

Managing the Politics of Quality Reforms in Education: policy lessons from global experience

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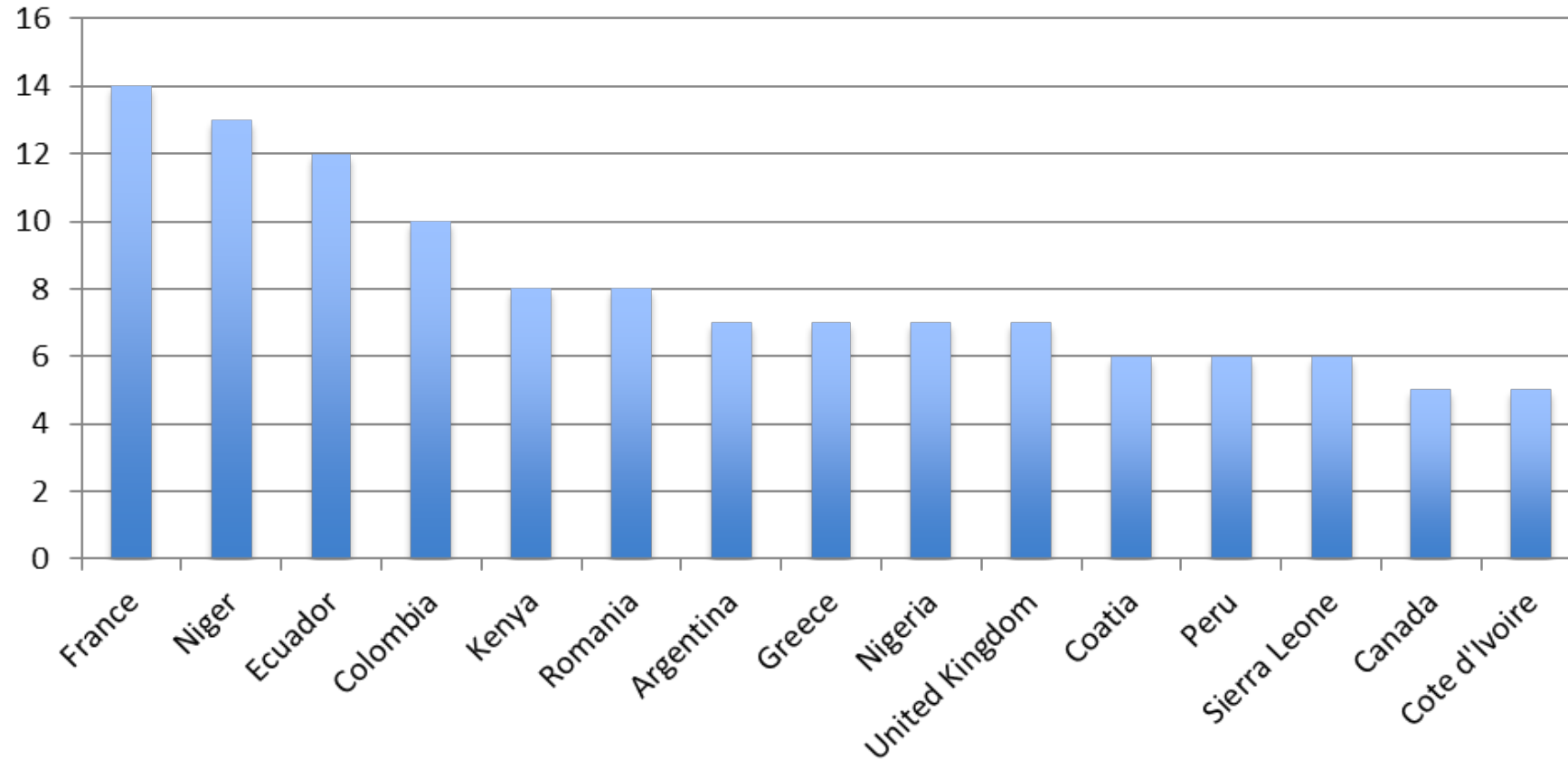


Chicago, 2013



Lima, 2012

Number of strikes and protest demonstrations led by educators, 1990-2004



- Excluding United States (37) and Lebanon (21)
- Overall, 229 strikes and 86 demonstrations in 85 different countries

Why politics matter

- Indonesia Teacher Law in 2005 required competency testing for all teachers
 - After protests from teachers associations, Parliament denied necessary funding
- In 2008 Mexican President and the national union, SNTE, signed a reform program
 - Union officials at the state level boycotted the competency tests for teachers
 - Then, the national SNTE leader publicly reneged on the agreement
- In 2015 the state of São Paulo announced overhaul of thousands of schools
 - Students occupied over 200 schools
 - Governor's popularity rating dropped
 - Governor fired the secretary of education and suspended the reform
- In many countries in Latin America, average tenure for ministers of education is under 2 years
- Change of administration results in complete roll-back or deterioration of reforms

Why do we know so little about the politics of reform?

- Handful political scientists conduct in depth research on education reform
- Schools of education?
- Why? Data are very costly
 - Reform outcomes are complex and difficult to measure
 - Political process is long and often opaque
 - And lonely pursuit?

Quality reforms are inherently difficult to implement

- Opacity of the classroom
 - For most reforms to affect student learning, must affect teacher practice in the classroom
 - Hard for reformers to monitor
- Slow and diffused results
 - Benefits – in terms of education system performance -- take years to accrue
- Teacher buy-in important for classroom-level change

Political economy of education stacked against quality reforms

- Education policy as distribution (jobs, spending)
- Education policy as instrument of nation building
- Clientelism
 - Education ministries, schools, funds, etc., can all be used in clientelistic politics

Quality Reforms are Inherently Conflictual

- Costs of reform are concentrated on teachers and teacher unions
 - Increased accountability, decreased job stability, more variable pay
 - Threats to union structure (decentralization) or unity (variable compensation)
- Unions have immense political power
 - Largest, most homogeneous, and most powerful union in many countries
 - High disruptive power through strikes and demonstrations
 - Direct political power in funding candidates and voting bloc

Teacher unions are not just labor associations

- Leadership often politicized and allied with powerful parties
- May control significant rents (e.g., appointments)
- May be part of clientelist, machine politics
- Multiple layers of interests superimposed on unions
- Quality reforms likely to affect all interests



Other stakeholders and latent pro-reform coalitions

- Business
 - But need to find those businesses that really suffer from lack of skilled workers
- Parents
 - But, dispersed and lack information
- International donors (varying influence in different contexts)
- Unexpected opponents
 - Religious leaders
 - Teacher training colleges
- Unexpected supporters
 - School directors
 - Education policy networks (education NGOs)

Why – and when – does reform happen?

- No satisfying answers from political scientists
- But major education reforms implemented in LAC over last 15 years
- Tentative observations
 - Economic openness generates greater business demand for skills (and less opposition from rich families)
 - Benchmarking shocks (PISA) and competition with neighbors
 - Changing nature of political campaigns eroding political power of teachers unions (mass media access to electorate makes “get out the vote” groundwork less crucial?)
 - NGO advocates for education becoming political force (Mexicanos Primeros, etc)

Common elements of successful political strategies

- Political leaders have adequate political capital
 - Mexico 2013, Peru (2010-15), Ecuador (2008-15), Rio state (2011-15) and Rio municipality (2008-2013), Brazil (1996-2010), Chile (multiple reforms, 1995-2015)
- Communications campaigns
 - Paint dire picture of status quo
 - Engage battle for public opinion
 - Mobilize pro-reform stakeholders (latent coalition) – eg, high-level commissions
 - Talk directly to teachers and use feedback to modulate implementation

Skilled use of reform tactics

- Passing new **legislation** that is hard to reverse
- **Compensation** strategies to gain teacher support
 - E.g., higher salaries but partly linked to performance
- **Dividing** opponents
 - Grandfathering – reforms only for new hires
- **Bundling** reforms with other benefits
 - Increased spending on infrastructure, ICT
- **Sequencing and phasing**
 - Start with student testing to generate school level outcome data
 - Pay for performance at school level
 - Individual teacher evaluation on voluntary basis (as prerequisite for promotions) before making them mandatory
- Overall, need time and resources

Further recommendations

- More research on reform politics
 - Know now more about what works than how to get it implemented
- Brain trust, or (Hirschman) “reform-mongers” trust
 - Pools of regional veterans available for debriefing and consultation
- “Checklist” tool for reform teams

Thank you

- Ongoing research
- Comments and suggestions welcome:
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of negotiation.

_____ What is the public perception of the teachers' union and its leadership? Have past disruptive actions (strikes and protests) negatively affected students and parents?

Box 3. Other Stakeholders

_____ Is there an association of religious schools? How will the proposed reforms affect religious schools? (eg, are there any expected

1. Class politics and economic interests

Are social groups likely to support reforms to basic education -- workers and lower middle class -- well represented in the political system?

Given the overall structure of the economy, which business sectors and firms have the greatest skill needs? Are they organized into associations? Are any of these groups active on education issues?

Has the economy recently been opened to international trade and otherwise liberalized thus creating more opportunities for skilled workers?

Is the economy open to international trade and otherwise liberalized, thus creating more opportunities for skilled workers?

2. Teacher unions

Does the teacher union have a monopoly of representation?

If more than one union exists, which is most likely to support reforms?

How popular is the union's current leadership? How effectively does it represent teachers' interests?

Is the teacher union allied with government party, opposition party, or smaller fringe, usually left, parties?

Are there people receiving teacher salaries working in union positions or government offices?

Have politicians had the power to appoint supporters to positions in the education bureaucracy, union staff, or school administration? If so, how numerous are these and where are they distributed? What political parties are they allied with?

Are past relations between the government and teacher unions characterized more by conflict or negotiation?

What is the public perception of the teachers' union and its leadership? Have past disruptive actions (strikes and protests) negatively affected students and parents?

3. Other stakeholders

Which business sectors and firms have the greatest interest in better educated workers? How are they organized? Have they been active on education issues? If not, are they informed about potential benefits from the proposed reforms? Are there any business sectors or firms that could be negatively affected by the proposed reforms?

Is there an association of private schools? How will the proposed reforms affect private school owners? (eg, are there any expected impacts on private enrollments? Teacher salaries or hiring? Tuition levels? Capitation grants? Curriculum? School calendar?)

Is there an association of religious schools? How will the proposed reforms affect religious schools? (eg, are there any expected impacts on their enrollments? Teacher salaries or hiring? Tuition levels? Capitation grants? Curriculum? School calendar?)

How will the reform affect institutions that train teachers? Would it affect admission standards and possibly enrollments? Curriculum (requiring faculty to design new courses)? Career prospects of graduates (eg, by instituting an exit exam)? Transparency of performance (eg, by showing which schools' graduates perform best on an exit exam)? Market for in-service training?

Are there local NGOs active in education? How many? What are their particular interests? Can they all be expected to support the reforms? If not, which are the most influential and important to bring on board?

Which media outlets are most critical for public opinion? Are there any media outlets with a good track record covering education? Can they help build the case for reform, for example, by reporting on system problems (eg, poor performance on international tests, teacher absenteeism, incompetent political appointees, dilapidated infrastructure)?

How active is the Ministry/Secretariat's policy dialogue with multilateral banks (WB, IBD, AfDB) and international donors? Are these providing any technical or financial support for the proposed reform program? If not, could this be mobilized? If so, are there any negative political consequences locally to the support from outside?

Could establishing an education reform commission help engage some potentially supportive stakeholders (such as business or NGO leaders) into reform design and advocacy?

4. Reform Design

Does the reform champion have the full political support of his or her principal (President, governor, mayor)? Does the reformer know how far he or she can go without risking that support (eg, would a major strike or demonstration be tolerated? For how long?) Does the reformer have any other support within the cabinet (eg, Minister/Secretary of Finance)? Does the reformer have any adversaries in the cabinet (eg, Health or social welfare secretariats that may lose resources or visibility or the political space to pursue major reforms of their own)?

What is the political process map for each of the proposed reforms? Which reforms require changes in legislation? Which can be changed through regulation? What is the minimum timetable for legislative reforms (how long to draft? How long for legislative review? How likely is passage?)

Which legislators are reform allies, and opponents? Have the sympathizers helped craft a legislative strategy for reforms that require new legislation (eg, a potential timetable for its introduction, a preliminary sense of where the votes are, and guidance on how to craft the law to maximize chances of success)?

What is the stakeholder support map for each of the proposed reforms? For example, for a reform of the teacher career path, are there some groups of teachers (eg, new hires, contract teachers who would be regularized, or high-performing teachers) that stand to benefit from the proposed reform, even if the union opposes it?

Are students and schools regularly assessed using standardized tests? Can these provide a basis for tracking reform impact?

Have students participated in international tests? Can these provide a justification for the proposed reforms?

Can schools be offered collective bonuses for improved performance (a politically popular way of introducing or strengthening the focus on results)?

How does current education spending compare with regional and international norms? Are there resources available for compensatory reforms such as infrastructure improvements, salary increases, new hiring?

Would acceptance of the reform be helped by making it applicable only to new hires (eg, grandfathering existing teachers)?

Are there any elements of the proposed program that could be piloted and evaluated first? Or phased in using random assignment, such that their cost-effectiveness can be rigorously evaluated?

Can reform elements be sequenced to generate some “quick wins” – early results or visible gains for some groups of stakeholders (eg, higher salaries for teachers or school directors who pass competency tests, or bonuses for schools that improve graduation rates and learning)?

5. Reform advocacy

What are the means for getting reform proposals favorable media coverage? How can the team keep the reforms in the media over the medium term? What early results might be publicized? Which school directors, teachers and students are likely to provide compelling stories that can give the reform agenda a “human face”?

Is the Minister/Secretary (reform leader) communicating directly with teachers through all possible channels: Twitter, email, social media, school visits, teacher conferences and workshops? Are communications short, personal and aimed at building trust and encouraging feedback? Is feedback followed up?

Is the reform leader consulting regularly with all of the key stakeholders: business, private schools, religious schools, teacher training institutions, education NGOs – and communicating a genuine willingness to listen and incorporate their feedback?

Has the reform leader been able to get his/her principal (President, Governor, Mayor) to publicly advocate for the reforms (assuming that this is a politically advantageous)?

Have similar reforms been implemented in any other country in the region that is an economic and political peer, or model? Have policymakers and the technical team from that country/countries been consulted for advice – on both reform substance and politics?

6. Reform implementation

Has the reform champion been able to identify and/or appoint 30-40 committed, qualified people within the education ministry/secretariat (including regional and district levels) to create a large, loyal change team?

Has the reform team prepared a detailed, timebound and costed plan for all major reform elements? Are intermediate steps identified, to facilitate monitoring?

Has the reform team identified particularly innovative or costly elements of the reform that merit rigorous impact evaluation? If so, have academic partners to carry out the evaluations been identified? And possible funding sources?

Does the change team have the authority to replace regional supervisors and school directors immediately? Does the change team have enough reform minded, qualified professionals to appoint as new supervisors and directors?

Has the reform champion established a “change and implementation team” that includes all of the key officials at the regional, district and school levels and established regular face to face interaction with this group (typically 500-1,000 people)? Six monthly meetings of this expanded change team to celebrate successes and report and resolve problems can be a powerful way of building broad implementation support.

Does the reform champion make weekly visits to schools, to hear directly from teachers and directors?

Does the reform champion have an open door to communications from the teachers union?

Does the reform team have the capacity to keep leading media outlets supplied with regular information on progress being made, and school-level stories and interviews that provide human interest?