

Unit 3: Politics of Learning

The political economy approach suggests that there are political dynamics related to both supporting and impeding successful education reform and sustained improvement in learning. This unit focuses on the political, social, institutional, and historical environment in which education systems are embedded. Understanding the variation in successful adoption and delivery of reforms across countries — and within countries over-time and across political regimes — requires a deeper understanding of the power relations among a broad range of interest groups. It also requires an understanding of the priorities, incentives, and decision making process of political actors (such as politicians, governments, and policy makers).

This unit covers frameworks developed to understand the ways in which politics can impact education outcomes and the channels of impact, with political economy studies from different countries referenced.

After completing the unit, students should:

- Know how political dynamics impact adoption of reforms, and how political dynamics contribute to the same reform having varied effects across different contexts;
- Know how local stakeholder politics and interests play out, such as why some reforms are implemented and others blocked by different stakeholders (including teachers, principals, grassroots bureaucrats, students, parents, community leaders);
- Be able to articulate the notion of political will and what it means in terms of envisioning and achieving development goals, and understand the importance of leaders declaring education/learning a priority;
- Understand how politics plays a part in what gets financed; and
- Learn about the politics of learning vs the politics of schooling.

Lectures

1. [The politics of schooling vs learning – Part 1](#) (Ken Opalo, Georgetown University)
2. [The politics of schooling vs learning – Part 2](#) (Ken Opalo, Georgetown University)
3. [The politics and governance of basic education – Part 1](#) (Brian Levy, Johns Hopkins University and University of Cape Town)
4. [The politics and governance of basic education – Part 2](#) (Brian Levy, Johns Hopkins University and University of Cape Town)
5. [The politics of education in developing countries](#) (Naomi Hossain, American University)

Required Readings

- Hickey, S. and Hossain, N. 2019. Politics of Education in Developing Countries: From Schooling to Learning (p. 256). Oxford University Press.

<https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780198835684.001.0001/oso-9780198835684-chapter-1>

- Levy, B., Cameron, R., Hoadley, U., and Naidoo, V. 2018. *The Politics and Governance of Basic Education: A Tale of Two South African Provinces* (p. 320). Oxford University Press.
<https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780198824053.001.0001/oso-9780198824053>
- London, J. 2021. *Outlier Vietnam and the Problem of Embeddedness: Contributions to the Political Economy of Learning*. RISE Working Paper Series. 21/062. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2021/062.

Further Readings

- Ansell, B. W. 2010. *From the Ballot to the Blackboard: The Redistributive Political Economy of Education*. Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Cuban, L. 1990. "Reforming Again, Again, and Again." *Educational Researcher* 19, no. 1: 3–13.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1176529>
- Fullan, M. 2016. The Elusive Nature of Whole System Improvement in Education. *Journal of Educational Change*. Vol 17, 539–544. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-016-9289-1>
- Levy, B. 2022. How Political Contexts Influence Education Systems: Patterns, Constraints, Entry Points. RISE Working Paper Series. 22/122. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2022/122
- Paglayan, A. S. 2020. 'The Non-Democratic Roots of Mass Education: Evidence from 200 Years'. *American Political Science Review*, September, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000647>.
- Paglayan, A. S. 2022. 'Education or Indoctrination? The Violent Origins of Public School Systems in an Era of State-Building'. *American Political Science Review*, April, 1–16.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055422000247>.
- Piper, B. 2016. International Education is a Broken Field: Can "Ubuntu" Education bring Solutions? *International Review of Education*. 62(1), 101–111. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-016-9544-y>

Supplementary Resources

- Nice White Parents: Longform podcast about US education politics by Serial.
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/nice-white-parents/id1524080195>
- The RISE Podcast: Brian Levy on Education and Governance in South Africa:
<https://riseprogramme.org/podcast/brian-levy>
- Trojan Horse Affair: Longform podcast/investigative reporting about UK education politics by Serial.
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-trojan-horse-affair/id1606918193>