

The Politics of Equity and Efficiency in Educational Reforms in Europe

Nigel Kragten^a, Herman G. van de Werfhorst & Brian M. Burgoon

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Abstract

While existing research on educational institutional context has focused mainly on its effects, the origins of educational institutions have remained largely unexamined. This study explores the extent to which political cleavages drive educational policies. We examine whether egalitarian governments seek equity-oriented reforms, while more market oriented governments seek efficiency-oriented reforms. To study this, we use recently collected historical data on three educational policy reforms: publicly funded pre-primary education, tracking age, and school autonomy, and associate these data with various sources on the political climate preceding the reforms. Our results show that an egalitarian political climate promotes the adoption of equity-oriented reforms, especially in the case of increases in the tracking age. Furthermore, governments with a more market oriented political climate are more likely to introduce efficiency-oriented reforms like those furthering school autonomy. These patterns provide important evidence that, even when controlling for various demographic and economic factors, the political climate plays an important role in shaping the equity- or efficiency-orientation of educational reforms.

Keywords: *educational reforms; efficiency; equity; political climate; egalitarianism; market orientation*

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^a Corresponding author: Department of Sociology, programme group: Institutions, Inequalities and Life courses (IIL)/ICS, University of Amsterdam (UvA), e-mail: N.Kragten@uva.nl