

Political Economy Research to Improve Systems of Education: Guiding Principles for the RISE Programme's Political Economy Team (Adoption) Research Projects

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RISE Political Economy Team - Adoption

Introduction: The context of the RISE PET-A research and how to read this paper

Over the past 50 to 75 years, most developing countries have greatly improved access to education, including for the poor. But few have made significant gains in learning as illustrated, for instance, by international standardised assessments of student achievement such as PISA, PIRLS, and TIMSS.¹ In regards to the rate of improved learning, “sustainability” is an empty catchphrase without meaningful (and in many cases) dramatic improvement in learning. Most analyses have attributed poor learning outcomes in developing countries to their proximate causes: inadequate funding, human resource deficits, poor curricular development, perverse incentive structures, poor management, and the like (Rosser 2018). Along these lines, the RISE Programme is a seven-year research effort that seeks to understand what features make education systems coherent and effective in their context, and how the complex dynamics within a system allow policies to be successful. RISE has Country Research Teams (CRTs) in seven countries: Vietnam, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Nigeria, India, and Pakistan.

Recently, however, some analysts have suggested that the determinants of learning lie more in the realm of politics and, in particular, the interests of state elites. True sustainability in educational improvement will hinge greatly on understanding the political economy of education reform (e.g., how contestation between competing political and social elements influences and constrains outcomes) and in aligning reform design and strategies with what is known about political settlements, the governance and politics of education, the actors and domains of contestation in an education system, and the structural and institutional drivers of reform.

“*Politics is not the obstacle; it is the way change happens.*”

David Hudson, et al
Development Leadership Program

“*Just as the formation of nations has been a highly contested process, so, too, the construction of systems of instruction has been marked by frequent conflict. This is not surprising: Given the central role of schooling in meeting conditions for societal survival and in the production of freedom, any method that is compulsory and spends public funds is likely to be controversial.*”

Ernesto Shiefelbein and Noel McGinn
(2017: 315)
Learning to Educate

¹ These international assessments are the tip of the iceberg. There is now very broad, deep, and robust literature on “learning profiles” using a wide range of international and national level data sets to examine learning, roughly defined as cognitive skill development. See for instance Kaffenberger (2019).

Pritchett (2018), for instance, has hypothesised that state elites in developing countries have been more interested in using education systems to promote nation-building objectives such as the use of a national language and commitment to a prescribed national identity than economic or social objectives. Similarly, Paglayan (2018) has argued that state elites in Western Europe and Latin America established or expanded national education systems primarily in order to enhance their political control over populations, noting that educational expansion often occurred in the wake of periods of widespread violence. In both cases, these scholars have suggested that improved enrolment rates have served elite agendas better than improved learning outcomes; the latter have, at best, been irrelevant and, at worst, antithetical to these interests.

As part of this larger effort, RISE has constituted a Political Economy Team (PET) with a programme of research to test these ideas, refine them, and generate new ideas about the link between politics and learning outcomes in developing countries by analysing a set of country cases. This Political Economy Team works along two primary dimensions:

- PET-A focuses on “adoption”: how the political conditions have been (or could be) fostered to put learning at the centre of an education system, while understanding the challenges to doing so.
- PET-I focuses on “implementation”: how teachers, principals, and local administrators and students, parents, and community stakeholders come to effectively implement new policies and programmes, or block or alter reforms at the ground level (so called “street-level bureaucrats” (Lipsky, 1980)

PET-A and PET-I are distinct research efforts, although they are part of the same intellectual endeavor. Some coordination and intellectual exchange will be required to ensure the success of the overall RISE PET as part of the broader RISE Programme, but the extent of this coordination will be mostly limited to one or two synthesis papers.² Throughout this paper we focus on PET-A and refer explicitly to PET-I when relevant.

For PET-A, all seven RISE countries will be cases that we will refer to alternatively as “deep dives” and Political Economy Country Studies.³ The programme involves three main components:

1. The formulation of an analytical framework—or a set of guiding principles—for understanding the political economy of education system development in developing countries and, in particular, enrolment and learning outcomes;
2. the application of this framework to a set of country cases to elucidate the political obstacles to improved learning outcomes in these countries and/or the conditions under which they have been overcome; and
3. an assessment of the implications of the analysis for donor and government efforts to enhance learning in developing countries.

In addition to the deep dives, we will add shorter, less expansive case study papers on some non-RISE countries, most likely from Latin America and East Asia. Each case (both in RISE and non-RISE countries) will be led by a Political Economy Country Study Lead (PECS Lead), whose Terms of Reference will be guided by and built upon this paper.

This paper develops the Guiding Principles for the RISE Programme’s PET-A research projects. It also begins to lay out a draft conceptual framework for the RISE Political Economy Analysis (PEA) of education reform, and discusses how the research itself should help flesh out that conceptual framework over the next couple of years. We describe an approach for the various research projects rather than a method, particular theory, or set of theories that will be tested. Throughout, we have a particular focus on the “politics of learning”, or the politics of educational strategies, policy design, and implementation processes and how they affect the long-term potential for developing countries to improve education quality and cognitive skill development at (in many cases) drastically improved rates.

² This separation is at the explicit direction of the RISE Research Director.

³ The possible exception is Pakistan, for which there is still on-going discussion regarding whether and how to do a full PET-A case study as part of RISE.

Why we need a ‘politics of learning,’ and what it might look like

A core question at the heart of this effort is, “Why do some countries adopt and successfully implement policies that improve learning, but most do not?”⁴ In this sense, the RISE PEA builds from a substantively different starting point than many of the frameworks more commonly used in the development community. That is, most educational PEA focuses on strategy in policy design and implementation once the overall policy goals have been set—in fact, often once the actual contours of an intervention have been designed. The RISE PEA first seeks to understand the *origin of intent*. To be sure, the origin of the intent, the implementation strategies, and politics of education reform are all deeply inter-related and affect each other. Whatever the origin of intent, it will be impacted by many forces and experiences, including the past and present political contestations. What induces a government to take learning goals seriously is likely to be closely tied to what strategies have been effective and how leaders and policymakers conceptualise and mean by “learning.” Fully disentangling these separate elements is not truly possible.

Of course, a government must have the capacity to deliver on its intent. We do not deny the crucial role of capacity and strategy, but we note that many, if not most, development efforts (especially donor-lead) focus too early and too much on government capacity and political strategies while making naïve assumptions about the nature of intent. One such assumption is that government policymakers are benign and share the objectives of the donor agencies and institutions. While convenient and even necessary for policy dialogue and design, we know this assumption is often false.⁵

Following Pritchett (2018) we argue that understanding how educational change happens will ultimately require a political economy approach that describes the motivations and behaviour of governments and policymakers. We can then begin to build a model that adequately address at least three key facts about basic education policies over the course of, roughly, the past 75 years:

1. Why did enrolments and attainment expand so much and so uniformly across so many countries?
2. Why do nearly all governments provide most education directly through building their own schools and employing their own teachers, and why do they do so through the modality of large bureaucracies (Weberian or otherwise)?
3. Why was there a politics of near-uniform schooling expansion but, concomitantly, a politics accepting very poor learning outcomes in so many countries, and what is different about the exceptions where the politics supported much improved learning?⁶

There is no shortage of models and theories of the political economy of education reform. We reviewed many of the leading efforts and conclude that while they may lend many important insights on the politics of education reform, none to date can adequately answer these three questions, let alone the larger driving question of why and when countries adopt and successfully implement quality-enhancing, learning-oriented reforms. Some lines of thought, such as the “political settlements” literature are excellent at examining the deep, underlying contextual forces that drive and more importantly constrain the policies a government might pursue (See for instance Levy [2018], Hickey and Hossein [2018], or Kelsall [2016] among others). But at least in terms of future policy design and strategy, the political settlements approach is often better at lending insights on the possible (and impossible or unwise), on the why rather than the what of what policies governments might actually adopt specifically to improve learning in a particular country context. Nor does the political settlements approach fully address the three motivating facts above; it is, in short, at least helpful and perhaps necessary to understanding the politics of learning, but not sufficient.

Other strategies focus on stakeholder analysis, which is of course a critical component but often either takes as its starting point what the government wants to adopt—rather than why it wants to adopt it—or ignores the deeper cultural, political, and societal contexts and divisions. Such approaches are common in the large international development organisations. (See for example Kaufman and Nelson [2005], Grindle [2004], Kingdon et al [2014] or Bruns, Harbaugh

⁴ This questions immediately begs another: How do we know what these polices are? We take up this question below.

⁵ See for instance Laura Savage and Susan Watkin’s analysis of Malawi (REFERENCE?) showing that elites in the government had little interest in improving learning in rural areas and were more interested in the quality of education for their own children.

⁶ In the end, PET-A work will concentrate largely on questions 1 and 3, though we may provide insights to question 2.

and Schneider [2018]). We seek to build a conceptual approach for PEA that finds the “sweet spot” between these literatures and that, concomitantly, will work for the seven RISE country programmes already underway, while providing insights for how to undertake similar work in other country contexts, and also facilitate cross-country insights.

Starting with political settlements as a kind of baseline?

The heterogeneity of the RISE CRTs and their research foci capture some of the tensions inherent in finding a common conceptual framework. However, at an internal workshop lead by, and based on the work of, Brian Levy (2014, 2018) key members of four out of the seven CRTs revealed considerable support for incorporating at least some work derived from the political settlements literature.⁷ The concept of a political settlement is “the balance or distribution of power between contending social groups and social classes, on which any state is based.” (di John and Putzel 2009: 4 in Hickey and Hossain (2019); See also Kahn (2010))

At least as a starting point for a “deep dive” into the politics of educational reform in any given country context over a period of several decades, Kelsall (2016: 2) provides the following useful working concept of political settlement:

....while different authors and organisations have defined ‘political settlement’ in slightly different ways, there is increasing convergence around the idea that [Political Settlement Analysis] PSA is about understanding ‘the formal and informal processes, agreements, and practices that help consolidate politics, rather than violence, as a means for dealing with disagreements about interests, ideas and the distribution and use of power’ (Laws and Leftwich, 2014: 1), and that these will play out across two levels, involving both intra- elite and elite-non-elite relations (Laws, 2012). A major implication of PSA is that, since replacing one political settlement with another is normally a very difficult or risky business, successful development practice involves some kind of adaptation to these formal and informal processes, practices and power balance, and their associated path-dependencies.

Building on Levy (2014, 2018) and Hickey and Hossain (2018) we briefly outline a typology of country-level political settlements that each of the deep dives will examine as a starting point. We recognise that the deep dives will also be heterogeneous and do not wish to overly define a method or strict framework that each must follow. However, we believe that starting with a goal to examine the politics of learning in each country context using this conceptualisation of political settlement will provide a kind of baseline comparative foundation upon which to build comparisons across countries (while also yielding useful insights regarding the politics of learning).⁸

Levy (2018) argues that a great deal of insight can be garnered from delving into three key variables:

1. The *extent of inclusion* (or exclusion) by dominant elites, or the degree of cohesiveness among elites about the nature of the political settlement. Stakeholders/politics, which is related to the nature of the social composition: Is it narrow or broad?
2. What are the characteristics of the *configuration of power* (institutions and politics)?
 - a. Are they Unipolar or multipolar?
 - b. Is there a clear principal-agent hierarchy or are there multiple principals?
 - c. Is it dominant/authoritarian or more Competitive/fragmented/negotiated?
3. Regarding *institutions*, what are the norms and dynamics by which they are governed?
 - a. Are they “personalised”, clientelist, and/or corrupt, on the one hand, or impersonal, rule-based, and/or meritocratic, on the other.

⁷ Feedback from a workshop exercise in 2019 with a broader range of members from each of the CRTs revealed enthusiasm for usefulness of the concepts but also concern over both the difficulty undertaking such a research effort and the potential political friction it might cause with the governments with whom they need to maintain productive relations.

⁸ Note that **bold text** is used to highlight key aspects of the overall approach for the PET-A work, as well as specific instructions for, or justifications for choices made about, the tasks that might actually go in the Terms of Reference for PECS Lead researchers. It is not intended to highlight or summarise the over-arching argument of this paper.

Thus, Levy (2018: 13-14) classifies political settlements “according to whether their configuration of political power is dominant or competitive, and whether the institutional rules of the game are personalised or impersonal.” This two-fold distinction generates four ideal types of political settlement. Operationalising these variables yields at least two useful “2 by 2” classifications of four potential kinds of political settlement and four potential kinds of public governance.

Table 1: Levy (2014) Classification of four ideal types of political settlement

	Dominant	Competitive
Personalised	Elite cohesion is high, power exercised top-down by leadership, limited constraints on political actors.	Elite cohesion is low, settlement demands power change hands on electoral competitive basis, but “rules of the game” are personalised
Rule-of-law	Elite cohesion is high, power is top-down, but actions are anchored in rules which institutionalise how power is to be exercised.	Politics is competitive, impersonal rules govern the exercise of power.

Source: Pritchett 2019, Review Essay

Table 2: Levy (2014) classification of four ideal types of “Public Governance”

	Hierarchical	Negotiated (Horizontally)
Personalised	Implementation is hierarchical, a principle-agent structure, but agent compliance is based on personalised authority of the leadership, not a system of rules.	Neither formal rules nor well-defined hierarchy of authority are in place. Such agreements to cooperate as may emerge (and they may not) depend on the specific people involved.
Impersonal	Classical “Weberian” bureaucracy of top-down enforcement of impersonal rules and standard operating procedures.	Multiple stakeholders, each with significant independent authority, agreed on how to work together, and codify these agreements in formal, enforceable rules.

Source: Pritchett 2019, Review Essay

Naturally, as with any stylised heuristic, dichotomous distinctions are conceptually helpful but rarely truly dichotomous in practice. Country contexts do not fit neatly into one category, but more likely have a dominant or overarching category with some aspects of some or all of the others. Each Political Economy Country Study Lead will need to decide how to resolve this issue. For example, Levy (rather optimistically) and Pritchett (rather more pessimistically) both discuss the potential for assigning rough percentages or weights to each of the four kinds of political settlement and public governance.⁹

We have, overall, refrained from “buying” the political settlements wholesale; for example, we do not assert that the political settlements approach can yet be used for prediction, but do hope that at the end of the RISE PET work, we are closer to a framework that may be used for prediction. Rather, the decision to use the political settlements literature as a starting point is based on a few inter-related concepts/issues:

- It can **give a sense of the possible** (and/or the impossible) for positive changes in the politics of learning by **interrogating the power structures of key elites.**
- It provides a potentially good **starting point for a study, or set of studies, of the politics of education reform in a given set of country contexts.**

⁹ If and how to do such allocations will need to be discussed among and across the different research teams doing the PET deep dives.

- **It frames an approach for tracking changes historically** back to whatever starting point is agreed upon as the relevant reform period (Approximately 3 decades or more in most of the RISE cases)
- **While specific political analysis in each RISE country will be a bit different based on the researchers involved, the CRT studies we have to complement the PET work, etc—it will give us at least some comparative continuity across cases.**
- **The approach has some significant degree of support and buy in** from at least four of the RISE CRT's (Indonesia, Vietnam, Ethiopia, and Tanzania), qualified support from the Nigeria CRT.¹⁰

An important related determination for each deep dive research team will be how to define the social groups or actors who impact the political settlement in each case (and how they may change over time). Taken together, these social groups are referred to as the Social Foundation. Henstridge, Lee and Salam (2019) note that:

... social foundations and social norms can be extremely persistent, and can constrain the institutional options for political leaders: a king who runs the army and the police may still find it impossible to introduce rules and practices that violate very widespread social norms. And yet, even social factors are persistent rather than permanent – economic outcomes that change lives and livelihoods, like literacy and urbanization, can shift social conventions and norms.

Kosack (2012) provides a useful discussion of how political leaders determine which groups hold sway in the social foundation over their ability to stay in power (whether in a democracy or not):

If leaders were free to pursue policies of their choosing, then, perhaps, their policy choices could be explained by the differences of political will, knowledge, or morality. But leaders are not free to choose what policies to pursue. The rule at the pleasure of a particular set of citizens – selected voting blocs or certain business elites, landowners, workers, or other economic, social, religious, or ethnic communities. (Kosack 2012: xi)

Furthermore, it may be possible for some or all of the deep dives to use and/or test Kosack's hypothesis that a successful politics of learning will involve what he calls a "political entrepreneurship of the poor," whereby organisational structures are developed to allow poor citizens to become a group in the social foundation and thereby to act collectively to support or contest the government and its leaders.¹¹ This implies an additional challenge for the RISE deep dives, namely assessing the nature of the political settlement and social foundation at the outset of the chosen reform time period (generally several decades) and determining if and how they evolve over the time period.¹²

Any such effort will necessarily consider a range of elites (many of which will be closely connected to what would be in a more typical "stakeholder analysis"). Yet, as part of the exploration of political settlements in RISE countries, we will encourage the deep dive teams to pay close attention to a relatively smaller group of political leaders. For example, the Development Leadership Program (DLP) has for more than a decade pursued a line of research that could prove helpful. They have argued that in fact "effective leadership and collective action of a relatively small number of leaders and elites, across the public and private sectors, are essential for building effective states."¹³ Acknowledging that effective political processes "involve diverse leaders and elites, representing different groups, interests, and organizations, tackling a

¹⁰ In Pakistan, we are still discussing the approach, and regarding India there is no reason to believe it will be rejected.

¹¹ Kosack also argues, as do many others, that democracy (at least as practiced in much of the developing world) is quite clearly not a requirement or perhaps even a generally positive influence on improved learning and therefore it cannot be the heart of a politics of learning. One important implication here is that median voter approaches are at best useless and at worst destructive for the development of the politics of learning. We will need to ensure that our own political settlements approach does not favor some kind of "democracy is the answer" implicitly or explicitly.

¹² Kelsall (2016: 3) also provides some important methodological advice that should mollify some of the concerns expressed by the RISE CRT members: "Although it is certainly possible to conduct very meticulous research into political settlements, 'good-enough' answers to these questions can also be obtained in a fairly economical way. Development practitioners should ... be looking for a rough idea, rather than a precise measurement, of where a settlement stands on each dimension. This is partly because knowing what kind of settlement one is in is just a first step in devising a more detailed way of working, which will involve additional and ongoing forms of political economy analysis (PEA) and should anyway be somewhat adaptive and experimental."

¹³ Adrian Leftwich and Steve Hogg (2007), "The case for leadership and the primacy of politics in building effective states, institutions and governance for sustainable growth and development," DLP, www.dlpprog.org See also, Hudson et al, "Inside the black box of political will: 10 years of findings from the Developmental Leadership Program", February 2018.

series of collective action problems in locally appropriate and feasible ways,” they argue that the “quality and quantity of leaders and elites with the necessary vision, knowledge, and experience” are often quite limited.

This could help bound the inquiry, though will be more appropriate for some cases than others. For instance, these concepts dovetail well with the recent proposals by the Tanzania CRT (Studies 8 and 9) which explores: “Under what conditions do coalitions for policy reforms emerge in a hegemonic party state? And what explains the rapid collapse of political support at the highest levels of the Government of Tanzania for BRN?”¹⁴ On the other hand, such a focused approach may prove less fruitful in a case like Vietnam with a seemingly more diffuse political elite primarily operating through the Communist Party.

It is important to note that these conceptual guideposts for the deep dive studies identify an approach and guiding principles but not a methodology or set of methods. Aside from the likelihood of doing elite interviews and some historical analysis, the political economy analysis and methods for each country case study are to be chosen and defined by the Political Economy Country Study (PECS Lead), each of whom may come from different disciplines and/or research traditions.¹⁵

Nor are we picking a particular theory to test. In fact, we would argue that the varied traditions and methodological orientation of the different researchers for this PET-A work make devising a conceptual framework for analysing the politics of education reform in developing countries complicated at best and potentially unhelpful because it potentially requires us to prioritise a particular tradition of analysis within political science and associated ontology and cast aside others. There are multiple ways of understanding the politics of policy-making in developing countries and they are not really compatible with one another because they presume/emphasise a different unit of analysis (e.g., the rational utility maximising individual in the case of neoclassical political economy/public choice theory, institutions in the case of the various strands of institutionalism, intra-bureaucratic cliques in Weberian patrimonial state analysis, class in the case of Marxist analysis, interest and other groups in the case of pluralist analysis, and individual politicians in the case of elite-centered analyses [Grindle and Thomas’ 1991 classic textbook on the politics of policy-making in developing countries is good on these distinctions]). The political settlements framework overcomes these issues to some extent by eliding the whole question of the unit of analysis—it emphasises the importance of power relationships and coalitions but doesn’t specify whether these relationships/coalitions are between individuals, classes, groups, cliques, or something else. This is perhaps one of the reasons this approach has proven so popular—it has allowed diverse groups of scholars working on donor-funded pieces of research to imbue it with their own preferred understanding of politics, avoiding the need for, say Marxist scholars, to work within a Weberian mode of analysis and so forth.

An initial research effort by such a diverse set of analysts to understand and categorise the variety of political settlements across RISE country contexts seems likely to yield important insights regarding the origin of, and constraints on, the intent of governments to improve learning outcomes. It will certainly not yield a generalisable (or testable) theory of the politics of learning as Pritchett (2018) calls for, but it should contribute to our ability to work towards such a theory.

Latitude within constraints for PET-A Research Teams

As is clear from the discussion above, we expect research teams to work within a set of broad Guiding Principles while giving them considerable latitude regarding how specifically to design and carry out their research methods and plans. However, to provide greater guidance and better ensure enough comparability across cases for integrative and comparative analysis, we further developed some specific parameters within which we expect the teams to work (unless they explicitly make a case otherwise).¹⁶

¹⁴ “RISE Tanzania Country Research Team Phase II Technical Proposal,” December 2018. Study 9 proposes to use “qualitative evidence from structured elite interviews... to uncover the political considerations that informed the creation of the Big Results Now coalition in 2012, with the goal of reforming the education system to boost learning outcomes.” The PET-A team will seek to work with the Tanzania CRT to expand the time frame covered and incorporate some of the conceptual framework outlined in this paper. Study 8 examines, in part, “the extent to which political career concerns shape local government managers behavior,” and should also thus provide opportunities for collaborative work with the PET-A efforts.

¹⁵ Their Terms of Reference will require a detailed project proposal early on in the project, which will specify the methodologies. The PET-A Lead will ultimately approve the project proposal, in consultation with the RISE Research Directorate.

¹⁶ These additional parameters came out of an all-day workshop with Alec Gershberg, Brian Levy, Luis Crouch, and Michelle Kaffenberger December 6, 2019.

Much analysis of education policy-making processes has been informed by what Paulston (1977) and others (e.g., Ginsburg et al, 1990; Arnove, 2009) have labeled the “equilibrium paradigm”. This paradigm portrays education policy reform as either part of a natural and inevitable process of progression from tradition to modernity in accordance with an underlying logic of increasing rationality (the evolutionary variant) or a functional response to system imbalances or societal needs in accordance with an underlying logic of system maintenance (the structural-functionalist variant). In both cases, it suggests that society is essentially consensual in nature and that education policy-making is a seamless and apolitical process driven mainly by technical educational and economic concerns. By contrast, and consistent with the Guiding Principles laid out in this paper, the deep dives and to some extent the non-RISE country case studies will apply a conceptual framework for analysing education policy-making that comprises the following main elements:

- A view of education policy—and the broader aims of education systems—as the product of conflict and contestation between competing political and social coalitions of stakeholders that have an interest in the nature of a country’s education system and the changing balance of power between them. In other words, the nature of the political settlement underpinning the country’s political economy and its education system in particular.
- An understanding of education policy-making as occurring in a range of domains and specifically those labelled “political”, “civic”, “bureaucratic”, and “legal” by Schiefelbein and McGinn (2017). See Figure 1 below.
- An understanding of competing political and social coalitions in terms of their interests, agendas with regards to education policy, and forms of leverage over the policy-making process.
- An understanding of learning as taking a variety of forms depending on the purposes/imperative driving the formation and operation of the education system, only one of which is the form measured by PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS.
- An understanding of education policy as a key determinant of the forms of learning promoted through the country’s education system.
- An understanding of patterns of market-oriented education policy reform as reflecting the way in which structural pressures for reform (emanating from economic conditions that confer additional leverage on political and social coalitions seeking to promote such reform) are mediated by the capacity of competing political and social coalitions to resist reform.
- An understanding of the latter in terms of these groups’ ability to organise collectively, access the policy-making process, mobilise public opinion, or otherwise exercise leverage over the policy-making process.
- An understanding of learning outcomes as measured by international standardised tests such as PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS as the product of the changing political settlement and what this implies for the forms of learning pursued through the education system.

While the specific range of policy areas to be explored will be determined by the research teams, to increase the likelihood the PET-A work will yield results that lend themselves to comparative work across countries, the research team should agree to devote attention to two key policy areas to drive part of the work.¹⁷

1. The development (or lack thereof) of national exams or outcome measures of learning
2. Teacher career paths¹⁸

¹⁷ Unless the team makes an explicit case why they should not or cannot examine these two policy areas

¹⁸ Teacher career path in this context is being understood narrowly, on purpose. In our context, it refers to the progression path in salaries and other benefits. What factors drive that progression? Is it purely age and years of service? Paper qualifications/certification? Or does it include performance-based pay, some notion of progression based on community esteem, or pay for being willing to be deployed to difficult situations, or teaching in subjects for which there is scarcity? Does it involve trial or probation periods? And, importantly, how did any of this change if the country pivoted, or tried to pivot, from an access agenda to an access plus learning agenda?

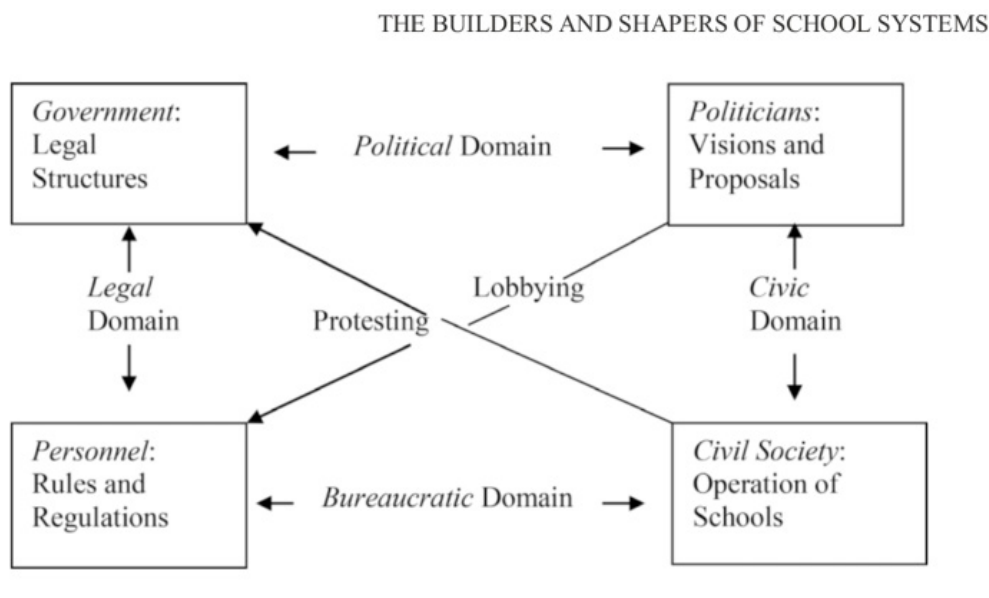
Again, these foci do not preclude any case exploring other policy areas in greater detail; rather, it is a commitment to explore these two policy areas in enough detail to allow some comparison across cases. The idea is that this encourages the political economy work to be problem driven. By paying some attention to these issues throughout the case, and the politics of their development over time, the specifics will cascade outward and reveal the political economy in a way that enlivens the political settlements work, and that will make it more useful to current policymakers. It also is likely to cascade outwards to intergovernmental (or multi-level) issues.

Domains of contestation

Shiefelbein and McGinn (2017) provide a simple framework for the domains of contestation in education systems that we propose to use as a bridge from the examination of political settlements to the inevitable stakeholder analysis of PEA. Figure 1 (Figure 23 in Shiefelbein and McGinn [2017]) is a stylised representation of the four domains of contestation.

1. The legal domain between government and personnel: formal legislation, constitutional arrangements, and policy are translated into rules to govern personnel who in turn seek to change policy to suit their own objectives.
2. The bureaucratic domain between personnel and civil society: the interaction between the rules and staff operating schools.
3. The civic domain between civil society and politicians: the interactions between those operating schools and politicians (akin to what the accountability framework calls “compact”).
4. The political domain between politicians and government: the interaction between the civic and the formal legislation and constitutional arrangements, where a wide range of political actors and interest groups seek to impact the formal decisions and actions of government.

Figure 1: Actors and domains of contestation in a system of instruction



Source: *Learning to Educate*, Shiefelbein and McGinn (2017)

The framework is useful on several levels. First, it serves as a check to make sure that the political settlement inquiry is fully covering the key areas for potential contestation and understanding what induces a government to take learning seriously. Second, each CRT is focusing more on some of these domains than others; thus being thoughtful about each of these domains may reveal some “blind spots” in their lines of research with respect to understanding the politics of reform. And third, there may be some potential to understand how differences in the domains of contestations play out in terms of adoption of quality-enhancing reforms

Discussing these Domains of Contestation might be done as part of the political settlements analysis or separately. Again, exactly how to do so is up to the individual Political Economy Country Study Leads to conceptual and propose.

The challenge of determining the origin of intent: how might we determine if a government were actually trying to improve learning?

Asking the question, “How are political conditions fostered that put policies to improve learning at the centre of an education system?” immediately begs another, “How do we know what these policies are?” Do we predetermine them before beginning the political economy analysis or are we open to the possibility of multiple possible solutions to the problem of learning?

- In both a theoretical and a very practical sense, how would we know if a government were actually trying to improve quality?
- For instance, in doing the historical work on the country “deep dives,” what criteria would tell us that country A really tried to improve quality (and succeeded or failed), while country B used all the right rhetoric but did not really truly try?
- Ultimately, the PECS Leads will have considerable leeway about how to make this determination and what to look for as evidence that a country really tried (or did not) to improve quality. However, we can provide some structure for thinking this through:
 - Can we distinguish that leaders and the educational ministry are proxying quality with learning outcomes, and learning outcomes with something measurable, and that these learning outcomes are central to the Ministry’s public discourse, and goals?
 - Is there at least widespread recognition of how the country is doing, relative to some well-established standard (be it global or national)? Numerically? Is there awareness of how broad the issue is (how many children fail to meet a clear standard—akin to percent of a population below the poverty line)? Is there awareness of how deep the issue is (akin to the total “mass” under the poverty line)?
 - Do other powerful actors support the centrality of learning outcomes? Actors such as Ministries of Finance or Planning? Civil society? Private sector? Unions? Do these actors interact and hold the Ministry of Education accountable for learning? What about the national parliament or other key groups?
 - Are there efficient communication channels that can inform key stakeholders and constituencies if children are not learning?
 - Is there a public dialogue about the right to learn (or at least the right to be taught)?
 - Are there numerical, measurable learning goals established?
 - Is the top talent in the Ministry, and in supporting civil society organisations, devoted to this issue?
 - Is the top talent, which often has propositional and budget power but often does not know how to implement (e.g., could not actually run a learning assessment) able to recruit, convince, and get support from the regular cadres that do know how to implement?
 - Is there recognition of the importance of being “aligned for learning?” Is there a clear recognition, even if implicit, of coherence in education policies for learning (as suggested by the RISE 5X4)?
 - More narrowly, is there a strong (even if somewhat implicit) recognition of the need for bureaucratic units to be “technically” aligned, such that the units in charge of what Crouch and Destefano (Year?) call the “instructional core” are effectively aligned?¹⁹

¹⁹ Are lesson plan models, lesson plan supervision, teacher and head teacher coaching, assessment (of various types), and learning materials aligned across bureaucratic units? It is very common to have lesson plans that are neither aligned with what is assessed nor aligned with the textbooks.

- In each of these areas, as well as collectively between them, is there a reasonable “theory” for how to drive learning (e.g., is there some version of Teaching at the Right Level (TARL)—as Shiefelbein and McGinn detail, all reasonably efficient 19th century education bureaucracies with a universalising aim did this)?
- For these core functions, is there a powerful, central, and “woke” bureaucrat who is one or two levels above the units that need to be coordinated, but also only 1 or 2 levels below the Minister, who forces those units to work together for quality? Is there a bureaucrat to whom they are ALL accountable, and to whom they are accountable for coordinating and aligning?
- Is there empirical analysis of how, in fact, quality is being produced even in schools that cater to the poor, but which are outliers in terms of quality? That is, does the country study its own quality-producing mechanisms?²⁰
- Compared to the bureaucratic alignment that has been reasonably successful on access, how is the bureaucratic alignment for quality?²¹

Clearly, it will be crucial to successfully examine the means of determining if and how (and why) we believe one country (say Vietnam) intended to improve learning and did so successfully while others (say Nigeria or Pakistan or Indonesia) either did not try or tried but were not successful. This gets at what the growth diagnostics analysts such as Pritchett call the “full trinity”: that an action should be technically correct, politically supportable, and administratively feasible.

Stakeholder and interest group analysis: the intersection of adoption and implementation

With the foundation of the political settlement analysis, and augmented by some consideration of the domains of contestation, each deep dive will also do some of the kind of traditional stakeholder and interest group analysis that, as discussed above, is more commonly the first step in (and the heart of) political economy analysis. Shiefelbein and McGinn’s framework for describing domains of contestation also yields a useful way to conceptualise stakeholders in terms of their relationships to the education system. Specifically, they see the education system as a source of different kinds of benefits to different groups of stakeholders and argue that some generalisable tendencies may be discernable from the nature of the relationship stakeholders have with the systems. Table 1 (Table 19 in Shiefelbein and McGinn’s framework) below provides a categorisation of stakeholders as “users”, “operators” and “suppliers” of the school system.

There are, of course, any number of frameworks for stakeholder analysis. Another useful one (at least to examine how adopted policies succeed or fail in getting implemented) is Bruns et al (2018), which is heavily focused on teacher unions and other teacher-oriented stakeholder groups.²² There may be scope to examine, in each or some of the PET deep dives, their “six interrelated issues in design and implementation that have been important to reform success: consultation, sequencing, compensation, negotiation, communication, and sustaining reforms.” (Bruns et al, 2018: 34)²³ Appendix A presents Kingdon’s (2014) “Theory of Change” for political economy analysis of education, primarily because it provides a very complete list of stakeholders one might consider.

²⁰ For instance, often some of the most effective schools have resisted educational fads and stuck to strategies they know produce results. Often these schools are in the private sector or parochial and faith-based that cater to the lower middle-class or rural areas.

²¹ E.g., does the system, when it comes to access, have a good way to place teachers in classrooms or schools newly built, and get teachers on payroll? Do they generalise from the ability to do such coordination for access to the much more difficult coordination for learning?

²² Kingdon et al (2014, Figure 5.1) provide an even more extensive list of potential stakeholders to consider, albeit within a framework that is considerably less useful. While we would not call their conceptualization a true theory of change as they do, we do commend and find useful their list of stakeholders. See Appendix A

²³ PECS Leads will propose how to carry out this stakeholder analysis for approval by the PET-A Lead and the Research Directorate

One common pitfall to avoid (and even challenge) in such stakeholder analysis, identified and fleshed out by Rodrik, is the “notion that there is a well-defined mapping from ‘interests’ to outcomes.” (JEP, 2014: 190). It would seem useful to incorporate insights from Crouch and DeStefano’s (2006: 9) analysis of how to overcome political the messiness and unpredictability of implementation.²⁴

“Since most development projects pay attention to the technical aspects of reform, we leave those aside. Conversely, since most projects fail to address the process and politics of reform, it is on those that we focus. In particular, ERS concentrates on the political and institutional dimensions of reform. We touch on leadership, institutional capacity, resources, and civil society issues, but within the context of how one uses them to define, advocate for, advance, and carry through reforms in the face of political and institutional obstacles.”²⁵

Table 3: An incomplete listing of stakeholders in a school system

Users	Operators	Suppliers
Parent associations	Teacher unions	Publishers
Churches	Schools administrators	Furniture makers
Professional associations	Ministry officials	Textbook writers
Labor unions	Private school owners	Discipline experts
Business organisations		Research centres
Taxpayer associations		Teacher training institutions
Political parties		Computer manufacturers
		Construction firms
		Curriculum designers
		International lending agencies

Source: *Learning to Educate*, Shiefelbein and McGinn (2017)

Connections to the accountability triangle and the RISE 5x4?

It is beyond the scope of this paper to do a priori a complete integration of the full RISE accountability framework and the 5x4 matrix with the approaches outlined above. In fact, we believe this integration will evolve over the course of the deep dives and that the PECS Leads will together with the PET-A Lead begin to fill out how the PET work dovetails with, and even impacts, the theory of change implied by the RISE 5x4. It is, however, necessary to draw connections between the political phenomena studied through the PET-A and at least selected relevant components of the accountability framework in each case. That is, as the CRTs begin to draw insights about system (in)coherence through their overall research efforts, we should seek to make connections to the political economy work undertaken through the PET and mine it for potential insights.²⁶

In a recent OPM working paper Henstridge, Lee, and Salam (2019) develop “Thicker Policy Diagnostics” for economic growth and provide an excellent visualisation for how the political analysis outlined above could be integrated with the RISE 5x4.

²⁴ Crouch, L., & DeStefano, J. (2006). Education Reform Support Today. USAID, AED. <https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/Education%20Reform%20Support%20Today.pdf>

²⁵ This is quite different from the political and stakeholder analysis of implementing any given piece of policy, which might concentrate on how one can go about creating and sustaining the necessary political coalition. This leads to “stakeholder-like” analysis and ‘tactics’ of who are allies, who are enemies, and how to empower allies and buy-off, deflect or defeat enemies, etc.

²⁶ This section is a placeholder for a more developed conceptualisation to be discussed with the RISE Research Directorate, the CRTs, and perhaps the new Politics member the theme team.

Figure 2: RISE system diagnostics (Figure 9 in Henstridge, Lee, and Salam [2019])



Source: Mark Henstridge, Stevan Lee, Umar Salam 2019

This visualisation is, however, deceptively simple and clear compared to the actual challenges faced, not the least of which is that as complex as growth diagnostics are, the causal pathways that lead from policy to growth are more well understood and “agreed upon” than those that improve learning. In addition, while only one of the “sides” of the accountability triangle is called “Politics”, there are political economy dynamics in each of the myriad relationships through the triangle and 5 by 4. We might start by taking the 5 by 4 matrix and transforming it in the manner that the growth diagnostics extrapolated what it would look like if any given reason for low private investment were a binding constraint to growth, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: What is the binding constraint to a politics that is coherent for learning outcomes (universal, early, conceptual and procedural mastery of basics)?

		Conceptual Question	Evidence	Evidence
Politics (citizens as principals, politicians as agents)	Delegation	If “weak delegation” were the binding constraint to a politics coherent for learning outcomes this is what we would expect to see...		
	Finance	If “weak finance” (level or structure) for education were the binding constraint to a politics coherent for learning outcomes this is what we would expect to see....		
	Support (?)	NA (?)		
	Information	If “weak information” ... (etc)		
	Motivation	If “weak motivation” ...		
	Row coherence (e.g., DFSIM within politics not coherent)	If “row incoherence” within politics were the bc to a politics coherent for learning outcomes, of the following types (D and I incoherent (e.g. delegation is broad, I narrow, D ambitious but F limited, I out of timing to make learning salient for M)		
	Column coherence (e.g. D across P,C,M,CP not coherent)	If “D” incoherent, “I” incoherent etc.		
Compact	D, F, S, I, M			
Management	D, F, S, I, M			
Client Power	D, F, S, I, M			

This structure makes it clear that lots of “PEA” are really about the other elements of the 5 by 4 (e.g., essentially the “politicians” are the principals and others are the “agents”/actors in what the framework calls “compact”). In addition, “management” and agenda-setting make salience to this issue an electoral (or settlement) success.²⁷

At the moment, we are productively headed towards creating, though not filling out, this matrix (i.e., what are the empirical counter-parts of the concepts of “weak delegation” or “weak political commitment to learning outcome goals” [which is the endogenous outcome?]).²⁸

The PET-A Lead and Research Directorate will work with the PECS LEADS and relevant CRT members, and together seek to fill in the above table via the approaches and plausible tools outlined here and in the PECS research proposals for each deep dive. One goal would be to determine the ways in which the elements of accountability differ by type of political settlement, or at least if the political settlement analysis provides insights into the ways accountability functions or not.

We might also explore the extent to which the PECS Leads have an appetite for examining the role of “leadership,” which in some ways stands the whole “accountability” triangle on its head. That is, authoritarian (totalitarian) governments see the citizens as accountable to the state and not particularly vice versa.

Opportunities to go deeper in context specific areas in RISE countries and draw lessons from non-RISE countries

Many of the research efforts underway or proposed by the CRTs hold potential to elucidate specific aspects of the overall PET-A framework. Although we would obviously not be able to undertake similar studies in each of the seven CRT countries, we will use, and in some cases work with the CRTs to carry out, work. Just a few examples would be:

- A proposal by the Indonesia CRT to study the political economy of teacher recruitment and deployment in Madrasahs
- An effort by the Pakistan CRT to study the regional examination system and examination boards
- A study proposed by the Tanzania CRT to “understand the role of politics in supporting learning outcomes through ... a randomised letter experiment (making education performance salient) to examine how electoral security affects the effort allocations of legislators.”
- A proposal by the Vietnam CRT to use the Locus of Decision Making framework from the OECD to understand who holds power and makes key decisions, and how and why there are differences between de jure and de facto policies.
- Another proposal by the Vietnam CRT to understand how (local) accountability works in the decentralised budget practices.
- Many potential examples of reform processes in non-RISE countries.

²⁷ With respect to “frontline service providers” and “client power” at the grassroots level, these are more in PET-I not PET-A, but it is worth mentioning here as they are clearly related.

²⁸ In this case each of the four relationships of accountability is (by design) a behavioral theory of a different set of actors--“politics” is a theory of why politicians do what they do, “compact” is a theory of why “supplier organisations” (paradigm case: Minister of Education) do what they do, “client power” is a theory of why individual teachers/schools (and this itself is problematic) do what they do. Already one sees that these are fundamentally different disciplines that have to be invoked for each (and economists are really only specialised in the “client power” element and less so in the others [e.g., a bit in “management”]). And the four/ five elements of each relationship will not obviously produce similar column elements, so while “changes cause changes” might be a column that is consistent (e.g., if finance is a binding constraint to learning then changes in finance should be related to changes in outcomes and if information is a binding constraint to learning outcomes [or more specifically to a politics coherent for learning outcomes] then changes in information should see changes in the strength of the politics of learning). This is not so wildly abstract: the Pakistan team papers on report cards are a test showing that changing the information available to parents did

Education as a publicly provided, if not a public good

While not central to the approach we have developed for the political economy analysis deep dive cases, **it may be helpful for the deep dives to reflect upon and look for insights into the nature of education as a public good and the extent to which learning is prioritised over, say, socialisation or nation-building by political leaders.** Building upon connections Pritchett (2018) draws to Mark Moore’s RISE working paper (Moore, 2015) in which the nature of education as an a-typical “public good” subject to an arbiter of public value is explored, **it may be worth considering the following framework developed 15 years ago by Mitchell and Mitchell (2003).²⁹ Their framework makes clear that differences in how different stakeholders see the aims of an education system can lead to very different motivations for supporting or blocking key reforms. They also make clear (as does Pritchett) that neither economic forces nor (perhaps as a consequence) economists can explain even half of the trends in expansion, let alone the means of production as large, publicly-controlled Weberian bureaucracies.**

Table 5: A Framework for Analysing the Political Economy of Education Policy

	What aims for education?	
Who benefits?	Education as technical: training in skills of practical value having economic value	Education as culture: awakening of identity and character having political value
A private good: Distributed results accruing to individuals as education is being obtained	Durable product: Durable skills and knowledge with workplace value that persists over time (lasting benefits)	Direct service: Safe, nurturing, sensitive, caring child rearing and decent working conditions for teachers
A public good: Cumulative benefits for everyone; expected to accrue interest over time	Human capital investment: System capacity building with some risk of not being realised by enough individuals to be worth cost	Cultural legacy: Establishment of civic value that determines status and may lead or lag society

Source: Mitchell & Mitchell (2003)

Most of the public discourse (including within scholarly and analytic communities) revolves around education as a human capital investment and thus assumes that education is a public good whose aim is to provide technical skill development with long lasting economic benefits to both individuals and society. However, both Pritchett and Mitchell and Mitchell (2003) show us clearly that this is demonstrably often not the correct view of how or why education policies are adopted.

Mitchell and Mitchell (2003) provide the additional insights that all of the following could be at play at once: a) policy dialogues that do not adopt the rhetoric of human capital investment are doomed to failure; therefore, we should expect politicians and policymakers to adopt such rhetoric (though not because they hold the same views as economists about the nature of education as a good or the promise of education as an investment in human capital); b) socialisation (or cultural legacy) is a key motivation in the politics of education policy and this attribute directly impacts the reasons why quality enhancing reforms are or are not adopted; and c) important stakeholders and constituencies (and voters)

changing information in a client power way (e.g., village by village, school by school) in more public sector settings does not influence outcomes (consistent with either that information doesn’t change client power or that client power doesn’t influence teacher/school behaviour). And, the basic theory of change of ASER in India was that repeated, relevant, reliable data on the performance of students in India was necessary (and sufficient?) to make learning outcomes a politically salient issue for politicians at the federal/state level.

²⁹ Mitchell, D.E. and R.E Mitchell (2003). “The Political Economy of Education Policy: The Case of Class Size Reduction,” Peabody Journal of Education, 78(4), 120–152

might view education as a direct service (a consumption good) and governments may seek to please them even if these constituencies' view is based on education being a private good—a view that does not match up with either the policymakers themselves or most of the educational research community.

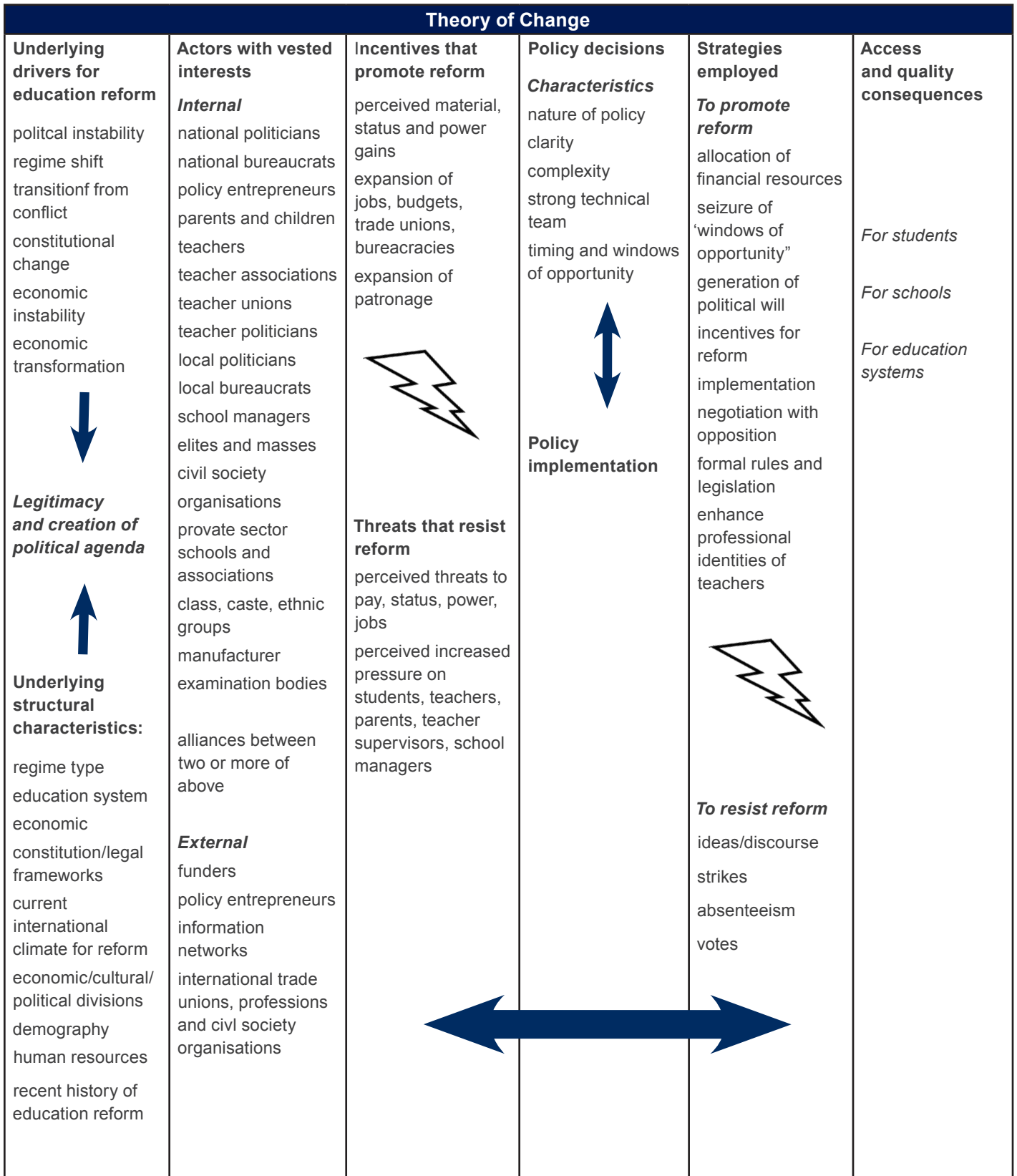
This framework supports the inanity and danger Pritchett (2018) elucidates of the “normative as positive” model by which economists often explain policymaker motivations and turns the “response to political pressure” model further on its head.³⁰ **Rodrik (2014) argues powerfully the need to understand the “ideas that political agents have about: 1) what they are maximising, 2) how the world works, and 3) the set of tools they have at their disposal to further their interests.”**

Indeed, as Pritchett argues, the politics of learning are likely to present so called “wicked problems” whose amelioration will require reform strategies and policy recommendations undergirded by both an understanding of complex adaptive systems and truly innovative models of government motivation and behaviour. The RISE CRT efforts should provide ample insights in this regard, which this PET-A research program should augment.

³⁰ As elucidated in Pritchett (2018), the explanation that many economists adopt either explicitly or implicitly is naïve at best and patently wrong at worst. Specifically, due in part to the focus with identifying market failures as a justification for government intervention, economists tend to assume that government actions are motivated by the need to address such market failure. That is, governments seek to adopt normatively optimal actions as if to maximise some measure of human well-being. Whereas, it may be just as true that actions that happen to appear normatively optimal in an economic sense are actually driven by political motivations with little consideration for social welfare maximisation. Pritchett calls this the economist's “normative as positive” (NAP) theory of change.

Appendix A

A rigorous review of the political economy of education systems in developing countries



Source: Kingdon et al (2014)

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Citation:

Gershberg, A. 2021. Political Economy Research to Improve Systems of Education: Guiding Principles for the RISE Program's PET-A Research Projects. 2021/030. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-RI_2021/030

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RISE is funded by:



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