The Influence of Politics on Education: The Policies of Human Resistance

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Abstract

Politics, religion, and education have become entwined in a dance that is sometimes exhilarating, sometimes difficult to follow. Religious extremism has moved front and center in this new century and threatens both political and educational institutions. Indeed, if public education ignores the moral void left by the secularization of schools, not only youth but democracy itself will suffer. Boundaries must be drawn around the intersections—magnifying the benefits of their partnerships and minimizing the disadvantages that can arise when religion and education are unmindfully combined. The consequences are increasingly dangerous as markets, science and technology disrupt all existing institutions and traditions, and enhance the dangerous potential of our evolved nature to inflict huge physical destruction and to manipulate the feelings and ideas of many people (including, sometimes particularly, the best educated) through ‘information operations’. Our fragile civilization is vulnerable to large shocks and a continuation of traditional human politics. The present discussion also focuses on the crisis of higher education.

Keywords: Education, Policies, Politics, Religion.

Introduction

In today’s highly competitive market economies, where academic credentials are widely used as job search currency and short cuts to guide employers in hiring decisions, more credentials mean a better chance at good employment. So, as student demand increases, colleges and universities increase their range of offerings, and credentialism (a form of a paper chase), which links education and access to education with the wider system of social inequality, is born. Considerations of merit and achievement are given over to the (higher) educational system, where the pursuit and accumulation of educational credentials (degrees, diplomas, certificates), are almost ends in themselves. Increases in the numbers of credentialed persons in a society will inflate the qualifications required for any given position. Hegel’s dialectic provides a model for
examining the fracturing that occurs when politics begins to exert influence over education and religion (Greg, 2006).

The Dialectic suggests that the current model, or thesis, will inevitably lead to a counter movement, the antithesis, and that the attempt to reconcile the two becomes a synthesis which in its own turn becomes the new thesis. Interaction among politics, education, and religion arouses passion in secularists and the faithful, civic leaders and educators, parents and taxpayers. The problem is intractable, in large part, because the debate is not limited to a narrow sector of society: it is not an academic problem or a legal one; rather, each citizen is a stakeholder in the issues. As a result, bringing light rather than heat to the debate requires examining the positions taken by various subgroups and determining a potential synthesis (Lewis and Harris, 2002).

The notion that formal educational attainment is the primary mechanism behind many citizenship characteristics is largely uncontested. Education has consistently been found to increase political participation, electoral turnout, civic engagement, political knowledge, and democratic attitudes and opinions. Missing from the literature, however, is a theoretical and empirical investigation of why education is such a powerful explanatory variable. Little is known about how the educational process has such a profound effect on so many aspects of democratic behavior. Decades of political science research have concluded that education directly influences an individual’s proclivity to participate in the political realm. In most empirical analyses, education is in fact the strongest predictor of political participation even when other socioeconomic factors are considered (Shields and Goidel, 1997).

Despite growing investment in education, 35% of its population is still illiterate; only 15% of Indian students reach high school, and just 7% graduate. 25% of teaching positions nationwide are vacant, and 57% of college professors lack either a master’s or PhD degree. The quality and education standards vary drastically state to state. Compare the likes of Karnataka, Maharashtra with that of Bihar and Jharkhand and we will get the magnitude of variation we are talking about. Literacy for females varies with around 34% in Bihar to 88% in Kerala; for males it is 60% in Bihar and 94% in Kerala. Rajasthan suffers the widest gender difference, female literacy stands at 44% and male at 77% (Borah, 2012).

Indian education system and politics

India is the largest democracy in the world. India has the largest number of political parties, which take part in election campaign. In the 1996 national elections, almost 600 million people voted and an average of 26 candidates competed for each of the 543 territorial constituency seats. Elections are held at different levels in India. The two major election levels are at national level, after which the national government is established and at state level after which the state government is established. Elections are also held for city, town and village councils. Indian politics has different political issues. However these issues remain to be issues without any solutions for decades. Some issues are national level and some regional level. Some communities demand more economical and social rights for their communities, while others demand more autonomy for their cultures within the Indian states. Some demanded autonomous states within the Indian Union, while the others demanded to be independent from India (Borah, 2012).

The problem that we come across on a daily basis and in large scale is political corruption in the education system. Today is the age of innovation and specialization. And with this fast moving techno-age, the Indian educational system seems to go nowhere. Though we are aware about the progressive minds of Indian students all over the world, we tend to overlook the fact that most of them find abode abroad in USA or Australia. Let us focus on some stark realities and realize that Indian
educational system in serious crisis (Borah, 2012).

If we go to higher technical education the problem is much bigger. For colleges like IITs, NITs and IIMs government hire faculties from abroad, but what about the institution which has either poor faculties or no faculties? Parents invest their life savings in dreams of making their children engineers, doctors and more but many unfortunates get into some universities running without an affiliation or at end—a fake degree. In January 2010, government decided to withdraw deemed university status from around 44 universities. Some were having inadequate infrastructure and some didn’t had sufficient faculties (Borah, 2012).

Possible connective mechanism

Converse (1972) describes the overwhelming significance of formal education on political participation by concluding that “education is everywhere the universal solvent, and the relationship is always in the same direction.” Although there are literally thousands of empirical analyses that demonstrate a strong, positive relationship between formal education and democratic behavior, this same literature lacks a definitive explanation as to the explicit mechanism by which education influences political behavior. Too many studies blindly include education in the regression model, assuming a purely linear and additive relationship, and failing to explain why it matters. Theoretical explanations of the link between education and political engagement have rarely been fleshed out—much less empirically tested. As Miller and Shanks (1996) lament, “We simply need a better understanding of the many ways in which education makes such a difference to rates of turnout on election day.” In this article, some competing hypotheses in order to explore the mechanisms that underlie the enduring correlation between formal years of education and political engagement.

Civic Education Hypothesis

Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) argue that the well-educated participate at higher rates because their schooling provided them with the “skills people need to understand the abstract subject of politics, to follow the political campaign, and to research and evaluate the issues and candidates. In addition, because of their schooling, the well educated are better able to handle the bureaucratic requirements of registration and voting”. Put simply, education lowers the material and cognitive costs of participation (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980).

Social Network Hypothesis

The civic education hypothesis suggests that increasing education in the population should produce a more informed and engaged electorate. Yet, we are all familiar with the aggregate trends that find a dramatic increase in educational attainment since the 1960s coupled with a simultaneous decline in political engagement (Brody, 1998). Developed in part as an explanation of this “puzzle of participation,” the social network hypothesis offers an alternative explanation for the cross-sectional relationship between education and participation.

Political Meritocracy Hypothesis

Perhaps the single challenge to the assumption that education increases political engagement comes from a variant of the “IQ meritocracy” hypothesis. Put simply, this hypothesis suggests that intelligence begets educational attainment, not the other way around. Formal schooling separates individuals with a high degree of innate intelligence from those with lesser levels—the most cognitively proficient students are those who excel in grammar school, graduate from high school, and continue to college and beyond. Luskin (1990) concludes that once intelligence and other variables are taken into account, education has no effect on political sophistication.
Religion and education

The results here suggest that college experiences and the post-college outcomes of those experiences have an even longer term effect on future levels of political engagement. More critically, this article has operationalized and tested the various hypotheses that exist for explaining the relationship between education and political engagement.

Individuals were free to worship, but publicly-funded schools were not to have any involvement with religion. If we are to address the crisis of public education, we must examine not only the academic failings, but also the rise of intolerance and fall of ethical standards plaguing our democratic societies. As the role of religion in modern, heterogeneous society is unclear and religious groups react to the “thesis” of secularism, groups addressing public education concerns must work together to address the moral void left by the secularization of the schools or not only the youth, but also democracy itself will suffer.

Conclusion and Discussion

In other words, intelligence, rather than education, is the more important determinant of political sophistication. And political sophistication in turn engenders political participation. Hess and Torney (1967) similarly find in a study of elementary age children that more intelligent children of all socioeconomic classes were more likely to discuss, read about, and participate in political activities than were less intelligent children. Neuman (1986) concludes that “the evidence supports the idea of an independent cognitive effect” as part of the proved link between socioeconomic status and political participation.

Of the three competing explanations for the enduring relationship between education and political engagement, the empirical analyses here offer the greatest support for the civic education hypothesis, though the findings suggest that a more complex theory about the relationship between education and political engagement may be in order. Verbal skills have a clear and significant influence on future political engagement, with such skills undoubtedly reinforced through college and career. Even taking into account those initial verbal skills, a social science curriculum affects voting turnout and political participation in a positive direction.

It is also found that college experiences and the post-college outcomes of those experiences have an even longer term effect on future levels of political engagement. More critically, this article has operationalized and tested the various hypotheses that exist for explaining the relationship between education and political engagement.

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