

# ROUTES TO REFORM

EDUCATION POLITICS IN LATIN AMERICA



Ben Ross Schneider

## ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *ROUTES TO REFORM*

“The road of educational reform is littered with many good initiatives that were poorly implemented. In analyzing success and failure, Schneider focuses on what is often overlooked: The politics of education. He shows how the laws, regulations, structures, and resources in reform are just like the small, visible tip of a huge iceberg. The much larger invisible part under the waterline is about the beliefs, capacities, motivations, and fears of the stakeholders who are involved in education. But Schneider also shows a way forward: Through understanding the true degree of resources, power, and influence the different stakeholders have over success and failure of the reform and how much they actually care about its outcome. Through building collective ownership for change. And through strengthening capacity and creating the right policy climate.”

—**Andreas Schleicher**, Head of Education, OECD

“Anyone who studies education seriously understands that both the quantity and quality of public educational services provided by various societies and how societies allocate those services among social classes is heavily influenced by politics. In this valuable book, Ben Schneider helps us understand how politics has worked to promote educational reforms in Latin America—particularly important reforms of teacher careers—and what this can teach us more generally about how educational change occurs and why it often does not occur. A great read.”

—**Martin Carnoy**, Lemann Foundation  
Chair of Education, Stanford University

Schneider's book offers critical analysis of the complex relationship between education and politics in Latin America. Importantly, Schneider provides a refreshingly nuanced and novel analysis of the diversity of forms that teachers' unions take on throughout Latin America. He also shows how the impact of teachers' unions can only be understood by examining the influence of other actors including students leading mass mobilizations, clientelist politicians, technocrats, political parties, and importantly, powerful policy networks driven by business philanthropists. The book is a great resource for scholars of educational politics in Latin America and globally.

—**Rebecca Tarlau**, Stanford University Graduate  
School of Education

# Routes to Reform

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*Education Politics in Latin America*

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BEN ROSS SCHNEIDER

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*To Jean and Ben—with gratitude for the perfect place to write through a pandemic and to their future descendants—may their quest for education run through propitious politics*



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## PREFACE

By the 2010s economists had reached a widespread consensus that education was about the best long-term investment that both individuals and societies could make. In development studies, education became the closest thing to a silver bullet seen in decades. So, why wasn't everyone investing in high-quality education?

Through this and other puzzles, I came to research on education politics over the past decade and a half with some hesitation but, in hindsight, inexorably. My research on varieties of capitalism and the low-skill equilibrium led me to ask many people in Latin America why business did not care more about promoting better education, given their need for ever better qualified workers. I continued asking these questions not only of business but also of other groups like teacher unions, parents, civil society, and politicians.

Some of my initial hesitation derived from the fact that so few political scientists were studying education. Had others already found out that it was impossible to do meaningful research? After years of on-and-off research on education, I am still a bit mystified that political scientists have so long avoided the topic, but the neglect won't last long. A new generation of talented scholars is already rapidly redressing it.

Education reform of course includes a multitude of different measures from curriculum to length of the school day, to technology in the classroom, and so on down the list. However, the answers to the two questions of what reform could have the biggest impact on learning and what reforms generate the most intense political conflicts were the same—remaking teacher careers. It made choosing a topic to research easier. If political scientists have something to contribute, it should be here.

This book does not analyze why some countries adopted education reforms and others did not. More interesting, and consequential, is understanding the process of implementation and the variation across countries, especially in personnel and transaction-intensive areas like reforming teacher careers. Thus, my main question is why countries adopting similar sorts of policies experienced such different political processes and outcomes.

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Lastly, I am so grateful to my former girlfriend whose entertaining and loving company lightens the travails of writing books, making it all worthwhile.

## ABBREVIATIONS

AEP	Asignación de Excelencia Pedagógica (Pedagogical Excellence Award, Chile)
AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, Turkey)
ANC	African National Congress
Anped	Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Educação (National Association for Graduate Study and Research in Education, Brazil)
Apeoc	Associação dos Professores de Estabelecimentos Oficiais Ceará (Association of Teachers in Official Establishments in Ceara, Brazil)
Apeoesp	Sindicato dos Professores do Ensino Oficial do Estado de São Paulo (Union of Teachers of Public Education in the State of São Paulo)
BDE	Bônus de Desempenho Educacional (Bonus for Educational Performance, Brazil)
BNCC	Base Nacional Comum Curricular (National Base for Common Curriculum, Brazil)
CCAE	Consejo Ciudadano Autónomo por la Educación (Autonomous Citizen Council for Education, Mexico)
CEP	Centro de Estudios Públicos (Center of Public Studies, Chile)
CEPPE	Centro de Estudios de Políticas y Prácticas en Educación (Center for Research on Educational Policy and Practice, Chile)
CIAE	Centro de Investigación Avanzada en Educación (Center for Advanced Research on Education, Chile)

CIDE	Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Educación (Research Center for Educational Development, Chile)
CME	coordinated market economy
CNE	Consejo Nacional de Educación (National Education Council, Peru)
CNE	Conselho Nacional de Educação (National Education Council, Brazil)
CNI	Confederação Nacional da Indústria (National Confederation of Industry, Brazil)
CNTE	Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores em Educação (National Confederation of Workers in Education, Brazil)
CNTE	Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (National Coordinator for Education Workers, Mexico)
COMIE	Consejo Mexicano de Investigación Educativa (Mexican Council for Education Research)
Conare	Comité Nacional de Reorientación del SUTEP (National Committee for the Reorientation of SUTEP, Peru)
Confiep	Confederación Nacional de Instituciones Empresariales Privadas (National Confederation of Private Business Institutions, Peru)
Conmerb	Confederación de Maestros Rurales de Bolivia (Confederation of Rural Teachers in Bolivia)
Consed	Conselho Nacional de Secretários de Educação (National Council of State Secretaries of Education, Brazil)
CPC	Confederación de la Producción y del Comercio (Confederation of Production and Commerce, Chile)
CPEIP	Centro de Perfeccionamiento, Experimentación e Investigaciones Pedagógicas (Center for Teacher Development, Chile)
CSO	civil society organization
CTEUB	Confederación de Trabajadores de Educación Urbana de Bolivia (Confederation of Workers in Urban Education in Bolivia)
DC	Democracia Cristiana (Christian Democratic Party)
DEP	Departamento de Estudios Pedagógicos (Department of Pedagogical Studies, Universidad de Chile)
Edu2020	Education 2020, Chile
Endo	Encuesta Nacional a Docentes (National Teacher Survey, Peru)
ExE	Empresarios por la Educación (Business for Education, Colombia)

Fecode	Federación Colombiana de Educadores (Colombian Federation of Educators)
Fenate	Federación Nacional de Trabajadores en la Educación del Perú (National Federation of Workers in Education of Peru)
FIDE	Federación de Instituciones de Educación Particular (Federation of Private Educational Institutions, Chile)
Fundeb	Fundo de Manutenção e Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica (National Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education, Brazil)
Fundef	Fundo Nacional Para o Desenvolvimento do Ensino Fundamental (National Fund for the Development of Fundamental Education, Brazil)
Gife	Grupo de Institutos Fundações e Empresas (Group of Foundation and Firm Institutes, Brazil)
GRADE	Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo (Group for the Analysis of Development, Peru)
ICE	Instituto de Co-responsabilidade pela Educação (Institute for Co-responsibility for Education, Brazil)
ICMS	Imposto sobre Circulação de Mercadorias e Serviços (Tax on Circulation of Goods and Services, Brazil)
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
Ideb	Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica (Index of Development of Basic Education, Brazil)
IEP	Instituto de Estudios Peruanos (Institute for Peruvian Studies)
INEE	Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación (National Institute for Education Evaluation, Mexico)
IQMS	Integrated Quality Management System (South Africa)
LME	liberal market economy
LyD	Libertad y Desarrollo (Liberty and Development, Chile)
MNBC	Movimento pela Base Nacional Comum (Movement for the National Common Curriculum, Brazil)
MPD	Movimiento Popular Democrático (Popular Democratic Movement, Ecuador)
MÜSİAD	Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği (Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association, Turkey)
Naptosa	National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa
NGO	non-governmental organization
NPM	new public management
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSD	occupation specific dispensation

PAIC	Programa de Alfabetização na Idade Certa (Program for Literacy at the Appropriate Age, Ceará, Brazil)
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party, Mexico)
PC	Partido Comunista (Communist Party, Chile)
PDE	Plan Decenal de Educación (10 year Plan for Education, Ecuador)
PDT	Partido Democrático Trabalhista (Democratic Labor Party, Brazil)
PIPE	Programa Interdisciplinario sobre Política y Prácticas Educativas (Interdisciplinary Program on Education Policy and Practice, Mexico)
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
PMDB	Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement)
PND	Política Nacional Docente (National Teacher Policy, Chile)
PPD	Partido por la Democracia (Party for Democracy, Chile)
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution, Mexico)
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, Mexico)
Pronatec	Programa Nacional de Acesso ao Ensino Técnico e Emprego (National Program of Access to Professional Education and Employment, Brazil)
PRT	power resource theory
PS	Partido Socialista (Socialist Party, Chile)
PSB	Partido Socialista Brasileiro (Brazilian Socialist Party)
PSDB	Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (Brazilian Social Democracy Party)
PT	Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party, Brazil)
PUN	Prueba Única Nacional (Single National Exam, Peru)
RN	Renovación Nacional (National Renovation, Chile)
Sadtu	South African Democratic Teachers Union
Senai	Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Industrial (National Industrial Apprenticeship Service, Brazil)
SEP	Secretaría de Educación Pública (Secretaria of Public Education, Mexico)
SERCE	Segundo Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo (Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study)
SGB	School Governing Body, South Africa

Sintepe	Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Educação do Estado de Pernambuco (Union of Workers in Education in the State of Pernambuco, Brazil)
SME	small and medium sized enterprise
SNED	Sistema Nacional de Evaluación del Desempeño (National System of Performance Evaluation, Chile)
SNTE	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (National Union of Workers in Education, Mexico)
Sutep	Sindicato Unitario de Trabajadores en la Educación del Perú (Unitary Union of Workers in Education of Peru)
TERCE	Tercer Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo (Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study)
TVE	technical and vocational education
Tüsiad	Türk Sanayicileri ve İş İnsanları Derneği (Turkish Industry and Business Association)
UDI	Unión Demócrata Independiente (Independent Democratic Union, Chile)
UNAE	Universidad Nacional de Educación (National Education University, Ecuador)
Undime	União dos Dirigentes Municipais de Educação (National Union of Municipal Education Managers, Brazil)
UNE	Unión Nacional de Educadores (National Union of Educators, Ecuador)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNPF	Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia (National Parents Union, Mexico)
VoC	varieties of capitalism
VTE	vocational and technical education
WSE	Whole School Evaluation, South Africa



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PART I

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## THEORY AND ARGUMENTS

Most children in Latin America attend school, but they are not learning much. Why? Unlike other types of social policy, education is a relatively empty policy area because children are not relevant politically, parents are dispersed, the middle class has moved to private schools, and business is not interested. Into this relative vacuum step opponents of reforms to improve learning especially clientelist politicians and some teacher unions.

Yet several countries and states in Brazil did manage to implement major quality reforms. These countries took either an electoral route where prior crisis had made education electorally salient, as in Chile and Ecuador, or a technocratic route, as in Colombia and Peru.

Compared to education politics elsewhere (and the much larger social science literature on them), politics in Latin America is less affected by broad institutions like democracy and more so by more micro factors like unions, technocracy, and policy networks.



# Introduction

## *The Contentious Politics of Education*

*Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin,  
is a great equalizer of the conditions of men.*

—Horace Mann, 1848

*If you do not change the demand for good education,  
it is very difficult to do anything about the supply.*

—Andreas Schleicher<sup>1</sup>

## I. Introduction: Actors and Factors

Why study the politics of primary and secondary education?<sup>2</sup> To start, education and healthcare are the two main social policies provided by governments that account for most public spending and are fundamental in their own right in enhancing citizen welfare. Education is also indispensable for understanding the broader political economy. For centuries, the twin scourges and defining features of the political economy of Latin America have been poverty and inequality. The best and probably only way to overcome these scourges long term is quality education for all.

The main questions that guide this book are the following: Why are learning outcomes in Latin America so disappointing? Why is it so difficult politically to upgrade education quality, especially improving teaching? And why have some governments managed to enact major makeovers of teacher careers, while opponents elsewhere blocked or reversed them? Among education scholars there is widespread consensus that teaching is the most important school input

<sup>1</sup> Schleicher is director for Education and Skills, OECD, cited in Rothman (2017).

<sup>2</sup> Higher education requires separate analysis due to distinctive reform issues and politics—especially mobilized students and in Latin America powerful owners of private universities.

and that reforming teaching is crucial to raising low learning in Latin America. Another book could be written on why some governments in Latin America enacted reforms and others did not. This book focuses instead on why the implementation of similar career reforms met such different politics and fates.

From 2002 to 2016, five countries and several states in Brazil undertook comprehensive reforms to teacher careers. The reforms were all multifaceted; the most systemic changed the whole career trajectory from admission to teacher training, to meritocratic hiring, all the way to decades-long career ladders with promotion at each rung dependent on complex evaluations. From the early 2000s, an Andean wave of education reform—with some of the most profound and systemic reforms in the developing world—unfolded in Colombia (2002), Peru (2007), Ecuador (2009), and Chile (2016, although Chile had a longer trajectory of cumulative reform). The politics of these reform experiences varied, as they were launched by governments, left, right, and center. But most benefited from popular and/or technocratic support and sustained implementation across multiple ministers of education and presidential administrations of varying partisan hues.

More specifically, explaining the routes to career reform across Latin America requires close analysis of six main factors: (1) *electoral mobilization* through (rare) campaigns focused centrally on education; (2) *clientelist politicians* dependent on diverting education resources and politicizing hiring to build patronage support; (3) *teacher unions*, some of which are political machines also keen on (mis)appropriating education resources and controlling teacher careers; (4) *civil society*, mostly NGOs (non-governmental organizations) with business funding; (5) *technocrats* in government with advanced training and nonpolitical careers; and (6) *policy networks* comprised of education experts in government, academia, and civil society. Figure 1.1 provides an initial summary of how these six factors combined in different ways to produce three outcomes: (1) top-down technocratic reform in Colombia and Peru; (2) bottom-up electorally driven reforms in Chile and Ecuador (initially); and (3) blocked reforms in Mexico (and South Africa). Some states in Brazil fall into each of these three categories.<sup>3</sup>

As elsewhere, reform plans were not lacking; nearly every president and minister of education has one. How far and deep they go depends on the constellations of these six factors. Whether reform routes start with elections that revolve around education was the most important factor in reform politics and process. Where elections mattered most—Chile and Ecuador—governments

<sup>3</sup> Brazil also has cases of a modified electoral route where state or local governments undertook small-scale pilot projects that showed positive results that subsequent candidates touted in elections and scaled up once in government.

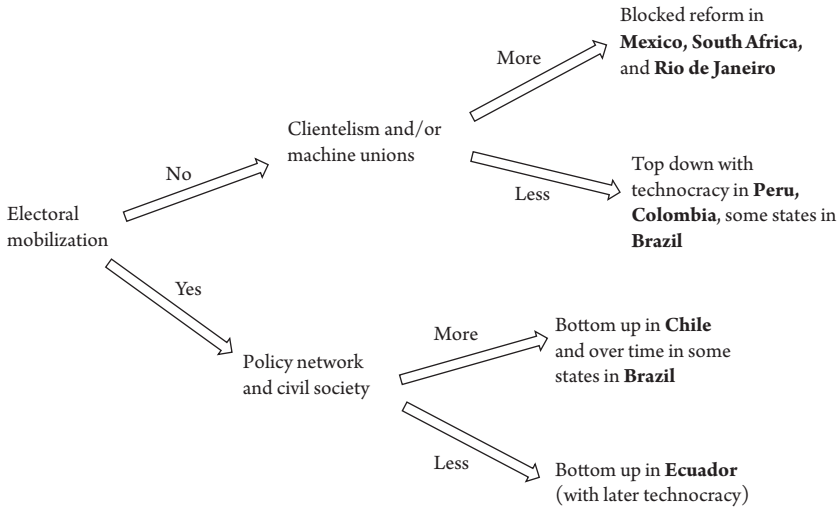


Figure 1.1 Routes to Reform

opted for big-bang reforms and rapid implementation.<sup>4</sup> A secondary factor distinguishing the two electoral cases was the stronger civil society and policy network in Chile that shaped reform design and consensus around it. Absent civil society and policy networks in Ecuador, technocrats played a later secondary role in design and continuity. In some states in Brazil, civil society was also a prime mover.

Top-down reforms in Peru and Colombia were more gradual and partial and depended on technocracy for implementation (where clientelist politicians and teacher unions were weaker). Mexico was another case of top-down reform (though also a big-bang reform), but the powerful (machine) teacher union opposed it and helped bring it down. Top-down reform in Rio de Janeiro met its match and premature demise more at the hands of clientelist politicians. Sections III and IV provide more background on these factors and actors and highlight the absence of others, notably parents and business.

Improving education quality is a special kind of governance or capacity-building reform. Stroke-of-the-pen policies like changes in interest rates, tariffs, or exchange rates can be implemented overnight and alter targeted behavior immediately. In contrast, launching a plan for revamping teacher careers is only the first step in a drawn-out process of implementation. It is precisely these sorts of arduous, medium-term, institution-intensive reforms that are the key to

<sup>4</sup> The causes prompting electoral mobilization varied and are further analyzed elsewhere (Mizala and Schneider 2020; Schneider et al. 2019). Severe crises emerged in both cases but were quite different: near collapse of the education system in Ecuador and waves of student protests in Chile.

strategies for escaping the middle-income trap that much of Latin America has been in for decades (Doner and Schneider 2016).

## II. From Quantity to Quality

Since the 1990s, governments in Latin America ramped up public spending on education and got most kids into school (table 1.1). The politics of expanding enrollments—quantity—were congenial as politicians, parents, and teacher unions all gained (Stein 2005). But quality lagged. On average, 15-year-old students in Latin America were two years behind students at the OECD average,

*Table 1.1 Core Education Indicators in Latin America*

	Mean years of schooling (2015)	% Secondary school enrollment	Mean reading score (2018)	% of students below level 2 (2018)
OECD average		91	487	13
<b>Selected Comparisons</b>				
Korea	12.1	98	514	8
Finland	12.8	96	520	7
Turkey	8.3	87	466	17
Thailand	8.5	...	393	35
<b>Latin America (median)</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>40</b>
Chile	10.6	89	452	24
Mexico	9.0	81	420	35
Uruguay	8.9	91	427	32
Colombia	8.5	78	412	40
Brazil	8.0	81	413	43
Argentina	11.6	91	402	41
Peru	9.7	89	401	43

*Sources:* Mean years of schooling in 2015 (or closest year) for all adults over 25 years old from UNESCO, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>. Secondary enrollment from World Bank, <http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/2.8>. PISA scores for column 3 and 4 from OECD, [https://www.oecd.org/pisa/Combined\\_Executive\\_Summaries\\_PISA\\_2018.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/pisa/Combined_Executive_Summaries_PISA_2018.pdf). Percent of students below level 2 for all three tests: math, reading, and science. Median for Latin America is for countries listed.

and three years behind students in top-performing countries in East Asia (30 points on the PISA test equal about one year of schooling) (OECD 2016, 37)). Looking at the lower end in Latin America, over a third of students scored below level 2 (out of 6 levels) on all three tests (math, reading, and science), meaning they lacked even rudimentary literacy and numeracy, essentially condemning them to a lifetime of unskilled, low-wage, low-productivity work. The IDB (Inter-American Development Bank) lamented, “The region has been left in the proverbial dust, unable to catch up with countries of similar levels of development in terms of schooling, years of education, and skills” (Busso et al. 2017, 3).

What are quality reforms? Many things—better infrastructure, computers and internet, smaller classes, and longer school days and years—can improve student learning (see Busso et al. 2017 for a review). However, the single most important school input is teaching effectiveness (Bruns and Luque 2015, 6; Hanushek and Woessmann 2015, 193). In the United States, improvements in teacher quality raise the probability of college attendance and the quality of the colleges that students attend. Students who get better teachers have steeper earnings trajectories (Chetty et al. 2014).<sup>5</sup>

What aspects of teacher careers deserve upgrading? The answer is often everything, from first training and selection through to late career motivation (Bruns and Luque 2015; Busso et al. 2017). In Latin America, most pedagogy students come from the bottom half of the pool: “The education career seems to be a refuge [fallback] option for many young people.”<sup>6</sup> Their training is largely abstract and theoretical and provides little practical instruction on how to teach (Elacqua, Hincapié et al. 2018, 28–35). Once in the classroom, teachers get little help and have few career incentives. Often they do not show up. In the 2000s, absenteeism was 15% in Ecuador, 13% in Peru, and 8% in Brazil (Elacqua et al. 2018, 7). And when they do, much of their time is not spent on instruction.<sup>7</sup> In sum, there is plenty of room to improve the quality of teacher recruits, their training, their mentoring, and their long-term motivation.

Career reforms in Latin America promoted merit in three distinct ways. First, *depoliticizing hiring*, usually by requiring an entrance exam, can immediately shift who gets hired and can have the largest short-term impact on learning. Evidence

<sup>5</sup> A meta review of six other reviews of 301 studies (all randomized controlled trials) found “broad support across the reviews for” three policies, two of which are interventions to improve teaching (Evans and Popova 2016, 3). Radical reforms to teacher careers in Washington, DC led to striking gains in student learning (Dee and Wyckoff 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Elacqua et al. (2018, 24). Note, all translations in this book are mine. In contrast, in Korea those who score in the top 1% go to university teacher training (Lee et al. 2018, 220).

<sup>7</sup> Teachers “spend 65 percent or less of class time on instruction (compared with a good practice benchmark of 85 percent) which implies the *loss of one full day of instruction per week*” (Bruns and Luque 2015, 2).

cited in part II, as well as more broadly (Beteille and Evans 2021, 24), shows that meritocratic selection of teachers consistently promotes learning gains.<sup>8</sup> Meritocratic hiring is one of the administratively simpler career reforms, but it is also a big and costly political reform, depriving as it does clientelist politicians of their base of support. Second, *attracting more talented recruits* is a longer term project because it requires changing the perceived value of the teaching career, which means years of better salaries and higher entrance requirements.<sup>9</sup>

Third, *incentivizing greater effort* through things like performance pay (usually one-off bonuses and/or career ladders with promotion depending on evaluation) can have a more immediate impact by shifting incentives of the existing teacher corps.<sup>10</sup> Various schemes for performance pay, including complicated metrics and evaluations, absorb a disproportionate amount of time and resources and generate the most political heat.<sup>11</sup> This third type is also the one that best fits with new public management (NPM) and draws criticism as neoliberal. Robust evidence on effectiveness is hard to come by (Crehan 2016 provides a review). A World Bank report concluded, “Meta-analyses of teacher merit pay programs across countries typically find no effect; when they find an effect, the size is small” (of long-lasting programs, “only Chile has seen positive and significant outcomes on student achievement”; Beteille and Evans 2021, 12).<sup>12</sup> Where available, the empirical chapters include references on learning effects, but this is a book about politics, not policy evaluation.

The problem with raising teaching quality lies not with a lack of good policies but rather with inhospitable politics (Bruns and Luque 2015, 3). Raising education quality through revamping teacher careers generates political issues and difficulties not seen in most other policy areas (Bruns and Schneider 2016).

<sup>8</sup> However, this reform still leaves in place the large proportion of existing teachers who were hired for political reasons. Early retirement programs, as in Ecuador, can speed their exit.

<sup>9</sup> Elacqua and co-authors offer a more comprehensive list including measures (1) to make a teaching career more attractive (including higher pay, professional development, non-teaching hours); (2) to improve initial training (higher entrance requirements, subsidies for talented students, reform and oversight of training programs); and (3) to select and promote the best new teachers (entrance and competence exams) (Elacqua et al. 2018, 78). For another comprehensive review of teacher careers in Latin America, see OREALC-UNESCO (2015) and Fumigalli (2018).

<sup>10</sup> A UNESCO review analyzes a widespread “motivational crisis” among teachers (Crehan 2016, 8).

<sup>11</sup> And run into funding problems. Tournier and Chimier review a range of countries in Latin America and other regions, and conclude, “in the majority of countries . . . resource constraints were the major obstacle to the successful implementation of teacher career reforms” (2019, 15); also Crehan (2016, 114).

<sup>12</sup> A review of merit pay in the United States found mixed results on student test scores and intriguingly some positive effects over the longer run as more effective teachers entered the career and low-scoring teachers left of their own accord (Stone and Peetz 2023).

First, it requires wholesale administrative change covering scads of teachers. Latin America has over 7 million teachers, constituting 4% of the total labor force and over a fifth of professional workers (Bruns and Luque 2015, 1). Moreover, changing the behavior of this massive teaching corps requires repeated interactions (what Andrew et al. [2017, 42, 104] call transaction-intensive policy). Consolidated reform comes only with widespread teacher buy-in or at least acquiescence (Beteille and Evans 2021, 14; Crehan 2016, 12, 107).

Second, relatedly, career reforms take a long time, both because of the vast scale and because reforms rely in part on recruiting new, better trained teachers. Substituting new for old teachers takes decades (three according to one UNESCO report; Tournier and Chimier 2019, 116), even if reformers offer incentives for early retirement.<sup>13</sup> This time dimension is crucial because most presidents and their ministers have shorter time horizons, much shorter than opponents of reform. Third, the “production” by teachers is opaque since so little is known about what actually transpires in the classroom. Hence, most reforms to teacher careers involve more testing of students and evaluations of teachers. These evaluations often become a central axis of contention between reformers and teachers and their unions.

Fourth, education is a sparsely populated, half-empty policy space. Other policy areas like pensions, healthcare, or public transportation have masses of intensely interested beneficiaries who have a loud voice in policymaking. Not so for students, the direct beneficiaries of primary and secondary education, who are not relevant politically, leaving the policy space emptier. University students are often engaged and disruptive, but secondary students rarely get involved (Chile is a notable exception). Moreover, many richer families in Latin America move their children to private schools, further emptying the policy area of one of the groups that in other countries is active and influential. Thus, in this relative vacuum, other groups with more potent interests in education policy—teacher unions and clientelist politicians—have disproportionate sway. On the pro-reform side, policy networks and technocrats also come to have more influence than they might in other policy areas with more politically active groups of users.

### III. Why Learning Lags: An Empty Policy Space

Why is education quality so low? The short answer is the usual Machiavellian lament: anemic support for reform and vigorous opposition. Students and

<sup>13</sup> The same UNESCO report on teacher careers concluded overall that “whatever governments decide to do, their efforts will need to be . . . sustained over several decades to be successful” (Tournier and Chimier 2019, 18).

families have much to gain from better education (around 10% higher income for each additional year of schooling; Barro and Lee 2015), but multiple factors stem their political engagement. To start, parents are dispersed and face high barriers to collective action. They often lack knowledge about school performance. Many parents have less education than their children, and parent satisfaction with education rises with fewer years of education (Lora 2008, 133; Kataria 2022).<sup>14</sup> Education quality is less visible and harder for voters to judge (Dahlum and Knutsen 2017). In opinion surveys in Latin America, education rarely figures among the top concerns voters have (details in chapter 2).<sup>15</sup>

Poorer families have additional reasons to doubt that their children will reap the high average returns to education. In Latin America, perversely, returns to education were lower for poor students than rich; the opposite was the case in Asia (di Gropello 2006). Richer families get higher returns and are more politically active and could in principle back reform. However, 40% of middle-class families have exited the public system (Larrañaga and Rodríguez 2014, 438), further emptying the policy space and sapping potential support for quality reforms in public schools.

Beyond a few wealthy business people, acting mostly as individuals with philanthropic foundations, business—especially organized business—was absent from the reform stories in this book, as it was in earlier studies of education politics in Latin America (Grindle 2004; Kaufman and Nelson 2004b). The reasons for this lack of interest are complex and multiple and explored further in chapter 2. For now, the simple explanation is that business either relies on low-skilled labor or can train their own workers (Schneider 2013, chapter 4; Bassi et al. 2012b). Either way, business does not depend on the education system to produce better trained workers.

This absence of beneficiaries—students, parents, and business—leaves the education policy space relatively empty.<sup>16</sup> Interviews for this project followed a common refrain: “Were political parties involved in education policy? No. Business? No. Parents? No. Elections? No,” and so forth. Similarly, Peterson et al. (2014, 7) conceptualize education politics as an iron triangle with legislators on one side, administrators on another, and teacher unions and vendors on the third. Students, parents, and non-vendor business are not even in the picture.

<sup>14</sup> Globally, the Varkey Foundation (2017) finds no relationship between parent satisfaction with their children’s education and actual performance on PISA.

<sup>15</sup> Survey research in Latin America on general preferences finds low support for expanding public services and redistribution due to high distrust (Keefer et al. 2022) and low expectations (Holland 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Moreover, from a sociological view, Jal Mehta argues that teaching is a “weak field” compared to other professions and therefore more vulnerable to external intervention (2013, 6).

Historically too, the drivers of early education expansion in the 19th century came from outside education as in religiously motivated growth in the United States (Peterson 2010, 23–25) and by nation builders more common in Europe and East Asia.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, communist regimes of the 20th century pushed universal literacy for ideological reasons. These examples illustrate both that education expansion does not happen spontaneously because potential beneficiaries demand it and that, in this a relatively empty sector, outside interests can have preponderant weight. Thus, over past centuries, millions of children received education because outsiders thought they could mold them into citizens imbued with their values, be they religious, national, or ideological. By contrast, no one pushes pensions or healthcare to promote values unrelated to health and pensions.

The relative emptiness of the education space amplifies the power of two main groups that oppose career reform.<sup>18</sup> The first is clientelist politicians—from municipal councilors to national deputies and senators—who build careers by offering supporters jobs and contracts in schools or the education bureaucracy. Meritocratic reforms can thus be career enders for these politicians. Education has a special vulnerability to clientelism because appointing unqualified personnel has less visible impact on performance than posting incompetent people to government agencies in health, transportation, and other sectors (World Bank 2018). This vulnerability thus draws clientelist politicians to education. Moreover, clientelist politicians are patient; if they lose initially in merit reforms they can, zombie-like, come back in later governments.

Second, the emptiness can make teacher unions appear bigger and more powerful (Moe 2011; Grindle 2004). Teacher unions can in fact be implacable opponents to revamping teacher careers—as they were in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Mexico, and South Africa (chapter 6). A World Bank study concluded: “The deepest challenge in raising teacher quality is not fiscal or technical but political, because teachers unions in every country in Latin America are large and politically active stakeholders” (Bruns and Luque 2015, 3). However, unions elsewhere negotiated and accepted major reforms to teacher careers as in Chile, Colombia, and some Brazilian states. In more extreme cases, reforming governments can sideline (Peru) or destroy (Ecuador) teacher unions. Understanding variation in union behavior requires in-depth analysis of the type of union—political machine (in Mexico and Ecuador) versus

<sup>17</sup> On Europe Paglayan (2021), Anderson (1987), and Green (2013) and on East Asia, Ashton et al. (2002, 11).

<sup>18</sup> In their analysis of education politics in Europe, Busemeyer et al. find that when the salience of education is low, then interest groups loom large (2020, 6).

interest group (most other cases)—and its relationship with the political system (Schneider 2022).<sup>19</sup>

Lastly, the short time horizon of most elected politicians means they have less interest in investing in education quality that may only show results decades later. Constitutions in Latin America limit presidents to single terms of four (Chile and Peru) or six years (Mexico) or one immediate reelection for a maximum of eight years (Argentina, Brazil [governors also], Colombia, and Ecuador). Their education ministers lasted on average less than two years (Schneider 2022). Well institutionalized parties could help overcome a short-term approach to education, but such parties were in short supply in Latin America (Bizzarro et al. 2018). Party support for VTE (vocational and technical education, chapter 8) was more the (partial) exception that proves the rule. Lack of politician interest further empties the policy space.

In sum, absent the main beneficiaries—families and business—education was left emptier and thus an attractive space for clientelist politicians and machine-type unions. This emptiness also made pro-reform efforts more dependent on outside allies like technocrats, civil society, and policy networks. This emptiness fills out and elaborates Schleicher’s claim at the outset that without changes in demand, it is hard to do much about the supply of education. Chapter 2 returns to this emptiness.

#### IV. Bottom-Up and Top-Down Routes to Reforming Teacher Careers

The difference between these routes is the initial electoral mobilization in the bottom-up cases (table 1.2). Education almost never tops the list of priorities in opinion surveys, and therefore it rarely ranks high in candidate platforms (chapter 2) (Coyoli 2024). However, in particular crises in Chile and Ecuador, education did become a priority campaign issue, and voters plumped by big majorities for reform. Backed by solid voter mandates, governments in bottom-up cases launched big-bang reforms with rapid implementation. In contrast, in top-down cases, presidential candidates (and gubernatorial in Brazil) did not emphasize education in their campaigns, and reform implementation—pushed mostly by technocrats—was slow and partial. Because education is an emptier policy space, policy networks, technocrats, and sometimes civil society were

<sup>19</sup> Chapter 2 elaborates further; for now a machine union should be understood as one that has leverage over teacher careers that it uses to mobilize them into national electoral politics often resulting in top positions for union leaders in parties and education ministries.

**Table 1.2 Major Causal Factors in Bottom-Up and Top-Down Reform Trajectories in Primary and Secondary Education**

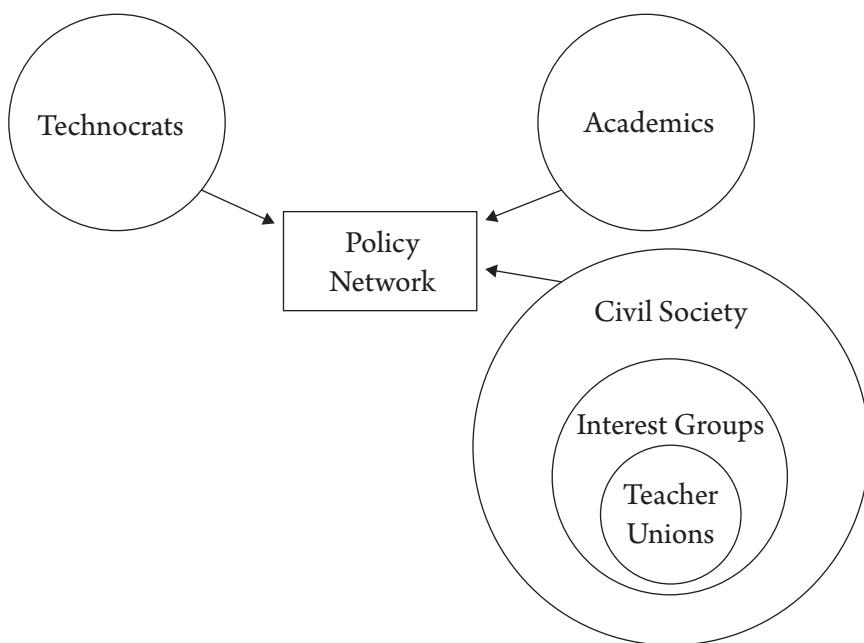
	<i>Electoral salience</i>	<i>Technocracy</i>	<i>Policy network &amp; civil society</i>	<i>Union type</i>	<i>Clientelist politicians</i>	<i>Reform outcome</i>
<b>Bottom up</b>						
Ecuador (2006)	<b>High</b>	<b>Strong</b>	Weak	Machine	Weak	Implemented
Chile (2015)	<b>High</b>	Weak	<b>Strong</b>	Interest group	Weak	Implemented
<b>Top down</b>						
Peru (2007)	Low	<b>Strong</b>	Weak	Interest group	Weak	Partially implemented
Colombia (2002)	Low	<b>Strong</b>	Medium	Interest group	Strong (until 2000)	Partially implemented
Mexico (2014)	Low	Weak	Medium	<b>Machine</b>	Medium	Overtaken

*Note:* Cells in bold identify the most important factors in each case. Factors varied by state in Brazil.

then more prominent in influencing reform trajectories, especially in top-down cases, as were unions and clientelist politicians in opposition.

In this book, the outcome to be analyzed was systemic implementation of reforms to teacher careers (systemic is understood as having a significant impact on the careers of most teachers), not the ultimate learning outcomes. Some of the biggest improvements on international assessments did come in countries where governments had remade teacher careers.<sup>20</sup> But, this progress cannot be attributed solely to career reforms because they were bundled with other policy

<sup>20</sup> Among the cases in part II, the best evidence for the positive impact of meritocratic career policies comes from Colombia (chapter 5 and Brutti and Sánchez 2017). Overall, “the most impressive gains in learning in the past two decades were observed in Peru, which improved its reading scores by 2.4 years of schooling, during this period, Chile and Colombia also improved their reading scores by 1.4 and 0.9 grade levels, respectively.” World Bank blog post by Emanuela di Gropello, Maria Vargas, and Monica Yanez-Pagans, “What Are the Main Lessons from the Latest Results from PISA 2018 for Latin America?” December 6, 2019. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/latinamerica/what-are-the-main-results-pisa-2018-latin-america>.



*Figure 1.2* Composition of Policy Networks *Note:* Machine unions are better conceived as part of the polity rather than civil society.

changes. Moreover, as noted earlier, implementing career reforms takes many years until most teachers are working with the grain of the reform, so there is less reason to expect immediate improvements in learning.

In bottom-up cases—Chile and Ecuador—electoral mobilization jump-started reform. In Chile, bottom-up pressure started with massive and repeated student demonstrations that put education on the electoral agenda, followed then by mass voting for reform. Later, the policy network and civil society, including the teacher union, participated more in shaping policy specifics. In Ecuador, the reform process and politics also shifted over time; reforms started with voters, but later, civil society, the teacher union, and policy networks had less weight, and technocracy more, in sustaining implementation.

Where electoral campaigns are short on specifics, policy networks can fill in the details.<sup>21</sup> By policy network I understand a small, closely connected group of experts holding top positions in government, think tanks, other NGOs, and academia, who often rotate among these positions (figure 1.2). The core, most influential members of policy networks probably number in the dozens. The

<sup>21</sup> For a general view of networks in social policy in Latin America, see Bonvecchi and Scartascini 2020.

influence of policy networks depends on the expertise of its members and consensus among them and does not include leaders from interest groups who have other sources of power and influence.

Most of civil society does not belong to expert policy networks, and other parts of civil society can have independent policy influence. Leaving aside interest groups like teacher unions, other kinds of CSOs (civil society organizations)—think tanks, advocacy groups, foundations, and NGOs—bring other resources to education politics.<sup>22</sup> For example, CSOs can push their agendas in the media, in coalition building, and in lobbying politicians. Foundations, especially of the billionaire sort found in the United States and Brazil, seek influence through media and lobbying, but they can also fund coalitions and help reformers directly by hiring consultants, organizing meetings, and paying for staff. These activities were especially clear in some states in Brazil.

Where the policy networks and civil society were sparser (most countries save Chile and Brazil), experts in government—technocracy—had greater influence in designing and implementing reform (Dargent 2015). Technocrats were recognizable by their prior careers in nonpolitical and nonelected positions in government and/or civil society, often but not always in the education sector. They often had advanced degrees in education or social sciences, though degrees were less of a marker than for technocrats in economic ministries. Technocrats may be part of policy networks but can also directly impact reform design and implementation without the rest of the network.

Although unions and teachers rarely embrace career reforms out of the gate, especially with high-stakes testing and evaluations, they may, with time, consider them acceptable and a normal part of the career. Several factors can nudge teachers and unions into the acceptance column. For example, if unions were consulted over the reforms and allowed to negotiate some adjustments, as in Chile and Colombia, buy-in was easier to secure. Moreover, if unions were interest groups as in Chile, Colombia, and some states in Brazil, then they had less to lose from career reform than did political machine unions, as in Mexico and Ecuador. Generous salary increases along with career reforms—as in Chile, Peru, and Ecuador—helped convince teachers and unions that career reforms were not exclusively punitive. Lastly, higher turnover among the teaching corps (25% new teachers in four years in Ecuador) can shift the balance in the teacher corps to those recruited under the new rules who are presumably more favorably disposed to them.

<sup>22</sup> CSO is the broader term and includes interest groups. NGOs are all other CSOs that are not interest groups. More in chapter 2.

In the top-down reforms in Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and some Brazilian states (table 1.2), education was not a major electoral issue, and more narrow technocratic teams launched and sustained reforms. The prior political question then is, Why do presidents appoint and keep technocrats? Expertise in education is not as important as economics training in economic ministries where appointing technocrats calms investor angst and where policy mistakes can have major political costs (Dargent 2015; Schneider 1998). Instead, countries like Colombia and Peru developed, over time, a tradition of technocrats in various ministries (Dargent 2015), so that presidents faced additional costs in public opinion if they contravened the expectations by making non-technocratic appointments; in a Peru poll, for example, 81% of respondents preferred independent, nonpolitical appointments to the cabinet (chapter 5).

Yet, the most important factor in technocratic continuity in Colombia and Peru was the absence of political parties (Muñoz and Baraybar 2021). On a measure of party institutionalization in 18 countries of Latin America, Colombia ranked 12th and Peru 17th (Mainwaring 2018b, 58). The weakness of parties both deprives presidents of a pool of party cadres to appoint to executive positions and reduces pressure to use education resources for patronage to support parties and party politicians, thus leaving presidents free to appoint technocrats.

Without support through elections or civil society, top-down reforms remain vulnerable to regular democratic turnover as happened in Mexico, Rio de Janeiro, and Peru. Social subsidies like pensions and cash transfers, or market reforms like privatization or trade liberalization, all create immediate winners who in short order become the sustaining coalition for these policies (Pierson 1994). In education, career reforms rarely have such a positive feedback dynamic, especially over the short and medium run. The benefits of education reform are long term and hard to see, while reform opponents can lobby governments to block implementation in the shorter term.

The usual suspects in most policy literatures—institutions and coalitions—were not prominent factors in education reform in Latin America (see Garritzmann et al. 2022). Broad social coalitions, including groups like business or the middle class, were key in their absence and thus in sustaining the low-learning status quo, but not in pushing reforms. Likewise, none of the main political institutions decisively shaped reform trajectories (save for federalism in Brazil which opened up opportunities for decentralized reform). Moreover, international influences were not weighty. Multilateral agencies like the World Bank, OECD, and IDB often supported reforms and provided technical assistance and loans but did not shift the balance in domestic politics (Díaz Ríos 2019; Díaz Ríos and Urbano-Canal 2023).

In sum, electoral mobilization and policy networks (more in Chile than Ecuador) were central to bottom-up trajectories of reform. In top-down cases in Peru and Colombia, lasting technocracy was key.

## V. Country Cases of Reforms to Teacher Careers

By general consensus, the main cases in Latin America of systematic makeovers to teacher careers after 2000 were Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru (Elacqua et al. 2018, 11, 76) with partial reforms in some Brazilian states.<sup>23</sup> The core of the more ambitious and successfully implemented reforms ran up and down the Andes. Mexico was not part of this group, both by geography and by the rollback of its reforms.<sup>24</sup> Many of the policies on teacher careers came bundled with new policies in other parts of the education system like financing, infrastructure, student testing, curriculum, and administration. Most of the analysis treats each country as a case of reform. However, as the empirical chapters show, most countries went through a progression of reforms, moving, for example, from voluntary evaluation to later legislation making evaluations compulsory (Chile, Peru, and Ecuador) or from simple written tests to complex 360 evaluations (Colombia). Each policy change offered a window into the protagonists and politics and thus multiple opportunities to assess the sometimes variable preferences and strengths of contending actors.

The main outcome of interest is the systemic, effective, and durable implementation of reforms to teacher careers. This book though is not meant as a blanket endorsement of these career policies. Of course, it is hard not to like policies that distribute teaching positions on some merit criteria rather than selling the positions or letting politicians dole them out to their flunkies. However, policies to evaluate and reward teachers on performance are far more complex, costly,

<sup>23</sup> In addition to the Elacqua et al. study, others agree on the major reform cases in the region. Writing before reforms in Mexico, Gindin (2011, 113) listed Chile, Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador. Rivas and Sanchez (2020) rank Mexico (pre-2019 rollback) and Chile as the most reformed overall, with Peru and Colombia as partial reformers. In a global review, a UNESCO report on career reforms included from Latin America Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru (Tournier and Chimier 2019) (also UNESCO, “Teacher Careers,” n.d., <http://www.iiep.unesco.org/en/our-expertise/teacher-careers>).

<sup>24</sup> As mentioned earlier, the Andean four scored some of the greatest improvements in the regional UNESCO tests from 2006 to 2013. Among the seven countries that participated in PISA tests from 2000 to 2015, Colombia and Peru showed the greatest gains across all three areas of math, science, and language (Elacqua et al. 2018, 10–11). Brazil, Mexico, and Chile showed smaller improvements in one of the three areas. Costa Rica and Uruguay, former education standouts, made no progress in all three areas. In UNESCO tests in 2019, Peru had the greatest gains of 16 countries in Latin America (UNESCO 2021b).

and controversial, and the jury is still out on their impact (Tournier and Chimier 2019). Some attack them as neoliberal and part of the NPM goal of importing personnel practices from the private sector (more on this in chapter 9).<sup>25</sup>

Figure 1.1 summarized the routes traversed in the six countries. Among bottom-up cases, the 2013 elections in Chile (chapter 3) gave the incoming government an imposing mandate for a makeover of teacher careers. After the election, Chile's well-knit policy network and associated vibrant civil society gave more specific form to the reforms. Electoral mobilization was also the spark for bottom-up reform in Ecuador (chapter 4) where voters elected Rafael Correa in 2006 at the same time they approved a referendum for sweeping education reform. However, later reforms came more in top-down fashion, especially the government's frontal attack on the teacher union and more technocratic implementation.

Chapter 5 turns to top-down reform in Colombia and Peru. Technocrats and more pragmatic, interest-group unions allowed reform implementation to survive. Teacher unions in both countries were largely sidelined, though Fecode in Colombia ultimately renegotiated teacher evaluations in 2015.

Among cases of blocked reform, Mexico (chapter 6) had one of the most powerful political machines among teacher unions worldwide. Reformers after 2013 started to dismantle the machine mostly through teacher reforms. However, AMLO (Andrés Manuel López Obrador), backed by many in the teacher union, won the 2018 elections promising to reverse the reforms and did so in 2019. A brief comparison with South Africa shows comparable reform blockage by a similar machine union. Lastly, both unions and, especially, clientelist politicians pushed for overturning reforms in the state Rio de Janeiro.

In Brazil's decentralized education system (chapter 7), significant education reforms emerged mostly in a handful of states and cities, especially Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Pernambuco, and Ceará. Policies in Brazil did not follow the Andean template with comprehensive career reforms but rather included a range of changes focusing on things like early literacy, full-day schools, and/or VTE. Over time reforms though also touched on careers with merit recruitment, mentoring, and performance bonuses. Reforms started top down but with support in civil society and little resistance from interest-group unions. Over time, reformers negotiated issues of implementation, and, as reforms started to show

<sup>25</sup> As should be apparent, this research project is not concerned with the intellectual origins of these kinds of career reforms. Much research (e.g., Ydesen 2019) identifies the OECD, World Bank, and other international agencies as major sources for career reforms. My research picks up the story when domestic reformers take up these recommendations in some form. Of course, given these origins, some of the opposition discourse attacks career reforms as illegitimate, neoliberal, and foreign imposed.

progress, education became a vote winner and more central theme in elections, providing more subsequent bottom-up support.

VTE (chapter 8) offers a further venue for foregrounding economic incentives for business and workers to support education improvement and investment. These incentives were generally tepid in Latin America where VTE enrollments remained low by international standards, except in Chile and Brazil where markets (demand by families) and parties played larger roles in expanding VTE. Turkey provides a useful, comparison case that shows how an extraordinary pro-VTE alliance between smaller businesses and the governing right-wing party emerged.

My arguments on what caused success or failure of reform implementation are based primarily on close process tracing of reforms as they unfolded over time, drawing on both the written record and personal interviews. Written materials included government documents (laws, reports, and other publications), secondary literature, periodical reports (primarily online), public opinion data, and data on learning assessments from UNESCO and OECD. In addition, I interviewed dozens of people who were either outside observers who followed the reforms closely, insiders who held top positions in reforming governments, or representatives of interest organizations, especially teacher unions (see appendix A). From 2015 to 2023, I conducted field research in seven countries of Latin America—Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru—with brief visits to Turkey and South Africa.

## VI. Conclusions: Underdeveloped Theory

By way of introduction to the next chapter's review of existing theories and their limitations, several common refrains in the literature merit mention. The first is paucity: "Political scientists rarely study education, and education researchers rarely study politics" (Moe and Wiborg 2017a, 13), though truer in comparative politics than American politics. The title of a review article is "Reading, Writing, and the Regrettable Status of Education Research in Comparative Politics" (Gift and Wibbels 2014). The introduction to another book—subtitled *Discovering a Neglected Field*—noted "the stunning discrepancy between the important position of education on the current political agenda and the reluctant attitude of political scientists towards this phenomenon."<sup>26</sup> On Latin America, despite its

<sup>26</sup> The introduction also provides quantitative evidence: "While from 1970 to 2007 political scientists published only 31 articles with 'education policy' in their title, the comparable figures for 'social policy' (158) or 'environmental policy' (119), to name two other research fields, have constantly been higher" (Jakobi et al. 2010, 5). A 2021 book promised some "initial insights" on public opinion on education but acknowledged that these insights were "dwarfed by the giant gaps in a

age, Merilee Grindle's book (2004) is still the standard reference since so little has been published since.

Second, what theory does exist does not explain much in Latin America. The substantial scholarship on OECD countries, usually with the frameworks of power resource theory (PRT) or varieties of capitalism (VoC), focuses heavily on organized groups and party politics.<sup>27</sup> The VoC perspective helps identify the absence of business and organized labor (not teacher unions) in education policy, but it is less helpful in identifying factors, like policy networks and technocracy, that were more important in Latin America. And parties in Latin America are less institutionalized and present in education politics. PRT and parties were more important in Chile and VTE but not business and VoC (chapter 8). A growing literature on education politics in the United States is more relevant as it focuses less on parties and more on teacher unions (Moe 2011, 2019), civil society (Rhodes 2012; Cohen and Mehta 2017), and advocacy networks (Finger 2018a, 2018b). Yet, overall, there is not much existing literature or theory to build on or build against.

Theoretically, my general framework starts with political economy and ends with organizations. The point of departure is to ask which groups in deindustrializing middle-income countries are likely to support policies to boost education quality. The answer, discussed earlier, is virtually none, from a strict perspective of self-interested groups, leaving a relatively empty policy arena, save for teacher unions and clientelist politicians.

The organizational analysis comes in later when analyzing civil society, policy networks, and especially pivotal teacher unions. If unions were often the main opponents to reform but sometimes willing to negotiate and then support quality reforms, then what features of these organizations might explain their differing behavior? The answers are mostly internal. Some unions are basic interest groups that are more willing to negotiate. Other unions are political machines, and meritocratic career policies threaten their political power. To know what type of union reformers face requires a deep dive into the organizational structure of the union, focusing specifically on the features that give union leaders leverage over members, especially influence in teacher careers as elaborated in chapter 2 (Schneider 2022).

picture of the comparative political economy of education that is only beginning to emerge" (West and Woessmann 2021b, 5).

<sup>27</sup> Martin (2012), Bussemeyer (2015), Bussemeyer and Trampusch (2012), Estevez-Abe, Iversen, and Soskice (2001).

# Theorizing on Education Politics

## *Macro to Micro*

*There really isn't a there there. No substantive focus.*

*No theoretical coherence. Little or no connection*

*between the various strands of research.*

—Moe and Wiborg (2017b, 12)

## I. Introduction: Thin and Disjointed Literatures

One example of “little or no connection” that Moe and Wiborg lamented is between research on rich and poor countries. Most research on rich OECD countries seeks to explain equilibrium outcomes like lasting cross-national variation in spending on different levels of education, while research on developing countries focuses more on change (Grindle 2004). Equilibrium arguments on developed countries typically rely on institutions (such as parties, veto points, and proportional representation versus majoritarian electoral systems) and large groups (business, workers, classes) and mostly view democracy as an effective conduit for transforming mass preferences through institutions into policies creating lasting educational systems (Ansell 2010; Bussemeyer 2015; Giudici et al. 2022).<sup>1</sup>

Although some similar approaches exist in research on developing countries (Brown and Hunter 2004; Kosack 2012), much of the rest views democracies as

<sup>1</sup> Within rich countries there is also “little or no connection” between analyses of US education politics and other rich countries. Cohen and Mehta (2017), for example, look only at the United States in developing their argument on “Why Reform Sometimes Succeeds.” For exceptions, see comparative work in (West and Woessmann 2021a; Moe and Wiborg 2017a). The first book emphasizes parties, institutions, public opinion, and elections (West and Woessmann 2021b). Another recent comparative study emphasizes ideology and governance (Gomendio and Wert 2023).

stunted (broken “long route of accountability,” World Bank 2003) and education systems as vulnerable to capture by small groups of insiders like clientelist politicians and teachers’ unions. Theories on OECD education politics hardly mention teacher unions, while they are front and center in research on the United States and developing countries.

Other research on developed countries in the varieties of capitalism (VoC) frame focuses on business strategies and associated demands for skills. As detailed in section IV, VoC finds only a faint echo in research on developing countries. In contrast, the power resource theory (PRT)—highlighting working-class power—is more consistently applied across rich and poor countries, in part because two prominent proponents—Evelyn Huber and John Stephens—have written so much on both groups of countries. PRT illuminates a few cases in parts II and III, especially in Chile and Brazil (chapters 3, 7, and 8).

The contrasts between developed and developing countries also highlight in the latter the relative emptiness of the education policy space. The main actors in developed countries of social classes, business, and parties are mostly absent in education politics in Latin America. Comparisons with other economic, social, and environmental policies highlight this relative emptiness in education. Policy beneficiaries—patients, pensioners, or subsidized or regulated business—are more active in their respective policy areas than are primary and secondary students (except Chile) and their parents. As introduced in chapter 1, this emptiness in turn enables other actors like teacher unions, clientelist politicians, policy networks, and technocrats to figure more prominently in education politics, especially when policies affect teacher careers. In the smaller VTE (vocational and technical education) segment (chapter 8), in contrast, the usual suspects—parties, classes, and business—were sometimes major players, which further highlights their absence in, as well as the relative emptiness of, policymaking in general education.

What is missing from this chapter and the empirical cases in part II are institutional theories, again mostly developed in the analysis of rich world education politics (West and Woessmann 2021a; Busemeyer 2015). Moe and Wiborg (2017b), argue that education reforms succeeded in political systems without veto points like courts and federalism that unions can use to block or delay reforms. VoC highlights various institutional complementarities, including between firm strategies and skill systems. Thus, high-quality manufacturing in coordinated market economies relies on elaborate skill systems (as in Germany’s dual model) and employment or unemployment protection (Estevez-Abe et al. 2001). In Latin America, such complementarities are often negative and help explain the absence of employers in education politics (section IV; Schneider 2013, chapter 4) but not variable reform outcomes. The main point for now is

that these and other institutional theories do not have much purchase in education politics in Latin America.

This chapter moves from macro to micro. It starts with the broadest forces of class and political regime (sections II and III); then considers meso-level players like interest groups (sections IV, V, and VI); and ends with micro influences from technocrats (section VII), policy networks, and civil society (section VIII). As noted in chapter 1, macro factors of democracy and class were not core drivers of reform in Latin America except episodically in bottom-up cases of Chile and Ecuador (and VTE). Meso-level actors, especially teachers' unions, were pivotal across nearly all routes to reform. In cases where macro- and meso-level factors faded, micro drivers—technocrats, civil society (CSOs in education), and policy networks—loomed larger, especially technocrats in top-down instances like Peru and Colombia.

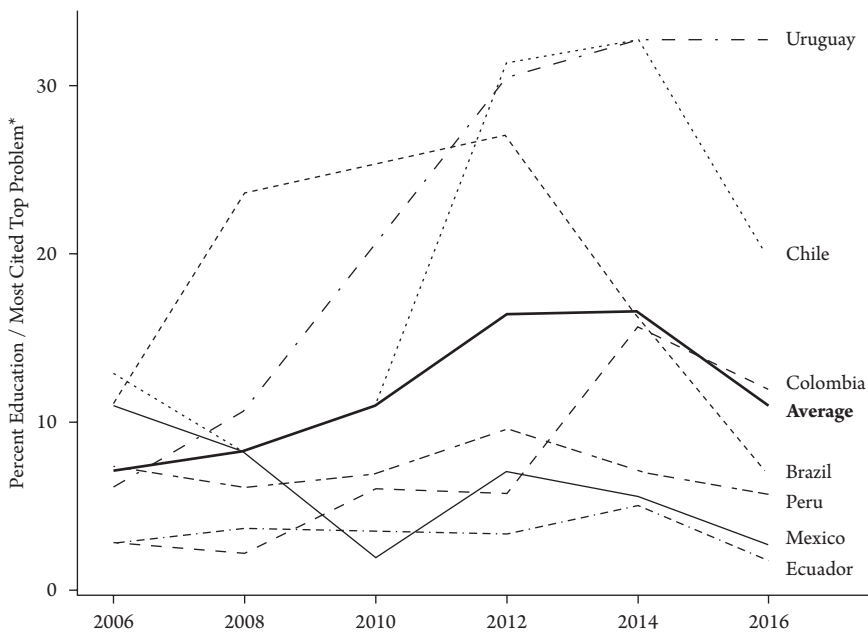
## II. Democracy Boosts Quantity but Not Quality

From the mid-20th century on, democracy promoted education spending and access. Ansell's global statistical analysis "confirmed a substantively strong and statistically robust relationship between public education spending and . . . democracy and openness" (2010, 72). A wide range of narrower studies confirm this connection.<sup>2</sup> For instance, democracy expands education access in Africa because democratic governments reduce school fees (Harding and Stasavage 2014). In Latin America, democracies spent more on education and more of that spending went to primary education (Brown and Hunter 2004).

Democracy, however, is not favorable for quality reforms (Dahlum and Knutsen 2017). Some hypothesize that voters hold politicians accountable for visible changes like reducing school fees but not for less visible outcomes like learning (Harding and Stasavage 2014). This hypothesis is a good starting point for why parents and voters are rarely involved in politics surrounding education quality. However, little in cross-national and quantitative research sheds much light on more targeted questions on when and how democracy affects reform politics.

The process-tracing case studies of Chile and Ecuador (chapters 3 and 4) delve into these more specific connections between democracy and education reforms. In these countries, education shocks fed into electoral mobilization around education. In Ecuador in 2006, education featured in a national

<sup>2</sup> See also, Stasavage (2005), Brown and Hunter (1999), Haggard and Kaufman (2008, 201). Further citations in Dahlum and Knutsen (2017). Historically, non-democratic regimes also promoted education (Paglayan 2021).



*Figure 2.1* Respondent views of most important problems (education as percent of most mentioned problem) *Source:* datasets.americasbarometer.org *Note:* The number of people who list education as the top problem the country faces as a share of people who list the top problem overall for that year (such as security or the economy).

referendum, overwhelmingly approved, and in Chile in 2013 was one of three key issues in the platform of Michelle Bachelet, the winning candidate. In Brazilian states like Pernambuco and Ceará, reforms started small, showed positive results, and then incumbents campaigned successfully on that record. In all these cases, electoral victory gave incoming governments a mandate, and legitimacy, in pushing substantial reform. Mexico is an opposite case of no electoral mobilization in Enrique Peña Nieto’s campaign in 2012, and when reformers there drafted drastic new education measures, they could not draw on a similar electoral mandate.

Outside these exceptions, education rarely ranked high in other elections. In regular opinion surveys in Latin America, education has never ranked as the top concern people have and rarely exceeds 30% of the most pressing concern respondents mentioned (figure 2.1).<sup>3</sup> Yet, variation across countries is

<sup>3</sup> A study of US public opinion found the “American public is rather ‘inattentive,’ ‘ill informed,’ and ‘incoherent’ in its views” (West and Woessmann 2021b, 8). See also Izquierdo et al. (2018) and Coyoli (2024).

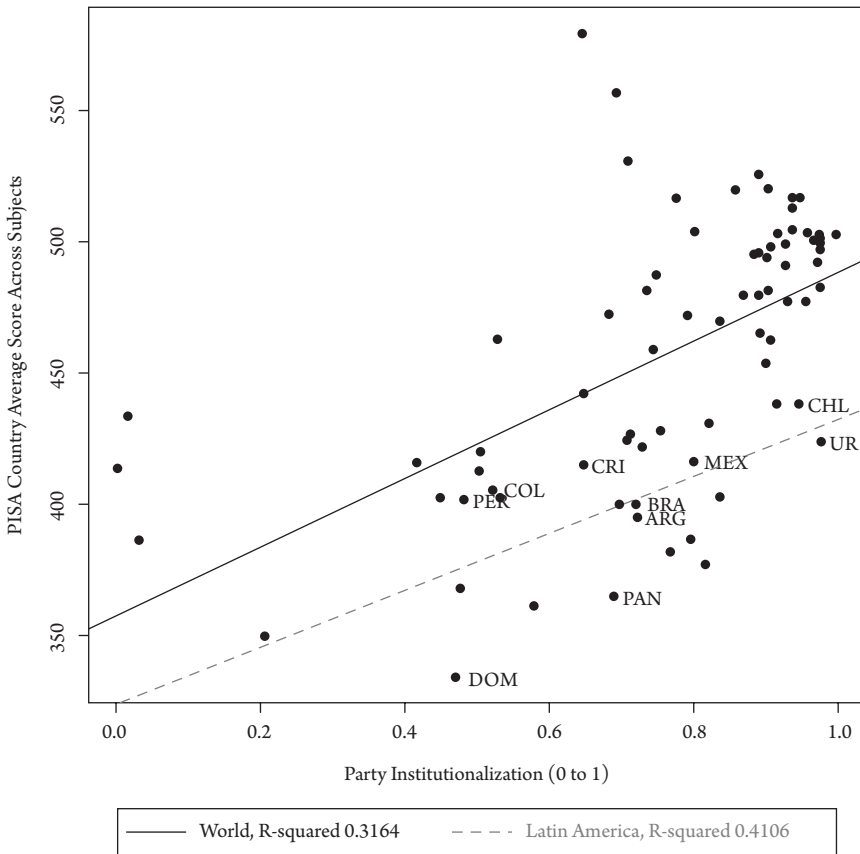
substantial, as in the rise in concern in Chile that fed directly into elections in the 2010s, but for now the key point is that across all of the larger, more developed countries of Latin America, education is not a major concern for voters as evidenced by the solid line with averaged responses across these seven countries. In Europe, in contrast, “education and health care tend to compete for the top spot on the public’s ranking of policy fields on which the government should focus,” with almost 80% of respondents favoring higher spending on education (and fewer for other policy areas like health [67%], pensions [58%], and so on) (Busemeyer et al. 2018, 167–68).

Another key impact of democracy comes through alternation in power. Although a mandate for reform may cow opponents in one election cycle, they can look ahead to counter-mobilize for the next. Successor governments may see fit to roll back or back burner controversial career reforms. This second alternation feature of democracy makes policy continuity essential to full implementation of quality reforms, as was the case in Ecuador (initially) and Chile, but strikingly not so in Mexico. Sections V and VI return to a closer analysis of main reform opponents—teacher unions and clientelist politicians—that can regroup to exercise more anti-reform influence through subsequent elections.

Overall, Chile, Ecuador, and a few states in Brazil are the exceptions to the general rule in Latin America of the difficulty of transforming voter preferences into concrete policies, what the World Bank calls the long route of accountability (World Bank 2003). This long route—from voters to politicians on to policy implementation—is generally tenuous in Latin America in education due to a combination of weak parties, rampant clientelism, and voter concern with other issues. Among democracies in Latin America, party institutionalization varies substantially (figures 2.2 and 2.3). In principle, strong parties could compensate for the short time horizons of politicians, mitigate the problems of alternation, and promote a longer term view of improving education quality (Di John 2007). This is one reading of the correlations in figure 2.2.<sup>4</sup>

However, party institutionalization bears little relation to recent improvements in PISA scores (figure 2.3). In fact, the relationship is negative, with countries with weaker parties like Peru and Colombia logging larger PISA improvements

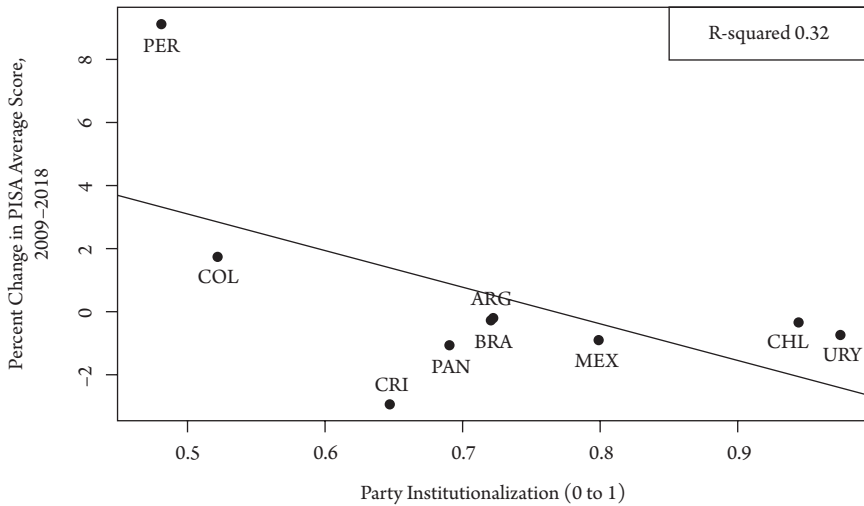
<sup>4</sup> However, this interpretation should not be pressed too far as the relationship between party institutionalization and GDP per capita is also close, as is GDP per capita and PISA scores. Strong parties were crucial to education politics in rich countries (West and Woessmann 2021a). Following the definition in Bizzarro et al. (2018, 286), party strength is a function of permanent national (or regional) party organization, permanent local party branches, centralized candidate selection, legislative cohesion, minimal party switching, and programmatic rather than clientelist linkages to key social bases.



*Figure 2.2* Party Institutionalization and Average PISA Scores, All Countries, 2018 Sources: OECD. 2018. Annex B1: Results for Countries and Economies. (PISA 2018 Results Volume 1, Version 3 + 1). [Data set]. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en>. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/>. Vdem Party Institutionalization Index Data: Coppedge, et al. 2020. V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset v10. (Version 10). Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project. <https://doi.org/10.23696/vdemds20>. <https://www.v-dem.net/data/dataset-archive/>, version 10

(though without Peru there is little relationship). That the change leaders—Peru and Colombia—rank low on party institutionalization suggests we should look elsewhere for sources of continuity in reforms, especially technocracy (discussed in section VI) that can thrive in contexts of feeble parties.

In sum, system-level variables of regime type and party institutionalization have little promise for explaining quality reforms. Survey respondents do not rank education as their greatest concern, so elections are less likely to turn on education platforms. Where they do, as in Ecuador and Chile, other factors were also at work. The next sections turn to these meso- and micro-level factors.



*Figure 2.3* Party Institutionalization and Change in PISA Scores in Latin America, 2009–2018 Sources: OECD. 2018. Annex B1: Results for countries and economies. (PISA 2018 Results Volume 1, Version 3 + 1). [Data set]. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en>.

<https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/>. Vdem Party Institutionalization Index Data: Coppedge et al. 2020. V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset v10. (Version 10). Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project. <https://doi.org/10.23696/vdemds20>. <https://www.v-dem.net/data/dataset-archive/>, version 10

### III. Social Class and Education as Redistribution

Much theorizing in developed countries focuses on the relative distribution of spending across primary, secondary, and tertiary education (Iversen and Stephens 2008; Ansell 2010; Busemeyer and Iversen 2014). In a basic model, aligned with PRT, lower classes want spending on earlier grades. but the middle class prefers more funding for higher education. In Europe, these class interests were historically represented through three broad types of parties. Where conservative parties representing middle and upper classes were in power longer, education spending skewed to higher education, as in Britain. Where social democratic parties, representing workers, remained in power longer, as in Scandinavia, governments plumped for basic education. Christian democratic parties as in Germany were cross-class coalitions favoring mixed education systems (Busemeyer 2015).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Moreover, spending on all levels of education—daycare, primary, secondary, VTE, tertiary, and active labor market policies—was higher under Social Democrats, medium in Christian Democrat cases, and low in liberal countries (Iversen and Stephens 2008, 616).

In most cases, these simpler class and PRT theories do not help much to explain teacher reforms in Latin America, in part because their distributional consequences are not readily apparent and in part because comparable class-based parties are rarer. Moreover, in Latin America, governments from across the spectrum—right, left, and center—enacted career reforms. Despite a relative lack of correlation among classes, parties, and education reform, leftist governments in Ecuador and Chile—two bottom-up cases (and Brazil in VTE)—packaged teacher reforms with other education policies that benefited poorer families in PRT fashion.

In another class approach, focused on the pivotal middle class, trade openness is one of the two factors for Ansell (2010) that most affects education spending. The next section examines business demand for skills, but, for Ansell, the crucial impact of trade openness comes indirectly through class relations. When markets are open to trade, then global demand sets skill premia in wages, and increasing domestic supply of skilled workers in one country does not lower global wage premia. Everyone wins with more education. In contrast, in more closed economies, more education for poor students drives down the domestic wage premia usually reaped by children of the middle class. Thus, in closed economies, the middle class opposes improving education for the masses.

Elites in Latin America show few signs of eagerness to pay for quality education for all, though less out of fear of competition with their children for good jobs. Elites in Latin America have erected multiple, effective barriers to entry in highly remunerated jobs (effective opportunity hoarding in Tilly's [1998] terms). Higher quality secondary education is often available only through private schools. These secondary schools then funnel students into top public, and often free, universities. Moreover, once graduated, non-elite job applicants, even from top universities, face multiple forms of discrimination and are shut out of social networks that pave the way for elite kids (Bordón and Braga 2020). In Chile, where higher education has boomed, graduates in their 20s from the richest quartile earned 56% more than graduates from families in the poorest quartile (PNUD 2017, 314).

As noted in chapter 1, returns to education in Latin America were higher for the wealthy than for the poor, the opposite of patterns in Asia. In seven of eight Asian countries, returns to education were higher in lower income quintiles, whereas in seven of eight countries of Latin America, returns to education were higher for wealthier quintiles, almost double in Bolivia, Brazil, and Chile (di Gropello 2006, 76–77). Through discrimination based on class, ethnicity, and race, labor markets still deliver higher wage premia to richer children, despite, contra Ansell, trade openness and the entry of poorer students into higher education (on Chile, Bordón and Braga 2020).

In Latin America, the middle class shaped policy as much by exit as by voice (Di John 2007). Middle-class demand accelerated the growth of private education. At the primary level, in 2013, 18% of students in Latin America attended private schools compared to 11% in North America and Western Europe and 8% in East Asia and the Pacific. Latin America had the highest regional average after South Asia (Elacqua, Iribarren, et al. 2018, 4). Similarly, in 2013 Latin America had the third-highest average in secondary education (behind South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa). In Latin America, 18% of secondary students were in private schools (compared to 17% in North America and Western Europe, and 16% in East Asia and the Pacific) (Elacqua, Iribarren, et al. 2018, 6).<sup>6</sup> Since 2000, “Latin America is the world region where educational privatization . . . has grown more constantly” (Verger et al. 2018, 131). As noted in chapter 1, 40% of the middle class in Latin America is in private education (Larrañaga and Rodríguez 2014, 438). In Chile, nearly 90% of students in the top-income quintile were in fully private schools (Inzunza et al. 2019, 500).

What happens to class politics and distributional struggles when large numbers of middle-class families move their children to private schools? The common, and plausible, assumption is that middle classes are less likely to support spending on public education and more likely to press instead for subsidies for private education, either directly to schools or through tax deductions for school tuition.<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere, middle classes are normally the most vocal group among parents in education politics, so their exit in Latin America renders the policy space of public education even more empty and deprives reformers of potential influential allies.

In Latin America, one area where left/right partisan distinctions and PRT did have more purchase was in VTE (chapter 8). More programmatic left parties as the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) in Brazil or a center-left coalition in Chile expanded VTE. However, some left governments cut funding to VTE. In Ecuador, in particular, the Correa government lambasted VTE as subpar, dead-end education for poor kids (interview, Freddy Peñafiel, 24 January 2018).

In sum, classes and associated parties in Latin America were rarely decisive in education reforms. The middle class was pivotal but mostly by contributing—by its exit—to lowering political pressure for improving quality in public education.

<sup>6</sup> A recent IDB report found much higher levels of private enrollment: “More than 40 percent of secondary enrollments are in private schools, compared with about 10 percent in OECD countries and middle-income countries in other regions” (Busso and Messina 2020, 13). Enrollment in private schools was much higher in large cities: 51% in Lima, 36% in Buenos Aires, 30% in Rio de Janeiro, 19% in Mexico City, 39% in Quito, and 33% in Bogota (Elacqua, Iribarren, et al. 2018, 12).

<sup>7</sup> Mettler (2011) and Hackett (2017) would emphasize that this sort of tax spending is part of a “submerged state” that is deliberately less visible and hence less accountable and contestable. On OECD countries, see Busemeyer and Iversen (2014).

Overall, the poor and working classes rarely pushed for quality reforms, save in a few elections in Chile, Ecuador, and some states in Brazil.

#### IV. Education as Human Capital: Business, Skills, and Varieties of Capitalism

Empirically, with law-like regularity, workers around the world with more education are more productive and earn higher salaries: on average about 10% more lifetime income for each additional year of school (Barro and Lee 2015), making education “a tremendously smart investment decision” (Busso et al. 2017, 6). Such phenomenal returns deepen the puzzle of why parents are not clamoring for more and better education. These returns also mean that education can be conceived as a kind of capital, rather than, or in addition to, a citizen’s right or as a factor in income distribution.<sup>8</sup> Conceiving of education as capital and a crucial input into production raises in turn a new set of political interests and actors, especially firms, workers, and government development planners.

Skills and these protagonists figure centrally in research on VoC (Estevez-Abe et al. 2001; Iversen and Stephens 2008; Thelen 2004). In the original formulation, workers and employers in LMEs (liberal market economies) sought general skills. At the high end, general skills came through tertiary education for middle-class families and basic high school for low-end jobs. In CMEs (coordinated market economies), in contrast, employers and workers invested in firm- and sector-specific skills that required high-quality secondary education, especially VTE, apprenticeships, and ongoing training.

Neither LME or CME skill patterns have emerged clearly in developing countries, but the general VoC approach of looking to business and worker demands for education, rather than voters and democracy, can yield insights. For Latin America and other middle-income countries, demand for high skills (both general and specific) is tepid in part because industry accounts for fewer jobs than it did in earlier industrializers in the 20th century and because the large majority of jobs in service and informal sectors are low skilled (Schneider 2013, chapter 4; Doner and Schneider 2016). As referenced in chapter 1, this lack of demand for skills by firms and workers helps explain the overall low quality of education. And chapter 8 explores the low enrollments in VTE in Latin America, the segment of education where business demand would be most expected.

<sup>8</sup> Since Gary Becker’s (1962) pioneering work in the 1960s; economists have devoted a lot of attention to skills and human capital (Acemoglu and Pischke 1999; Acemoglu and Autor 2012; Goldin and Katz 2009).

Short of a full variety of capitalism, other authors argue that particular economic sectors or activities, especially exports, shift demand for education. Economies dependent on manufactured exports, as in East Asia, move businesses to demand more skilled workers (Haggard and Kaufman 2008, 10, 347). However, what countries export is crucial. Dependence on exports of natural resources—long common in Latin America—depresses demand for human capital (Birdsall et al. 2001).

For Kosack, “The skilled-labor needs of businesses are highly motivating to a government concerned with staying in power. But . . . there are only limited conditions under which businesses will pressure the government to invest in mass education,” namely “a flexible labor market, where skilled wages fall when the supply of skilled labor increases” (Kosack 2012, 4, 5, 15). Thus, in the 20th century, business demand for mass education was high in Taiwan (with flexible labor) and low in Brazil and Ghana with more rigid labor markets where business demanded only selective, targeted training through “specialized training centers, or grants or tax breaks to allow employers to train their own workers” (Kosack 2012, 35).

Senai (Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Industrial), the huge training agency in Brazil, offers a good example of selective, targeted training in industry. Senai designed training programs based on surveys of business demand (Schneider 2013, 132). The informal Senai motto was “we do not train people for unemployment.” So, training was tightly connected to immediate demand. By law, all industrial firms contributed 1% of payroll to Senai. Large firms could, however, get authorization to keep that 1% to pay for in-house training, making it even more selective and targeted.<sup>9</sup>

Firm size affects business strategies to fulfill their skill needs. Large firms in Latin America can also find private, individual solutions to their skill needs. One study summed up this approach as “hire for attitude, train for skills” (Bassi et al. 2012b). Smaller firms lack slack and scale for in-house training and hence rely more heavily on publicly financed training. Yet, SMEs (small and medium sized enterprises) face more obstacles to collective action and hence organized clout to press governments to promote VTE. Chapter 8 analyses three exceptions—Chile, Brazil, and Turkey—where strong parties pushed VTE. Only in Turkey though was the strategy connected to an alliance with SMEs, making it more the exception that proves the rule.

<sup>9</sup> VTE in Guatemala offers a striking example of business capture of training agencies. While education as a whole was in parlous condition, well-organized large businesses had virtually taken over the VTE-training institute to provide selective, higher cost and quality training, at public expense to a small minority of students destined to supply the skill needs of this small group of large firms (Bogliaccini and Madariaga 2020).

The other empirical chapters confirm the general expectation of muted business interest in education quality or VTE. Across all cases in part II, business associations mattered little to career reforms, echoing earlier reviews of education reforms across Latin America (Grindle 2004, 198 and Kaufman and Nelson 2004b, 267).<sup>10</sup> In some cases, specific firms or their owners took special interest in education through foundations, philanthropy, and think tanks (section VIII). Such engagement though was not driven by skill needs of firms.

In sum, viewing education as human capital and a core input for business is crucial to understanding low business demand for higher quality education systems in Latin America. Gauging business interest is crucial to understanding the demand side; as Schleicher warned in chapter 1, without demand for quality education, little can be done about supply.

## V. Education as Political Fodder I: Clientelist Politicians

Education quality is another policy area subject to Machiavelli's grim blocking logic: future beneficiaries of reform are weak, dispersed, and mostly unaware of potential benefits, while losers are well organized, well aware of possible losses, and intensely interested in stopping them. In Latin America, the core, and most powerful, losers from meritocratic career reforms were clientelist politicians and political-machine teacher unions (next section). Clientelism is not just a predation problem in Latin America; a study of 60 countries around the world showed that clientelist parties were associated with lower spending on secondary education and worse performance on standardized tests (Chen and Kitschelt 2022).

Clientelism and "the widespread use of the teacher payroll for political patronage" (Stein 2005, 230) regularly come up in discussions of education politics but are rarely theorized. In general, clientelist politicians thrive through the discretionary allocation of state funds and jobs to their supporters. With a big chunk of government spending, education is a fertile realm for building a clientelist career. In Colombia, for example, according to the minister of education in 1985, teacher jobs and transfers were put up for sale, and "100 percent

<sup>10</sup> Reform stories outside Latin America also document the absence of business. In Indonesia, education reformers drew "little support from the domestic business community" that was "largely 'silent' on education issues" (Rosser and Fahmi 2018, 74). In the United States, "Business groups . . . have played a secondary role to governors in the contemporary reforms and were not a central factor in the 1960s reforms" (Mehta 2013a, 13). But, see Rhodes (2012).

of teachers were appointed through political recommendation” (Duarte 1998, 140). Furthermore, “regional politicians consider the public education system one of the best sources of political clientelism not only through the manipulation of the hiring of public teachers, but also because it gives them access to the control of the everyday administration of teachers’ affairs” (Duarte 1998, 148).

Four factors make public education especially appetizing to clientelist politicians. First, teachers are distributed throughout the territory in rough proportion to voters. Second, teachers are socially embedded and in remote and poorer neighborhoods may have some prestige and influence.<sup>11</sup> So, appointing clients to teaching positions could help mobilize a lot of votes. Third, education is especially vulnerable to clientelism because incompetent political supporters hired as teachers, staff, and school directors do less detectable, immediate, and severe damage than would, say, incompetent train drivers or doctors (World Bank 2018; Bruns et al. 2019). And the impact may not be apparent until years later.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, parents and voters lack means to assess the counterfactual (of teachers hired on merit) or to attribute the damaging education loss to specific patronage hires. Fourth, the huge numbers and administrative complexity of education systems mean that payrolls can be padded with phantom employees who are easier to hide. In Mexico, it took the government years to get control of the payroll and a full census of employment in education.

Clientelism can deeply infect education systems wherever politicians (and sometimes allied bureaucrats) gain control or influence over teacher careers, especially hiring, promotion, and transfers. Sometimes politicians control all three as appears to be the case in Indonesia where

predatory political and bureaucratic elites have for decades used the school system—and teacher management in particular—to accumulate resources, distribute patronage, mobilize political support, and exercise political control rather than to maximize educational performance and equity. (Rosser and Fahmi 2018, 72)

<sup>11</sup> On Mexico, Hecock (2014, 65). In Indonesia, “teachers can be effectively deployed during election campaigns to deliver turnout and votes due to their embeddedness in local social networks. Further, teaching jobs themselves are valuable patronage rewards (Golden 2003) or provide access to valuable rents (for example, some Indonesian teachers collect illegal school fees that finance political machines). In effect, teachers there act as organizational brokers in clientelistic machines” (Pierskalla and Sacks 2020, 1284). But see Toral (2020) on conditions where clientelism can improve education outcomes.

<sup>12</sup> In a similar vein, electoral systems more dependent on the personal vote have greater illiteracy, and increasing expenditure has no impact on illiteracy. On personal-vote rankings, success cases Ecuador, Chile, and Peru were lowest ranked; Brazil and Colombia medium; and non-reformed cases South Africa and Uruguay ranked high (Hicken and Simmons 2008, 116).

Clientelism plagues not only contemporary developing countries; in the United States in the early 20th century, “the spoils system frequently determined who won or lost teaching jobs” (Wirt and Kirst 2009, 9).<sup>13</sup>

As noted earlier, clientelism in Colombia pervaded the education system (Duarte 1998, 140–48; Tournier and Chimier 2019, 77). Decentralization in the 1990s meant the “municipalisation of clientelism in public education,” and “with a change of mayor, most municipal teachers were replaced” (Duarte 1998, 140). Clientelist politicians also sold positions and transfers (Lowden 2004, 353; Duarte 1998, 141). A teaching position in 1990s cost about a year and a half of an average teacher’s salary, transfers about a year’s salary (Duarte 2003, 128). Selling teaching positions was not a 20th-century invention; the practice was widespread in the United States in the late 19th century (Peterson 2010, 34–35). As in Colombia, local politicians, not union leaders as in Mexico and South Africa (next section), were making the sales.<sup>14</sup>

Even if reformers kick clientelists out in one moment, they (or other ambitious politicians) can, zombie-like, return later whenever an opportunity opens up (as in the Rio de Janeiro story in chapter 7). By conventional wisdom, clientelism overall is not easy to rub out and usually succumbs only to pressure from growing middle classes at higher levels of development (Stokes et al. 2013; Weitz-Shapiro 2012). Yet, in Latin America, the exit of middle-class families from public education attenuates this potential anti-clientelist pressure. For poorer countries without substantial middle classes, the price of meritocracy in education may be constant vigilance against clientelism. As discussed in chapter 5 on Colombia and Peru, another factor that attenuated clientelist predation on the education system was a general weakening of the party system, along with high turnover in the legislature, which meant fewer politicians could sustain careers through clientelism.

<sup>13</sup> In India, the clientelism rampant in some states seems to work primarily through bureaucrats who control teacher transfers. Hiring is managed through examination and placement is determined centrally, meaning presumably that many teachers want transfers as soon as they are hired (Aslam et al. 2016). The influence of politicians over teachers’ requests for transfers allows them to reward teachers who helped them politically (Béteille 2009; Béteille et al. 2017, 263).

<sup>14</sup> Incentives to monetize control over teacher careers suggests that funds were more useful (and available immediately) than having loyal supporters on the public payroll. The problem of political appointment of teachers, or the sale of these positions, is not just that people of unknown competence get hired. Rather people with the least talent, who have the fewest alternative career options, have incentives to pay the highest price, in money and/or political work for the appointing patron. And candidates who pay the most are less likely to feel an obligation to invest much in teaching.

## VI. Education as Political Fodder II: Political Machine Unions

Some leaders of teacher unions also seek to use education resources and personnel for their own ends. Among developing countries, unions in Latin America have long been considered among the best organized.<sup>15</sup> Salaries are a perennial concern, but the focus here is on union opposition to reforming teacher careers.<sup>16</sup> For many scholars, teacher unions are universally opposed to career reform and the main obstacle in most countries (Grindle 2004; Bruns and Luque 2015; López 2008); “Teachers’ unions have opposed pay for performance incentives all around the world” (Stein 2005, 229).

The opposition of teacher unions to reform is a central theme in scholarship on education in the United States, due in part to decades of Terry Moe’s research (Moe 2011, 2017). Moe argues that teacher unions are vested interests that are “by far the most powerful groups in the American politics of education. No other groups are even in the same ballpark” (Moe 2011, 8). Moe’s more recent work on Europe and New Orleans emphasizes veto points, or rather their absence, to explain successful education reform (Moe 2019; Moe and Wiborg 2017a). Some polities offer few veto points, as in Britain, and hence government reformers can prevail over unions. Others like the United States are rife with veto points, so union rent-seeking only stops where shocks like Hurricane Katrina happen.

The major limitations of this perspective are, first, the universalizing point of departure that all teacher unions are the same, which they are manifestly not in Latin America. Second, Moe argues that unions just pursue member interests; leaders “must be centrally concerned with pleasing their members” (Moe 2011, 20). That should be a hypothesis rather than an assumption, as union leaders often have separate interests (retaining their political power) and the ability to pursue them at member expense. For example, in one Mexican poll, 74% of teachers felt their union leader did not represent them (Ornelas 2018a, 147).

An alternative conceptualization (developed more fully in Schneider 2022) divides unions into two ideal types: interest groups and political machines. The organizations may both be called teacher unions, but in politics they are different animals. In political machines, the union leadership has interests of its own independent of members, and career reforms—especially meritocratic

<sup>15</sup> “By global standards, teachers’ unions in Latin America . . . have been considered especially strong” (Bruns and Luque 2015, 287). In Latin America, “the power of unions is unparalleled” (Gomendio and Wert 2023, xvi).

<sup>16</sup> On salary issues, see Mizala and Ñopo (2016), Grindle (2004), and Saavedra (2004).

hiring—are much more threatening to the interests of these leaders. The organizational root of machine unions lies in leaders' formal or informal influence over teacher careers. According to Aurelio Nuño, a former minister of education in Mexico, “they [the union] decided who would be hired, who would get promoted. They have it in writing. Getting promoted depended on how many times you had marched in the demonstrations” (Garfias 2018).<sup>17</sup> Interest-group unions lack any such influence.

Because leaders in machine unions have influence over careers, they can ask teachers to engage in politics for the candidates and parties the leaders choose. This leverage in turn allows union leaders to commit support to parties in return for more organizational resources (like full-time organizers put on the education payroll), policy influence, and appointments in the education bureaucracy. Machine unions are more likely to support a single party, whereas teachers in interest-group unions support a range of parties and candidates (details in part II).

In Mexico, the teacher union, SNTE (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación), was the quintessential political machine. SNTE was born with a range of organizational benefits, including compulsory membership and dues for all teachers and other workers in education. In addition, Mexican presidents assigned SNTE central responsibilities in politics, including fielding numerous candidates to run for elected office in the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) (Cook 1996).

Yet, what cemented SNTE's evolution into a political machine was its growing control over teacher careers—hiring, transfers, and promotions. Thus, teachers needed the support of union leaders and so would heed their calls to join strikes, demonstrations, rallies, and do campaign legwork. According to one long-serving president of SNTE, “teachers are the plumbers of the electoral/political system” (Ornelas 2012, 426). Although not so fully developed, UNE in Ecuador was also a machine union, and Fecode (Federación Colombiana de Educadores) trended briefly toward a machine. Outside Latin America, Sadtu in South Africa was another well-developed example of a machine union (chapter 6).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> According to Hecock (2014, 78), “There is clearly a sense that teachers earn their perks, in merit pay and otherwise, by pleasing the union leadership. In interviews, teachers reported that it is much more advantageous professionally to skip class to attend a protest at the behest of the union than it is to attend a training workshop.” In another view, “the greatest source of union [SNTE] power lies in being able to control who works and who is dismissed” (Elizondo 2009, 187). See also Chambers-Ju and Finger (2017).

<sup>18</sup> Some teacher unions in India would also qualify as parts of a political machine, though the politicized relations differ from those in Latin America. In Uttar Pradesh, teachers accounted for 12–23% of members of the upper legislative house (well above the constitutionally mandated 8%)

**Table 2.1 Reforms to Teacher Careers and Union-Government Relations**

	<i>Type of union</i>	<i>Government strategy</i>	<i>Reform outcome</i>
Colombia (2002–)	Interest group (Fecode)	Bypass union, then negotiate	Partially implemented
Ecuador (2007–)	Machine (UNE)	Destroy union	Implemented
Peru (2007–)	Interest group (Sutep)	Unilateral	Partially implemented
Mexico (2013–18)	Machine (SNTE)	Unilateral	Overtuned
Chile (2016–)	Interest group (Colegio de Profesores)	Negotiation	Implemented

*Source:* Chapters in part II and Schneider (2022). Unilateral means the government acts mostly alone without negotiating with unions.

The Colegio de Profesores in Chile offers a counterexample of an interest-group union. Interest-group unions lack electoral clout and rarely place members in education ministries. Crucially, they lack influence over teacher careers. Union leaders may occasionally wind up in government or Congress, but it is not systemic as it is with machine unions. Interest-group unions still engage in politics, mostly on the left, but are usually riven by factions supporting different parties, thus limiting the value of union endorsements to candidates and parties.

The distinction between machines and interest groups is crucial to explaining union engagement with reforms to teacher careers (table 2.1). Given the dependence of machine unions on their control of personnel decisions, meritocratic career reforms pose a direct and existential threat. Reformers in Mexico and Ecuador—with the strongest machines in the region—frontally attacked the unions, with success in Ecuador but not Mexico where reforms were overturned by a new president supported by the unions. Reformers in these two countries made explicit reference to the goal of state (re)building or recovery of state control over education. Interest-group unions in contrast are not as threatened by career reforms and often willing to negotiate on the details

and 8% of the lower house (Kingdon and Muzammil 2013). Teachers are highly unionized (85% of public and private-aided teachers) and call on unions and politicians to intervene on their behalf to block disciplinary actions and help with transfers and promotions. Politicians in turn count on teacher votes and help at the polling places they run. However, none of the three main national unions are closely affiliated with one political party (Beteille et al., 2017, 250).

and implementation of reforms, as they have in Colombia, Chile, Brazil, and to a lesser extent Peru.<sup>19</sup>

In sum, in this meso-level view of stakeholders in education, the distributional struggle is not between classes or groups in society but rather between clientelist politicians and teacher unions (sometimes allied) on one side and the government and other stakeholders on the other. Reforming teacher careers is a zero-sum attack on the rent-seeking and resources of leaders of machine unions and clientelist politicians who make these reform politics highly contentious, contingent, difficult to sustain, and often dependent on counterforces like technocrats, civil society, and policy networks.

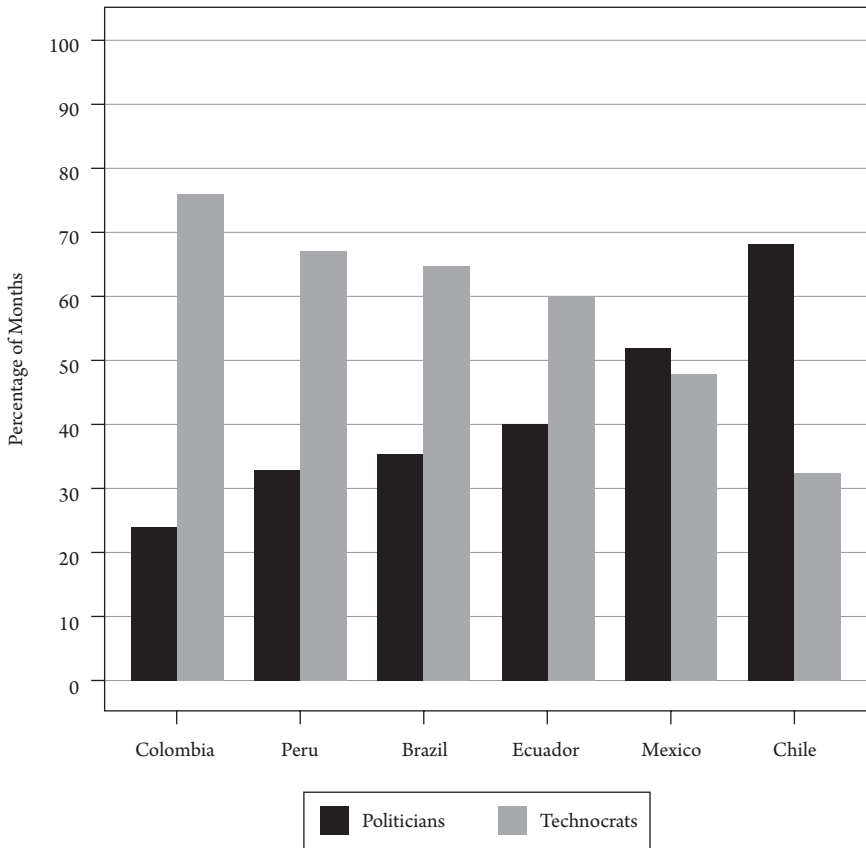
## VII. Micro Drivers: Technocracy

In contexts where broad forces like political parties or coalitions of the poor and middle classes are not animating education politics—emptying the policy space—political analyses often privilege small groups of elite actors—numbering in dozens—like policy entrepreneurs, technocrats, and policy networks. The latter two were sometimes pivotal in education reform in Latin America; policy entrepreneurs not so much.

Grindle (2004), one of the most cited references in comparative theorizing, highlights the importance of “reform mongers, policy entrepreneurs, heroes, or champions” (2004, 58) while emphasizing that “parents’ organizations, business groups, or pro-education civic alliances were conspicuously absent from these stories of reform” (2004, 198). For Grindle and many others, policy entrepreneurs are mostly conceived of as top government officials willing to stand up to reform opponents and pay the political costs.<sup>20</sup> The policy stories in part II cover the impressive exploits of a number of education champions like Jaime Saavedra in Peru or Wilson Risolia in the state of Rio de Janeiro. However, policy entrepreneurs may get reforms enacted but not implemented without longer term backing by some mix of support from parties, civil society, technocrats, policy networks, and/or teachers and their unions.

<sup>19</sup> Consultation with unions has generally been scarce in decades of reforms in Latin America (Grindle 2004, 134; Vaillant 2008, 58).

<sup>20</sup> Jesse Rhodes provides a more conceptually elaborated view of what he calls political entrepreneurs who, at least in the United States, are more likely to be policy experts in civil society. Among other things, these entrepreneurs shift policy debate by recombining problems and solutions, create organizations, craft new coalitions, and take advantage of moments of policy uncertainty (2012, 8–12). Similar sorts of political entrepreneurs were not common in the cases discussed in part II.



*Figure 2.4* Share of Time Ministry of Education Occupied by Politicians and Technocrats, 2000–2020 *Source:* Percentage of months served by politicians and technocrats as ministers of education. See online Appendix B.

In cases with a string of nonpolitical appointees, it is more appropriate to think of technocracy rather than serial policy entrepreneurs. Countries vary in the share of ministers of education over the past several decades who were politicians and technocrats (appointees without prior electoral careers) (figure 2.4).<sup>21</sup> Peru and Colombia—two top-down cases—had the largest proportion of technocratic ministers. At a national level, Brazil also relied heavily on technocrats, though more partisan technocrats.<sup>22</sup> Ecuador tended toward more

<sup>21</sup> The technocrats are identified by their lack of previous political careers not by common training; some had advanced training in education, while others were economists or had long experience in education administration.

<sup>22</sup> In Brazil, the two ministers with the longest tenure—Paulo Renato de Souza (96 months) and Fernando Haddad (78 months)—are, in this figure, classified as technocrats. However, both had

of a balance between technocrats and politicians. Chile, famed for professional bureaucracy overall, had, ironically, mostly politician ministers.

The study of technocracy has a long history in Latin America, especially on Chile and Mexico (Centeno and Silva 1999; Montecinos and Markoff 2009). This research emphasized the rise to power in the 1980s of US-trained economists in major economic agencies (Centeno 1995; Silva 2008). More recently, and well aligned with figure 2.4, Eduardo Dargent's (2015) work on Peru and Colombia found robust technocracies not only in the economic sphere but also in healthcare agencies.

In education, Colombia and Peru were the cases where technocracy most contributed to sustaining career reforms.<sup>23</sup> What explains the power of these technocracies? For most analyses, expertise and advanced graduate training are the main sources of technocrat power (Dargent 2015; Centeno and Silva 1999). This argument might hold for top economic positions like heads of central banks.<sup>24</sup> However, it is less convincing for education where many reforms are fairly obvious—like nonpolitical, meritocratic hiring—and do not require postgraduate degrees to design; “it is not rocket science” as one former minister put it (interview Jaime Saavedra, 5 March 2021).

For economics and healthcare, Dargent (2015, 6–8) argues that four factors help technocrats prevail: (1) high cost to the incumbent president of poor policy performance; (2) plural and balanced constellations of stakeholders; (3) policy complexity; and (4) expert consensus.<sup>25</sup> Except for expert consensus, the other factors were not relevant in education. Poor policy performance in recent decades has had few political costs (making education vulnerable to clientelism as discussed earlier). Stakeholders were unbalanced with teacher unions and clientelist politicians having inordinate influence. Education policy is administratively complex to implement, but, as noted, less so to design. The last factor, expert consensus, did matter in education policy in countries like Chile with well-developed policy networks and countries like Peru and Colombia with a succession of like-minded technocratic ministers.

important roles in their parties before being appointed and went on to electoral careers. Reclassifying them as politicians would tip the proportion heavily toward politician.

<sup>23</sup> Stein (2005, 225) also emphasizes the importance of technocracy in earlier reform politics: a “modernizing and sometimes technocratic team at key ministries, often the ministry of education or the ministry of planning, has always initiated the reforms.” And “the main policy game played in Latin America over the past 15 years has had two main actors: the unions and the executive.”

<sup>24</sup> Appointing technocrats to economic ministries also sends important signals to calm investors (Schneider 1998 and Alexiadou et al. 2022).

<sup>25</sup> For West Europe, Busemeyer et al. (2020, 9) argue that state bureaucrats have more influence when interest groups are “divided.”

Overall, technocracy in education depended less on positive, empowering features of expert bureaucrats and more on the emptiness of the policy space. In Peru and Colombia, the weakness or relative absence of political parties further emptied the space (figure 2.2). Ephemeral parties, especially in Peru, meant that presidents did not have party cadres to call on to staff executive positions (Muñoz and Baraybar 2021, 5). It also meant that politicians did not have time to develop clientelist electoral strategies using education resources: “without organized political parties or an enduring system of electoral competition, politics is constantly in flux. And because of that, long-lasting forms of clientelism are difficult to maintain” (Muñoz and Baraybar 2021, 4). Thus, technocracy prevailed by default or by vacuum.<sup>26</sup>

## VIII. Micro Shapers: Civil Society and Policy Networks

Policy networks and civil society (understood as organized non-governmental groups, only in education) are not coterminous, but a substantial civil society is necessary (though not sufficient) to sustain an impactful policy network. They are not coterminous because policy networks also include people in government and because policy networks are comprised of elites and include only a small minority of all people working in NGOs, usually dozens like technocrats (as in figure 1.2). As nonstate actors, both civil society and policy networks (except government members) are part of bottom-up pressure for reform (though members are often from the socioeconomic elite). Over time, an overlap can develop between leaders in civil society and technocracy as many nonpolitical appointees to top ministry positions come from previous positions in civil society and technocrats return to NGOs (the revolving door in education). Civil society and policy networks are micro factors because of the small numbers of people and shapers and because they do not instigate reforms but rather influence their course once begun (with some exceptions in Brazil).

As noted in chapter 1, civil society in the education space comprises two distinct groups—NGOs and interest groups. Interest groups include teacher unions, associations of private school owners (especially powerful in Chile), and religious groups, especially the Catholic Church. NGO is then the residual category of all other CSOs that are not interest groups, including think tanks,

<sup>26</sup> No reelection rules in a no-party system like Peru’s also means that single-term presidents without worries about reelection are free to appoint nonpolitical ministers. Sutep supported Ollanta Humala’s election in 2011, but Humala did not need their support for reelection and appointed technocrats against their wishes. Over a decade later, Sutep’s website still accused him of betrayal.

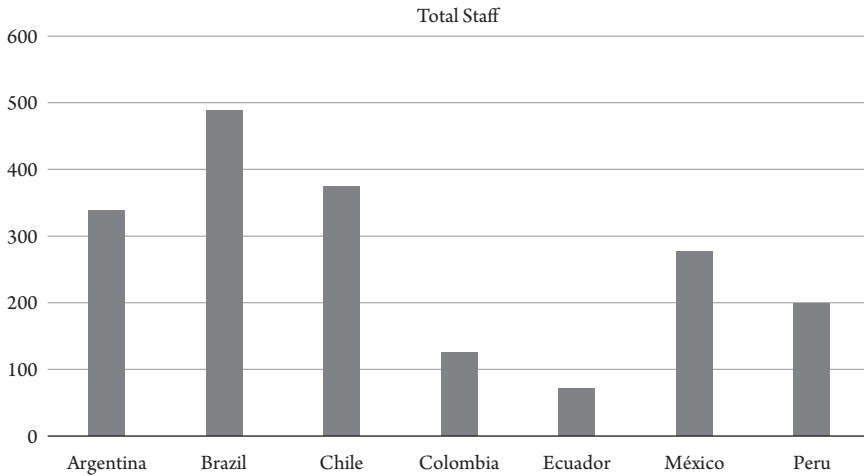


Figure 2.5 Total Staff in Education NGOs, 2021

foundations, and research institutes. These NGOs may favor some interests over others, but they do not directly represent them. NGOs influence education policy in several ways, including lobbying, networking, funding studies and staffing, and appearing in the media to shape debate on particular policy issues.

One comparative metric of the vibrancy of, and investment in, civil society is the number of staff in education NGOs (figure 2.5).<sup>27</sup> It is not enough to just count the number of organizations in the education space, because some, like the Lemann Foundation in Brazil or Mexicanos Primero, dwarf the others. A better metric is the number of staff, and since the main expense of most organizations is personnel, this is also a good proxy for spending and investment. Much of the financial support for these CSOs comes from business or wealthy families, providing some businesses with indirect policy influence.<sup>28</sup>

In absolute numbers, Brazil is the regional leader, followed by Chile, Argentina, and Mexico. Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru have, by this staff metric, a smaller civil society engaged in education. In per capita terms, Chile way outdistances the rest of the region, but absolute numbers are more relevant as civil society and policy networks have but one national policy space to engage.<sup>29</sup> This rough

<sup>27</sup> These numbers were collected through exhaustive internet searches for organizations related to education. Not all websites reported staff numbers, so these figures should be taken as preliminary. See Appendix E.

<sup>28</sup> The United States is the most extreme case of philanthropy politics with huge education foundations created by Gates, Walton, Broad, Zuckerberg, and other billionaire families (Hess and Henig 2015; Reckhow and Tompkins-Stange 2015; Reckhow 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Per capita calculations are less revealing. Civil society appears stronger in small countries like Ecuador where CSOs had limited policy impact and minute in large countries like Brazil and Mexico

gauge of CSOs in the education field comports mostly with broader measures of civil society. In V-Dem data, Brazil and Chile (Argentina and Uruguay) have the strongest civil societies while Colombia, Mexico, Ecuador, and Peru rank medium (Altman and Castiglioni 2020, 773).<sup>30</sup>

In the empirical chapters, civil society was most developed, active, and influential in Brazil and Chile. In Brazil, civil society in education emerged mostly in São Paulo and was well coordinated through an umbrella association, Todos Pela Educação, TPE, and sometimes led by the largest of them, the Lemann Foundation. NGOs from São Paulo had deep impacts in various state-level reforms and generated and sustained the movement to reform the national curriculum (chapter 7). This curriculum movement in Brazil best showcases the power of civil society.<sup>31</sup> In Chile, civil society was especially organized and active during the process of career reforms in 2014–2016 when, again from the bottom up, a group of 20 main CSOs, including the teacher union, came together to hold several months of meetings and consultations in order to precisely generate and document consensus elements in the career reform.

Looser policy networks also sometimes shaped reform outcomes (Au and Ferrare 2015). Policy networks include technocrats in government but also dozens of senior experts in universities, research centers, think tanks, foundations, and other NGOs. As noted in chapter 1 (figure 1.2), policy networks do not include interest group leaders and draw more on the research side of civil society. These networks do not have power resources—like lobbying clout or voting blocs—to get reforms going, but they can have significant impact on how reforms evolve.<sup>32</sup> First, if reformers have been appointed to top government positions

were CSOs had much greater impact. CSOs have one national media market, one Congress, etc., so absolute numbers are a better gauge.

<sup>30</sup> Federalism could be expected to increase incentives for more investment in civil society, but as cases of state-level reform in Brazil show, the influence of civil society still came from nationally active CSOs.

<sup>31</sup> Civil society in Brazil has also been heavily involved in healthcare, both general (with the *sanitarista* movement) and in specific areas like HIV/AIDS (Rich 2019). However, CSOs in health have large memberships, including professional associations, and bring social movement pressures to bear (Gibson 2018), whereas NGOs in education are narrower non-membership organizations backed by small numbers of wealthy business people.

<sup>32</sup> In another education example, Finger (2017) finds that state-level reform efforts in the United States were more likely to succeed if they had strong connections to, and support from, out-of-state reform advocates. The general literature on policy networks is diffuse. For classic treatments and reviews, see Borzel (1998) and Rhodes (1997). For a recent application to education reform in India, see Ball (2016). Bruce Fuller found networks crucial to education politics in Los Angeles, especially “the emerging network of African American and (mostly) Latina leaders by the 1990s [that] would ally with civil rights litigators, reform-minded nonprofits, dissonant teachers, and well-heeled Democratic donors” (2022, 5). This network differs from those in Latin America because it does not include bureaucrats and has power resources beyond expertise and consensus.

(some without prior experience in education policy), members of the network can help fill in details on specific reform policies. Second, policy networks have access to mountains of data and information that can be mobilized to inform policy debates and controversies. Third, frequent interaction among network members over long periods helps generate consensus on reforms, and this consensus contributes to reform continuity when governments and ministry personnel change. As with technocracy, unity across the broader policy network enhances influence (Dargent 2015).

In interviews, policy participants often confirmed the importance of policy networks. In Latin America, Chile had the most developed network with 40–50 core members, according to a prominent participant (Mizala and Schneider 2020). All countries have faculty from teacher training programs, but few have social science research centers and institutes dedicated exclusively to education like CIAE and CIDE in Chile or PIPE in Mexico.<sup>33</sup> These research centers are committed to policy relevance in addition to producing sound research. Other participants come from think tanks, NGOs, and foundations in civil society. Governments too can help support and promote policy networks by creating commissions to analyze problems and make recommendations. Chile was a regional leader in the number and impact of education commissions.

## IX. Conclusions: Most but Not All

In sum, at a micro level of dozens of people involved in designing and implementing reforms, three concepts clarify the types of agents and their sources of influence: technocrats, civil society, and policy networks. All three help depoliticize policy, generate consensus, and bolster reform continuity. Technocrats may step into a relatively empty (especially of politicians and parties) policy space and reflect presidents' political strategies for depoliticizing education. Similarly, policy networks generate consensus that aids continuity. Civil society can bring more material resources and lobbying, as well as generate coverage and debate in the media to raise the salience of education.

This chapter covered a lot of recent theorizing on education politics, but not all. For example, a large literature analyzes the spread of testing, quantification, accountability mechanisms, and the related global reach of PISA and the education wing of the OECD that runs it (Ydesen 2019; Mundy et al. 2016).

<sup>33</sup> CIAE—Centro de Investigación Avanzada en Educación, CIDE—Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Educación, PIPE—Programa Interdisciplinario sobre Política y Prácticas Educativas.

Reformers in Latin America were clearly linked to these shifts in ideas and practices, and many performance metrics and teacher rewards are not possible without the prior expansion of testing and the bureaucratic capacity to collect and analyze it. This focus would be crucial for understanding why reformers focused on teacher careers and not on other dimensions (though many reforms did that as well). However, the focus here is less on explaining where reforms came from and more how they fared once adopted.<sup>34</sup>

This chapter's review also did not engage a growing interest in street-level bureaucrats (Pepinsky et al. 2017), though the concluding chapter returns to it. Teachers are certainly front-line workers, and their huge numbers raise similar issues of how to change the behavior of masses of public employees. However, the focus here is on the reform process and the politics of it—and thus a relatively small number of central actors—rather than on implementation and reform effects at a dispersed mass level.

Empirically in part II, macro forces like democracy, social class, and business, mattered less, so reform in Latin America depended more on meso- and micro-level factors like clientelist politicians, teacher unions, technocrats, and policy networks. This shift in explanatory focus means that much of the well-developed and researched theories (especially in Europe) on electoral politics, partisan alignment, and skill regimes do not get much traction in explaining reform in Latin America (and probably in other middle-income countries as well). The exceptional bottom-up cases of Chile and to a lesser extent Ecuador do initially fit a general PRT approach, but technocracy, teacher unions, and policy networks also shaped reform evolution. Left parties and PRT were also crucial in the narrower area of VTE. And VoC perspectives—especially the lack of business demand for skills—helps explain the overall underperformance of education systems but not their reform.

As this chapter moved from macro to meso to micro, it also progressed from areas of more existing data and research to areas of less prior work. Familiar data exist for measures of democracy, education spending, and education quality (at least as gauged by international tests). Although not as plentiful, especially for purposes of cross-national comparison, extensive data and scholarship exist on education, class, inequality, and distribution. Where data and research are scarce is on the core actors in Latin America, especially business, teacher unions, clientelist politicians, technocracy, civil society, and policy networks. In areas

<sup>34</sup> For an example of fuller arguments on how ideas drove accountability reforms in the United States, see Mehta (2013a, 2013b).

of existing agreement on the blocking role of unions or the absence of business in education politics (Grindle 2004; Kaufman and Nelson 2004a), little follow up research delves deeper into the causes of union opposition or the roots of business indifference. These data are of course much more costly to get, but advances in our understanding of education politics depends on that investment. Part II turns to that empirical task.

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## PART II

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# REFORM CASES

Reforms in Chile followed the electoral route. Massive student demonstrations, especially after 2011, prompted the center-left coalition to adopt education as the top campaign priority. Once elected, the government moved quickly to implement a range of reforms including a make-over of teacher careers. Civil society and the teacher union were also important in shaping the reform.

Ecuador suffered a different education crisis, but by 2006, national elections focused on a referendum for education reform. Subsequent governments proceeded to implement thorough career reforms, but without input from civil society and especially the teacher union, which the government destroyed.

Reforms to teacher careers in Peru and Colombia were more gradual, partial, and technocratic without electoral salience or engagement by civil society.

Mexico, the state of Rio de Janeiro, and South Africa were cases with ambitious reforms—also without electoral or civil society support—that subsequent governments with union support overturned.



# Bottom-Up Reform in Chile

## *Electoral Mobilization, Policy Networks, and Civil Society*

The more flexibility there is in the school system, the stronger public policy needs to be. . . . Only through a concerted effort by central and local education authorities will school choice benefit . . . all students.

—Andreas Schleicher (OECD 2017, 3)

## I. Introduction

Chile is the regional bellwether both in process (many years of successive reforms to teacher careers [1990s to 2010s]) and in outcomes—it has the best test scores on international assessments.<sup>1</sup> Reformers in other countries traveled to Chile or invited Chilean consultants to advise them. Much could be, and has been, written on the sequence of piecemeal career reforms through 2015—the shift to civil service statute in 1991, collective incentives in 1996, and voluntary individual-level performance promotions in the early 2000s (Mizala and Schneider 2014a; Stein 2005).

This chapter instead focuses on the 2016 reforms because they were so thoroughgoing and because they brought the politics of career reform into high relief. The *Política Nacional Docente* (PND, National Teacher Policy) of 2016 totally revamped teacher careers.<sup>2</sup> The PND law covered all aspects of a lifetime career from initial teacher preparation to recruitment and induction, and then through five major steps (three required and two voluntary) on a comprehensive career ladder that culminates with the title of master teacher. The annual cost of the PND was projected to be enormous, nearly 1% of GDP. The process of enacting this reform was contentious and dramatic, but it ultimately led

<sup>1</sup> This chapter draws on Mizala and Schneider (2020) and several other articles co-authored with Alejandra Mizala. See also Ávalos and Bellei (2019).

<sup>2</sup> The final law was called *Sistema de Desarrollo Profesional Docente* (System for Professional Teacher Development). I use the simpler acronym PND throughout the chapter.

to a compromise law that both government reformers and opponents like the teacher union supported. The bill passed Congress in 2016 with most articles approved unanimously, and implementation moved ahead apace.

How were reformers able to get such a sweeping reform enacted? The core argument is that three main groups had major influence, sequentially over time and in descending order of impact: (1) poor and middle-class voters, (2) policy networks in education, and (3) civil society, especially the teacher union, *Colegio de Profesores* (hereafter *Colegio*). The voters provided a resounding but inchoate mandate for change, the policy network added specifics on the main alterations to teacher careers, and the *Colegio* and other NGOs tweaked some final adjustments. Compared to reform politics elsewhere, several distinctive features of the process in Chile stand out: widespread electoral mobilization (Ecuador is the only comparable case), the most developed policy network, and negotiations with teacher unions rather than more unilateral policy imposition elsewhere.

The absence of two opponents—clientelist politicians and machine unions, prominent in other cases but not in Chile—smoothed the path of reform. Chile's public administration was one of the most professionalized in Latin America (Stein 2005), which reduced opportunities for clientelism, and Chile's parties were more programmatic (Luna and Mardones 2016). Education ministers tended to be more political and less technocratic than in Peru, Colombia, and Brazil (figure 2.4), but, coming from programmatic parties, these appointees did not bring a clientelist threat to the Ministry of Education (aka *Mineduc*). And, the teacher union, *Colegio*, was an interest-group type of union without influence over hiring—as in Ecuador and Mexico—and therefore had less to lose from career reform and more to gain from negotiating.

Few if any countries have experienced longer, deeper, broader political tumult over education than did Chile in the 2000s and 2010s: strikes, school occupations, electoral campaigns, street demonstrations, and intense public debate and media scrutiny. Beginning in 2006, demonstrations by secondary students gave new urgency to problems of quality and equity of Chilean education. In 2011, university students and allied movements (secondary students, the teacher union, and others) took to the streets in scores of huge marches and demonstrations (Cummings, Mizala, and Schneider 2023; Donoso 2013).<sup>3</sup> These waves of protests over education—not seen anywhere else in Latin America—gave reforms their initial bottom-up route.

<sup>3</sup> Student demands covered a wide range of issues, including free public education, quality education across all tiers of the system, an end to profits in private schools and universities, and a more affordable and accessible university system.

These demonstrations—with widespread support from public opinion—ratcheted up the salience of education in politics and fed into the electoral campaigns for president in 2013, with candidate Michele Bachelet of the Nueva Mayoría (New Majority) coalition promising radical changes at all levels of education. Bachelet was elected with solid majorities in both houses of Congress and an imposing mandate for deep education reforms (Bunker 2014; Altman and Toro 2015).

This electoral story fits power resource theories (PRT) discussed in chapter 2 where poorer voters support redistribution and more generous social programs (Ansell 2010; Huber and Stephens 2012). In Chile, the center-left coalition supporting Bachelet had a redistributive program and drew most of its votes from the poorer half of the electorate (UDP 2013; Navia and Soto Castro 2015).<sup>4</sup> Reforms of teaching careers covered around 90% of enrollments (fully private schools were not affected), and so benefited all but the richest families. The accompanying Inclusion Law added more redistributive policies in education. Although they fit the distributional aspects of the reforms, bottom-up, class models do not explain the focus on teacher careers nor the content of the reforms.

To get at that content, the analysis turns to policy networks where experts in civil society (academia, think tanks, and other NGOs) and government (with close, long-term connections among them) influence policy specifics by virtue of their expertise, information, and consensus on technical issues (Bruns and Schneider 2016; Kaufman and Nelson 2004a). Chile has a visible and well-connected policy network of 40–50 experts (Mizala and Schneider 2020) who often advise or take jobs in the Ministry of Education. This policy network had debated teacher careers and policy proposals for many years before the 2016 PND. In response to the 2006 demonstrations, the government created the first of several commissions and panels (including representatives from civil society and policy experts) to make recommendations on reforming the education system including teacher careers. In 2010, the Piñera government convened another expert panel. Although split along right-left partisan sympathies, members of the policy network shared a rough consensus on the core elements of the PND: attract better candidates to teaching careers, improve their university preparation, and provide clear progression through steps in a career based on regular evaluation (interview Nicolás Eyzaguirre, 29 January 2020).

Finally, civil society added some finishing touches in two ways. First, 20 civil society organizations (CSOs) convened a national dialogue that supported the

<sup>4</sup> In their statistical analysis, socioeconomic levels are much better predictors of votes in the 2009 and 2013 elections than before (Navia and Soto 2015).

policy consensus but pushed further specific issues like more non-teaching, preparation hours. Second, unlike reforms elsewhere in Latin America, final passage of the PND came through negotiation and compromise with the Colegio, the teacher union (Rivas 2015).<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, most other reforms to teacher careers—especially those focused on pay for performance—were either enacted over union opposition or blocked by unions, or both as reforms get enacted but are later scuttled (as in Mexico or the state of Rio de Janeiro the 2010s, see chapter 6).

Section II summarizes the main features of the reform. Section III lays out the cast of characters that were most active in reform politics. Section IV traces the process of reform over the course of 2015.

## II. Summary of the National Teacher Policy

Since the 1990s, center-left Concertación governments had introduced first collective and then individual evaluations and bonuses. Enacted in 1996, the first collective incentive was SNED (Sistema Nacional de Evaluación del Desempeño de los Establecimientos Educativos) that gave bonuses to high-performing public and private-voucher schools (Mizala and Romaguera 2004; Stein 2005, 236–40). In the 2000s, governments introduced additional individual incentives that further differentiated salaries (AEP, Asignación de Excelencia Pedagógica) though only in municipal schools.

The PND in 2016 was a much more ambitious and comprehensive reform. It covered all preschool and K-12 teachers in schools (municipal and private-voucher) that received government funding or 92% of enrollments (44% municipal and 47% private-voucher).<sup>6</sup> The PND constituted more centralization and government intervention into the private-voucher sector that generated a lot of push back. More specifically, the PND included higher entrance requirements and new accreditation standards for teacher preparation programs (*pedagogía* in Chile) and more mentoring and professional development. The career ladder had three required steps and two further voluntary rungs and provided for increased salaries and professional opportunities at each level. To climb through the career levels, teachers had to demonstrate pedagogical skills (measured through a portfolio assessment with various components including lesson

<sup>5</sup> The Colegio is the only large teacher union in Chile. For more background, see Murillo (2002), Crouch (2005), and Assaél and Inzunza (2008).

<sup>6</sup> In 2015, Chile had three types of schools: private (no government support, 8% of enrollments), private-voucher (private with government financing, 56% of enrollments), and municipal (public with government financing, 36% of enrollments). However, there were proportionally more teachers in municipal schools (44%) and private schools (9%) compared to private-voucher schools (47% of teachers) (Mineduc 2016).

planning and a classroom video) and disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge (measured through written tests) (details in Ávalos and Bellei 2019, 59–60).

The law set maximum time limits for teachers to progress through the first three obligatory steps on the career ladder. Teachers who did not pass in the maximum time could no longer teach in publicly funded schools. As discussed in section V, these time limits and associated sanctions for missing them were contentious issues in negotiations with the Colegio. The PND also increased non-teaching preparation time from 25 to 35% of the work week (though 35% is still on the low end in the OECD [OECD 2014, 480]). Non-teaching hours were high priorities for teachers (CPP 2015, 41) and became a special point of contention in the last phases of negotiating the PND.

The career reform was costly, and finding funds to pay for it raised further political challenges. The PND raised starting salaries by a third, and after 16 years teachers at the highest level could earn more than 50% over the previous maximum salary. These and other costs were expensive—estimated at .9% of GDP and 3.8% of total public spending (Mineduc 2015)—and the Bachelet government in 2015 raised taxes by a massive 3% of GDP to pay for the PND and other ambitious education reforms (Altman and Toro 2015).

In comparative terms, the career ladder with evaluations and salary incentives was similar to those in Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. In these other cases, however, a crucial and immediately impactful component of career reform was to depoliticize initial hiring, cutting out influence by machine unions, clientelist politicians, or both. Chile in contrast already had long-standing meritocratic procedures for hiring.

### III. Key Stakeholders in Policy Debates

Over the course of 2015, debates over the career reform were intense.<sup>7</sup> Political parties and CSOs participated, especially the teacher union, but also other foundations, think tanks, research centers, and NGOs. Yet, despite high levels of organization (Schneider 2004), traditional business associations shied away from participating. Unlike all but a handful of other education systems, well over half of enrollments were in privately owned schools, and the well-organized private-voucher schools in particular constitute a distinctive feature in Chile's political landscape (Mizala and Schneider 2014b).

<sup>7</sup> Mizala and Schneider (2020) and Cummings, Mizala, and Schneider (2023) assess the number of times each group appeared in the media in 2015 to gauge their interest and investment in public debate.

The main driver of the reform was the executive branch, and education reform was high on the agenda. To coordinate education policies, Bachelet appointed Nicolás Eyzaguirre (former finance minister 2000–2006) to Mineduc. Eyzaguirre wasted no time. In his first year, 2014, he got the very controversial Inclusion Law (banning profits, student selection, and fees in private-voucher schools) through Congress and sent a bill on the PND to Congress in 2015. Both Eyzaguirre and Bachelet were constantly in the press and very invested in supporting education reforms.

Among interest groups, one of the most well organized and active groups was the Colegio. Of the roughly 100,000 teachers in municipal schools (44% of all teachers), around half belonged to the Colegio.<sup>8</sup> Although the Colegio had proportionally fewer members than teacher unions in much of the rest of the world (Schneider 2022), it had significant organizational capacity. The Colegio could mobilize members for street demonstrations, and their strikes shut down almost all municipal schools as they did for 57 days in 2015. The Colegio's preferences on the PND were fairly predictable: more preparation time (non-teaching hours), union participation in designing evaluation instruments, higher starting salaries, and retirement bonuses. However, and in contrast to many other teacher unions, the Colegio accepted the principle of evaluation and had cooperated since the early 2000s with teacher evaluations in municipal schools (Mizala and Schneider 2014a), though they wanted to include other items in the evaluation and to reduce the number of evaluations included in the PND.

Compared with the rest of Latin America, civil society in Chile is relatively well organized and active in politics (figure 2.5) (Altman and Castiglioni 2020, 773). Most other countries have teacher unions, as well as some foundations and NGOs active in education. Where Chile differs is in its active student organizations, think tanks, and associations of private schools. As discussed in section V, representatives from many of these civil society groups, 20 associations in all, banded together to draft the Plan Maestro (Teacher Plan) proposal on teacher careers. Think tanks and research centers were also more developed in Chile than elsewhere in Latin America (Mendizabal and Sample 2009). In contrast, the parents associations had surprisingly little to say about reforming teacher careers, confirming in part the general pattern of weak mobilization of parents around quality reforms (Grindle 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Membership numbers are disputed. The Colegio website put total membership in 2017 over 100,000 (<http://www.colegiodeprofesores.cl/institucion/>, accessed 12 August 2017), but outside estimates put the total much lower. *El Mercurio* reported 52,000 (26 November 2016, p. 3). Wikipedia put paid up members at 65,000 [https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colegio\\_de\\_Profesores\\_de\\_Chile](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colegio_de_Profesores_de_Chile), which comports with figures given informally by staff at Colegio and Mineduc. Some portion of most of these estimates (perhaps in the 10–20,000 range) includes retired teachers.

While most countries in Latin America have lots of purely private schools (usually 10–30% of secondary enrollments), none has as many private schools with public funding (vouchers) (Larrañaga and Rodríguez 2014; Verger, Moschetti, and Fontdevila 2018). Private-voucher schools valued their autonomy highly. And, over the past decades of reforms to the education system, private-voucher and private schools became quite well organized. Both the Inclusion Law and PND were designed explicitly to regulate private-voucher schools and in fact prohibit core practices like selecting students or charging copayments. As expected, the opposition of these associations was strong and consistent (interviews with leaders of associations of private-voucher schools, see appendix A).

Since the 1990s, research on education in Chile has expanded dramatically. This expansion is partly the result of Chile's radical voucher reforms of the 1980s, which generated a lot of international interest, but more fundamentally due to the investment by researchers at universities and think tanks in Chile. Each new government since 1990 enacted significant education reforms that provided ample material for research and debate for what emerged as a vibrant group of researchers in the education policy network and a substantial group of well-established research centers, most of which were active in debates on PND.

Foundations were less visible in the press though they were important collective supporters of Plan Maestro. Among foundations, Educación 2020 appeared the most often in the press debating reform initiatives. Elige Educar (Choose Teaching) was more engaged with PND<sup>9</sup> because it was an NGO devoted to promoting the entry of talented young people into teaching careers.

Business was strangely absent during public debates on education. Some Chilean businesses may have channeled their views through foundations and think tanks, but major business associations were mostly mute. Nor did business participate in other less visible ways (none of the interviewees mentioned significant engagement by business). This relative silence was similar to the Andean pattern of business abstention (Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia). Business was more involved in Mexico and Brazil, as well as in the United States, though more through philanthropy than traditional business associations (Rhodes 2012; Bruns and Schneider 2016). A full explanation for the absence of Chilean business is beyond the scope of this chapter, but a plausible starting hypothesis noted in earlier chapters would be their relative lack of demand for more skilled workers due to their concentration in natural resources and other lower technology sectors.

Where were the technocrats and clientelist politicians who were key actors in other countries? In general, the political system ranked low on both the supply

<sup>9</sup> Elige Educar and Educación 2020 were less than a decade old in 2015 (founded in 2009 and 2008, respectively).

of, and demand for, clientelist resources. The Chilean bureaucracy ranked second highest (just behind Brazil) in Latin America for professionalism, meaning fewer jobs were available for political appointment (Stein 2005, 68–69). On the demand side, Chilean parties ranked high on programmatic orientation and party institutionalization and therefore depended less on clientelism (Stein 2005, 34–36; and chapter 8 this volume). What clientelist politicians there were, especially in UDI (Unión Demócrata Independiente), distributed privately funded material goods not government jobs.<sup>10</sup>

Technocrats have long held sway in economic ministries and agencies from the neoliberal Chicago boys under Pinochet to more heterodox technocrats in Concertación governments (Silva 2008). Not in education, however, where most ministers were politicians (figure 2.4). In comparative terms, the education policy space in Chile is less empty and populated by stronger civil society (especially student movements), electoral contention, and engagement by Congress, thus increasing incentives for presidents to appoint politicians and lessening the space for technocrats to move in. Nonetheless, lower levels in the ministry had many experts, technocrats, and members of the larger policy network.

In sum, the impetus for, as well as design of, education reform came from the executive, but Congress, political parties, interest groups, think tanks, foundations, and others in civil society and the policy networks were also intensely engaged in debating these reforms.<sup>11</sup> Business was conspicuous by its absence.

#### IV. Reform Unfolding: Electoral Mobilization and Policy Networks

As noted in the introduction, the short story is one that starts bottom-up with the strong electoral mandate for the Bachelet government to improve education quality that the policy network helped turn into a specific proposal on revamping teacher careers. Then, at the end of the policy process, civil society and the Colegio pressed politicians in Congress to tweak aspects of the final law but without altering the core features: more selective recruitment, improved training, career advancement by merit, and enhanced material and professional

<sup>10</sup> “Successful politicians tended to be those who were able to pay a household’s utility bill during the campaign period, to offer legal or medical assistance, or to distribute TV sets, food boxes, . . . or cakes for bingo parties” (Luna 2014, 215).

<sup>11</sup> Policy networks in Chile are well connected to international organizations like the OECD or multilateral development agencies like the IDB (InterAmerican Development Bank), but the international agencies themselves were not visible participants.

rewards (and applied to all teachers in both private-voucher and municipal schools).

Although the PND was the most comprehensive and far-reaching career reform ever, the reform process followed a path common to previous education reforms: the Ministry of Education designs the reform (consulting, along the way, Colegio and experts in the well-developed policy network), sends the bill to Congress, then negotiates with Congress and the Colegio, and incorporates some revised compromise positions. When the Colegio and Mineduc sign off on this revised reform, Congress then moves quickly to approve it, usually by large majorities. Following this pattern, prior governments enacted a series of reforms through the 1990s and 2000s that introduced various forms of teacher evaluations and performance pay (Mizala and Schneider 2014a; Avalos and Assaél 2006). Thus, going into 2015, stakeholders knew there were precedents for significant reform and for negotiated compromises. Although the PND followed a similar route, the government by 2015 had more at stake.

Understanding the priority and urgency the Bachelet government gave to education reform requires backtracking to consider the student protests that dogged her predecessor and fed into the electoral campaign of Bachelet and the Nueva Mayoría. In 2011, in Sebastián Piñera's second year as president, students took to the streets in major protests against the education system (figure 3.1).

Over several years there were scores of demonstrations, many involving hundreds of thousands of protesters. By any standard, this was impressive organization and sustained mobilization, far more than seen in other Andean countries (figure 3.2). Moreover, public opinion sided with the demonstrators (Bellei and Cabalin 2013). In her first speech as president-elect, Bachelet promised a

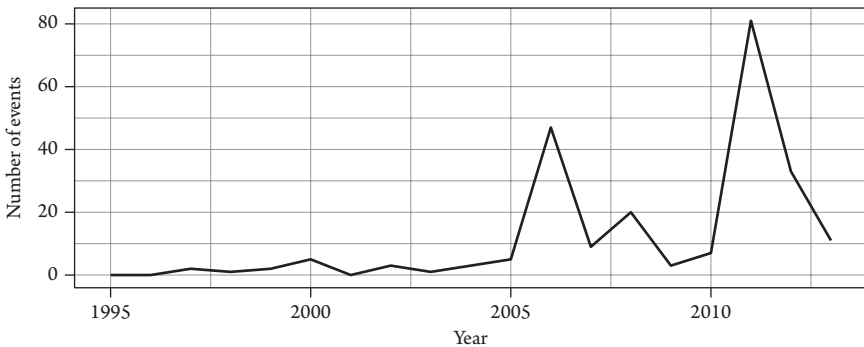


Figure 3.1 Education protests in Chile 1995–2016 Source: Data from Integrated Crisis Early Warning System (ICEWS) Dataverse <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/icews>. See appendix D.

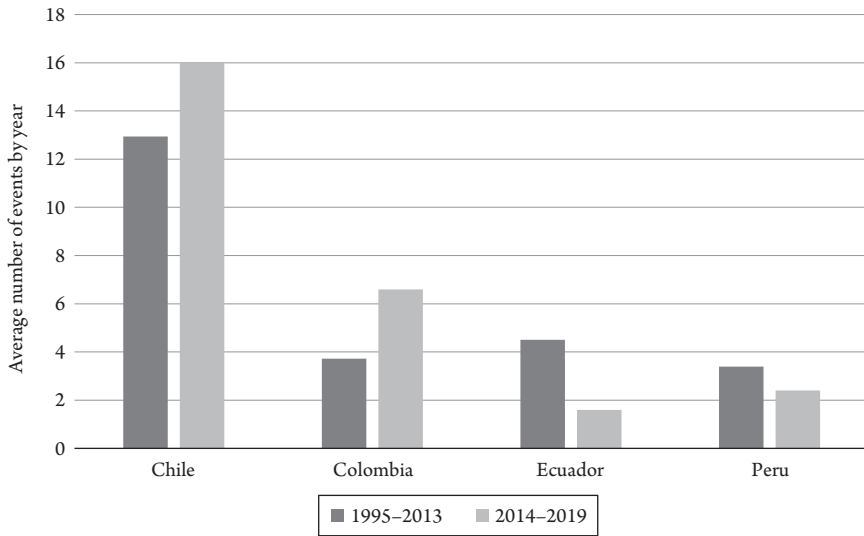


Figure 3.2 Protests and demands in education, 1995–2016 Source: Data from Integrated Crisis Early Warning System (ICEWS) Dataverse <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/icews>. See appendix D.

government that would channel the “voice of citizens that had marched in the streets” (Altman and Toro 2015, 167).<sup>12</sup>

For the 2013 elections, Bachelet assembled a center-left coalition of parties similar to that of the Concertación but also comprised several small left parties, including the Communist Party (Palacios-Valladares and Ondetti 2019). The Nueva Mayoría’s electoral platform was a long 198-page document that headlined three core areas of fundamental change, starting with education, followed by tax and constitutional reform.<sup>13</sup> Bachelet’s right-wing opponent campaigned explicitly against these proposals further enhancing their salience (Bunker 2014, 348). The eight-page section on education included proposals on (i) new regulations for preschool education; (ii) prohibition of student selection by schools, parental copayments, and profits (what would become the Inclusion Law); (iii) a national teaching career to improve teaching quality (what would be the PND); and (iv) de-municipalization of public education as well as reforms to higher education.

In December 2013, Bachelet won the second-round run-off election by a huge margin (62% of the vote)—the largest ever since 1990—and the Nueva Mayoría

<sup>12</sup> Unlike controversies over profits in state-subsidized schools, reforming teacher careers had not been a big rallying point for street demonstrations before the Bachelet government. However, educational quality was, and improving quality usually entails improving teaching, which led to promises on career reform in Bachelet’s electoral campaign.

<sup>13</sup> “Programa de gobierno,” October 2013, [www.onar.gob.cl/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/ProgramaMB.pdf](http://www.onar.gob.cl/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/ProgramaMB.pdf).

won majorities in both houses of Congress (Bunker 2014, 348). This unprecedented victory provided an imposing mandate for reform and made the Ministry of Education a crucial arena for turning the campaign platform into policy. Eyzaguirre was a prominent and experienced minister, but he had no previous connection with education policy, except at a distance when he was finance minister (2000–2006). For this reason, he relied on the policy network for ideas on how to design the new teaching career. Eyzaguirre appointed a core group of internal advisers (some with close links to various Nueva Mayoría parties) and contracted external advisers to work on particular reforms. These external advisers were mostly academics and independent sympathizers of the Nueva Mayoría. Overall, this core “change team” included many veterans of the policy network who had long worked on education policy with previous center-left Concertación governments.

Bachelet’s campaign platform made promises to create a new teacher career but left the crucial details undefined. However, the team designing the PND did not start with a tabula rasa. Lengthy debates over reforming teacher careers had been ongoing for over a decade in previous governments. Policy proposals were well advanced already in Bachelet’s first term (2006–2010), but they did not make it into final legislation. Harald Beyer, Piñera’s minister of education in 2012, also drafted a bill for teaching careers, but it did not make it through Congress. In all there were a half dozen or so earlier proposals with many elements in common that Eyzaguirre’s PND team could draw on (Bonifaz and Mizala 2014, anexo). At least since the early 2000s, the Colegio had been advocating a new teacher career with more non-teaching hours and “formative” teacher evaluations (Assaél and Pavez 2002, 83). Of course, the details of evaluations later became a major point of contention.

Many experts from universities, think tanks, and foundations, as well as former top appointees in Mineduc—the policy network—participated in these multiple commissions and proposals. The core elements of the PND came from a consensus within this policy network on the need for better recruiting, improved teacher preparation, and stronger career incentives provided by progressive career steps (with higher salaries) based on evaluations.<sup>14</sup> Chile’s partisan cleavages of course ran through the policy network. However, this divide manifested itself not over the desirability of a new law on teaching careers but rather over whether the law should include private-voucher schools and whether evaluations should be left to schools or centralized. On these dimensions, the

<sup>14</sup> These core ideas cannot be traced to specific academic theories, particular political parties, groups of technocrats, foreign models, or interest groups. By contrast, the earlier voucher reform of 1981 can be directly traced to the writings of Milton Friedman through a handful of technocrats in the previous dictatorship in Chile (Carnoy 1998). Ávalos and Bellei (2019, 60) call this consensus “civic agreement” and emphasize the strength of consensus on teacher careers and lack of it in other areas of education policy.

center-left side of the network won (through Bachelet's resounding victory) and imposed centralized evaluations of the PND that cover private-voucher schools.

Eyzaguirre, ministry staff, and outside experts took up where these proposals left off. In the early months, the ministry team met with other outside experts from think tanks and universities to brainstorm about the reform design. This consultation offered the policy network an initial opportunity to shape early discussions on policy design. Ministry staff was also in regular contact with the Colegio through 2014, meeting every two weeks or so.<sup>15</sup>

## V. Finishing Touches: Civil Society and the Teacher Union

At the same time that ministry staff was working on a bill, 20 CSOs came together to prepare their own set of proposals in the Plan Maestro. This was a remarkable case of bottom-up, collective work among diverse organizations including the Colegio, teacher preparation institutions, academic research centers, foundations, and associations of university and secondary students.<sup>16</sup> This collective action was remarkable not just for the number of CSOs involved but also the range of political sympathies (from the Colegio president's affiliation to the Communist Party on the far left to the center-right think tank CEP [Centro de Estudios Públicos]), as well as the range of interest groups from the owners of private schools, to students, to the Colegio.<sup>17</sup> Given the wide range of civil society organizations involved, it is again noteworthy in comparative and theoretical terms that no representatives of business (outside of the education business) were included.

During four months in mid-2014, the Plan Maestro group organized a national conversation on reforming teacher careers. By the end of these deliberations, the movement was able to produce a booklet with 12 agreed principles and more than 100 proposals (Plan Maestro 2015) that it delivered in 2014 to the minister of education. Later, during the discussion of the bill in Congress, Plan Maestro leaders had the opportunity to voice their concerns about it, suggesting some

<sup>15</sup> At the time though, the Colegio was mostly interested in negotiating shorter term issues on working time, salaries, and pensions (interview Rodolfo Bonifaz, 17 January 2017).

<sup>16</sup> See Mizala and Schneider (2020) and Ávalos and Bellei (2019) for a full list. Several CSOs did not participate, including parent associations, business associations, and further-right think tanks like Libertad y Desarrollo.

<sup>17</sup> They coordinated in a Consultative Council (with representatives from each of the 20 organizations) in charge of guiding the discussion and articulating agreements, a Base Forum that built the proposal (guided by input from the Consultative Council), and citizen meetings in the north, center, and south of Chile that provided input and broader debate.

adjustments. Congress in turn picked up on some ideas from Plan Maestro not fully incorporated into the ministry's first bill. For example, groups in Plan Maestro strongly supported increasing non-teaching hours. The ministry bill did not include substantial increases due largely to cost concerns, but Congress later increased them in the final law.<sup>18</sup> Overall, though, the Plan Maestro supported the core elements of the government bill and showed Congress and Mineduc that it had the backing of nearly all major stakeholders in civil society.

The critical political question was how would the Colegio react to the government's bill sent to Congress in April 2015? There were grounds to expect the Colegio would support it. The Colegio was an active participant in Plan Maestro and had maintained close contact with the Ministry of Education. And the bill included large salary increases and other significant benefits for teachers. The initial reaction of the Colegio was muted, but by June they were out on strike. As the strike dragged on, members of the Nueva Mayoría in the Education Committee in the Chamber, especially its president (and former student leader) Camila Vallejo, called for three-way negotiations among Colegio, Mineduc, and the Education Committee. This was an unprecedented move in the long history of negotiated reforms (interview Nicolás Eyzaguirre, 29 January 2020), facilitated in part by the fact that both Vallejo and Colegio president Jaime Gajardo belonged to the Communist Party that was part of the Nueva Mayoría coalition.

The final three-way agreement included over a dozen changes to the bill. These modifications loosened some of the requirements for advancing through the career stages, but they did not undermine the core provisions of differentiated pay scales with movement among them dependent on disciplinary and pedagogical evaluations.<sup>19</sup> These lengthy and ultimately successful negotiations merit highlighting because they were so rare in Latin America; governments more often acted unilaterally. Several factors (considered in the next section), including a track record of previous bargaining, favored a negotiated outcome in Chile.

These negotiated changes did limit the government's ability to move underperforming teachers out of the profession in their first years, but it did not change the principle that teachers who could not pass evaluations would be removed from the classroom. In fact, even before the implementation of PND, previous evaluations had led to the dismissal of around 200 teachers (interview

<sup>18</sup> The Plan Maestro successfully pushed two other changes in the initial Mineduc bill: to eliminate an entrance exam to begin teaching (also strongly opposed by the Colegio), and to make voluntary the last two of the five career levels.

<sup>19</sup> Ávalos and Bellei (2019, 60–61) argue that these amendments moved the career law further away from the new public management (NPM) focus of the original law.

Rodolfo Bonifaz, 17 January 2017). These numbers are of course tiny, but they likely already affect the expectations of many teachers, especially new teachers.

With Colegio endorsement, the final bill passed in early 2016. Teacher buy-in was substantial, likely due in part to ongoing union consultations with Mineduc and Plan Maestro as well as the final negotiations with Congress. By 2015, two-thirds of teachers in one survey thought that teachers should be removed from the classroom after up to three negative evaluations (CPP 2015). Similarly, in 2018, 69% of teachers in municipal and private-voucher schools approved of national teacher evaluations, and 66% felt evaluations should determine promotions up the career ladder (CPP 2018, 1).

## VI. Conclusions

The full, long-term impact of the PND on learning outcomes will take decades to emerge as new teachers enter the career and receive all the preparation, mentoring, and performance incentives, and replace teachers who entered before the PND.<sup>20</sup> However, on the first phase of teacher recruitment, immediate post-enactment developments showed positive signs. After the 2016 national college entrance exams, more students with higher scores chose the teaching field (*pedagogía*), and applications for government fellowships for teaching doubled.<sup>21</sup>

Chile's was the most bottom-up reform process in Latin America. The non-state actors who participated—with varying levels and types of influence—included voters, student protesters, NGOs in civil society, Colegio de Profesores, and a sophisticated policy network. As will be seen in coming chapters, one or another of these actors had influence in other countries, but none had the full bottom-up complement, and state actors and technocracy consequently loom larger outside Chile.

A central policy lesson from Chile is that negotiation with teacher unions is possible, even on the normally most conflictual issues of pay for performance, evaluations, and dismissals. Elsewhere in Latin America and other developing countries, successful negotiations were rare in reforms regarding teacher careers,

<sup>20</sup> Early assessments on learning were positive. In a survey of studies of merit pay, “only Chile has seen positive and significant outcomes on student achievement” (Beteille and Evans 2021, 12). Neilson et al. (2022) found positive effects from teachers who scored higher on college entrance exams.

<sup>21</sup> And in mid-2017, the new salary scales came into effect, boosting salaries by 30%. For those entering university in 2018, more students overall and more students with higher exam scores applied to pedagogy programs (*El Mercurio*, 28 March 2018, p. C6). Of course, the pandemic upended these initial trends, making it harder to predict long-run tendencies.

especially those that dramatically changed teacher education, recruitment, and promotion. Several features of the Chilean context favored negotiations. First, Mineduc and the Colegio had years of experience coming to negotiated settlements on a wide range of issues. Second, the Colegio was on record in previous discussions of teacher careers endorsing the principle of promotion tied to evaluations. Lastly, the Communist Party was part of the Nueva Mayoría, which made it more difficult for Gajardo, the head of the Colegio and a member, to refuse to negotiate.

Business was absent both as organized interest groups and individually engaged wealthy individuals along the lines of the Gates and Zuckerberg foundations in the United States or the Lemann Foundation in Brazil. The partial exception was the think tank CEP that is financed largely by business. CEP was a core node of the policy network, with active participation in the Plan Maestro.<sup>22</sup>

For broader theories, the politics of PND provide support for some of the main arguments reviewed in chapter 2. First, in the power resource tradition, from the voting in Bachelet's landslide victory in 2013 and subsequent opinion polls, her support came heavily from poorer voters, and the PND (as well as the Inclusion Law and university reform) favored poorer and middle-income families. Bottom-up student demonstrations and electoral coalitions gave education salience and momentum for reform.

Second, policy networks were crucial, as the teams that designed the reforms and debated them subsequently emphasized the need for a new structure for teacher careers. Through successive commissions, panels, and proposals, the policy network across top officials in Mineduc, foundations, think tanks, and universities forged a consensus on implementing a career with higher entry standards, improved training, more attractive material and professional rewards, and regular evaluations to progress up the career ladder. This consensus accelerated the timely design of a complex career structure and facilitated its final passage in Congress. Lastly, civil society shaped the PND in both collective and interest group ways. CSOs mobilized their capacity for debate, media visibility, and consensus building in the Plan Maestro, as well as later direct connections to Congress. The Colegio, the main interest group, negotiated final compromises in ways only seen, briefly, in Colombia.

<sup>22</sup> Although general business absence conforms to the trend of other Andean countries, it is more puzzling in the Chilean case because the context was so favorable. Business is among the most organized in Latin America and participates actively in other policy areas (Fairfield 2015; Schneider 2004). And the rest of Chilean civil society actively engaged the reform process due to many more openings to civil society than possible in other top-down cases like Mexico or Colombia, meaning business had plenty of opportunities to engage.

# From Bottom Up to Top Down in Ecuador

*Never let a good crisis go to waste.*

—attributed to Winston Churchill

*Article 349. The State shall guarantee, for the teaching staff . . . job security, modernization, ongoing training, and teaching and academic improvement, as well as fair pay, in accordance with their professional development, performance and academic merits. The law shall regulate the teacher career stream and salary and promotion scale; it shall set up a national performance evaluation system and salary policies at all levels.*

—Ecuador's 2008 Constitution

## I. Introduction

Chile's education system is among the most researched in Latin America; Ecuador's is among the least.<sup>1</sup> Yet, education reform in Ecuador was the most dramatic and profound in the region, and it certainly deserves more attention. The scale of the transformation after 2007 is in part due to the near collapse in the years before when the education system “was basically on life support and barely had a pulse” (Baxter 2019, 156). A core component of the transformation, as well as the focus of this chapter, was the makeover of teacher careers. However, it is important to bear in mind that nearly everything else in the education system was changing at the same time: infrastructure, school governance, ministry regulation, curriculum, and more as the government tripled education spending in the short span of seven years (2006–2013).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.thedialogue.org/blogs/2015/08/why-should-we-study-ecuadors-education-reform/>, August 11, 2015; Blog by Pablo Cevallos Estarellas (blog subsequently deleted). Parts of this chapter draw on joint work with Barbara Bruns and Pablo Cevallos (Schneider et al. 2019).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* For coverage of all dimensions of reform, see Cevallos Estarellas and Bramwell (2015).

The reforms started with a major bottom-up impetus, namely a national referendum on education reform that voters approved by a wide margin in 2006. Running at the same time for president, Rafael Correa made education reform the centerpiece of campaign. His large margin of victory provided a hefty mandate (reaffirmed in his first reelection in 2009).

The major stakeholder outside government and main reform opponent—the teacher union UNE (Unión Nacional de Educadores)—was (along with SNTE in Mexico) a political machine kind of union (Schneider 2022). UNE monopolized teacher representation and had a series of benefits granted by the government, including administration of teacher benefits (unemployment funds), automatic dues collection, and representation on personnel committees. Before 2006, union leaders used these levers over teachers to goad them into union and political mobilization, and this political power in turn gave union leaders sway in the appointment of officials in the education ministry (Posso Cevallos 2014). In the end though, UNE turned out to be weaker than anticipated. Among the cases in this book, Ecuador stands out as the only instance where the government faced down the union, stripped away its many privileges, and then shut it down.

Part of the rationale for sweeping reform was state building or state recovery (Posso Cevallos 2014). Prior weaker governments had traded away influence over education and had institutionalized measures to strengthen teacher unions in return for political support. In restricting the influence that teacher unions and other groups in civil society had over education before 2006, Correa insisted that his goal was to reestablish state control—*rectoría*—over public education (similar to the process in Mexico after 2013) (Baxter 2019, 156).

After the election, the process of designing and implementing reforms to teacher careers was top down—in line with the goal of state *rectoría*—and concentrated in the reform team in the Ministry of Education. Reformers in the Ministry enjoyed long tenure and sustained presidential support through the first six (2007–2013) of Correa’s ten years in power. As in other technocratic cases (Peru and Colombia), parent associations, business, think tanks, and other civil society organizations did not have much influence. Finally, among facilitating factors, the commodity boom increased government revenue that could be used to ramp up education spending, double teacher pay, and offer appetizing early retirement packages.

Ecuador is a hybrid or intermediate case. Reforms clearly had more bottom-up momentum and electoral legitimacy than in Peru, Colombia, and Mexico. Yet, the top-down design and implementation (and destruction of the union) also clearly lacked the continuing participation in Chile of civil society, policy networks, and the teacher union. This shift in Ecuador to top down owes something to Correa’s imperious style across many policy areas, but more

fundamentally it resulted from the weakness of civil society (figure 2.5) and policy networks, as well as the fact that the teacher union was a machine type with everything to lose from a career reform.<sup>3</sup>

Section II describes the main features of the career reform. Section III discusses major stakeholders in the process. Section IV examines how these stakeholders interacted over the reform trajectory.

## II. Teacher Career Reforms, 2006–2017

Two laws were key.<sup>4</sup> The 2009 law introduced three radical changes: teacher hiring based on competency tests; promotion based on performance evaluations rather than seniority; and the possibility of dismissal with two failing evaluations. Two years later, the National Assembly, in a rare moment of consensus, adopted the 2011 *Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural* (hereafter Education Law). This law codified five key policies, covering all stages of the teaching career: (a) more selective entry into teacher-training institutions (and higher accreditation standards for these institutions), (b) more rigorous selection of new teachers, (c) performance evaluation for all teachers at regular intervals, (d) higher quality professional development programs, and (e) promotions based on tested competencies and performance evaluation (Cevallos Estarellas 2017). A year later, the government tightened control over teacher training; it closed 23 low-quality public pedagogical institutes, required higher minimum scores for entry into teacher training, and created a new National University of Education, UNAE (*Universidad Nacional de Educación*) (Chiriboga 2019, 29).<sup>5</sup>

Before 2007, public teachers were selected by provincial committees of the Ministry of Education, in which representatives of the teacher union (UNE) had direct participation and usually preponderant influence (Posso Cevallos 2014, 15). Candidates were supposed to be tested on content knowledge and pedagogical skills, but tests tended to be arbitrary, and favoritism based on political or union affiliation or even bribery was rife (interview with Freddy Peñafiel, 24 January 2018) (Chiriboga 2019, 26). Some of the Correa government's first measures were to take back control over teacher careers, first in late 2007 by

<sup>3</sup> Conaie (*Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador*) is the exception in civil society as it has often shut down the country and destabilized governments. However, Conaie was not involved in reforms to teacher careers and the rest of civil society was less developed.

<sup>4</sup> More details about this section in Chiriboga (2019); Cevallos Estarellas and Bramwell (2015); and Schneider et. al (2019).

<sup>5</sup> Trying to close low-quality *private* pedagogy programs elsewhere met with overwhelming political opposition by owners and their political allies, especially in Peru (Bruns et al. 2022).

removing UNE from personnel committees (Posso Cevallos 2014, 15). The government introduced a national hiring exam in 2008, and 55,000 applicants took the exam. By 2012, 21,000 or 7% of 320,000 candidates had passed the entrance exam (Cevallos Estarellas and Bramwell 2015, 348). The government also introduced evaluations for existing teachers, evaluating more than half of all teachers by 2013.<sup>6</sup>

The 2011 Education Law based promotions on teacher performance and expanded the range between top and bottom salaries (US\$817 to \$1,676 per month; Ecuador uses the US dollar). The law doubled the starting salary for new teachers, from US\$395 per month in 2010 to \$775 in 2011 (Cevallos Estarellas and Bramwell 2015, 351; Cevallos Estarellas 2017, 16). However, salaries since have been mostly “frozen” and have fallen behind other public sector employees (Chiriboga 2019, 53).

In the wake of these and other reforms, Ecuador logged major advances on international assessments.<sup>7</sup> From 2006 to 2011, in a vote of confidence, families moved around 74,000 students from private to public schools (Cevallos Estarellas and Bramwell 2015, 343). Better causally identified work on career reforms finds consistent positive effects, especially for poor students, of hiring teachers by exam (Araujo 2019, 2022; Araujo et al. 2020).

In sum, the reform of the Correa government radically increased both teachers’ rewards and their accountability for performance. Reformers ramped up spending and enrollments at the same time they established new institutions for teacher preparation, performance evaluation, student assessment, and in-service professional development.

### III. Fewer Main Stakeholders

Compared to other countries, education politics in Ecuador was distinctive in the narrower range of stakeholders, more executive and technocratic dominance, and more radical measures to sideline the teacher union. As one observer

<sup>6</sup> New performance evaluations had multiple components, including self-evaluation; feedback from peers, principals, parents, and students; class observation by the principal; and tests of linguistic abilities, pedagogical knowledge, and content knowledge.

<sup>7</sup> On the Latin American regional test of sixth graders, by UNESCO, between 2006 and 2013, Ecuador made the largest gains in reading scores among the 15 countries tested and the second-largest gains in math (after Chile) (Schneider et al. 2019, table 1). In assessing the results of LLece 2019 (the latest in the Serce-Terce series), the head of Ineval stated that Ecuador started in 13th place in Latin America in Serce 2006, rising to 10th place in Terce 2013, and to 7th place in LLece 2019 (though absolute improvement in 2019 scores was modest and much less than in 2013) (UNESCO 2021, 2).

decried: “Civil society was deprived of any participation in the design, management, and evaluation of education policy” (Torres 2017).<sup>8</sup>

Correa retained the technocratic team in the Ministry of Education from the previous government. This team played an important role in framing issues and identifying policy options (similar to the technocrats directing reform in neighboring Colombia and Peru). Some consider Correa himself to be a technocrat or “techno-populist” (Baxter 2019, 139, 153). To promote excellence throughout the bureaucracy as a whole, Correa even created a dystopian sounding National Institute of Meritocracy (Baxter 2016, 124).

On the union side, by the 2000s, UNE had developed, like SNTE in Mexico, into a powerful political machine (Schneider 2022).<sup>9</sup> Union density was high, with UNE representing around 90% of Ecuador’s 170,000 public teachers (Grindle 2004, 121).<sup>10</sup> The government collected dues automatically, put full-time union organizers on the education payroll, and granted UNE control over select benefits like an unemployment fund. Key to the power of UNE leaders was representation on local personnel committees that allowed UNE to exercise influence over hiring, transfers, and promotions (Posso Cevallos 2014, 72, 74, 77; Baxter 2016, 120–21). This influence in turn gave teachers powerful incentives to join UNE and follow its directives on union and electoral mobilization.<sup>11</sup>

Given this political power, UNE historically enjoyed the right to name high-level Ministry officials and a say in the selection of ministers, as well as in policymaking (Baxter 2019, 141). UNE was allied politically—fused actually—with a Maoist party, the Movimiento Popular Democrático (MPD). The MPD had a small contingent in the legislature and supported Correa’s run for president in 2006.<sup>12</sup> UNE also had significant disruptive power. Among non-federal

<sup>8</sup> Torres also deemed Correa’s education policy “top down” and technocratic.

<sup>9</sup> In the 1990s, UNE ranked as strong among unions in Latin America in terms of centralization (high), relations with the Ministry of Education (medium, though this would deteriorate), and strength of party relationship (high) (Grindle 2004, 121). By Grindle’s rankings on these dimensions, UNE was weaker than Sutep in Peru, but stronger than SNTE in Mexico. UNE had managed to block major government policies in the 1990s (Baxter 2016, 121) and 2000s (Fernández 2012, 8).

<sup>10</sup> For details on calculating the number of teachers and union density, see Schneider et al. (2019). Chiriboga’s in-depth report put the number of members at 140,000 (Chiriboga 2019, 31).

<sup>11</sup> A 2007 decree took away the representation of the teacher union “in processes of hiring, transfers, and promotions. The area of management where UNE maintained a substantial dominion, and from which, in good measure, derived (“*afincó*”) the reproduction of its political and union power” (Posso Cevallos 2014, 15). Chiriboga claimed that UNE “had an enormous capacity to call (“*capacidad de convocatoria*”) strikes and demonstrations” (Chiriboga 2019, 24).

<sup>12</sup> MPD’s legislative bench was never more than 10%, but it had the “best distribution of votes around the country” because UNE was also spread across the country. MPD had “a very small but quite loyal electoral niche.” However, as the Correa government stripped UNE of prerogatives, MPD lost power and disappeared shortly after the government outlawed UNE (Basabe-Serrano 2018, 156–57).

countries in Latin America (1998–2003), Ecuador ranked at the top with Bolivia in terms of days lost to teacher strikes and protests (Gentili et al. 2004, 1265). In the two decades leading up to Correa's election, children had lost to strikes on average a month of school per year (Baxter 2016, 185; Fernández 2012, 53; Chiriboga 2019, 26).

UNE engaged in several efforts to block Correa's reforms from 2007 to 2009, but the government effectively sidelined it thereafter. The Correa government went well beyond denying UNE access to veto points to fatally weakening the union organizationally by stripping it of funds and influence in the Ministry and over teacher careers, ultimately revoking its legal registration (as chronicled in section IV).

Business associations, as in other chapters, played no significant role in the reforms, and Ministry officials reported few contacts with business except for consultations on technical areas such as vocational training (interviews with Monserrat Creamer, 22 January 2018 and Alejandro Martinez, 23 January 2018). This may be due in part to the business community's general estrangement from the Correa government (Wolff 2016), but it also appears to stem from a longer standing tradition of little business involvement with education in Ecuador.

The think tanks, university centers, foundations, and other education-focused research and advocacy groups in civil society, often business backed (that have been important in reform efforts in Chile, Mexico, Brazil, and the United States) had little impact in Ecuador from 2007 to 2016. Two NGOs active in education in Ecuador were the Grupo Faro and *Contracto Social por la Educación*. The latter formed in 2002 as an umbrella organization to work to make education a national priority and grew to include a large and diverse range of NGOs concerned with education. *Contracto Social* did not though have much influence after 2006, and Correa ended up in conflict with them (as he did with many CSOs; Becker 2013). Grupo Faro deals with public policy generally, not just education, and also did not have much influence on the reforms.<sup>13</sup> As in Colombia and Peru, Grupo Faro also sometimes served as a springboard for top government positions. Monserrat Creamer, former head of education at Grupo Faro served as minister of education from 2019 to 2021.

Lastly, throughout Correa's tenure, changes in education were visible and enjoyed high levels of popular support. According to *Latinobarómetro*, satisfaction with education more than doubled from an average of 30% in the years prior to Correa to an average of 70% under Correa (Schneider et al. 2019, 270). There was also majority support for teacher evaluations (Chiriboga 2019, 25).

<sup>13</sup> Grupo Faro did, however, have regular contact with the Ministry of Education though through monitoring stipulated under the terms of a grant from the European Union.

In sum, among recent cases of systemic career reform in Latin America, the process in Ecuador under Correa stands out for the power of central actors in the executive branch, the high levels of popular support, and the absence of influence from organized civil society actors, including the teacher union, business, and independent policy networks.

#### IV. Reform Dynamics

By the early 2000s, Ecuador's education system was in a parlous state. It was the only country in Latin America where education spending fell from 1990 to 2000, dropping from close to 3% of GDP to around 1% of GDP, shockingly low and well below regional averages. Without funding, public schools started charging fees for admission, materials, and uniforms (Baxter 2019, 142); "teachers were sometimes not paid for months and this inevitably led to absenteeism and teacher strikes" (citing a ministry official; Baxter 2019, 140). By early 2003, 14% of teachers were absent on an average day during unannounced school visits. By another measure, teachers were present in school for only 62% of their contractual hours (Rogers et al. 2004). Long strikes were regular events. By 2006, Ecuador had some of the lowest test scores in Latin America, on the level of much poorer countries.

After years of astounding political instability—seven presidents and nine ministers of education in the prior decade—in 2005, President Alfredo Palacio appointed Rafael Correa as finance minister and in 2006 Raúl Vallejo as education minister. Vallejo shepherded the development of a Ten-Year Plan for Education (Plan Decenal de Educación), approved by a national referendum in November 2006 (Araujo and Bramwell 2015, 4). Palacios had appointed Vallejo and his vice minister Gloria Vidal in the last year of his term as president. Without enough time to initiate meaningful reform, Vallejo and Vidal decided instead to promote a national debate on education reform (interview with Vidal, 24 January 2018). This dialogue began with extensive open forums and consultations around the country. The Ministry team then distilled this input into the PDE and the referendum. Vallejo and Vidal thus laid the groundwork and prepared voters and other stakeholders for major disruptive reforms.

Rafael Correa won his first presidential election handily—with 57% of the vote—and entered office in 2007 with a 73% approval rating (Conaghan 2011, 271). Correa had long held a personal commitment to education, having worked as a teacher after university and at the Inter-American Development Bank on education projects. He campaigned on the promise of education as a tool for more equitable distribution of opportunity and income. Approved by an even larger

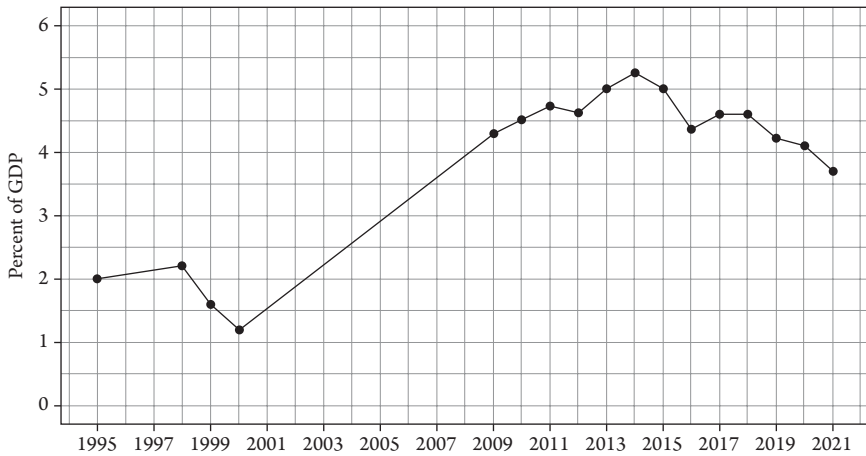


Figure 4.1 Public education spending in Ecuador as a percent of GDP 1995–2015 Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/?queryid=181#>.

margin (two-thirds), the 2006 referendum provided a solid bottom-up mandate for reform.<sup>14</sup>

Candidate Correa thoroughly endorsed the PDE in the referendum, and once elected asked Vallejo and Vidal to stay on in the Ministry and implement it. The PDE had eight policy goals, four of which centered on expanding access to education at all levels. Three goals focused on quality: improving infrastructure and equipment, improving quality and equity with a national assessment and accountability system, and enhancing the prestige of the teaching career and the quality of teacher training. The eighth goal was to raise public spending on K-12 education by 0.5% of GDP annually, until it reached 6% of GDP. Buoyed by high oil prices and economic expansion, public education spending almost quadrupled in nominal terms, from US\$1.1 billion in 2006 to \$3.9 billion in 2012 (Araujo and Bramwell 2015, 5), reaching 5% of GDP in 2013 (figure 4.1), on par with many countries in Latin America (including richer ones such as Chile, Brazil, and Argentina).

The democratic alternation of parties in power regularly stalls or rolls back education reform, so the continuity across Correa's three consecutive terms was a major boon to reform implementation. When minister Vallejo stepped down in 2010, Vice Minister Vidal stepped in and stayed on until 2013. Over a critical seven-year period, Ecuador had a degree of continuity that is rare in education ministries, and which contrasts sharply with the decade before Correa (1996–2006) when 11 different education ministers cycled through, averaging less than

<sup>14</sup> Blog by Pablo Cevallos Estarellas, August 11, 2015 (cited earlier).

a year in office. From 2007 to 2017, Correa appointed only three different ministers with an average tenure of four years, double the regional average of around two years (Schneider 2022).<sup>15</sup> Vallejo and Vidal were nonpolitical, technocratic appointees, like their counterparts in neighboring Colombia and Peru. The third minister, Augusto Espinosa was more of a politician (see appendix B).

In 2007 the government created a teacher evaluation system with the explicit purpose of diagnosing needs for training. Having analyzed Chile's experience with teacher performance evaluations on a voluntary basis (teachers could opt in, with the carrot of monetary bonuses if they were evaluated as effective), the government chose the same route in 2008. The Ministry believed this would allow time to refine the evaluation criteria and processes (interview Pablo Cevallos Estarellas, multiple dates 2017–18). However, less than 1% of teachers—1,500 out of about 170,000—volunteered to be evaluated and only 4% passed (Fernández 2012, 55).

So, in 2009, the Ministry made evaluations mandatory for all teachers and school principals.<sup>16</sup> This provoked vehement resistance and a 23-day strike.<sup>17</sup> According to the UNE president:

From a pedagogical point of view, excuse the term, they prostituted the concept of evaluation. Teachers were no longer in the process of evaluation to improve or to show their weaknesses so that they could get training, but to get a 1200 US dollar prize. (Cited in Baxter 2016, 210)

UNE called off the strike after negotiating some minor concessions (e.g., teachers failing two evaluations could retire if eligible instead of being fired; Fernández 2012, 58).

Correa methodically undermined UNE's sources of power. In 2007, he denied UNE its traditional influence in Ministry appointments and reappointed minister Vallejo over union objections. The 2009 Teacher Career Law made striking teachers subject to immediate dismissal (Baxter 2016, 121). Then Correa went

<sup>15</sup> Crucial components of the PDE were included in the 2008 Constitution, also passed by referendum. Ecuador is one of few countries (along with Mexico in 2013) to have evaluations of teacher performance written into the Constitution. In general, constitutional provisions signal greater consolidation and institutionalization. However, from 1830 to 2006, Ecuador had 19 Constitutions (Conaghan 2011, 264), so constitutional law may not guarantee continuity. Constitutional amendments did not save reforms in Mexico.

<sup>16</sup> Of the 90,397 public teachers evaluated from 2009 to 2013, 1% were rated excellent, 34% very good, 62% good, and 3% unsatisfactory (Ministerio de Educación 2014, 59). Teachers evaluated as excellent received a bonus of \$1,200, and those rated very good received \$900 (Fernández 2012, 56).

<sup>17</sup> *The Economist* offered a vivid account of this early reform episode: "Correa's Curriculum," 20 August 2019, <http://www.economist.com/node/14258942#print>.

after organizational resources. In 2009 the government discontinued automatic dues collection, costing UNE 60% of its revenue (Fabara 2019, 65). In 2012, the government reduced the “*permisos sindicales*” to the minimum, forcing union organizers back to teaching full time (Isch 2017, 209). In 2015 the government stripped UNE of control over an unemployment fund for teachers (Fondo de Cesantía del Magisterio). The government delivered the coup de grâce in 2016, cancelling UNE’s legal registry and taking over its remaining assets (Isch 2017).<sup>18</sup> Overall, it is hard to think of another reform experience that has been so completely devastating to a teacher union, especially one that appeared so strong before 2007 (Grindle 2004, 121–23).

To replace UNE, the government had set up in 2010 La Red de Maestros por la Revolución Educativa. By 2015, this union had over 50,000 members (Baxter 2016, 185–86) and claimed 100,000 members by 2018 (Chiriboga 2019, 25). However, the Red did not charge dues, so it is difficult to know what to make of these membership figures (interview, Nelly Miño, 24 January 2018). Down but not entirely out, by the 2020s UNE was trying to make a comeback.

The government also spurred rapid turnover in the teacher corps. To clear out the aged (many in their 70s and 80s) and others, the government offered after 2008 a whopping early retirement bonus of \$32,000 (more than six times the annual base salary before 2011). It worked. About 20,000 teachers took the retirement package in the first year, and 4,000–5,000 in each of the following four years, for a total of about 40,000 retirements, around a quarter of all teachers (interview with Peñafiel, 24 January 2018). A younger, better trained cohort quickly took their place (Bruns and Luque 2015, 236). By 2016, 50% of teachers had less than five years’ experience and 70% less than ten (Chiriboga 2019, 23).<sup>19</sup>

This massive turnover smoothed the path of reform, especially teacher evaluations, as teachers who opposed performance evaluations could leave the profession, and new teachers entering the profession did so through more selective exams, and they knew regular assessments would be part of their careers. By 2017, half of teachers had a positive view of evaluations, and the other half was indifferent, not negative (Chiriboga 2019, 12).

Correa used “relentless communications to mobilize public opinion on the side of reforms” (Bruns and Luque 2015, 319).<sup>20</sup> Correa even “directly organized

<sup>18</sup> The Correa government was not the first to outlaw UNE. Several governments in the 20th century, mostly military, had also outlawed UNE (Isch 2017, 203–205). In 2007, as noted earlier, the government had removed UNE representation on local hiring committees (Bruns and Luque 2015, 320).

<sup>19</sup> Some data show less turnover. In a 2017 survey, “only 17 per cent of those surveyed . . . joined less than five years ago” (Tournier and Chimier 2019, 58).

<sup>20</sup> “The Ministry invested considerable resources and efforts in crafting public messaging to help build support for the policy reform agenda among general citizens. This communication, combined

and attended several counterprotests against those groups opposing the change” (Baxter 2019, 147). Although hard to tell what impact this communications barrage had, it did comport with the rising satisfaction of education in public opinion. By 2011, in opinion polls, Ecuador ranked third-highest among countries in Latin America in the percent of respondents who said education had improved over the past 10 years (56%) and last in the percent who said it had deteriorated (7%) (OEI 2012, 44).

Over the 2010s, the new career continued but lost some luster. After 2011 salaries were frozen, reducing the attractiveness to new recruits. By 2017, only a third of new recruits said new “career advancement” options influenced their decision (Tournier and Chimier 2019, 58). While teachers generally approved of evaluations, as noted earlier, many were frustrated by the lack of progression up the career ladder. By 2019, 61% of teachers were clustered on a lower G rung with only 18% on upper levels (Chiriboga 2019, 93). So, teacher buy-in was tepid (though only a quarter said they wanted to leave the profession; Tournier and Chimier 2019, 138).

In sum, Correa’s personal conviction and electoral mandate, the ultimate frailty of the teacher union, and support in public opinion all favored the reform process even without organized backing in civil society. Early technocrat continuity in the Ministry of Education and the inclusion of reform components in legislation and the Constitution were key advantages that increased the odds of reform survival, despite the acrimonious political split between Correa and his successors. The main policies and institutions of the Correa reforms carried on (interview *Ciro Avitabile*, 31 January 2022).

## V. Conclusions

The broad, extended consultation and later national referendum in 2006–2007 were major innovations in education politics. Later reformers in Brazil, Mexico, and Chile all conducted similar national consultations (though not referenda). State actors, especially in Ecuador and Mexico, sometimes took the lead in organizing this societal consultation. In Brazil, in contrast, the process (major curriculum reform) was coordinated by big education foundations in São Paulo (Barros 2018). In Chile, the consultation was also more bottom up (Mizala and Schneider 2020).

with Correa and his Ministers’ constant use of the bully pulpit bolstered the government” against opposition (Baxter 2019, 147).

As in Chile, elections in 2006 gave reform a forceful bottom-up impetus. The 2006 national consultation and referendum gave education enormous political salience. The terrible state of education—including some of the worst learning outcomes and the lowest rate of spending (1% of GDP) in Latin America—allowed reformist politicians to tap into pervasive public discontent, confirming Churchill’s maxim that crises should not be wasted. However, unlike Chile, civil society played little role, in part due to its shallower development, and in part to Correa’s imperious style. The effect was to leave the policy space emptier, especially as the electoral engagement waned.

With Correa’s consistent support, policymaking devolved to technocrats in the Ministry of Education. Minister Vallejo was a writer and not a typical technocrat, yet he was not an electoral politician.<sup>21</sup> Much of the rest of Vallejo’s team, though, was more expert in education without prior political positions as was Vidal, Vallejo’s vice minister and later minister herself. Although less consistently than in Peru and Colombia (figure 2.4), technocratic dominance continued after Correa’s departure (interview Monserrat Creamer, 11 April 2023).

The degree to which the ministry implemented major contentious reforms owed a great deal to the continuity of Correa and his education team, at least through 2013. Democracies with regular turnover in elected offices pose serious challenges to reforms in education that can take decades to have full effect. Incoming presidents regularly overturn or dilute reforms; a seven-year period of sustained implementation by a stable team in the Ministry of Education is exceptional in Latin America (matched only in Colombia). A corollary lesson is to renew school leaders and teachers quickly, as retirement bonuses helped do in Ecuador. Part of the reason that teacher career reforms take a long time to impact student learning is that it can take decades to renew the whole teacher corps. Mechanisms to accelerate turnover can speed that renewal.

For those who highlight union opposition to reform (Moe 2011; Bruns and Luque 2015), it might be tempting to emphasize the destruction of the teacher union as crucial to career reform. Certainly, removing UNE influence over hiring was necessary along with other measures to strip union advantages that made UNE a machine union (like automatic dues, paid organizers, and control of social benefits). However, outlawing UNE and replacing it with a government-supported alternative was likely unnecessary overkill. As seen in Chile, and in the next chapter, unions along the rest of the Andes have negotiated compromises or at least gone along with career reforms.

<sup>21</sup> Although he had been appointed once before in 2005 to be minister of education, briefly, and later ambassador.

# Top-Down Reform

## *Unions and Technocrats in Colombia and Peru*

*Typically, when one brings together a group of experts, the experts are able to counteract each other by citing empirical evidence. This naturally produces a process of convergence . . . it is possible to reach an agreement.*

—Harald Beyer, former minister of education in Chile<sup>1</sup>

### I. Introduction

The other main cases of reforms to teacher careers in the 2010s—Mexico, Colombia, and Peru—were more top down and technocratic than the bottom-up electorally driven reforms in Chile and Ecuador. While reforms in Chile and Ecuador were mostly implemented, outcomes in top-down cases were mixed. In Mexico (chapter 6), the ambitious reforms of 2013–2018 did not fare well, and in 2019 the incoming government, with support from the teacher union, overturned them. In contrast, career reforms in Peru (2007–) and Colombia (2002–) were partially implemented and survived due in large part to technocrats in ministries of education who kept them going and teacher unions that went along with them.

Colombia's experience shows another way to handle, or circumvent, union opposition. Career reforms began in 2002, but rather than confront the teacher union Fecode (Federación Colombiana de Educadores) head on, the government applied the reform statute only to new hires. The cost of this bypass was lengthy delays. Fifteen years passed before half of teachers had been hired through the 2002 meritocratic process. As the process was gradual, it did not involve major electoral mobilization, for or against. In the 2010s, despite the bypass, Fecode and the Ministry of Education negotiated to create a new

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Kubal and Fisher (2016, 230–31). Empirical evidence is also key in policy networks.

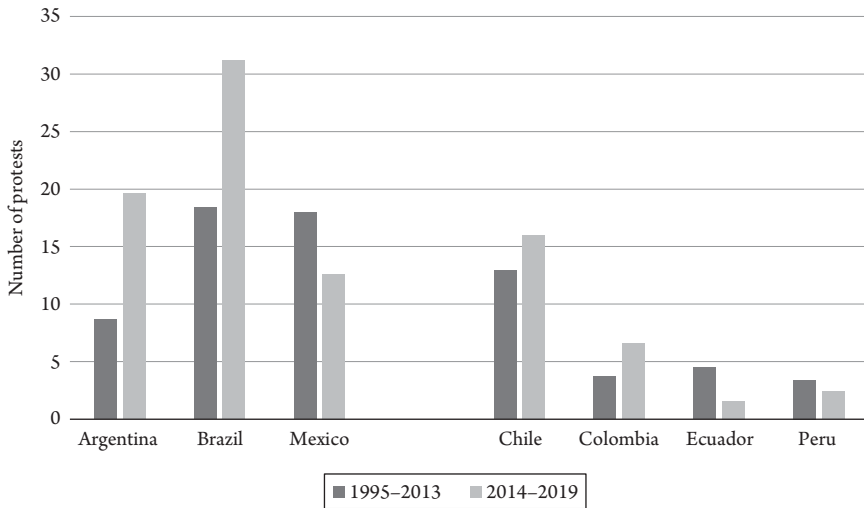
evaluation for teachers hired under the 2002 statute. Policy continuity derived more from reelected conservative presidents (through 2022), the long tenure of their technocratic ministers, and union acquiescence, than active support from civil society or policy networks.

Reforms in Peru resembled those in Ecuador and occurred around the same time, though reform continuity did not come through repeated reelection of a single president like Correa. The continuity puzzle in Peru was that major reforms survived four presidents from across the political spectrum: left, right, and center, and the political turmoil of the late 2010s. Sutep (Sindicato Unitario de Trabajadores en la Educación del Perú), the teacher union, was not consistently or intensely opposed to teacher reforms. Thus, even though the teacher reforms lacked strong backing in electoral politics or social coalitions, they continued through a mix of support in public opinion, like-minded technocracy (see appendix B), and insubstantial opposition, until the political crisis of the 2020s.

Peru and Colombia showcase the ability of technocracy to keep reforms going in the absence of machine unions (potential opponents) and bottom-up electoral demands (potential support). Across six countries in Latin America, for two decades after 2000, technocrats occupied ministries of education the longest time in Peru (67%) and Colombia (76%).<sup>2</sup> As discussed in chapter 2, in economic agencies, technocracy thrives because policymaking is technically complex and mistakes are politically costly, and because business supports it (Dargent 2015). In education, in contrast, policy is less complex and mistakes are rarely costly. So other factors promote technocracy in education.

These other main factors are related to the general emptiness of the education policy space. In comparative terms, in Peru and Colombia, the usual opposition suspects—teacher unions and clientelist politicians—had less influence. The reasons for missing clientelist politicians varied somewhat between Peru and Colombia, though in both cases political parties were not institutionalized. Among the nine countries in figure 2.3, Peru and Colombia ranked lowest in party institutionalization. In another ranking of party system institutionalization across 18 countries in Latin America, Colombia came in 12th and Peru 17th, second to last (Mainwaring 2018a, 58). This party weakness gave presidents and ministers less reason to exchange political appointments in the executive for legislative support (as was the norm in Brazil and elsewhere). Similarly, high turnover in both legislatures reduced incentives for exchange and meant that legislators were not in office long enough to entrench clientelist electoral strategies.

<sup>2</sup> “Technocrat” defined as a minister without prior electoral career. See figure 2.4.



*Figure 5.1* Protests and Demands in Education *Source:* Data from Integrated Crisis Early Warning System (ICEWS) Dataverse <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/icews>, 2016. See appendix D.

Sutep and Fecode did have the power to call disruptive and costly strikes. However, protests (by all groups) were fewer than in much of the rest of the region (figure 5.1). This is one blunt measure—the process tracing also shows in greater detail the relative weakness of unions and civil society. Sutep and Fecode were more accommodating, interest-group unions than the political machines encountered in Ecuador and Mexico (Schneider 2022).

Although other factors contributed, through the mid-2010s, Colombia and especially Peru clocked major gains on international tests; on PISA tests from 2000 to 2015, they showed the greatest improvement in Latin America (Elacqua, Hincapié, et al. 2018, 10). In the 2019 UNESCO tests, Peru outgained all 16 other countries in Latin America, though Colombia’s scores languished (UNESCO 2021a, 1). More targeted research that isolated the impact of career reforms found mostly beneficial learning effects, especially in Colombia.

## II. Colombia: Slowing Reform to Bypass the Union

Colombia was an early reformer, starting in 2002 with a new meritocratic career (statute 1278, also referred to as the 2002/new statute) that governed new hires after 2004. The decree stipulated merit procedures for initial hires, annual

Table 5.1 Comparing 1979 and 2002 Statutes on Teacher Careers

	1979 Statute	2002 Statute
Hiring through	Mostly political connections	Examination, interview, and public competition ( <i>concurso</i> )
Employment or protection	Stable tenure	Possible dismissal after probation or later through failed evaluations
Promotions through	Education credentials and seniority	Education and examinations (after 2015 teaching evaluations)

Source: Ome (2012).

evaluations, and competence exams for promotions (table 5.1 from Ome 2012). The career reforms were mostly technocratic in that they lacked electoral visibility (first enacted at the end of a lame-duck administration) and broader support in civil society or an active policy network. As noted, ministers after 2000 were mostly technocrats (three-quarters of the time). The merit reforms survived due largely to gradual implementation and technocratic continuity in government, as well as negotiations in 2015 with Fecode to revamp teacher evaluations.<sup>3</sup>

The 2002 statute required three kinds of evaluations: (1) a *concurso* for entry, (2) annual performance reviews, and (3) evaluations to move up the career ladder (Forero and Saavedra 2019, 49).<sup>4</sup> The government offered the entry *concurso* only every three years, and often took years to publish the results. The share of applicants passing the *concurso* dropped steadily from 22% in 2004 to 12% in 2006 to 8% in 2012 (Forero and Saavedra 2019, 52, 54). The promotion evaluation started as a written exam but, as discussed later, changed to a multicomponent evaluation of teaching after 2015.

The 1278 statute started in 2002 in the waning months of the Pastrana government and grew slowly to have a larger effect on the education system only

<sup>3</sup> For details on career reforms, see Cuenca et al. (2023); Figueroa et al. (2018); García et al. (2020); Forero and Saavedra (2019); Gomez (2019); and Radinger et al. (2018).

<sup>4</sup> For the *concurso*, candidates received 65% of their points from a national exam on teaching aptitude, subject knowledge, and psychometric values. Another 20% came from degrees and training, and a final 15% came from an in-person interview with the local hiring committee (Bertoni et al. 2018, 7).

decades later. The Pastrana government had made two previous attempts to introduce teacher evaluations, one of which passed in Congress but was struck down by the courts. Fecode intensely opposed both bills (García et al. 2020, 6–8). The 1278 statute, though gradually introduced, did have the immediate effect of wresting hiring away from local politicians. As documented in chapter 2, clientelist appointment of teachers in Colombia was pervasive in the 20th century. The new statute made all new hires meritocratic and after 2006 centralized hiring (Gomez 2019).

In comparative terms, the reform process in Colombia was mostly top down from a well-ensconced technocracy (Baxter and León 2022). By one account:

The design of the teachers' reform in the early 2000s was predominantly a technical endeavour. A group of technocrats (from the National Planning Department, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance) was closely involved in the design of the teachers' statute, using as input consultation from experts, international organizations, as well as previous experience of evaluation systems from other countries. (García et al. 2020, 9)

Education had little prominence electorally, and participation by civil society NGOs and Fecode were slight and came later. The process could not have looked much more different from Ecuador with a national referendum or Chile with an electoral campaign featuring education followed by a months' long national consultation with civil society.

The government had included Fecode in a commission on the reform, but Fecode claimed it was not involved in drafting the final statute, which it considered imposed by the government (Cuenca et al. 2023). The commission met for six months before the reform. It had 8–10 members, including the minister and vice minister of education, two representatives from Fecode, several experts, a representative of NGOs and Fundación Corona (interview Margarita Peña, 17 February 2021). Although not a negotiated outcome, Fecode had made it clear that it would oppose career reforms applied to all teachers.<sup>5</sup>

To sidestep immediate, frontal confrontation with Fecode, the 1278 statute required the new career only of new hires. Fecode came out of the 1990s much strengthened by support from the government of Ernesto Samper (1994–1998),

<sup>5</sup> The more significant agreement for the immediate fiscal crisis was to postpone until 2009 automatic promotions of old-statute teachers. Officials in financial agencies initially supported the 2002 statute to stem costly automatic promotions under the old statute (García et al. 2020, 5). Crucially, teachers under the 2002 statute did not have the possibility of receiving a pension and continuing to teach as old-statute teachers did (Forero and Saavedra 2019).

which pushed Fecode in the direction of a political machine with a top-town mobilizing strategy. Among other benefits, the Samper government gave Fecode representation in local departmental personnel committees, increased the number of union organizers on the education payroll (15 for the national office and 10 in each departmental branch), and appointed a former union leader as vice minister of education (Chambers-Ju 2020, chapter 5). Reformers in 2002 thus had reason to be wary of direct confrontation with Fecode.

It turned out to be a snail's pace transition.<sup>6</sup> By 2017, only 54% of teachers were new-statute hires (Gomez 2019, 10). A major reason for the slow rate of replacement was that older teachers had powerful incentives not to retire. As one former advisor to the minister put it, "the teaching career . . . was like jail because all incentives were put at the end of the career" (quoted in García et al. 2020, 6). Teachers hired under the 1979 statute could start receiving pensions at age 55, while continuing to teach until mandatory retirement at 70 (Forero and Saavedra 2019, 47–48). By 2016, a third of teachers under the old statute were at the top of their salary scale and nearly half of these (over 50,00 teachers) were also receiving a pension worth 75% of their salary.

As noted, the 2002 statute was a decree, not new legislation, of an outgoing, lame-duck government, without mobilized support from voters, parties, or civil society.<sup>7</sup> In principle, such an executive statute would be more vulnerable to subsequent revision by a successor government than reforms voted by large majorities in Congress (as in Chile) and enshrined in the Constitution, as in Mexico and Ecuador. In compensation, since it did not affect current teachers or impose other noticeable costs, the 2002 statute had few opponents initially (mostly local clientelist politicians).

In any event, every government and minister since 2002 continued to implement the career reform. The first eight years of implementing the reform benefited from the continuity in office of President Uribe and his minister of education, Cecilia Vélez, who vigorously supported the new statute (interview, 14 August 2018). Another conservative, Manuel Santos, succeeded Uribe for another eight years (2010–2018). Moreover, Santos before had been the minister of finance from 2000 to 2002 when the government decreed the 1278 statute.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In 2009, about 30% of teachers were new hires under the 2002 statute (Ome 2012, 15). By 2014 only 29% of all teachers (including teachers on temporary contracts), or 36% of permanent teachers, had been hired under the 2002 statute (Figueroa et al. 2018, 10). A UNESCO review of career reforms concluded that managing two career tracks (old and new) is costly and time consuming, so "where feasible, a big-bang approach . . . may be more suitable" (Tournier and Chimier 2019, 17).

<sup>7</sup> Technically, Congress had granted the executive emergency powers to legislate by decree, so the new statute had the force of law and required new legislation to revise or rescind it.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, up until 2002, Santos had a fairly technocratic career with master's degrees from LSE and Harvard's Kennedy School. In the 1980s, he worked as an economist at the coffee confederation and at his family's newspaper, *El Tiempo*. In 1991 President Gaviria appointed him minister for

Conservative governments over these 16 years generally had few incentives to help out Fecode, a usually staunchly leftist union (Chambers-Ju 2017).

However, in the tight race for reelection in 2014, Santos asked for and received endorsement by Fecode. This support then predisposed Santos's second-term government to negotiate with Fecode when it went on strike in 2015. Even so, the government gave up little on negotiated evaluations (details later) and refused a long-standing Fecode demand to create a new, single teacher statute.<sup>9</sup>

Teacher representation in these negotiations was skewed in that most Fecode members were old-statute teachers and few new-statute teachers belonged to the union (interview Over Dorado, 22 January 2020). Fecode even used the negotiations to leverage benefits for 1979-statute teachers, including bonuses for the highest paid of 10% in 2016 and 15% in 2017 (Forero and Saavedra 2019, 302). New statute teachers were not happy with these agreements and argued that Fecode “negotiated in favor of the ‘oldest’ teachers to the detriment of the new” (Suárez 2015).<sup>10</sup>

Beyond the political advantages of imposing the 2002 statute on new hires only, this route also made it easier for researchers to isolate the impact of the 2002 statute by comparing sets of teachers. Multiple studies with varying methods found large learning gains on standardized tests (Saber) for new-statute teachers.<sup>11</sup> Teachers' higher scores on entry exams correlated with better student learning (Brutti and Sánchez 2017). By another metric, the gain in student performance between old- and new-statute teachers was equivalent to having a veteran (five years' experience) versus a starting teacher (Brutti and Sánchez 2017, 17).

Initially, evaluations for promotion consisted of written subject (*competencias*) exams. Only 20% passed the first competencies tests in 2011 and 2013 (Forero and Saavedra 2019, 124). In 2015, after lengthy negotiations between Fecode

foreign trade, “Juan Manuel Santos,” Wikipedia, 16 September 2023, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan\\_Manuel\\_Santos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Manuel_Santos).

<sup>9</sup> García et al. (2020). Interview with Luis Enrique García, vice minister of education (2014–2016), 16 August 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Pay levels were comparable across the two statutes through 2009 when new statute salaries started to exceed those for old statute teachers (Ome 2012, 11). By 2010s, starting pay for new-statute teachers was about the same as old-statute teachers, but 10 years into the career, new-statute salaries were around two-thirds higher (Brutti and Sánchez 2017, 11). Compared to other professionals in Colombia, teachers were paid less in 1990s but more by 2010s, and more than in Peru but less than in Mexico and Chile (Ome 2012, 9, 14, 28; also Gomez 2019, 10–11).

<sup>11</sup> See also Bonilla-Mejía et al. (2018, 5). Placement of new-statute teachers was fairly random, wherever there were openings, and they taught alongside old-statute teachers in the same schools making the comparison of student learning meaningful. Students of new-statute teachers were less likely to drop out (Ome 2012, 33). One early study, however, found a negative impact of new-statute teachers (Bonilla-Mejía and Galvis 2012).

and the government, the ministry shifted from a single written exam to “diagnostic-formative” evaluations based mostly (80%) on a video of classroom practice (evaluated by peers), with surveys of students, peers, and parents, and results from yearly performance evaluations (Gomez 2019). In 2015, 71% of teachers evaluated passed (Elacqua, Hincapié, et al. 2018, 84) though not all were promoted.<sup>12</sup> Others criticized the promotion evaluations because teachers who fail them can then take classes instead to get promoted.<sup>13</sup> However, most teachers were still clustered at lower career rungs, and only 14% of eligible teachers took the promotion evaluation in 2015 (Gomez 2019, 21), suggesting that the evaluation was perceived as difficult.

Some considered the annual performance reviews (different from the promotion exams) to be “completely ineffective” (Forero and Saavedra 2019, 123). Teachers with two successive unsatisfactory evaluations were to be dismissed, but there is no record in the secondary literature of such dismissals taking place, especially in large numbers. However, performance evaluations were common in other parts of the public sector, which made it difficult (as in Chile) for teachers to argue for an exemption (López 2008, 41).

Thus, the first of the three meritocratic evaluations, the entry concurso, may have had the greatest, though slowing moving, effect on the teacher corps. Entry into teaching was still highly competitive with only 9% of applicants passing in 2016 (Gomez 2019, 21). Then, successful applicants start on a four-month probation that one in six do not pass (Gomez 2019, 14). Moreover, when the exam system began, contract teachers also had to take the entrance exam and those who failed were fired (Gomez 2019, 22).

Because the reform was so gradual, it elicited little visible support from civil society and, as noted, little opposition from Fecode (which called no strikes 2002–2010). Colombia has long stood out in the region for the strength of its think tanks, especially Fedesarrollo, and of its business associations (Schneider 2004). However, these parts of civil society did not engage much with policy debates on education reform. Despite general disengagement, civil society was briefly active in the months before the 2015 revision of teacher evaluations. Led by Pedro Gómez, a prominent businessperson and head of *Fundación Compartir* (Sharing Foundation), activists from civil society, academics, and government officials met repeatedly to discuss education, especially quality (García, et al., 2020, 14).

<sup>12</sup> The evaluations were used to rank teachers, but then the percent promoted depended on fiscal capacity to pay for promotions and on negotiations with Fecode (interview, Victor Saavedra, 20 January 2020) (Tournier and Chimier 2019, 83).

<sup>13</sup> Forero and Saavedra (2019, 125, co-author Saavedra was a top ministry official 2015–2016).

When asked about support in civil society, several interviewees mentioned *Empresarios por la Educación* (ExE, Business for Education). Founded in 2002, with encouragement from Minister Vélez, this NGO brought together some businesspeople along with other business foundations—but had only 30 some paying members, including some multi-national corporations like Intel and Bimbo (interview Carolina Meza, 15 August 2018) (see Cabal and Chambers-Ju 2022). Organizationally, ExE had a very small operation with a staff of six and a budget of less than \$2 million (<https://fundacionexe.org.co/>, and Annual Report for 2019), a fraction of the size of much larger business-backed entities like *Mexicanos Primero* and the Lemann Foundation (staff of 70+) in Brazil.

During the campaign for president in 2018, ExE organized a debate on education among the candidates, however the front-running candidate Iván Duque did not participate. This is a good signal of the generally low electoral importance of education.<sup>14</sup> Overall, ExE activities seem less focused on lobbying government for reform and more on organizing events (sometimes in collaboration with the ministry) and directly funding programs like university courses for school directors (interview Carolina Meza, 15 August 2018).

ExE and business influence may come more indirectly through Colombia's pervasive revolving door with common movement from the private sector into government and vice versa (Schneider 2004; Urrutia 1983). In education, in 2018 President Duque appointed the former head of ExE, María Victoria Angulo, to be minister of education.<sup>15</sup> Another minister of education, María Fernanda Campo Saavedra (2010–2014) had previously been the president of the Chamber of Commerce of Bogotá (2000–2010). These ministers did not bring a pronounced pro-business shift but presumably endorsed the meritocratic elements in the new-teacher statute.

If overhauling teacher careers was not a major issue in civil society or electoral politics, what, thus orphaned, kept reforms going? The short answer is the technocracy. Colombia has a long tradition of technocracy in ministries and agencies related to the economy (Dargent 2015; Botero 2020). In the Education Ministry from 2002 to 2020, only one of five ministers was a politician (Gina Parody) and served for only two of the eighteen years. Among the technocrats, Veléz and Campo served much longer—eight and four years respectively—than

<sup>14</sup> Confirmed in opinion polls where education ranked as the sixth most important concern. In answer to the question, what issues most concern you and your family: security (48%), health (45%), unemployment (38%), the economy (28%), corruption (25%), and education (23%) (Pérez 2018).

<sup>15</sup> From the late 1990s through 2011, Angulo held various lower level positions in planning, finance, and education ministries. From 2011 to 2015, she headed up ExE before being appointed secretary of education for Bogotá (2015–2018). [https://es.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mar%C3%ADa\\_Victoria\\_Angulo](https://es.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mar%C3%ADa_Victoria_Angulo).

regional average of two years (appendix B). Even Gustavo Petro, Colombia's first leftist president, appointed technocrats after 2022. In the 2000s, Fecode in contrast, suffered leadership turmoil, and two presidents were deposed by the Executive Committee (López 2008, 46).

Technocracy in Colombia (and Peru) did not derive power from the usual hypothesized sources of technical knowledge and the costliness of policy mistakes (Dargent 2015) nor to backing from civil society, especially business (Schneider 1998). The sorry state of education was testament to the low political cost of previous policy errors in education. And, while the administrative details are complex, the basics of meritocracy in teacher careers are not technically challenging.

What creates space for technocrats in both Peru and Colombia is the relative absence of parties and politicians that elsewhere regularly intervene in, and prey on, education politics.<sup>16</sup> As noted earlier, parties in Peru and Colombia rank near the bottom on party institutionalization, thus weakening incentives for presidents to exchange clientelist benefits and appointments in education for party support in Congress. Similarly, it is difficult for politicians to establish a clientelist electoral strategy and credibility with presidents if they do not last long in office. In Peru's unicameral Congress, only 20% of legislators were reelected. Reelection was even less common in the upper house in Colombia, just 12% (1999–2008) (second lowest of eight countries in Latin America) though more common (52%) in the lower house (Estrada 2016, 15–16).<sup>17</sup>

In sum, overall political continuity and technocratic leadership in the Ministry of Education shielded the new 1278 statute of 2002 and gave technocrats time to gradually replace much of the teacher corps. Reform continuity depended in part also on union acquiescence that came from the reform design which did not affect Fecode members (who were almost all old-statute hires). Fecode also endorsed in 2015 the new evaluation it had negotiated. Along with Chile (around the same time), Colombia is one of the few cases of negotiated reform.

<sup>16</sup> Appointing politicians would also have costs in public opinion (interview Victor Saavedra, 20 January 2020).

<sup>17</sup> As noted in chapter 2, by the late 20th century all teacher hiring in Colombia was by political appointment. With the decentralization of the 1990s, local politicians took over this clientelist system. So, by 2002 and the new statute, national politicians may have been less dependent on clientelism, making it presumably easier politically for the national government to dispossess local politicians who would have little recourse to oppose meritocratic hiring, especially after the government recentralized hiring after 2006.

### III. Peru: Staying Alive through Turbulent Times

As in Mexico and Colombia, reform in Peru was a top-down affair with little valence in electoral and party politics and scant engagement by civil society.<sup>18</sup> The electoral and organizational shortcomings of the teacher union, Sutep, facilitated the top-down route. In part due to the absence of other powerful actors, government technocrats managed to get reforms partially implemented (Balarin and Saavedra 2023). In comparative terms, the education space in Peru was on the emptier end of the continuum.

A remarkable political aspect in Peru is that reforms after 2007 survived across four different presidents, from across the political spectrum, and their seven education ministers (see appendix B). In the biggest surprise, Ollanta Humala (2011–2016) campaigned on the center-left—with support from Sutep—yet deepened the career reforms of his predecessor Alan García (center). Then Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, aka PPK (2016–2018, center-right) continued Humala’s reforms, even keeping Humala’s education minister. Finally, the caretaker governments of Martin Vizcarra (2018–2020) and Francisco Sagasti (2020–2021) appointed technocrats and let reform implementation proceed. Political turmoil of the 2020s, left career reforms in limbo (Balarin 2022).

However, many teachers were not won over. Some teachers still distrusted evaluations, in part due to government bungling of evaluations in the 2000s (Cuenca and Vargas 2018, 24). Some strikes in thlate 2010s, led by dissident regional unions, demanded major changes to the evaluation system. In surveys in 2016 and 2018 around 40% of teachers cited disadvantages of the career reform versus 20% who saw benefits, with tenured and older teachers seeing more disadvantages (Minedu 2018). Nonetheless, 73% of teachers were in agreement or totally in agreement with periodic evaluations (Minedu 2018, 21), and Sutep had mostly accepted the reform (Cuenca 2017, 22). Jaime Saavedra, minister from 2013 to 2016, during the most intense period of implementation, called the relationship with Sutep “complex but in general positive” (Saavedra and Gutierrez 2020, 159).

Reasons for this lack of teacher enthusiasm for actual reforms were likely several. Of public school teachers, 146,000 or 38% were temporary, contracted teachers, a share that had risen rapidly in the 2010s (Guadalupe et al. 2017, 25).<sup>19</sup> So, only 243,000 (or 42% of all teachers) were subject to the new career

<sup>18</sup> According to Ricardo Cuenca (who has written more than anyone else on teacher careers in Peru), “the reform was designed and implemented from the top down. The markedly technocratic nature of its management has left little room for discussion” (2017, 21).

<sup>19</sup> Peru had a total of 576,000 teachers (Chiroque Chunga 2020, 1, 3). Of these, 383,000 worked in public schools, and the rest (34%) in the private sector.

rules and only 9% of them were hired under the new merit procedures in place since 2014 (Puch and Salas 2020, 79). Of permanent teachers (*nombrados*), 79% were still in the first three of eight levels in the new career ladder (Chiroque Chunga 2020, 3) and thus were not reaping the material rewards promised in the new career system.

How did the reforms and their technocrat backers survive the turnover in presidents and ministers and lack of enthusiasm among teachers? It was clearly not due to presidential reelection as in Ecuador, nor to party continuity as in Chile, nor to lasting backing in civil society and an influential policy network. Continuity resulted largely from an absence of political parties, a more accommodating teacher union, favorable ratings in public opinion, and in consequence a politically unencumbered technocracy. After some brief background on the education system and the reforms, this section considers each of these three factors.

Coming into the 21st century, Peru had one of the worst education systems in Latin America in both coverage and quality. Public spending per pupil had dropped by two-thirds from the 1960s to the 1990s. Teacher salaries plummeted by close to 90% from the 1970s to the 1990s (Guadalupe et al. 2018, 8, 13). From this low base successive governments after 2000 increased spending dramatically, expanded access, and retooled teacher careers. Spending per pupil in primary schools rose sixfold to \$932 from 2000 to 2015 and fivefold in secondary schools to \$1,056 (Cuenca and Vargas 2018, 14). As noted before, Peru logged some of the most dramatic gains on international assessments.<sup>20</sup> By 2019, Peru ranked among the highest scorers in Latin America, alongside long-time education leaders like Uruguay and Costa Rica (Unesco 2021a, 1).

Comprehensive reform of teacher careers took off in the García government.<sup>21</sup> The 2007 *Ley de la Carrera Pública Magisterial* (CPM) established five career levels with evaluations required to climb the career ladder and continue teaching (with dismissal after three failed evaluations). Like the 2002 teacher statute in Colombia, the 2007 law applied only to new hires (already hired teachers could join if they wanted). By 2012, only about a fifth of all teachers were in the new career (Fernández 2012, 50).<sup>22</sup> The 2012 *Ley de Reforma Magisterial* (LRM)

<sup>20</sup> On national assessments, the share of students with satisfactory outcomes quadrupled in math from 6% in 2007 to 27% in 2015 and tripled in reading from 16% to 50% (Cuenca 2017, 13). However, one early study of the career reform found little impact on learning (Puch and Salas 2020).

<sup>21</sup> For more details on teacher career reforms, see Cuenca et al. (2023); Cuenca (2020); Cuenca and Vargas (2018); Saavedra and Gutierrez (2020); and Balarin (2022).

<sup>22</sup> Only 54,000 teachers (29,000 new hires and only about 25,000 voluntary transfers by existing teachers). In the 2010s, other reforms also included a new national curriculum reform, full-day programs, schoolwide bonuses for performance, and other measures (Saavedra and Gutierrez 2020; Balarin 2022).

made the 2007 law mandatory for all teachers. From 2013 to 2021, governments managed to implement much of the new meritocratic career, except for the yearly performance review. Explaining this continuity requires a closer analysis of the weakness of two usual opponents—unions and political parties—and the resulting strength of technocracy in the Ministry of Education.

To understand Sutep's political weakness requires a deeper dive into internal union organization and politics (Schneider 2022). A first issue is low union density. Most estimates put Sutep density at less than 40% (Bruns and Luque 2015, 300; Schneider 2022)—compared with a median in Latin America of 77%—and likely falling in the 2000s in part due to the expansion of teachers on temporary contracts (up to 40% of teachers by the late 2010s) who were less likely to join Sutep (Zegarra and Ravina 2005, 174, 176, 195).<sup>23</sup> In 2007 the García government cut 90% of union organizers on the public payroll (*licencia sindical*) from 303 to 30 (Chiroque Chunga 2008, 69; Fernández 2012, 49). The 2007 career law further weakened Sutep by removing its representative from evaluation committees (Fernández 2012 48).

According to a national survey of teachers conducted by the ministry, only 30% of teachers claimed membership in Sutep (Minedu 2018). When asked about trust in various institutions, teachers ranked Sutep at the bottom—the bottom of 13 institutions in 2014 and the last of 7 institutions in 2016 and 2018. Only around a third of teachers in 2014 and about 20% in 2016 and 2018 expressed trust in Sutep. In contrast, trust in the Ministry of Education rose from just over half in 2014 to two-thirds in 2016 (possibly reflecting Minister Saavedra's popularity).

A core puzzle in Sutep is how the far-left Patria Roja Party dominated the secretary general and other leadership positions (as well as the 28-member National Executive Committee [CEN]) for five decades and counting since Sutep's founding in 1972, especially considering that almost no teachers support Patria Roja. The short explanation is indirect elections. Only at the bottom level do teachers vote directly to elect school-level union leaders. All elections at four higher levels are indirect, by delegates in assemblies, where it is easier for incumbents to influence delegate elections and court supporters.<sup>24</sup>

Sutep's lack of heft in national elections derives from this dominance by a tiny splinter party, as shown by the distribution of teacher votes in the first-round presidential election in 2006 (Chiroque Chunga 2008, 61, 63). The teacher

<sup>23</sup> In 2014 contract teachers were about half as likely to join Sutep as tenured teachers (Minedu 2018).

<sup>24</sup> For further analysis, see Schneider (2022). Another hypothesis was that Patria Roja leaders recruited sympathizers to teach in rural districts that were over represented in Sutep voting (Zegarra and Ravina 2005, 175).

vote for Patria Roja was in fact 10 times the share in the popular vote, but only 2.4% voted Patria Roja compared to 0.24% nationally. The rest of teachers split their votes across the ideological spectrum: 24% for Humala (campaigning center-left), 21% for Paniagua (center), 20% García (center), and 15% for Flores (right). Overall, teacher votes were fragmented across the political spectrum with heaviest concentration in the center, far from Patria Roja.<sup>25</sup>

Organizational fracturing compounded this electoral weakness (interview Juan Pablo Silva, 18 March 2016). Where the government in Ecuador destroyed UNE, Sutep seemed to implode on its own. Conare (Comité Nacional de Reorientación del SUTEP) was the first and main dissident faction in the 1990s followed later by dissident subfactions of Conare and regional affiliates. Conare was reportedly connected to Sendero Luminoso and split then along lines within the rump Sendero (armed struggle or not). It is revealing that two of the teacher unions in Latin America with the largest and longest standing dissident movements—Mexico and Peru—are the only two (in this book) with indirect elections and long-lived incumbents, either leaders like Elba Esther Gordillo in Mexico or parties like Patria Roja in Peru. Among other demands, the dissidents in both countries called for greater internal union democracy.

Relations between Sutep and the governments of Toledo and García were generally antagonistic (Cuenca 2020, 7). In the 2000s, Sutep led dozens of protests, including in 2007 a lengthy strike, with 96% of teachers participating, against the new teacher law (Fernández 2012, 25). Relations with Humala started out frosty, but after a month-long strike in 2012, interactions improved.<sup>26</sup> Saavedra pushed for raises, and salaries increased about 40% during Humala's term (Chiroque Chunga 2015, 2). In 2015, the average salary for career-track teachers (*nombrados*, not contracted) was \$680. Yet, teacher salaries remained among the lowest in Latin America (Cuenca and Vargas 2018, 21–22).<sup>27</sup> Still, there were no long strikes during Saavedra's term (2013–2016).

<sup>25</sup> After 2006, lacking organic ties to mainstream parties, Sutep endorsed for run-off elections—with the strategy of *“mal menor”* (lesser evil)—whichever candidate was running against the right-wing Fujimoristas, Humala on the left, then PPK on the right (interview Hamer Vallena, 14 November 2019).

<sup>26</sup> The new minister in 2013, Saavedra, had conducted research years earlier when working at the think tank GRADE on teacher salaries and knew they had long been low. Relations improved in the Humala government, in part due to the initiative started in 2009 by CNE and Foro Educativo to have a broad national dialogue on benchmarking teacher performance (*buen desempeño*). Meetings and conferences continued through 2012 when the proposals were delivered to the Ministry of Education (Cuenca 2020, 12–13).

<sup>27</sup> And the career lacked status; in a 2015 poll, 55% of respondents thought teaching “was an easy job,” and 64% would not want their children to become teachers. Among teachers, 63% thought society did not value their profession, and 53% of teachers would not want their children to follow in their footsteps (Saavedra and Gutierrez 2020, 157).

First as union leader and then as president, Pedro Castillo succeeded finally in fracturing Sutep. In 2017, against Sutep leaders, Castillo and other regional union leaders led a wildcat 75-day strike with 63% of teachers out at its peak.<sup>28</sup> The ministry of education, also known in Peru as Minedu, reached various agreements with separate groups but refused to budge on evaluations. At one point, Castillo met with Minister Marten and raised another institutional demand, also not granted, that Minedu rescind Sutep's monopoly representation and recognize Castillo's faction (interview Marilú Marten, 2 March 2022). Then, on the day after Castillo's inauguration as president in 2021, the government granted legal recognition to the dissident movement in a new union, Fenate (Federación Nacional de Trabajadores en la Educación del Perú), formalizing the scission. Overall, through the 2010s, Sutep had relatively few members, lacked influence in national elections, and was riven by factions.

Since 2000, Peru has had a no-party political system (Muñoz and Baraybar 2021; Levitsky 2018). As noted earlier, Peru ranks second to last in Latin America in terms of party institutionalization. What parties do exist rarely last and are usually just personal vehicles loosely organized around election time. The constitutional prohibition on reelection means that presidents, once elected, have no reason to invest in building a lasting party. This relative absence of parties relieves the usual political pressure to use the education system for patronage. Similarly, evanescent political parties and the related high levels of turnover among legislators reduced their incentives to prey on education for clientelist resources. Among eight unicameral legislatures in Latin America, Peru, as noted earlier, had the third-highest level of turnover with just over 20% of incumbents on average reelected (1995–2008) (Estrada 2016, 16). Effective use of education resources for clientelism takes time, which parties and politicians in Peru rarely had.

Few education NGOs had emerged by the 2000s and conform to a general assessment that civil society in Peru was “feeble” (Vergara and Watanabe 2019, 38) though it ranked medium in Latin America on a V-Dem scale for civil society (chapter 2). GRADE and IEP were influential think tanks and research

<sup>28</sup> 63% was the ministry count, “Más del 50% de docentes no acudieron a clases en algunas provincias de 18 regiones,” *El Comercio*, 16 August 2017, <https://elcomercio.pe/peru/minedu-50-profesores-acudieron-dictar-clases-18-regiones-noticia-noticia-450536-noticia/> 1. Other estimates put the share of striking teachers higher, around 71% (250,000 of a total of 340,000 teachers). The strike started in just one region, Cusco in June 2017 with 14 demands, mostly salary and related items but among them a call for more training before teachers did the performance evaluations (León 2017). As the strike spread—still against the position of Sutep's national leaders—evaluations and the possibility of getting fired became more central and the core issues that united all the striking factions.

institutes, but they covered all policy areas, not just education.<sup>29</sup> Foro Educativo (Education Forum) had a single focus but had minimal staff and few members (though with some organizing capacity in the dialogue on benchmarking teacher performance).

A public body, CNE (Consejo Nacional de Educación) was partly responsible for channeling input from civil society. The 24 members appointed by the government during 2020–2026 included researchers, educational authorities in schools and universities, and representatives of private schools and the Catholic Church, but significantly no union representation.<sup>30</sup> It was not until 2021 that CNE built up its technical staff of about 20 to allow it to get beyond its “basically ritual function” (Guadalupe et al. 2017, 241). Although considered weak by some, CNE was central to benchmarking teacher performance and elaborating two strategic plans, one in 2007 and another in 2020 (Guadalupe et al. 2017, 241).<sup>31</sup> During his term (2013–2016), CNE did not have a big role in policy, but Saavedra found it a useful “sounding board” (interview 5 March 2021).

As elsewhere, parents and business did not participate much in reform politics (Cuenca 2017). One of the reasons parents were not more involved, beyond the usual impediments to collective action, was because so many children had migrated to private schools: about 30% nationally in 2015, up from 26% in 2011, and close to half in Lima (Chiroque Chunga 2015, 4). Business officially backed the reforms (Cuenca 2017, 22), but one leader in Confiep, the multisectoral peak association, said it was “cheap talk” (*de boca para fuera*) not backed up with more active support.<sup>32</sup> Some businesses were involved in the Foro Educativo, but that was more a form of corporate social responsibility than policy support (interview Juan Pablo Silva, 18 March 2016).

The executive branch in Peru has long been the reserve of technocrats (Dargent 2015; Balarin and Saavedra 2023). A detailed study of the upper echelons of five core ministries, including education, and 59 interviewees found almost no trace of clientelism in top appointments (Muñoz and Baraybar 2021). This was a well-ensconced technocracy abetted by the lack of patronage interventions from political parties. When they take office, presidents do not

<sup>29</sup> Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo (Group for the Analysis of Development) and Instituto de Estudios Peruanos (Institute for Peruvian Studies).

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.cne.gob.pe/consejeros/>.

<sup>31</sup> The process leading to the plan published in 2020 included 847 meetings (“*jornadas de educación*”) with more than 25,000 participants across the country and led to a 184-page document of desiderata (CNE 2020). Weirdly, the plan only briefly discussed standardized tests (international and domestic) mostly to criticize, mentioned career reforms only a few times in passing, and made no reference to Sutep.

<sup>32</sup> Interview María Isabel León, 19 January 2016. Confederación Nacional de Instituciones Empresariales Privadas.

have parties to turn to for party cadres and networks to fill the many appointive positions, so by default they turn to technocrats (Muñoz and Baraybar 2021, 5). By one count, technocrats were taking over, until the 2020s: “Technocrats made up 49 percent of Toledo’s ministers, 63 percent of García’s, 75 percent of Humala’s, and 70 percent of Kuczynski’s” (Vergara and Watanabe 2019, 38). And voters too liked technocrats; in a 2021 poll 81% preferred “independent and experienced professionals in the cabinet.”<sup>33</sup>

The transition in 2011 to president Ollanta Humala was a critical point for the teacher reform and a surprise when he appointed two technocrats, first Patricia Salas (2011–2013) and then Jaime Saavedra (2013–2016). Minister Salas took the previous government’s teacher reform and made it compulsory and got it (LRM) passed by Congress by late 2012. When Salas left in 2013, Humala appointed an even more classic technocrat. Jaime Saavedra was an economist (PhD from Columbia University) and had worked in the World Bank and other multilateral agencies as well as GRADE (the Lima think tank) and other government positions in Peru. According to Saavedra, Humala gave him few instructions (speed up reforms and promote one special scholarship program) yet otherwise *carte blanche* with full authority to fill other appointed positions in the ministry (interview 5 March 2021).

Saavedra went full steam ahead in implementing the new teacher career, surrounding himself in the ministry with a young group of economist technocrats (interview Juan Pablo Silva, 23 March 2016). Saavedra ended up as Humala’s most popular minister, much more popular than Humala himself, so it was less of a surprise when the next president Kuczynski made the unprecedented move of inviting Saavedra to stay on. By late 2016, Saavedra was still the most popular minister (40% approval), had been given a standing ovation at an annual business conference (CADE, Conferencia Anual de Ejecutivos), and been lionized by media columnists (Torres 2016).<sup>34</sup> This popularity notwithstanding, and in the context of bitter divisions between pro and anti-*fujimorista* factions, 52% of respondents thought Congress should impeach Saavedra for his alleged involvement in several corruption scandals, as Congress ultimately

<sup>33</sup> Castillo’s politicized appointments to the executive provoked a backlash in public opinion: “While the Ipsos poll found that 37% of respondents still support Castillo, as many as 70% felt he had made poor ministerial appointments . . . just 7% of respondents advocated appointing ministers from the ranks of . . . parties,” *Latin American Weekly Report*, 9 December 2021, WR-21-49, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> A survey in mid-2016 showed 36% approval for Saavedra to stay on in the PPK government. Support was higher among Kuczynski voters (47%) versus Keiko Fujimori voters (25%), for richer respondents (57% for socioeconomic levels A and B), and in Lima (42%) (GFK survey 2016), suggesting support for technocracy is higher among the better off.

did (Saavedra 2022). Saavedra returned to the World Bank, and several more technocrats succeeded him in the ministry.

Public opinion gave additional encouragement to reformers. In 2007, of two-thirds of respondents who knew about the new 2007 law more than half approved. By a similar margin, 60% of respondents disapproved of Sutep's strike (and disapproved of the strike more than four other contemporary protests in other sectors) (Ipsos 2007). In other polls, 37% said education quality was poor, 43% thought the poor quality of teachers was a major problem, and 74% felt the 2007 career law would be good for students and teachers (Fernández 2012, 49).<sup>35</sup>

By 2012, 71% thought the new teacher law would improve quality, 62% thought existing teacher quality was among the main problems, 65% felt teachers should be fired after failing three evaluations, and 51% considered Sutep to be harmful for education (Fernández 2012, 52).<sup>36</sup> Later, a 2017 survey did not ask about the career law overall, but it did find that 84% of respondents thought teachers should pass exams to enter teaching and to be promoted.<sup>37</sup> Overall though, the impact of public opinion was modest, both because respondents were often divided and because they did not have parties to represent or channel these preferences beyond the surveys.<sup>38</sup>

Evaluations proceeded apace in the 2010s. From 2014 to 2018 the ministry conducted 17 evaluations “with relative success and low levels of contention” for a total of 1.2 million evaluations (more than two per teacher) (Cuenca 2020, 20). However, three factors limited the impact of the career reforms. First, few applicants passed the entrance exam (PUN, Prueba Única Nacional). As a consequence, second, the number of contracted, temporary teachers remained high, more than a third of teachers.<sup>39</sup> However, contracted teachers were drawn off

<sup>35</sup> In a major irony, the García government invited Elba Esther Gordillo, leader of the teacher union in Mexico, to showcase union support for career reforms. Chapter 6 notes that Gordillo scuttled reforms in the 1990s and blocked them in the 2000s, before the government jailed her for corruption in 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Another poll showed more divisions. On the Sutep strike in 2012, 54% disapproved. However, only 45% thought the government should proceed with the new career law of 2012, and 42% thought the president should not keep his education minister, Patricia Salas (who in fact did not last much longer) (Ipsos 2012).

<sup>37</sup> *La Republica*, “El 85% de peruanos respalda la evaluación a maestros, según GfK,” August 26, 2017, <https://larepublica.pe/politica/1079004-el-85-de-peruanos-respalda-la-evaluacion-a-maestros-segun-gfk/?ref=lre>.

<sup>38</sup> Former Minister Saavedra thought support in public opinion helped generally and specifically it strengthened the ministry's bargaining power within the government and with the president (interview 5 March 2021). Saavedra and his team devised a comprehensive communication strategy to win over public opinion and especially teachers (Tournier and Chimier 2019, 102–103).

<sup>39</sup> Contracted (i.e., temporary, short-term) teachers increased from 7% in 2000, to 18% in 2011, to 30% in 2015 (Chiroque Chunga 2015, 4), to 34% in 2016 (Cuenca and Vargas 2018, 22). Peru

the list of teachers who took the entrance exam (but scored below the cutoff) and thus were still selected on a merit basis. Lastly, as noted earlier, 80% of the *nombrado* teachers were stuck in the bottom three of eight steps of the promotion ladder. For senior teachers hired under the old law, this meant salary cuts, generating “vehement dissatisfaction” (Tournier and Chimier 2019, 109).

In sum, through 2021, the ensconced technocracy, an accommodating teacher union, and a no-party electoral system all facilitated partial reform implementation. Education never became a core electoral issue, even in Castillo’s campaign for president. Political crises of the 2020s, however, left education reform in limbo.

#### IV. Conclusions

In comparing Colombia and Peru several commonalities stand out. First, pro-reform electoral mobilization was not significant—especially compared to Ecuador and Chile. Without electoral or party support but with lasting reform, these top-down cases raise questions about what other factors can keep reforms going.

Teacher unions in Colombia and Peru were more interest groups than political machines, though pulled left by their leaders (Schneider 2022). Government reformers could count on some support from teachers and at least acquiescence from Sutep and Fecode. Their relative weakness, especially in electoral politics, made it easier for presidents and technocratic ministers to keep reforms on track. Fecode’s negotiation of teacher evaluations (as in Chile) gave it more input into the process and gave the reform its approval, although Fecode continued to call for a new, single statute covering all teachers.

Although nowhere near the power of SNTE in Mexico, among South American cases, Fecode and Sutep and dissident factions had significant though uneven influence on career reform, often through anticipated reactions and government inaction. In Colombia, two moments showed this most clearly. First, the 2002 reform applied only to new teachers, not to any of Fecode’s members. In other countries (Peru, Ecuador, Chile) career reforms were initially voluntary but made compulsory for all teachers after several years. That governments in Colombia never attempted a similar move evinced reluctance to antagonize Fecode. The second key moment came in 2015, after Fecode’s electoral endorsement of Santos, when the reelected government negotiated new promotion

had the highest share of temporary teachers among countries adopting career reforms (Tournier and Chimier 2019, 24).

evaluations, in partial compensation (the government also raised salaries) for perceived help in getting reelected.

In Peru, the only comparable moment came in the 2017 wildcat strike that led to the 2021 fracturing of the teacher union. Despite Sutep's acceptance of career reform, this strike was so disruptive and politically costly (Cuenca et al. 2023) that later caretaker governments and technocratic ministries (2018–2021) likely did not want to roll out performance evaluations and risk confrontations with more radical, breakaway factions in the union.

Policy continuity was essential for reforms in Colombia and Peru, and these cases show its multiple sources. Social coalitions (business especially) and civil society were not key in either case. Continuity in Colombia was due in part to continuity in conservative presidents (Uribe and Santos both were in office for eight years) and ministers, especially the first, Cecilia Vélez, who served for the first eight years of the reform. Peru, in contrast, cycled through a variety of presidents who all, however, appointed technocrats to the Ministry of Education, and they in turn provided continuity, at least until the 2020s.

The continuity and power of technocrats was not—as in many theories—intrinsic to their expertise but rather resulted more from the relative absence of the most powerful potential contenders in the education space—teacher unions and clientelist politicians. Union opposition was comparatively muted in both countries though for different reasons—organizational in Peru and due to the bypass strategy in Colombia. And party systems were not institutionalized and thus lacked enduring clientelist politicians, especially in Peru. Civil society and related policy networks in Colombia and Peru (and Mexico, next chapter) were not as developed or active as in Chile and Brazil. Technocrats thus filled the vacuum.

Subsequent chapters will highlight these contrasts and relative weaknesses (in Colombia and Peru) of parties, civil society (including business), and policy networks. Chapter 7 on Brazil emphasizes the important roles for civil society and sometimes parties and elections. Parties were also key in VTE (chapter 8), and, in the Turkish exception, business, especially SMEs.

# Union Blockage and Clientelist Backlash in Mexico, South Africa, and Rio de Janeiro

*What elements of your program were the most difficult,  
from a political point of view?*

*Without doubt, the most difficult was to break the perverse logic of political  
appointments of school and regional directors.*

—Wilson Risolia, former secretary of education  
Rio de Janeiro, email, 7 April 2016

## I. Introduction: Filling the Empty Space

In January 2011, Wilson Risolia became secretary of education for the state of Rio de Janeiro with a mandate from the reelected governor to rescue the state from near last place in the Ideb ranking for all states in Brazil. Risolia enacted a broad set of reforms that essentially depoliticized education administration (kicking out political appointees to superintendent and school director positions) and provided teachers and schools with mentoring and support. By 2014, when Risolia left office, the state of Rio de Janeiro ranked an astonishing fourth in Brazil. However, in the next government clientelist politicians and teacher unions counterattacked and repoliticized education in short order, reversing Risolia's reforms. By 2019, Rio was back in 18th place.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ideb (Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica) is based on student test results and passing rates. Average test scores for states were all in a narrow range (from 2.7 to 3.9 in 2009), so small changes in average scores could shift rankings dramatically (Ministry of Education, <http://ideb.inep.gov.br/resultado/>).

In Mexico, in December 2018, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, better known as AMLO, was settling in as the new president with a long to-do list of campaign promises. Among them was to roll back the sweeping education reforms undertaken over the previous six years by his predecessor Enrique Peña Nieto (2012–2018). AMLO with backing from a significant share of the teacher union, promised to reverse the reforms and end teacher evaluations and proceeded to do so in 2019. These two vignettes capture the fate of many promising reforms in Latin America and show that opponents of quality reforms, especially for teacher careers, are powerful and patient.

Reformers in Mexico, South Africa, and Rio de Janeiro lacked the factors that contributed to implementation in previous chapters—electoral mandates in Chile and Ecuador and lasting technocracy in Colombia and Peru. Instead, isolated reformers in Mexico and South Africa confronted two of the most politically powerful teacher unions in the world, and reformers in Rio de Janeiro struggled against dedicated clientelists. As analyzed in chapter 2, much of the power of machine unions in Mexico and South Africa depended on their control over teacher careers. Thus, meritocratic hiring and promotion posed existential threats to the political muscle of leaders of machine unions and of clientelist politicians.

Mexico has the most powerful teacher union in Latin America and confirms the conventional view that unions—or at least those that become political machines—can be the main, and mortal, enemies of career reforms. Governments in the 1990s and the 2010s enacted meritocratic changes to teacher careers, but the teacher union, SNTE (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación), gutted the first reforms in the 1990s and helped—especially its dissident wing CNTE (Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación)—get the second rescinded. Neither reform though was part of a major electoral mobilization as in Chile and Ecuador. Policy networks had less impact, and support from civil society was narrow. Lastly, Mexico’s constitutional rule of no reelection for presidents opened up a greater possibility for policy reversal. Not quite a perfect storm, but multiple factors were working against reform survival and few allies were defending it.

For a comparison outside Latin America, a similarly powerful teacher union in South Africa blocked reform out of the gate. South Africa’s teacher union and political trajectory resemble Mexico’s, especially in the 20th-century fusion of teacher union and dominant party. Like SNTE, Sadtu (South African Democratic Teachers Union) had sway over teacher careers and in some cases, as in Mexico, even sold teaching positions. Sadtu had likewise become a potent political machine and was officially part of the ANC (African National Congress)

governing alliance. Like SNTE/CNTE, Sadtu blocked several merit policies for teacher careers.

Mexico and South Africa illustrate well the importance of understanding the wide variation in the types of teacher unions that reformers confront. Chapter 2 discussed the fundamental distinction between political machines and more professional interest groups (Schneider 2022). Teacher unions in Mexico and South Africa were two of the world's most potent political machines. Fecode in Colombia had moments where it might have evolved into a political machine, but it came up short in the 21st century and trended instead toward an interest group. Machine unions are staunch opponents of reforms to teacher careers that pose existential threats, while interest-group unions are not as threatened and are thus more amenable to negotiation and accepting career reforms.

Reformers in the state of Rio de Janeiro (2011–2015) also confronted a combative teacher union. Yet reforms survived several strikes, with the full backing of the governor. The bigger problem, as signaled by this chapter's epigraph, was clientelism and opposition to Risolia's nonpolitical appointments of school and regional directors. Shortly after Risolia left office in 2015, politicians in the state assembly repoliticized director appointments (by making the positions elective). Chapter 7 covers more lasting reforms in three other states in Brazil, but the case of scuppered reform in Rio de Janeiro sheds more light on the blockage arguments developed in this chapter.

The exact type and strategies of opponents varied across the three cases in this chapter, but reforms all suffered from a lack of countervailing support seen in other chapters. Moreover, compared to these success stories, reformers lacked time and continuity in power, especially in Mexico and Rio de Janeiro. Thus, when emptied of pro-reform actors, other political opponents can more easily fill education space. These three cases are by no means the universe of blocked reform in Latin America or the Global South. Mexico and Rio de Janeiro were, though, the cases in Latin America with the most ambitious career reforms and the most complete reversals. Most importantly, all three cases show when, why, and how opponents mobilized to block reforms.

## II. Reform in Mexico: Imposed from above, Dismantled from above

Shortly after taking office at the end of 2012, President Peña Nieto moved with alacrity to raise quality in education and transform teacher careers. He announced a bold reform, jailed the head of the union SNTE several months later, and got Congress to pass amendments that enshrined education quality and teacher evaluations in the Constitution. The government's decisive action,

constitutional amendments, and solid backing from all three of the main political parties all seemed to augur well for lasting reform. Politics rarely align so well.

As in the Andean wave, the core policies in Mexico transformed the teaching career with meritocratic procedures for entry and promotion.<sup>2</sup> In place of particularistic, politicized hiring practices dominated by SNTE—including selling positions and passing them on to children (Ornelas 2018a; Elacqua et al. 2018a, 175)—the reforms instituted examinations to enter the teaching career and evaluations for promotion. To implement testing and evaluation, the government strengthened and made more autonomous the evaluation agency, INEE (Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación).<sup>3</sup>

Where did this reform impulse come from? Most striking is where it did not come from, namely electoral mobilization as in Ecuador and Chile. Peña Nieto hardly mentioned education on the campaign trail, and education was not a top concern among voters.<sup>4</sup> However, during the long, five-month transition in 2012 from election to inauguration, Peña Nieto's transition team negotiated what became the Pacto por Mexico, including major education reforms (Elizondo 2017). On the transition team, Peña Nieto tapped Aurelio Nuño (then only 34 years old) to be the point person on education. Nuño in turn contracted the consulting firm of Miguel Limón (former minister of education 1995–2000 in the last PRI government) and worked with a small group of education experts to draft a reform program, including specific pieces of legislation (interview Aurelio Nuño, 11 March 2021).<sup>5</sup>

The Pacto was an unprecedented policy agreement negotiated among the three main parties—PRI, PAN, and PRD.<sup>6</sup> The Pacto covered a number of areas of political reform and economic regulation in sectors like oil and telecoms,

<sup>2</sup> Mexico had actually been a reform leader in Latin America on teacher careers, having implemented a full reform, complete with performance evaluations, in the early 1990s. However, by 2000 SNTE had gutted the reform, and all teachers received the same top performance score (Ornelas 2002; Chambers-Ju and Finger 2017, 223). It ended in “disaster” (Ornelas 2018a, 140).

<sup>3</sup> For more details on the reforms, see Hrusa et al. (2020); Moch et al. (2021 89); Bonilla-Rius (2020); Coyoli (2024, 1); Elacqua, Hincapié, et al. (2018).

<sup>4</sup> Education groups in civil society got together to present proposals to the candidates and ask for policy commitments. Peña Nieto participated in these meetings but education was not a big part of his electoral strategy (interview Jennifer O'Donoghue, 16 January 2020).

<sup>5</sup> This small team did draw on contemporary ideas about best practice advocated by Washington multilaterals and domestic outfits like Mexicanos Primero. However, the reform team had no direct contact with Washington multilaterals. Nuño did though meet regularly during the transition with representatives from Mexicanos Primero. The team also consulted with experts from Chile (interview with Elisa Bonilla-Rius, 10 June 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Revolutionary Institutional Party), Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party), and Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution).

but it also included quality reforms in education. For some, this was an effort at state-building or state-recuperation whereby the parties in the Pacto sought to recover central government control (*rectoria*) over captured sectors (*poderes facticos*) like education (Moch et al. 2021; Ornelas 2018a, 144). In Ecuador, another country with a machine union, Correa had earlier used similar language about regaining state control over education.

The biggest worry was the teacher union. Peña Nieto signaled right off the bat a confrontational approach with the union and Elba Esther Gordillo (SNTE president since 1989 and a top PRI politician through the mid-2000s) by appointing Emilio Chuayffet as secretary of SEP (Secretaría de Educación Pública, equivalent to ministries of education elsewhere). Chuayffet had been one of Gordillo's main rivals within the PRI. Early in 2013, the government went on the offensive against her leadership as well as the organizational sources of her power within SNTE, including jailing Gordillo on corruption charges.

A range of factors had contributed to making SNTE a powerful political machine (as elaborated in chapter 2) and what a former long-time leader, Carlos Jonguitud Barrios (1972–1989), called “the plumbers” of the electoral system.<sup>7</sup> By law, all teachers and other educational staff automatically belonged to SNTE (and in the 20th century to the PRI) and 1% of their salary, making SNTE the largest and richest teacher union in Latin America with an annual budget of around US\$120 million (Fernández 2012, 11).

More important, SNTE amassed major additional person-power and resources from union organizers on the public education payroll. Such positions number in the dozens or hundreds in other countries, but SNTE operated in another league. A survey conducted before the reforms by the national statistics agency in Mexico (because the Education Ministry did not know the payroll), determined that 13% of 2.2 million teachers and staff on school payrolls did not show up to teach (Ornelas 2018a, 144). The survey found that there were

39,000 “aviators” (as they are popularly known; these are people on the payroll who “fly around” without doing any educational work at all). Also, it showed . . . more than 110 thousand other “commissioned” employees doing administrative work. The jewel of the findings: almost 115 thousand workers who had resigned, were retired or even deceased continued cashing their checks (Economist 2014). Between the dead,

<sup>7</sup> See Schneider (2022) for fuller analysis. Unlike teacher unions in the rest of Latin America, SNTE has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention. For recent overviews, see Barba (2018); Ornelas (2018b, 2008); Chambers-Ju and Finger (2017); and Chambers-Ju (2017). Over several decades, Carlos Ornelas has produced some of the best and most thorough research.

retired, commissioned, and aviators, the government was spending about 1.4 US billion dollars a year. (Ornelas 2019, 255)<sup>8</sup>

After 2013, SEP forced teachers working in administration and SNTE back to schools. SEP eliminated 85% of the *comisionados* who were on federal payroll but could not get rid of the thousands paid by states. Among the *comisionados* were thousands of full-time political operatives who organized supporters to vote, rally, and protest, and who presumably monitored whether and how rank-and-file teachers were participating (interview Aurelio Nuño, 11 March 2021).

SNTE had additional power and value in electoral politics due to union leverage over hiring, transfers, promotions, and in some cases even payroll (Chambers-Ju and Finger 2017; Ornelas 2018a). Its leverage was similar, but the dissident CNTE wielded it more to mobilize protests than votes. This leverage meant that teachers had major incentives to heed the summons when union leaders called strikes, street protests, or legwork for electoral campaigns (Moch et al. 2021, 83).

These multiple factors made SNTE an all pervasive, nationwide political machine. For the second half of the 20th century, SNTE was imbricated with the PRI from “plumbers” manning local polling stations, to political operatives, to PRI candidates running for national office.<sup>9</sup> The PRI happily granted SNTE many prerogatives like automatic enrollment, appointment of dozens of members to top positions in national and state education agencies, and tens of thousands of *comisionados* in return for SNTE’s staunch electoral support. However, even after PRI hegemony ended in 2000, SNTE maintained its prerogatives, and its leaders realized they could make alliances with other parties. In particular, Gordillo switched to making deals with PAN governments (2000–2012) that also chose not to rescind SNTE’s prerogatives (Ornelas 2012; Chambers-Ju and Finger 2017, 221, 224–25).

<sup>8</sup> Other researchers provide different numbers, but estimates are uniformly in the tens of thousands. By mid-2017, SEP uncovered 44,000 people paid as teachers who were not giving classes: 15,000 in administrative positions, 17,000 on paid leave (some to work for SNTE), and 10,000 people SEP could not find (Corona 2017). Before the 2013 reforms, SNTE had 31,000 commissioned teachers (Ornelas 2019, 255), but even as late as 2019, the government was still paying 9,000 teachers (*comisionados*) who were working full time for SNTE (México-Evalúa 2019, 3). One leader estimated that SNTE had a total of 50,000 union activists to work on elections (cited in Chambers-Ju 2017, 49).

<sup>9</sup> SNTE numbers in the chamber of deputies peaked in 2003 at 35 or 7% of the lower house (Chambers-Ju and Finger 2017, 60). In state governments, over time, 60%–70% of secretaries of education were affiliated with SNTE (Moch et al. 2021, 86). In late 2012, out of 32 states “20 State Secretaries of Education still responded to Mos. Gordillo. She was given those positions to distribute by state governors either because of her power or in gratitude for her helping them win elections” (Ornelas 2018a, 140).

In civil society, steadfast sustenance for retooling teacher careers came from Mexicanos Primero. This NGO was not a traditional business association with corporate members. However, the board members were mostly the scions of the wealthiest business families, so many viewed Mexicanos Primero as business backed.<sup>10</sup> Some other NGOs existed in the education sphere, but Mexicanos Primero was the largest, most vocal, and adamantly in favor of revamping teacher careers (Loyo 2011; Cabal and Chambers-Ju 2022). In 2012, an election year, Mexicanos Primero released an hour-long documentary, *De panzazo*, on the sorry state of Mexican education. This and other positions of Mexicanos Primero drove a wedge between it and SNTE, so that Mexicanos Primero ended up rather isolated as a narrow part of civil society supporting reforms (interview María Antonieta García Lascurain, 3 August 2016). The broader business community publicly endorsed the reforms but did not provide more substantial support.<sup>11</sup>

Other NGOs existed in the education space, but civil society and associated policy networks were comparatively underdeveloped and had little influence on Peña Nieto's reforms. As noted in chapter 2, staff levels in education NGOs in Mexico ranked fourth in absolute numbers, behind smaller countries like Chile and Argentina, and even lower in per capita terms (figure 2.5).<sup>12</sup> In Chile, for a contrast, the Plan Maestro brought together 20 associations in civil society, including the teacher union, to draft together detailed proposals on teacher careers.<sup>13</sup>

In SEP, a counterpart pro-reform technocracy was also comparatively weak, despite Mexico's long history with technocracy in economic ministries (Centeno 1995). In the 20th century, even the last three PRI presidents all had PhDs from US universities (two from Harvard, one from Yale). After the transition to democracy in 2000, technocrats continued to preside over economic

<sup>10</sup> Interview David Calderón, 16 February 2011; Chambers-Ju and Finger (2017, 231–32).

<sup>11</sup> Secretary Nuño tried to create a German-style apprenticeship program, but business resisted footing the bill to implement it (interview, 11 March 2021).

<sup>12</sup> Beyond highlighting the prominent role of Mexicanos Primero, Loyo (2011, 294) listed several other less important associations. CCAE (Consejo Ciudadano Autónomo por la Educación) grouped together over a dozen more specialized or niche NGOs, in addition to Mexicanos Primero. Academics created COMIE (Consejo Mexicano de Investigación Educativa), but it has not had much influence in policy debates. Lastly, UNPF (Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia) and Episcopado Mexicano (of the Catholic Church) are long-standing organizations but without much direct interest in, or influence on, the Peña Nieto reforms.

<sup>13</sup> Similarly, but on curriculum rather than careers, the government in Mexico consulted with all major stakeholders, including “teachers, unions, experts, and families,” from February to June 2014, for a total of “approximately 28,000 participants engaged in 18 regional and three national forums hosted by the SEP, resulting in 15,000 proposals” (Moch et al. 2021, 89–90; Ornelas 2018a, 144–45).

agencies, but not education where most ministers were politicians (figure 2.4 and appendix B). During Peña Nieto's government, the first minister, Emilio Chuayffet (2012–2015) was an old-style PRI politician. His successor, Aurelio Nuño (2015–2017) had a master's degree in history from Oxford University, but his career was primarily political since 2010, especially as Peña Nieto's adviser, campaign organizer, and chief of staff.

The Peña Nieto reforms were very popular nationally, even among teachers and teachers in training.<sup>14</sup> Out of the gate, the reforms already had 60% public support (Ornelas 2018a, 143). By 2016, 86% of respondents thought the best way to improve education was through better teacher training, followed by 61% who thought evaluating teachers was best (Cesop 2016).<sup>15</sup> Fully 86% had heard of the education reform, though only a third thought it had improved the education system. By a monster margin of 91% to 7%, respondents approved of regular evaluations for teachers. Among teachers, two-thirds had a favorable view of meritocratic hiring, and around two-thirds of school directors approved of evaluations for hiring, promotion, and performance (INEE 2017). For students in teacher colleges in 2017, 94% approved of merit-based pay and "promotion via an evaluation, and 74% thought the same of the permanence evaluation" (Moch et al. 2021, 96).

The new SNTE leadership (after Gordillo's arrest) formally endorsed the reforms, but many subnational groups of teachers and union leaders opposed them, especially CNTE, the dissident wing of SNTE. For example, 15,000 teachers from local SNTE affiliates in the State of Mexico demonstrated in 2015 against the teacher reform (Rosas 2020). Other SNTE sections formally approved the reforms but put up obstacles to implementation "under water" (Aurelio Nuño email 21 April 2020). In the presidential election of 2018, "the teacher unions became a key ally of López Obrador's coalition" (Moch et al. 2021, 99). SNTE officially endorsed the PRI candidate, but SNTE leaders and others estimated that over two-thirds of SNTE members voted for AMLO (Schneider 2022). CNTE and Gordillo officially endorsed AMLO.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> María Antonieta García Lascurain, director of SNTE, called the support "overwhelming" (*contundente*) (interview 3 August 2016).

<sup>15</sup> In this same survey, 47% deemed the national education system bad versus only 29% good. Moreover, 48% had a bad or very bad view of SNTE compared to 19% with a good or very good rating. Years of capable and persistent investigative journalism had by the 2000s uncovered some of SNTE's most egregious practices and contributed to an earlier rise in unfavorable views of SNTE, from 34% in 2010 to 55% in 2013 (Chambers-Ju and Finger 2017, 232–33). On jailing Gordillo, 86% approved, and 74% of teachers felt she did not represent their interests (Ornelas 2018a, 147).

<sup>16</sup> CNTE did not endorse AMLO directly. Rather CNTE recommended not voting for any of the parties in the Pacto por Mexico, leaving AMLO as the only other viable option.

Despite solid support in public opinion and from the three formerly dominant parties, the Achilles heel of reform was lack of continuity in government. Counterfactually, had the PRI won the 2018 election, the Peña Nieto policies might have survived and been consolidated. Or, had the three parties in the Pacto por Mexico kept a majority in Congress, they could have blocked legislation undoing the reforms. In the event, AMLO won by a resounding margin, and his party elected legislative majorities sufficient to amend the Constitution.

By late 2019, after a year in office, AMLO had dismantled most of the reforms, neutered the INEE, reinstated dismissed teachers, and amended the Constitution. In terms of evaluation, the AMLO government erased previous policy. Entry into teaching was a grayer area with formal legal provisions for public application procedures (*concursos*) on the books, but with more particularistic and clientelist influences in practice (Rosas 2020; Rosas was a state-level SNTE leader). The AMLO government returned to appointing SNTE affiliates to the Secretariat of Education and to local hiring committees (Moch et al. 2021, 99). One of the few lasting pieces of the reforms were the 206,000 teachers hired through 2018 under merit procedures (Moch et al. 2021, 95), and these teachers were producing “substantial gains in student learning” (Beteille and Evans 2021, 24; Estrada 2019).

In short, without a clear electoral mandate, but with unanimous support from the three main political parties, the Peña Nieto government embarked on an ambitious set of reforms and enshrined key elements in the Constitution. Although backed in public opinion, the reforms lacked wide support in civil society, policy networks, and technocracy. And teacher unions mobilized opposition that fed into AMLO’s presidential campaign. AMLO, as promised, reversed the reforms in 2019. Paradoxically, many of those who previously voiced support in surveys for teacher evaluations and other Peña Nieto reforms, as well as held negative views of teacher unions, ended up voting for AMLO.<sup>17</sup>

### III. Stymied Reforms in South Africa

Among the many challenges for dismantling apartheid after 1994, education was one of the most pressing. Apartheid governments had rendered education unequal, racist, and discriminatory as possible and made only grudging improvements in black schools in the 1970s under pressure from business to improve worker skills. After 1994, education policies focused on decentralization

<sup>17</sup> Assuming some overlap between the majorities supporting reform and the majority voting for AMLO.

at the provincial level, equalization of per pupil funding across black and white schools (which had been as high as 6 to 1 and earlier 20 to 1), and promoting access, especially in secondary schools where enrollment rose from 51% in 1985 to 91% in 2007 (Levy 2018b, 11). According to one overview, “The transformations wrought by the ANC government . . . on South Africa’s education system in the mid-1990s could be argued to be among the most far-reaching of the second half of the twentieth century anywhere in the world.” And, specifically on financing, “such a rapid reduction in inequality in public spending is unequalled in modern history” (Crouch and Hoadley 2018, 27, 45).

After 2000, reform politics in South Africa bore a number of similarities with Mexico, particularly with respect to teacher unions. As in Mexico, Sadtu was a political machine closely allied with the ANC, the ruling party since 1994. Sadtu members held top positions in the Ministry of Education and in provincial Secretariats of Education (Pather and Plessis 2015, 3–4). In the first post-apartheid government, four Sadtu members held top positions in the new Department of Education, and three other Sadtu members were members of Parliament and served on education committees (Cameron and Naidoo 2018, 63; Govender 2015, 195).<sup>18</sup> According to a ministerial report from 2016:

It is known . . . that all the Deputy Directors-General in the Department of Basic Education are SADTU members and attend meetings of that Union. That being the case, it is not improbable to say that schooling throughout South Africa is run by SADTU. (DBE 2016, 93)

Unlike SNTE in Mexico, Sadtu membership was not compulsory nor a monopoly, and total numbers and density were lower. Sadtu in 2015 had 260,000 members, mostly black African, around 70% of teachers (Herbst and Mills 2015, 157; Govender et al. 2016, 35).<sup>19</sup> Sadtu was founded in the early 1990s, and it was not until 2006 that its main rival, Naptosa (National Professional Teachers’ Organisation of South Africa), emerged. Naptosa had 50,000 members, was more conservative, and claimed to better represent South Africa’s racial diversity (Govender 2015, 191).

<sup>18</sup> In the words of one Sadtu member: “We’ve put our own people in Parliament, in the Department, it’s our Minister, our Thami [Mseleku] is advising the Minister” (Govender 2015, 195). Angie Motshckga (minister of basic education, 2009–) had participated in the formation of Sadtu in the 1990s but had a largely political career thereafter. South Africa Parliament, “Mrs Matsie Angelina Motshckga,” n.d., <https://web.archive.org/web/20200726131020/https://www.parliament.gov.za/person-details/251>.

<sup>19</sup> Govender puts Sadtu membership at 240,000 (2015, 181) as do Pather and Plessis (2015, 4), though still 70% of teachers. Mlachila and Moeletsi (2019, 33) put the density at 80%.

Similar to SNTE, Sadtu had, through various channels, influence or control in hiring teachers and school directors. For management positions like department head or school director, Sadtu sought to promote only teachers who had worked for the union to show their commitment (Zengele and Pitsoe 2014). Sadtu also often had influence or dominance in School Governing Bodies (SGB). By statute, SGBs had representatives from parents (with a majority of votes in the body), staff, and teachers, but where parent representation was weak, Sadtu members could prevail (Patillo 2012, 81). In one report, Sadtu went so far as to exchange director positions for cattle (Kota et al. 2018, 142). In a 2014 report by *City Press*, “plum posts, including principal and deputy principal are being sold for upwards of R30,000” (about US\$ 2400) up from R11,000 in the 1990s (quoted in Pather and Plessis 2015, 6).

In 2016, Minister Angie Motshekga appointed a task force to investigate Sadtu’s selling positions. The team found numerous instances and concluded that Sadtu members used “undue influence of varying kinds to affect appointments to posts in education, a practice which is universally acknowledged to be endemic” (DBE 2016, 118). Sadtu achieved this control through a variety of mechanisms including “by practising cadre deployment to ensure that high percentages of managers, decision-makers and others with power and influence in education are placed in well-paid positions where they can prioritise the Union’s interests.”<sup>20</sup> The report concluded, “The more generic term for South Africa’s practice of cadre deployment is ‘patronage-based political appointments’” (DBE 2016, 119, 123).<sup>21</sup>

Like SNTE in Mexico, Sadtu was deeply embedded in South African politics and adamantly opposed teacher evaluations and linking pay to performance. Starting in the 2000s government reformers attempted to implement, alongside NPM (new public management) measures in other parts of the bureaucracy, a series of policies to evaluate teachers and then base pay increases on their performance (see Tournier and Chimier 2019 for details on some reforms). Despite Sadtu’s control of many parts of the education system, the union could not stop reform proposals. It did though manage to block implementation of each new proposal (Mlachila and Moeletsi 2019, 33).

In 2001, Sadtu was not consulted beforehand and roundly criticized the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) as managerial and punitive and encouraged members to boycott (Clercq 2013, 43–44; Pather and Plessis 2015, 4). WSE was

<sup>20</sup> More generally, “The Department of Basic Education has retained semblances of managerial and administrative control in three of South Africa’s nine Provinces [Free State, Western Cape, and Northern Cape]. In all other Provinces, SADTU is in de facto control” (DBE 2016, 119).

<sup>21</sup> The report cites similar practices in Mexico several times. See also Govender et al. (2016, 43–44).

“never implemented at scale” (Cameron and Naidoo 2018, 68). In 2003, the government followed up with the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) that it negotiated collectively with Sadtu. However, IQMS relied heavily on self-appraisal, and most teachers, unsurprisingly, performed well. Student test scores were not part of the evaluation.

In 2007, government reformers began negotiating with Sadtu the terms of what they called “occupation specific dispensation” (OSD).<sup>22</sup> With this the government wanted to introduce pay for performance with differential raises based on teacher evaluations (with student assessments included) every two years. Yet, the final deal in 2009 had no pay for performance but rather pay for seniority (possibly due to the pressures of elections later that year; Gustafsson 2019, 58). The other teacher union, Naptosa, had agreed to the original OSD proposal. Lastly, in 2015, Sadtu, this time with support even from opposition parties, managed to pause indefinitely annual student assessments (Gustafsson 2019, 60).

However, Sadtu is not politically embedded across all provinces. In particular, Sadtu is more professional in the Western Cape (where it has roughly as many members as Naptosa) and works closely with the more than 50 staff in the labor relations department of the provincial education authority (Cameron and Levy 2018, 90). According to one former official in the national evaluation unit, surveying subnational variation,

When I entered the National Education Evaluation Unit in South Africa’s Department of Basic Education I thought SADTU was a huge problem. . . . But the more I got into the data . . . I began to realize that there is a bigger problem. The biggest problem is the poor management in many parts of the system. Where management is weak, unions do what they do. (Cited in Levy 2018a, 269)

Sadtu was also weaker in the richer province of Gauteng (interview, Jonathan Janson, 29 April 2019).

In sum, South Africa was another case of reform blockage by a similarly powerful machine union, and in this Sadtu was even more effective than SNTE. In Mexico, SNTE had to work to overturn legislation and constitutional amendments, whereas career reforms in South Africa never got far off the drawing board. In both countries, merit reforms posed existential threats to the sources of power of union leaders (leverage over teacher careers).

<sup>22</sup> Naledi Pandor, minister of education in the 2000s without close ties to Sadtu, recommended in 2006 and 2008 various policies to link teacher pay to performance (Gustafsson 2019, 51).

## IV. Clientelism Redux in Rio de Janeiro

The state of Rio de Janeiro took a different route to reversal. Unlike South Africa, the teacher union (one of two), though decidedly opposed, could not stop a technocratic team from enacting major changes. Nor had the winning candidate in the next governor's race campaigned against reforms as AMLO had. In fact, the new governor was a close protégé of the outgoing governor, which seemed to bode well for continuity. Instead, it was clientelist politicians in the State Assembly who later undermined the reform package.

The state of Rio de Janeiro has a long history of innovation in education, including full-day schools in the 1980s and a series of performance bonuses for teachers. Unfortunately, the state has an equally long pattern of high secretary turnover and consequent policy volatility. Over 16 years (1999–2015) the state government had 12 different secretaries of education (Dusi 2017, 147–48). Taking out Wilson Risolia and his extraordinary stint of four years as secretary (2011–2014), the other 11 averaged a bit over a year in office.

Risolia enacted profound reforms that were systemic and touched on everything from curriculum to performance bonuses, to infrastructure. For teachers, the Risolia reforms did not go deeply into career structure, but they did have a complex performance bonus based on a number of indicators, including student test scores, curriculum coverage, grade progression, and teacher attendance (Dusi 2017, 152). Reforms also emphasized depoliticizing administration—firing politically appointed school and regional directors—and providing more support to teachers especially through a mentorship program.

The reform impetus started in 2011 through the reelection campaign of Sergio Cabral who promised to fix education and raise the state from the bottom of national Ideb rankings, from 27th place to 5th.<sup>23</sup> Cabral won with 66% of the vote (Panico 2019, 64). This landslide though seemed to owe less to promises on education than on Cabral's first-term success in lowering crime and boosting infrastructure investment (state elections in chapter 7 revolved more centrally around education). Nonetheless, Cabral appointed Risolia, a technocrat, and promised him a free hand to rebuild the education system. Risolia hired a young kitchen cabinet of newly minted professional managers and contracted with São Paulo consulting firms and education foundations to help design and implement reforms. However, Risolia did not mobilize or gain wider support in local civil society (Panico and Abrucio 2019, 8–9, 12).

<sup>23</sup> Suggesting that Rio de Janeiro may not be a pure case of nonelectoral impetus as noted in figure 1.1

Around 80% of school directors were political appointees. Risolia replaced three-quarters of them or 60% of all directors (Risolia interview, 16 May 2016).<sup>24</sup> Clientelist politicians in the State Assembly complained about the dismissals of their confederates, but Governor Cabral had given Risolia *carte blanche* to reorganize education (Panico 2019, 79).<sup>25</sup> Risolia also found 26,000 people who were being paid as teachers but were not in classrooms (interview, 16 May 2016). About half were on medical leave, and Risolia's outside medical consultant determined that most were fine to return to the classroom. Another 2,000 people paid as teachers were in fact working for (*cedido*) state politicians, a huge clientelist benefit.

Risolia allowed that having two teacher unions facilitated reform (interview 16 May 2016). The more militant union, linked to several far-left parties, opposed the reforms and had succeeded in getting earlier reforms rolled back.<sup>26</sup> The other more professional union was open to negotiating and ultimately supporting reforms. Through Risolia's term there were almost yearly strikes, including one in 2011 when the union occupied the Education Secretariat. Adhesion by teachers was often low, but strikes were nonetheless disruptive (interview Antoine Lousão, 19 December 2016). Cabral again backed Risolia and allowed him to wait out the strikes.

Why and how did the reforms unravel so quickly after Risolia's departure? It was pretty much a perfect (political) storm (Panico and Abrucio 2019, 15–18; interview with Antoine Lousão 19 December 2016). First, the state suffered a severe fiscal crisis after 2014 and had a hard time even meeting payroll. The government cut all of Risolia's extras like peer mentoring, bimonthly testing, ongoing professional development, and reduced the value of performance bonuses (Panico and Abrucio 2019, 2). Cabral's successor as governor was Luiz Fernando Pezão ("Bigfoot"), Cabral's vice governor. Pezão and Cabral were close—linked "umbilically"—making policy continuity in principle more likely (Panico and Abrucio 2019, 1). But, only a few months into his term, plea-bargained

<sup>24</sup> Panico puts the number at 500 directors or 41% of all directors in Rio de Janeiro (2019, 63). Nationally, 46% of school directors were political appointees (Panico and Abrucio 2019, 3). See Toral (2020) for conditions where political appointments can be good for education.

<sup>25</sup> Subsequent investigations revealed Cabral to be phenomenally corrupt. Courts sentenced Cabral to 342 years in prison ("Cabral é condenado a mais 10 anos de prisão por crimes da Lava Jato," *Véja*, 4 March 2021, <https://veja.abril.com.br/politica/cabral-e-condenado-a-mais-10-anos-de-prisao-por-crimes-da-lava-jato/>). Cabral testified that Risolia did not partake (Panico 2019, 104).

<sup>26</sup> The governor elected in 2006 had campaigned on the promise to the teacher union to rescind the 2001 performance bonus (the first in Brazil), as AMLO had in Mexico (Brooke 2016, 221).

testimony implicated Pezão in a major corruption scandal (*Lava Jato*), further adding to the political crisis (Panico and Abrucio 2019, 12).<sup>27</sup>

The coup de grâce came during the political turmoil in 2015 when the teacher union went out on strike, high school students occupied 65 schools, and the education secretary resigned. Among other demands, the unions and students clamored for electing school directors (Panico and Abrucio 2019, 15). Then in May 2016, when all eyes were on the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in Brasília, the State Assembly passed a law requiring school directors to be elected, opening them up again to influence by local clientelist politicians (Panico 2019, 78, 90). The state's Ideb ranking fell from tied for 4th place in 2015 to 11th place in 2017, to tied for 18th place in 2019.<sup>28</sup>

## V. Conclusions

These three cases illustrate well when and how the main opponents to merit redesigns of teacher careers—machine unions and clientelist politicians—can derail reform. In Rio de Janeiro, the main culprits were clientelists who waited out the reform government to take advantage of a subsequent crisis to reassert influence over hiring. Machine unions were the lead opponents in the other two cases, blocking reforms before they could start in South Africa and overturning them with a new government in Mexico. Control over hiring was again the core cause of this opposition—as unions could no longer trade teacher votes and electoral mobilization for government resources and positions of power.

Comparisons with Ecuador are revealing. SNTE and Sadtu were classic political machines (as in Ecuador historically) where meritocratic teacher reforms posed existential threats to political power of union leaders. In Ecuador, Correa closed UNE, but political machines in Mexico and South Africa survived and derailed career reforms. Mexico was similar to Ecuador in that reformers expressed an explicit goal to regain control of education, to reestablish state “*rectoria*,” to dislodge machine unions from parts of the state they had colonized, and take back control over teacher careers. The perceived loss of control, both over the administration of education, and particularly in Mexico in party coalitions more generally, provides strong motivations for presidents and top leadership, but it also means that reforms are seen as zero-sum by union leaders

<sup>27</sup> Panico and Abrucio (2019) argue that reforms in Rio de Janeiro were more vulnerable to reversal because the government imposed them rapidly and without consulting political opponents, compared to the process in Espírito Santo that was more gradual, consultative, and lasting (chapter 7).

<sup>28</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais, <http://ideb.inep.gov.br/resultado/>.

(and they are). Reformers may struggle to build broader coalitions, as “regaining state control” does not necessarily resonate with voters or other groups in society.

Makeovers of teacher careers take time to become institutionalized, accepted, and routine, as seen in previous chapters and the next. Therefore, continuity in power by reform-sympathetic politicians (or at least not reform antagonistic) is indispensable. However, continuity runs into constraints with most constitutions, as noted in chapter 2, which limit presidents to one term (Peru, Chile, and Mexico) or two (Brazil, governors too; Ecuador, since 2018; and Colombia). These limited terms do not allow enough time to design and implement serious career reforms, even with two four-year terms. Therefore, continuity depends on other factors like institutionalized political parties, gridlock (no one has power to change previous legislation), consensus in policy networks, technocracy, and/or civil society (including teacher unions). None of these factors, alas, came to the rescue of reforms in Mexico and Rio de Janeiro. In South Africa, continuity was extreme, with the ANC in power since 1994, but the machine union was part of the ruling coalition.



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## PART III

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# COMPARISONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In Brazil, it was mostly state government that undertook major learning reforms, especially Ceará, Pernambuco, and São Paulo. In the first two of these states, regular elections of the same party allowed candidates to campaign on prior success in education.

Vocational and technical education (VTE) deserves separate analysis due to its distinctive politics. VTE enrollments are generally low in Latin America, due in part to low demand by business. Left governments in Chile and Brazil were some of the few governments active in expanding VTE. Turkey provides an intriguing case of an alliance with smaller businesses to promote VTE.



# Brazil

## *Innovating in the States*

*It is one of the happy incidents of the federal system that a single courageous state may . . . serve as a laboratory; and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country.*

—Justice Louis Brandeis, *New State Ice Co. v. Liebmann*, 285 U.S. 262, 311 (1932)

## I. Introduction

By the 2010s, Sobral—a poor city in the interior of Ceará, a small, poor state—was fast becoming a household name throughout Brazil.<sup>1</sup> In 2000, Sobral had surveyed students in its primary schools and discovered that almost half could not read (Abrucio et al. 2017). In response, the municipal government designed an effective program to target basic literacy. In 2007 the state government adopted the program, then dubbed Programa de Alfabetização na Idade Certa (PAIC, Program for Literacy at the Appropriate Age). By 2021, 87 of the 100 top-scoring public primary schools in all Brazil were in Ceará (Madeiro and Bimbati 2023; up from 77 in 2017 [Rodrigues 2017]). By the late 2010s, five other states were copying PAIC (Nogueira 2021, 77).

Nationally, reforms in funding and student testing in the 1990s and early 2000s paved the way for the rapid expansion in enrollments and steady improvement in international assessments like PISA (Veloso 2011).<sup>2</sup> Since the

<sup>1</sup> And by the 2020s the World Bank was touting its success, e.g., “The State of Ceara and the City of Sobral, in Brazil, are Role Models for Reducing Learning Poverty,” <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/brazil/publication/state-ceara-brazil-role-model-reducing-learning-poverty>. The *Economist* was also smitten, “What a Brazilian State Can Teach the World about Education” (18 December 2021).

<sup>2</sup> On the ERCE test in 2019, Brazil scored impressive gains of 13% to 36% (depending on the subject and level) over 2013 and scored well above the average for Latin America (UNESCO 2021, 3).

**Table 7.1 Prominent Reform Cases in Brazil**

	<b>Overall reform</b>	<b>Teacher career</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Ceará (2007–)	Primary literacy	Mentoring, bonus, accountability	Implemented
Pernambuco (2004–)	Full school day, lead schools	Selective recruitment and bonus	Implemented
Rio de Janeiro (2011–2015)	Depoliticization	Bonus, mentoring	Overtaken
São Paulo (2007–)	Curriculum and merit measures	Bonus, exams for promotion	Implemented

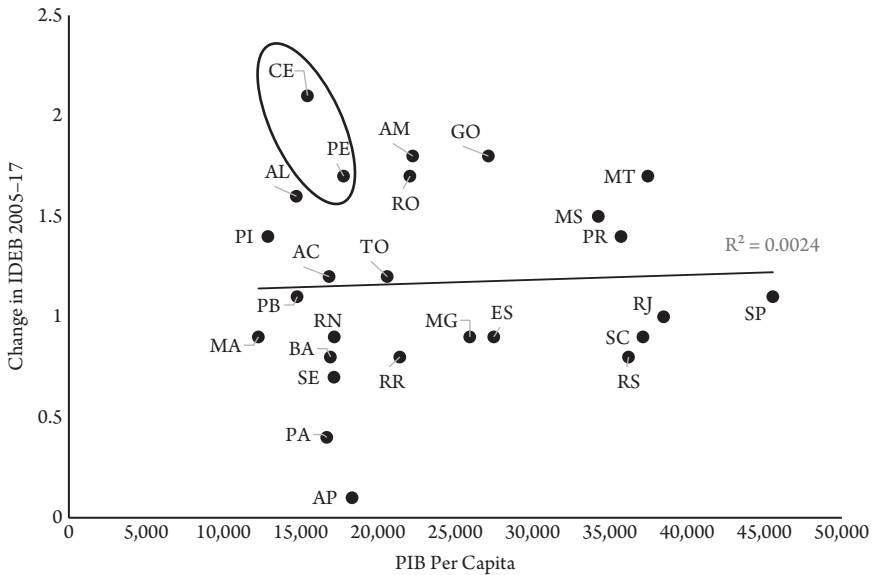
*Note:* Bonuses are collective and based on school-wide performance.

turn of the century, most of the reforms in Brazil designed to improve quality and classroom learning came from municipal and especially state governments (table 7.1).<sup>3</sup> By 2017, 11 states (over 40%) and several cities had introduced some form of pay for performance (usually collective bonuses) (Gatti et al. 2011, 210; Dusi 2017, 84; Brooke 2016), but it was rarely accompanied by the systemic reforms to teacher careers seen in the Andean countries and Mexico that regulated hiring, promotion, and evaluation. Even without such systematic revamping, star reformers like Ceará and Pernambuco did take the first, and most effective, step toward meritocratic careers by depoliticizing appointments of school directors and teachers.

Surprisingly, the learning leaders after 2000 were poorer, remoter states in the northeast, especially Ceará and Pernambuco. Overall, figure 7.1 shows no relationship between income (GDP per capita) and educational improvement since 2005. It was not just average scores that rose; by 2017 inequalities in learning in primary education in Ceará and secondary in Pernambuco were the lowest

Public spending on education climbed rapidly from 4.5% of GDP in 2000 to 6.6% in 2013, and more than tripled on upper secondary between 2002 and 2013 from 0.5% to 1.7% of GDP (Almeida et al. 2016, 5–6). However, a large share of secondary students were taking night classes that offered only four hours of instruction per day compared to seven or more in OECD countries (Almeida et al. 2016, 8).

<sup>3</sup> In federal systems, the distribution of responsibilities varies cross-nationally. In Brazil, the federal government had more policy authority (like setting national curriculum and regulating textbooks) than the federal government in the United States but less than the federal government in Mexico. In Brazil, running schools is the responsibility of municipalities (mostly primary) and states (mostly secondary, 85% of enrollments; Almeida et al. 2016, 29). The federal government ran some secondary technical schools (chapter 8).



*Figure 7.1* State GDP per capita and improvement in Ideb, 2005–2017 Sources: For Ideb: <http://ideb.inep.gov.br/resultado/resultado/resultado.seam?cid=3581574>. Per capita income: <https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/agencia-sala-de-imprensa/2013-agencia-de-noticias/releases/23038-contas-regionais-2016-entre-as-27-unidades-da-federacao-somente-roraima-teve-credito-do-pib>.

in Brazil (Nogueira 2021, 44). By concentrating on three main reform cases in table 7.1—Ceará, Pernambuco, and São Paulo—this chapter sacrifices some breadth for depth (chapter 6 covered Rio de Janeiro).<sup>4</sup> Although not necessarily representative, Ceará and Pernambuco have some of the longest track records, are most closely associated with improving test scores, and are most copied by other states. The expansion of VTE (vocational and technical education) was also significant and is covered in chapter 8.

Initial reforms in Ceará and Pernambuco focused on, respectively, initial literacy and longer school days. So, these reforms did not begin with systemic changes to teacher careers, but they both ended up raising the quality of teaching. For example, Pernambuco started slowly to convert schools to full days (*tempo integral*). These schools then recruited new, better teachers at higher pay. In addition, after 2008 schools that met preset targets received a performance

<sup>4</sup> Other parties and governors also enacted important reforms in Goiás, Espírito Santo, Rio de Janeiro, and Minas Gerais (Dusi 2017; Segatto and Abrucio 2017) (the conclusion briefly considers the first two). Veloso (2011, 241–44) singled out reforms in the states of São Paulo, Pernambuco, Minas Gerais, and the city of Rio de Janeiro.

Table 7.2 Main Factors in Reform Politics in Brazilian States

	Ceará	Pernambuco	São Paulo	Rio de Janeiro
Electoral salience	High (over time)	High (over time)	Low	Medium
Civil society	Medium	High	Medium	Low
Union opposition	Low	Low	High	High
Technocracy	High	Medium	Medium	Medium

Note: Shaded cells are the crucial factors. Chapter 6 covers reforms in Rio de Janeiro.

bonus. São Paulo and cities in other states also enacted school-wide bonuses for meeting targets (Veloso 2011, 241–44; Brooke 2016).

A key factor in reform success in Ceará and Pernambuco was continuity in state government and, relatedly, the emergence of education as a programmatic vote winner (table 7.2) (Barros 2018, 29; Amaral 2016). Reforms did not start, as in Chile and Ecuador, with a big education shock followed by electoral mobilization. Rather, over time, politicians and voters made education a bigger issue in elections. The over-time component is crucial in both Pernambuco and Ceará, and in contrast to reforms discontinued in other states like Rio de Janeiro, because reformers had time to start slow and small scale, build on success, and then make that success a plank in reelection campaigns. Either the same party (Pernambuco, São Paulo) or same group with varying party labels (Ceará) was in power for close to two decades. Electoral and party continuity was more robust than the technocratic continuity in Peru and Colombia, which depended less on the positive force of programmatic commitment and more on the absence of countervailing political pressures.

In terms of the emptiness of the education policy space, the three main groups vying to occupy it combined in different ways from the Andean cases in part II. Teacher unions in Brazil were of the interest-group type and were either less involved or supportive (save in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo), in part, because reforms were not perceived as major threats. Clientelist politicians were rarely visible in the cases of reform success (where they had been pushed out of education), though they were crucial in the story in the state of Rio de Janeiro of reforms overturned (and so were left off table 7.2). However, clientelist politicians are key actors generally in Brazil (Toral 2020). In two-thirds of municipalities, school directors were still political appointees (Nogueira 2021, 80).<sup>5</sup> Technocrats were prominent in other cases, though less due to weak parties

<sup>5</sup> Panico and Abrucio (2019, 3) put the share of politically appointed directors at about half. Their calculation may comprise primary and secondary schools.

as in Colombia and Peru and more to their affiliation with more programmatic parties like PT (left), PSDB (center right), and PSB (center left).<sup>6</sup> Lastly, NGOs in education (largely in São Paulo) were big, active, and well-funded by business philanthropy (figure 2.5).

Created in 2007, a national ranking, Ideb (Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica—based on test results and student passing rates—helped make education more electorally salient.<sup>7</sup> The federal government deliberately released results and rankings for all states, municipalities, and schools every two years before elections for mayors and governors (Torralba 2020). Federal and state governments set targets for Ideb improvement so that candidates can run on the simple information of targets met or not met. The rankings and timing of their release were designed to raise the salience of education and to overcome a common refrain in Brazil that “*educação não da voto*,” education does not win votes.<sup>8</sup> Politicians in Ceará and Pernambuco managed to refute the refrain, but only over time as education performance, especially Ideb rankings, showed substantial gains that politicians could then tout on the campaign trail.

Section II examines the main stakeholders in education politics in Brazil. The following sections cover the literacy program and other measures in Ceará (section III), reforms to secondary schools in Pernambuco (section IV), and merit policies in São Paulo (section V). Section VI looks at federal reforms in funding and national curriculum.

## II. Principal Protagonists: Business Philanthropy, Political Parties, and Teacher Unions

Compared to the rest of Latin America, civil society and political parties were more prevalent in education politics in Brazil, while teacher unions were more decentralized and less contrary. Connections to civil society ran through São Paulo, rather than locally.<sup>9</sup> When asked about support outside government,

<sup>6</sup> Partido Socialista Brasileiro (Brazilian Socialist Party), Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (Brazilian Social Democracy Party), and Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers’ Party).

<sup>7</sup> According to a World Bank analysis, Brazil has “one of the world’s most impressive systems for measuring education results” (Bruns et al. 2012, 7).

<sup>8</sup> Or as Thiago Peixoto put it, “the topic of education doesn’t mobilize votes” (interview, 5 December 2018). Peixoto served as the secretary of education for the state of Goiás (2011–2013), enacted a series of quality reforms (more in the concluding section), and boosted Ideb rankings. When, after serving, he ran for reelection to the Chamber of Deputies, campaigning on his record as secretary, he received 3,000 fewer votes than in his first election prior to his stint as secretary. Barros also emphasizes that politicians lack interest in education (2018, 16).

<sup>9</sup> For overviews on private foundations, see Veloso (2011, 238–40); Avelar and Ball (2019); and Avelar (2018).

Mozart Neves, a reform pioneer in Pernambuco said civil society was in São Paulo and very supportive (interview 1 February 2018). Some of the main foundations in São Paulo targeted partnerships with governments in other states (Dusi 2017; Kauko et al. 2018). Given huge regional inequalities in Brazil, NGOs from the largest and richest states could have outsized influence in much poorer, smaller states.

As seen in chapter 2, civil society was very vibrant in both Brazil and Chile, though with differences in focus and structure. Civil society in Chile had a larger academic wing and some of the main think tanks like CEP were general-purpose policy institutes that also propagated well-developed views on education. In contrast, in Brazil, civil society, mostly in São Paulo, in education comprised dozens of NGOs, foundations, and think tanks dedicated exclusively to education. In a survey of its members, an association of philanthropies found that 85% had education as top priority and, among those spending more than \$21 million, 75% aimed to influence policy (Avelar 2018, 42).<sup>10</sup> The academic wing worked closely with CSOs, but it was relatively less developed than in Chile.

The Lemann Foundation was the giant in the field (Avelar and Ball 2019).<sup>11</sup> Founded in 2002 by Jorge Paulo Lemann, one of Brazil's richest men, and devoted exclusively to education, the foundation had by 2020 more than 70 staff and funded programs across Brazil (Lemann Foundation 2020). The foundation was the lead funder and executive secretary of the mobilization to revise curriculum (section VI). The foundation's fellowship program supported hundreds of Brazilian students studying in the United States at elite universities like Stanford, Harvard, and Columbia.

This fellowship program started to bear fruit in policymaking in the 2010s as returning students ran for elected office, worked in education NGOs, and accepted high-level positions in reformist governments. By 2020, the expanded alumni network—Nova Rede de Líderes—had 639 members with 22% in academics and research, 17% in NGOs, 15% in government, 14% in the private sector, 5% in international agencies, and 5% in elected positions (*Relatorio*

<sup>10</sup> Founded in 1989, by 2021 Gife—Grupo de Institutos Fundações e Empresas—had 160 members, (from their website, <https://gife.org.br/quem-somos-gife/>). Education foundations also invested heavily in research (often subcontracted) and media exposure. In one year, “TPE proudly reported 12 published articles in press, 2000 press clippings, 600 interview requests” (Avelar 2018, 44). Although less visible than the main business-funded CSOs, a left/labor related umbrella CSO, *Campanha Nacional pelo Direito à Educação*, brought together NGOs, the teacher union confederation (CNTE, Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores em Educação), and Movimento Sem Terra (Kauko et al. 2018).

<sup>11</sup> For more background, see Tarlau and Moeller (2020b, 2020a). Full disclosure, through 2019 I was the faculty director for a small MIT Brazil program funded largely by the Lemann Foundation.

*Annual 2020*, p. 32). Moreover, Lemann funds annual meetings of the Nova Rede, strengthening a core subset of Brazil's policy network. In 2021, a COVID year, 248 members attended the meeting. In essence, the Lemann Foundation invested tens of millions of dollars in a sustained, long-term effort to create from scratch new education technocrats and a close-knit policy network whose influence is likely to grow as graduate fellows age into their peak career years.<sup>12</sup>

While many big firms and wealthy businesspeople were deeply engaged in education, organized business was not, as in other reform cases in part II. For example, in early 2017, the peak industry association Confederação Nacional da Indústria (CNI) in Brazil sent a seven-page email to its list serve outlining the major policy goals for the year. Of nine different policy areas, education came dead last. By 2021, it did not even make the list; CNI's *Agenda Legislativa* had 12 priorities, none related to education (CNI 2021).

Teacher unions were weaker organizationally in northern reforming states, more professional, and more interest groups than political machines (chapter 2). State-level unions mostly supported reforms in Ceará and Pernambuco.<sup>13</sup> Negotiation with unions smoothed the path of reform in Pernambuco and other states, but the lack of negotiation in São Paulo contributed to teacher and union resistance (Segatto and Abrucio 2017, 100–101). Especially in the beginning, some unions opposed bonuses and pay for performance, but only in Rio de Janeiro did they help get it rescinded (Brooke 2016, 221).

Political parties played a more prominent role in pushing reform, as in Chile. Brazil's party system overall was fluid, extremely fragmented, and frequently chaotic (though medium on a scale of party institutionalization (Bizzarro et al. 2018)). However, within that kaleidoscopic party system, several parties stood out as more institutionalized and programmatic, including the PT (especially before the corruption and other crises after 2014), PSDB, and PSB. These three parties pushed reforms in Ceará, São Paulo, Pernambuco, and other states. In Ceará, the PT (left) was in power 2015–2022 and before that the related

<sup>12</sup> In 2022, 368 members of the 698 people in the Nova Rede were former fellows who had studied in the United States (Caroline Bellacosa, email, 14 January 2022). Nothing close to the Lemann network exists elsewhere in Latin America or the world for that matter. Billionaire funded foundations in the United States—Gates, Zuckerberg, Walton et al.—spend comparable amounts and have outside policy impacts (Hess and Henig 2015; Reckhow 2013). They have not though put such sustained investment into a policy network. Teach for America is a better comparison, but with tens of thousands of members the network is less close-knit and lacks continued financial backing like the Nova Red (Trujillo et al. 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Most state and municipal teacher unions belong to the national confederation, CNTE, that is allied with the PT. CNTE appears to be a powerful confederation with lots of resources and members, but in fact research on the state-level reform episodes covered in this chapter do not mention it.

reformist PDT (Partido Democrático Trabalhista, 2007–2014). In Pernambuco, the PSB (center left) won governor races from 2007 to 2022, as did the PSDB (center right) in São Paulo (appendix C).

In sum, as throughout Latin America, parents and business (as associations) were absent in Brazil. Business philanthropy was big and so were the NGOs and foundations they endowed. This civil society, mostly in São Paulo, was especially influential and effective when working with reformers in smaller, poorer states in the rest of Brazil. Teacher unions were of the interest-group variety. They did not block or overturn reforms (with the partial exception of Rio de Janeiro) and actively negotiated and engaged reforms in some states. Compared to most of the Andean countries and Mexico, political parties played bigger roles in sustaining reforms over time.

### III. Ceará: Scaling Up Sobral

In an implausible Cinderella story, the poor northeastern city of Sobral started in the 2000s appearing regularly in national media. Isolated in the interior of the state of Ceará (fifth poorest of 26 states), Sobral had little else going for it, yet was logging some of the highest test scores in Brazil—scores on par with France and Britain—while spending much less per student than the rest of Brazil (figure 7.2) (Barros 2018, 39). How did Sobral do it, and how did the Sobral model become lasting state-level policy?

In 2000, the municipal government surveyed students in primary schools and was alarmed to find that half of them could not read (Abrucio et al. 2017, 29). The subsequent campaign to achieve literacy at the right age (early primary school) had a focused, straightforward goal and included support for schools and teachers, and regular assessments to monitor progress.<sup>14</sup> The Sobral reforms included a merit component for teachers; teachers with above average student performance (on bimonthly tests) received bonuses and teachers with the worst performing students were moved out (Barros 2018, 38). As a World Bank delegation reported after visiting, it was not magic.<sup>15</sup> However, this delegation also cited a “high level official” who said the key first step to reform was “to take politics outside of schools.” In the context of the poor, interior northeast, this first

<sup>14</sup> Barros (2018, 31–39); Loureiro et al. (2020); Loureiro and Cruz (2020); and Abrucio et al. (2017).

<sup>15</sup> Andre Loureiro, Emanuela Di Gropello, and Omar Arias, “There Is No Magic: The Formula for Brazil’s Ceará and Sobral Success to Reduce Learning Poverty,” July 9, 2020, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/there-no-magic-formula-brazils-ceara-and-sobral-success-reduce-learning-poverty>

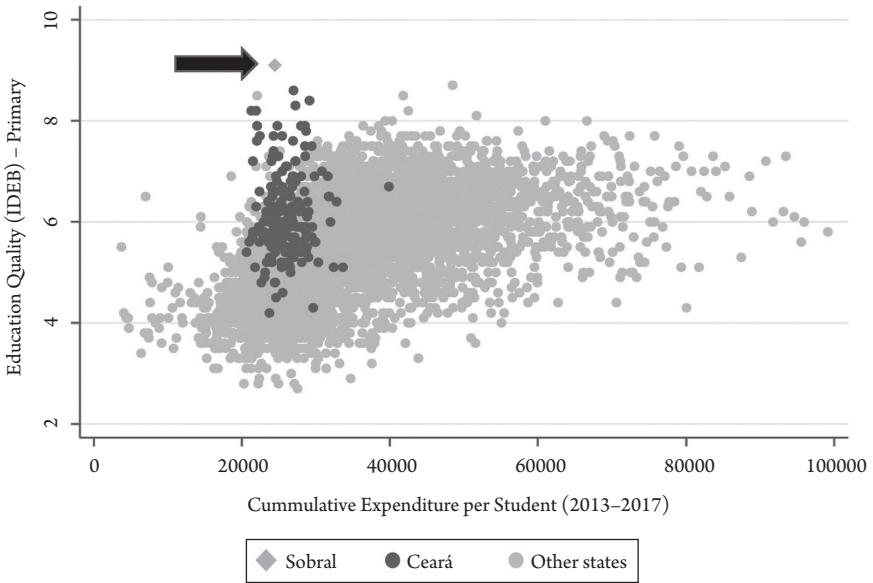


Figure 7.2 Student Learning and Per Pupil Spending Source: Holanda et al. (2020, 5).

step was, if not magical, then equally rare, especially to take politics out and keep them out for decades (Toral 2020).

In 2006, Cid Gomes campaigned for governor based partly on his successes in early literacy programs as mayor of Sobral (1997–2005).<sup>16</sup> Once elected governor, he nominated his municipal education secretary, Izolde Cela, to be his state secretary. They took office in 2007 with a clear plan to replicate the Sobral reforms on a state-wide basis. The core government program, PAIC, had a number of components, all targeted at improving literacy in the first years of primary school.<sup>17</sup> The government also fired politically appointed school directors and instituted a meritocratic procedure to evaluate candidates on their education and substantive knowledge as well as managerial skills (Abrucio et al. 2017, 30).

The teacher union in Ceará mostly supported the quality reforms. In the view of Anizio Melo, president of the teacher union Apeoc (Associação dos

<sup>16</sup> For other reforms before 2007, see Abrucio et al. (2017); Dusi (2017); Nogueira (2021). Ceará was the second state in Brazil to establish in 2001 performance bonuses for teachers (Brooke 2016, 209). A World Bank review emphasized the shift from political appointment of directors to merit recruitment (Beteille and Evans 2021, 24).

<sup>17</sup> This PAIC focus was awkward institutionally for the state government because municipalities controlled primary schools (the state ran most secondary schools). However, the state government could use some of its resources to work with municipalities that signed up for its programs. So PAIC was one of a broader set of policies linking states and municipalities in what were called “collaboration regimes.” All 184 municipalities in Ceará signed up for the program (Abrucio et al. 2017).

Professores de Estabelecimentos Oficiais Ceará): “We have the best secretaries of education in Brazil” (interview, 17 January 2019). Melo also thought that “Ceará has the best teacher career in Brazil.” Ceará is one of a small number of states that evaluates teachers on performance, student learning, and attendance (Prado 2019, 30). After 2009, all staff in schools that met performance targets set by the state received a bonus (Dusi 2017, 160). General comity notwithstanding, Apeoc did strike several times in the 2010s, including one strike for over two months in 2011, though mostly over salary issues.

The rest of local civil society was not engaged. The state government did create a coordinating committee for PAIC that included various public agencies, associations of municipal schools, but only one representative from local civil society (Abrucio et al. 2017, 37). The committee was especially active in the early stages of PAIC. In contrast to Pernambuco, NGOs and foundations from São Paulo did not start the reform process, but rather became gradually involved, especially Instituto Natura and later Instituto Unibanco (on several governance reforms). The Instituto Natura and Fundação Lemann also worked to spread the Ceará model to other states (Nogueira 2021, 77; *Economist*, 18 December 2021).

In another institutional innovation, the government of Ceará invented a singular policy of harnessing fiscal incentives to get mayors to pay more attention to education and promote meritocratic hiring.<sup>18</sup> States transfer a lot of money to municipalities, mostly on a per capita basis, but the new governor in 2007, Cid Gomes, decided to allocate a fifth of these funds to municipalities that had most improved student performance on standardized tests. It was a competition among municipalities that any could win because it was based on improvement, not levels. Significantly, the additional funds received for good performance were not tied to education but rather could be used in any way the mayor saw fit. And, this could be serious money, up to as much as a third of the municipal budget (Holanda et al. 2020, 13).

The bet was that mayors would find that the political benefits of these additional unrestricted funds outweighed the political costs of foregoing clientelism in the education system. Perhaps closer to magic—this was brilliant financial and political engineering. In essence, this fiscal boost majorly bolstered the usually faint electoral incentives for improving education by tying budget bonuses to educational improvement. A World Bank study found that this budget incentive led to prodigious gains equivalent to three to five months of student

<sup>18</sup> Interview Marcos Holanda, designer of original program (17 January 2019); and Holanda et al. (2020); Dusi (2017). All state governments distribute a share of the sales tax ICMS (Imposto sobre Circulação de Mercadorias e Serviços) to municipalities. Most of the transfer is on a fixed per-student basis, but the law lets state governments decide how they want to distribute 25% of the funds. Most states distribute this discretionary share on the same per-pupil basis.

learning (Lautharte et al. 2021, 3–4; see also Ponne 2023). The new Fundeb law of 2020 incorporated and expanded these incentives for all states, another win for Brandeis’s laboratory of democracy (section V).

Reform continuity in the first years was guaranteed by the reelection of Cid Gomes. However, Gomes’s successor Camilo Santana was from a different party (and Gomes supported his opponent). However, Santana ran as a candidate for continuity with an electoral alliance named *Para o Ceará Seguir Mudando* (For Ceará to Continue Changing). Elected governor in 2014 (and reelected in 2018), Camilo Santana was from the PT, but he had also started his career in Sobral and was close to the long-standing group of education reformers in government.<sup>19</sup> By the 2010s other states were copying PAIC, and the federal government jumped on the bandwagon to promote it as well (Dusi 2017, 139).

Continuity was clear in the career trajectories of key technocrats. Izolda Cela started in 2001 as the municipal sub-secretary of education in Sobral and moved to secretary in 2004 (interview, 18 January 2019 and Wikipedia). In 2007, Gomes appointed Cela state secretary of education where she initiated PAIC. After eight years as state secretary, candidate Santana—signaling his commitment to continuity—invited Cela in 2014 to run as his vice governor where she stayed from 2015 on (and ceased being a technocrat), into Santana’s second term. Santana likely thought that Cela’s record in education would attract voters. The trajectory of Mauricio Holanda reinforces this continuity. Holanda was adjunct secretary of education for the eight years of Gomes two terms, and then Santana appointed him secretary of education for 2014–2016 (Nogueira 2021, 51).

Santana continued early literacy policies but switched focus to work more on secondary education. In the decade after PAIC started in 2007, Ideb scores for primary students progressed rapidly and consistently, but those for secondary students still languished at the bottom of national league tables. Reforms for secondary schools focused on VTE and full-day schools, and over the 2010s, Ceará became a national leader in expanding VTE. Full-day schools rose to 230 of around 700 schools, second-highest proportion in Brazil (interview Francisco Maia Junior, 17 January 2019). The government also gave a collective bonus—*Prêmio Aprender Pra Valer*—to employees in schools that met pre-established targets (Dusi 2017, 208).

In Ceará’s laboratory of democracy, successive governments sustained two major reforms, PAIC (scaled up from Sobral) and tax incentives for mayors.

<sup>19</sup> By other metrics, the continuity went farther back (Dusi 2017, 158). Governors from the PSDB held office from 1995 to 2006. Gomes (PDT) and Santanta (PT), though from different parties, had both started their political careers in Sobral and belonged to the same political group (interview Holanda, 17 January 2019) (Barros 2018, 37). See appendix C.

Two political factors in reform success in Ceará (as well as Pernambuco) were continuity in state government, even across different parties, and, related, the emergence of education as a vote winner. Civil society in São Paulo brought in further assistance. Locally, the teacher union Anpeoc was a strong supporter. In the 2010s, technocrats Cela and Holanda contributed further to reform success and longevity. In the ultimate scale up, President Lula in 2023 appointed Santana to be minister of education and Cela as vice minister to bring the Sobral/Ceará model to the national level.

#### IV. Pernambuco: Leveraging New Schools to Improve Quality

The main reforms in another small, poor, northeastern state came through the creation of new full-day schools (after 2007 called *escolas de referência*, “reference schools”), expanding technical education and instating performance bonuses for teachers.<sup>20</sup> Rather than revamp careers for all teachers, policymakers gradually established new “reference” secondary schools that hired new teachers with new expectations, including regular evaluations (Barros 2018, 189–96 provides details). Higher salaries drew large numbers of applicants, so reference schools could be more selective. Reference schools way outperformed other schools; in 2009, 51 reference schools scored 4.9 compared to a state average of 3.0 (Bruns et al. 2012, 93). Pernambuco also had the lowest dropout rate in Brazil, 1.5%, down from 24% (Dusi 2017). Over time, Pernambuco shot up in national rankings.

Pernambuco’s reform trajectory shows the importance of (1) civil society and business philanthropy, (2) electoral campaigning on success, and (3) policy continuity. Business participated both as individuals and as the growing civil society for education in São Paulo, though not local associations of business (interview Mozart Neves, 29 November 2017). Compared to Ceará and cases in part II, business philanthropy had the biggest influence in Pernambuco (as it did later with the new national curriculum, section VI). As in other states in Brazil (and the United States [Finger 2018a]), São Paulo foundations intervened

<sup>20</sup> Debates continue on the value of longer school days, usually increasing from four hours per day to seven or more. For the IDB, lengthening school days is not cost effective; it requires 60% more in spending for a gain of 10% in learning (Busso et al. 2017, 11). The same report though lists “extended school day” as one of four programs with clear evidence on effectiveness in raising learning (189). Research on Chile found additional benefits: “Full-day schooling increases educational attainment, delays childbearing, and increases earnings in young adulthood” (Dominguez and Ruffini 2020, 1).

when new reform windows opened up in other states.<sup>21</sup> Policy continuity across three governors for 20 years was substantial. Four of the five governments in this stretch were from the same party, the center-left PSB (Partido Socialista Brasileiro).

One of the binding constraints on learning was that most high school students in Brazil did not spend much time in class. Schools usually ran three 4-hour shifts: morning, afternoon, and evening. This schedule allowed students to work full time while finishing secondary school. Having multiple shifts also took full advantage of scarce infrastructure. However, what students can learn in four hours per day has limits, so many quality reforms (as in Chile or Ceará) sought to transition to full-day instruction.

As in Ceará, reforms in Pernambuco snowballed. They started small, expanded slowly, and then extended statewide. The process began almost by accident. Marco Magalhães grew up in Pernambuco and left for a high-flying business career in São Paulo. On one return visit in 1999, he checked in on his old secondary school. He found it empty and dilapidated, and he decided to raise funds to restore it. In 2004, Magalhães got the government of Jarbas Vasconcelos to incorporate the refurbished school into the state network as a full-day school. The Vasconcelos government went on to create a dozen more full-day schools using the same model (curriculum, management, and pedagogy) piloted by the business-backed NGO, ICE (Instituto de Co-responsabilidade pela Educação; Nogueira 2021, 59).<sup>22</sup> The Vasconcelos government had also earlier, under Raul Henry as secretary of education, taken the crucial step of depoliticizing the appointment of school directors and adding meritocratic recruitment procedures (Segatto and Abrucio 2017, 98).

In 2006, Eduardo Campos first campaigned against the elitist reforms of the incumbent government, but, ironically, once elected Campos extended the reference-school model statewide.<sup>23</sup> In 2007, the Campos government partnered with businesses grouped into ICE to convert 10 schools “into a new model of full-day schools with high-quality instruction” (Bruns et al. 2012, 92–93). ICE provided infrastructure, scholarships for poor students, and management help. Pernambuco quickly became a national leader in full-day secondary education. Subsequent governments continued the policies, and by 2023 nearly two-thirds of students were in full-day schools (Madero and Bimbati 2023) compared

<sup>21</sup> By 2018, the secretariat of education in Pernambuco had ongoing partnerships with Lemann Foundation, Natura, ICE, and other foundations.

<sup>22</sup> ICE member firms included Phillips, Odebrecht, ABN Amro/Real Bank, and Hidreletric Company of São Francisco.

<sup>23</sup> Business executive Marco Magalhães was key in convincing Campos to continue the policies of his predecessor (interview Mozart Neves, 29 November 2017).

with a national average of 10%. Additionally, the state ramped up the number of VTE schools (also full time) from 6 in 2008 to 44 in 2018 that enrolled 15% of students, double the national average and second only to Ceará (interview Severino Andrade, 13 December 2018).

In 2008, the Campos government created the collective Bonus for Educational Performance (Bônus de Desempenho Educacional [BDE]).<sup>24</sup> The total amount to spend statewide was fixed and thus fostered competition among schools (Veloso 2011, 242). Secretary of Education Mozart Neves had initially proposed an individual bonus, but the union, Sintepe, objected (in lengthy negotiations) and suggested instead a collective, school-wide bonus, as later adopted.<sup>25</sup> Through 2012, the bonus “ranged from 168 percent to 221 percent of a monthly salary . . . a significant incentive” in Brazil (Bruns and Luque 2015, 268). The BDE was associated with higher grade progression in part through large declines in dropouts and grade repetition.<sup>26</sup>

Teachers bought into the bonus. A 2012 survey of teachers found that 96% had heard of BDE and 86% knew the rules (Furtado and Galvão 2014, 5). Although about half thought the school gave more emphasis to the subjects tested (math and language), three-quarters of teachers said it added to teacher salaries, and two-thirds thought the bonus improved relations (1) among teachers, (2) between teachers and school management, and (3) between teachers and students (three separate questions). Almost all school directors also lauded the bonus scheme (Bruns et al. 2011; Bruns and Luque 2015, 269–70).

Teacher unions mounted little resistance to the reforms (Segatto 2011). Sintepe had a complicated relationship to the reforms, but overall, after initial opposition to the first “reference schools,” did not put up much of a fight. Overall, Sintepe supported the expansion of full-day schools (interview Ronildo Oliveira, director, Sintepe, 13 December 2018). However, Sintepe had reservations about some details; namely the bonus did not take into account the school’s context, focused too much on language and math, and left part of it open to potential manipulation by the school director.

<sup>24</sup> The government paid the bonus on a collective, school-wide basis to schools reaching 50% or more of pre-established learning targets (including test scores in math and language, and grade progression rates) (Dusi 2017, 119; Segatto and Abrucio 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Neves worked out the structure of the bonus in four long meetings with Sintepe (Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Educação do Estado de Pernambuco) over the course of a year. Neves also got funding help from the World Bank and the federal government (Segatto 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Moreover, “students who are black, who have repeated grades, who work part time, and who have low parental education have shown the strongest improvements.” The structure of the bonus also rewarded schools that reduced learning inequality (as in São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, and Espírito Santo) (Dusi 2017, 210).

By 2013, education reform and its results were visible enough to become a core plank of Paulo Câmara's electoral campaign that promised continuity (Câmara had served as secretary for several agencies in Campos's previous two terms). Câmara's campaign highlighted government achievements in education.<sup>27</sup> In another signal, Câmara's running mate, Raul Henry, had served earlier as secretary of education (as in Ceará).

Even better, Câmara's main rival, Armando Monteiro Neto made education quality the centerpiece of his platform (*Jornal do Comercio*, 6 September 2014) and anchored his criticism of the outgoing government on Pernambuco's Ideb ranking of 17th out of 26 states. What a godsend it was then for Câmara when the federal government—a month before the election—issued new rankings with Pernambuco in 4th place (*Jornal do Comercio*, 6 September 2014). Câmara won the election handily in the first round (68% of the vote).<sup>28</sup> Ideb more generally shifted education politics in Brazil because results were released every two years before elections. Politicians, especially incumbents were “keen to show improvement in their results” (Costin and Pontual 2020, 60; Toral 2020). The 2018 election was largely a replay between Câmara and Monteiro, though Câmara won by less. Education was again central to both campaigns.<sup>29</sup> Survey respondents rated education second on their list of concerns (12%), though far behind their first concern, health (47%) (*Jornal do Comercio* 8 September 2018).

By the late 2010s, Ceará and Pernambuco had become national references for how to reform primary and secondary education, respectively. With help from the Lemann Foundation and other civil society groups, Ceará and Pernambuco both adopted the other state's models (for different levels of education) and started exporting their own models to other states. The export of Pernambuco's full-time high school model went even farther and faster than Ceará's early literacy program. By 2020, 19 other states were adopting Pernambuco's program, promoted by an NGO, Sonho Grande (Big Dream), and facilitated by federal funding after 2016 (Nogueira 2021, 59–60).

Initial state-level reforms in both states began, not with an overall plan, but rather by scaling up reforms that had been piloted and shown to be effective. And because they continued to show effectiveness at the scaled-up state level, politicians invoked education in electoral campaigns and promised continuity. Coupled with endorsement or acceptance by teacher unions, these reforms were thus better inoculated against opponents (like clientelist politicians). Support from civil society in São Paulo helped in early reforms and scaling up, but reform

<sup>27</sup> Campos had run more on growth and anti-crime, but for Câmara education was the core campaign issue (interview Severino Andrade, 13 December 2018).

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.pe.gov.br/governo/governador/>.

<sup>29</sup> Based again on a review of the *Jornal do Comercio* the month before the election.

longevity owed more to local politics and the rare emergence of education as a vote winner (Dusi 2017, 123).

## V. Merit Reforms in São Paulo

Compared to reforms in the northeast, those in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro (chapter 6), and other states were statewide (without prior piloting) and more top down, orchestrated centrally by reformist secretaries of education.<sup>30</sup> The great political continuity—six consecutive PSDB administrations (appendix C)—did not mean, as in other states, sustained investment in career reforms. Continuity did though allow inertia to carry policies along and to keep reform opponents out of government. The reform process in the late 2000s was decidedly top down with little consultation with unions or other stakeholders. Intriguingly, despite the strength and concentration of civil society in São Paulo, reform accounts rarely mention any CSOs. Civil society in São Paulo, ironically, had more influence in other states than at home.

In São Paulo state, education secretaries in the government of governor José Serra (2007–2010) enacted core changes to teacher careers, especially performance bonuses and exams for career progression (initial hiring was already since the 1960s depoliticized by *concurso*).<sup>31</sup> Student test scores in the early 2000s were lagging (especially for the largest and one of the richest states in Brazil), which helped set the stage for change (though the perceived crisis was less acute than in Chile and Ecuador). Before Serra took office, student tests in 2005 showed worrisome declines in language (–12%) and math (–8%) (Prado 2012, 138). A perennial presidential candidate, Serra wanted to show improvements by the time of elections in 2010.

Serra's education secretary, Maria Helena Guimarães de Castro (2007–2009), first created a standardized curriculum (picking up an initiative started by her predecessor), giving teachers a concrete guide to what their students were expected to learn. In 2008, a new program set targets for schools and collective bonuses for directors, teachers, and staff for meeting them. The targets included both student learning and teacher attendance (the state already had an earlier bonus for good attendance and low dropout rates, 2000–2006; Dusí 2017, 109–10). For schools meeting all targets, the bonus could reach 2.4 to 2.9 times monthly salaries (Veloso 2011, 241; Brooke 2016, 216; Souza 2015).

<sup>30</sup> Cláudia Costin also implemented deep reforms as the municipal secretary of education for the city of Rio de Janeiro (2009–2013) (Neves et al. 2018). São Paulo was also a leader in VTE (chapter 8).

<sup>31</sup> Prado (2012, 2019); Segatto and Abrucio (2017, 99); Segatto (2011, 90–99); Souza (2015).

Opposition came from the teacher union APEOESP (Sindicato dos Professores do Ensino Oficial do Estado de São Paulo) that was not consulted on the reforms.<sup>32</sup> Education faculties at major universities in the state also opposed the reforms (Segatto 2011, 94). On the other side, the reforms had backing from many in the press and public opinion (Prado 2012, 276).

Secretary Castro favored collective bonuses that promoted collaboration in schools to individual bonuses that would foment competition among teachers (interview, 8 February 2019). The teacher union also favored collective bonuses and opposed efforts in 2009 to add individual bonuses (Bruns and Luque 2015, 296). In 2011, the new secretary of education, Paulo Renato Souza, wanted to scrap the collective bonus but surveyed teachers who overwhelmingly (90%) approved of the bonus (and the new standard curriculum), and so he mostly continued Castro's reforms (Segatto 2011, 94).<sup>33</sup>

The reform that generated the most resistance was introducing tests in 2010 for career progressions. Staff in the secretariat joked that "this will get us fired" (*agora a gente cai*). These were high-stakes tests, and APEOESP mobilized against them. Some in the secretariat wanted to add components for a more comprehensive evaluation (as in Chile) (Prado 2012, 329–31; see also Dusi 2017, 105–14). The Programa de Valorização pelo Mérito (Program for Merit Valorization) created eight career levels (Souza 2015). After at least three years at any level, teachers could take tests to progress up to the next levels and earn another 11%. Despite resistance, the program went ahead, and by 2017, 100,000 teachers had received promotions (Instituto-Unibanco 2017, 65).

In sum, in São Paulo the three major reforms (2007–2011) were a standardized curriculum, performance pay through collective bonuses, and exams for progressing up the career ladder. Continuity and implementation depended in part on widespread teacher buy-in (especially curriculum and bonuses) (interview Guilherme Bueno de Camargo, 11 November 2021) and on unbroken control of a single political party, the PSDB. However, reforms in São Paulo were among the least negotiated with the union, which generated resistance and contributed to Castro's early departure from the secretariat (Segatto and Abrucio 2017, 100).

<sup>32</sup> According to a top official in the education secretariat, opening a discussion with Apeoesp would have slowed the reform down for years (Segatto 2011, 95).

<sup>33</sup> However, the bonus was no silver bullet. Econometric and internal evaluations did not show large and consistent gains in learning (due in part to teacher turnover) (Saldaña 2018). The bonus seemed to have the biggest effect in schools that were already high performers (Carvalho 2017).

## VI. National Reforms: Redistributive Finance and Common Curriculum

At the federal level, major reforms covered redistributive financing and a new national curriculum (chapter 8 covers national reforms in VTE). States and municipalities run most schools and hire teachers, so the federal government cannot do as much directly to remake teacher careers as national governments did elsewhere in Latin America. During years of relative political stability (1994–2010) under presidents Cardoso and Lula, education ministers Paulo Renato Souza (1995–2002) and Fernando Haddad (2005–2012) enjoyed much longer tenure than ministers before or since (they were followed by six different ministers in the next four years, 2012–2016; Nogueira 2021, 20). Although from competing parties, Souza and Haddad pushed similar reforms to stabilize and increase education funding and expand information and assessment (Barros 2018, 72).

Starting in the 1990s, the center-right Cardoso government passed a law, Fundef, mandating significant transfers for education funding from federal to state and municipal governments.<sup>34</sup> Fundef was broadly redistributive and benefited poorer states and cities (Arretche 2016). Fundef was a temporary plan that the successor left, PT government rebranded Fundeb and renewed through 2020. When in 2020 Fundeb was due to expire, Congress passed a constitutional amendment (requiring supermajorities in both houses) to make Fundeb permanent. Remarkably in Brazil's strongly presidential regime, the executive was AWOL in this process. Nonetheless, Congress moved on its own because many states and cities depended on this funding.

The 2020 law went beyond the usual redistributive formula to include incentives to improve learning. In another clear example of Brandeis's laboratory, Fundeb 2020 extended the model of Ceará's fiscal incentives to all states and municipalities, expanded it to primary and secondary education, and enlarged the criteria to include conditions like 80% student participation in assessments and curriculum aligned with national standards, as well as improvement on average learning *and* in reducing learning inequality.<sup>35</sup> As in Ceará, this fiscal policy did not affect teacher careers directly—like the many detailed reforms in part II—but the fiscal incentives could significantly boost meritocracy in hiring (and

<sup>34</sup> Fundeb—Fundo de Manutenção e Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica (National Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education, Brazil). Fundef—Fundo Nacional Para o Desenvolvimento do Ensino Fundamental (National Fund for the Development of Fundamental Education, Brazil).

<sup>35</sup> Holanda et al. (2020, 13); Nogueira (2021, 77); interview Thiago Peixoto (30 September 2021).

displace clientelism) as mayors and governors could become more (self) interested in hiring the best and brightest teachers, directors, and administrators.

In another significant national reform, civil society played the lead role in the expert input and stakeholder consultations leading to the 2017 national curriculum reform (Barros 2018). The drawn-out process (2013–2018) to create a common curriculum (BNCC—Base Nacional Comum Curricular) survived government turmoil and six ministers of education because lead associations in civil society held the reform coalition together (Barros 2018). The multiyear process of meetings and consultations—including teachers, unions, and representatives of state and municipal schools—paved the way for a consensual reform process. Of all the cases in this book, BNCC was most driven by civil society and business philanthropy.

The process started with a meeting in 2013 at Yale University sponsored by the Lemann Foundation.<sup>36</sup> The 35 participants included a range of public and private stakeholders, though conspicuously not unions. This group met again later that year at Campinas University and thereafter engaged an ever broader range of stakeholders throughout Brazil. The group, including 45 public officials reconvened at Yale in 2015 for a four-day workshop.

The CSO coalition subsequently became formalized in Movimento pela Base Nacional Comum (MBNC), an NGO with institutional support from Lemann and other foundations, as well as associations of municipal and state secretaries of education, Undime and Consed.<sup>37</sup> MBNC had both organization and individual members, including 12 private NGOs. The Lemann Foundation, Natura Institute, and the bank Itaú BBA funded MBNC, and the Lemann Foundation was the “executive secretariat” (Avelar and Ball 2019, 69). Several states—including the three in previous sections—had already devised common curricula and supported the national version. In a 2014 survey, 82% of teachers favored a common curriculum (Barros 2018, 170).

From the beginning MBNC spanned public and private sectors and grew to have more members from the public sector, in part due to the migration of people from private to public jobs. From 2015 to 2016, MBNC grew from 40 to 70 members (Avelar and Ball 2019, 70); 24 of the 30 newcomers came from foundations. Then, over the course of 2016 membership became more heavily

<sup>36</sup> For the full policy trajectory of BNCC, see Costin and Pontual (2020); Avelar and Ball (2019); and Tarlau and Moeller (2020b, 2020a).

<sup>37</sup> União dos Dirigentes Municipais de Educação (National Union of Municipal Education Managers) and Conselho Nacional de Secretários de Educação (National Council of State Secretaries of Education). “It was the Lemann Foundation who garnered the support of other non-profits, education leaders, university professors and politicians (from the executive and legislative branches) in Brazil to create the Movimento pela Base, starting with a seminal trip to Yale University in 2013” (Costin and Pontual 2020, 50).

public.<sup>38</sup> This public-private collaboration might seem like the policy network in Chile, however, the impact of MBNC came less through expertise among a small group but more from CSOs that provided funding and staff and convened meetings across Brazil, a policy network on steroids.<sup>39</sup> Overall though, MNBC is thus better understood as driven by NGOs in civil society.

By 2014, the Ministry of Education had taken up the task of drafting the first version, which it posted online in late 2015 for commentary and feedback. For the next two years until its formal approval in December 2017, three drafts of the BNCC went through a series of broad consultations and opportunities for stakeholders to provide feedback in a range of formats including online, in regional forums, and in hearings of the CNE (Conselho Nacional de Educação) (Costin and Pontual 2020). Throughout the process, MBNC developed into a cohesive public-private collaboration or co-production.

The government approved the common curriculum for primary education at the end of 2017, followed in late 2018 with the curriculum for secondary education.<sup>40</sup> Full implementation across Brazil's many fragmented school districts would though take years, although MBNC and its CSO backers were investing heavily in promoting implementation. Over the five years of the process (2013–2018), Brazil went through two presidents and six ministers of education from parties ranging across the political spectrum. The great success of the CSO coalition in the MBNC was to maintain momentum throughout this political turbulence.

However, this success should not be overplayed. The MBNC was mostly pushing on an open door and encountered little opposition in government or civil society. Teacher unions were not very engaged, either for or against, and as noted, over 80% of teachers supported a common curriculum.<sup>41</sup> The main

<sup>38</sup> Over the course of 2016 the composition of MBNC shifted from majority private (41 to 29) to majority public (37 to 33). These and other numbers in this paragraph are from Avelar and Ball (2019, 69–70). While the MBNC “is fully funded and maintained by private organisations, its membership includes representatives from every level of government (federal, state, municipal). . . . What is particularly striking is how many members of MNLS [acronym in English for MBNC] hold or have held positions in the National Council of Education, the Ministry of Education and the Câmara dos Deputados. . . . By the end of 2016, more than half of MNLS members were working in state institutions” (Avelar and Ball 2019, 69).

<sup>39</sup> For a detailed network analysis, see Avelar and Nikita (2018).

<sup>40</sup> Mid-2016 was hardly a propitious time to push for completion of the common curriculum. Congress impeached President Dilma, and her unpopular right-wing vice president, Michel Temer, took over. Yet, during Temer's brief government, the vice minister of education was Castro who had been active in MBNC since the first Yale meeting (Costin and Pontual 2020, 52).

<sup>41</sup> The national teacher union, CNTE, just followed the PT line, supporting BNCC during PT governments through 2016, and opposing it during Temer's presidency (interview Castro, 8 February 2019).

organized opposition came from Anped, an association of graduate programs in education (Barros 2018, 169).<sup>42</sup> Universities were “still the BNCC’s strongest opponents” (Costin and Pontual 2020, 58). However, Anped and other academic critics were no match for the MBNC coalition of teachers, state and local government, and São Paulo’s hyper-developed civil society.

Not surprisingly for a massive and complex education system, these core national reforms—Fundeb and BNCC—followed different logics. Fundeb’s continuity was a more institutional story, where majorities in Congress wanted to ensure that resources continued to flow to their constituencies. In contrast, the BNCC showcased the significant political and operational capacity that civil society in São Paulo had accumulated by the 2010s. Comparatively, open and inclusive consultations were also crucial in education politics around major reforms in Ecuador, Chile, and Peru. Although costly in both time and money, these broad national consultations smoothed the path of subsequent reform (chapter 9).

## VII. Comparisons and Conclusions

In Brazil’s decentralized system, additional cases of meaningful reform emerged in other states and cities. For teacher careers, most included some means for limiting clientelist meddling with education personnel and some form of merit pay, including in the states of Espírito Santo, Minas Gerais, Goiás, Bahia, Amazonas, and Paraíba (Prado 2012; Dusi 2017; Segatto and Abrucio 2017). Many of these cases also highlight core themes in this chapter, including the benefits of political continuity, collaboration with CSOs from São Paulo, and negotiating with teacher unions.

For example, Espírito Santo was another small state (population 4 million) that embarked after 2003 on decades of quality reforms.<sup>43</sup> Measures included a

<sup>42</sup> Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Educação. Later, implementing the BNCC ran into some opposition from text book publishers (Costin and Pontual 2020, 57–58).

<sup>43</sup> Dusi (2017, 135–46); Segatto and Abrucio (2017, 93–96); Panico and Abrucio (2019). Goiás was another interesting case: interviews with Thiago Peixoto (5 December 2018 and 30 September 2021) and Caroline Tavares (6 February 2019). Early reforms came fast and furious with education secretary Peixoto (2011–2013). One easy reform was to get teachers back in the classroom; in 2011 almost half of teachers (14,000 of 29,000) were not teaching. Of these 50 were working for the teacher union, though legally they had the right to only 6. Absenteeism was also a problem, so Peixoto created a bonus for good attendance. Peixoto was unable to change the politicized system for electing school directors but did manage to make them pass an exam prior to their election. Peixoto relied a lot on civil society, in São Paulo, not locally. Movimento Brasil Competitivo paid a consulting firm (Bain) to design reforms based on international best practice. Peixoto also got help designing

new standardized curriculum, performance bonuses for staff (based on both individual, e.g., attendance, and collective, e.g., meeting school targets, indicators). In 2009–2010, the government used a new merit process to replace half of the school directors (Panico and Abrucio 2019, 5). In the 2010s, the state joined a national literacy program (2012) and later copied Ceará’s literacy program. By 2015, Espírito Santo ranked fourth nationally on Ideb for secondary schools.

Continuity in government and negotiations with the teacher union contributed to these reforms. For 12 of the 16 years from 2003 to 2018, Paulo Hartung was governor, and the other governor in this period was from the same party. The education secretariat took two years to design the pay-for-performance policy in part because it was negotiated with the teacher union (Segatto and Abrucio 2017, 94). To overcome opposition from clientelist politicians and stem possible counter-mobilization, the secretary of education and top advisers met individually with all state deputies and mayors who felt politically undercut by merit hiring of school directors (Panico and Abrucio 2019).<sup>44</sup> Civil society from São Paulo was not as prominent as in Pernambuco and Goiás, but Instituto Unibanco did have a partnership with the state government, and Todos Pela Educação was also involved (Avelar and Ball 2019, 94).

In most of the Andean cases in part II, officials in the national Ministry of Education designed the reform, sent it to Congress (except Colombia) that, once approved, sent it back to the ministry to implement. All very centralized, but not in Brazil. Instead, many reforms percolated gradually out of small, ad hoc, decentralized events: a curriculum workshop at Yale University, a wealthy patron refurbishing his old high school in Pernambuco, or a small poor town in Ceará trying to figure out how to get its children to read. Continuous policy and electoral support were crucial to keeping reforms going in Ceará and Pernambuco. Scaling them up and disseminating them widely to other states in Brazil depended more on CSOs in São Paulo though with later federal help. These processes are classic examples Brandeis’s “laboratories of democracy” in federal systems where subnational governments have the freedom to experiment, and then other local or national governments can copy policies that work. Ironically, even in other federally enacted reforms—the common curriculum and Fundeb—much of the initiative came from decentralized politics and civil

reforms from Itaú Social and Todos Pela Educação and went to Chile on a delegation sponsored by the Lemann Foundation.

<sup>44</sup> The government in Rio de Janeiro did not do this and faced counter-mobilization by clientelist politicians. In terms of communication strategies, Risolia in Rio de Janeiro tried to reach out to the broader public, while secretaries in Espírito Santos focused communication efforts more toward core stakeholders: teacher unions and clientelist politicians (Panico and Abrucio 2019, 14).

society. In contrast, the federal push into VTE (analyzed in the next chapter) did follow the more traditional path of top-down, ministry-generated reforms.

Compared to the cases in part II, electoral politics came to provide ongoing support for reforms with the rare but virtuous cycle where piecemeal reforms yield positive results, politicians campaign on these results, voters plump for them, and elected politicians press on with further support or extensions to previous reforms. These electoral dynamics were most visible in Pernambuco and Ceará. Federalism facilitated these positive political dynamics because education (and healthcare) are the main functions of state and local governments. Subnational governments cannot do much about countrywide issues like inflation, unemployment, immigration, all in the realm of national policy. The federal distribution of responsibility thus helps focus voter attention at the subnational level on public services like education. This is not meant as a blanket endorsement of decentralization, but it does highlight how education can get lost in national-level politics in ways that are less likely in local elections.

Civil society played a greater role in Brazil than in the other reform cases, save Chile. Federalism also amplified the role of civil society in that well-funded São Paulo CSOs could have outsize impact in smaller, poorer states. The record of past successes encourages would-be reformers in other states knowing they could likely count on help from well-resourced CSOs from São Paulo.

Most Andean career reform tried to banish politics and clientelism by statute with detailed regulation for hiring and promoting teachers and directors. Many Brazilian states and municipalities did the same. Yet, without continued supports, these regulations can be rescinded or circumvented, as seen in Rio de Janeiro and Mexico. Rather than just attempting to prohibit politics in hiring, reformers in Brazil tried to shift politician incentives to meddle in education through new electoral and fiscal carrots. Rather than saying just “keep politics out,” policymakers also gave them incentives to do so through the publication of student test score results (and meeting targets) shortly before elections and through offering financial bonuses for good education performance, first in Ceará and then nationally through the newly permanent Fundeb. This sort of institutional engineering to shift incentives seems to hold particular promise for the many middle-income countries beset by clientelism.

# Parties, Coalitions, and Routes to Technical Education

*Education is the only way to escape the middle-income trap*

—Nicolas Eyzaguirre, Minister of Education, Chile, 2014–2016<sup>1</sup>

## I. Introduction: An Empty Policy Space

Although it is part of secondary education, and came up in earlier chapters, vocational and technical education (VTE) deserves separate analysis for its distinctive politics. VTE is even less visible in normal politics and is rarely mentioned in campaigns for elected office or pushed by civil society, making it a less salient and emptier policy area than general education.<sup>2</sup> However, VTE is more closely connected, in principle, to skill needs of business, so the political economy, human capital frameworks in chapter 2, should be more relevant theoretically.

In VTE, the questions shift from quality and teacher careers in part II back to quantity and access—why so little VTE in Latin America?<sup>3</sup> Why so much variation across countries? And, the major focus of this chapter, what are the

<sup>1</sup> Carlos Peña, “Eyzaguirre devela el misterio,” July 20, 2014, <http://www.elmercurio.com/blogs/2014/07/20/23672/Eyzaguirre-devela-el-misterio.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> As well as much less researched. Washington multilaterals were also less interested in VTE (in contrast to the European Union in Turkey [Sancak 2017]), further emptying the policy space. Flagship publications on education from the IDB (Busso et al. 2017) and World Bank (2018) devoted little attention to VTE but warned about mistakes to avoid. For the World Bank, VTE works, “but only when programs are designed and implemented in partnership with employers” and should not lock students into specializations too early (154, 157). The OECD in contrast consistently advocated for VTE (Kuczera et al. 2009; OECD 2015).

<sup>3</sup> VTE teachers are already better trained in their subject areas and better paid. And because teacher training varies so much across technical subjects—from animal husbandry, to hotel management, to coding—generic career reform makes less sense.

unusual politics that generated greater access in Chile historically and in Brazil more recently?

Although not unanimous, much research finds individual gains from this human capital. In Latin America, VTE students who leave after high school earn 19% more than those leaving general education (though variation across sectors and countries is wide; Busso et al. 2017, 180).<sup>4</sup> These returns should make VTE attractive to poorer families, parties that represent them, and development planners. And, the conventional view is that VTE students in Latin America “tend to come from lower socio-economic backgrounds” (Busso et al. 2017, 180). However, VTE usually costs more per student than regular education and sometimes therefore attracts, and further subsidizes, better-off students. Compared to Europe, VTE in most of Latin America has a decided middle-class skew, which shifts the potential support coalition.

Teacher unions and clientelist politicians, core protagonists in part II, were hardly visible in stories of increasing VTE. In principle, VTE is less vulnerable to clientelism because teaching is more specialized and technical, and hence incompetent patronage hires would be more apparent and damaging. Teacher unions are less interested because VTE is a smaller segment in educational systems in Latin America, and unions may gain from many reforms in VTE that include positive-sum expansion, bringing potential new members.

As in general education, business demand for VTE skills in Latin America was anemic because many large firms either employ low-skilled workers or find private rather than collective solutions for their skill needs. Multi-national corporations (MNCs) often train in-house, or they can move to other countries that offer the skills they require (Doner and Schneider 2016; Sancak and Özel 2018). Large local firms are often concentrated in natural resources and non-tradeables where skill requirements are lower (Schneider 2013). What training does occur is likely to be less sector-wide than highly specialized and in-house for a relatively small number of employees (Bassi et al. 2012a; Kosack 2012).

The firms most in need of a pool of skilled workers coming out of secondary education—typically smaller or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)—often cannot afford in-house training and face greater risk of poaching were they to invest in training. Yet in politics, SMEs face barriers to collective action and so struggle to lobby for more public VTE. Overall, the absence of business—big and small—pressure is a key part of explaining the perennially low levels of VTE in Latin America.

<sup>4</sup> Returns in Peru to VTE were also 19% higher than in general education, though only 2% of enrollments were in VTE. Alex Ríos Céspedes, “Formación técnica para reducir efectos de la pandemia y la recesión económica,” November 20, 2020, <https://www.educacionperu.org/formacion-tecnica-para-reducir-efectos-de-la-pandemia-y-la-recesion-economica/>

In industrialized countries effective VTE has often been linked to well-organized employer associations that not only advocated training but also sometimes played a “parapublic” role in administering it (Culpepper and Thelen 2008). Brazil created (and a number of other countries copied) a corporatist framework for short-term adult training, but similar European-style public-private arrangements did not exist for secondary VTE, save exceptions like Turkey (section V).<sup>5</sup>

The empirical cases (sections III–V) illustrate three different trajectories of expanding VTE secondary education: mostly market led in Chile, mostly state-led in Brazil, and coordinated in Turkey. VTE expansion in Chile’s privatized education system was initially market driven with parties and government entering the scene later. VTE policy in Brazil was more top down, that is, government and party driven. In both cases, business was little involved in either politics (lobbying for VTE) or implementation (Busso et al. 2017, 180). The Turkish case provides the counterfactual of what politics and implementation look like in a middle-income country when organized business—especially SMEs—provides active coalitional support and coordinated implementation.

These cases are among the more extreme examples of each trajectory that helps pull their distinctive politics into higher relief. Within Latin America, Chile had among the highest enrollments in secondary VTE. Brazil had one of the most rapid increases after 2000. Programmatic left parties in both countries played important roles (though only recently in Chile) in ways that broadly fit power resource theory (PRT), diluted by the absence of labor unions and greater presence of the middle class in Brazil. These cases, though, are the exceptions to the general rule in Latin America of an emptier policy space and low enrollments in VTE.

Before turning to the three cases, section II provides basic comparative data and highlights the wide gaps in VTE between high- and middle-income countries and the more middle-class skew of VTE in Latin America.

## II. Cross-National Variations and the Middle-Class Slant in Latin America

In secondary enrollments, Europe was the global leader in technical education with, since the late 20th century, around one-quarter of secondary students in

<sup>5</sup> In Brazil, e.g., as noted in chapter 2, laws from the 1940s set aside 1% of firms’ payroll to fund training institutes, like Senai in industry that were administered directly by business associations (Schneider 2013, chapter 4).

VTE (Doner and Schneider 2020). One-third of OECD countries had 50% or more of students in VTE.<sup>6</sup> Public opinion in Europe solidly backed VTE (Busemeyer et al. 2020, 83, 86). Almost two-thirds of respondents favored more spending on both VTE and general education (more than support for higher education), and more than half preferred more spending even if it meant higher taxes.

Rates in Latin America stagnated around 10%, though enrollments in countries like Brazil expanded after 2000. Some of the richer middle-income countries like Turkey, Mexico, and Chile (actually recently graduated to high income) had enrollment rates over 20%.<sup>7</sup> Historically, Korea was a leader in VTE; enrollments rose from 40% in 1960 to 72% in 1990. Thereafter enrollments dropped to 60% in 2000 as the government and parents pushed more students on to university tracks (Ashton et al. 2002).

PISA scores reveal an astonishing difference between Latin America and OECD countries. VTE students in five countries of Latin America scored higher on PISA assessments than students in general education. It was the complete opposite in all OECD countries: VTE students fared much worse than those in general education (Altinok 2012; Avendano 2017). By 2018, the gap was about 60 points below in the OECD and 20 points above in Latin America (figure 8.1a–c) (Fiszbein et al. 2016, 23). These point differences are ginormous; 30–40 points on the PISA scale is equivalent to a full year of instruction. Disaggregating, PISA scores in VTE schools were lower than in general education in Chile and Uruguay, about the same in Argentina, and higher in Colombia, Mexico, and especially Brazil (nearly 20% higher) (Bogliaccini and Madariaga 2021).<sup>8</sup>

In Latin America, the positive differences in VTE over general education were greatest for poorer students. Student motivation to learn (as measured in PISA surveys) was higher among students in technical education and associated

<sup>6</sup> In Europe, VTE enrollments were 70% or more of upper secondary students in 6 countries, 50% or more in 12 countries, and 40% or more in 18 countries (OECD 2015, 1).

<sup>7</sup> VTE enrollment numbers vary widely across national and international sources. For example, Sevilla (2017, 31) provides much higher calculations for Latin America, in most cases double or more the World Bank/UNESCO figures. Some differences may be due to alternative denominators. For example, VTE in Chile is only available for the last two years of secondary education. Percentages are thus higher if the VTE share is calculated as a percent of upper secondary, though some estimates use the share as a percent of both upper and lower secondary education. Rankings though are mostly consistent across sources. I use international sources like OECD and UNESCO for cross-national comparisons but national sources for the country cases.

<sup>8</sup> Following a negative correlation with level of development. On PISA 2015, federal schools in Brazil (mostly VTE) ranked 11th worldwide compared to 69th of 70 countries for general public education (Henry n.d.).

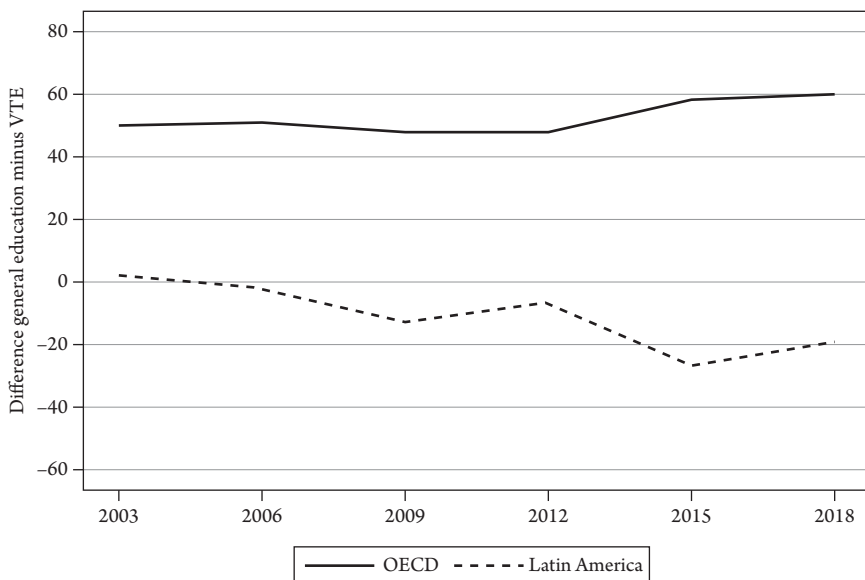


Figure 8.1a Difference in PISA Scores between General Education and VTE in Reading

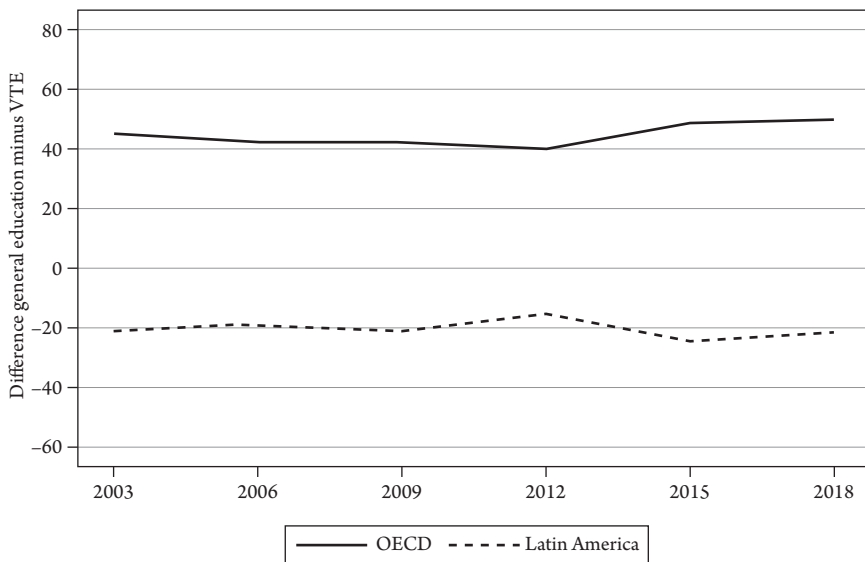
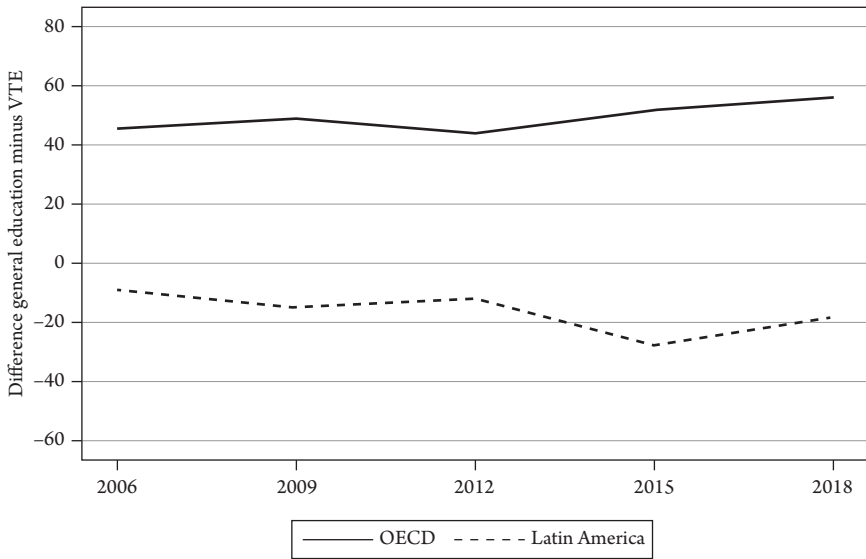


Figure 8.1b Difference in PISA Scores between General Education and VTE in Math

with better test performance. In OECD countries, better performing students get pushed on to the academic or general track. In Latin America, few countries do national tracking, and enrollment in vocational education depends more on family and student choice (Farías and Sevilla 2015).



*Figure 8.1c* Difference in PISA Scores between General Education and VTE in Science *Source:* OECD Skills Surveys, [https://pisadataexplorer.oecd.org/ide/idepisa/report.aspx?p=1-RMS-1-20183,20153,20123,20093,20063,20033,20003-PVREAD-ISCEDO-CHL,COL,MEX,ARG,QRG,BRA,CRI,DOM,PAN,PER,URY-MN\\_MN-Y\\_J-0-0-37&Lang=1033](https://pisadataexplorer.oecd.org/ide/idepisa/report.aspx?p=1-RMS-1-20183,20153,20123,20093,20063,20033,20003-PVREAD-ISCEDO-CHL,COL,MEX,ARG,QRG,BRA,CRI,DOM,PAN,PER,URY-MN_MN-Y_J-0-0-37&Lang=1033).  
*Note:* Latin America includes all countries that participated in PISA: Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Panama, Peru, and Uruguay.

VTE and general education differ in per-pupil spending. The liberal, Anglophone countries and middle-income countries like Mexico spend more per student on general education compared to most East European and coordinated market economies like Germany and the Nordic countries that spend more or close to equal amounts on vocational education (Doner and Schneider 2020, 4–5). Turkey and Chile spend about the same on each type of education. In contrast, spending per pupil in Brazil in some types of VTE schools is fully three times more than on the general education track (Almeida et al. 2016, 76).<sup>9</sup>

Secondary VTE attracts middle-class students in Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, and Brazil, which may help explain the better PISA scores in VTE schools (rather than VTE value added) (Bogliaccini and Madariaga 2021).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> By another metric, in OECD countries, student-teacher ratios were similar across general education (ratio of 12:1) and VTE (14:1) (OECD 2017), and in Chile 21:1 in general education and 19:1 in VTE (OECD 2020, 2). Yet in Brazil, differences were huge: 26:1 in general upper secondary (more than double the OECD average) compared to 12:1 in VTE (below the OECD average). This higher per-pupil spending in Brazil was no doubt part of the draw for richer families.

<sup>10</sup> On Argentina, interview with Santiago de la Barrera, 10 August 2016 and (Martínez et al. 2013). PISA tests 15-year-old students around the time when students are starting VTE in upper secondary, so VTE programs would not have had time to impact scores much.

Among other features that attract richer students, VTE schools tend to have longer school days, pay teachers more, and admit students through exams. VTE secondary schools are usually designed to funnel graduates straight into the labor market, but for richer families, they are a bridge to university (Castioni et al. 2019; Martínez et al. 2013, 18). Students from richer families may block out poorer students (Tilly's [1998] opportunity hoarding) and thus stanch upward mobility, but politically it may also attract more middle-class support for continued investment in VTE.

Figure 8.2 offers class contrasts between Europe and Latin America. In countries above the 45-degree line, proportionally more poor children go into VTE. In countries below the line, the few in Latin America, richer students do. In another calculation, a disadvantaged student in Europe is 4.3 times more likely to

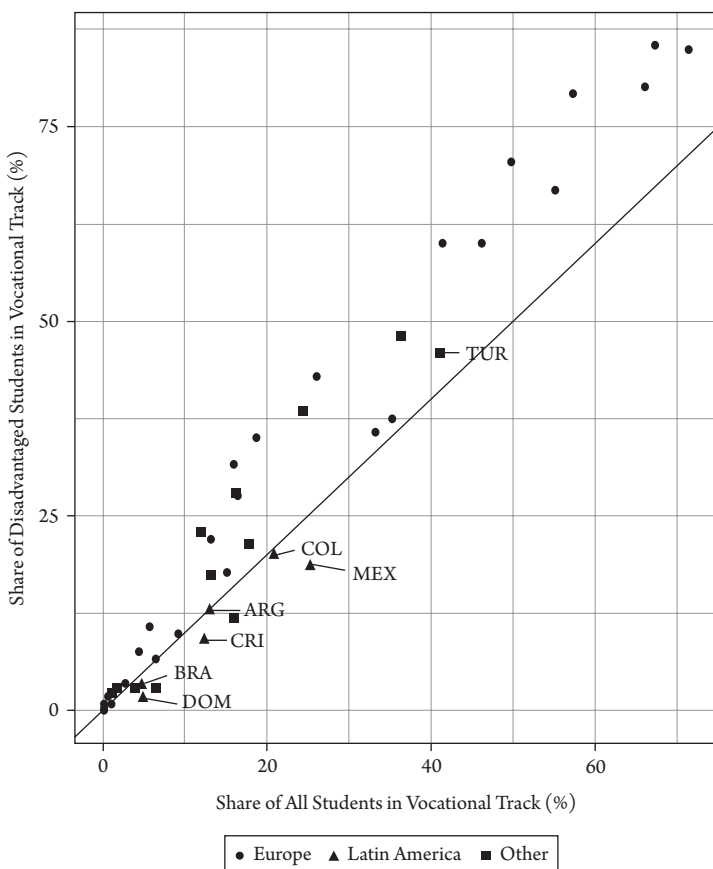


Figure 8.2 Share of Disadvantaged Students in VTE in 2015 Source: From PISA student questionnaire. Students self-report whether they are in VTE or not, so reporting problems probably exist. PISA 2015 Results (Volume I), p. 417.

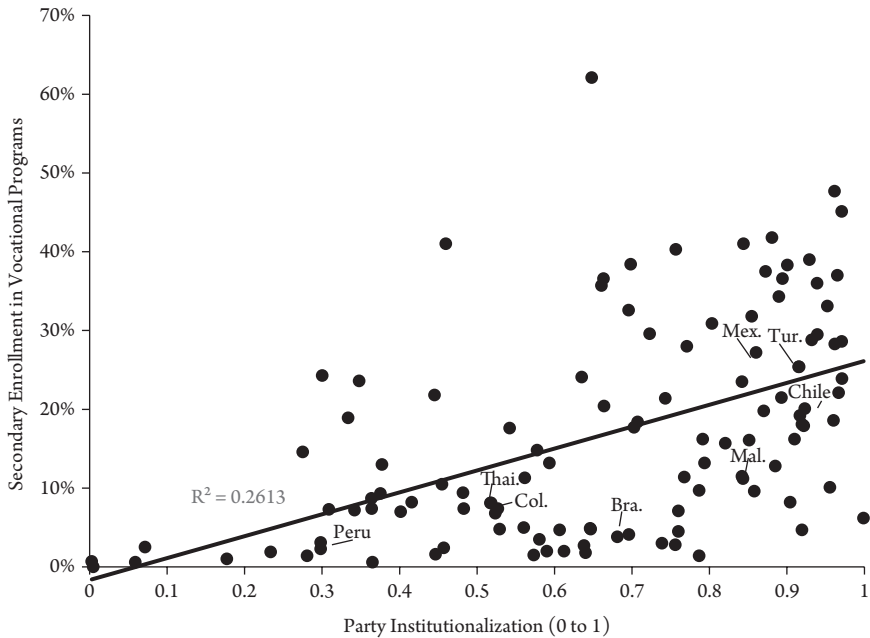


Figure 8.3 Secondary Enrollment in Vocational Programs and Party Institutionalization, 2015 Source: Doner and Schneider (2020, 8). Note: For sources and notes on parties, see figure 2.2.

attend a VTE school than a rich student. The figure for Latin America is 0.8, meaning a poor student is less likely than a rich one to opt for VTE.<sup>11</sup>

Unusual politics—with uncommonly stable, broad political parties (at least through the mid-2010s)—in Chile, Turkey, and Brazil made them more exceptions that highlighted the rule of weaker parties in the rest of Latin America. In most middle-income countries, political parties were less institutionalized and programmatic than the social democratic and Christian democratic parties in Europe that provided lasting support for VTE (Busemeyer 2015). Figure 8.3 shows a rough correlation between VTE enrollment and a composite measure of party institutionalization.

The next sections provide in more detail how parties mattered for VTE. The general point here is that institutionalized parties were more programmatic, and expanding VTE can be a good way for parties to connect their programs with poorer, working-class families, as well as, in Latin America, some middle-class voters. These connections were common in center-left, social democratic

<sup>11</sup> The OECD defines poor or disadvantaged as the bottom 25% in all country samples and rich is the top 25% of incomes (sources in figure 8.1a–c).

parties, but populist-right parties, as in Turkey, may also try to appeal to poor voters with VTE programs.

In sum, rates of enrollment in secondary VTE vary across countries with higher rates in northern Europe and lower rates in liberal economies and middle-income countries (with some exceptions like Chile and Turkey). The VTE indicators for middle-income countries in Latin America show on average low enrollments, fairly high spending per pupil, higher PISA scores, and more middle-class students.

### III. Markets and Left Parties in Chile

The early expansion and higher enrollment levels of VTE in Chile were largely the result of market demand and later left parties. The same emptiness as the cases in part II characterized the context for policymaking. For example, the government increased scholarship funding for VTE in the 2000s despite the “negligible” “political clout of the sector” (Bernasconi and Sevilla 2017, 144). According to Ramble et al. (2020, 76), “There was not a strong political interest in building a true TVET system, since policy-makers relied on a market-friendly approach that sidelined effective regulation.” In Chile’s voucher system, around half of VTE secondary enrollments were in private-voucher schools established to meet increasing market demand.<sup>12</sup>

VTE students came predominantly from lower income families—a core constituency for left parties—and more so than elsewhere in Latin America. Left-party support was especially apparent in Bachelet’s second government (2014–2018) that created additional public VTE schools and added a VTE sub-secretary at Mineduc (Ministry of Education), giving VTE a small foothold there. Overall, Chile’s education trajectory fits fairly well in Busemeyer’s (2015) partisan and welfare-state model of skill formation and PRT more generally (Cummings et al. 2023).

In Latin America, Chile had one of the largest and most developed systems of VTE in secondary education (Bogliaccini and Madariaga 2020; Sevilla 2017).<sup>13</sup> Enrollments climbed steadily from 27% of upper secondary students in 1981 to 45% in 2007.<sup>14</sup> By the 2000s, two-thirds of families in the poorest quintile

<sup>12</sup> The briefer analysis in Doner and Schneider (2020) focused on parties; this chapter also brings in markets. Market demand was also key in Korea’s very rapid expansion where in the late 20th century around half of enrollment in upper secondary education was in private schools (with government incentives) (Lee et al. 2018, 20).

<sup>13</sup> Moreover, 44% of tertiary enrollments were in VTE (Bernasconi and Sevilla 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Almost doubling in absolute numbers from a little over 200,000 students in 1990 to 400,000 in 2007.

went for VTE compared to only 10% of the richest quintile (Iruarrizaga 2009, 7, 14). As in Europe (but decidedly not the rest of Latin America), by the 2010s over 90% of VTE students came from the poorest two income quintiles (Sevilla 2018, 10).<sup>15</sup>

Poorer families may be drawn to better initial outcomes for VTE graduates; three-quarters find employment (versus two-thirds in general education), and incomes were initially similar across the two groups (OECD 2020, 2). Mineduc findings were similar; VTE graduates were more likely to find jobs quickly than in general education and earn more in the medium run (Mineduc 2020, 27; see also Larrañaga et al. 2014).

Through the late 2000s, the expansion of technical education was largely an “extreme case of the market model” (Valiente et al. 2020, 93). Government policies for education generally—massive increasing in spending, upping teacher salaries, switching to full-day instruction, and so forth—all benefited VTE, but policies did not single out VTE for special support. By 2010s, 55% of VTE secondary students were in private-voucher schools, revealing robust market demand for technical education (CEPPE 2013, 3). In Chile’s national voucher system, burgeoning enrollments in VTE required investments by private owners to create new schools. This heavy investment in secondary VTE is mostly school based without close connections to business (as in European apprenticeship programs; Farías and Sevilla 2015). After 2007, the proportion of enrollments in VTE fell from 45% to 37% by 2018 (and remained at 37% in 2021; Sevilla and Polesel 2022, 9).

Middle-class exit drove much of the drop (Mineduc 2020, 9). From 2008 to 2018, the portion of students from the poorest quintile in VTE rose from 71% to 79%, the share from the next quintile (lower middle class) fell from 71% to 51%, and the proportion from the middle quintile plummeted from 25% to 8%. Almost no students from the upper quintiles went to VTE schools. It seems that families in the lower middle and middle quintiles, as their incomes rose, started to think their children should aspire to white-collar jobs that came from general education and university.<sup>16</sup> A similar shift in expectations came to those still in VTE. In 2006, less than half of parents with children in VTE secondary

<sup>15</sup> One hypothesis for this concentration of poor families is that 68% of non-VTE schools charged additional fees compared to 75% of VTE schools that did not (Arroyo and Pacheco 2018, 9). VTE schools were also concentrated in poorer neighborhoods (interview Cristian Lincovil, 15 March 2023).

<sup>16</sup> Already in 2011, survey respondents in Chile thought university education was a better route to a good job, around 85% versus 70%. This was by far the largest gap of the 18 countries of Latin America surveyed (OEI 2012, 80). By 2018, earnings for people with higher education in Chile were 141% higher than those with only secondary—way above the OECD average of 54%—and second highest in the OECD (OECD 2020, 3).

schools expected them to continue to post-secondary education, including non-university technical institutes. By 2014, the share rose to 79%.<sup>17</sup>

In the late 2000s, government got more involved. The waves of student protests discussed in chapter 3 did not target VTE (Zancajo and Valiente 2019, 580). The turbulent years of protests after 2006 focused on issues like cost, quality, inequality, and school profits. Leaders of the protests came mostly from non-VTE high schools (Zancajo and Valiente 2019, 589). However, in 2008, in the midst of debates on the whole education system, the Bachelet government appointed an external commission to review VTE and make policy recommendations. This commission “can be considered as one of the first signs of interest in public policy” for VTE from center-left governments.<sup>18</sup>

In the elections of 2013, the new coalition of left parties, Nueva Alianza, backed a campaign platform with three core priorities: tax increases, education reform, and revising the Constitution. This coalition drew more enthusiastic support from poorer voters (Cummings et al. 2023). Among the ambitious education reforms analyzed in chapter 3, improving and expanding VTE was also a central element at both secondary and tertiary levels, including new public schools in each of Chile’s regions (Bachelet 2013, 19–21). Tellingly, business was on the sidelines (as was organized labor) throughout the three-decade transformation of Chilean education, including VTE (Zancajo and Valiente 2019): “Neither single companies [including MNCs] nor employers’ associations have played an active role in building a TVET system in Chile.”<sup>19</sup>

The relative absence of business from the VTE coalition derives in good measure from the fact that big business either does not rely on skilled labor or has devised private solutions (Schneider 2013; Valiente et al. 2020). The Chilean economy relies heavily on natural resources (copper, agriculture, forestry), sectors where firms either employ few people (mining) whom firms can afford to train themselves or do not require much training (agriculture). Among firms with private solutions, a representative of one of the largest companies in Chile said his firm hired only truck drivers from VTE training, “all the rest are trained by us” (Valiente et al. 2020, 100). Manufacturing is small and does not

<sup>17</sup> Paula Sevilla, email, 27 September 2021. VTE students scored lower than general education students on the university entrance exams in part because the curriculum in general education offered better preparation (Valiente et al. 2020, 97). See also Zancajo and Valiente (2019, 584).

<sup>18</sup> Rambla et al. (2020, 70); Sevilla (2018, 6); Valiente et al. (2020, 97).

<sup>19</sup> Rambla et al. (2020, 76–77). Some businesses took apprentices from VTE schools, but they accounted for only 11% of students (Sevilla 2018, 19) (12% in 2020 compared to 34% in the OECD [OECD 2020, 2]). The pre-1990 dictatorship had transferred some technical schools to business associations and had devised a tax scheme that put business in charge of ongoing adult training. However, the business-run technical schools were a small proportion of all VTE enrollments and the rest of business had little connection to the VTE system (Rambla et al. 2020, 70).

export much, so firms in these sectors are not under pressure to upgrade skills and education. Also worth mentioning is the support for VTE from the private-sector owners of VTE schools (55% of secondary level and almost 100% private at the tertiary level). However, as noted, school owners did not have much influence—they lacked clout (Bernasconi and Sevilla 2017, 144).

Given the political weakness of private VTE schools and the indifference of business, it is not surprising that political appointees in left governments played larger roles in pushing proactive planning and public promotion.<sup>20</sup> They pushed for the first VTE commission comprised of mostly VTE experts and government officials (Zancajo and Valiente 2019, 588, 590), in contrast to the much broader advisory council Bachelet created in 2006 that included many other stakeholders (chapter 3). One of the only recommendations from the VTE commission that Bachelet implemented, and her right-wing successor maintained, was the new sub-secretariat of VTE within Mineduc.<sup>21</sup> At first this sub-secretariat “had more symbolic value than an effective influence” on policy (Zancajo and Valiente 2019, 591). However, in the second Bachelet government, officials in the sub-secretariat had more heft, both in advocating adjusting other system-wide reforms to the needs of VTE and recommending policies specifically for VTE (Zancajo and Valiente 2019, 593).

In sum, secondary VTE in Chile depended on shifting market demand and a long-lasting center-left coalition of parties. The enduring party coalition superseded and substituted for bottom-up pressure from business and labor. And in contrast to European skill systems, organized business and labor were not engaged in coordinating VTE implementation. This was thus a diluted PRT story, with left parties (but without organized labor) that pushed for expanded VTE schools that served mostly poor families.

#### IV. Left Parties and Ramping Up in Brazil

In a similarly diluted PRT case, left PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores) governments (2002–2016) pushed a lot of funding into VTE. This investment made programmatic and coalitional sense given the PT’s early electoral base in the industrial southeast and later base in Bolsa Familia recipients (poor families) in the northeast. It was also personal. President Lula’s vocational training at Senai (chapter 2) as an adolescent gave him, a poor migrant from the northeast, his

<sup>20</sup> “Efforts to escape the ‘low-skills trap’ in Chile have come more from government than from business and mostly with a focus on the expansion of the supply of skills” (Valiente et al. 2020, 94).

<sup>21</sup> However, the Piñera government cut the staff from 20 to 10 people, interview, Cristian Lincovil, 15 March 2023.

first step into formal industrial work on his way into the auto industry and its union that would later launch him on the national political stage in the 1970s.

Investing in VTE also made policy sense because it was working. Multiple studies found higher earnings for VTE graduates ranging from 10% to 14%, and some showed higher gains among poorer participants in the northeast (Portela et al. 2015, 13–14).<sup>22</sup> However, some of these gains may be due to self-selection as technical high schools have entrance exams and their students tend to come from richer families (Almeida et al. 2016, 15, 30; Bogliaccini and Madariaga 2021).

The patchwork of secondary VTE provision by federal schools, state schools (as seen in Ceará and Pernambuco, chapter 7), and the massive S System (publicly funded but privately managed) all grew after 2000. In industry, firms pay 1% of payroll to Senai to fund a huge system of training schools and programs. Similar arrangements govern skill acquisition in other sectors and together make up the S system. At the secondary level, private schools (including S System) accounted for half of total VTE enrollments, state schools for 37%, and federal schools for 11% (Almeida et al. 2016, 25). Thus, as in Chile, market demand led to major private investment in schools (even discounting the “forced” investment through the S System). From 2002 to 2015, the private VTE network doubled (Schwartzman 2016, 128). Public schools grew even faster. From early in the Lula years (2002–2010), federal VTE programs proliferated.<sup>23</sup> Federal funding grew fivefold, and federal vocational institutes more than doubled. From 2007 to 2014, VTE enrollment grew by 123%.<sup>24</sup>

Compared to mostly dead-end secondary VTE elsewhere in Latin America, many VTE students in Brazil continued on to university (Almeida and Packard 2018). Part of the attraction for upper income families was that VTE secondary school offered many more hours of instruction per year (from 266 to 400 hours), and, as noted earlier, the amount invested per student in integrated programs was three times the amount in traditional academic programs (Almeida et al. 2016, 37, 76).<sup>25</sup> Overall, the S System “mostly attracts students coming from families

<sup>22</sup> The effect does not though work through immediate employment in their field of training. In industry, less than half of young VTE graduates work in an area of their technical training, though the proportion drops to a quarter by the time workers are 55 (Portela et al. 2015, 23). Returns vary greatly across sectors (Almeida et al. 2016, 77).

<sup>23</sup> Programs included Projovem, Escola de Fábrica, and others (Castioni et al. 2019; Frigotto et al. 2005). Funding went from .04% of GDP in 2003 to 0.2% of GDP in 2013 (Portela et al. 2015, 3). Federal institutes grew from 140 in 2002 to 354 in 2010 (Almeida et al. 2016, 26).

<sup>24</sup> From 780,000 to 1.74 million students (Almeida et al. 2016, 11). At the tertiary level, VTE enrollments also increased dramatically by 140% from 2007 to 2013, to a total of nearly a million students (Portela et al. 2015, 8–9).

<sup>25</sup> Brazil has three types of VTE secondary education: integrated (academic and VTE in the same school), concomitant (academic and VTE in different schools), and subsequent (VTE after

with low socio-economic status, while [Federal Institutes] increasingly enroll middle-class students” (Fasolo and Castioni 2017; Rambla et al. 2020, 73).

In Brazil’s fragmented federal system, state governments ran the bulk of secondary schools, predominantly general education except for a few outliers with large VTE programs. Take the state of São Paulo, where VTE was huge and high performing. With 42% of São Paulo secondary enrollments, Centro Estadual de Educação Técnica e Tecnológica Paula Souza had 211 technical schools with 216,000 students (almost a third of all public enrollments in VTE in Brazil).<sup>26</sup> On the national high school exam, 12 of the top-50 best performing schools were in the Centro Paula Souza network, and many graduates went on to university. Of course, much of these positive outcomes resulted again from selective admissions based on exams. As noted in chapter 7, two of the top education reformers (and performers on standardized tests), Ceará and Pernambuco, also led other states in expanding secondary VTE. As in the other national cases of VTE expansion, governments in Ceará and Pernambuco relied on relatively well-institutionalized left parties and benefited from continuity in power.

In Ceará, the government launched a plan in 2008 to create, as in Pernambuco, new full-time VTE schools.<sup>27</sup> The plan started with 25 schools and expanded to 113 schools and 45,000 students across the state by 2015. However, connections to business were scant. The only sector that worked with business associations and worker unions was air conditioning and refrigeration. The new VTE schools increasingly attracted middle-class students for the usual reasons: entrance exams, longer school days and years, and 50% more spending per pupil than in general education. Reflecting this middle-class shift, more than half of graduates (and an increasing share over time) went on to university (Schwartzman 2016, 172; interview Marcos Holanda, 17 January 2019).

Federal funding jumped again with President Dilma Rousseff’s signature policy, Pronatec (Programa Nacional de Acesso ao Ensino Técnico e Emprego), launched in 2011. Dilma even made technical education a campaign issue in her two successful runs for president (Castioni et al. 2019, 118). The government designed Pronatec top down: “Unlike the previous national plans for TVET

completing academic secondary education). The integrated program is more selective, and students there plan to continue on to tertiary education (Almeida et al. 2016, 76). Integrated programs are 92% public while concomitant and subsequent courses are 60% private (Frigotto et al. 2014, 67). These programs are all classified as secondary education, however, the average age of students is 21 in concomitant and 28 in subsequent programs, and over half of programs are night school (Schwartzman 2016, 74). For most students, these programs could be considered post-secondary like community colleges in the United States.

<sup>26</sup> And 56 tertiary-level technical institutions with 65,000 students (Almeida et al. 2016, 30–31).

<sup>27</sup> Most of this paragraph comes from Schwartzman (2016, 169–72).

and qualifications, unions and employer associations did not play any role in Pronatec.”<sup>28</sup> Pronatec was designed to connect with recipients of Bolsa Familia and address the next steps the program could take to get recipients into better jobs.<sup>29</sup> The scholarships allowed the government to target poorer recipients and thus counter the middle-class drift in VTE. Through 2014, well over half of the scholarships went to students registered in the Bolsa Familia program (Schwartzman 2016, 176). A majority, 60%, of Pronatec participants were women, unlike most other VTE programs that skew male (Portela et al. 2015, 15). As such, Pronatec was less designed for the needs of employers and more a program for “social and productive inclusion” (Portela et al. 2015, 26).<sup>30</sup>

Overall, as in Chile, the expansion of VTE had an early market-driven component through the private sector. Brazil differed though in the boom under PT governments in public VTE. As in Chile, post-2000 expansion in VTE secondary education in Brazil resulted from sustained investment—at both federal and state levels—by fairly institutionalized, programmatic, left parties, especially the PT, confirming a PRT interpretation of VTE expansion. Much of the increase went to students of poorer families, a core constituency of the PT, but a substantial amount also went to middle-class families, broadening the potential pro-VTE coalition. Yet, despite decades of rapid expansion, the proportion of secondary students in VTE in Brazil still remained quite low—at 10%—by international standards (Castioni et al. 2019, 126).

## V. The SME Alliance in Turkey

Among large middle-income countries, Turkey was one of the few to ramp up VTE in the 21st century. However, the political economy of its programs differed from that in Latin America. Among the sharpest contrasts, Turkish VTE was 95% public (Ozer 2019, 463), formed part of a programmatic alliance with small business, and ran through institutionalized consultation with business (Özel 2022). At 35%, secondary VTE enrollments were higher than in most of

<sup>28</sup> Rambla et al. (2020, 73). Pronatec comprised six component programs including student scholarships, distance learning, and an agreement with the S System. By 2015, Pronatec offered 646 short courses and 220 technical courses (Portela et al. 2015, 4). Developmental states in East Asia often created super ministries to centralize information gathering and coordinate implementation of VTE programs (Ashton et al. 2002). Pronatec could be seen as a short step in that direction.

<sup>29</sup> Bolsa Familia was a conditional cash transfer (CCT) program that was effective in reducing poverty and keeping children in school, but it did not, until Pronatec, have a complementary employment program.

<sup>30</sup> One study found huge gains from Pronatec, but only for women: 21% higher employment and 50% higher wages (Camargo et al. 2021, 1).

Latin America and distinct in offering students a clearer path to university (Ozer and Suna 2019, 169–70).

Since 2000, AKP (Justice and Development Party) governments expanded enrollments in and spending on technical education.<sup>31</sup> Turkey was one of the few middle-income countries to spend more per pupil on technical (versus general) education. Enrollments almost tripled in the decade after 2005, reaching nearly 3 million students in 2015 (Doner and Schneider 2020, 11). VTE graduates have higher employment rates than students from general education but usually outside their field of training (Ozer 2019, 459–60). Conforming to patterns in Europe, VTE students came from poorer families and on PISA tests scored way below general education students (on reading around 60 points) (Ozer 2019, 467).

In most middle-income countries, big business dominates relations with governments, and SMEs have little influence (Schneider 2004; Shadlen 2015). However, in Turkey, SMEs were centrally involved in expanding and upgrading technical education after 2000. Over the course of the 2000s, then–prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the right-wing AKP increasingly alienated big business.<sup>32</sup> As in Latin America, big business in Turkey was dominated by family-owned, diversified business groups and MNCs (Colpan 2010; Colpan et al. 2010) that were well represented in an exclusive association for big business, *Tüsiad* (Turkish Industry and Business Association). Big business was more secular and internationalist and did not support Erdogan’s nationalism, Islamism, or autocratic backsliding (Özel 2018). As relations with big business soured, Erdogan courted associations of Muslim businesses and other associations with more SMEs. Business

established organizations representing religiously conservative SMEs, such as the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association (*Müsiad*), currently the leading partner of the AKP government in its ruling coalition, and the Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey (*Tuskon*) became influential, forming a new cluster against the secular(ist) big businesses (and their organizations), especially the powerful *Tüsiad*. (Sancak and Özel 2018, 9)

<sup>31</sup> Some discounting of the enrollment figures before 2013 is in order because the government classified religious education as VTE (as in training for a religious career, about 10% of VTE enrollments), so the total numbers are not strictly comparable to other education systems (Günlü 2008). Other calculations show a slight decline after 2015, then plateauing through 2018 (Ozer 2019, 458).

<sup>32</sup> AKP support shows that VTE is not just an issue for the left. In surveys in Europe, right-wing respondents also support VTE (Busemeyer et al. 2020, 88).

As part of this courtship, the Erdogan government increased funding for upper secondary VTE—more than doubling in the 2010s (Doner and Schneider 2020, 12)—and put representatives from business associations on boards to oversee VTE programs. The Turkish government also invested in developing a national system of skill certification (a contemporary program in Mexico did not prosper) (Sancak and Özel 2018). Although big business, represented by *Tüsiad*, did have a voice in workforce development efforts, the key private-sector intermediary was the semi-public association, *TOBB* (Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey), a federation of 365 local chambers (Ozer and Suna 2019, 182). Given that most firms in Turkey are small, SMEs have a louder voice in the compulsory *TOBB* than in other voluntary associations (Sancak 2017). *TOBB*'s influence, reflected in its position as a pivotal member in the government's tripartite arrangements, was enhanced by its presence throughout Turkey.

In sum, strained relations between big business and the AKP opened up opportunities for closer government collaboration with SMEs on skills and VTE. These exceptional politics highlight how rare it is generally—in the absence of special organization and influence by small businesses—to construct coalitions that are more attentive to the skill needs of SMEs. Another rare factor in AKP's coalition building for VTE was an overlapping religious cleavage (Özel 2020). Many SMEs also belonged to *Müsiad* and supported AKP's policies promoting Islam.

#### IV. Conclusions

What then can we learn from the exceptional cases of Chile, Turkey, and Brazil (both nationally and in Pernambuco and Ceará)? The main common element was the crucial roles of political parties (that rarely came up in part II). In principle, well-institutionalized parties can facilitate pro-VTE coalitions by lengthening the time horizons of politicians and by putting together policy coalitions that would not necessarily form in the absence of parties as seen in Turkey (Bizzarro et al. 2018, 280). When smaller firms are more valuable in electoral terms, parties may be more solicitous in seeking SME support, and increased investment in VTE can be a way to court them. However, SMEs were not a necessary coalition partner as evidenced in Brazil and Chile.

In terms of partisan sympathies, the AKP tilted right, and the PT and PSB in Brazil and pro-VTE parties in Chile leaned left (as with social democratic parties in Europe) (Busemeyer 2015). A traditional PRT perspective thus works for Chile and Brazil where poorer voters tend to vote left. However, well-organized labor unions—crucial partners in European PRT—were small in Chile and mostly absent in VTE in Brazil. The irony for left parties in Latin America, like

the PT in Brazil, is that creating high-quality VTE often meant establishing better schools than those in general education which in turn attracted richer students. Center-left parties may decide this is the price to pay (and a way to pick up middle-class support) or devise targeting strategies like the VTE scholarships for poor students in Brazil.

In comparison to the cases in part II, political parties were more active, but otherwise VTE was an even emptier policy space. VTE rarely headlines election campaigns as general education did in Ecuador and Chile (though VTE was officially part of Bachelet's and Rousseff's campaign platforms). Among regular reform opponents in part II, clientelist politicians rarely came up in VTE expansion. VTE teachers tend to have more and more specific training, which means clientelist politicians have few hiring options and would likely meet greater resistance, especially from middle-class parents. Teacher unions were also barely mentioned. Again, the longer training, higher salaries, and greater heterogeneity make VTE teachers harder to mobilize. And VTE cases in this chapter were expanding and thus providing unions with potential new members and dues. Civil society was little engaged, except in Turkey. In Latin America, business associations were largely absent except when legally obligated, as with Brazil's S System (or when capturing training systems as in Guatemala, chapter 2). Even business philanthropy rarely targeted VTE.

# Conclusions

*In short, education is one of the most powerful instruments known for reducing poverty and inequality and for laying the basis for sustained economic growth, sound governance and effective institutions*

—World Bank 2002<sup>1</sup>

## I. Introduction: A Summary Guide to Routes

Among the cases examined in this book, what is the best route to reform? This, unfortunately, is the wrong question, at least as the first question. The Chilean route with electoral mobilization, a well-developed policy network, and negotiations with the teacher union might look attractive as a model for other countries to follow. However, that route depended on an exogenous shock coming from waves of student protests, an interest-group kind of union, and decades of development of CSOs and policy experts, conditions lacking in the other countries in Latin America and much of the Global South.

Without those preconditions, reformers might then opt for the top-down, nonelectoral route. On this technocratic route, how entrenched clientelist and union control of education resources are present a crucial issue. When high, as in Mexico, Rio de Janeiro, and Ecuador, this technocratic route hits the hardest headwinds. This is not to say there's no point attempting reform; rather, it is a high-risk endeavor where reformers may want to concentrate on reforms that have a greater chance of lock-in or are more likely to generate short-term support beyond the terms of technocrats. Correa's strategy of disbanding the machine union, UNE, suggests that apparently powerful machines (Grindle thought so [2004, 123]) turned out to be paper tigers, as UNE was unable to mount any real opposition. Two factors facilitated Correa's strategy. First, Correa did not need the votes of UNE's allied party in Congress nor the votes of UNE members

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Mundy and Verger (2015, 343). World Bank (2002, v).

in presidential elections.<sup>2</sup> Second, Correa's long term in office made it harder for UNE to regroup and make a comeback once Correa had decamped.

Neither of these conditions held in Mexico. In the end, AMLO's margin of victory in 2019 was large enough that he did not really need SNTE votes. However, AMLO did not know that earlier in the campaign when he promised to roll back reforms to teacher careers. And Peña Nieto did not last long enough in office to dismantle SNTE's machine operations more thoroughly. In particular, though the Peña Nieto government changed national leadership, state and local SNTE sections and CNTE had enough autonomy to continue their previous clientelist, machine operations.

Technocrats played crucial roles in keeping reforms going in Ecuador, Peru, and Colombia. However, it bears reiterating that these technocrats were different from technocrats in economic ministries. Technocrats in education had influence more by default (because clientelist pressures were low) than because they wielded expertise that presidents depended on (as in (Dargent 2015)). The corollary of this weakness was that technocrats did better when they had full support from presidents/governors and/or backing from teachers, public opinion, parents, or other social groups.

Career reforms fared better in countries where at least some aspects of reform were negotiated with teacher unions, especially in Colombia, Chile, and to a lesser extent Peru. Such negotiations were ruled out where career reforms posed existential threats to machine unions. Non-machine unions focused negotiations on salaries of course but also working conditions (especially non-teaching hours in Chile) and elements that went into teacher evaluations (both Chile and Colombia) and consequences for failing them. Reform advocates were often dismayed at concessions on these issues, but they may be the cost to pay for teacher buy-in and reform longevity. A strict policy of "rank and yank" to identify and fire the worst performing teachers might in principle be the fastest way to improve average teaching quality, but it is rarely worth the cost of union opposition and teacher disaffection.

Policy continuity was as indispensable to education reform as it was rare in contemporary democracies in Latin America. Minister of education is a temporary job, averaging two years, often less. Each new president and each incoming minister present—especially to opponents—a new opportunity to roll back reforms. The task then is to identify ways to lock in reforms over time. Winning reelection, both incumbents and parties, was the surest way. In the virtuous cycle, reforms showed early positive results, candidates campaigned on

<sup>2</sup> Similarly, this lack of dependence on Fecode and Sutep made it easier for governments in the 1990s and 2000s to strip them of increasing machine prerogatives.

maintaining them, then this continuity led to further positive results, and so on. Alas, this cycle was rare, mostly in Ceará, Pernambuco, and other states in Brazil, and some elections in Ecuador. It helped that these cases were starting from some of the worst rankings on student learning, making it relatively easier to demonstrate visible gains in the short run.

Brazilian cases also showed the advantages of starting small and then building on success and learning along the way to fine-tune programs. Reformers could adjust as they scaled up reforms, and other stakeholders could voice concerns and get used to new policies. Reforms in Ceará started in one town, Sobral; in Pernambuco they started with one pilot school and scaled up gradually. Chile and Colombia also moved gradually, Colombia by applying reforms to new hires only; and Chile by moving slowly, over decades, from collective performance bonuses to individual, voluntary evaluations and bonuses, to mandatory evaluations for promotions. Mexico in contrast was on the other extreme of big-bang reforms, and to a lesser extent Peru and Ecuador, which ran into implementation snags that alienated teachers, especially in Peru.

The VTE (vocational and technical education) cases highlighted more the roles of parties, coalitions, and power resource theory (PRT). Technical education was also an empty policy sphere, sometimes even emptier than general education, in part because teacher unions and clientelist politicians were less involved. On occasion, as in Brazil, Chile, and Turkey, parties and distributional coalitions got involved in VTE. In a more standard PRT approach, in Brazil and Chile, left parties promoted VTE to appeal to working-class constituencies (and in Brazil some middle-class voters). In Turkey, it was a right-wing party that forged an alliance with smaller businesses with increased spending on VTE.

In sum, reformers across Latin America faced a range of different long-term factors including clientelism, machine unions, policy networks, civil society, technocracy, and electoral mobilization around education. The main policy implication would be to fashion reforms to fit the set of factors most prominent in particular countries and periods.

Shifting to more recent challenges, the full and long-term effects of COVID-19 on education in Latin America will take time to emerge. Yet, even shortly after the pandemic, it was already abundantly and sadly clear that learning losses were massive for a generation of children. Moreover, schools in Latin America were closed longer than elsewhere in the world, and fewer students had access to remote instruction. The learning losses were borne unevenly, with the poor losing far more than the rich, both for countries and families (IDB/UNESCO 2020).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps in a quixotic (and doomed) attempt to avoid politics, this IDB/UNESCO report offers detailed recommendations on how to reopen schools without a single mention of teacher unions.

The pandemic sidelined debate on, and implementation, of career reforms. However, if anything, the pandemic's devastation of education made improving the quality of teaching more urgent than ever. It may be years before we know the full extent of the damage, but quality teaching will be crucial to repairing it.

## II. Moving Masses and Problematizing Organizations, Bureaucracies, and Networks

Remaking teacher careers is a case of reforming large-scale administration and public service delivery, and overall, education has shared in the revival of interest in political science in bureaucracy generally (Bersch 2019; Rich 2019; Toral 2020; Mangla 2022). Despite its manifest importance, bureaucracy was largely neglected in research on public services and development, save the occasional report (World Bank 2003; Stein 2005). Work on the developmental state in East Asia emphasized bureaucracy, but only small groups of elite bureaucrats in lead economic agencies (Johnson 1982; Evans 1995). Newer work, in contrast, focuses mostly on mass, front-line bureaucrats, usually in close contact with citizens (Zacka 2018; Toral 2020; Pepinsky et al. 2017). This renewed interest is welcome; however, theorizing about bureaucracy and change in bureaucracy remains inchoate.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, organizations merit closer attention, especially hybrid organizations, like SOEs (state-owned enterprises), business groups, and teacher unions.<sup>5</sup> It is unwarranted to assume SOEs and business groups act like any other firm, and in education it is risky to presume that teacher unions are all the same and behave like any other union. Teacher unions can be very valuable for electoral politics, and thus vulnerable to take over and manipulation into political machines. Understanding political machines takes us into the realm of informal power relations and again suggests that empirical research needs to look well beyond formal institutions to find out what is really going on inside organizations (Brinks et al. 2019).

Those critical of recent education reforms often call them neoliberal, but this is usually a misnomer. The apparent correlation between career reforms and other neoliberal policies adopted by Chile and Colombia is belied by similar career reforms pushed by a left populist like Correa in Ecuador. Neoliberalism is better left to classifying policies that effectively introduce more competitive

<sup>4</sup> And simple theories of yore premised on salary and budget maximization, e.g. Niskanen (1994), are poor foundations for theorizing about complex organizational structures and teachers and others following vocations in public service.

<sup>5</sup> This is something of a theme of mine (Schneider 2004, 2009, 2022, 1991).

markets, such as cases of collective school-wide bonuses that promoted competition among schools (e.g., Pernambuco in Brazil).

The more apt label would be “new public management” (NPM).<sup>6</sup> Since the 1990s, NPM reformers have advocated applying more private sector personnel techniques to public sector workers like teachers. At the extreme, some schemes for teacher evaluation and termination for poor performance could be seen as importing draconian practices from private firms. Bonuses too were premised on the idea that teachers, like employees in private firms, would respond to purely economic incentives.<sup>7</sup> As noted in chapter 1, reforms in Latin America cover three major and different aspects of careers: (1) depoliticizing teacher and director hiring; (2) recruiting more talented students to become teachers; and (3) instating evaluations and performance pay to motivate existing teachers. Only this third component really fits the NPM label. The first two are common professionalizing reforms implemented globally since the onset of mass education. Depoliticizing hiring, especially of school directors, is also the simplest to achieve administratively, though politically the most difficult because of the losses imposed on clientelist politicians and machine unions. From the empirical studies cited in part II, depoliticized hiring was the most likely to improve student learning in the short run.

While most reforms focus on shielding hiring from politics, the innovative institutional changes in Brazil—publishing test score before elections and offering budget top-ups for increased student scores—tried instead to shift politician incentives to hire on merit. That is, instead of reforming the bureaucracy to shield it from politicians, these reforms in Brazil tried to convince politicians they could benefit more by relinquishing clientelist meddling in education.

Research in “new behavioralism” has shown a brighter light on front-line, street-level bureaucracy. Behavioral research has not, though, reached higher up the bureaucratic hierarchy to the middle and higher ranges of education ministries and other policy bodies. The number of relevant actors atop administrative hierarchies is much smaller, on the order of scores to hundreds of officials with influence over policymaking or implementation. In most countries in Latin America, incoming presidents and their ministers of education can replace all or most of these top bureaucrats, so motivating or reorienting them is not difficult. The core theoretical and empirical questions for these elite bureaucrats is whether they bring technical or political criteria to their jobs. On

<sup>6</sup> A number of recent critiques of NPM types of reform tar them with the evocative label GERM (global education reform movement), e.g., Verger et al. (2018). On Chile, see Ávalos and Bellei (2019).

<sup>7</sup> Reforms to teacher careers in the 21st century were also centrally shaped by broader movements of quantification, accountability, and testing (Espeland and Sauder 2016).

the political side, the education sector, as noted throughout this book, is attractive to clientelist politicians who have long preyed on education systems in many countries of the region.

When, in contrast, technically oriented officials, aka technocrats, rule the roost they can root out clientelism and unions and make and implement policy according to technical criteria. The next question, as with technocrats in economic areas, is which technical criteria? For teacher careers in Latin America, the technical criteria were largely based on Weberian models of meritocratic recruitment and promotion and NPM models of motivating teachers on the job through pay or promotions based on performance. These Weberian and NPM models fit well with best practice recommendations pushed recently by economists in multilateral agencies like the World Bank and IDB. However, these technical models can and do change over time, though they always clash with political criteria.

Policy networks usually include technocrats in government but also have members in civil society and universities who are actively engaged in policy debates. As such, the numbers in policy networks can vary depending on the development of civil society and research capacity in academia, which in turn is generally related to levels of development and, as in Chile, high levels of controversy over education policy. Thus, policy networks were larger and more influential in Chile, Brazil, and Mexico, and less so in Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia. In terms of moving masses, policy networks have direct influence in creating consensus (that network members carry into government when appointed), and when out of government they can support reforms through active punditry in the media—op-eds, blogs, regular columns, and talk shows. The case trajectories in part II showed how consensus within policy networks could help policy design and continuity. This consensus could also smooth implementation down the chain to the front line.

Ultimately, and beyond the time frame of this book, moving masses of teachers requires a fair degree of voluntary compliance and buy-in. In the shorter run, the communication plans adopted by reformers—school visits, social media, regular conferences—can help, as does accelerating turnover (as in Ecuador) to hire more new teachers (who self-select into, and presumably endorse, the new career). Where possible, negotiations with unions can give reforms legitimacy in the eyes of teachers and bring unions into operating within the parameters of the reforms.

More broadly, mass and regional consultations as in Ecuador, Mexico, Chile, and Brazil helped get a wider range of stakeholders on board. Ecuador was the only case of a national referendum on education. The others had a series of online venues, regional meetings, and national conferences, and included not only teachers but also civil society (including sometimes teacher unions), local

officials, and parents. These consultations boost education salience beyond its natural low level. Such national-level consultations seem rare in other policy areas, but they are an effective way to raise the political profile of education, generate consensus, and foster some further degree of teacher and stakeholder buy-in.<sup>8</sup>

Let me close this section with a brief rant on methods and biased investment in education research. As emphasized in earlier chapters, we know little about pivotal actors in education politics like teacher unions, policy networks, and technocracy. This is not, though, for lack of overall investment in education research in the Global South—which has been enormous in recent decades—but in part because education scholarship suffers from over-investment in experimental research. Education seems especially apt for experimental research because it is relatively easy to randomize treatments and interventions by pupil, classroom, or school. A meta-analysis in 2016 covered a very large number—301—randomized controlled trials (RCTs) in education in developing countries (Evans and Popova 2016), but their substantive coverage is limited. For example, hundreds of RCTs have been conducted in Africa, yet we still lack basic information on teacher unions there; unions that can be decisive in blocking or allowing policies based on the results of experimental research.<sup>9</sup>

Experimental methods can identify the impact of simple, targeted interventions but are not much help in explaining complex phenomena with many interrelated components that emerge over the longer term, like quality teaching. As noted in part I, reviews of experimental research have found some evidence on the positive effect of teacher bonuses. However, a bonus is only a small piece of everything that goes into improving teacher careers, including depoliticizing hiring, recruiting more talented students into teacher training, constructing career ladders based on teaching performance and knowledge, negotiating with unions, and increasing teacher status and prestige. Few of these

<sup>8</sup> Brazil created formal, standing local councils in a variety of policy areas (Pires 2011). More generally, with the emphasis on empty policy spaces and primacy of state actors like technocrats, my findings do not mesh with recent work on co-production where public-private cooperation enhances state capacity (Amengual 2013; Rich 2019). The main cases of co-production came in Brazilian states like Ceará and Pernambuco where governments worked closely with NGOs from São Paulo.

<sup>9</sup> A successful pilot project in Kenya added contract teachers to schools. Scaled up nationally, the policy failed due to union opposition (that might have been predicted with a little more research on the union) (Aslam et al. 2016, 14; Bold et al. 2018). For a small example, as noted earlier, we lack basic information on how teacher unions elect their leaders, either directly or through delegates and assemblies. Unions using the latter (on a small sample of cases) have longer serving incumbents and dissident factions—Peru and Mexico—with big implications for education reform. For the cost of a few experiments, we could generate much broader and deeper research on teacher unions.

elements, let alone the whole career system, can be easily randomized for experimental assessment.

When “evidence-based” policy recommendations are based solely on experimental or quasi-experimental research, they are likely to be fairly narrow. For example, IDB’s flagship report on education recommended ways to enhance “student learning at very low cost: non-monetary incentives for students, lesson plans, and guided technology with extra time.”<sup>10</sup> This was hardly the way Korean, Finnish, or other top-performing education systems were constructed.

The point is not that experimental work should be abandoned, but rather that the balance of different kinds of research is out of whack. Redirecting, for example, a fraction of the resources devoted to experiments to research on politics would not only greatly help theory building in education politics but also generate actionable policy lessons. As noted in part I, we are still regularly citing touchstone books by Grindle (2004) and Kaufman and Nelson (2004a)—for 20 years—because these are great books, but also because, more tellingly, so little has been written since on education politics in Latin America.

In short, much remains to be done on theorizing bureaucracy, networks, and organization in public services as well as on education politics.

### III. Back to Inequality and Development

The struggle over education is not just about how much children learn. Education also determines their productivity and hence their wages and opportunities for social mobility. Productivity and income in turn also shape national development, class structure, and inequality. These are the broader issues that inspired this deep dive into education politics, based on the premise that we cannot, in fact, understand development and distribution without analyzing education.

Returning to my point of departure, the most enduring puzzles in Latin America are why the region has not developed and why it is so unequal. Analysis of education politics can help provide answers to both. Increasingly in the 21st century, economists have argued that human capital was the prime input to rapid development in the 20th century (Goldin and Katz 2009). For Hanushek and Woessman (2015), this connection holds especially for Latin America where

<sup>10</sup> “These policies can generate important increases in yearly learning, ranging from about 20 percent for nonmonetary incentives and lesson plans to 40 percent for guided technology with extra time. And costs are tiny—just a 2 percent increase in annual costs for each of these policies. The lesson is clear: to boost student learning in primary schools, policymakers should focus on low-cost options that have demonstrated evidence of effectiveness and assess the feasibility of implementing them in particular contexts” (Busso et al. 2017, 11–12).

the lack of improvement in learning held the region back compared to fast-growth economies of Asia where investment in human capital was enormous and sustained (Lee et al. 2018), even labeled “educational developmentalism” (György 2023).

If investment in human capital includes or, better yet targets poor children, it could in turn promote social mobility and reduce inequality. This was partly the story in the 2000s, when the rapid expansion of secondary education reduced skill premia and with it inequality (Huber and Stephens 2012; Gasparini and Lustig 2011). The consistent global finding is that each additional year of schooling adds around 10% more lifetime earnings (Barro and Lee 2015). Such large returns on investment means that, especially if targeted to the poor, education could be a massive engine of social mobility—“a great equalizer of the conditions of men” as Horace Mann put it over a century ago. Internationally, higher levels of VTE are associated with lower inequality, as in northern Europe, because VTE can open up opportunities for rapid and secure employment (Spiel et al. 2018, 30; Busemeyer 2015). Thus, low levels of VTE in Latin America may contribute to inequality, and even more so if more middle-class students take up spots in VTE schools, as they do in much of the region.

Education may have fueled growth and rising incomes in the 20th century, but can it do the same in the 21st? The rapid advances in the 21st century in automation and artificial intelligence raise questions whether traditional education is really needed anymore. In more apocalyptic scenarios, technological advances will destroy ever more jobs, and with it the need for training for those jobs. The work of the future is evolving, but at a base level it will likely require at least foundational literacy and numeracy from high-quality primary and secondary education that in turn can generate greater growth and equality.

## *Appendix A*

### INTERVIEWS

#### Argentina

- Maria Rosa Almandoz, former head of Instituto Nacional de Educación Tecnológica, 11 August 2016
- Santiago de la Barrera, coordinator for the national council for technical education in Argentina, 10 August 2016
- Rolando Lange, director of Tenaris Universidad, 12 November 2015
- Mariano Narodowski, education researcher, Universidad Torcuato di Tella, 3 August 2017
- Paula Razquin, director, Escuela de Educación, Universidad San Andrés, 3 August 2017
- Manuel Alvarez-Trongé, president, Educar 2050, 4 March 2015

#### Brazil

- Severino Andrades, deputy secretary of education, state of Pernambuco, 13 December 2018
- Margarida Azevedo, *Jornal do Commercio*, Pernambuco, 4 November 2015, by Guillermo Toral
- Guilherme Bueno de Camargo, adjunct secretary of education, São Paulo (2009—10), 11 November 2021 by Beatriz Oliani
- Izolda Cela, secretary of education in Sobral, state secretary of education (2007–13), vice governor (2014–22), 18 January 2019
- Priscila Cruz, director, Todos pela Educação, 8 May 2017, 5 April 2018
- Maria Helena Guimarães de Castro, head of Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais (1995–2002), secretary of education São Paulo

- (2007–9), executive secretary, Ministry of Education, (2016–18), 8 February 2019
- Marcos Holanda, former director of Instituto de Pesquisa e Estratégia Econômica do Ceará, 17 January 2019
- Antoine Lousão, public sector manager, Secretariat of Education (2011–14), state government of Rio de Janeiro, 19 December 2016
- Anizio Melo, president of Apeoc (Associação dos Professores do Estado do Ceará) (2011–), 17 January 2019
- Mozart Neves, former secretary of education, Pernambuco; director, Instituto Ayrton Senna, 1 February 2018
- Ronildo Oliveira, diretor, Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Educação do Estado de Pernambuco, 13 December 2018
- Thiago Peixoto, secretary of education, state of Goiás (2011–13), former federal deputy, 5 December 2018 and 30 September 2021
- Cecilia Pereira, director of Profissão Docente, 4 October 2022
- Wilson Risolia, secretary of education, state of Rio de Janeiro (2011–14), 16 May 2016
- Alexandre Schneider, former secretary of education, city of São Paulo, email, 8 September 2019
- Caroline Tavares, official, education secretariat, Goiás (2011–14), 6 February 2019
- Luiz Antonio Tozi, former director in Paula Souza VTE school system, 5 October 2022

## Chile

- Jenny Assael, professor of psychology, Universidad de Chile, 28 January 2020
- Harald Beyer, director of CEP (Centro de Estudios Públicos) and former minister of education (2011–13), 21 March 2016
- Rodolfo Bonifaz, CPEIP (Centro de Perfeccionamiento, Experimentación e Investigaciones Pedagógicas), Ministry of Education, 17 January 2017
- Nicolas Eyzaguirre, minister of education (2014–16), minister of finance (2000–6), 29 January 2020
- Hernan Herrera, president of Colegios Particulares de Chile, 21 March 2016
- Cristian Lincovil, executive secretary for technical education, Ministry of Education (2022–), 15 March 2023
- Andrés Pérez, executive secretary for technical education, Ministry of Education (2018–22), 13 March 2023
- Guillermo Scherping, executive director of the journal *Revista Docente* (*Teacher Magazine*), Colegio de Profesores, 21 March 2016

Carlos Veas, executive secretary of FIPE (Federación de Instituciones de Educación Particular), 16 January 2017

## Colombia

Over Dorado, member of National Executive Committee, Fecode, 16 August 2018 and 22 January 2020

Luis Enrique García, vice minister of education (2014–16), 16 August 2018

Sandra Garcia, professor, Universidad de los Andes, 15 June 2018 and 20 January 2020

Pilar Mendez, high school teacher, Bogotá, 22 January 2020

Carolina Meza, director, Fundación Empresarios por la Educación, 15 August 2018

Margarita Peña, vice minister of education 2000–2, 17 February 2021 (with Sandra Garcia)

Angel Pérez, former subsecretary of education in Bogota, 19 April 2021 (with Sandra Garcia)

Victor Saavedra, former vice minister of education, 20 January 2020

Olga Victoria Salcedo and Erika Londono, Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación (ICFES), 21 January 2020

Fabio Sánchez, professor, Universidad los Andes, 20 January 2020

Isabel Segovia, vice minister of education (late 2000s), Fundación Compartir, 16 August 2018

Cecilia Vélez, minister of education (2002–10), 14 August 2018

## Ecuador

Josette Arevalo, director, Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa (Ineval), 25 January, 2018

Pablo Cevallos Estarellas, adviser to the minister of education (2007–9); undersecretary of educational quality (2009–10); deputy minister of education (2010–13); co-author, multiple dates 2017–18

Montserrat Creamer, undersecretary of professional development (2012–13) and minister of education 2019–21, 22 January 2018 and 11 April 2023

Miguel Herrera, official in the Ministry of Education (2016–17), 22 January 2018

Alejandro Martinez, director, ExpoFlor, and president of Comité Empresarial Ecuatoriano (CEE, 2015–17), 23 January 2018

Nelly Miño, national sub-coordinator, Red de Maestros, 24 January 2018

- Roxana Palacios, former president of UNE, 14 June 2020, by Carlos Pástor Freddy Peñafiel, minister of education (2016 and previously vice minister and undersecretary for coordination), 24 January 2018
- Eduardo Salgado, former director of Ineval, 12 April 2023
- Rosemary Terán, professor of education, Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, 22 January 2018
- Gloria Vidal, vice minister of education (2006–10), minister (2010–13), 24 January 2018
- Mery Zamora, former leader of UNE, by Carlos Pástor, 10 June 2020

## Mexico

- Antonio Avila, former head of planning, Secretaria de Educación Pública (SEP), 1 August 2016
- Elisa Bonilla-Rius, director for curriculum development, SEP (2016–18), 10 June 2019
- David Calderón, director, Mexicanos Primero, 16 February 2011 and 15 January 2018
- Rafael de Hoyos, education specialist, World Bank, Mexico, 17 January 2018
- Marco Fernández, professor, Tecnológico de Monterrey, Mexico City, 15 January 2018
- María Antonieta García Lascurain, director of SNTE, 3 August 2016
- Fernando González, former sub-secretary, SEP, 16 January 2018
- Blanca Heredia, head of PIPE, CIDE, 15 February 2016, 6 August 2018
- Imelda Infante, member of CEN (Comité Ejecutivo Nacional) and responsible for teacher careers, SNTE, 14 January 2020
- Aurelio Nuño, secretary of education (2015–17), 17 January 2020, 11 March 2021
- Jennifer O'Donoghue, former director at Mexicanos Primero, 15 January 2020
- Sylvia Schmelkes, director of INEE, 15 February 2016, 16 January 2018

## Peru

- Patricia Andrade, vice minister, Ministry of Education, 14 November 2019
- Patricia Arregui, researcher at GRADE, director of Forge, 21 January 2016
- Jorge Arrunátegui, former head of teacher career unit, Ministry of Education, 14 November 2019
- Ciro Avitabile, senior economist, World Bank, Lima, 31 January 2022
- Luis Castilla, former minister of finance, 17 October 2017

- José Chlimper, Agrokasa (produce business) and VP candidate for Keiko Fujimori, 19 January 2016
- Ricardo Cuenca, Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, member of the Consejo Nacional de Educación, 21 January 2016
- Giuliana Espinosa, head of evaluation, Ministry of Education, 2013–17, 29 December 2021
- María Isabel León, ex-president of Asiste and director of Avia, 19 January 2016
- Marilú Marten, minister of education, 2017, 2 March 2022
- Carolina Méndez, IDB Peru office, 21 December 2021
- Humberto Perez, head of student testing, Ministry of Education, 16 November 2019
- Walter Quiroz, president, Derrama Magisterial, 12 November 2019
- Alberto Rodríguez, director, World Bank office for the Andes, 19 January 2016
- Jaime Saavedra, former minister of education, 18 March 2016, 5 March 2021
- Juan Pablo Silva, vice-minister for management, Ministry of Education, 23 March 2016
- Idel Vexler, former minister of education 2017–18, 14 November 2019
- Hamer Villena, ex-secretary general, Sutep, 14 November 2019

## Other Interviews

- Jonathan Jansen, professor of education, Stellenbosch University, South Africa, 29 April 2019.
- Deniz Gurel, head of social policy, Tüsiad, Turkey, 8 May 2015
- Harry Patrinos, World Bank, 7 March 2016
- Gregory Elacqua, lead economist, education group, IDB, 7 March 2016



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