

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

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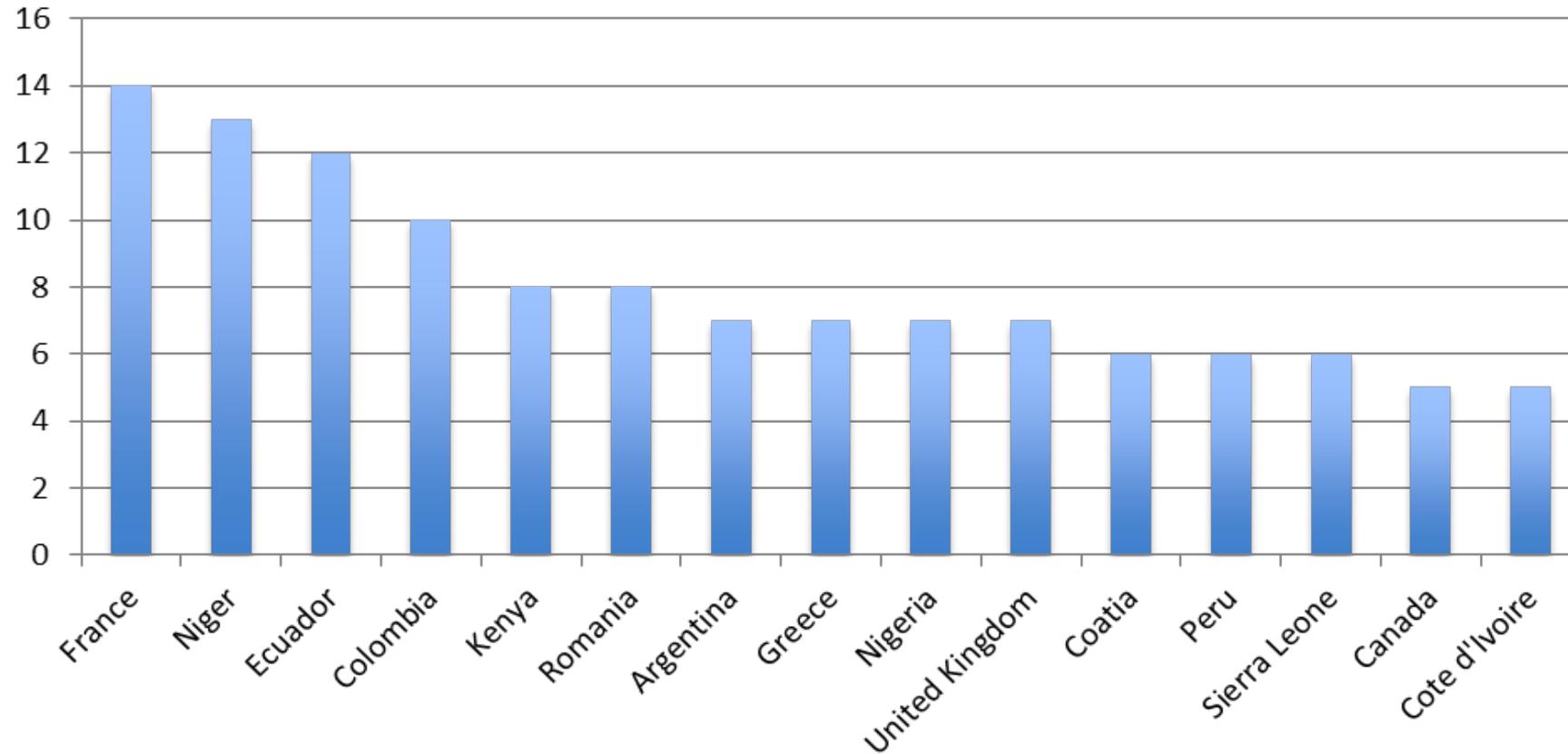


Chicago, 2013



Lima, 2012

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



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

# Why politics matter

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

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

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

# Education reform is inherently difficult to implement

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

# Quality Reforms are Inherently Conflictual

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

# Teacher unions are not just labor associations

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



# Other stakeholders and latent pro-reform coalitions

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

# Common elements of successful political strategies

- Political leaders have adequate political capital
  - Mexico 2013, Peru (2010-15), Ecuador (2008-15), Rio state (2011-15), Brazil (1996-2002), Chile (multiple reforms, 1995-2015)
- Communications campaigns
  - Paint dire picture of status quo
  - Engage battle for public opinion
  - Talk directly to teachers
  - mobilize pro-reform stakeholders (Latent coalition)

# Some common reform tactics

- Passing new **legislation** that is hard to reverse
- **Compensation** strategies to gain teacher support
  - E.g., higher salaries but partly linked to performance
- **Dividing** opponents
  - Grandfathering – reforms only for new hires
- Limited **bundling**
  - As in infrastructure investment plus teaching testing
  - Quality reforms not likely to fare well with cost cutting
- **Sequencing** reforms to consolidate one phase before starting the next
- Overall, need time and resources

# Further recommendations

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

# Thank you

- Ongoing research
- Comments and suggestions welcome:
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