from 1941 to 1974.

- *"Formally, the emperor had absolute and unchallenged power on all matters....By recruiting educated and loyal retainers of low origin, the emperor ensured that the entire political and bureaucratic machinery was under his control....The emperor strongly believed education to be the key for his project of modernization" (pp 5-.6).*

The goal of modernization notwithstanding, as of the early 1960s, the education enrolment rate for the 5-14 age cohort was only about 10 percent. (See Table 3 below.)

From 1974-1991, the country was ruled by the military Derg regime; Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam was the uncontested leader from 1977:

"The system of rule during this period was personalized with a strong elite cohesion within the Derg." (p.11) "The major policy objective of education under the Derg was entrenching the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the regime and thereby the creation of a new socialist citizen...The Programme for the National Democratic Revolution (p.11) of 1976 proclaimed that free education will be provided to the 'broad masses' with the aim of 'intensifying the struggle against feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism'..... the expansion of access to education to achieve the goal of universal primary education became an immediate priority of the government". (p.11-12) The introduction of new subjects and expansion of schools were done without proper planning, sufficient qualified teachers and adequate infrastructure." (p.12)

In 1991, Ethiopia formally adopted a democratic constitution. In practice, governance continued to be top-down, with Meles Zenawi exerting tight control through his Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Political Front (EPRDF) until his untimely death in 2012:

"Meles Zenawi not only subdued his opponents by using his executive powers, but also later consolidated his personal rule....The EPRDF moved to a party under the uncontested control of the prime minister with no institutional checks on his power." (p.17) From the beginning, the EPRDF has put expanding access as its priority objective……The development orientation of the new leadership affected the policy's focus on a significant expansion to create educated labour for the rural and industrial sectors" (p.20) "The EPRDF uses the provision of social services, especially education, as a core element of state legitimacy to consolidate power and its support base by

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[16] The final sentence is quoted from Peter Lewis, "From Prebendalism to Predation: The Political Economy of Decline in Nigeria, *Journal of Modern African Studies,* Volume 34, Number 1.

emphasizing and fulfilling its image as a revolutionary, pro-poor movement and as the representative of the rural masses." (p.27)   The belief of the EPRDF that previous regimes did not respect and protect the rights of subnational groups within Ethiopia impacted the focus of the policy about decentralization and mediums of instruction…" (p.20)

The consequences of dominance. Figure 2 distinguished among education systems according to whether or not they are coherent, and whether or not they are learning oriented. As the five PET-A case studies showed, in dominant settings goals (including goals for the education system) were set by leadership. Insofar as authority is consolidated, dominant leaders can use their top-down authority to impose these goals throughout the long route chain of links identified in Section II. They can over-ride the complications and cautions technocrats bring to them; they can ignore (or suppress) any direct representations emanating from civil society stakeholders. The education systems were thus coherent vis-à-vis the goals that they pursued. But coherent to what purpose?

In his classic book, *Seeing Like a State,* James Scott lays out how a combination of unconstrained state power and what he terms 'high-modernist' aspirations can result in the enthusiastic embrace of far-reaching projects of social engineering, built on far-reaching oversimplifications of complex realities that brush aside tacit knowledge and the details of context-responsive implementation. The results can be tragic, as China's Cultural Revolution and the Cambodian Khmer Rouge's genocidal campaign against intellectuals illustrate.

None of the PET-A experiences come close to what happened in China and Cambodia in the late 1960s and early 1970s – though some might argue that elements of ideologically-driven over-reach by dominant leaders are evident in Nigeria's systematic undermining in the 1970s of missionary and private schools in the southern regions of the country, and in Tanzania's 1970s rural-oriented Education for Self Reliance campaign, which tightly restricted access to post-primary education. (The Rwandan government's determined effort to replace French with English as the language of instruction in the country's schools – even through, a former Belgian colony, French rather than English was far-and-away the most commonly used non-indigenous language – offers another example.[17])

In time (although not necessarily at the outset), all five dominant PET-A countries expanded access to education. In all the countries, enhanced access was in service of the pursuit of broader political legitimacy. In Indonesia, as discussed earlier, this was an aspect of a broader ideology of nation-building. In Nigeria and Ethiopia (during the Derg period) it was part of the way in which military governments sought to demonstrate their responsiveness to historically excluded segments of the population. In Tanzania (and Ethiopia subsequent to 1991) it was part of a broader transition to the 'form' of multi-party democracy, without actually surrendering political control. Only in Vietnam was access combined with a strong commitment to improve learning outcomes. Strikingly, Vietnam also is an outlier among the dominant countries for the multiple ways in which (as Box A details) its top-down governance is complemented by "embedded societal engagement" (as the PET-A paper puts it).

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[17] Timothy Williams, "The Downsides of Dominance: Education Quality Reforms and Rwanda's Political Settlement", chapter 5 in Hickey and Hossain (2019).

Box A: Vietnam – social inclusion within a dominant context[18]

The Vietnam PET-A study identifies three distinct ways in which the governance of education is embedded in society. First, as noted earlier, is the distinctive relationship between the education bureaucracy and the CPV:
> *"The presence of a perpetual political process (through the Party cells) within the education system amounts to a countervailing force that can (though does not always) generate enhanced accountability to education policy goals. In Vietnam, Party structures and processes are employed to hold schools, principals, and teachers to account (p.47)*

Second, the fiscal crisis and resulting *doi moi* reforms led to a significant shift of fiscal responsibility for education financing to citizens. (Perhaps euphemistically, this policy came to be known as 'societalization'.) Thus:
> *"Societalization policies have sought to maximize the flow of societal resources into services, ease burdens on public finance, enhance participation in the creation and allocation of services by diversifying modalities of service provision and payment, and improve the overall quantity, quality and accessibility of services. "
> p.57…..[but]…… By raising barriers to access, societalization has contributed to the emergence of an increasingly stratified education system whereby better-off households pay and benefit from higher quality education services and better-off schools reinforce their bargaining power vis-a-vis private payments" (p.62)*

Third, Vietnam also is characterized by:
> *"…. what we might call, for the lack of a better term, an education sector public sphere - in which one can observe something resembling a relatively autonomous and strikingly vibrant area of public opinion, debate, and political speech…… While these features might violate commonly held assumptions about features of an education system in a socialist-oriented and, in many respects illiberal, party-state, they are in reality vitally important elements that are intrinsic to the functioning of Vietnam's education system and its performance on learning. " (p.55)….. In Vietnam, a highly literate society with a large party-controlled "revolutionary press" and a teeming social media scene, matters pertaining to the education sector are widely discussed across a variety of social media platforms". (p.63)*

Table 3 provides some summary statistics for four of the five dominant countries on how both access to basic education and levels of basic literacy changed over a four decade period (supplemented by more recent information on throughput into secondary schooling). As the table shows:
- In Indonesia there was no trade-off. Rates of literacy following the completion of five years of education (but no more)[19] were high in the 1960s, and remained almost as high four decades later, after a massive expansion of access (especially for girls); throughput into secondary education also was high.
- In Nigeria, gains in access and rates of basic literacy after five years of schooling moved in radically opposite directions, with massive declines in the latter.
- In Tanzania and Ethiopia, there was some trade-off, but it was muted; Gains in access were especially massive in Ethiopia (with the seemingly large girls' literacy decline signaling less a weakening than the fact the education system for girls was being built from scratch) – and with a heightened emphasis on improved learning outcomes (not captured in the data) in the Meles years. But reflecting earlier limits on access to education in both countries throughput into secondary education was low.

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[18] Note that Kelsall et. al. use 'social inclusion' as one of two variables (along with 'power concentration') for distinguishing among political settlements.

[19] As Le Nestour, Moscosviz and Sandefur (2022) explain, the literacy % combines information from repeated Demographic and Health Surveys run by USAID, and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys run by UNICEF; both include data on birth year, number of years of education, and whether (as a literacy test) respondents are able to read a sentence out loud.

Table 3: Access and learning outcomes in four dominant contexts (percentages)

	Ethiopia	Indonesia	Nigeria	Tanzania
Primary enrollment (boys)				
Early (1960s)	18.6	71.1	66.4	77.5
Later (2000s)	59.7	93.9	80.2	82.3
Literacy % after exactly 5 years of education (boys)				
Early (1960s)	97.2	91.8	71.6	76.0
Later (2000s)	82.8	90.8	31.2	64.5
Primary enrollment (girls)				
Early (1960s)	4.0	58.5	40.9	49.0
Later (2000s)	41.6	96.6	62.4	79.4
Literacy % after exactly 5 years of education (girls)				
Early (1960s)	97.5	83.9	52.3	77.4
Later (2000s)	68.2	91.7	21.2	65.0
Lower secondary enrollment (all; 2010)	43	89	47	42
Upper secondary enrollment (all; 2010)	16	64	41	9

Sources: Alexis Le Nestour, Laura Moscoviz and Justin Sandefur (2022), "The long-run decline of education quality in the developing world", *Center for Global Development Working Paper 608,* February, Appendix A4, Tables 7 and 8. World Bank, Education Statistics (Edstats) available at https://datatopics.worldbank.org/education/

In sum, viewed from the perspective of education sector reformers, the challenge posed by dominant contexts is clear: how to nudge top-down coherence towards more systematic pursuit of improved learning outcomes? The PET-A case studies suggest that this might be less daunting than a James-Scott-like interpretation might suggest. Vietnam and Nigeria illustrate contrasting extremes – but, perhaps in part because many dominant regimes pay attention to political legitimacy, the overall cross-country pattern is less bi-modal than might be expected. Three of the five cases (Ethiopia, Indonesia and Tanzania) fall more in the middle of the distribution; all three aggressively expanded access to education, with at most modest declines in learning outcomes.[20] The final section of the paper will explore how this combination of coherence plus at least some desire for legitimacy might be leveraged in pursuit of better learning outcomes.

IV: EDUCATION POLICYMAKING IN IMPERSONAL COMPETITIVE CONTEXTS

Governance processes work differently in competitive contexts than in their dominant counterparts. As we have seen, in dominant contexts goals are set by top political leadership and (as per the long route) straightforwardly cascade downwards. By contrast, translating the back-and-forth jockeying of competitive contexts into concrete, implementable goals can be a messy process, both in settings governed with impersonal rules (the focus of this section) and even more so in settings where the rules of the game are personalized (the focus of Section V).

In impersonal competitive contexts, formal rules putatively provide mechanisms for reconciling political competition and public sector coherence. Here is the normative vision: Impartial elections sort among competing political leaders. Political leaders and senior, technically-skilled public officials then interact

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[20] Note that insofar as the expansion of access brings lower socio-economic, and more difficult-to-reach populations into the education system, some decline in learning outcomes is to be expected – even with no change in the learning orientation of the system.

with one another in structured processes to craft coherent policy goals, aligned with the winning political platforms. Goals and policy having been set, rule-bound processes insulate the public bureaucracy from political pressures, sustaining policy coherence, and enabling implementation to proceed straightforwardly.

This normative vision is built around great expectations of what formal rules can achieve. These expectations include: Ensuring that all parties accept the legitimacy of elections and their outcomes. Helping elected political leaders manage the ongoing subsequent challenge of aligning the interests of political allies, who are likely to vary in both their goals and the extent of their allegiance. Keeping political contestation from spilling over into the workings of policymaking and implementation processes. And enabling all of this while sustaining the morale, results-orientation and effectiveness of the public sector policymaking and implementation apparatus.[21] In practice, as the PET-A case studies of Chile, Peru, South Africa and India detail, things are not that straightforward. This subsection will review each of these four in turn, and then conclude with some comparative lessons on the challenges of education sector governance in impersonal competitive contexts.

Chile and Peru. In both Chile and Peru, the contemporary governance of education was shaped by a period of dictatorial rule and its aftermath. Augusto Pinochet's 1973-1990 dictatorship in Chile lasted longer, and was more far-reaching in its institutional ambitions than the 1990/92-2000 rule of Alberto Fujimori in Peru. Regardless, in both countries, the earlier authoritarian period seemingly provided a propitious starting point for education sector governance in the democratic era. The inherited systems were organizationally coherent. Chile's dictatorship in particular had used its dictatorial authority to re-orient education-sector stakeholders (notably including the trade unions) around professional rather than interest-based or ideological concerns. However, what came subsequently did not follow the normative long-route script for impersonal competitive contexts.

Table 4 uses the three long-route governance processes highlighted earlier as the basis for contrasting the patterns of education sector governance in Chile and Peru. As is evident in the table, in both countries the post-dictatorship governance of education was characterized by a strong role for the country's education 'technocracy' (which, in both countries, enjoyed strong support from the World Bank). Correspondingly, both countries invested heavily in the systematic measurement of learning outcomes, with the results strongly influencing policy. However, as the table also signals, there also were some striking differences between the two countries.

Table 4: Comparing 'long-route' governance in Chile and Peru

	Chile since 1990	**Peru since 1995**
I: The politics-policymaking interface	Consensus-oriented, built around shared commitment to improve learning outcomes	Repeated political re-sets of strategic priorities
II: Policymaking processes *IIa: Capacity of education policymaking technocracy*	Quite strong base, strengthens over time	Strengthens over time

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IIb: Authority of education policymaking technocracy	Strong, as key input into policy consensus-building	Increasingly able to win de facto insulation from back-and-forth political resets
IIc: Role of standardized learning assessments	Central to education sector management	Central to education sector management
IId: Teachers union engagement in policymaking	Engages as professional organization, committed to learning – but becomes increasingly critical of policy over time.	Conflictual relationship between policymakers and union
IIe: Participation of other non-governmental stakeholders in policymaking	Involvement of technical experts from academia and NGOs in policy formation. Very limited broad-based stakeholder engagement prior to mid-2000s. Significant World Bank influence.	Civil society organizations -NGOs, universities and think tanks participate in shaping policy. Significant World Bank influence.
III: The policymaking - implementation interface	(i) Very far-reaching decentralization of school governance to municipal level (including vouchers) (ii) Highly formalistic relationship, mediated via formal specification of career paths, plus incentive regime	(i) Some movement toward decentralization, but limited in practice. (ii) Less formalistic, and more iterative change than in Chile.

Source: Chile and Peru PET-A studies

One striking difference concerns the extent to which the provision of education was decentralized. As the Chile country study details, Chile's arrangements for decentralization, codified within the political transition from dictatorship to democracy, were especially far-reaching:

> *"The financial and administrative reforms introduced by the dictatorship in the educational sector in 1981 included competition, decentralization and privatization, with the transference of public education to the municipalities and the introduction of a voucher system .....By promoting privatization of schools and competition, control over what happens in schools moves from the public sector to private entrepreneurs or the Church and individual rather than collective preferences shape supply. The more disseminated or atomized control, the more difficult becomes an attempt to use the school system to spread any "revolutionary" ideology…*
>
> *"The first democratic government had reasons to fear an explosion of social demands and preferred to limit participation and the role of civil society organizations…. ..It was difficult to confront the disagreement about the roles of markets and there was no point to do so, as the institutional setting defined by the dictatorship would be any way preserved by a minority due to the constraints imposed by the binomial electoral system ....The most practical alternative was to ignore the issue, while attempting to improve quality by other means ....."(pp. 6, 8, 11)*

In the early 1990s, Peru also embraced decentralization – in its case as a reaction to centralized autocracy. However, the county's decentralization initiatives were much less far-reaching than Chile's:

> *"The decentralization process and the various participative mechanisms it established were developed as a kind of ideological reaction to the authoritarianism of the previous decade – 'there was a conviction that democracy could only be resolved through decentralization' . But the real impact of those participative processes was low. The model was to create various participatory councils, from the national to the local/school level, tasked with defining policies and actions. According to a key informant, the problem with this model was that the focus was on publishing*

documents and establishing protocols for the operation of such participatory councils that were non-binding, often inadequate and monitored in highly ritualistic ways ." (pp. 39-40) "

A second striking difference between Chile and Peru was in the extent of systematization of interactions among stakeholders – both de jure, and the de facto reality. This difference cut across all three links in the long-route chain. In Chile, the process was largely top-down and systematically managed. Thus:

> *"Since the return to democracy, Chile has built a consensus on the importance of educational quality and has pursued this objective in a systematic and incremental way. Agreement on improvement of educational quality occurred during the 90s and was sustained thereafter. Along with increase in resources and programs, technical capacities within the Ministry of Education gradually improved……An elite/expert consensus was established in early 90s and at different key junctures was more precisely elaborated in the form of "representative" "expert" commissions that were appointed by the executive branch to produce proposals on particular issues……Technical experts' capacities are reflected in pieces of legislation that follow a smooth legislative process, where legislators have little to add or modify because they are not expert in the field." (p.46)*

> *"The right wing coalition was invited to the educational priority consensus at several points, and publicly endorsed it. The participation of both left and right intellectual and political influential elites transformed educational policies into 'state policies', which offered a longer horizon of stability and legitimacy..... There was little room for voice and participation during the 90s. Aside from the possibility that the Teachers Association and the non-teacher association consulted with their bases, or the parliament invited different stakeholders to express their views, key policies involving resources were a matter of expert decision making..... Input policies and programs were top down, with few choices for schools…." (p.15)*

By contrast to Chile, in Peru all three links in the long-route chain evolved messily, with ongoing back-and-forth jockeying among stakeholders, messy compromises with the teachers union[22], and multiple policy reversals. Even as interactions between political and technocratic actors were fraught, technically-skilled sector professionals gradually expanding their sphere of influence.

> *"Political and sectoral instability caused by the general weakness of the country's political and institutional system, as well as by corruption, have had a profound influence on the nature and especially on the pace of reforms during this period. The education sector has been led by 20 ministers in 25 years – a figure that in and of itself is illustrative of the radical degrees of discontinuity in policy making."(p. 74)*

> *"Ministerial teams as well as those working at the regional and local levels, have changed constantly. This has made the definition and implementation of reforms sketchy, and has led to a form of 'protracted incrementalism', to describe the very slow and often discontinuous pace at which reforms are advanced, one where many key aspects of those reforms may get lost in the way….Small incremental gains may be achieved by one administration only to be dismantled by another and to then be re-established, often partially, at a later stage." (p.15)*

> *"There has been a gradual transformation of the Ministry of Education and of the education policy arena in general. It has gone from a model of policy-making in which individual figures ruled, more or less freely, imposing their views and decisions regardless of the need for some level of policy coherence and continuity, to a much more technocratic model of policy-making, in which decisions fall in the hands of technocrats…. There have been several attempts to strengthen institutions and*

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[22] A law to put teachers' careers on a more meritocratic pathway was approved in 2007, against the opposition of the teachers union. Subsequently, however, to accommodate the union, the new law was implemented alongside the old one, with teachers free to decide under which regime their careers would be governed.

processes that may lead to greater sectoral policy coherence…..These mechanisms, however, have not been very successful in a country where informal relations are the rule, and, agreements are often ignored by ministerial administrations and political parties. (p.67)

"Civil society organizations – NGOs, universities, think tanks and research centers – have also played a key role in defining policy agendas [and….] in the development of education policies and reforms. Though not always able to contain either technocrats' or other policy makers, they have certainly contributed to the continuity of agendas and to the advancement, through piecemeal, of reforms." P.62

Evidently, Chile's policy and implementation processes were more systematically articulated, and more consistently implemented than were Peru's. Insofar as a better-aligned long route – with more systematic, consistent policies - is likely to be more effective than a 'messier' counterpart, one might expect that learning outcomes would show more improvement over time in Chile than in Peru. Yet that is not what the evidence shows.

Table 5: Learning outcomes in Chile and Peru

	2000	**2009**	**2018**
Mathematics			
Chile	384	421	417
Peru	292	365	400
Reading			
Chile	410	449	452
Peru	327	370	401

Source: Edstats https://datatopics.worldbank.org/education/

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international assessment that measures 15-year-old students' reading, mathematics, and science literacy every 3 years. Table 5 reports 2000, 2009 and 2018 results for Chile and Peru. As the table shows, Peru shows greater gains than Chile. This might be explained in part by the fact that Chile began from a higher base. However, as discussed later in the paper, there may also be a deeper, paradoxical governance feature at work – namely that Peru's messier, less formalistic and more iterative process of policy formulation and adaptation helped build broad legitimacy for education policy, importantly including trust in the technocrats and professionals responsible for its formulation – thereby enhancing their ability to push back increasingly effectively against idiosyncratic initiatives proposed by political appointees.

The authors of the Chile study point to the risks of a too-narrow technocratic perspective:
"Good intentions to improve educational quality, resources and carrots and sticks have not been enough to move the Chilean educational system in the direction that its political authorities wanted….The top down character of Chilean educational policy making and the insufficient use of institutional voice mechanisms might backfire as the mounting social tensions and the 2019 social movement casts some doubts about its survival" (p.47)
To make the point differently, more than in Peru, Chile's policymakers were successful in bringing coherence (as per Figure 2) to the governance of basic education. However, in practice this coherence may have turned out to be more an end in itself than a means to improve learning outcomes. More on this later in the paper.

South Africa.[23] In the 1990s, South Africa made its 'rainbow miracle' political transition from apartheid to constitutional democracy. 1994 witnessed the country's first non-racial democratic election, which resulted in Nelson Mandela becoming president; 1996 saw the finalization of its constitution. That same year, its parliament passed the South African Schools Act – a far-reaching institutional reform to align the (hitherto ethnically-structured) education sector with the new democratic era.

South Africa's new institutions were unusually robust for a middle-income country;[24] they seemingly provided a strong platform for the 'long-route of accountability', both generally and within the education sector. Responsibility for education-sector policymaking, regulation and financing was located at the national-level; the country's provinces were assigned the task of implementation; school governing bodies were given quite substantial responsibilities. In practice, as the middle column of Table 6 suggests, the institutional arrangements worked messily. What accounts for the disconnect between seemingly robust, well-structured institutional forms and uneven, disappointing practice? Section V includes some discussion of implementation at the subnational level. This sub-section addresses the question for national-level links in the long-route chain, using the Chilean and Peruvian experiences as points of reference.

To begin with the first link, at first sight South Africa's way of governing the interface between politics and policymaking might seem similar to that of Chile. Chile was organized around well-articulated formal processes for crafting learning-oriented policies that enjoyed broad support among both political and technocratic actors.   Superficially, South Africa seemed to be similarly well-positioned. The African National Congress (a political party with longstanding, well-institutionalized formal decision-making processes) won a sweeping electoral mandate, and continued to be electorally dominant into the early 2020s. As per Table 6 below, a well-defined political principal was thus dominant. This might be thought to provide a strong platform for clarifying politically the goals to be pursued, and then empowering policymakers at sectoral level to pursue them. However, beneath the surface things were messier.[25]

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[23] In addition to the Gustaffson & Taylor PET-A paper, this subsection also draws on Brian Levy, Alan Hirsch, Musa Nxele and Vinothan Naidoo (2021) "South Africa: When strong institutions and massive inequalities collide" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,* and various chapters in Brian Levy, Robert Cameron, Ursula Hoadley and Vinothan Naidoo (eds.), *The Politics and Governance of Basic Education: A Tale of Two South African Provinces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[24] As Levy, Hirsch, Nxele and Naidoo (2018) detail, the Worldwide Governance Indicators generally ranked South African institutional quality in the 70th-80th percentile globally, well above the typical rating for a middle-income country.

[25] For details, see Levy, Hirsch, Nxele and Naidoo (2021).

Table 6: 'Long-route' governance in South Africa and India

	South Africa 1996-	India, since the 1980s
I: The national-level politics-policymaking interface	Political principals dominate	Political principals largely defer to sectoral technocrats and non-government expert stakeholders
II: National-level policymaking processes		
IIa: Capacity of education policymaking technocracy	Uneven	Technically strong
IIb: Authority of education policymaking technocracy	Limited	Strong relative to national political principals; limited relative to state level
IIc: Role of standardized learning assessments	Very limited	Limited (?)
IId: Teachers union engagement in policymaking	Very strong; oriented to economic interests of membership	[Unaddressed]
IIe: Participation of other non-governmental stakeholders in policymaking	Limited; formalistic and conflictual	Strong de facto influence
III: The policymaking-implementation interface	Far-reaching decentralization of implementation to provincial-level (and, within provinces, to school-governing bodies). Financing & regulation at national-level	Far-reaching decentralization. Responsibility for implementation (and state-level financing and rule-setting) assigned to state-level.

Source: India and South Africa PET-A studies; Levy et. al (2018)

Formally, the ANC governs as an "alliance" in partnership with the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions. Under the umbrella of the alliance, center-left leaders wrangle over policies with hard-line left ideological factions; the influence of unions, including the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) has continually been strong. Champions of the racial transformation of the elite (so-called "radical economic transformation" of "white monopoly capital") wrangle with both. Machine-building politicians and patronage-seekers confound the best-laid-plans of ideologues and technocrats. Highly-contested leadership transitions (in 2007 and, again, in 2017) have riven the party. In sum, superficial similarities notwithstanding, in democratic South Africa the processes of goal formation for the education sector were way more contested than in post-Pinochet Chile.

Turning to policymaking processes, here a useful comparison is with Peru. Peru compensated for the chaotic character of its politics with a mix – immediately beneath the political level - of formal and informal interactions among education sector stakeholders that provided a good-enough platform for convergence around learning-oriented policies, even in the face of erratic signals from the political (Ministerial) level. In South Africa, by contrast, as Gustafsson and Taylor put it:

"*Politicians enjoy the institutional power to force planners to specify politically-driven targets Politicians can be expected to ask for too much of their bureaucracies. It is in the nature of their roles. The problem arises when they make their requests to under-capacitated planners. Such planners have no solid basis for arguing that an agenda is over-ambitious. At a personal level, not*

having the capacity required for one's job is disempowering, and is likely to result in, first, an inability to push back effectively against unreasonable demands and, secondly, strategies that will allow someone else to be blamed when failure hits." (pp. 57-8)

Why have South Africa's education sector professionals found it difficult to achieve the critical mass of co-operation and self-assurance that enabled education sector professionals in Peru to effectively influence policymaking? Part of the problem has been a failure among experts to constructively work through their disagreements. South Africa, like other countries, has had to wrestle with differences of views between technocrats (often trained as economists) and professionals more closely affiliated to teachers (and SADTU). But the conflicts have gone beyond that. Gustafsson and Taylor document an unusually strident conflict among experts over the details of measurement and monitoring – a conflict that, as they detail, has been an important part of why the country has repeatedly tried but repeatedly failed to put in place any systematic measurement of learning outcomes prior to the end of twelfth grade.

A perhaps deeper set of obstacles to the emergence of an effective technocracy is rooted in the difficulties of transcending South Africa's racist history. One obstacle concerns how to staff a 'transformed' public sector. A senior public official described what happened:[26]

"Everywhere we look, politicians have taken operational control of public administration. ... The state needed to be transformed, and political leadership need the power to enact this change. However, none of them are professional public managers. And being placed in positions of operational authority, they are consistently eroding the quality of the public management"

A second obstacle was identified in the early 1990s by Blade Nzimande (he subsequently became the Minister of Higher Education and the Secretary General of the South African Communist Party):

"The National Education Policy Initiative classically represents the problem of this division of labor, in that the experts are academics, university-based people largely, who are predominately white; whilst the National Education Coordinating Committee structures are mass-based, community people who are predominantly black. That has got the potential of creating severe tensions". [27]

The combination of unresolved conflicts among political leaders and the absence of coherent countervailing power (other than from SADTU) resulted in a pattern that is common among organizations that are supposed to be united, but in practice are riven by contending factions - paper over divisions with a combination of high-minded (but in practice lowest-common-denominator) rhetoric and pre-occupation with formal processes.[28] Education sector policymaking in South Africa illustrates how this works. As Gustafsson and Taylor put it:

"South Africa's plans are commonly accused of being unimaginative and un-revolutionary…. The political culture in South Africa dictates that politicians must put forward targets which tend to be over-ambitious. .....An excess of indicators on non-financial inputs and processes, without a proper sense of the costs and benefits of collecting and processing the data, leads to malicious compliance and large volumes of unusable statistics." (p.26)

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[26] The first quote is from Michael Sachs, a former Chief Director in South Africa's influential Ministry of Finance. The second is from Blade Nzimande, General Secretary of the South African Communist Party and Minister of Higher Education. (pp. 45; 51).

[27] Quoted inn Gustafsson and Taylor, p.51

[28] As James Q. Wilson put it in his classic study, *Bureaucracy.* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), *"The complexities of doing business with government often are said to be the result of the 'bureaucracy's love of red tape'…. But few, if any, of the rules producing this complexity would have been generated by the bureaucracy if left to its own devices ….. These rules have been imposed by external actors. They are not bureaucratic rules, but political ones….Legislators find it easier to constrain inputs than outputs"* (pp. 117, 121).

In sum, at the national level, South Africa parallels Chile's in that it has been more successful in bringing coherence to formal governance than in improving learning outcomes – though less successful than Chile in either dimension. In South Africa's education sector policymaking, form has triumphed over function.

India. For aficionados of innovations to improve learning, India is a vibrant laboratory. As the India PET-A papers summarize, for almost half a century, the country's national education-sector policymakers have been at the cutting-edge globally in championing new initiatives. Yet the whole of the achievements has been less than the sum of their parts. Exploring the workings in India of the three long route governance processes helps explain why.

To begin with the politics-policymaking link, as the right-hand column of Table 6 summarizes, in India this link works in a way that seemingly puts strikingly large authority in the hands of national-level sectoral professionals, within and outside the bureaucracy. Thus:
> *"The overall process of reform initiation, ideation and implementation remained a-political, though with the support of the national level leadership..... Trusted members of the bureaucracy were given the space to ideate, design and implement the reform initiatives. The political leadership was not initiating the reform or playing the lead role in its ideation."*

Given the empowerment of technical professionals in the processes of policymaking, it might be expected that the result would be a continually-improving education sector. But this does not seem to be what has happened.[29] Instead:
> *"Both the process and the ideas themselves remained somewhat technical, instrumental and institutional." (p.25)...... Multiple, conflicting ideas co-exist..... Ideas become dominant [for a while...] not because there is a settlement arrived between opposing groups. It's merely that one set of actors are able to capture some ideational and implementation space." (p.5)*

Indeed, the India PET-A case study suggests that a deferential approach adopted by national-level politicians does not de-politicize educational policymaking but alters the nature of the political game. Among those absent:
> *"The reform ideas were not developed in response to a grassroots movement of parents or teachers. Nor were they catering to the challenges of ground-level implementation."*

As for who was influential:
> *"The impetus for reform came from the political dynamics within and between the international and the national governance systems........ Actors involved in reform ideation have been bureaucrats, educationists, academics and civil society leaders at the national level with occasional inputs from the judiciary. (p.24)..... During the 1990s, there was a rise of donor and donor-selected consultants who came to play an important role. During the 2000s, the involvement of people-focused civil society organizations reduced and that of internationally funded NGOs became prominent". (p.7)*

Beyond the specifics of national-level processes, there is a more fundamental reason why, India's education policy innovations had limited impact on learning outcomes. As the India PET-A paper details, there is limited engagement between the (national-level) innovators and the (state-level) implementers. On the contrary:
> *"[There is....] a stark disjuncture between [national-level] actors involved in initiating and ideating for reform and those [at state and below-state levels] implementing it..... (p.17)....The implementation of [reform] ideas at the state level has varied dramatically and remained mired in the complexity of state and below-state level administrative structures and the political contexts of*

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[29] Of course, systematic measurement of trends in learning outcomes over time would provide the best way to tell what have been the fruits of the reform process. However, the India PET-A study contains no details of any such systematic measurement.

the states…."[Often] the ground realities were not receptive to these ideas…. ….Innovative reform ideas were not mainstreamed within the education bureaucracy." (p.18) At times implementation at the state level has explicitly undercut the national level reform ideas." (p. 11).

Drilling further into the details, the India PET-A study highlights some startling gaps vis-à-vis both institutional design and financing. On institutional design:

- *"While implementation is at state- and below-state levels, reformers give limited attention to these administrative architectures. New ideas are outfitted on old structures with small tweaks made occasionally to align it to the overall system. Administrative architectures at the state-level require significant political support to be realigned. But neither in the reform design nor in the process of developing the reform ideas have the structural foundations been laid out." (p.17)……*
- (PET-A's specific assessment of the 1980s, World Bank supported DPEP) *"….. project design, the implementation systems and the extent of engagement with the wider set of stakeholders were in many ways [oriented] to meet the needs of 'managing' a central government project funded by external stakeholders." (p.11)*

Parallel gaps are evident vis-à-vis financing:

- In the 1980s: *"The DPEP project interventions…..created a parallel administrative structure ….Its large funding stood in stark contrast with that of the finance-strapped state education departments…."*
- In the 2000s: *"The translation of the reform program into political prioritization – particularly at the state level, indicated by a financial commitment and political oversight over the state administrative architecture for implementation – did not happen through the chosen cohort of actors and the chosen reform process". (p.25)*
- In the 2010s: *"At the state level, the political ownership of the Right to Education Act dwindled once it became clear that the financial costs of implementing the act were to be borne by the state level." (p.21)*

This disconnect between relatively strong coherence at the national level but limited impact at the subnational levels where implementation actually happens, raises a fundamental question: What has been the de facto purpose of the seemingly vibrant engagement of India's sector professionals with the puzzle of what it takes to improve learning?

In a 2010 article, [30] Lant Pritchett, Michael Woolcock and Matt Andrews describe how, all-too-often, reform initiatives are pre-occupied more with seeking legitimacy from external constituencies than with the effectiveness of reforms. The resulting 'isomorphic mimicry' leads to a focus on so-called "best practices" rather than effort to align reform with local circumstances (with the latter often calling for more attention to the 'basics' than to the global cutting edge of innovation). Refracted through the lens of the Pritchett, Woolcock and Andrews article, the India PET-A study points towards a question the answer to which goes beyond the scope of this paper: In India's half-century of education sector reform, what has been the balance between a journey of learning on the one hand and, on the other, an ongoing pre-occupation with influencing and adapting to continually shifting global fashions?

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[30] Lant Pritchett, Michael Woolcock and Matt Andrews, "Capability Traps? The Mechanisms of Persistent Implementation Failure", *Center for Global Development Working Paper Number 234* 2010; and R. Ashworth, G. Boyne and R. Delbridge, "Escape from the Iron Cage? Organizational Change and Isomorphic Pressures in the Public Sector", *Journal of Public Administration, Research and Theory,* Volume 19, 2007, pp. 165-187.

Governing education in impersonal competitive contexts – some comparative lessons. Table 7 presents data on access and learning outcomes for three[31] of the four countries that have been the focus of this section. The table (together with the data in Table 6) underscores that Peru has been successful in achieving large gains in both access and learning. By contrast, in both India and (perhaps, though the data seem problematic[32]) South Africa, gains in access to education were associated with a sharp lowering in learning outcomes.

Table 7: Access and learning outcomes in three impersonal competitive countries (%)

	India	**Peru**	**South Africa**
Primary enrollment (boys)			
Early (1960s)	61.2	n/a	n/a
Later (2000s)	87.9	n/a	n/a
Literacy % after exactly 5 years of education (boys)			
Early (1960s)	91.5	n/a	n/a
Later (2000s)	56.2	n/a	n/a
Primary enrollment (girls)			
Early (1960s)	36.6	71.7	89.2
Later (2000s)	77.3	93.7	98.9
Literacy % after exactly 5 years of education (girls)			
Early (1960s)	89.8	69.4	71.4
Later (2000s)	51.4	84.9	47.9
Lower secondary enrollment (all; 2010)	80	103	103
Upper secondary enrollment (all; 2010)	50 (2014: 64)	77 (2016: 94)	88 (2014: 108)

Sources: See Table 3

Considered in tandem, this section's summary of the PET-A evidence of how governance processes actually work in Chile, India, Peru and South Africa, and the data in Tables 5 and 7 suggest that a narrow pre-occupation with strengthening 'long route' institutions as the way to improve education may be misplaced – even in contexts where impersonal institutions are relatively robust. To be sure, on paper the 'long route' provides a compelling depiction of what it take to improve education sector governance in impersonal competitive settings. The key, it implies, is to 'get the institutions right' and thereby put countries into the Figure 1 'sweet spot' - the pattern #1 combination of coherence and alignment to learning that enables the deployment of cutting-edge technocratic interventions which evidence shows can help improve pedagogy and learning outcomes. While countries such as Finland, France and Japan provide examples of how this can work, the four case studies suggest that all-too-often there can be a large disjuncture between the 'form' and 'function' of education sector governance.

For one thing, as Peru illustrates, effective function need not depend on some pre-conceived form. The way in which Peru achieved its success– massive dysfunction at top political levels, offset by strong learning-oriented coalitions immediately beneath the political chaos – was very far from the tidy hierarchical logic of the long route. Conversely, as the Chilean, Indian and South African case studies

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[31] Chile was not included in the official DHS/MICS surveys on which Le Nestour, Moscovis and Sandefur (2022) base their analysis; as of 2010, Chile's gross lower-secondary enrollment rate was 98%.

[32] The South African 1960s measures of enrollment and learning outcomes for girls shown in Table 7 do not seem consistent with other measures; one possible explanation is that the universe of learners reported in the study was based on an exclusionary, apartheid era definition (ie one that excluded much of the African majority of the population.

illustrate (each in different ways), a pre-occupation with long route 'form' can be at the expense of 'function', and can thereby misdirect the search for ways to improve learning outcomes:

- The Chilean case study suggests that (prior to the latter 2010s), the country's reputation for having in place a robust, high-quality formal framework for governing the education system was well-deserved. However, the case study also suggests that other 'softer' aspects of governance were given limited attention. Neglect of the latter may be part of the explanation why only limited improvements in learning outcomes were achieved between 2000 and 2018.
- In India, the deference shown by national political leaders provided a seemingly ideal terrain for sector-specialists. Yet the result seems to have been more a triumph of form than of function: continuing contestation among the specialists over ideas, without convergence as to the way forward; and a massive, ongoing disconnect between the (national-level) policy discourse and the sub-national levels that were responsible for implementation.
- In South Africa, the top-down assertion of power and the reality of its limitations resulted in a pre-occupation with formal rule-following (and breaches thereof) at the expense of a focus on learning (and of the 'softer' aspects of governance that were key to its improvement).

A provocative implication follows from the four cases: Perhaps the risk of confusing form with function is greatest in precisely those competitive contexts where the possibility of a high-performing, coherent impersonal system, though not yet achieved, seems tantalizingly close. In such contexts, using the normative logic of the long-route as a guidepost for action may indeed strengthen (as per Figure 2) an education system's rule-boundedness (and thus formal coherence) – even as it leaves unresolved political conflicts, and associated contestation over what should be the goals of a country's education system. However, as we have seen – and contrary to presumptions of the power of 'best practice' institutions– 'best practice' coherence is neither necessary nor sufficient for achieving good learning outcomes. Indeed, a pre-occupation with coherence might have the unintended consequence of directing the attention of reformers away from some key challenges that need to be addressed for learning to improve – and, in particular, away from the messy but crucial task of building learning coalitions among diverse stakeholders, as well as other 'softer' governance possibilities that might be especially helpful. More on this in the final section of the paper.

V: PERSONALIZED COMPETITION'S LOCAL-LEVEL SILVER LINING

Personalized competitive contexts lack the seeming strengths of either their dominant or their impersonal competitive counterparts. Rather than a dominant leader, there are multiple politically influential groups. However, unlike impersonal competitive contexts, beyond an agreement to hold elections there is no credible framework of impersonal rules with the potential of bringing coherence to political competition; insofar as formal rules exist on paper, they have little, if any, practical import. The time horizons of political actors are short. Political allegiances trump organizational hierarchies; loyalties are cemented via personalized deals, including the targeted conferral of patronage. In such contexts, fragmentation – and thus the absence of 'coherence' in Figure 2 – is inevitable. The reality is the opposite of a vision of a long-route chain of well-structured hierarchical links. In personalized competitive contexts, the notion that an education sector can be governed via coherent goal formation and associated policymaking at the national level, and consistent follow-through by national bureaucracies, is wholly fanciful.

Notwithstanding these deep-seated weaknesses, personalized competitive contexts perhaps have a silver lining. A paradoxical consequence of the seemingly dysfunctional reality of personalized competition - fragmented power, and rules of the game that do not cascade systematically downwards from national to local levels – is that space potentially can open up for local-level initiatives. In the education sector, this

can take the form of local alliances among developmentally-oriented stakeholders, who together foster a culture of commitment to learning.

The PET-A case studies provide very limited insight into the prospects for a local-level silver lining. As per Tables 1 and 2, only two of the PET-A studies were in personalized competitive contexts (and only for Kenya is some pertinent information available for the personalized competitive period). Nor were they intended to drill down into the salient local-level dynamics. Happily, both of these gaps are filled by research conducted under the auspices of the DFID-funded Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID) research program. Of particular relevance for present purposes are the ESID analyses of education sector governance in Ghana, Bangladesh and South Africa's Eastern Cape province.[33] All three studies combined a top-down political analysis of the influence of personalized competition on education sector governance, with a bottom-up analysis of how the political dynamics played out at school- and local levels.[34] While the institutional details varied across the three contexts, as the paragraphs below detail, there turned out to be a common overarching pattern. In all three contexts, the haphazardness of personalized competition created space for the emergence of local-level (and/or school-level) 'islands of effectiveness'.[35]

Consider Ghana. Beginning in 1988, the country introduced a decentralized framework for the provision of public education. The decentralization reforms were extended in 1993, and then further elaborated in 1995 and again in 2008. The cumulative impact was mixed. Thus:

> "*Ghana's competitive clientelist settlement generates a high degree of education sector policy incoherence and politicization..... Decentralization of education service delivery created new mechanisms and structures to empower regional- and district-level stakeholders to play active roles in the management of education service delivery. These included District Assemblies made up of elected and appointed members of localities...headed by centrally appointed district chief executives who are political agents of the ruling party. The drivers of improved performance and accountability do not flow from the national to the local level, but instead have to be regenerated at the level of districts and schools...".*

District-level power dynamics thus turned out to be central determinants of school performance, as the comparative case studies showed:

> *In one district intense intra- and inter-party competition between the main political actors undermined the ability to promote teacher accountability and decrease absenteeism.....In the other*

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[33] Samuel Hickey and Naomi Hossain (eds.) *The Politics of Education in Developing Countries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). Included in the volume are Edward Ampratwum, Mohamed Awal and Franklin Oduro, "Decentralization and Teacher Accountability: The Political Settlement and Sub-national Governance in Ghana's Education Sector"; and Naomi Hossain Mirza Hassan Muhammad Ashikur Rahman Khondoker Shakhawat Ali and Md. Sajidul Islam, "The Politics of Learning in Bangladesh." ESID also funded Levy et. al. (2018)

[34] Each of these studies included in-depth comparative case studies of two matched pairs of schools; both schools in each matched pair came from the same locality, with one a relatively high performer and the other less so.

[35] The country-level analyses conducted for Ghana and Bangladesh were different (exploring different questions) than those of the PET-A countries; this paper has thus not sought to explore broader questions concerning their education systems, beyond the specific points made in the text. Even so, their education sector outcomes, as reported in De Nestour et.al. (2022) and thus paralleling the data in Tables 3 and 7, are noteworthy. In Bangladesh, primary school enrollment of girls rose from 28.5% of the relevant age cohort in the 1960s to 84.3% in the 2000s; their literacy rate after five years of schooling fell from 87.3% in the 1960s to 73.8% in the 2000s. In Ghana, girls' enrollment rose from 53% in the 1960s to 82.6% in the 2000s; literacy rates after five years of schooling rose from a startlingly low reported rate of 5.1% in the earlier period to 13.2 percent in the later period. Note also that in Kenya, girls enrollment rose from 61.3% in the 1960s to 89.8% in the 2000s, and literacy rates after five years of schooling declined somewhat over the period from 66.5% to 61.4%.

less intense inter- and intra-party competition led to far greater coherence in the application of strategies to address teacher absenteeism…. In the latter district, there was evidence of the emergence of a developmental coalition between community, school and district-level actors…..including "political officials and teacher unions…..evident at district level, and mirrored at the community level"[36]

By contrast to Ghana, the formal institutional arrangements for education sector governance in Bangladesh were centralized. In practice, though, local political dynamics were again trumps. As per the ESID case study:

"Bangladesh features an education system which, while formally highly centralized is in practice fairly decentralized and discretionary in whether and how it implements reforms…..School Management Committee membership is among the spoils of local politics…..Learning reforms were not universally absent or everywhere poorly implemented, but they were adopted with great discretion at the school level. They were adopted and implemented to the extent that the relationship between school authorities, the local elites involved in school governance, and the wider community aligned behind improved teacher and student performance."[37]

In both Ghana and Bangladesh, the emergence of 'islands of effectiveness' occurred by default, a consequence of pervasive personalized competition at all levels of governance. But 'islands' can also emerge at least partially by design - a result of pro-active delegation of responsibility to local-levels. Indeed, as Tables 4 and 6 summarize, in all four impersonal competitive countries that were the focus of Section IV, decentralization was explicitly part of the design of education sector governance. In practice, a normative vision of decentralization can be undermined by two opposite sets of risks: a continued influence of top-down control, notwithstanding formal delegation; or a surrender of control to local-level actors whose goals may be very different than improving learning (including, at the limit, capture of education sector resources for predatory purposes). Notwithstanding the limitations of the PET-A coverage, the Chilean and South African (plus Indonesian) case studies offer some insight into these risks.

In Chile, as discussed earlier, a formalistic culture appears to have pervaded the system as a whole, undercutting motivation and local-levels. In Indonesia, as Box B details, the PET-A study suggests that, even after the country's transition to democracy and its embrace of decentralization (including for education), the education system appears to have been governed at local levels in ways that were more legacies of the authoritarian past than expressions of the new freedoms and opportunities provided by democracy and decentralization.

Box B: Decentralization's effect on local education governance – the Indonesian puzzle

In the early 2000s, Indonesia enacted a far-reaching decentralization of its political and administrative governance system – including vis-a-vis the education system. As the Indonesia PET-A study (and the V-Dem indicators in Table 2) signal, the broader context within which this decentralization unfolded was one of relatively weak formal rules, and relatively high levels of clientelism. (In Table 2, Indonesia falls in the 'intermediate' category in both dimensions.) The analysis in Sections IV and V of this paper suggest that, in an Indonesia-like context, the consequence of decentralization would be increased variability in sub-national learning outcomes.

However, neither the Indonesia PET-A study (which, it must be noted, focused on national-level policy adoption rather than sub-national variation) nor related work sponsored by RISE[38], found more than marginal evidence that at least some locales have been building on the new-found flexibility to foster innovation and a stronger learning orientation in the sector. As per the PET-A study:

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[36] Both Ghana-related quotes are from Ampratuwam et al (2019) pp. 55-59

[37] Quoted from Hossain et al (2019) p. 76.

[38] Arif et. al. (2022).

"Indonesia's learning crisis has stemmed from the continued political dominance of predatory political, bureaucratic and corporate elites...throughout the New Order (1965-1998) and post-New Order (1998-present) periods.....(p.2).....Although the collapse of the New Order weakened the predatory elements it did not eliminate them....they maintained instrumental control over the state apparatus notwithstanding the shift to a more democratic system....Newly empowered local governments were captured in many regions by predatory elements within local arms of the military and bureaucracy, the local business community and criminal networks". (p.37)

Indonesia's seeming lack of local-level innovation - notwithstanding what by all accounts has been a genuine shift in political power - is different from the patterns observed in the other case studies discussed in Sections IV and V. Why might this be the case? One possibility is that expectations have been path dependent. As summarized in Section III, Indonesia was governed in a consistent, top-down manner for thirty years, with control of education a key part of the top-down system. Though the formal rules of the game shifted, anecdotal evidence suggests that, especially in education, community-level actors within the sector may have continued to engage on the basis of long-standing expectations that education is "about government". [39] Indeed, as the PET-A study details, though responsibility for teacher recruitment shifted to regional levels, national-level actors (and rule-makers) continued to have significant influence over prospects for career advancement (and, insofar as regional officials exercised discretion, it generally – though not always – was to take advantage of new opportunities for patronage).

Relatedly, the PET-A study also points to a continuing pre-occupation among "progressive" actors with national-level concerns. Thus:

"In policy terms, the progressive agenda has been squarely opposed to neoliberal reform of the country's education system on the grounds that such reform promotes the 'privatization' or 'commercialization' of education and, in so doing, worsens education inequality ....(p.24).... The collapse of the New Order increased the scope for popular elements promoting progressive ideas to influence policy...A [strengthened] Constitutional Court....created a new entry point into the policy-making process for progressive elements, albeit one that could only block or frustrate neo-liberal reform rather than actively promote adoption of alternative policies." (pp. 37-8)

Insofar as Indonesia continues along a decentralized trajectory, the experiences of Peru, Ghana and Bangladesh case studies point to potential gains from extending the national-level 'progressive' agenda to incorporate also pro-active, multi-level alliance-building of a kind that supports a stronger learning orientation at the school-level. More on this in Section VI.

South Africa shows evidence of both risks – too much control in some provinces, too little in others. As noted earlier, the institutional arrangements that democratic South Africa put in place for governing education assigned principal responsibility for implementation to the country's nine provinces, and also delegated significant authority to school governing boards in which parents are a majority. In practice, as a comparative case study of two provinces has explored, there has been wide variation in how provinces exercise their authority.[40] At one end of the spectrum, the patterns of delegation in the Western Cape province have resulted (perhaps paralleling Chile) in formalistic top-down management, pre-occupied with process compliance. By contrast at the other end of the spectrum, exemplified by the Eastern Cape province, personalized competition predominates:

"The Eastern Cape inherited from the apartheid era a fragmented, patronage-oriented bureaucracy.....Fragmentation among elites within the dominant party fueled the predisposition to seek influence via patronage. The result was that the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) has been bedeviled by divergent and competing regional interests, organizational cultures, and patronage ties which consistently defied centralized control. It has experienced repeated leadership turnover and a general flouting of centralized authority. Obstacles

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[39] This hypothesis builds on an informal conversation with Scott Guggenheim, a longtime Indonesian resident (and global expert on local development). He noted that Indonesian communities generally refrained from proposing school-related small-scale infrastructure projects; schools were perceived to be "about government" and thus "off-limits".

[40] For details, see Levy et. al. (2018).

to enforcing management control and sustaining leadership continuity have contributed to chronic weaknesses in both financial and personnel management."[41]

Eastern Cape schools have largely been left to fend for themselves. As four school-level case studies show, the consequences varied according to the balance of power at local-level between developmental and predatory influences. Two schools were low-performing. In one, there was a low-level equilibrium of capture with the principal, teachers, and the School Governing Board (SGB) working in cahoots with one another; in the other, stakeholders were mired in endemic conflict. Two schools were better-performing. Both illustrate how an alliance between the school principal, the SGB and the community can fend off predation. One of the schools had long had an institutional culture where all stakeholders—teachers, the SGB, the extended community—felt included. The other provides a striking example of a community mobilizing for turnaround. After over a decade of neglectful and predatory leadership, a group of parents and some SGB members successfully mobilized to replace the principal, and then worked closely with the successor principal to turn around the school.

In sum, ESID's local-level studies in Ghana, Bangladesh and South Africa's Eastern Cape province provide compelling evidence that local-level power dynamics can open up space for learning-oriented islands of effectiveness to emerge. To be sure, how widespread such islands might be cannot be divined from ESID's in-depth, qualitative case study methodology – such studies can reveal the forces at work within the specific case being analyzed, but cannot shed light on the relative balance between developmental and predatory actors across the broader population of schools from which the cases were selected. However, a fourth country that, as per Table 2, fits broadly within the personalized competitive subcategory – Kenya – offers a tantalizing sense of the broader possibilities.[42]

Kenya's combination of rotating, ethnically-oriented political alliances and significant administrative continuity from colonial times results in a 'Janus-faced'[43] political-institutional order – rule-bound on the surface, but in practice rife with patronage, factionalism and corruption. Strikingly, notwithstanding these weaknesses, cross-country standardized tests show the country to be a strong positive outlier in its learning outcomes.[44]The country's success can hardly be attributed to the quality of its education bureaucracy. What seems to have made the difference are the 'softer' dimensions of governance. Consider the following description from a long-time practitioner/observer of the Kenyan education system:

> *"What one sees in rural Kenya is an expectation for kids to learn and be able to have basic skills….Exam results are far more readily available in Kenya than other countries in the region. The 'mean scores' for the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and equivalent KCSE at secondary school are posted in every school and over time so that trends can be seen. Head teachers*

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[41] Qouted from Levy et. al Chapter 10, pp. 260-261. For an in-depth analysis of the Eastern Cape bureaucracy, see Zukiswa Kota, Monica Hendricks, Eric Matambo and Vinothan Naidoo, "Provincial Governance of Education – the Eastern Cape Experience", chapter 5 in Levy et. al. (2018).

[42] The paragraphs that follow are adapted from Brian Levy, "'All for Education' – Meeting the Governance Challenge", chapter 10 of Levy at. al. (2018). A supplementary note to Ayiro et. al's Kenya PET-A study provided useful additional information.

[43] The phrase is from D. Branch and N. Cheeseman (2006), "The politics of control in Kenya: Understanding the bureaucratic-executive state, 1952-1978", *Review of African Political Economy* Volume 107, pp. 11-31. It is quoted in a supplementary note provided by the authors of the Kenya PET-A study.

[44] Only Mauritius consistently outperforms Kenya in the standardized assessment for 2007 of the Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ). As Levy et. al. (2018) chapter 7 shows, Kenya outperforms South Africa's Western Cape, with the differences especially large and statistically significant once the usual range of socio-economic variables are controlled for.

are held accountable for those results to the extent of being paraded around the community if they did well, or literally banned from school and kicked out of the community if they did badly"[45]

Kenya's experience points to the possibility that pro-learning norms can over-ride a seemingly unpropitious political and institutional context for learning. The roots of active civic engagement in the education sector run deep in the foundational ideas which shaped modern Kenya: the vision of the country's first president, Jomo Kenyatta (himself a former school teacher and head of the anti-colonial Kenya African Teachers College) of an educated population as key for being a proud independent nation; in the inclusion of education as top priority in the country's first national plan; and in a commitment in the first decade of the country's independence to *Harambee*—'self-help'—as the pathway to development, with a vision of 'All for Education' central to the Harambee movement. The final section will explore further some broader possibilities suggested by Kenya's 'all for education' experience.

VI: WAYS FORWARD

Recent years have witnessed a continually deepening awareness of the complexity of development policymaking and implementation. In the 1980s and 1990s, the focus was on 'best practice' policies and institutions. In the education sector, this was evident in a broad consensus (notwithstanding heated disagreements on many details among sector specialists) as to the general contours of sectoral 'best practices': Have in place institutional arrangements that differentiate between political and technocratic considerations; afford space for sectoral specialists to bring to bear their expertise on how to improve curriculum and pedagogy; support thriving school environments. This, as per pattern #1 in Figure 2 is the education 'sweet spot'.

Over the past two decades, the influence of politics and power on policymaking and institutional design has received increasing attention. This has made the limitations of 'best practices' thinking increasingly evident. The PET-A studies illustrate for the education sector the far-reaching practical implications of taking politics seriously. As Sections III-V of this paper detail, political-institutional contours vary across the PET-A countries. Some countries are dominant, others competitive. In some, interactions among stakeholders are governed largely by impersonal rules; in others, conflicts are resolved by personalized deals. Across the range (with the possible exception of Vietnam), education governance is all-too-likely to be characterized, not by the Figure 2 'sweet spot', but by the non-learning-oriented patterns #2 and #3. In these messy settings, as Box C explores, many conventional approaches for improving learning outcomes can be difficult to deploy effectively.

Box C: How some specialized education sector interventions interact with context
Education sector researchers and practitioners have accumulated a great deal of knowledge of ways to improve learning outcomes. The left hand column of Table C1 lists four leading examples of specialized sectoral innovations (plus the provision of infrastructure as a point of reference). As the second column signals, implementation of each involves substantial technical challenges. As per the third and fourth columns, each also has to reckon with political and institutional/organizational challenges. These might include the resistance of stakeholders who perceive their interests threatened by innovation in the relevant area - teachers who might resist heightened expectations of performance; traditionalists who might resist curricular innovations; patronage-oriented politicians and officials who might resist loss of control over positions and promotions - – and, more broadly a fear that loosening top-down control could result in a weakening, rather than strengthening of learning-orientation on the part of front-line staff.

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[45] Ben Piper, quoted in chapter 10 of Levy et. al. (2018)

Table C1: Improving learning – some interventions and their challenges

	Technical sectoral challenges	Political challenges	Importance of local-level discretion
Standardized assessment of learning outcomes	High	High	Low-medium
Curriculum reform	High	Medium	Low
Structured teaching of the instructional core	Medium-High	Medium	Low-medium
Quality-supporting teacher career paths	Medium	High	High
Infrastructure provision	Low/logistical	Low	Low

Source: author

When politics and institutions are aligned appropriately, countries can overcome these obstacles and find themselves in the Figure 2 'sweet spot', with abundant opportunities for improving learning outcomes. However, as the PET-A case studies have underscored, being in the 'sweet spot' is more the exception than the rule. Four context-specific challenges seem especially noteworthy.

First, all four of the specialist interventions in Table C1 require a 'good-enough' education sector policymaking and bureaucratic apparatus – both to mobilize the specialized skills needed for design, and to provide the requisite reach for sustained, system-wide implementation.

Second, for reasons laid out earlier, personalized competitive contexts are especially unlikely to have 'good enough-bureaucracy. Pockets of effectiveness are the most that can be hoped for – and these pockets do not provide an adequate platform for the implementation of any of the Table C1 initiatives.

Third, dominant contexts potentially are well-positioned to both cut through political obstacles and to build the requisite bureaucracy. However, realizing this potential requires two sets of commitments on the part of leadership: a commitment to prioritizing learning as the goal of the education system; and a commitment to delegate authority and provide the requisite motivation, and space for innovation, to technocrats, teachers and other education officials. As the PET-A case studies discussed in Section IV detail, such commitments are not the norm.

Fourth, impersonal competitive contexts potentially also are capable of providing the institutions and organizations needed to design and implement Table C1-like pro-learning reforms. However, as the PET-A case studies discussed in Section IV detail, impersonal competitive contexts confront distinctive challenges both upstream and downstream. Upstream, many impersonal competitive contexts struggle to align the competing goals of multiple stakeholders, many of whom have the power to block change; in order for policymakers and sector specialists to focus their energies around the goal of improving learning, they need to carve out space/insulation from this messy contestation. Downstream, impersonal competitive contexts are vulnerable to the traps of process compliance and isomorphic mimicry. Navigating in a good-enough way the challenges of goal-formation, process compliance and isomorphic mimicry are necessary preludes to the deployment of the Table C1 interventions. The body of Section VI suggests some 'soft governance' ways of cultivating the requisite enabling environment.

If not 'best practice' as a guidepost for the way forward, what then? One response has been to focus on how power works - and to work with the grain of the constraints it brings. A second response has been to focus on the ideas that protagonists bring to their engagement. Dani Rodrik usefully spells out how heightened attention to power and ideas transforms the development discourse:

> *"Any model of political economy in which organized interests do not figure prominently is likely to remain vacuous and incomplete. . . . But a mapping from interests to outcomes, depends on many*

unstated assumptions about the ideas of political agents… If policy outcomes are pinned down by the structure of interests, it is futile to make policy recommendations: there will be no takers"[46]

This section will explore how attention to power and ideas surfaces new possibilities for improving learning outcomes. The discussion is organized around four sets of potential entry points, each (loosely) aligned with a distinct level/link in the long-route chain of governance processes introduced in Section II:

- *The leadership level - purpose:* What are the goals of the education system? How to strengthen its orientation towards learning?
- *The stakeholder level - alliances:* Which influential stakeholders champion learning? How to strengthen their collective influence?
- *The bureaucracy level - mission:* How to empower mission-oriented public officials within the education system?
- *The citizen-level - expectations:* How do the expectations of parents, communities and citizens influence the extent to which the education sector is learning-oriented? How might learning-oriented influences be strengthened?

Finding a 'good fit' between entry point and context is key to improving learning outcomes. The subsections that follow explore the potential value added of each of the above four 'soft governance' entry points for the three political-institutional contexts that have been the focus of this paper. The concluding subsection (see especially Table 8 in that subsection) provides a summary overview of how this good fit varies across the three contexts.

The leadership level – purpose. In a recent paper, Michelle Kaffenberger brings the influence of purpose to center stage. As she puts it:

"While much effort in the education sector focuses on changes to technical practices or support functions, little attention is given to the purpose the education system is striving to achieve. We contend this is a critical missing link for improving learning outcomes……We argue that an underlying driver of learning outcomes lies at the core of an education system: its purpose…..While many countries have paid lip service to a commitment to the purpose of learning, this purpose is often not embedded in education systems"[47]

The evidence synthesized in this paper suggests that the role of 'purpose' varies enormously across contexts. In dominant contexts, the relationship between purpose and outcome is direct. As Section III explored, dominant leaders vary in the goals they have in mind for their country's education system. Insofar as political leadership is committed to improving learning outcomes, large gains are possible; but insofar as other goals are prioritized, improvements in learning will be hard to achieve. In dominant settings, efforts to influence the ideas that political leaders have about education are thus key to improving the sector's learning orientation.

By contrast to dominant contexts, in competitive settings there are multiple stakeholders, each with distinctive goals vis-à-vis education, and each pressing for influence. Where competition is underpinned by formal rules, the rules putatively provide a 'container' within which purpose can be clarified. In practice, however, things were messier in all four of the impersonal competitive PET-A cases. In Peru, there was ongoing conflict over purpose (and means of achieving it) between politicians on the one hand, and sectoral stakeholders and experts on the other. In India, there was a large disconnect between (national) policymakers and (state-level) implementers. In Chile and (especially) South Africa, a a pre-occupation with formalism fostered process compliance, with correspondingly less de facto attention on

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[46] Rodrik (2014), pp. 189-190
[47] Michelle Kaffenberger, "Purpose-driven education systems: How systems shift", draft, June 2022.

how to improve learning. In personalized competitive contexts, power (and thus goals) are even more fragmented; in these contexts, the crucial challenge is to find ways forward within the fragmented reality. This brings us to the second set of entry points highlighted above – alliances.

The stakeholder level – alliances. In competitive contexts, alliances to help improve learning outcomes can emerge at multiple levels: at the policymaking level; at district levels; at the level of individual schools. The case that such alliances can add value is clearest in personalized competitive contexts (even though the gains may seem quite modest in aggregate).   In these contexts, contestation among stakeholders invariably leads to both policy incoherence and bureaucratic fragmentation – leaving public resources especially vulnerable to predation. Yet, as summarized in Section V, in both Ghana and Bangladesh, the silver lining of fragmentation was that it created space for alliances of developmental stakeholders to successfully push back against predatory pressures, and eke out islands of effectiveness in at least some locales; as the Eastern Cape case studies shows, these islands can be as localized as an individual school.

On the surface, the case for fostering developmental alliances might seem less compelling in impersonal competitive contexts. In these contexts, formal rules already putatively insulate policymakers and implementers (down to the school-level) from political pressures. However, as Daniel Carpenter's influential study shows, in the United States bureaucratic autonomy was not conferred by formal rules, but was won politically. It emerged from a combination of internal capability (on which more in the next sub-section) and external alliances. Thus:

> *"Bureaucratic autonomy requires political legitimacy - Strong organizational reputations embedded in an independent power base….with linkages to the numerous power bases of politics….. can foster the belief by political authorities and citizens that agencies can provide solutions to national problems found nowhere else in the regime."*

Put differently, in at least some contexts, bureaucratic autonomy is 'socially-embedded'.[48]

Education sector efforts to forge a socially-embedded developmental alliance committed to improving learning outcomes confront a distinctive, formidable challenge. At least on the surface, both improvements in learning outcomes and an expansion of access to education are developmental – although value added from the latter depends on whether or not children indeed learn while at school. As Kelsall et. al. (2022) explain, there is a natural, potent constituency to champion the latter, but not the former:

> *"The reluctance of governing elites to prioritize learning over schooling flows most directly from the relative power and coherence of the coalitions lined up behind either agenda. Those whose interests are served primarily by a focus on access include populist leaders with large and predominantly rural constituencies local political leaders and teachers unions….This coalition has significantly higher levels of holding power than those actors with an interest in learning. The latter includes business owners who require a better-trained workforce to be internationally competitive, middle-class parents and, of late, some international development agencies."[49]*

Key to cutting through this seeming logjam is for stakeholders to engage respectfully with one another in ways that can contribute to a shared understandings as to the central importance of combining a commitment to universal access with a complementary commitment to sustained improvements in quality.

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[48] Note the implicit reference to Peter Evan's classic book, *Embedded Autonomy* (Princeton University Press, 1995). Evans ' interest was on industrial policy; he focused on the relationship between the bureaucracy and the private sector. For the education sector, the emphasis would naturally be on other non-governmental stakeholders.

[49] Kelsall et. al (2022), p.150.

The South African and Peruvian PET-A cases illustrate, as opposite sides of the same coin, the relevance for bureaucratic autonomy of alliances and the ideas which underpin them. (So, too, in a dominant context, does Vietnam, as Box A detailed.) In South Africa, impersonal rules have been relatively strong, but there has been little effort to foster alliances across the range of stakeholders (inside and outside the bureaucracy) committed to improve learning, (though with divergent views as to how to do so). In consequence, as the PET-A case study shows, formal rules offered little protection from political-level directives that (even if not predatory) were at best only partly responsive to the technical concerns of sector professionals, but were made with an eye on the immediate concerns of key political allies of the party in power. In Peru, by contrast, though pressures on the sector from the political level also often were antithetical to the sustained pursuit of learning outcomes, a strong alliance among sectoral experts (and other influential sectoral stakeholders) inside and outside government was able to hold them at bay.[50]

The skill sets needed for building alliances – the orchestration of power; coalition-building on the basis of shared ideas - are very different from those of most technocratically-oriented sectoral reformers. The orchestration of power matters insofar as a key goal is to organize developmental stakeholders into alliances that are sufficiently strong to fend off non-developmental pressures. And attention to ideas matters insofar as the goal is to facilitate cooperation among stakeholders who (though all developmental) vary among themselves in their goals, priorities, and understandings of how the world works.[51]

An all-too-human response among specialists is to give only limited attention to problems that lie outside their domain of expertise. Yet the PET-A case studies suggest that in messy governance contexts inattention to the dimensions of power and ideas can result in a narrow focus on sectoral-specialist expertise – even, at the limit, to the point that it becomes a gateway to pre-occupation with isomorphic bromides that distract from the realities of failing education systems. Successful alliance-building can open up the space needed for efforts to improve learning outcomes to gain traction.

The bureaucracy level – mission. The remit of the PET-A studies did not extend to in-depth exploration of the inner workings of public bureaucracies. Even so, at least five of the studies (Chile, Indonesia, Peru, South Africa and Vietnam) offer some tantalizing pointers as to how these inner workings influence learning outcomes – including (of particular interest for this subsection) the influence of ideas as to how bureaucracies should be governed.

When it comes to bureaucracies, it is all-too-easy to focus on 'form', without delivering on the function – especially in impersonal competitive contexts. As James Q. Wilson spelled out in his classic book, *Bureaucracy,* a pre-occupation with formal processes can become a way for political leaders to paper over unresolved conflicts. To be sure, detailed rules are not necessarily problematic. Tight, top-down controls can be a useful way of delivering on blueprint-like logistical tasks (a national program of classroom-building for example) – but such controls work less well for more craft-oriented activities (for example, skillfully engaging with young minds).[52] As Francis Fukuyama explains:

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[50] As for the other PET-A impersonal competitive countries: arguably, alliances played a similar role in India's education sector policymaking as in Peru – but (because of weaknesses at the policymaking-implementation link) without the resulting benefits for learning. In Chile, the long-route arguably worked as intended, but gains were constrained by bureaucracy-level weaknesses, on which more below.

[51] Elinor Ostrom's landmark work on collective action (1990 and 2005) is especially relevant here; as these detail, resolving collective action problems effectively involves both rules and ideas/norms. Ferguson (2014; 2017 2020) and North (2005) spell out in detail the crucial role in successful collective action of ideas/mental models (not only rules). Levy (2014) chapter 8 suggests ways of incorporating power into Ostrom's analysis of collective action.

[52] For an extended exploration of how this tension between rules and discretion plays out in the education sector, see Dan Honig (2022).

> *"Organizations in all societies seek to get optimal performance out of low-specificity [craft] activities not by setting up elaborate systems of monitoring and accountability but rather by relying on norms…..All good managers know that it is ultimately the informal norms and group identities that will most strongly motivate the workers in an organization to do their best, and thus spend much more time on cultivating the right 'organizational culture' than on fixing the formal lines of authority".*

Countries with a longstanding foundation of political legitimacy, and longstanding norms of public service (e.g. France, Finland and Japan) are well-placed to use only 'light-touch' rulemaking to foster performance. However, in contexts where norms are weaker and political conflict is endemic but formal institutions are relatively well-developed, both politicians and public managers are likely to seek to govern education via a dense web of formal rules. The result can be to undercut the goal-orientation, motivation and initiative of public officials - they become pre-occupied with process compliance rather than the effort to improve learning outcomes. As discussed in Section IV, the case studies suggest that something along these lines may have happened in Chile and South Africa's Western Cape province.

How to unleash the latent, mission-driven energies of public officials in service of improved learning? 'Cutting back on red tape' is not a useful answer - discretion without oversight can be a formula for opportunism. Nor is an intensified focus on stronger hierarchical accountability for results likely to be helpful. Long experience with so-called 'new public management' has shown that a pre-occupation with top-down oversight can all-too-readily translate into a rise in mutual distrust, and accompanying demotivation.[53] Rather, as Fukuyama's insight suggests, what seems to make the crucial difference is a sense of mission, (and accompanying de facto peer-to-peer monitoring and accountability) even in the absence of a dense panoply of rules.

Where might this sense of mission come from? From organizational leaders (as per Fukuyama). Or from being part of a developmental alliance with a sense of shared purpose– perhaps nationally, among professional networks as appears to have been the case in Peru (and, in a much more structured way, in Vietnam); perhaps locally as in Ghana and Bangladesh; perhaps at the level of individual schools (which, of course, is where the majority of education sector employees work). Especially for the latter, networks of mutual purpose and mutual accountability go beyond elite political and professional actors to include a broad range of school-level stakeholders. This brings us to our final entry point – society.

The citizen-level – expectations. As laid out in Section II, this paper takes political settlements theory as its analytical point of departure. Political settlements theory focuses principally on interactions among powerful groups. Consistent with that approach, and reflecting also the emphasis of the PET-A case studies, this paper has focused largely on the role of elites (broadly defined) in education sector governance – politicians, public officials, academic and other specialist experts, teachers and their organizations, and (elite-led and often internationally-oriented) non-governmental organizations. This sub-section broadens the lens to include non-elites (parents, communities, and citizens more broadly) – with a particular emphasis on their expectations vis-à-vis public schools and their governance.

Non-elites can have a wide range of plausible expectations vis-à-vis public schools and their governance. At one end of the spectrum are societies with a longstanding foundation of political legitimacy, and longstanding norms of public service where there is a realistic expectation that public education systems can be successful, without direct involvement in governance by parents and communities. At the other end of the spectrum are settings where non-elites are passive for an opposite reason – cynicism shaped by

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53 For a discussion, see Dan Honig, *Navigation by Judgment: Why and When Top-Down Management of Foreign Aid Doesn't Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

experience of an education system deeply mired in patronage, predation, political capture, opportunism and corruption.

Of more immediate interest for the present paper are two intermediate patterns of expectation. One intermediate pattern comprises contexts where the general expectation – shared among parents, communities, citizens, public officials, and politicians – is that 'government should deliver', even in the face of the reality that such delivery is mediocre at best. (This expectation was evident at the school-level in South Africa's Western Cape province[54] and perhaps also in Chile and Indonesia as well - though the information provided for the latter in the PET-A studies is very, very limited and indirect.) The other intermediate pattern comprises contexts where formal institutions are messy, but nonetheless the societal expectation is one of "all for education" – that parents and communities, especially, have an active role to play in supporting a learning-oriented education system. As discussed earlier, Kenya offers an example[55] of how this might work. Indeed, the experience of Kenya suggests that even when public bureaucracies fall well short of being well-oiled, learning-oriented machines, a broad-based commitment to 'all for education' can be the secret sauce that supports the achievement of superior learning outcomes.

As discussed in Section V, a focus on 'all for education' aligns well with the realities of personalized competitive contexts. But perhaps there is potential also in settings where education bureaucracies are stronger. The PET-A case studies suggest that in many less-than-perfect governance settings, there are large limits to what technocratic initiatives aimed at improving institutions and strengthening learning are able to achieve. In such settings, perhaps the way to renew commitment to learning is to cultivate the idea that improving learning outcomes is everybody's business, and to create opportunities for engagement - to invite citizens to become active participants in a shared endeavor to equip coming generations with the capabilities they will need be part of a vibrant, thriving society.

Context-responsive entry points – a summing up. Education sector governance and policymaking play out within a broader political and institutional context. 'Best practice' nostrums for improving learning outcomes presuppose that this broader context is benign. However, as the PET-A case studies detail, political and institutional realities in most countries fall well short of this benign vision. How to improve learning in the face of these messy (and difficult to transform) realities?

This paper has tried to go beyond the now-cliched nostrum that 'context matters' and explore **how** it matters. To do so, it has grouped the PET-A cases into three distinct political-institutional categories. Sections III-V have explored comparatively how these divergent contexts generate distinctive incentives and constraints for stakeholders – and how these all-too-often undercut well-intentioned efforts to improve learning outcomes. However, from the perspective of reformers seeking to improve learning outcomes, it isn't good enough to explain why reforms don't work – to be practically useful, analysis needs to also offer guidance as to what, notwithstanding difficult political and institutional circumstances, might potentially might add value.

In that spirit, and as a pointed way of concluding, Table 8 overleaf offers a distillation of some of Section VI's key points in the form of a summary, heuristic depiction of the top (not necessarily only[56].....) priority 'soft governance' entry point for improving learning outcomes for each of the three

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[54] Ursula Hoadley, Brian Levy, Lawule Shumane and Shelly Wilburn, "Case Studies of School-level Governance Dynamics in the Western Cape", chapter 8 in Levy et. al. (2018).

[55] At least prior to reforms in the mid-2000s that may have had the (perhaps unintended) consequence of reducing the opportunity and incentive of parents and communities to actively engage at the school-level.

[56] What might be second priorities? For dominant contexts, a focus on strengthening bureaucratic capability would follow naturally from a commitment to learning as the purpose of education (with a 'socially embedded' dimension likely to not come naturally, but be helpful). For impersonal competitive contexts a championing of "all

political-institutional contexts around which the analysis has been organized. As the table signals, the top-priority entry point varies radically from one context to another.

In dominant contexts: where leadership is committed, the long-route chain of governance links potentially can provide a robust platform for improving learning outcomes, insofar as fostering learning is a priority goal of leadership. However, as the PET-A case studies showed, all-too-readily dominant leaders' goals vis-à-vis the education system can veer in other directions, with very different consequences. In such contexts, as Table 8 suggests, the top-priority for education sector reformers is thus to focus on leaders goals – and to engage with leaders as to how best learning outcomes might be achieved.

Table 8: Improving learning outcomes when governance is messy – top priorities across contexts

	DOMINANT	**IMPERSONAL COMPETITIVE**	**PERSONALIZED COMPETITIVE**
Leadership level: Purpose	*Top priority: influence ideas of political leaders vis-à-vis education*		
Bureaucracy level: Mission		*Top priority: Foster socially-socially embedded bureaucratic autonomy[57]*	
Stakeholder level: alliances			*Top priority: Foster local (including school-level) alliances*
Citizen level: expectations			

Source: Author

In impersonal competitive contexts: where a combination of strong formal institutions and effective processes of resolving disagreements results in a shared commitment among powerful interests to improve learning outcomes, gains can straightforwardly be achieved. However, in these contexts, the realities of political contestation all-too-often render implausible the achievement of a shared top-level commitment to learning. Instead, as the PET-A case studies suggest, all-too-likely outcomes include some combination of pre-occupation with rule compliance and performative isomorphic mimicry. In such contexts, as Table 8 suggests, rather than pursuing the chimera of some grand institutional 'fix' of the long-route as a whole, education sector reformers might do better to invest in alliances among champions of learning (and thus in 'voice' and persuasive power) – importantly, including in these alliances public officials (at all levels) motivated by a learning-oriented sense of mission.

In personalized competitive contexts the prospects of achieving a shared commitment to learning at the interface between politics and policymaking are even more remote than in their impersonal counterparts. Further, this fragmentation is all-too-likely to cascade downwards - public bureaucracies (and thus the implementation link in the long-route chain) will almost certainly be dysfunctional, with the underlying reasons ones that cannot be addressed by managerial 'fixes'. In such contexts, as Table 8 suggests, gains in learning are most likely to come from the bottom-up – via a combination of local-level initiatives, plus

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for education" could be a useful second priority – it could both help ease the challenge of aligning goals among diverse political leaders, and be a further way (beyond 'social embeddedness', which already implies this) of encouraging parents and communities to participate in school-level governance.

[57] This phrase was introduced on p.26 of this paper, in the discussion of Daniel Carpenter's interpretation of bureaucratic autonomy. As per the discussion on p.27, the case for prioritizing socially-embedded bureaucratic autonomy is strongest in the subset of impersonal competitive countries where formal institutions are relatively well developed, but politics is conflict-ridden and norms of public service are weak.

(more ambitiously) a broader effort to inculcate a vision of 'all for education', a shared sense that improving learning is a task to be embraced by a country's citizenry.

In sum, as Table 8 underscores (and to borrow a phrase from some earlier work of Lant Pritchett….), in seeking to improve education systems, context matters 'big time'[58].

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[58] Lant Pritchett, "Divergence, Big Time" Journal of Economic Perspectives, 1997.

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