Why Do Politicians Invest in Education?

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“ignorance on the part of the policy maker often explains why policies fail”
(Banerjee & Duflo 2011, Poor Economics)

“key to promoting learning is evaluating what works and using that evidence to inform policy change”
(The World Bank 2011, Education Sector Strategy 2020)
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“what works” approach is based on assum’s about the politics of education policy making
why do govt’s provide education? how do they choose education policies? can evidence on what works lead to better policy choices?
who influences education policy?

politicians respond to:

- technocrats and experts ("what works")
- voters
- interest groups
- their own interest

→ very different implications for what to do
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  - democracy, esp. the extension of voting rights to the poor, creates electoral incentives to improve access and learning
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  - strong teacher unions lead to higher salaries and spending, but block reforms that improve learning
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- their own interest
  - e.g. inculcate loyalty, build military power, promote industrialization, etc.
politics matters, but it influences education policy in counterintuitive ways
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  - democracy, esp. the extension of voting rights to the poor, creates electoral incentives to improve access
1. democracy is not a panacea
the democracy argument

“the spread of **democratic voting rights** played a leading role in explaining ... the rise of primary schooling”

(Lindert 2004, 105)

democracy does not increase access to schooling
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(*) Finding robust to four different measures of democracy: Polity binary, Polity continuous, Boix-Miller-Rosato, and universal male suffrage.

PAGLAYAN (2018), Democracy and Educational Expansion: Evidence from 200 Years
democracy does not increase access to schooling

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2. there is considerable variation between unions; and teacher union strength is endogenous
the argument on unions

“the most well-positioned and organised interest group exerting pressure on the educational decision-making process is usually teacher unions”
(DfID 2011)

“teachers’ unions [in the U.S.] are primarily rent-seeking, raising school budgets and school inputs but lowering student achievement”
(Hoxby 1996, 711; cf. Lovenheim 2009)
states that historically spent more on education
gave collective bargaining rights to teachers
states that historically spent more on education gave collective bargaining rights to teachers

avg. per-pupil spending in states with collective bargaining rights in 1990

states without collective bargaining rights

# of states mandating collective bargaining

Per-pupil expenditures (log, at 2010 US$)

Year

PAGLAYAN (2018), Public-Sector Unions and the Size of Government
mandating collective bargaining w/ teachers did not lead to higher salaries or spending

PAGLAYAN (2018), Public-Sector Unions and the Size of Government
3. in democracies, the policymaking process entails negotiation and compromise

some benefits for unions, some for business groups → prevalence of status quo in salaries and spending
politicians respond to:

- technocrats and experts ("what works")
- voters
  - democracy, esp. the extension of voting rights to the poor, creates electoral incentives to improve access
- interest groups
  - strong teacher unions lead to higher salaries and spending,
- their own interest
4. politicians often introduce policies that experts want for reasons of their own; reasons that may have nothing to do with promoting human capital

e.g., inculcate loyalty
education to “moralize the masses”

- high quantities of primary education provided by autocracies

PAGLAYAN (2017), Civil War, State Consolidation, and the Spread of Mass Education
in Europe and Latin America, large-scale domestic conflict created incentives for autocrats to expand primary schooling.

- primary schools designed to “moralize” the lower classes and promote orderly behavior by instilling values and behaviors of obedience, discipline, respect for the rule of law, and respect for authority.

PAGLAYAN (2017), Civil War, State Consolidation, and the Spread of Mass Education
education to “moralize the masses”

- Chile: 1859 civil war → 1860 Law of Primary Education

PAGLAYAN (2017), Civil War, State Consolidation, and the Spread of Mass Education
education to “moralize the masses”

- **Prussia**: peasants revolts → 1754, 1763 *School Regulations* to teach “loyalty, obedience, and devotion to the king” and discourage aspirations for social mobility (Johann Felbiger, quoted in Melton 2002; Boli and Remirez 1987)

- **France**: July Revolution → 1833 *Guizot Law* “to improve the moral life of the poor, learn to respect the laws of the country and its sovereign, foster a true patriotism, and encourage the poor to be satisfied with their material condition” (Guizot 1816)

- **Argentina**: civil wars → 1884 Law: “primary instruction must be exclusively devoted to moral development and to the maintenance of social order” (Sarmiento 1849)
education to “moralize the masses”

- Europe and Latin America, 1830-1950:

PAGLAYAN (2017), Civil War, State Consolidation, and the Spread of Mass Education
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- Europe and Latin America, 1830-1950:

![Graph showing ATT Effect of Civil War on Primary School Enrollment Rate]

-10 -5 0 5 10 15 20
Years since Civil War

ATT Effect of Civil War on Primary School Enrollment Rate

0 5 10 15 20

avg. pre-war enroll. rate: 20%

# of countries=29

results not driven by liberals winning; or incumbents winning

PAGLAYAN (2017), Civil War, State Consolidation, and the Spread of Mass Education
politics matters,
but it influences education policy
in counterintuitive ways
old: “key to promoting learning is evaluating what works and using that evidence to inform policy change”
(The World Bank 2011, Education Sector Strategy 2020)

new: key to improving learning is understanding the politics of policymaking, and using that knowledge strategically to identify favorable conditions and opportunities for reform
thank you!

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research: PE of education

why a PE of education research agenda?

“what works” approach is based on questionable assumptions about what motivates govts to provide education:

1. politicians have incentives to promote learning, but don’t know how to
2. when democracy exists and the poor have a voice, politicians want to promote learning…

alternative: govts expand education for reasons that have nothing to do with improving HK of the poor
research: PE of education

different implications for what to do:

1. politicians want to promote learning, but don’t know how
   → invest in understanding what works
2. when democracy exists and the poor have a voice, politicians want to promote learning, but don’t know how to
   → invest in promoting democracy & understanding what works
3. govts provide education for reasons that have nothing to do with improving HK of the poor
   → invest in understanding (i) why govts provide education, and (ii) how/when govts’ own goals can be aligned with donors’ goal of promoting learning
non-democratic origins of primary education

primary educ. systems in Europe & Latin America emerged in non-democracies

PAGLAYAN (2018), Democracy and Educational Expansion: Evidence from 200 Years
non-democratic origins of primary education

States worldwide took an interest in primary education well before democratization.
non-democratic expansion of education

NOTE: Finding robust to three different definitions and measures of democracy.

PAGLAYAN (2018), Democracy and Educational Expansion: Evidence from 200 Years
no positive impact of democratization

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PAGLAYAN (2018), Democracy and Educational Expansion: Evidence from 200 Years
laws and policies often cater to multiple competing interests

some benefits for unions, some for business groups → prevalence of status quo in salaries and spending

PAGLAYAN (2018), Public-Sector Unions and the Size of Government
Schools per 10,000 inhabitants

Year

1860 1865 1870 1875 1880

Atacama Synthetic control

synthetic weights:
Concepcion (0.95),
Nuble (0.03),
Valdivia (0.02),
Chiloe (0), Llanquihue (0),
Arauco (0), Maule (0)

PAGLAYAN (2017), Civil War, State Consolidation, and the Spread of Mass Education
not driven by mining economy

PAGLAYAN (2017), Civil War, State Consolidation, and the Spread of Mass Education
driven by goal of reducing disorder

A reduction in the share of prisoners who had formal education interpreted as “a good sign ... because this reveals the good results that are produced by teaching morality to the masses” (Anuario Estadistico... 1872: 120)

PAGLAYAN (2017), Civil War, State Consolidation, and the Spread of Mass Education
skills acquisition as a by-product

skills acquisition and social mobility is often a by-product of policies chosen to pursue other goals (e.g. Argentina, France, China, USSR, Eastern Europe)

→ *Historical Education Quality Database*, tracking curriculum and teacher training and recruitment policies ~1870-2015
skills acquisition as a by-product

Big differences in curriculum policy:

... and big differences in standards to become a teacher

SOURCE: Historical Education Quality Database