

Welfare Regimes and the Political Economy of Learning in Developing Countries

PE 11

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Abstract

This paper synthesises the findings of the RISE Political Economy of Adoption (PET-A) country studies by interpreting their findings in light of the findings of comparative research on the evolution of 'welfare regimes'. This paper suggests that PET-A countries have not, for the most part, developed the sorts of political settlements identified as conducive to change in the welfare regimes literature or indeed others that might be expected to produce similar gains. They are instead dominated by predatory coalitions which seek to use education systems for rent-seeking, ideological, or other non-developmental purposes while technocratic and progressive elements are marginalised. In all cases, they consequently lack coalitions that are capable of driving education development. At the same time, the PET-A studies also provide some evidence to suggest that democratic reform can trigger improvements in education policy and learning outcomes by shifting the balance of power between elements within political settlements. In this respect, the PET-A studies suggest that the key to promoting educational development/learning in the developing world may be to think beyond narrow education-focused interventions to broader programs of democratic rights-oriented reform. In presenting this argument, this paper begins by providing an overview of the welfare regimes literature's findings with regards to the political dynamics that have facilitated education and learning gains. It then assesses the extent to which the PET-A countries have developed such political settlements or indeed any others that might produce learning gains and reviews the evidence in the PET-A studies as to the effects of democratic reform. The final section of the paper presents the conclusions.

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Introduction

In recent decades, many developing countries have greatly improved access to education including for the poor. But few have made significant gains in learning as measured, for instance, by international standardised assessments of student achievement such as PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS, leading some analysts to declare that many developing countries are facing a ‘learning crisis’ (World Bank 2018). Most analyses have attributed this crisis to its proximate causes: inadequate funding, human resource deficits, perverse incentive structures, and poor management (Rosser 2018). However, some scholars have suggested that its determinants lie more in the realm of politics (Pritchett 2013; Paglayan 2017; Rosser 2018). Most importantly for our purposes, scholars such as Hossain and Hickey (2018), Levy *et al* (2018), Pritchett (2018) and Kelsall *et al* (2022) have argued that learning crises in many countries have reflected the nature of ‘political settlements’ in these countries—that is, ‘the balance or distribution of power between contending social groups and social classes, on which any state is based’ (DiJohn and Putzel 2009: 4).

Education systems, they have observed, can be harnessed to a range of different interests and agendas, some conducive to improved learning outcomes and others not, depending on the balance of power between the competing political and social elements that make up these political settlements. Broadly, they suggest that where elements who have little interest in promoting good learning outcomes have dominated these political settlements—the typical scenario in the developing world—countries have failed to adopt and implement the education policy reforms that are required to shift education onto a higher quality and more learning-focused trajectory (Hossain and Hickey 2018: 2).

To further this line of analysis, the Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE) programme has commissioned a stream of work exploring the link between politics and learning outcomes in developing countries. Known as PET-A, this stream of work has four components: i) formulation of a set of guiding principles for understanding the political economy of learning that emphasizes the role of political settlements in shaping education policy and learning outcomes; ii) application of these principles to a set of developing country cases to elucidate the political obstacles to improved learning outcomes in these countries and the conditions under which they have been overcome; iii) preparation of synthesis papers that draw together the findings of the country studies in different ways; and iv) an assessment of the implications of the analysis for donor and government efforts to enhance learning in developing countries.

This paper synthesises the findings of the PET-A country studies by interpreting their findings in light of the findings of comparative research on the evolution of ‘welfare regimes’. Such research has traditionally had little to say about education, focusing instead on other areas of social welfare such as health and social security.¹ However, recently, this has changed due to important contributions by scholars such as Torben Iversen, John Stephens, Marius Busemeyer, Ian Holliday, Huck-ju Kwon, Ian Gough, Geof Wood, Mason Kim, Rick Doner and Ben Ross Schneider. Focusing predominantly on advanced democracies (Iversen and Stephens 2008; Busemeyer 2014) and East Asian developmental states (Holliday 2000; Gough 2001; 2004; Holliday and Kwon 2007; Hwang 2012; 2020; Kim 2015), these scholars have pointed to two types of political settlements that have facilitated the emergence of welfare regimes encompassing significant educational and learning improvements, one centring on powerful left-wing political parties and organised labour operating within the context of democratic political regimes and the other on relatively autonomous state elites driving change from above in line with strategic developmental ambitions. At the same time, they have also noted that ‘strong upgrading coalitions’—that is, ones likely to drive educational development as well as research and development (R&D)—have not yet emerged in middle-income countries and are unlikely to do so (Doner and Schneider 2016; 2020). For the most part, neither the PET-A stream of work nor the aforementioned work on the politics of education and learning in developing countries has engaged with these findings. Yet they seem relevant to PET-A’s objective of understanding the political foundations of educational and learning outcomes. A key goal of this synthesis paper is thus to bring the PET-A stream of work into dialogue with the welfare regimes literature, so that the latter’s insights can inform the former’s conclusions.

This paper suggests that PET-A countries have not, for the most part, developed the sorts of political settlements identified as conducive to change in the welfare regimes literature or indeed others that might be expected to produce similar gains. They are instead dominated by predatory coalitions which seek to use education systems for rent-seeking, ideological, or other non-developmental purposes while technocratic and progressive elements are marginalised. In

¹ In a seminal analysis of Western welfare states, Wilensky (1975: 6) argued that: ‘A nation’s health and welfare effort is clearly and directly a contribution to absolute equality, the reduction of differences between rich and poor, young and old, minority groups and majorities; it is only a secondary contribution to equality of opportunity. In contrast, a nation’s educational effort, especially at the higher levels, is chiefly a contribution to equality of opportunity –enhanced mobility for those judged to be potentially able or skilled; it is only a peripheral contribution to absolute equality.’ This notion that education is different to other realms of social policy is widely considered to be the main reason why the welfare regimes literature has given relatively little attention to education (Iversen and Stephens 2008: 602).

all cases, they consequently lack, to use Doner and Schneider's (2016; 2020) terminology, 'strong upgrading coalitions'—that is, coalitions capable of driving education development. At the same time, however, the PET-A studies also provide some evidence to suggest that democratic reform—a factor emphasised in the welfare regimes literature—can trigger improvements in education policy and learning outcomes by shifting the balance of power between elements within political settlements. In this respect, the PET-A studies suggest that the key to promoting educational development/learning in the developing world may be to think beyond narrow education-focused interventions to broader programs of democratic rights-oriented reform.

In presenting this argument, this paper begins by providing an overview of the welfare regimes literature's findings with regards to the political dynamics that have facilitated education and learning gains. It then assesses the extent to which the PET-A countries have developed such political settlements or indeed any others that might produce learning gains and reviews the evidence in the PET-A studies as to the effects of democratic reform. The final section of the paper presents the conclusions.

Key Findings of the Welfare Regimes Literature

Preliminaries: Definitions and Typology

According to Gough (2004: 26), a welfare regime is 'the entire set of institutional arrangements, policies and practices affecting welfare outcomes and stratification effects in diverse social and cultural contexts'. As indicated above, it encompasses the nature of education policy and institutions as well as those in other areas of social policy such as health and social security. Much research on welfare regimes has been concerned with identifying clusters of countries with common welfare features (Esping-Andersen 1990; Wood and Gough 2006). Indeed, Abrahamson (1999: 394) has suggested that 'a whole academic industry' has emerged dedicated to this purpose (see also Abrahamson 2011 and Hwang 2015). Our concern here is with the political constellations that shape the evolution of welfare regimes rather than how these regimes cluster *per se*, but it is nevertheless necessary to employ consistent terminology throughout concerning different types of welfare regime. To this end, we employ the influential taxonomy of global welfare regimes developed by Wood and Gough (2006) (see Figure One).

Wood and Gough (2006) distinguish between three main types of welfare regime, each of which, they suggest, is associated with specific regions of the world:

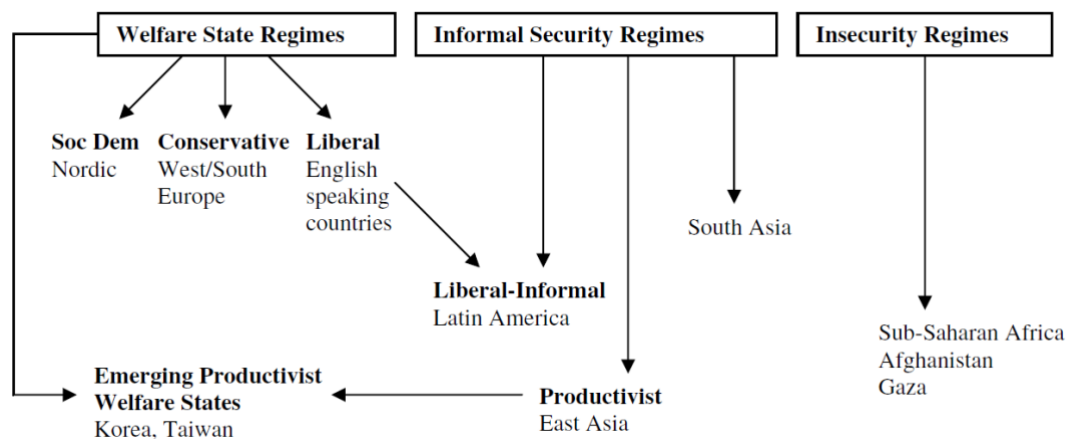
- *Welfare state regimes* refers ‘to the family of social arrangements and welfare outcomes found in the OECD world of welfare states’ (Gough 2004: xx). Such regimes are characterised by, among other things, combinations of state intervention, market forces and family structures to create a ‘welfare mix’ that ‘de-commodifies labour to varying degrees (and provides social services as well as investing in human capital)’. Drawing on Esping-Andersen’s (1990) influential typology of welfare states, Wood and Gough identify three variants of welfare state regimes: liberal, social democratic, and conservative. The characteristics of these three variants is summarised in Table One.
- *Informal security regimes* by contrast are ‘institutional arrangements where people rely heavily upon community and family relationships to meet their security needs, to greatly varying degrees’ (Wood and Gough 2006: 1699). They are associated with South Asia, Latin America, and East Asia. Alongside the general category of informal security regimes, Wood and Gough (2006) identify two specific variants of such regimes: i) *productivist* regimes characterised by significant state investment in education and, to a lesser extent, health but little investment; and ii) *liberal-informal* regimes characterised by heavy reliance on communities, families and markets as sources of social welfare with a minimal (or at least deteriorating) role for the state. The former, they suggest, are associated with East Asia (Holliday 2000), while the latter are associated with Latin America (Barrientos 2004).
- *Insecurity regimes* are ‘institutional arrangements which generate gross insecurity and block the emergence of stable informal mechanisms to mitigate, let alone rectify, these’ (2006: 1699). Such regimes are associated with sub-Saharan Africa, Afghanistan, and Gaza.

Table One: Variants of Welfare State Regimes

	Liberal	Conservative-corporatist	Social democratic
Role of:			
Family	Marginal	Central	Marginal
Market	Central	Marginal	Marginal
State	Marginal	Subsidiary	Central
Welfare state:			
Dominant locus of solidarity	Market	Family	State
Dominant mode of solidarity	Individual	Kinship Corporatism Etatism	Universal
Degree of de-commodification	Minimal	High (for breadwinner)	Maximum
Modal examples	US	Germany, Italy	Sweden

Source: Reproduced from Gough (2008: 24)

Figure One: A Taxonomy of Global Welfare Regimes



Source: Reproduced from Wood and Gough (2006)

The Politics of Welfare Regimes

In examining the political dynamics surrounding the emergence of welfare state regimes, many scholars have employed a functionalist approach, seeing them as a systemic response to economic development and corresponding structural economic change. For instance, Wilensky (1975: xiii) argued that ‘the root causes of the general emergence of the welfare state’ in the West were economic growth and its attendant demographic effects (as cited in Gough 2008:

44). On the one hand, industrialization increased need for skilled labour, necessitating the expansion and improvement of education systems (Busemeyer 2014). On the other hand, demographic changes accompanying economic growth—such as ‘a fall in mortality and fertility rates, a decline in three-generational households, and a move to smaller households’—created a need for an array of other ‘social policies, from social protection to care services’ (Gough 2008: 45). Similarly, scholars writing about democratic middle-income countries have found a ‘moderate level of industrialization and economic development [...] to be a necessary condition for welfare state emergence’ (Öktem, 2016: 296 as cited in Dorlach 2021: 771) and that increased GDP per capita ‘generally has a positive effect on social spending variables’ (Dorlach 2021: 771).

Industrialisation and economic development, such scholars have noted, have not always led to the emergence of welfare state regimes, however. In some parts of the developing world, the outcome has been relatively effective informal security regimes (that is, ones which encompass significant improvements in education and learning and/or other social outcomes). In East Asia, for instance, industrialisation led to the emergence of ‘productivist’ welfare regimes (Holliday 2000; Kwon 2005; Pierson 2005), as noted above. According to Pierson (2005), the uneven nature of productivist welfare regimes is ‘explained at least in part in terms of what is distinctive about these states and the period and circumstances of their industrialization. Developmental strategies deliberately prioritized economic growth and, within social expenditure, there was an emphasis upon the ‘investment’ areas of education and health care.’ In Latin America, industrialisation led initially to the emergence of welfare regimes more akin to welfare state regimes, particularly in the Southern cone. But, over time, these regimes were transformed by neoliberal economic reform and authoritarian politics such that, for instance, ‘social insurance began to be replaced by individual saving and market provision’, ‘private financing and provision of health and education was encouraged’, and ‘state origins of protection [for workers] were weakened’ (Wood and Gough 2006: 1705). The result was the transformation of incipient welfare states into ‘liberal-informal’ welfare regimes (Wood and Gough 2006: 1705).

Such functionalist accounts have been criticised for obscuring the role of conflict and contestation in shaping welfare regimes, particularly by scholars subscribing to power resources theory (PRT) (Esping-Andersen 1990; Olsen and O’Connor 1998). As Olsen and O’Connor (1998) have noted, the broad thrust of PRT analysis as applied to the emergence of welfare state regimes has been as follows:

PRT.....viewed the capitalist class as, by far, the most powerful actor in society by virtue of its control over economic resources (the means of production). However,.....it maintained that the balance of power between labour and capital was fluid, and therefore variable. While capital would always have the upper hand within a capitalist framework, labour had potential access to political resources which could increase its power, and thereby allow it to implement social reform and alter distributional inequalities to a significant degree. Creating a political party and mobilizing its numerical majority in the party's support was one way the working class could increase its power. However, the success of social-democratic, labour, or other parties of the left would depend upon a well-organized labour movement. High rates of unionization and the organization of unions into a cohesive labour central or confederation were therefore crucial (Korpi, 1980, 1983). It was also acknowledged that labour strength could be augmented if the working class was able to form coalitions with other classes, such as agrarian or white-collar workers (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Esping-Andersen and Friedland, 1982). PRT maintained that welfare states would develop the farthest in nations where labour was strongest as measured along such dimensions.

Building on this argument, several scholars have pointed to the important role that democracy has played in facilitating the strength of progressive elements—whether in the form of left-wing parties, organised labour, progressive NGOs, or some other form—and their efforts to promote welfare-oriented reform. In many parts of the world, welfare-oriented social policy reforms were initiated by authoritarian regimes (e.g. Bismarckian Prussia/Germany, military-ruled South Korea, ‘New Order’ Indonesia). However, as Gough (2008: 60) has observed, PRT analysis ‘convincingly shows the importance of democratic organization, though more so when allied to the mobilization of class organizations in civil society’. In his seminal work, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Esping-Andersen (1990), for instance, showed how democratic class struggle in which left-wing parties and organised labour were key participants drove the emergence of welfare state regimes in 18 OECD countries, noting that the impact of these elements in this respect was mediated by their alliances/relationships with other political and social forces such as rural farmers and the middle classes and their political party representatives. This process of mediation, he argued, laid the foundations for differences in the welfare state regimes that emerged in these regions, specifically whether they took a liberal,

social-democratic and conservative form. Likewise, in an analysis of the politics of social policy in Latin America, Huber and Stephens (2012: 3) argued that democracy worked to promote more egalitarian social policy in two ways: on the one hand, it was ‘a precondition for the development of left parties and their access to governmental power’ and, on the other, it encouraged political competition between left parties and non-left parties, shifting the policy agenda.

Finally, scholars working on East Asia have suggested that democratisation in countries such as South Korea, Taiwan and Indonesia created an incentive for political leaders to promote social protection policies because such policies were popular with electorates and would help them win votes. At the same time, democratisation opened up opportunities for progressive elements to participate more in advocacy and policy-making and push forward the cause of social welfare reform (Haggard and Kaufman 2008; Hwang 2012; Aspinall 2014). Ramos (2020) argued in an analysis of social policy in the Philippines during the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte (2016-2022) that social policy reform can be about legitimising conservative and authoritarian leadership and can cement narrow forms of social protection, rather than promote a more progressive agenda. Nevertheless, she suggests democratic competition has pushed Duterte to pursue social protection to build a stronger support base among the poor, and she notes that such reform could evolve in more progressive directions over time (see also Jessoula *et al* 2022).

Education

In writing about education specifically, scholars working broadly within the PRT tradition² have focused on three topics. The first has been explaining variation in the nature of education policy and institutions in Western Europe, North America and Western countries, building on Esping-Andersen’s (1990) analysis. For instance, Busemeyer (2015: 5-6) showed that ‘despite relatively similar starting points in the postwar decades, education systems in Western welfare states developed along distinct historical pathways, displaying obvious institutional similarities to [Esping-Andersen’s] well-known worlds of welfare capitalism.’ Furthermore, he contended that: ‘Partisan politics help explain the political dynamics of education reforms that put countries on different development paths.’ Similarly, Iverson and Stephens (2008), traced

² Doner and Schneider (2016; 2020) do not explicitly position their analysis in terms of this tradition. But I nevertheless include them here because of strong similarities between their approach and that of PRT scholars.

differences in systems of human capital formation in these countries ‘to historical differences in the organization of capitalism, electoral institutions, and partisan politics, emphasizing the distinct character of political coalition formation underpinning each of the three models.’ In both cases, their analyses emphasised the role of left-wing political parties, operating in the context of democratic political regimes, in promoting the development of education policy and institutions that were consistent with the broader emerging welfare state regime types of which they were part.

The second topic has been the development of education systems in East Asia. Kim (2015), for instance, has explained the development of effective education systems in Korea, Singapore, and China—in all cases as part of the emergence of broader productivist welfare regimes—in terms of the political dominance of relatively autonomous state elites pursuing national developmentalist agendas. In contrast to Western Europe and North America, he argues, left-wing political parties and trade unions were not the driving force of welfare regime development in these countries; indeed, such elements were firmly repressed by authoritarian governments. Nor were states beholden to the interests of domestic capitalists, which were also weak politically and subject to extensive state control (for more on the political weakness of business, see Haggard 1986 and Jenkins 1991). Finally, the international and regional context, particularly the advent of the Cold War, provided incentives for states to pursue rapid economic development by posing significant security threats and in some cases providing new opportunities to attract aid and investment (Stubbs 2005). In this context, according to Kim (2015), state elites seeking to promote developmentalist agendas became the dominant political element in these countries, enabling them to pursue social policies needed to support the cause of rapid economic development (for a similar argument, see Jeong and Armer 1994). The result was significant state investment in education in accordance with the productivist model of social welfare.

The third topic has been skill formation and educational upgrading in middle-income countries. In an important article, Doner and Schneider (2016: 619), for instance, have argued that economic elites and workers in middle-income countries ‘have different compositions, cleavages, and underlying interests than did those in the earlier industrializers’ because of middle-income countries’ ‘reliance on various combinations of cheap labour, foreign investment, and commodity exports’. As a result, ‘strong upgrading coalitions’ have yet to emerge in these countries, restricting potential for political settlements to emerge that are conducive to improved skill formation and educational outcomes. Indeed, Doner and Schneider

(2016: 619) state that they ‘can only speculate about what such an upgrading coalition might look like in the future’ noting that ‘the past experience of rich countries suggests that it might be cross-class among business and workers, as in Northern Europe, or more elitist and more exclusively among economic elites, as in East Asia.’ In a separate analysis focused on technical and vocation education in particular, they (2020: 680) note that, consistent with the latter scenario, ‘exceptional TVE expansion in Chile, Turkey, and Malaysia’ was characterised by a ‘top-down dynamic led by strong parties and stable governments that compensated for weaker coalitions.’ At the same time, they (2020: 682) note that ‘the conditions for success – political stability and strong parties – are also in short supply in developing countries’ with the result that ‘the default weak coalitions and demand may continue to impede progress on TVE in most middle-income countries.’

Summary and Conclusion

In sum, then, the welfare regimes literature, particularly work informed by PRT, has suggested that, historically, two types of political settlements have facilitated the emergence of welfare regimes encompassing significant educational and learning improvements. The first of these has been characterised by a central role for left-wing political parties and organised labour operating within democratic political regimes and in the wake of industrialisation. The second has centred on relatively autonomous state elites pursuing developmental ambitions in authoritarian contexts aided by propitious external environments. At the same time, the welfare regime literature has also suggested that developing countries typically lack such political settlements due to the absence of ‘strong upgrading coalitions’ (Doner and Schneider 2016; 2020). In the following section, we examine the findings of the PET-A studies with regards to the nature of political settlements in the PET-A countries and how they have changed over time. In so doing, we explore the extent to which these political settlements match those identified in the welfare regimes literature or otherwise indicate a propensity to promote educational reform and learning gains.

The PET-A Studies

The PET-A countries are listed in Table One along with some basic country data related to population size, income status, democracy rating, and level of industrialisation. The PET-A studies show that, broadly, the PET-A countries have failed to develop the sorts of political

settlements identified in the welfare regimes literature as being productive of educational development and learning gains. Nor have they developed other sorts of political settlements that one might expect to produce such benefits. Their learning outcomes have accordingly been poor relative to OECD countries. The sole exception among the PET-A countries is Vietnam which, as we will see below, shares much in common with the East Asian productivist model of welfare development. In presenting this analysis, we begin by briefly outlining the nature of political settlements analysis (PSA) as it has been employed in the PET-A studies. We then identify the main sets of actors, interests and agendas which have influenced education policy and its implementation in the PET-A countries as well as the political settlements these actors have produced in the PET-A countries.

Table One: PET-A Countries

Country	Population (2022) Millions	Income Status (2021-2022)	Freedom House (2022)	Manufacturing Value Added (2014), % GDP, Current \$US
<i>Africa</i>				
Nigeria	206	LMI	Partly Free	9.75
Ethiopia	114	LI	Not Free	4.13
Tanzania	59	LMI	Partly Free	6.05
Kenya	53	LMI	Partly Free	10.81
South Africa	59	UMI	Free	13.29
Egypt	102	LMI	Not Free	16.44
<i>Latin America</i>				
Peru	32	UMI	Free	14.80

Chile	19	HI	Free	12.36
<i>South Asia</i>				
Pakistan	220	LMI	Partly Free	14.06
India	1300	LMI	Partly Free	17.18
<i>Southeast Asia</i>				
Indonesia	273	LMI	Partly Free	21.56
Vietnam	97	LMI	Not Free	17.46

Source: Income status from World Bank, democracy ratings from Freedom House, MVA data from UNCTAD (https://stats.unctad.org/Dgff2016/prosperity/goal9/target_9_2.html)

Political Settlements Analysis

PSA emerged out of the new institutional economics and critical perspectives in political economy (Khan 2010). It starts with the notion that ‘institutions’—that is, the rules, regulations and enforcement mechanisms that govern economic and social activity—not only shape prospects for economic and social development—as many new institutional economists have shown (North 1994)—but also the distribution of political, economic and social resources. Institutions are consequently subject to conflict and contestation between competing sets of actors. In accordance with these ideas, as noted earlier, DiJohn and Putzel (2009: 4) have defined a ‘political settlement’ as ‘the balance or distribution of power between contending social groups and social classes, on which any state is based’.³ Importantly for our purposes, PSA shares much in common with PRT. Both approaches have a common concern with the determining influence of the balance of power between competing political and social forces.

³ As Gray (2020) has noted, there is ‘a notable difference’ in the political settlements literature ‘between theorists who understand political settlement primarily “as process” and others who understand political settlement primarily “as action.”’ The former see political settlements in terms of (changing) configurations of power while the latter see them in terms of formal and informal agreements. Our outline of PSA here conforms to the former approach. For a detailed discussion of alternative versions of political settlements analysis, see Kelsall (2018), Khan (2018) and Kelsall *et al* (2022).

They differ mainly in the fact that PRT employs an explicitly class-centric lens whereas political settlements analysis tends to be more eclectic/permissive in its understanding of state and society.

The core concepts associated with PSA are actors, interests, and institutions (Parks and Cole 2010, 6). The latter is understood essentially in Northian terms as described above. With regards to actors and interests, the focus is on elite groups; in general, non-elite groups are excluded from the analysis on the grounds that they occupy a subordinate position in the power structure and cannot therefore participate effectively in the construction of institutional arrangements (DiJohn and Putzel 2009). However, some recent contributions (for instance, Hickey *et al* 2015; Rosser 2016) have sought to incorporate ‘popular’ or ‘subaltern’ forces in recognition of the fact that, while elite actors generally dominate policy-making and implementation processes in developing countries, popular/subaltern actors can play a significant role, particularly when empowered by democratic reform or structural change in the economy and society. In these circumstances, popular/subaltern forces can become party to the political settlements that determine the institutional arrangements governing economic and social activity (Hickey *et al* 2015).

So far, the political settlement approach has primarily been used to explain differences in economic institutions and growth rates in developing countries (see, for instance, Khan 2010; 2012). To apply it to the case of education policy and its effects with regards to learning entails: 1) conceptualising education policy and its implementation as a set of institutions—that is, a set of rules, regulations and enforcement mechanisms; 2) recognising that these institutions have consequences not just in terms of overall educational and economic outcomes (enrolment rates, qualification levels, innovation levels etc.) but also the distribution of resources and opportunity with society—in particular, they affect who has access to education, the learning it produces, the income benefits that accrue as a result of having an education and learning, and the financial benefits stemming from control over government funding; and 3) understanding the nature and pattern of education policy in terms of the extent to which key actors’ interests align or diverge in relation to policy initiatives. This in turn entails identifying the actors who are involved in contesting education policy and its implementation in specific contexts and understanding how particular institutional arrangements serve or harm their interests. It also entails understanding the evolution of education policy and its implementation in terms of continuities and shifts in the balance of power between actors. Finally, it entails recognizing that the extent of alignment between the interests of key actors may vary by policy measure:

while all key actors may agree on the need for some measures, they may disagree on the need for others.

In the PET-A studies, the main purpose of the PSA approach has been to shed light on the intent underlying education policies and their implementation in the PET-A countries. Has this intent been to promote learning, particularly in forms that accord with dominant market-oriented approaches emphasising job-readiness and the acquisition basic skills as assessed through international standardised tests such as PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS or forms that accord with nations of social justice, rights and citizenship? Has it been to promote learning in accordance with developmentalist ambitions to promote industrial competitiveness so as to build national economic strength? Or has it been to promote other objectives such as nation-building, loyalty to the nation, obedience and loyalty to the state or dominant political groups, mastery of religious ritual and knowledge of religious texts, or particular ideological agendas? Either way, how has the outcome been shaped by the balance of power between competing political and social actors and how this has changed over time?

The Contending Actors and Interests

The PET-A studies differ markedly in how they define the actors who make up political settlements in the countries under study. In the wider political settlements literature, PSA researchers have tended to define these sets of actors in terms of broad political social strata related to class, ethnic, religious, and gender-based divides (Hickey *et al* 2015; Rosser 2016); competing patron-client networks (Khan 2018); or competing political and social coalitions, broadly defined (Parks and Cole 2010). The PET-A studies reflect this eclecticism and arguably add some more, focusing among other things on the role of individuals/leaders, political organisations (especially the military and political parties), international organisations (such as the IMF and the World Bank), and broad political and social strata (classes, ethnic groups etc). The PET-A studies also differ markedly in the extent to which they interrogate the interests of these various actors, associated policy agendas, and the material or political bases for these interests. Some studies simply note that education policy-making and its implementation were characterised by differences of opinion, producing conflict and debate, while others provide a fine-grained analysis of actors' material/political interests and how these translate into positions/actions on education policy and its implementation. Finally, the PET-A studies vary in the timeframes analysed.

This eclecticism and inconsistency make it difficult to distil overarching findings from the PET-A studies with regards to the nature of the actors, interests, and agendas involved in education policy-making and its implementation in PET-A countries (or, indeed, the characteristics of the political settlements of which they are part). Nevertheless, it is possible to group the actors identified in the PET-A studies into three broad groups. These groups are:

- 1) *Predatory/authoritarian political, military, and/or bureaucratic elites*. This set of actors includes senior political, military, and bureaucratic figures at the national and local levels who use their positions to secure or maintain control over the state apparatus and to accumulate wealth. These actors seek to use education systems to generate rents, distribute patronage, mobilise political support, and/or exercise political control (including through the promotion of nation-building objectives and ideological or religious values) rather than promote educational development and learning. This is the case whether acting in the context of authoritarian or democratic political systems. Such actors invest state resources in the expansion of education systems if it helps them achieve these objectives but otherwise prefer that scarce state resources are allocated to other areas of more immediate political or financial benefit. Often linked to the dominant sections of domestic capital through family, friendship, ethnic or political connections, they will countenance educational privatisation to open up opportunities for business cronies. At the same time, they have little interest in improving educational and learning outcomes and may even view such outcomes as a threat. In all these ways, they deflect effort from serious human resource development in the education sector, improved curricula, and sounder pedagogy and, in so doing, work against improved learning.
- 2) *technocratic elites and their supporters* at the international financial institutions (IFIs) and other organisations controlling mobile capital. These actors are ideologically committed to liberal markets. They seek to create educational systems that meet citizens' demand for education services and the economy's need for skilled labour as efficiently as possible in terms of the cost to the state. They promote measures that aim to deregulate education markets, privatise/corporatize public education institutions, and ensure fiscal prudence. The latter concern has at times—most notably during the mid to late 1980s—contributed to severe budget cuts that have reduced access to education for the poor and in so doing harmed a learning agenda even in the particular sense advocated by these elements (Cornia *et al* 1989). Since the mid to late 1990s, however,

this concern has been tempered by a commitment to protect the poor in the midst of economic reform and/or economic crisis through the use of social protection measures ensuring affordable access to health care, education, and food. This set of actors seeks to promote improved learning through the acquisition of basic skills as assessed through international standardised tests.

- 3) *progressive elements* who are ideologically committed to causes such as social justice, human rights, and corruption eradication. These elements often express a concern for the plight of subaltern actors such as peasant farmers, workers, and the poor. They operate variously through left-wing political parties (especially ones grounded in worker movements as opposed to elite cliques), NGOs, university student groups, and universities. In the education sector, they seek to promote the right to education, particularly through provision of quality public education. In this pursuit, they receive some support from UN agencies due to the latter's expressed commitment to protection of human rights and social protection. They contest both predatory and technocratic agendas with regards to education, the former because it undermines education and learning and the latter on the grounds it promotes inequality. These actors also often advocate for a broader learning agenda than one focused on the acquisition of basic skills for job readiness to encompass critical thinking, independent learning, and human rights.

Importantly for our purposes, none of the PET-A studies suggest that parents and children, the main clients of the education system, are significant actors in shaping education policy and its implementation in the PET-A countries, although the reasons for this are not explored in depth in the studies. The Chile case study points to the involvement of parent associations in various consultative processes related to education policy-making. But, for the most part, the studies are either silent on the role of parents and children in education policy-making and implementation, presumably reflecting the fact that this role is modest, or (as with the Ethiopia and Indonesia reports) assert explicitly that parents and children have had little involvement in these processes. The Indonesia report ventures some thoughts as to why parental involvement has been so limited in that case, noting that parent groups have been 'poorly organised, small in scale, and typically concerned with issues at particular schools rather than larger education policy issues.' At the same time, it also finds that 'the main institutional mechanisms for parental participation in education decision-making—school committees and education boards—have been captured by school principals and local political elites, limiting scope for

genuine input by parents into education decision-making.’ It is possible that such factors have been at work in other PET-A countries but further work is required to establish whether this is indeed the case.

The Political Settlements

Broadly speaking, the PET-A studies suggest that PET-A countries have been—and in many cases remain—characterised by political settlements in which i) predatory/authoritarian political, military, and bureaucratic elites (and associated corporate elites) are the dominant political and social force; ii) progressive elements are the weakest force; iii) technocratic elites and their supporters lie somewhere in between, exercising significant influence at times of economic crisis or downturn and less influence at other times; and iv) parents and children barely figure. As such, there has been little scope for the emergence of, to use Doner and Schneider’s term, powerful ‘upgrading coalitions’ that might drive educational development, learning and increased investment in R&D in these countries. The prospective members of such coalitions—technocratic elements, their supporters, and progressive elements—are simply too weak, even in alliance, to seize control of the state apparatus and use this to promote their respective causes. At the same time, the scope for such an alliance is reduced by the ideological and political differences between these elements. Clearly, such political settlements differ markedly from those which contributed to the emergence of welfare states and effective education systems capable of generating significant learning gains in Europe and North America.

At the same time, the studies also point to the potential for democratic reform to promote educational development (including improved learning) by facilitating a transition away from exclusionary political settlements towards more inclusive political settlements. Specifically, they suggest that democratisation promotes political settlements in which—while predatory elites may remain the dominant political force—progressive elements participate more in education policy making and its implementation. This is because electoral competition creates incentives for elites to pursue progressive policies desired by the voting public and/or institutional change creates new policy-making spaces that are accessible to progressive elements. The Tanzania study insightfully observes that: ‘In countries that are still plagued by access gaps, electoral politics are decidedly biased in favour of increasing access [to education—AR], even at the expense of the quality of learning’. But the PET-A studies also

provide examples of state adoption of various reforms aimed at improving learning post-democratisation, although these are often ones that accord with the neoliberal reform agenda promoted by technocratic elements rather than reforms envisaged by progressive elements, reflecting the relatively powerful position of the former. These reforms include competency-based curricula, teacher certification programs, efforts to give public educational institutions greater autonomy from the state in decision-making, and participation in international standardised testing regimes.

In the paragraphs below, we summarise the findings of four PET-A studies (Nigeria, Tanzania, Indonesia, and Vietnam) with regards to the nature of political settlements and their effects on education policy, illustrating how each case corresponds broadly to the scenario above, with the partial exception of Vietnam. We focus on these studies because they offer the most detailed political settlements analysis among the PET-A studies. In presenting summaries, we engage in a degree of retelling of their analysis to fit with the analytical categories of actors and interests specified above.

Nigeria

The Nigeria study distinguishes broadly between the political settlements that characterised the periods of military rule from 1966 to 1979 and 1983 to 1999⁴ and of democratic rule from 1999 to the present. The political settlement during the former period entailed the dominance of predatory/authoritarian elites based in the military, the exclusion of progressive elements, and variable influence by technocratic elements. Summarising its nature, the study authors state that: ‘the military constituted a political block that decreed laws and policies with some degree of consultation with the non-military elites and almost no consultation with the masses.’ Moreover, they also note that a hallmark of the political settlement was the influence of ‘corruption, rent-seeking and patronage networks’ while others were military efforts to promote nation-building and ideological objectives. The military, they suggest, ‘was committed to the political settlement of its cronies, allies and advancement of ethnic politics. These contributed to eroding accountability as well as collective and individual responsibility of officeholders to the people. They were neither responsible to anyone nor accountable to any laid down processes’.

⁴ The intervening period (1979-1983), known as the Second Republic, was a period of civilian rule.

The onset of economic crisis during the mid to late-1980s, during which the country was subject to an IMF and World Bank-sponsored structural adjustment program, enhanced the influence of technocratic elements, at least for the period of this program, while, as Kew and Kwaja (2018) have noted, the advent of democratic rule in 1999 created greater opportunities for progressive elements to influence policy, not least because of the incentives for political elites to pursue progressive policies created by electoral competition. Yet predatory elites—under democratic rule now drawn from both the military, business, professional and other civilian backgrounds—remained the dominant element in the political settlement, reflecting their ability to capture new political parties and through them retain control over the state apparatus. Corruption has accordingly remained an entrenched feature of Nigeria's political economy since 1999 as have efforts to promote ideologies that accord with the priorities of the ruling elite.

The consequence of this situation for the nature of education policy and its implementation in Nigeria was to gear things towards the pursuit of political, rent-seeking and ideological agendas rather than educational ones and especially improved learning. For instance, with regards to corruption in the education system, the study authors note that: 'Although information is limited on the existence of patronage networks in the NPEC [National Primary Education Commission], available information indicates that NPEC and SPEC [State Primary Education Commission] may have been part of the patronage and payoff conduits, which could have also induced different forms of political bargaining in its recruitment processes. Ojukwu (2006: n.p) observed that NPEC "was scrapped because of administrative and personality conflicts within and outside the commission" and the key managers were particularly "more interested in the money released by the Federal Government than being committed to the cause of primary education".' With regards to influence of nation-building and ideological agendas during the period of military rule, they note that: 'Education played a leading role in the reconstruction and reconciliation mission and was seen as a hope for the country's national unification. This particular reason underpinned the prominence given to the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme.' Finally, quoting Olusola, Ayodele and Osiki (2011: 19), they also contend that: 'Successive governments, both during the military and civilian regimes, tend to pursue educational programmes in line with their respective ideologies and priorities'. By contrast, learning-based agendas, either in accordance with technocratic or progressive principles, were sidelined, even during periods of technocratic influence when the focus was on budget repair.

Indonesia

The Indonesia study argues that Indonesia's 'learning crisis' has stemmed from the continuing political dominance of predatory political, military, and bureaucratic elites for much of the period since that country declared independence in 1945. These elites were nurtured initially under the New Order, the authoritarian military-backed regime that ruled Indonesia from 1965 to 1998. Technocratic elements were able to exercise some level of influence over education policy, but primarily only during periods of economic crisis such as the mid-1980s when a fiscal crisis occurred as a result of the collapse of international oil prices. Progressive elements were marginalised through the use of authoritarian controls. The onset of the Asian financial crisis in 1997 and the fall of the New Order regime in 1998 enhanced the position of technocratic elements, especially during the period of the crisis and ensuing IMF rescue package. They also enhanced the position of progressive elements by opening up new opportunities for these elements to participate in and influence policy as a result of democratic reform. But they did not dislodge predatory elites from their position of pre-eminence. Whereas the New Order was characterised by an exclusionary political settlement, the post-New Order period was characterised by one more inclusive in nature.

Within this context, the Indonesian government has failed to adopt and implement education policies that promote learning in Indonesian schools along the lines assessed by tests such as PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS. The New Order constructed a system that served as a mechanism through which New Order elites could generate rents, distribute patronage, mobilise political support, and exercise political control. The main instruments of political control were curricula that emphasised loyalty to state and nation; requirements for civil servant teachers to be members of KORPRI (the civil servants' corps) and vote for Golkar, the New Order's electoral vehicle; promotion of nationalistic rituals; and requirements for use of the national language as the language of instruction. Technocratic input into education policy-making in the midst of the 1980s economic crises led to cuts to government education spending, arguably holding back the cause of improving learning rather than advances for this cause. To the extent learning occurred under the New Order, it centred on ensuring children and teachers were loyal and obedient to the Indonesian nation, the Indonesian state and, to some extent, their religion. The Asian economic crisis and fall of the New Order witnessed the introduction of a series of neoliberal education policy reforms some of which were aimed at promoting improved learning. These included corporatization of public

educational institutions, a new teacher certification scheme, and a high stakes national exam. But continued predatory dominance combined with democratic reform meant predatory and progressive elements were able to contest these reforms, leading in many cases to their partial or full defeat. At the same time, however, this period also witnessed new commitments to increase public education spending and improve access to education, particularly through the implementation of a new push to realise free basic education. These reforms proved more durable.

Tanzania

The Tanzania study argues that the country's political settlement since independence in 1961 has been characterised by the dominance of predatory/authoritarian elements within the Tanzania African National Union (TANU)/Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), the ruling political party throughout the post-independence period. At the same time, this political settlement has changed in important ways due to shifts in the balance of power between competing elements with the party. This in turn has had significant effects on the broad orientation of education policy and specifically the extent to which it has focused on learning-related objectives or other objectives.

In the early 1960s, the study argues, bureaucratic and commercial interests within the party drove a nationalist agenda 'in favour of manpower planning to modernize and Africanize the higher echelons of government and the economy.' In this phase, the focus of education policy was accordingly on investing in and developing the education system to produce a 'limited skilled workforce' that would enable national control over the state apparatus. After 1967, a new coalition came to power which 'eschewed the perceived elitism of manpower planning in favour of education for agrarian development' in accordance with *Ujamaa*, a socialist ideology promoted by TANU leader and national president Julius Nyerere. At the same time, technocratic elements within the party and bureaucracy were marginalised. In this phase, the focus of education policy shifted to 'rationing of secondary education' and using the primary education system to promote 'civic education, nation-building, and socialist agrarian development', including through an emphasis on the development of practical skills. This was an exercise not only in promotion of a particular vision of development but also in securing political support and exercising political control. Economic crisis in the 1980s combined with Nyerere's resignation as President in 1985 led to a third iteration of the political settlement

whereby technocratic elements became increasingly influential. During this phase, the focus of education policy shifted to budget cuts, the introduction of school fees, greater emphasis on scientific education and technical skills, and expansion of private schooling, driven by a concern to meet the ‘human capital demands of a modernizing economy.’ A transition to a system of multipartyism in 1992 led to a fourth iteration of the political settlement, one characterised by greater inclusion. While CCM remained the ruling political party, it could no longer ‘subordinate popular demands for education access and improved learning outcomes to elite-driven ideological objectives.’ Policy during this period accordingly became concerned both with meeting popular demands and the needs of a modernising economy. This twin set of concerns led to a focus on providing universal primary and secondary education, a competency-based curriculum, and basic education as a precursor to higher levels of education. While not discussed in the Tanzania study, other analysis has noted that corruption became an entrenched feature of Tanzania’s education system (Sedigh and Muganda 1999), indicating that the elite sought opportunities to generate rents from the education system as well as use it to mobilise political support and exercise control through promotion of nation-building measures and ideological values.

Overall, the effect of this configuration of political interests and its effects on education policy have been to ensure that ‘learning has not always [been] the intended goal of schooling’. This in turn has led to a ‘stagnation in education quality’ and contributed substantially to the country’s ‘current learning crisis’.

Vietnam

The Vietnam study suggests that the political settlement which has characterised Vietnam’s political economy in recent decades has been dominated by a predatory/authoritarian elite based in the Communist Party of Vietnam and the marginalisation of progressive elements. As such, it shares much in common with the political settlements of the other countries examined here. The crucial difference between Vietnam’s political settlement and that of the other countries examined here—explored only indirectly in the study—has been with regards to the position of technocratic elements, particularly since the mid- to late-1980s when the country faced a severe economic and political crisis due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, its main international benefactor. As Hill (2013: 114-116) has noted, the country’s group of technocratic officials were small in number and politically weak at this point in time. But the country

nevertheless launched an ambitious transition away from central planning towards a more market-based economy in the late 1980s and early 1990s because of the scale of the economic crisis it faced. Since then, ‘a growing coalition of technocrats, former or retired senior party members, and ordinary citizens’ (Dinh 2000: 366) as well as a new generation of more technocratically-inclined political leaders has advocated for and pushed through key economic and social policy reforms (Vu-Thanh 2017). Moreover, they have done so insulated from pressure from vested interests in accordance with the East Asian model of state-led developmentalism. Page and Tarp (2017: 7) have argued that Vietnam’s political leaders and their technocratic advisers were able to ‘maintain a very high level of autonomy, both in relation to the government and vis-à-vis the enterprise community, while remaining embedded in both’ *ala* Evans’ notion of ‘embedded autonomy’, a key feature of East Asia’s developmental states.

At the same time, this developmentalist bent—and specifically its implications for the country’s education system—was aided by a number of other factors. These include the fact that country has rich ‘traditions of education and learning formed through centuries and a veneration of learning’ in line with the country’s Confucian heritage. They also include the economic opportunities the country has faced by virtue of its location in the most economically dynamic region of the world, East Asia. As the Vietnam study notes: ‘the sense and reality of expanding opportunities in the world market and in local labour markets and returns to investment in education and skilling have incentivized education spending by both government and households.’

In this context, Vietnam’s education policies and their implementation have had contradictory orientations in terms of their effects on learning. On the one hand, ‘monitoring and inculcation of political ideas is pervasive’ at all levels of education while corruption is deeply embedded in educational administration. On the other hand, the Communist Party has ‘maintained high levels of public support for education’, spending almost 5.7 percent of GDP on education in 2017, ‘compared with 3.6 for Indonesia (2015) and 2.6 for the Philippines (in 2012)’. And, while the ‘development of a socialist citizenry’ is identified as ‘the primary aim of education.....in the Law on Education’, the Communist Party has nevertheless ‘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 for the national modernization project’. Moreover, teacher absenteeism rates are low, and teachers have a strong professional ethos. The study authors are at pains to point out that the country’s

education system is beset by a range of problem related to both access and quality. But this mix of policy and implementation practices has despite its contradictions nevertheless laid the basis Vietnam's educational development and in particular successes in international standardised tests of student learning.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to synthesise the findings of the PET-A country studies by interpreting their findings in light of those of comparative research on the evolution of 'welfare regimes'. Based on the experience of Western European and North American welfare states and East Asian developmental states, this research has suggested that two types of political settlements are conducive to the emergence of welfare regimes encompassing significant educational and learning improvements. The first of these entails a powerful position for left-wing political parties and organised labour, the precise impact of which is mediated by relationships with capitalist and rural class interests. Historically, it emerged within the context of democratic political regimes and led to the formation of welfare states complete with effective education systems. These second type of political settlement entails relatively autonomous (and authoritarian) state elites driving change from above in line with strategic developmental ambitions. It has been associated with the emergence of productivist welfare regimes in which state investment in education and to a lesser extent health is privileged over other areas of social policy.

The PET-A studies suggest that the PET-A countries have failed to develop such political settlements or indeed any other types that might be conducive to educational development and learning gains. Rather than left-wing political parties and organised labour or autonomous developmental elites, their political settlements have instead been dominated by predatory elites which seek to use education systems for rent-seeking, ideological, or other non-developmental purposes. 'Upgrading coalitions' centred on technocratic and/or progressive elements have been weak. The sole exception in this respect is Vietnam which broadly adheres to the East Asian productivist model. In its case, state investment in education and support for improved learning has been facilitated by the influence of relatively insulated technocratic officials and political leaders as well as a cultural heritage supportive of learning and a regional economic environment providing economic upgrading opportunities unavailable to many other developing countries.

At the same time, the PET-A studies also suggest that the nature of political settlements dominated by predatory elements can change over time and in ways that aid the cause of learning. Democratic reform—a factor seen as having a positive effect on the development of welfare states in the welfare regimes literature—is crucial in this respect because it can trigger improvements in education policy and learning outcomes by shifting the balance of power between elements within political settlements.

The takeaways from this analysis are thus threefold. The first is that change is extremely difficult and hence unlikely to happen quickly. The second is that, to the extent that change is possible, it is most likely to happen of its own accord—either because autonomous authoritarian elites seek to take advantage of emerging economic opportunities by improving the functioning of education systems, political elites drive change in the context of democratic reform, or other forms of political settlement emerge that are conducive to improved learning outcomes—rather than because donors fund new education interventions. This in turn suggests that donors seeking to promote educational development/learning in the developing world need to think beyond such interventions to how it can support broader processes of change, particularly of the democratic variety given their expressed preference for democratic forms of governance.

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