Political Learning and Democratic Commitment in New Democracies: The Case of Spain*

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Abstract: This paper proposes a new model of mass support for democracy that improves upon existing explanations that emphasize the importance of either the socialization of values during youth or more contemporaneous evaluations of regime performance. Specifically, the model stipulates that democratic attitudes are the product of a *weighted average* of the *political contexts* experienced by individuals and the political subgroups to which they belong over their entire lifetimes. The extent to which political contexts provoke pro-democratic political learning is determined by sources of values and performance identified in the existing literature. Crucially, the age at which individuals encounter such political contexts as well as their level of political sophistication condition the contexts' impact on regime preferences. By integrating contextual variables into an individual-level lifetime learning model, the theory has the potential to explain why support for democracy varies not only among countries, but also within them. The paper assesses the framework through an intensive test of the model using over three decades of comparable survey data from Spain. The results show that learning during both the critical formative years and in adulthood is critical for understanding contemporaneous attitudes toward democracy. Further, the analysis helps resolve an ongoing debate in the literature about when democratic attitudes evolved in the country and points toward how more extensive cross-national analyses can test the generalizability of the theory.

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Introduction

The development of mass support for or commitment to democracy[1]—defined as a preference for governments selected through inclusive, contested elections (Dahl 1971) along with the rejection of non-democratic alternatives (Rose Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998)[2]—is important for nascent democratic regimes, since democratic consolidation requires that democracy becomes the "only game in town" not only among elites, but also within mass publics (Linz and Stepan 1996, ch. 1). While elites play the most direct role in determining whether new democracies consolidate or breakdown (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986), elites do not make decisions in a vacuum. It is not so much that mass regime preferences have a direct impact on democratization or democratic breakdown, but rather that such support or ambivalence to democracy provides an important political resource for elites in their efforts to strengthen or weaken regimes. For example, broad mass support for democratic rule has been integral to the successful defeat of coup attempts during and following democratic transitions in Spain (1982) and the former Soviet Union (1991) (Gunther, Montero, and Botella 2004, 196; Gibson 1997). In contrast, elites took advantage of broad ambivalence to democracy in successful coup attempts in Honduras in 2009 and Mali in 2012.[3]

While relatively high levels of support for democracy among citizens living in recently democratized countries has encouraged optimism about the prospects for further democratization and democratic consolidation in many parts of the world (Diamond 2008; Inglehart 2003), considerable variance in citizens' commitment to democracy at both the national and individual

[1] For the sake of readability, the manuscript uses terms such as support for democracy, democratic commitment, preference for democracy, regime preferences, and attitudes toward democracy interchangeably.

[2] This definition is minimalist in the sense that it emphasizes the importance of formal democratic procedures over other potential aspects of democracy. Democratic beliefs systems, however, are likely to be multidimensional. Support for democracy does not necessarily entail commitment to the "institutional guarantees" identified by Dahl (1971) as being integral for the proper functioning of democratic regimes (Carlin and Singer 2011). While minimal democratic support is not sufficient for a more encompassing commitment to democracy, such support is arguably a necessary condition for the development of the broader democratic belief systems that are conducive to high quality democratic governance.

[3] Prior to the 2009 coup in Honduras, surveys conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Project indicated unusually low support for democracy in the country (Booth and Seligson 2009; Seligson and Booth 2009). AfroBarometer data showed that Malian citizens were the least likely to reject military rule among the countries studied.

levels remains (Norris 2011, ch. 5). These differences point toward a number of puzzles for researchers. Why is it that the mass publics of some new democracies are more committed to democracy than mass publics in other, similar countries? That is, why does democracy consistently garner more support among Uruguayans than Chileans, Costa Ricans than Panamanians, and Czechs than Slovaks? Second, why do people even within the same countries exhibit wildly different attitudes toward regimes? Why is it that those on the right of the political spectrum in Peru are more supportive of democracy than those on the left, while the opposite has been the case in Chile and Spain? Why are the young more committed to democracy in Russia than the old, while youth in many Latin American countries are more skeptical of democracy than their elders?

Although the perceived importance of mass attitudes to democracy has generated a large literature, empirical analyses of the leading theoretical perspectives, which emphasize the early socialization of *values* and more recent evaluations of regime *performance*, suggest that extant theories do not adequately explain why support varies among and within countries. I argue that this failure reflects overly simplistic views about how individuals learn and update their attitudes over their lifetimes. Further, an overreliance on single-year cross-sectional data exacerbates these theoretical difficulties. It is perhaps not surprising that models often explain little of the observed variance in democratic support, and strong predictors of democratic commitment often raise more questions then they answer. At the aggregate level, country fixed effects (i.e., country dummy variables) often dominate other predictors. At worst, this finding suggests what amounts to a non-explanation: that each country's unique political culture and national myths best explain why citizens in some countries are less committed to democracy than citizens in other countries (e.g. Clark, Dutt, and Holmberg 1993; Evans and Whitefield 1995; McCallister 1999, 201; Power and Clark 2001, 68). This conclusion implies that mass commitment to democracy can change only slowly and incrementally and that authoritarian elites can maintain a base of support—a troubling

prospect in countries where mass publics demonstrate significant ambivalence toward democratic governance.

Further, at the individual level, much of the explained variance is accounted for by variables that emphasize very proximate causal explanations. For example, most studies explain democratic support primarily using attitudinal variables that are measured concurrently with attitudes to democracy, including variables capturing respondents' confidence in institutions, or satisfaction with democracy or the previous dictatorship. While the significant relationships between such variables and support for democracy do provide us with some meaningful inferences about what factors increase or decrease commitment to democracy, we are left wondering how these intervening attitudes arose in the first place. In other words, the analyses do not take us very far back in the causal story and probably bias our understanding of the origins of democratic support toward theories that emphasize the importance of performance evaluations during recent years.

To overcome these problems, I propose a new lifetime learning model of support for democracy that better incorporates the complex ways in which changing political contexts impact the formation of attitudes over individuals' lifetimes. I agree that both values socialization and performance evaluations matter but, building on leading models of political learning, I argue that their effects accumulate over the lifetime and that political contexts affect different groups in society in different ways. Specifically, the proposed model stipulates that democratic attitudes are a function of a *weighted average* of individuals' experience with changing *political contexts* over their lifetimes. Political contexts—which reflect all of the social and political events and changes that occur within a given period—provoke pro-democratic or anti-democratic political learning due to factors identified in the two leading perspectives, including regime performance, socioeconomic modernization, regime socialization efforts, international diffusion of democratic norms, and the occurrence of events such as coups or military defeats that provide information about the

desirability of different regimes.[4] Crucially, the age at which individuals encounter such political contexts as well as their level of political sophistication condition (i.e., weight) the contexts' impact on their regime preferences. While the main theoretical perspectives suggest greater receptivity toward political contexts during either youth (values perspective) or more recent years (performance perspective), I argue that political learning occurs over the entire lifetime, implying that individuals weight changing environments more uniformly over the life cycle.

To test the model, I present an intensive analysis of survey data on democratic attitudes from Spain, one of the paradigmatic cases of democratic transition in the global third wave of democratization. Unlike virtually every other new democracy, survey data on democratic attitudes have been collected in Spain since the transition to democracy, resulting in over 30 years of comparable data from the late 1970s to today. This long-term repeated cross-sectional data uniquely facilitates a direct test of the proposed political learning model; not only can this type of data demonstrate at which periods in the life cycle respondents are most receptive to information from the political environment, but also *when* political contexts have been most conducive to support for democracy in Spain. By leveraging birth cohort level change in democratic commitment over time and cohorts' experiences with varying political contexts over their lifetimes using a series of non-linear statistical models, the analysis demonstrates the importance of political learning over the entire lifecycle. Consistent with the theory, the results also show that the extent to which individuals are receptive to information from changing political contexts varies by their political sophistication, and that the same political contexts are interpreted in disparate ways by members of different ideological groups.

Further, this intensive test of the model helps resolve an ongoing debate in the literature about how, when, and why attitudes toward democracy in Spain evolved over time. While

[4] For simplicity, with the term "political context," generally I am referring to the information provided by the social and political events occurring within a given period (usually one or two years) about the desirability of democratic and non-democratic regimes.

proponents of theories associated with the *values* perspective have suggested that support for democracy primarily increased prior to the transition in the mid to late 1970s due to rapid socioeconomic modernization, international diffusion of democratic norms, and a changed regime discourse, those emphasizing instrumental evaluations of regime *performance* have argued that large changes in support for democracy principally occurred as a result of the inclusive nature of the pacted regime transition and subsequent political performance by democratic governments. The statistical analysis shows that both perspectives have merit. The political contexts that emerged prior to the transition in the 1960s provided significant pro-democratic information, but so did those after the transition, likely reflecting changes in performance by the democratic regime. While the analysis cannot conclusively demonstrate which factors best account for why different political contexts across Spanish history provoked pro-democratic learning, the trends in the estimates are consistent with a story in which both socialized values and performance evaluations play a role in the formation of support for democracy at the individual level.

While the statistical analysis of the Spanish case provides strong support for the lifetime learning model advanced in this paper, more extensive analyses will be necessary to assess the generalizability of the findings and in particular to test the hypotheses about which macro-level factors predict pro-democratic political contexts. The paper concludes by proposing specific methods for testing the model using both short-term panel and repeated cross-sectional survey data from a larger set of new democracies.

Values, Performance, and Commitment to Democracy

The differences between the leading *values* and *performance* perspectives can be reduced to two main distinctions: (1) the factors that shape mass attitudes toward democracy and (2) the periods in the life cycle in which such variables impact individuals' attitudes. On the one hand, the

values perspective focuses on various cultural agents or structural factors that promote societal norms, broadly conceived. Such sources include long-standing religious and cultural value systems common to particular "civilizations" existing in different parts of the world (e.g. Huntington 1998; Weber 2003 [1958]); social capital, civil society density, and civic culture (e.g. Putnam 1993, 1999; Almond and Verba 1963); economic modernization and concomitant attitudinal shifts in favor of self expression and self governance (e.g. Lipset 1959; Diamond 1992; Inglehart and Welzel 2005); regime-backed efforts to socialize citizens into values supportive of regime maintenance (Linz and Stepan 1996; Easton 1965; Easton and Dennis 1969); and international diffusion of norms about democracy and dictatorship (e.g. Huntington 1991; Brinks and Coppedge 2006).

In contrast, for the *performance perspective*, the sources of attitudes that reign supreme are the actual outputs of regimes, and in particular, the current regime. What is most relevant is the degree to which a regime delivers on citizens' economic and political expectations (Przeworski 1991; Sarsfield and Echegaray 2005). Regime preferences are thus a function of more instrumental evaluations of the performance of democratic or non-democratic regimes with regard to a variety of economic and political outputs. These outputs include economic performance (e.g. Booth and Seligson 2009; Clark, Dutt, and Kornberg 1993; Mishler and Rose 1997, 2007); control of corruption and enforcement of the rule of law (Booth and Seligson 2009; Salinas and Booth 2011); provision of political rights and civil liberties (Evans and Whitefield 1995; Mishler and Rose 1997); protection of citizen security and utilization of violence (Booth and Richard 1996, 2006; Booth and Seligson 2009); politicization of the regime question (Torcal 2007); and the delivery of political goods more generally.

The second key distinction between the *values* and *performance perspectives* is related to the individual-level models of political learning that implicitly underline each perspective (Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998, 117). On the one hand, theories grouped in the *values* perspective

highlight the importance political socialization particularly during the so-called "critical formative period," which is consistent with the political learning theory known as the *early persistence model*. According to this model, events experienced early in the life cycle retain a disproportionate impact on future attitudes relative to the impact of events experienced after youth and young adulthood (Searing,Wright, and Rabinowitz 1976). Further, future events and information are filtered through the lens of past socialization, resulting in different interpretations of the same events by different generations (Searing, Schwartz, and Lind 1973). Together, the unparalleled openness to information from the political context during the critical formative period and closure to new information thereafter leads to persistent political attitudes that undergo little change throughout the life cycle. The *values* perspective thus predicts significant generationally-based patterns in democratic support, particularly when the political contexts experienced by different generations are strongly distinctive and family, school, and political environments provide consistent, "one-sided communication" about regimes (Sears 1983, 94-96; Jennings and Niemi 1974; Mannheim 1928).[5]

In contrast, the scholars promoting the *performance perspective* have focused on more or less rational evaluations of regimes at the present day or recent past rather than on socialization during youth. For proponents of this perspective, experiences with the political context that matter most are those occurring during the most recent years in individuals' lifetimes, in keeping with the *lifetime openness* political learning model. While the *early persistence model* stipulates that attitudinal persistence increases with age, the *lifetime openness* model suggests that age should be essentially irrelevant to the likelihood of attitudinal change. Building on the purported pervasive existence of so-called "non-attitudes" (Converse 1969; Gergen and Ullman 1977) in addition to evidence of moderate to high levels of individual and cohort attitudinal change over time (Searing,

[5] There is little agreement about which ages constitute the "critical formative period" (Delli Carpini 1989, 19-22). While some studies point toward childhood (e.g., Easton and Dennis 1969; Greenstein 1965; Sears and Valentino 1997; Bartels and Jackman forthcoming), other suggest greater openness during adolescence and young adulthood (e.g., Mannheim 1928; Jennings and Niemi 1984; Alwin, Cohen, and Newcomb 1991; Jennings 1989; Sears and Funk 1999).

Wright, and Rabinowitz 1976), the *lifetime openness model* argues that attitudes have a more "uniform potential for change at all ages" (Sears 1983, 81). Thus, according to the *lifetime openness* model, learning during more distant early years should be sharply discounted relative to more recent experience, and attitudes toward democracy should be relatively open to change throughout the life course in response to variations in regime performance.

While it is true that there are important differences between the theoretical moorings of each general perspective, in practice most recent large-scale studies of democratic attitudes have taken a more ecumenical approach in their empirical analyses, viewing variables associated with both the *values* and *performance* perspectives as possible contributors toward regime preferences (e.g. Norris 2012; Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer 1998; Booth and Seligson 2009; Mattes and Bratton 2007). The common finding that variables associated with each perspective retain at least some predictive weight highlights the fact that ultimately, even though the two perspectives are ostensibly in competition with each other, they are by no means mutually exclusive. Indeed, there are no persuasive theoretical or empirical reasons why commitment to democracy or dictatorship should be shaped only by learned values or performance evaluations, but not both. Ultimately both perspectives imply that the attitudes are the "product of experience" with changing political contexts (Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998, 117). In other words, experience with both agents seeking to socialize an individual into a particular set of values and the actual outputs of regimes likely impact the individual's commitment to democracy. That is, socialization induced by learning from families, schools, churches, and the media are complemented by evaluations of regime performance based on experiences with the regime in practice.

Similarly, although the competing *values* and *performance* perspectives differ in terms of their hypotheses about when individuals are most receptive to the influence of these factors, these sharp distinctions overly simplify the process by which individuals form preferences over different

regimes. Political socialization research has shown that political learning after young adulthood is probably significantly greater than previously thought (Langton 1984; Sigel 1989), and this appears to be the case in particular with regard to regime preferences (e.g. Mishler and Rose 2007; Torcal 2007). Similarly, studies examining the effects of regime performance demonstrate that comparisons between old and new regimes, rather than just assessments of the current regime, are key to understanding democratic attitudes (Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998). This finding is in tension with the utility maximization envisioned by a strict reading of the performance perspective, which suggests that past contexts are "sunk" and should be of little relevance to current evaluations.

Further, while the *values perspective* suggests significant attitudinal stability and the *performance perspective* indicates greater possibility for attitudinal variation, attributes of democratic commitment as an attitude object imply a strong likelihood of both persistence and change. On the one hand, since attitudes toward regimes are fundamental political predispositions that are consequential for society and are wrapped up in the symbolism of freedom, liberty, and elections, they are likely to demonstrate considerable persistence, in keeping with the *early persistence model* (Dalton, Shin, Jou 2008; Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer 1998; Sears 1983; 93). Similarly, compared to older democracies, in many new democracies, questions concerning the proper regime have been a persistent part of the public discussion, often breaking down along salient political cleavages (Torcal 2008; Mainwaring and Torcal 2003). As a result, individuals living in new democracies often have developed more overt practice with expressing and considering their regime preferences, heightening the possibility of attitudinal persistence (Sears 1983; 94-102).

On the other hand, greater openness is suggested by the fact that commitment to democracy probably reflects not only an affective component, but also an evaluative one, which implies greater potential for attitude change over the life course. To the extent that the large social, political, and

economic changes endured by many new democracies lead to multiple competing discourses in favor of different regimes rather than consistent messaging in favor of one regime over the other, the likelihood of persistence is also lessened. Furthermore, the meaning of democracy and alternative non-democratic regimes is also subject to change and differing interpretations over time, suggesting greater instability over the life course (Sears 1983; 94-102).

These competing characteristics of attitudes toward democracy imply that both persistence and change are likely the norm, suggesting that learning over the entire lifetime is important for the development of regime preferences. Consequently, I argue that a *lifetime learning model* (Langton 1984; Mishler and Rose 2007) better characterizes the formation and evolution of individual-level support for democracy. According to this model, individuals remain open to change even after the intense period of early learning. Instead of resisting information flows that occur after young adulthood as in the *early persistence model*, changing political contexts over the life course can continue to shape an individual's attitudes. Unlike the *lifetime openness model*, though, individuals do not quickly "forget" or discount earlier experiences, which may continue to frame the interpretation of future experiences and information flows, meaning that individuals at different ages will react to the same change in the political environment in potentially distinctive ways (e.g. Bartels 2001; Langton 1984).

While a few single country studies have provided evidence of both significant attitudinal persistence and change over time consistent with the *lifetime learning model* (e.g. Mishler and Rose 2007; Torcal 2008), existing cross-national analyses continue to rely on the overly simplistic distinction between the early socialization of values and recent evaluations of performance. To test the *values* hypotheses, analysts tend to include birth cohort dummy variables, variables indicating the regime experienced by the individual during his/her critical formative years, or national-level variables capturing, for example, the average level of democracy experienced by the country over

the moderate to distant past (Booth and Seligson 2009; Salinas and Booth 2011; Mattes and Bratton 2007). On the other hand, scholars include attitudinal variables such as those measuring "satisfaction with democracy," institutional trust, approval of government economic performance, other measures of system legitimacy, and exposure to crime or corruption to indicate the relationship between recent performance and democratic support (Salinas and Booth 2011; Norris 2011; Mattes and Bratton 2007; Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998).

Although significant coefficients associated with many of these variables indicate the potential importance of both values socialization and performance evaluations, these modeling strategies likely obscure the importance of learning over the entire lifetime, a problem that is exacerbated by an overwhelming reliance on single-year cross sectional data. With cross-sectional snapshots, it is difficult to identify whether the current political environment (favored by proponents of *performance* theories) or past contexts (favored by *values* theories) best account for current attitudes. For instance, with this data, tests of the *values* perspective are forced to look for generational differences in democratic attitudes toward support. With only cross-sectional data, however, it is statistically impossible to determine if observed birth-cohort differences represent enduring generational differences, transitory effects restricted to the period in question, or life-cycle trends (e.g. Delli Carpini 1986; 1989; Yang and Land 2008). Similarly, to the extent that generational differences narrow or disappear over time due to shared learning after the "critical formative period" as suggested by the *lifetime learning model*, single year snapshots provide little inferential leverage for understanding how individuals form and change their attitudes over their lifetimes, much less what aspects of past contexts help explain current levels of democratic commitment.[6]

[6] Further, using national level averages of past contexts (e.g. levels of democracy) is problematic since such legacy variables (1) are likely to be collinear with other national level variables such as the level of development or regional specific cultural variables (Pop-Eleches 2007) and (2) do not take into account that different birth cohorts do not all share the same experience with past regimes.

In a similar sense, the reliance on attitudinal variables measured concurrently with democratic support overly prioritizes current regime evaluations while obscuring the potential role of past assessments of regime performance. The result is a very proximate form of explanation that leaves researchers wondering how intervening attitudinal variables such as "satisfaction with democracy" arose in the first place. However, without more longitudinal data and a broader theoretical perspective, the consequence is that these studies tend to be biased toward attitudes that provide evaluations of current conditions. As a consequence of these shortcomings, it is not surprising that many of these studies often explain relatively low levels of the variance in democratic support and ambiguous country fixed effects remain some of the best predictors of democratic attitudes (e.g. Salinas and Booth 2011; Booth and Seligson 2009; Norris 2011).

A Lifetime Learning Model

Perhaps a better conclusion from the lackluster performance of the main perspectives and the continued importance of variables capturing unique country attributes is that researchers' models are significantly underspecified (Salinas and Booth 2011, 45). I argue that its not so much that analysts are wrong about the importance of values socialization and performance evaluations, but rather that existing theoretical and empirical models do not fully take into account the complex ways in which differing political contexts impact attitudes over time. By proposing a more nuanced lifetime learning model, a mathematical framework for testing the competing perspectives, and more appropriate statistical tests, this paper has the potential to improve significantly our understanding of why democratic support varies not only across countries, but also within them.

As I argue above, democratic attitudes are likely to reflect a mixture of both more passive socialization of values and active evaluations of performance across the entire life cycle. As Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer (1998) note, regime preferences are likely to be "initially shaped by early

socialization and then [evolve] continuously throughout the adult life as initial beliefs are reinforced or challenged by later experience" with the performance of democratic and/or non-democratic regimes (117-118). Values are thus reevaluated based on more "rational" assessments of actual regime performance. Similarly, the actual evaluations of regime efficacy are likely shaped by previously held values gained through earlier socialization experiences. In the words of Kuechler (1991), regime preferences reflect "a sort of emotionally biased running tally that citizens keep on the performance of a system" (281). In other words, a process of lifetime learning best explains why individuals form and change their attitudes to democracy.

An intuitive way to develop a lifetime learning model is to stipulate that individuals' level of commitment to democracy is the product of a *weighted average* of the *political contexts* experienced by individuals over their lifetimes (Bartels and Jackman forthcoming). Political contexts, which reflect all of the social and political events and changes in a given time period, provide individuals with information about the desirability of different regimes, based on factors identified in the literature as fostering or discouraging support for democracy, such as socioeconomic development, regime performance, and regime-related events such as coups, massacres, or military defeats. However, as suggested by the competing models of political learning, the age at which an individual experiences these political contexts moderates their impact on his or her attitudes, as individuals are more receptive to information during different points in the lifecycle. In other words, the model proposes that an individual's level of democratic commitment at a given period of time reflects a weighted average of past experiences with the political system.

This political learning framework, which was originally developed to study partisanship in the United States by Bartels and Jackman (forthcoming; Bartels 2001) builds on the traditional age-period-cohort (APC) model, which scholars generally employ to study generationally based attitude change. As the name age-period-cohort suggests, the APC model parcels out the determinants of

attitudes among three components: the effects of the *age* of the individual (capturing lifecycle effects); the impact of the temporal *period* in which the attitude is measured; and the influence related to membership in a particular birth *cohort*, with the expectation that cohort differences reflect the distinctive political environments that different generations experiences over their lifetimes. Attitudes are simply modeled as the additive sum of these three components. In relation to the main theories of democratic attitudes, period effects are clearly more dominant according to *performance perspective* given its emphasis on recent evaluations of regime performance, while cohort effects are more influential according to the *values perspective,* given its stress on earlier socialization. The innovation of the weighted average framework is that it explicitly models the amorphous cohort differences found in the APC model as a function of the period effects (i.e. political contexts) experienced by birth cohorts over the course of their lifetimes. The stability and/or change of an individual's attitude or attitudes in the aggregate are thus a product of the specific sequence of experiences that the individual or society faces over the course of time. As a result, "generational patterns of political change arise endogenously from the interaction" of changing political contexts and age-related weights (Bartels and Jackman forthcoming, 3).

More formally, the model is as follows:

$$y_{iT} = \frac{\sum_{C}^{T} w_{t-c} * x_t}{\sum_{C}^{T} w_{t-c}} \qquad (1)$$

where y_{iT} is the democratic commitment at time T of individual i born at time C, the x_t's are the political contexts experienced by the individual at times t (from birth at time C until attitude measurement at time T), and the w's are the corresponding weights assigned to the t-Cth time point (or age) of the individual's life. For simplicity and without loss of generality, we can assume that the time intervals from C to T are years. Thus, the number of summed terms for each individual is

equal to his/her age.

For simplicity, at this point I make two assumptions: first, I assume that the weights are identical across individuals of the same age. That is, all individuals at the same age at time *t* weight the information from political context occurring at time *t* equally. Second, the magnitude and direction (i.e. pro- or anti-democratic) of information from yearly political contexts are equivalent for all individuals, although the weight attributed to such contexts varies based on their age. This second assumption means experiences that matter for individuals are conceived at the macro, country level. More precisely, democratic commitment is thus a product of different birth cohorts' experiences with changing macro-level contexts accumulated over the course of their lifetimes. Since these assumptions are probably too restrictive, I will partially relax them later in the paper.

Specified in this fashion, the relevant sets of parameters of interest are twofold: (1) a sequence of political contexts represented by series of parameters x_t occurring over the individual's lifetime (from year C to year T) that vary in the degree to which they are supportive of democratic attitudes and (2) a series of *T*-*C* age specific weights (the *w*'s) that moderate the impact of the yearly political contexts over the course of the individual's lifetime. The weights reflect the relative *openness* of an individual to new information from experiences within the political environment (i.e. political contexts) at a given age or period in the lifecycle. Weights should be relatively high when individuals are most likely to accept or absorb new information from the political world, while they should be lowest when individuals are more likely to resist new information. Change or persistence of attitudes is thus dependent not only on these age-related weights, but also the relative magnitude and direction of information from the political contexts occurring at a given age. Attitude change thus requires either (1) at least a moderately sized change in the degree to which the political context is supportive of democratic attitudes occurring when a weight is relatively large or (2) a relatively large change in the political context at points in which *w* is smaller. In contrast, attitudinal

persistence can result from either (1) the lack of contextual change, no matter the corresponding age weights, or (2) relatively low age weights in the presence of significant (although not overly large) changes in the political context.

This weighted average framework thus reduces the differences between the competing theoretical perspectives to different hypotheses about the distribution of the age-related weights and the factors that shape the degree to which political contexts impart pro-democratic information. Figure 1 graphically displays three important differences in the distribution of the weights hypothesized by the leading perspectives: the *absolute weight* given to political contexts at a given age relative to all weights over an entire lifetime; the *incremental impact* of political contexts occurring at a given age; and the proportion of total learning occurring during youth across the lifespan. For the *values perspective*, the *w*'s are highest during the period of maturation, with *w'*s increasing into a somewhat arbitrarily defined critical formative period with a mode at age 20 and decreasing thereafter, reflecting the greater openness to experience during individuals' youth and young adulthood (Figure 1a). Beyond this critical formative period, however, the probability of attitudinal change due to the influence of later political contexts becomes miniscule, as shown in Figure 1b, which displays the incremental impact of political contexts across the lifecycle. That is, since the size of the weights beyond young adulthood is very small compared to the sum of all previous weights, attitudinal persistence is likely to be the norm.[7] Finally, Figure 1(c) plots the sum of all the weights prior to age 26 as a proportion of total weights across the lifespan, thereby showing the persistent importance of the experiences of early life on attitudes much later in life. Throughout the lifecycle, early learning exerts profound influence on attitudes in this formulation (>90%).

<Figure 1>

[7] In other words, since the sum of the weights in the denominator of Equation 1 increases with each successive year, a greater change in the political context is necessary to alter the underlying attitude. Incremental impacts are calculated by dividing the weight at a given age (e.g. T) by the sum of the weights from age 0 to age T.

In contrast, according to the *performance perspective* (Figure 1 d-f), present political contexts are most important, meaning that the each *w* should be larger than previous *w's*. In order to ensure that the incremental impact of each successive political context has an equal chance of causing attitudinal change (Figure 1(e)), the absolute size of the weights is exponentially increasing over the lifecycle (Figure 1(d)). Since the incremental impact of each year is closer to being flat rather than declining over the life course, experiences during the "early formative years" are significantly discounted over time such that by middle age such experiences have little effect on attitudes, and generationally based patterning is non-existent. In this respect, the *lifetime openness model* underlining the *performance perspective* reflects more of a moving average of political contexts with a sharp discounting of contexts occurring in the medium- to long-term past.

<Figure 2>

However, as I argue above, the formation of regime preferences is not as simple as the two main competing perspectives suggest; rather, the distribution of the *w's* should reflect the importance of both early learning as well as learning later in the life cycle—i.e., a *lifetime learning model*. Figure 2 (a-c) proposes a weight distribution that combines the attributes of the *early persistence* and *lifetime openness models*.[8] Like the former, there is a distinctive mode appearing during the critical formative period with declining weights shortly thereafter (Figure 2a). Including this mode during this period is consistent with the generational effects often found in the literature. However, like the *lifetime openness model*, after the decline following the early formative period, the weights become exponentially increasing such that the incremental impacts of successive political contexts beyond the critical formative period are equal (Figure 2b). Specified in this way, early learning remains important through middle age, but eventually it is overpowered by the succession of new political contexts over time (Figure 2c).

[8] Although the relative age weights associated with the previous two polar models are fairly clear (Figure 1), a wide range of possible functional forms are possible under the broader *lifetime learning* framework. Fortunately, the empirical analysis will help resolve which weight distribution best accounts for how individuals learn over the lifetime.

> **H1 Temporal Weighting:** An individual's level of democratic commitment reflects a weighted average of the political contexts that he/she experiences over his/her entire lifetime in keeping with the lifetime learning model.

The second main component of the political learning framework advanced here refers to the character of the political contexts that individuals experience as they move through their lifetimes. Whether a given political contexts imparts pro-democratic or anti-democratic information is determined by the factors underscored by both the *values* and *performance* perspectives. The former suggests that socioeconomic modernization (e.g. Lipset 1959; Diamond 1992; Inglehart and Welzel 2005), efforts of regimes to socialize their citizens into values and norms consistent with the preservation of the regime itself (Easton 1965; Easton and Dennis 1969; Chong, McClosky, and Zaller 1983; Linz and Stepan 1996, ch. 3; Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer 1998), and international diffusion of norms about democracy and dictatorship (Huntington 1991; Kopstein and Reilly 2000; Levitsky and Way 2006; Brinks and Coppedge 2006) affect the degree to which political contexts impart pro-democratic information.

> **H2 Socioeconomic Development:** Higher levels of socioeconomic development will be positively associated with pro-democratic political contexts and democratic commitment at the individual level.
>
> **H3 Regime Socialization:** Non-democratic regimes will be negatively associated pro-democratic political contexts and democratic commitment at the individual level.
>
> **H4 International Diffusion:** Positive trends in democracy among a country's neighbors, region, and the world more generally will be positively associated with pro-democratic political contexts and democratic commitment at the individual level.

On the other hand, as suggested by proponents of the performance perspective, actual regime performance also likely affects the degree to which a given political context provides pro-democratic information to individuals and may in some cases overpower the effects of socialized values.[9] Thus, political contexts should foster support for democracy or dictatorship to the extent

[9] For example, widespread repression and incompetence of many authoritarian regimes in Latin America likely induced significant pro-democratic learning (Bermeo 1992; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). Likewise, persistent poor performance by democratic regimes likely erodes the values taught by schools, parties, and the media about the importance of democratic governance.

that the regime in question meets economic and political expectations. Economically, regimes that deliver strong economic performance (e.g. growth and control of inflation) should change beliefs about the desirability of different regimes. Similarly, both democratic and non-democratic regimes should be evaluated on the extent to which they provide order, security, and low levels of violence (Booth and Richard 1996, 2006; Booth and Seligson 2009); control corruption and enforce the rule of law (e.g. Chang and Chu 2006; Mishler and Rose 1997, 2007; Rose, Shin, and Munro 1999); and effectively provision other public goods such as infrastructure and education. Democratic regimes should also be evaluated based on the degree to which they actually supply civil liberties, political freedoms, and relatively equal representation of different groups across society (Evans and Whitefield 1995; Mishler and Rose 1997).

> **H5 Socioeconomic Performance:** Higher socioeconomic performance under a democratic (non-democratic) regime will be positively (negatively) associated with pro-democratic political contexts and democratic commitment at the individual level.
>
> **H6 Political Performance:** Higher political performance (e.g. the provision of order, security, low levels of corruption, public goods, and civil liberties) under democratic (non-democratic) regimes will be positively (negatively) associated with pro-democratic political contexts and democratic commitment at the individual level.

A final set of factors that should impact the democratic or non-democratic character of political contexts and subsequent political learning includes salient political events that speak directly to either the values or performance of different regimes. Given the evidence that politics is often too distant from most people's daily lives to have a continuous effect on attitudes (e.g. Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996) and that political learning may occur more as the result of the exposure to more discrete salient political events (e.g. Sears and Valentino 1997), high profile events that reflect well or poorly on democratic and non-democratic regimes should be particularly effectual in the generation of regime preferences. Important events such as transitions to democracy (Torcal 2008), founding elections (Bermeo 1992), anti-democratic coups, massacres, and mass mobilizations might produce the largest shocks to the political context. For example, experiencing the zeitgeist of a

transition to democracy should produce a stronger understanding of and belief in democratic principles through overt practice, whereas living through a massacre perpetrated by a democratic regime may lead to greater ambivalence toward democracy due to poor evaluations of the regime's use of violence.

> **H7 Salient Political Events:** Salient political events that reflect well (poorly) on democratic (non-democratic) regimes will be positively associated with pro-democratic political contexts and democratic commitment at the individual level.

Model Complications

In order to clearly outline the lifetime political learning model, I made two assumptions that we can now partially relax in order to provide a more accurate depiction of the political learning process with respect to regimes. The assumption that the information provided by a political context occurring in a given year is equivalent for every citizen suggests that all citizens objectively integrate changes in the political system in the same way, setting aside for a moment the moderating weights. In reality, when speaking of the effects of the factors described above, such impacts should be interpreted in terms of *average* effects on the population as a whole (Mannheim 1928; Bartels and Jackman forthcoming). However, such average effects are likely to obscure significant variation in the actual conclusions drawn by different individuals and the subsequent lessons learned during a particular period of time (Jennings 1987, 2002; Mannheim 1928). Social and political groups moderate individuals' experience with the macro context due to the fact that different subgroups objectively experience and subjectively interpret the same contexts and information differently (Bartels 2002; Delli Carpini 1986; Jennings 1987, 2002; Mannheim 1928). For example, assessments of the economic performance of an authoritarian regime likely differ based on socioeconomic status (objective experience) and ideological proximity to the authoritarian government in power at the time (subjective interpretation). Although ideological orientation and/or partisan identification are likely to be the most important subgroup level distinctions, in some

countries politicized social groups (e.g. religious, ethnic, and rural/urban subgroups) might prove more important. Ultimately, the groups that are the most important moderators of information from the political environment are context dependent.

> **H8 Subgroup Variance in Political Contexts:** The magnitude and direction of information imparted by yearly political contexts will vary based on the political and/or social subgroup(s) to which an individual belongs.

The other key assumption that should be relaxed is the stipulation that the weights should be equivalent for all individuals at the same age. Recall that the weights reflect the degree of openness of an individual to the receipt and absorption of information from the political context. However, it is likely that there will be some variance across individuals in their degree of openness separate from their age. Studies of attitude change have shown that highly politically aware or sophisticated individuals[10] tend to be most able to *resist* new information that is discordant with their prior beliefs, while those at lower levels of sophistication are less able to resist such information (Chong, McClosky and Zaller 1983; Geddes and Zaller 1989; Zaller 1992; Van Deth 1989). As a result, the functional form of the weights for the most politically sophisticated individual should be closer to the *early persistence model* such that the marginal impact of political contexts declines over the life cycle. In contrast, less sophisticated individuals will demonstrate greater openness to information from changing political contexts such that the marginal impact of political contexts will remain steadier over time. As a result, political learning during youth will retain the greatest impact for the most politically sophisticated, while early learning will influence attitudes less for more unsophisticated individuals.

> **H9 Variance in Weights by Sophistication**: The functional form of age weights will vary based on an individual's political sophistication such that the potential incremental impact of political contexts will decline more rapidly over the life course for the most politically sophisticated, while among less sophisticated individuals, the size of the incremental impacts will remain steadier over the life course.

[10] By political sophistication or political awareness, I mean the "extent to which an individual pays attention to politics *and* understands what he or she has encountered" (Zaller 1992, 21; see also Converse 1964; Luskin 1987).

The Evolution of Democratic Commitment: The Case of Spain

Political learning theories like the one proposed here are difficult to test empirically since they require data across both time (to test the weights component of the model) and space (to assess which factors make political contexts most conducive to democratic commitment). As I argued above, model identification is essentially unattainable with single-year cross sectional data, since a single snapshot neither allows researchers to observe when individuals are most receptive to information from the political environment nor gauge whether concurrently measured attitudes evaluating regime performance are the result of recent assessments of performance or more cumulative evaluations.

Ultimately, the best data to test the weighted average framework would be long-term panel survey data collected across multiple generations and multiple countries, since such data would allow researchers to identify when citizens are most receptive to changes in the political context as well as which contextual factors best predict pro-democratic political environments. Long-term repeated cross-sectional survey data provides a second best option, since such data can isolate cohort level changes over time, thereby providing a somewhat less direct test of the weights component of the model. Unfortunately, long-term comparable survey data on attitudes toward democracy is simply non-existent in nearly every new democracy; regional democracy barometers such as the Latin Barometer, AfroBarometer, and the New Europe Barometer have collected comparable survey data for at most 15 years, with most studies spanning less than 10 years. These data limitations severely limit the possibility to test comprehensively the competing theoretical perspectives across a wide range of countries.

The exception to this rule is Spain, where the Center for Sociological Research (CIS) has collected comparable survey data on democratic attitudes for over three decades. With such long-

term repeated cross sectional data, it is possible to estimate not only which political contexts over the course of Spanish history have been most conducive to support for democracy, but also during which parts of the lifecycle individuals are most receptive to information from the political environment (Bartels 2001; Bartels and Jackman forthcoming). This test is possible since we can (1) observe birth-cohort level changes in attitudes over time to estimate the weights in the model and (2) leverage birth cohorts' varying experiences with the political environment over the course of their lifetimes to estimate the degree to which different years (i.e. political contexts) provide pro-democratic information. Since the analysis only focuses on one case, it would be difficult to test statistically which factors (e.g. regime economic performance, international diffusion, etc.) explain why different political contexts are more pro- or anti-democratic.[11] However, examining when political contexts are most pro-democratic will provide significant qualitative evidence concerning these factors and will suggest the broad plausibility of the political context hypotheses.

Background and Literature

After the death of Spanish dictator Francisco Franco on November 20, 1975, it was far from clear that a transition to democracy was imminent in Spain, much less one of the most lauded examples of successful democratic transitions to occur during the third wave of democracy (Linz and Stepan 1996, ch. 6).[12] Perhaps even more surprising to some observers was how quickly democracy became the "only game in town" among Spanish citizens (Linz and Stepan 1996). Prior to the transition, many commentators concluded that Spanish political culture, with its purported emphasis on hierarchy, Catholicism, nationalism, fierce individualism, and order was ill suited for democratic politics (Castro 1965; Gunther, Montero, and Botella 2004, 131-133). Not only were the country's elites seen as unwelcoming of liberal democracy, but writers also argued that the

[11] Statistical identification would be difficult due to the collinearity among many of the variables (e.g. modernization, international diffusion), the statistical imprecision of estimates for political contexts early in the 20th century, and the small number of political context estimates.

[12] A detailed bibliography of the Spanish transition is available in Linz and Stepan 1996, 87 fn. 1. See also Linz et. al. (1981); Linz and Stepan (1996, ch. 6); Maravall and Santamaria (1986); Gunther, Montero, and Botella (2004).

authoritarianism of Franco's regime was a reflection of the underlying political culture. Indeed, pointing to initial public opinion data collected in the late 1960s, some observers even argued that the mass public was even *more* authoritarian in its attitudinal dispositions than the regime itself (Fundación FOESSA 1970, 397; López Pina and Arandgueren 1976, 74-76). Even after the successful transition in the 1970s and consolidation of democracy in the 1980s, some scholars continued to worry that Spain's purported cultural traditions of authoritarianism and corporatism remained a threat to regime persistence and mass acceptance of democracy (e.g. Wiarda 1989).

Yet, as shown in Figure 3, by the mid to late 1980s, over three quarters of Spanish citizens consistently said that they preferred democracy to all other alternatives, based on a variety of different survey questions. Even during the *desencanto* (disenchantment) with the early performance of democratic rule in 1980, two-thirds of survey respondents chose democracy over dictatorship or regime indifference. By 2000, the percentage signaling support for democracy was near unanimous, with over 90 percent of citizens expressing commitment to democracy in all circumstances. By this point, Torcal (2007, 2008) argues that support for democracy had become "unconditional" such that it was no longer dependent on performance evaluations of the incumbent government or ideology, which had long been a recurrent dividing line between Franco regime proponents and opponents.

<figure 3>

While it is clear that commitment to democracy has become both wide and deep in Spanish society, competing arguments mirroring the *values* and *performance* perspectives dispute how such democratic attitudes developed and evolved over time. Although both sides agree that the early Franco period fostered ambivalent attitudes toward democracy at best, they disagree about when attitudes shifted in a democratic direction. On the one hand, those favoring values-based theories have argued that three key changes in the 1960s and early 1970s significantly increased support for

democratic rule *prior* to the transition—particularly among the youngest cohorts—making the transition almost inevitable (Edeles 1995; López Pintor 1982). As a result, levels of support for democracy since this period have steadily increased over time, primarily reflecting the replacement of older generations socialized prior to the 1960s.

First, dramatic socioeconomic modernization during the *Tardofranquismo* period fundamentally reshaped Spanish society, which according to proponents of modernization theory led to fundamental attitudinal shifts in favor of democratic governance. Unlike many of its neighbors in Europe, at mid-century Spain was still relatively "backward" economically: nearly half of Spaniards were still employed in agriculture, and per capita income in Spain was half that in Western Europe (Encarnación 2008, 26). After an ill-fated experiment with economic autarky after the Second World War, the Franco regime abruptly liberalized the economy in late 1959 and turned economic policy over to technocrats. Coinciding with the post-war economic boom in the industrialized world, the results were stunning: from 1960 to 1967, economic growth averaged over 10 percent per year, and real wages increased 40 percent. By the mid-1970s, Spain had moved from being an economic backwater in Europe to the 10th largest economy in the world.[13]

The second large shift during this period is related to the first: with the opening of the Spanish economy, large influxes of foreign tourists flooded the country, while Spanish citizens also went abroad in pursuit of economic opportunity.[14] These flows of people across borders provided a clear mechanism for the international diffusion of democratic norms. While immigration abroad exposed Spaniards to democratic political systems, foreign tourists brought with them conceptions

[13] Concomitant changes in society were equally dramatic. Massive urbanization occurred as the percent of citizens living in cities with populations greater than 100,000 doubled from 20 percent in 1960 to 40 percent in 1975. The rate of female labor force participation doubled, while Spanish citizens became not much different in their consumption habits from other Western Europeans (Encarnación 2008, 26-28; Aceña and Martínez Ruiz 2007).

[14] The number of annual foreign visitors increased over six fold from 6 million in 1960 to over 40 million in the later years in the decade, and the Franco regime placed strong emphasis on tourism as a development strategy. Over 2 million Spaniards temporarily left the country in search of work in Western Europe during this period (Encarnación 2008, 27; Gunther, Montero, and Botella 2004, 160-161).

of liberty and freedom at odds with the Francoist government (Pack 2007; Gunther, Montero, and Botella 2004, 160-161).

Third, changes in the regime's relationship with the mass public reflected the societal transformations brought by modernization. Specifically, the Francoist regime began emphasizing a distinct legitimizing discourse in an effort to perpetuate the longevity of the regime while allowing some limited societal (but not political) pluralism.[15] Instead of highlighting Franco as the "savior" of the country from assaults by radical leftists and the chaos of the Republican period, the regime began socializing citizens into the importance of "peace and prosperity" and the regimes achievements with respect to these objectives. Since these values are not inherently anti-democratic, the emphasis on peace and prosperity instead of the disorder and polarization of the 1930s provided a rhetorical window for the democratic opposition, which promised to provide not only peace and prosperity, but also political freedom (Torcal 2008, 51).

While proponents of the *values* perspective point to the importance of the dramatic societal changes in the 1960s and 1970s, others have argued in line with the *performance* perspective that the large changes in support for democracy occurred principally as a result of the transition and the subsequent consolidation of democracy. Specifically, the "inclusive regime founding political pact and the absence of the 'regime issue' from the political agenda and party competition" led Spanish citizens across generations to evaluate the democratic regime favorably (Torcal 2007, 220). By ensuring that nearly all major political movements had a seat at the table in the negotiations for the transition, elites sought to bury the hyper-polarization of the pre-Franco period. Without this "political crafting" at the elite level, consolidation of support for democracy would not have

[15] While these moves by the Francoist regime explicitly excluded political organizations, a wide range of associations became increasingly politicized into the 1970s, suggesting a rebirth of democratic civil society in the country (Radcliff 2007; Gunther, Montero, and Botella 2004, 161-162).

occurred nearly as rapidly as it did.[16] Instrumental evaluations of the performance of democracy since that time have served to consolidate "unconditional" support for democracy such that support is no longer strongly associated with ideological or partisan preferences. As both center-left and center-right parties have gained power through elections, the traditional correlation between political predispositions and support for democracy had virtually vanished by 2000 (Torcal 2007).

According to this perspective, the comparatively low levels of active support for democratic rule in the early surveys in the 1960s and early 1970s reflected the Franco regime's strong performance (see Figure 3), and as a result, rapid attitudinal change necessarily occurred during and immediately following the transition to democracy rather than before the transition. The relatively small generational differences in support for democracy observed after the transition are taken as evidence against the pre-transition theory, since such a finding is inconsistent with the large generational differences suggested by the *values* perspective.

According to the lifetime political learning model advanced here, however, both the pre-transition and post-transition theses should help explain the evolution of support for democracy in the country. The dramatic societal changes in the 1960s and 1970s did fundamentally change the degree to which the Spanish political environment fostered pro-democratic attitudes. On the other hand, the inclusive characteristics of the transition and the actual performance of the subsequent democratic regime also likely shaped the extent to which post-transition political contexts fostered commitment to democracy. Declines in support for democracy during the *desencanto* (disenchantment) period in the early 1980s and subsequent increases following the first election of the left (1982) and the right (1996) support the argument that instrumental evaluations of the performance of democratic regimes also matter. Finally, according to the lifetime learning model, the relatively small and narrowing differences between generations do not discredit the role of the

[16] Implicitly, this argument suggests that even if a democratic regime had emerged and persisted in the absence of an inclusive political pact, support for democracy in Spain would not be nearly as robust.

"critical formative years" so much as show the importance of learning over the entire lifetime.

In sum, the pre-transition thesis suggests that the contexts became strongly pro-democratic after 1960, the post-transition thesis implies a sharp change during the transition period (1976-1978) and some variation thereafter, and the lifetime learning model represents a compromise between the two. We can generate predictions about the evolution of democratic attitudes in Spain for each model by inputting the hypotheses about the nature of the political contexts over time along with the varying distributions of weights into Equation 1, thereby weighting the information from the political contexts according to the age at which individuals experience them. Figure 4 (a-c) plots the predicted support for democracy for individuals born in 1930, 1950, and 1970 according to each of the theories from age 15 until the year 2000.

<figure 4>

As shown in Figure 4(a), the pre-transition thesis, which highlights the importance of early socialization experiences, predicts significant and stable generational differences, particularly between the individual born in 1930 on the one hand and the two younger individuals. In contrast, the post-transition thesis, which suggests that individuals should always be open to change from information from the political context, predicts virtually imperceptible differences between the three individuals and a tight correspondence between information from the changing political contexts and support for democracy. Unsurprisingly, the lifetime learning model predicts levels of democratic commitment in between those predicted by the other models. Generational differences are apparent, but they are substantially smaller and narrow over time as the three cohorts share similar political contexts in the last few decades of the century. In the next section, I test these competing predictions using survey data collected from just after the transition to democracy until 2010.

Data

The Spanish data comes from 47 national probability samples conducted between 1979 and 2010 by the Center for Sociological Research (CIS), including the LatinBarometer series conducted by CIS from 1996-2010. This rich data source includes over 120,000 respondents born from 1900 onward. Although it would have been preferable to include data from before 1979, such data is not available at the individual level.[17] Appendix A provides more detailed information about the data, including the distribution of the data across time and cohorts as well as a discussion of measurement issues related to mostly small differences in question wording.

To measure commitment to democracy, I principally employ the following survey question asked in nearly every survey from 1980-2010:

> Now we're going to talk about distinct types of political regimes. I would like for you to tell me which of the following phrases you agree with most.
>
> - Democracy is preferable to all other forms of government
> - In some circumstances an authoritarian regime, a dictatorship, can be preferable to a democratic system
> - For people like me, it does not matter whether a government is one regime or another

Given the fact that it is unclear whether respondents choosing the indifferent response option (option 3) are any more or less committed to democracy than respondents choosing the second option, I follow Torcal's (2008) practice of dichotomizing the variable so that those respondents choosing the first option are coded as 1 and all others, including don't knows but excluding refusals, are coded as 0. Given the sparsity of data during the period immediately following the transition (1979-1984), to supplement the analysis, I also included data from a different, but arguably comparable, question displayed in Figure 1 that asks respondents about their preference for elected

[17] Personal communication with CIS. Although aggregate level data is available before this period, data collected before the transition is both sparse and likely to be biased due to social desirability pressures inherent to questions about regimes asked in the context of an authoritarian regime.

leaders or an appointed leader.[18]

The model specifies that different political subgroups are likely to interpret the political environment differently with respect to the information it provides about the desirability of democracy. In Spain, perhaps the most important distinguishing factor for the regime question has been ideology. Although the relationship between ideology and democratic support has lessened in recent years (Torcal 2007), those on the right have tended to be less supportive of democracy then the left, reflecting the Republican versus Nationalist divide from the Spanish Civil War. Those on the right are likely to have learned different lessons from, for example, the Second Republic or the Franco regime than those on the left. To capture these group-based distinctions, I created three dummy variables indicating whether the respondent identified with the political left, right, or center. If we make the plausible assumption that ideological identification is relatively stable throughout the life cycle (e.g. Krosnick 1991; McDonough, Barnes, and López Pina 1998, 137-138), then these variables should roughly distinguish how individuals experience and interpret changing political contexts over their lifetimes.

As a rough proxy for political sophistication, I employ the respondent's level of formal education. I code the low sophistication dummy variable as 1 for those with only primary schooling or less (zero otherwise), moderate sophistication as 1 if the respondent has gone beyond primary education but less than post-secondary education, and high sophistication as 1 for those with post-secondary education. As I discuss below, political sophistication enters into the equation as a moderating variable for the estimated weights.

Since education is also probably the best predictor of democratic support in the literature, I also included a four-point education variable (less than primary, primary, secondary, postsecondary)

[18] The inclusion of data from this alternatively worded question does not fundamentally change the conclusions of the analysis, although it does help stabilize the estimates, particularly for the political context estimates from the earliest part of the century and the early 1980s.

as an additive individual-level predictor in the model. Including education as a control variable is important since educational attainment is correlated with age/birth cohort and since it is likely to have an effect independent of its moderating impact on the weights. The education variable is centered such that those who have completed primary education (the median and modal category) are coded 0. As additional controls, I also include gender (female=1, male=0), a dummy variable indicating if the respondents responded to the alternative democratic support question, and a dummy variable indicating if respondent received the slightly altered LatinBarometer wording.

Statistical Model

In order to estimate the model stipulated in Equation 1, we need to alter the equation to include dummy variables indicating the age at which the individual experienced each given context x_t as well as membership in theoretically relevant socio-political subgroups and levels of political sophistication. More formally, we can modify Equation 1 to include a series of dummy variables (a_{ct}) corresponding to the age at which members of a given birth cohort experienced each political context:

$$y_{iT} = \frac{\sum_{c}^{T} a_{ct} * w_a * x_t}{\sum_{c}^{T} a_{ct} * w_a} + u_i \qquad (2)$$

The inclusion of these dummy variables ensures that the equation reflects an average of the political contexts experienced by each birth cohort weighted by the age at which members of the cohort experience them. For example, for a respondent born in 1942, the variable $a_{22,1964}$ would be 1, while for all other respondents (whether they were alive in 1964 or not) the value of the variable would be 0, since at period 1964, members of the 1942 cohort were age 22. Thus, the principal independent variables included in the baseline model are the birth-cohort specific series of dummy variables a_{ct}, ranging from the birth year of the first cohort in the sample to the last surveyed year, including a dummy variable for each age group in each year. Specified in this fashion, the model can estimate

not only the degree to which each yearly political context is conducive to democratic commitment (the x_t's), but also at what periods in the life cycle individuals are most receptive to information from the political environment (the w_a's). In other words, neither the political contexts nor the weights need to be set by assumption; we can estimate each series of parameters directly.

The baseline model is complicated by the hypotheses that (1) the degree to which political contexts impart pro-democratic information varies by socio-political subgroups and that (2) the extent to which individuals integrate information from the political contexts they experience also varies by levels of political sophistication. For the first hypothesis, this entails including dummy variables indicating membership in a given subgroup along with new parameters providing estimates of the political context for each subgroup. In the Spanish case, the relevant subgroups of interest are ideological, with the expectation that those on the left, center, and right essentially learned different lessons from the political contexts in Spanish history. Thus, each estimated political context in the baseline model changes such that the model estimates three contexts for every year instead of one:

$$x_t = left_i * lx_t + center_i * cx_t + right_i * rx_t \quad (3)$$

In Equation 3, $left_i$, $center_i$, and $center_i$ are the dummy variables representing membership in the left, center, and right of the ideological spectrum. The other terms are parameters to be estimated that indicate the size and direction of the political context in year t for each ideological group.

A similar change is necessary in order to account for the hypothesized difference in weights by levels of political sophistication. Instead of estimating a single weight for each age group, we must estimate weights by age and level of sophistication:

$$w_a = lowS * lw_a + mod\,S * mw_a + highS * hw_a \quad (4)$$

Thus, we estimate three weights for each age corresponding to low (lw_a), moderate (mw_a), and high

(hw_a) political sophistication. To do so, we simply multiply the sophistication parameters by three dummy variables indicating the respondent's level of sophistication.

Substituting Equations 3-4 into 5, the final equation becomes the following[19]:

$$y_{iT} = \frac{\sum_{c}^{T} a_{ct} * (lowS * lw_a + mod\,S * mw_a + highS * hw_a) * (left_i * lx_t + center_i * cx_t + right_i * rx_t)}{\sum_{c}^{T} a_{ct} * (lowS * lw_a + mod\,S * mw_a + highS * hw_a)} + u_i \quad (5)$$

Estimation

Estimating the baseline model and the subsequent complications is difficult due to the number of parameters involved and the fact that it is a nonlinear equation. To reduce this complexity, I define birth cohorts, age weights, and political contexts in two-year increments instead of one-year increments. Without this reduction, the baseline model alone would require the estimation of 90 weights (ages 0-89) and 110 political contexts (1900-2010). The more complicated model specified in Equation 5 would require the estimation of 330 political contexts (110 years*3 political subgroups) and 270 weights (90 years X 3 levels of political sophistication). By defining birth cohorts, age weights, and political contexts in two-year intervals, the number of estimated parameters becomes more manageable although still relatively large (45, 55, 135, and 165, respectively). Second, by defining periods in two-year increments (i.e., pooling data every two years), we are able to average out transient changes in the observed data that are largely due to sampling variability, differences in question order, and other short term disturbances that obscure the underlying distribution of support for democracy at a given point in time. Specified in this way, each two-year birth cohort between 1916 and 1986 has at least 1,000 respondents, with 68 to 976 respondents representing cohorts outside of this range (1900-1914, 1988-1994). This distribution

[19] The additive predictors (education, gender, question wording dummy variables) are not shown in Equation 5, but they enter in linearly following the weighted average and decrease the residual variance captured by u_i.

results in over 1500 dummy variables (i.e. a_{ct}) indicating the age of each birth cohort (0-88) at each given year (1900-2010) since birth.

Since the dependent variable is dichotomous and the equations are nonlinear in the parameters, I estimated the equations as generalized nonlinear models with logistic links using SAS's PROC NLMIXED procedure, which estimates the model using an iterative maximum likelihood procedure. Following Bartels (2001), to simplify the estimation I reduced the model to two simpler nonlinear models. First, to estimate the baseline model, I set all weights to equal 1 and estimated the political contexts. Second, I set the political contexts equal to the estimates from the first step and estimated the weights. I then iterated back and forth between these two models, taking the estimates from the previous step as given. Although I arbitrarily stopped estimation after 10 iterations, by this point improvements in the goodness of fit level off and the parameter estimates are unlikely to change very much with further iterations. Given the number of parameters required for the ideology and sophistication models, I estimated the ideological group-based political contexts using the standard specification of the weights (i.e. no variation by sophistication) and vice versa for estimation of the sophistication-based weights. For each of these models, I started the estimation using the final estimates from the baseline model before conducting 10 additional iterations for each model.

Finally, since weights appear in both the numerator and denominator, their absolute scale is indeterminate. To identify the model, I fixed the weight associated with age 18-19 to 1. Thus, all weights are relative to the 18 to 19-year-old weight. Since there is no constant in the model, the political contexts estimates for each two year increment reflect estimates for respondents for which all of the control variables are 0 (i.e. males with primary schooling responding to the baseline question wording). Since the model employs a logistic link function, the estimates for the degree to which political contexts provide pro- or anti-democratic information are expressed in logits.

Results

When are individuals most receptive to the influence of information from the political environment? Do individuals weight the political contexts experienced during their critical formative years more than more recent contexts, or do individuals learn both during youth and adulthood? Figure 5 plots the estimated weights from the baseline model along with 95 percent confidence intervals.[20] I have also included a locally weighted regression line (LOWESS) to provide a better sense of how weights shift over the lifespan.[21] As the LOWESS line demonstrates, the model suggests that learning about democracy best fits the lifetime learning model. There is a clear mode during the critical formative years (18-21) followed by incrementally increasing weights after the late 20s and continuing through age 80-81. The large weight at age 18-19 is not surpassed until the late 50s, suggesting that what citizens learned during the transition from youth to young adulthood remains important for much of their lifetimes. However, since the weights steadily increase after the trough in the late 20s, new contexts still have a potential to impact attitudes beyond this point.

Finally, one unanticipated finding is the mode occurring during the 0-4 age range. Although at first it might seem implausible that events happening during infancy and young childhood should impact learning more than late childhood and the early teen years, I argue that this finding probably reflects the importance of parental socialization. Since children tend to be born when their parents are in their early to mid 20s, the heightened weights during this period probably reflect the learning of their parents during this period, who then impart their attitudes to their children.[22]

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[20] Although weights are estimated up until age 88-89, the low number of respondents above age 80 means that these estimates are very uncertain and provide little useful information. As a result, I exclude these estimates from the figures.

[21] The LOWESS line is implemented using running mean smoothing with a bandwidth of 0.135. This bandwidth ensures that the line is fairly sensitive to changes in the estimates, as each takes into account no more than 13.5 percent of the data, or approximately three weight estimates (6 years).

[22] The estimates for the other independent variables follow expectations. Education is positively associated with democratic support (0.471, s.e.=0.009), as are the dummy variables for the alternate question used in 1979 and 1982 (0.2613, s.e.=0.017) and the LatinBarometer survey (0.130, s.e.=0.018). Gender (i.e. female high) is negatively related

<Figure 5>

Examining the incremental effects of successive political contexts on support for democracy as well as the proportion of total learning occurring in youth further illuminates the power of both early learning and learning later in the lifecycle. The blue line in Figure 6 plots the incremental impacts of changing political contexts over the lifetime, starting at age 18. As expected, political contexts during the earliest period (18-21) have the greatest impact, while the marginal impact of later contexts decline and largely level off at about half the value seen during the transition from youth to young adulthood. Since the decline is slight, however, political contexts after the late 20s have nearly equal capacity to alter attitudes, suggesting that attitudinal change should be greatest during the critical formative period relative to other periods, but that after this point there should be very few differences by age.

<Figure 6>

The red line in Figure 6 (right axis) shows the persistent importance of learning during youth over the lifetime. It plots the sum of learning (i.e., the weights) occurring prior to age 26 as a proportion of total learning at each age increment. Learning during youth accounts for over half of respondents' support for democracy until approximately age 50. In other words, the first 25 years of a person's lifetime is as important as the next 25 for her attitudes at age 50. Continued learning beyond young adulthood results in a steadily declining importance of learning during youth such that by age 80-81, early learning accounts for a quarter of all learning relevant to a person's democratic commitment. Although this statistic certainly represents a decline, the capacity of learning during youth to maintain such an influence *over 55 years later* is quite remarkable and suggests that a pure lifetime openness model does not represent how individuals form their regime preferences.

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to support for democracy (-0.264, s.e.=0.011). Estimates for these parameters remain relatively stable across the different estimations of the model.

<Figure 7>

The model also hypothesizes that in addition to age, weights should be conditional on the political sophistication of the respondent, as the most sophisticated individuals should be most capable of resisting new information that is incongruent with their prior predispositions. Allowing the weights to vary by political sophistication confirms this intuition as suggested in Figure 7, which plots the LOWESS smoothed values of the weights across age by level of political sophistication. While each group demonstrates a fairly similar pattern during childhood and youth, after this point the weights for the most sophisticated are notably smaller than those of moderately sophisticated and especially the least sophisticated. While the distribution of weights for the most sophisticated reflect more of an early persistence model, less sophisticated respondents appear to follow a model somewhat closer to the lifetime openness model. The consequence of these different weight distributions is that early learning has a much greater influence on attitudes over the lifetime for the most sophisticated than for those with moderate to low sophistication. Indeed, learning prior to age 26 represents over 50 percent of total learning until approximately age 70 for the most sophisticated respondents, while the 50 percent benchmark is crossed in the mid-40s for those with lower levels of sophistication. In contrast, by the mid-40s, early learning still accounts for over 85 percent of total learning for the most sophisticated respondents.

When did the political contexts shift to a pro-democratic direction? The estimated degree to which political contexts provided pro-democratic information over time helps confirm the broad plausibility of the estimated weights and illuminates the temporal period during which today's high level of democratic support took root in Spain. Figure 8 displays the political context estimates with 95 percent confidence intervals and a LOWESS mean smoothed line for reference.[23] As expected, our confidence in the estimates are negatively related to the year such that the estimated political

[23] Like the LOWESS line used for the display of the weights, I used a bandwidth (0.11) that is fairly sensitive to changing estimates and ensures that smoothed estimates are based on approximately three estimates (6 years).

contexts during the first several decades are fairly uncertain, while estimates in the last third of the century are fairly precise. With that caveat in mind, the estimates broadly follow changes in Spanish political history. The estimates suggest that the first two decades of limited pluralism in the 20th Century actually provided relatively anti-democratic political information. However, experience with the Primo de Rivera dictatorship (1923-1930) actually bolstered support for democracy and coincided with the establishment of the Second Republic. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly at first, the Republican period actually saw a reversal in the direction of the estimated political contexts. Instead of fostering pro-democratic attitudes, this period actually left a profoundly negative impact on attitudes toward democracy, reflecting the chaos and political maximalism of the period. The Civil War period (1936-1939) and the first two decades of the Franco dictatorship (1939-1959) provided fairly ambiguous signals about the desirability of democratic rule, suggesting a political environment which fostered neither strong support for democracy *nor* for dictatorship.

In keeping with the expectations of the pre-transition school, an abrupt shift in the political contexts occurred during the 1960s. The political environment went from one that fostered ambiguous attitudes toward regimes to one that was strongly supportive of democratic rule. This strongly democratic atmosphere persisted through the early to mid-1970s, with only a slight decline during the transition in the late 1970s. While democratic attitudes were certainly nurtured during the transition period, the estimates underscore the profound importance of the changes occurring in the 1960s in the formation of strong support for democracy after the transition occurred.

The post transition period also saw notable changes in the political context that help explain how approximately 90 percent of Spaniards had come to support democracy by the turn of the century. The economic crisis and period of disenchantment (*desencanto*) following the successful transition in the late 1970s produced a large negative shock to the system in 1980, but this period effect was fortunately short-lived. Following the defeat of military coup plots in 1981 and the

election of first Socialist government in 1982, the context again became increasingly favorable to democracy, albeit slightly reduced during the period of economic weakness in the early 1990s. The largest estimated pro-democratic context coincided with economic revitalization of the mid-to-late 1990s and the first electoral success of the right (PP) since the transition to democracy. The importance of these changes in consolidating support for democracy coincides with Torcal's (2007, 2008) argument that instrumental evaluations of the political outputs of the democratic regime were key to consolidating support for democracy by 2000.

However, Torcal's conclusion that support for democracy in Spain has become unconditional on performance or other political factors appears premature and reflects the fact that his analysis stopped with data from 2002. The strongly positive evaluations of the political system were at their peak in the late 1990s, but the contexts changed swiftly at the turn of the century. The downward shift was particularly large in the 2004-2005 period, which saw both the terrorist attacks on the Madrid transit system and the election of PSOE's José Luiz Zapatero as President of Government. While the political context recovered somewhat from its low in 2004, the estimate for the 2010 political context suggests that the economic crisis beginning in 2008 has the potential to erode support for democracy even further from its turn-of-the-century peak.

While these political context estimates are illuminating, ultimately they reflect changes in the average degree to which the political environment fostered democratic support. These average estimates likely obscures significant variation in the lessons learned from the political world by different groups, and in the Spanish case, different ideological groups in particular. Reestimating the model to allow the political contexts to vary by ideological group (left, right, and center) suggests that while members of these different groups did learn somewhat different lessons from the same political contexts over time, what is perhaps equally clear is the degree to which the estimates across groups moved together. Figure 9 plots the LOWESS mean smoothed estimates of the

political contexts by ideology starting in 1940 (the uncertainty before this point precludes useful analysis of prior estimates).

While those on the left have consistently learned more democratic lessons from the political environment over time than moderates and particularly those on the right, the differences are not that large from a statistical standpoint, and the fluctuations in the nature of the political contexts consistently move in the same direction. However, the figure clearly shows how important the changes of the 1960s and the election of the first center-right government since the transition in 1996 were for democratic attitudes for those on the right and in the center. Similarly, the consistency of the pro-democratic nature of the political contexts estimates for the left relative to the other two groups suggests that the latter have tended to be much more sensitive to the changing performance of the democratic system then the former. In sum, we can conclude that there were both more universal and group specific aspects of learning from the political contexts occurring over Spanish history in the 20th Century, in keeping with the theoretical framework.

Model Predictions

With the estimates from the models reported in the last section, we can make predictions about how support for democracy has formed and changed across Spanish history, both at the birth cohort and at the aggregate levels. By analyzing these predictions, we can evaluate the performance of the model, discuss possible model drawbacks, and critically examine the competing arguments about the evolution of democratic support in Spain.

Before we make these assessments, we should acknowledge several important inferential difficulties in comparing the model's predictions with the scattered survey data from the pre-transition period (see Figure 3). First, the wording for questions on the regime differed before and after democratization, making the comparison not as clear as we would like. Second, the pre-

transition surveys likely significantly understate support for democracy due to social desirability pressures (i.e. fear of openly contradicting the incumbent regime) and the one-sided nature of elite discourse (Reilly and Zigerell 2012; Pina and Aranguren 1976, 92 Zhu 1996).[24] Third, on the other hand, to the extent that there is a similar and opposite bias under democratic rule, the predicted probability of democratic support during dictatorship is also likely to be biased upward. In other words, the model's predicted probabilities reflect the survey-taking context existing under democracy; that is, one in which freedom of expression reigned and elite discourse was weighted heavily in the pro-democratic direction. Together, these considerations suggest that the actual level of democratic support during the pre-democratic period was somewhere between the estimates from the observed data and the predicted probabilities implied by the model.

<Figure 10>

With these caveats in mind, Figure 10 plots the predicted probability of support for democracy by 10-year birth cohorts from the early 1920s until 2010 using estimates from the baseline model.[25] The predictions imply that the probability that those born before 1920 would support democracy would not surpass 50 percent until the mid 1960s, although support was steadily increasing among members of these cohorts during the first half of the century. Those coming of age in the 1950s were largely ambivalent to democracy and dictatorship, while the predicted probabilities for those born between 1940 and 1970 (similar to the "liberalization" and "transition"

[24] Although the fear of expressing one's underlying predispositions was perhaps lower in Spain than in other authoritarian or totalitarian regimes due to the *relatively* low usage of secret police and informants for political control, the pressure was nonetheless real. During the first two decades of his rule, Franco actively sought to depoliticize the population, and even after economic liberalization in the 1960s, controls on press freedom as well as political speech and activities remained significant. The 1970s saw renewed crackdowns on opposition and civil society activity, particularly in the wake of the assassination of Francoist President of Government Luis Carrero Blanco in 1973. Reflecting this reality, the Instituto de Opinion Publica, which conducted the 1966 and 1976 surveys reported in Figure 3, omitted responses to the regime question from its published results (López Pintor 1980, 13).

[25] The estimates reflect a simple average of the predicted probabilities of all 5 two-year birth cohorts within each 10-year cohort. Using 10-year birth cohorts helps simplify the presentation and smoothes out noise in the predictions based on two-year birth cohort parameters. The predicted probabilities are based on setting all other independent variables to zero, meaning that the probabilities reflect those for men with primary education answering the standard democratic support question.

cohorts in Torcal's analysis (2007, 2008)) reflect very strong support for democracy. As a result of the strongly pro-democratic contexts in the 1960s and 1970s, these cohorts have demonstrated the highest levels of support for democracy after the transition. The slightly less pro-democratic contexts experienced by the youngest cohorts (i.e. the generation of democracy) have resulted in somewhat lower support for democracy, particularly among those born after 1979.

Although the second panel of Figure 10 emphasizes the continuing birth cohort differences in support for democracy by focusing on only the post-transition period, what is perhaps most remarkable about the predictions in the first panel is the convergence of attitudes during the last several decades. While large generational differences were the norm before this period, the political environment under democracy has significantly reduced them. A large part of this change has occurred as a result of attitudinal "catch-up" by the older cohorts through the late 1980s and 1990s, reflecting the importance of the lifetime learning process and perhaps the "instrumental" evaluations of legitimacy highlighted by Torcal. However, not an insignificant part of this convergence can be attributed to declining support for democracy among mid-century cohorts and lower levels of democratic commitment emerging among the post-1970 cohorts, especially after 2000. While this lower level of support among the youngest generations is on its face troubling, greater levels of education among these younger cohorts means that these trends have not translated in to as large of drops in aggregate support for democracy as implied by Figure 10.

<Figure 11>

We can also evaluate the model in terms of its aggregate level predictions relative to (1) the actual data and (2) to aggregate survey responses from surveys conducted prior to 1979. The dotted line in Figure 11 plots the aggregate level predictions of the model (in terms of predicted probabilities) based on the proportion of respondents in each two-year birth cohort in each two-year period. The solid line plots the mean level of democratic support over the same period (1966-

2010).[26] The model does a very good job accounting for changes in commitment to democracy from about mid-1976 onward, and particularly during the period for which we have individual-level data (1979-2010). Over this period, the average absolute error in the predicted probabilities is less than 2 percentage points, and there appears to be little evidence that the model consistently over or under predicts support for democracy. As I alluded earlier, evaluating the much larger divergence between the predicted probabilities and the observed data from the pre-transition period is more difficult. According to the model, in 1966 approximately 66 percent of Spaniards would have supported democracy, in comparison to only 35 percent who actively choose the democratic option in the survey actually conducted that year (over 54 percent did not respond to the question). Similarly, in 1974, the model predicts that approximately 78 percent of respondents would have supported democracy, while only 60 percent selected representation by elected representatives over rule by an appointed man. Given the very different contexts under which the pre-transition surveys occurred, what the model really is suggesting is that if the survey context was the same in the pre-transition period as it was in the post-transition period—*i.e., characterized by freedom of expression and a pro-democratic bent in elite discourse*—then support would have surpassed 65 percent in the country as early as the mid-1960s. In other words, if a transition to democracy had occurred in the early 1960s instead of the 1970s and the estimated political contexts remained otherwise consistent, then support would have been as high then as it would be in 1980.

Of course, ultimately we cannot directly evaluate this counterfactual. However, even if the actual level of support for democracy in the late-Franco period is somewhere between the model's

[26] While these predictions are fairly straightforward for the post-1978 period, we have to make a few minor assumptions to compute predicted probabilities for the pre-1979 period. First, I use the age distribution from the first survey in the model (1979) to extrapolate the cohort distributions back to 1966, the first year in which we have comparable aggregate level survey data on democratic preferences. Second, since the pre-1979 surveys included respondents born prior to 1900, we cannot actually estimate the predicted probability of democratic support for these respondents since we do not have political context estimates prior to 1900. Instead, I set the predicted democratic support for the pre-1900 birth cohorts to the 1900 cohort predicted probability, with the assumption that their level of democratic support would not be any greater than that of the 1900 cohort.

estimates and the observed aggregate survey estimates, the model still suggests that the roots of strong democratic support in democratic Spain emerged prior to the actual transition. The strongly pro-democratic estimates of the political contexts in this period are reflected by the fact that respondents born between 1940 and 1969 have evidenced the highest levels of support for democracy throughout the post-transition period. In addition to the relatively pro-democratic contexts of the late 1980s and late 1990s, the increasing size of these cohorts relative to the pre-1940 cohorts has been one of the key reasons for the steady rise in support for democracy in the country over this period. The plateau and slow decline in support since 2000 reflects not only less-democratic political contexts, but also the fact that the proportion of the samples made up by the 1940-1968 cohorts has begun to decline in favor of younger cohorts. Together, this evidence underlines the profound importance of the pre-transition period for the formation of democratic commitment in the country, even if it is ultimately impossible to know exactly how much support there was in the late Franco period.

While this evidence provides support for the pre-transition thesis, it should not be taken to suggest that how the transition progressed and democracy performed after the transition have not been important for the consolidation of democratic attitudes in Spain. Nor does the evidence imply anything about the inevitability or not of the democratic transition itself. Indeed, had elites chosen a less inclusive path, the transition might not have even occurred, and if it had, the political contexts during the late 1970s could have been much less pro-democratic in content. The *desencanto* period in the early 1980s may have been much more severe and led to significantly lower support for democracy thereafter. Further, regime performance after this point (at least until 2000-2001) has been important for the slow but steady rise in democratic commitment in Spain, in keeping with Torcal's emphasis on the instrumental evaluations of regime performance. Consequently, the rise of democratic commitment in Spain has been a process that largely started in the 1960s, but it did not

stop at the transition. Finally, although higher levels of education among younger cohorts helps to limit the negative impact of the most recent years on democratic attitudes, the possibility of persistently poor political contexts in the coming decade due to the ongoing economic crisis in Spain suggests a possibility for greater ambivalence to democratic institutions in the years to come. Consequently, the political context estimates suggest that factors from both the *values* and *performance* perspectives help explain how and when support for democracy has evolved in Spain. Along with the estimated weights, the results underline the profound importance of learning over the entire lifetime in response to values socialization and performance evaluations.

Discussion

Beyond the Spanish case, the model proposed in this paper has the potential to provide a strong contribution to the literature on democratic attitudes due to its incorporation of macro-level contextual variables into a micro-level political learning process. Instead of separating out country-level contextual effects from individual level "micro social" effects (e.g. Salinas and Booth 2011; Mattes and Bratton 2007), the model offers an integrated framework for explaining why countries are different in the aggregate as well as why citizens within countries vary in their regime predispositions. Further, although existing studies have prioritized explanations based on causally proximate attitudes, the model gives more weight toward more distal explanations of democratic commitment, thereby moving the analysis further back in the causal sequence.

The results of the statistical analysis of the Spanish data provide strong support for the proposed lifetime learning model, and in particular the weights component of the model, which indicate that individuals are receptive to new information about regimes not only during their critical formative years, but also well into adulthood. Further, the findings help to resolve an ongoing debate about when super-majority support for democracy among Spanish citizens came to

fruition. Given the ongoing economic crisis in Spain, the model predicts slowly declining support for democracy, although higher levels of education are likely to blunt the negative effects of the crisis.

The Spanish results are encouraging, but it remains an open question as to whether the model generalizes to other countries. While similarities between the political histories of Spain, Portugal, and Latin American countries are suggestive of the potential wide applicability of the weights component of the model, without more extensive cross-national assessments, our confidence in the model will remain tenuous. Further, without these tests, it will be impossible to determine whether the model actually does explain both national- and individual-level differences in support for democracy, since the analysis presented here does not test statistically which factors are most conducive to pro-democratic political contexts. Instead, it only shows *when* the political contexts in Spanish history were most conducive to democratic support. How can researchers test the model and its implications more broadly?

As I argued earlier, given the short time series of repeated cross sectional data available in the vast majority of new democracies, testing the age weights component of the model is quite difficult. However, a number of less direct tests of additional model implications should increase our confidence in the weights distribution hypothesized by the lifetime learning model. First, although long-term panel data on democratic attitudes is essentially non-existent, short-term panel data in which individuals are interviewed on multiple occasions over a few years is available from a few new democracies and should be illustrative. According to the model, attitudinal stability should be moderately high over time, reflecting the likelihood of some persistence and change in response to varying political contexts. Further, attitudinal stability should also be lowest among the young and the least politically sophisticated, while stability should be higher among older individuals and the most politically sophisticated.

Second, these implications should also be apparent at the aggregate level. Since the probability of attitudinal modification in the face of changed political contexts is largest during the earlier years of life (i.e., ages 15-25), the likelihood of attitudinal change at the aggregate level should be greater for "younger" societies. In keeping with the "youth bulge" model of the relationship between demographics and regimes (Cincotta and Doces 2011), this greater openness to change of youth should translate into greater year-to-year variance in average levels of democratic support at the national level. In contrast, countries further along in the demographic transition from high fertility to low fertility should exhibit greater year-to-year stability in mean democratic commitment because citizens in these countries are older, on average, than in "younger" countries. This relationship also implies that the more distant past should have less of an impact on younger countries than on older countries, since relatively fewer citizens in the younger countries actually experienced the political contexts occurring in more distant history, while relatively more have done so in older countries. As a result, a country's past history should have a greater impact on older individuals and in older countries than on younger people and younger countries (Salinas and Booth 2011).

One of the most important challenges to the Spanish analysis regards isolating which macro-level factors best determine whether a given political context is conducive to democratic support or more authoritarian preferences. Indeed, given the collinearity between variables such as economic modernization and international diffusion of democratic norms in the Spanish case, it is difficult to determine which specific aspects of the political context were most important for shaping the political contexts and subsequent democratic norms in the country. In order to demonstrate which factors best impact whether a political context is pro-democratic more generally, we need to engage in more extensive cross-national analysis. To do so, researchers could leverage the weights from the Spanish case and the competing theories to weight macro-level variables according to the manner in

which individuals experience them, and use these weighted variables to predict democratic support using cross-national survey data covering a shorter time period. For example, to test the impact of living under democratic regimes for individuals born in 1965 in a given country, we could compute the weighted average of the level of democracy in the country from 1965 until the year of attitudinal measurement. Researchers could further complicate these models by stipulating differing effects based on respondents' levels of political sophistication and membership in politically salient groups as well. The ultimate outcome of these tests would help illuminate which factors best help improve democratic commitment and provide guidance for NGOs, governments, and international organizations seeking to increase support for democratic governance.

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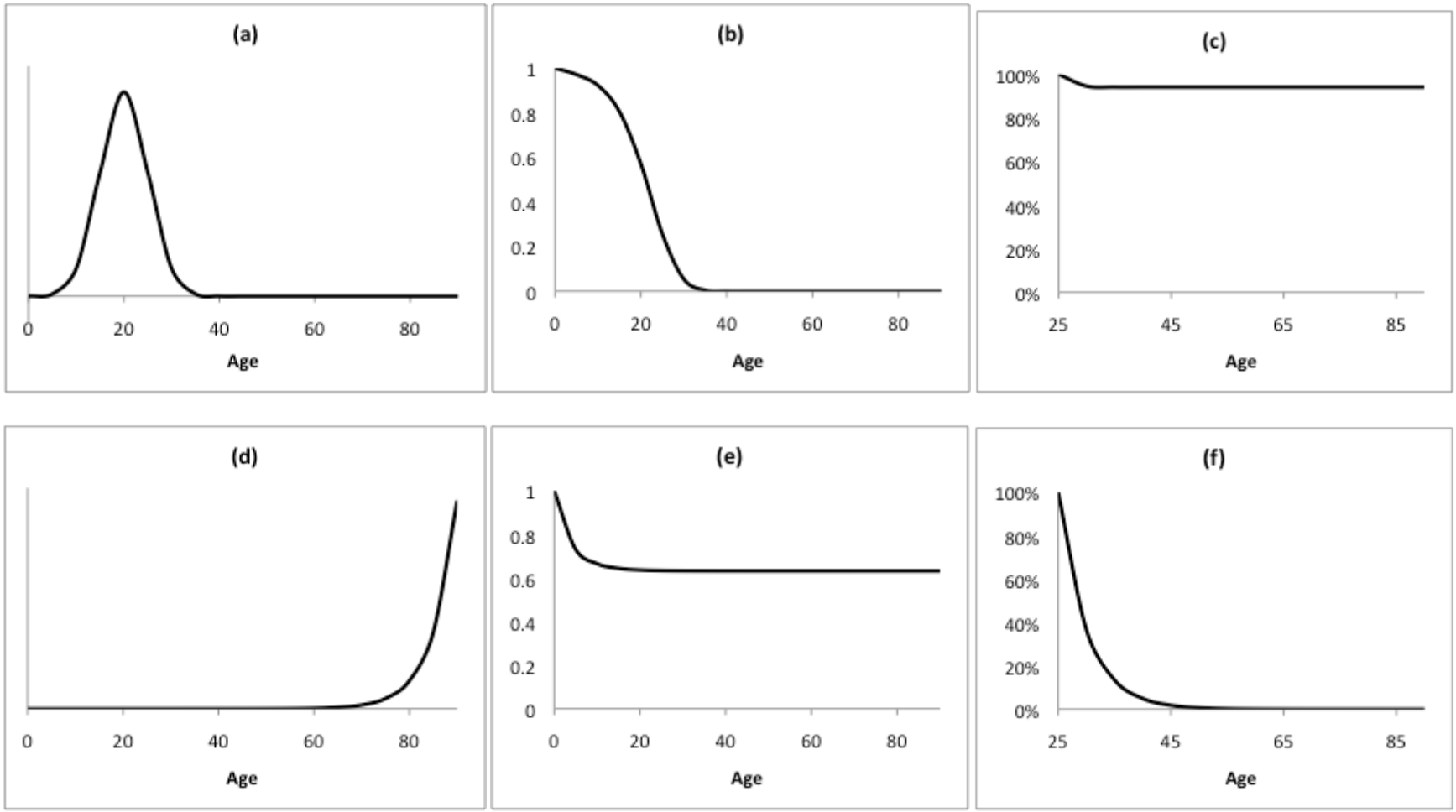
Figures

FIGURE 1: ATTRIBUTES OF WEIGHTS, EARLY PERSISTENCE AND LIFETIME OPENNESS MODELS

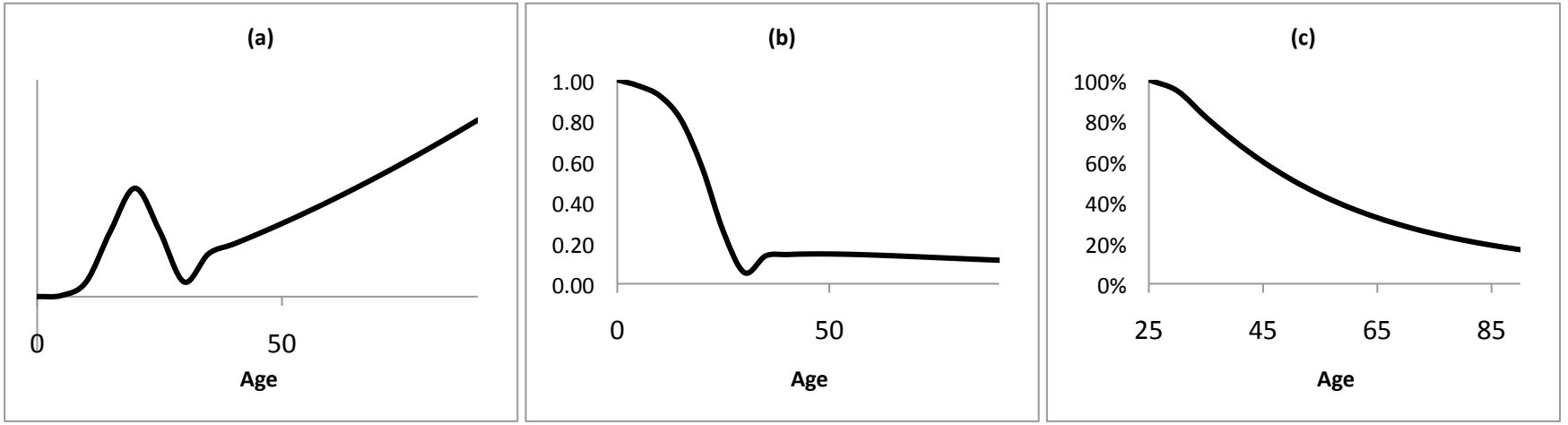


Weights (absolute values)

Incremental Impacts (degree to which political contexts can change attitudes)

Strength of Early Learning (Sum of weights from age 0-25/total sum of weights*100)

FIGURE 2: ATTRIBUTES OF WEIGHTS, LIFETIME LEARNING MODEL

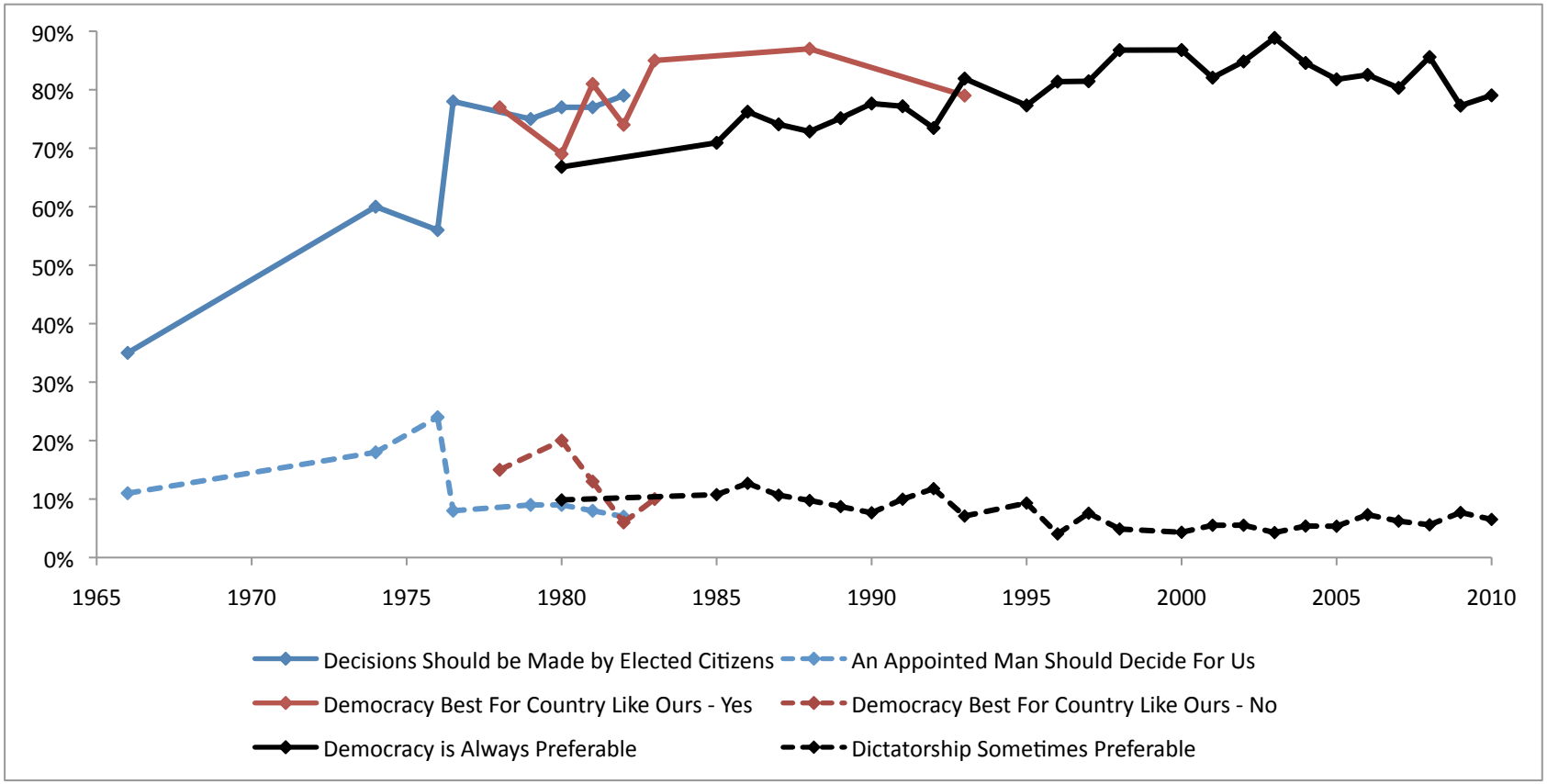


Weights (absolute values)

Incremental Impacts (degree to which political contexts can change attitudes)

Strength of Early Learning (Sum of weights from age 0-25/total sum of weights*100)

FIGURE 3: SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY AND DICTATORSHIP IN SPAIN, 1966-2010



Sources: López Pintor (1980, 13); Linz and Stepan (1996, 108); CIS Databank; Montero, Gunther, and Torcal (1997, 5-6).

FIGURE 4: MODEL PREDICTIONS, CASE OF SPAIN

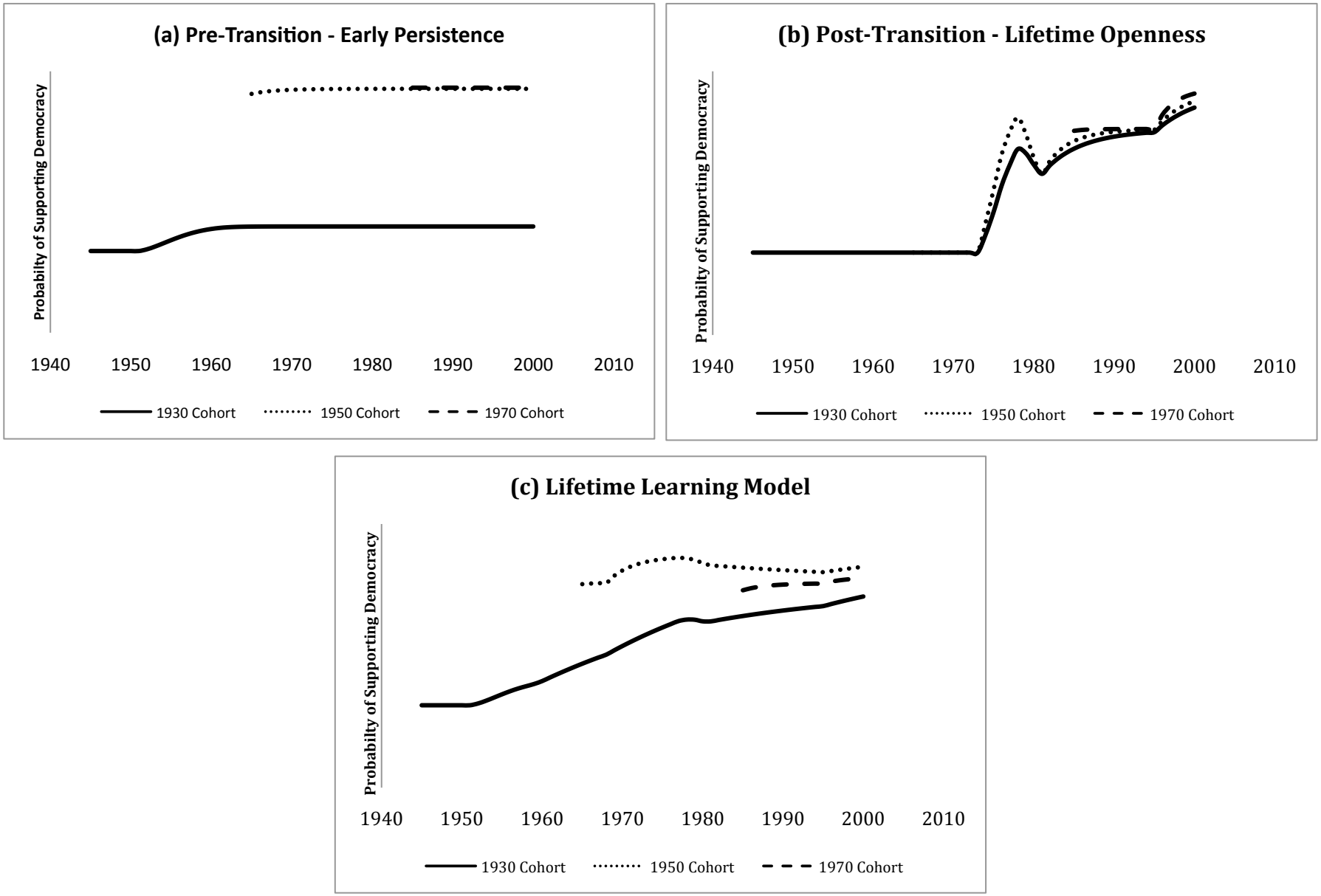


FIGURE 5: ESTIMATED WEIGHTS, BASELINE MODEL

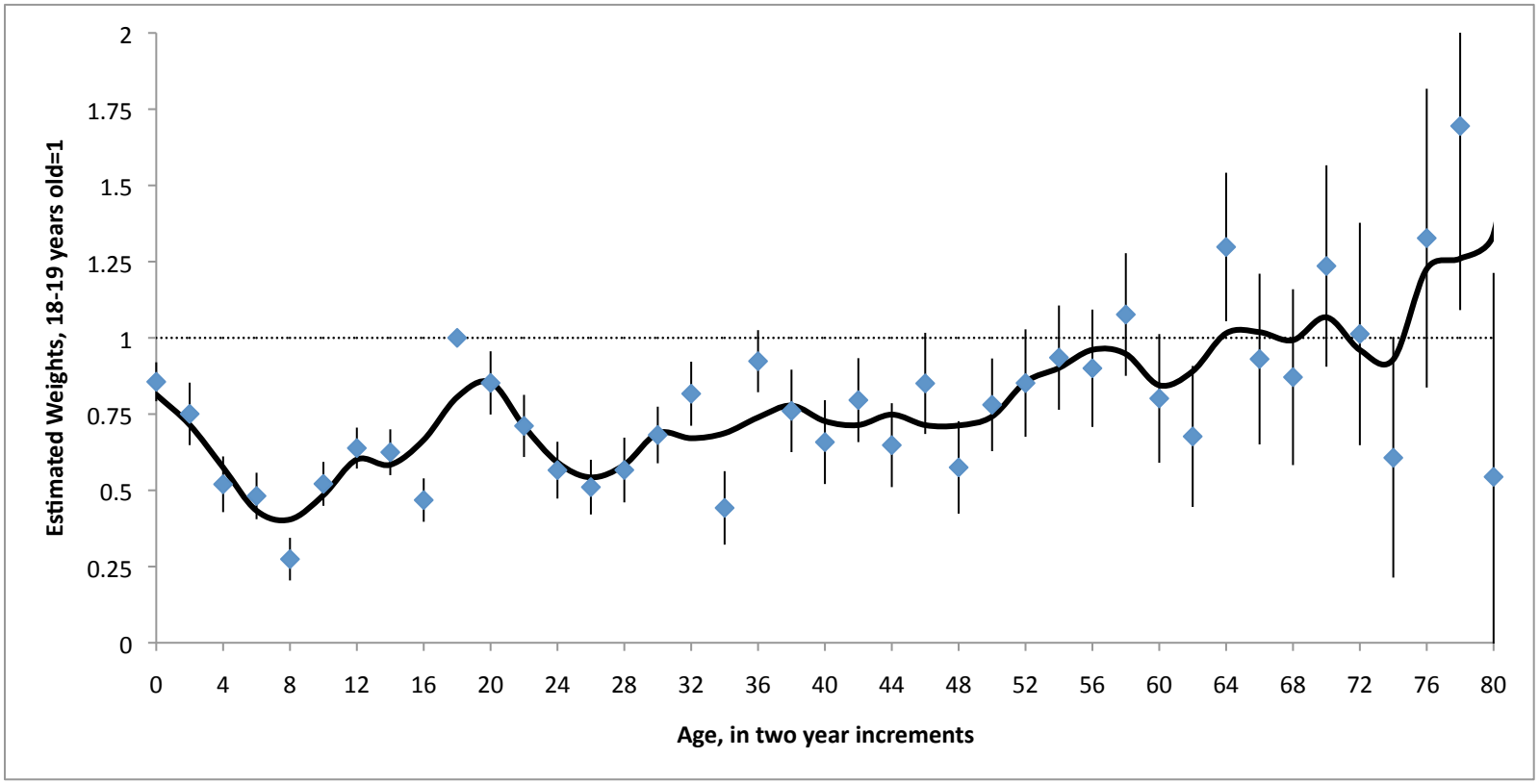


FIGURE 6: INCREMENTAL IMPACTS OF POLITICAL CONTEXTS AND PROPORTION OF TOTAL LEARNING IN YOUTH, BASELINE MODEL

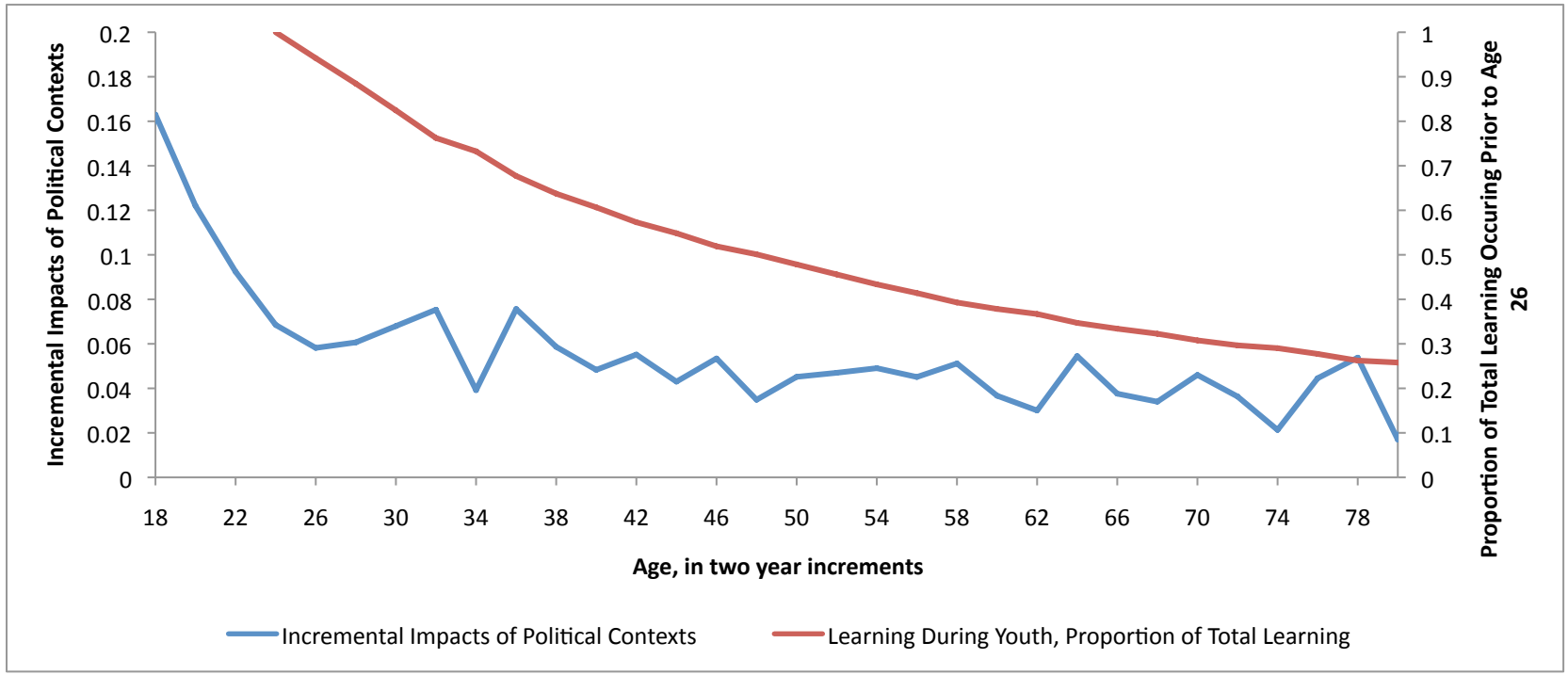


FIGURE 7: ESTIMATED WEIGHTS BY POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION, SMOOTHED VALUES

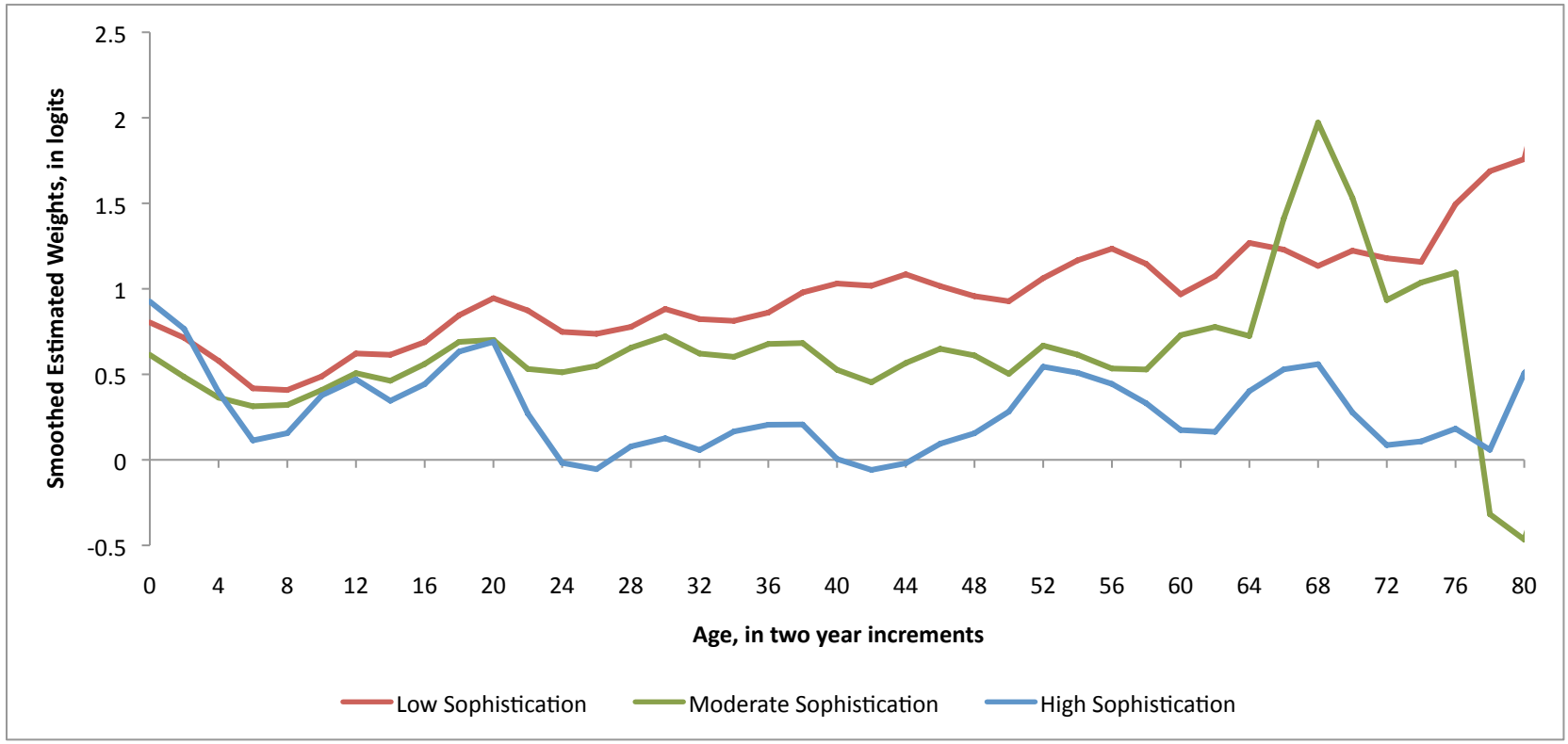


FIGURE 8: ESTIMATED POLITICAL CONTEXTS, BASELINE MODEL

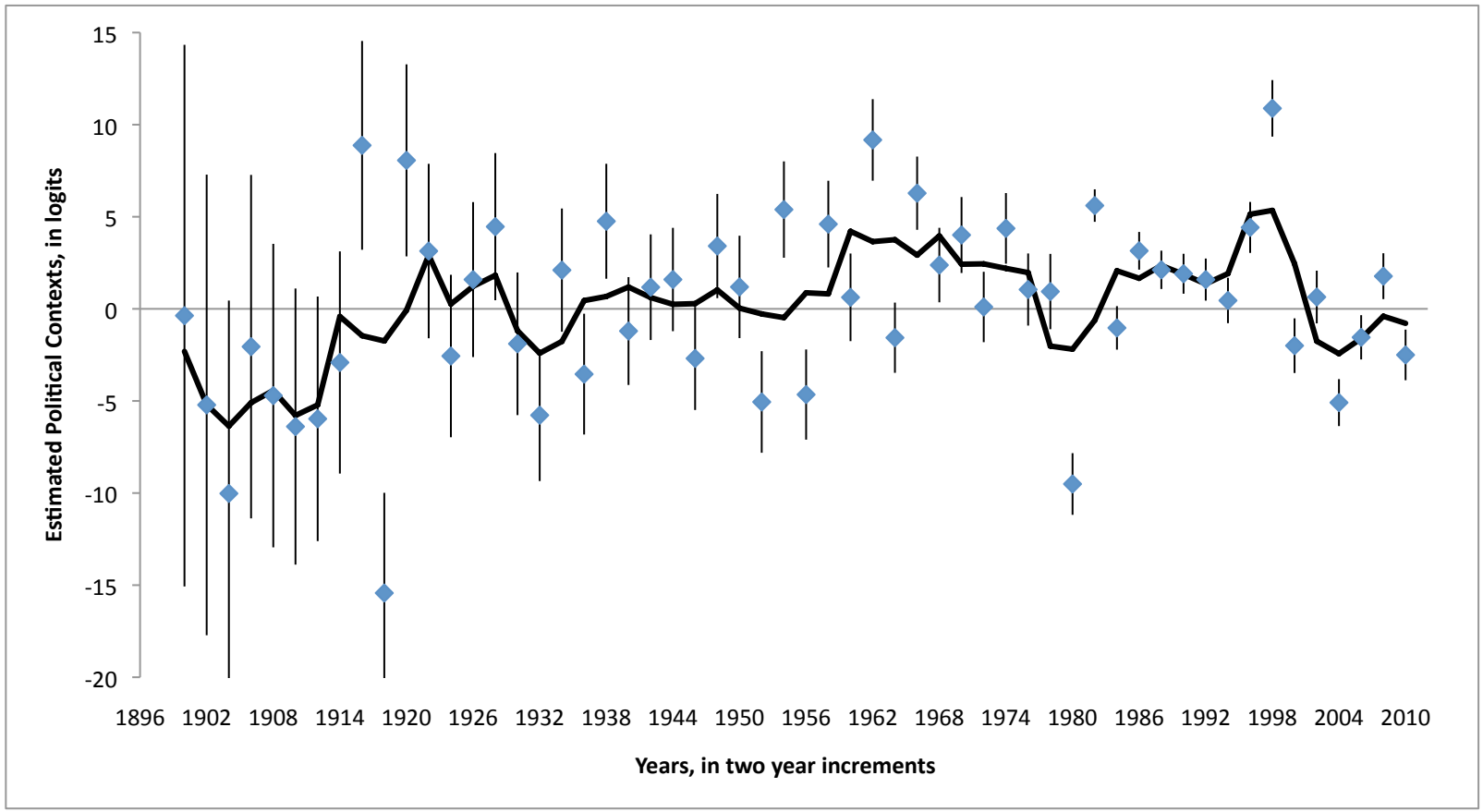


FIGURE 9: ESTIMATED POLITICAL CONTEXTS BY IDEOLOGY, SMOOTHED VALUES

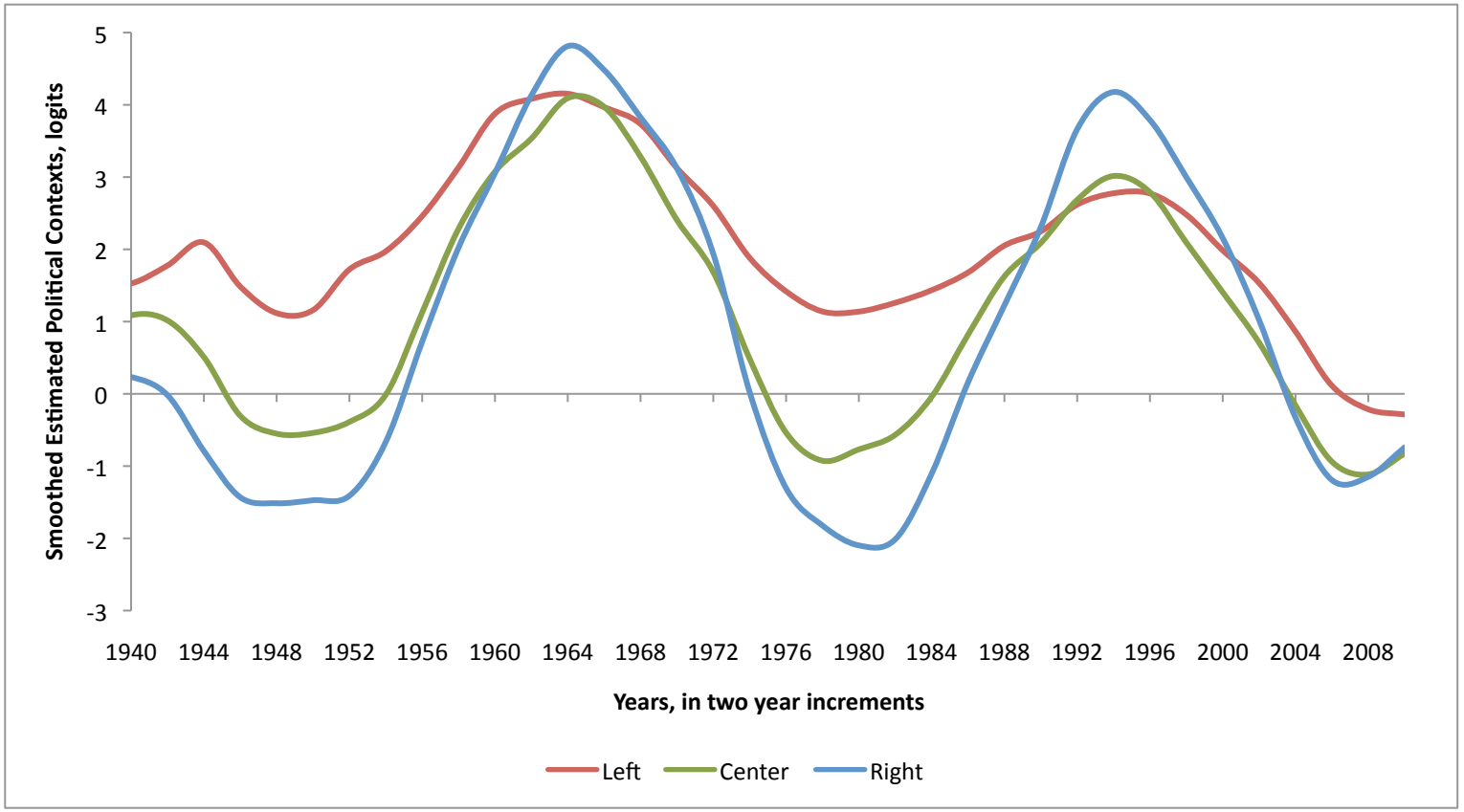


FIGURE 10: PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY, BY 10 YEAR BIRTH COHORTS

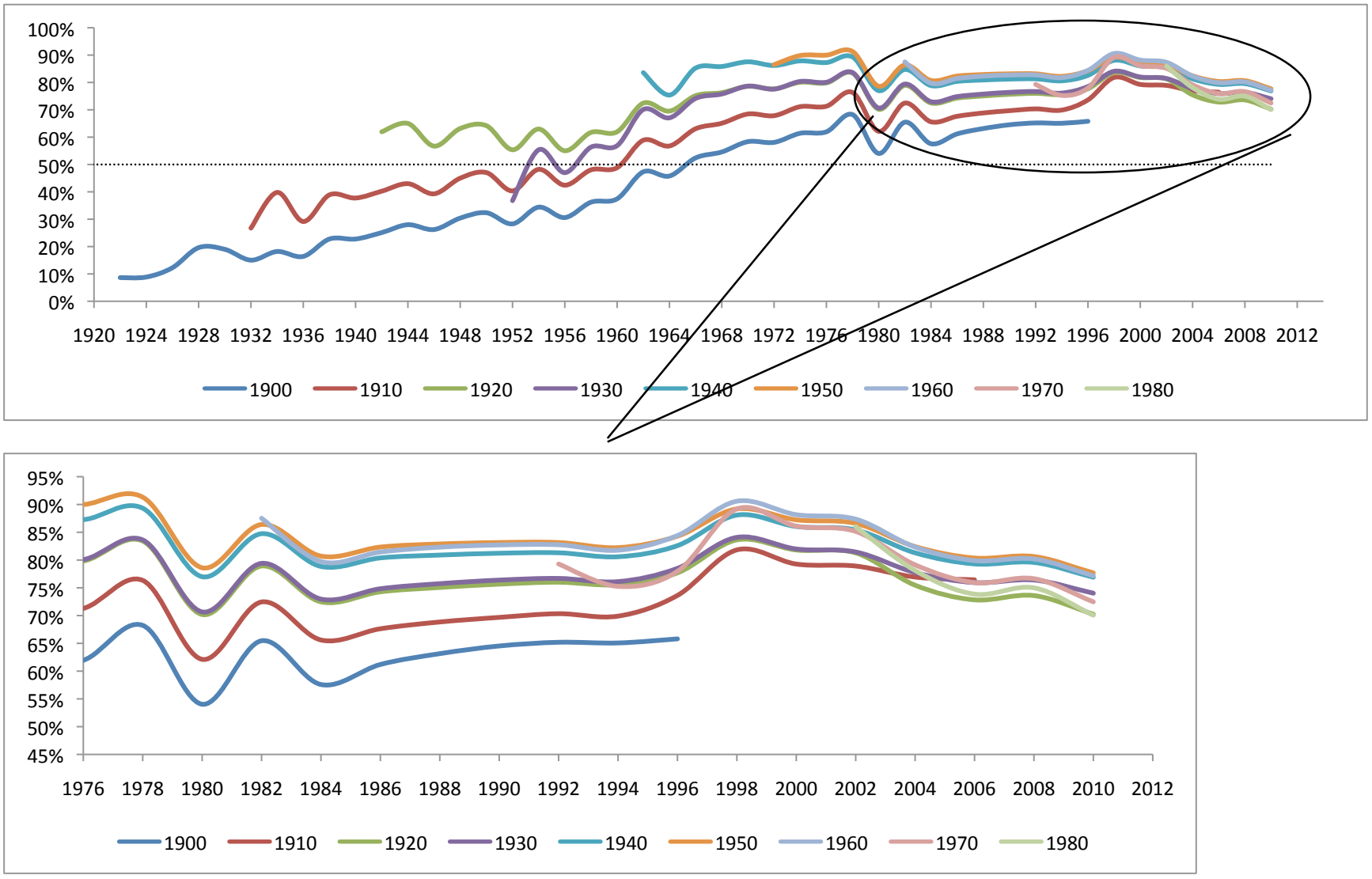
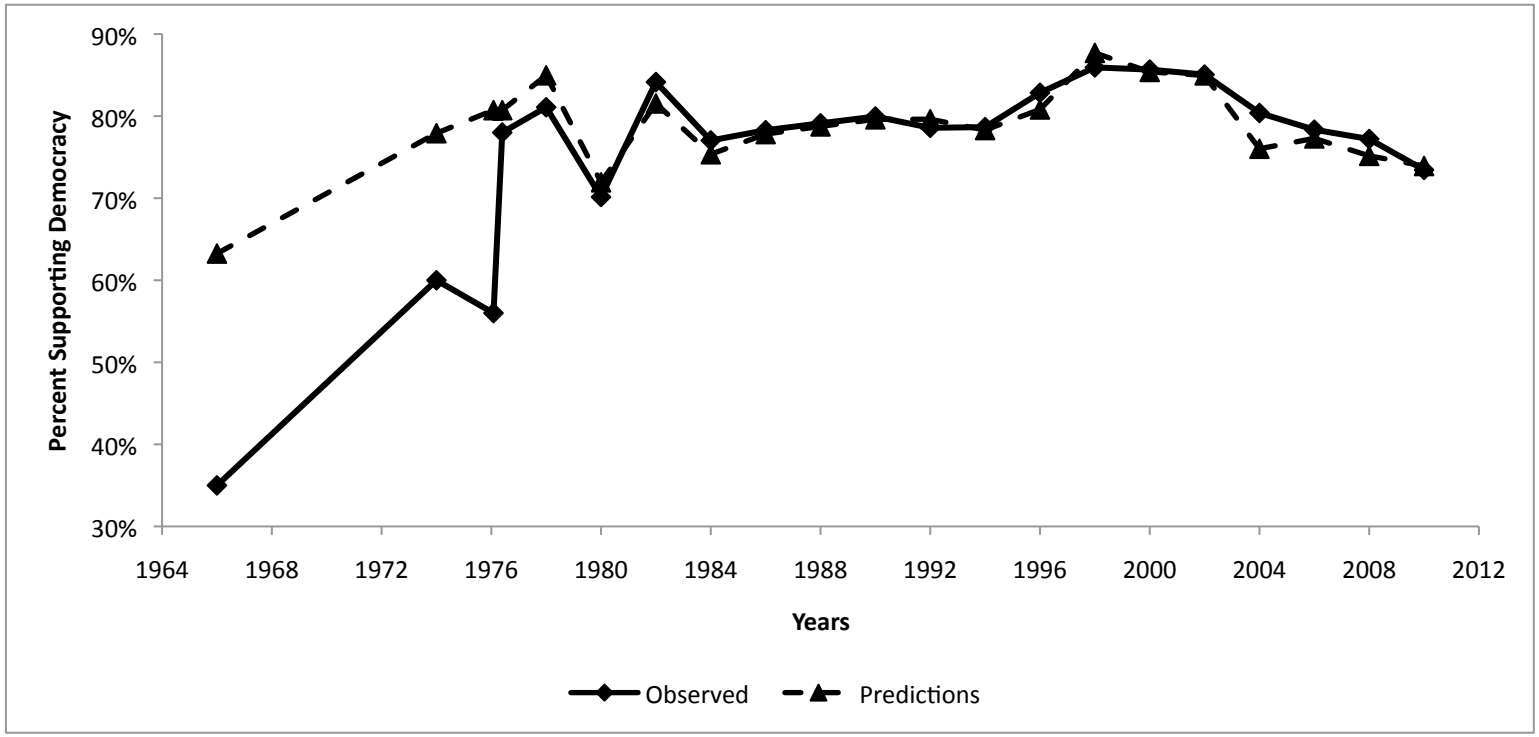


FIGURE 11: PERCENTAGE OF SPANIARDS SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY, OBSERVED AND PREDICTED VALUES



Appendix A: Data and Measurement

This appendix describes in greater detail the data used for the statistical analysis. The dataset includes nearly every national survey in Spain that asked about citizen support for democracy between 1979 and 2010 from the Center for Sociological Research's (CIS) databank. The data comes from 47 surveys conducted during this period, resulting in 124,468 unique respondents. Figure A1 plots the absolute number of respondents for two-year time intervals from 1978-2010 by birth cohort (defined for simplicity in 10 year increments). Due to the very limited number of respondents born before 1900, I have excluded them from the analysis. Their inclusion would have little impact on the results, and estimated political contexts prior to 1900 would be so uncertain as to make them virtually meaningless. The figure shows that the data is fairly sparse in the early 1980s, with some oscillation in numbers in the next two decades. Figure A2 plots proportion of the data accounted for by each ten-year birth cohort in each two-year period. The downward slopes of the lines separating the generations are indicative of generational change and replacement over time. The jagged pattern appearing in 2004 and 2008 reflects the inclusion of data from surveys of youth (ages 15-34), which essentially resulted in oversampling of younger birth cohorts during these years. Due to the variation in the number of respondents by period, I weight all responses such that each two-year period is weighted equally in the analysis. These weights also take into account sampling weights provided by CIS.

FIGURE A1: ABSOLUTE NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS BY 10-YEAR BIRTH COHORT

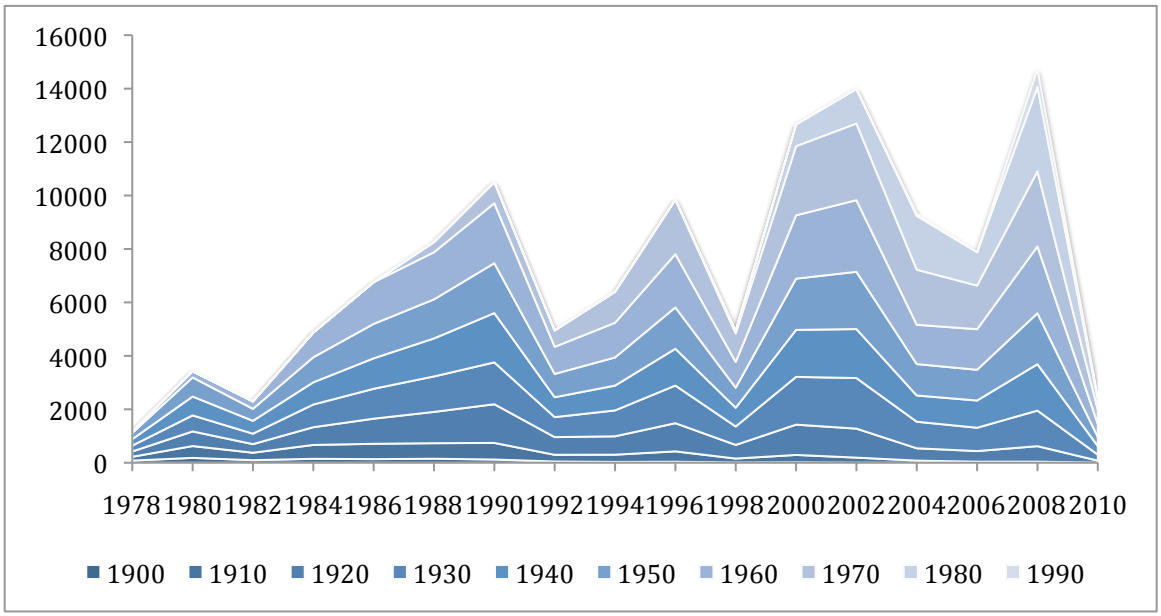
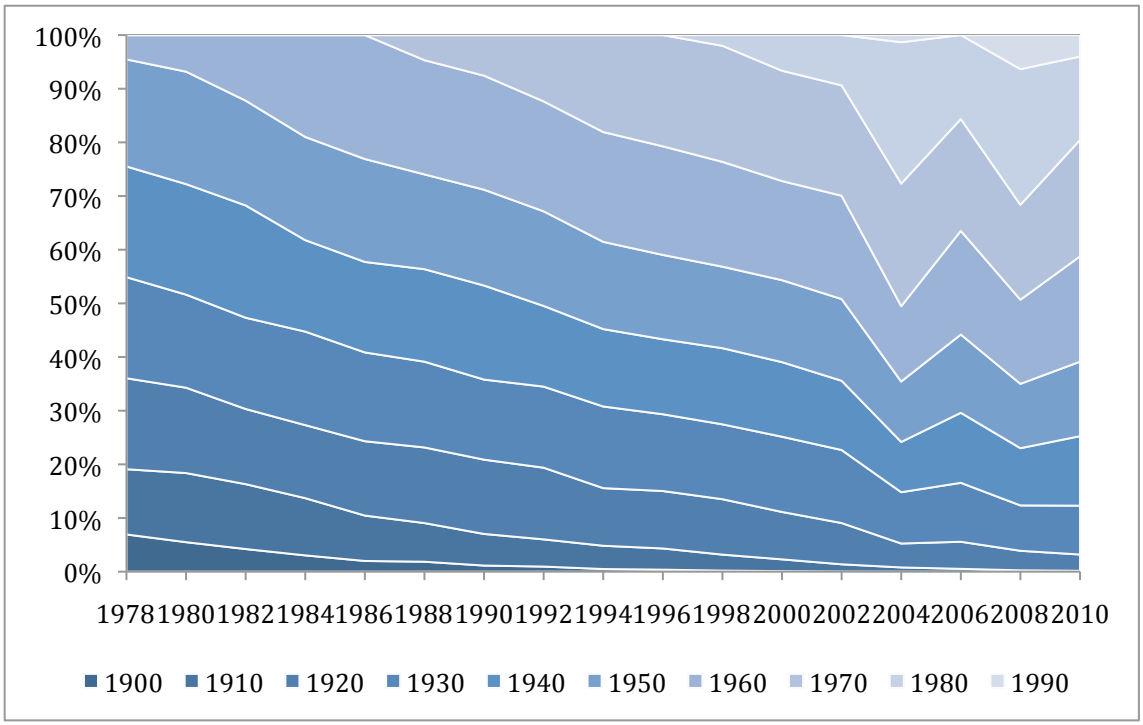


FIGURE 4.3: PROPORTION OF RESPONDENTS BY 10-YEAR BIRTH COHORTS



Although for the vast majority of the surveys the wording for the democratic support question was identical to wording provided in the main text, in a few surveys the wording varied slightly, and in one case the wording varied considerably. The question wording of the primary question in Spanish is the following:

> Ahora vamos a hablar de distintos tipos de regímenes políticos. Me gustaría que usted me dijera con cuál de las siguientes frases está usted más de acuerdo.
>
> - La democracia es preferible a cualquier otra forma de Gobierno
>
> - En algunas circunstancias un régimen autoritario, una dictadura,
>
> puede ser preferible al sistema democrático
>
> - A las gentes como yo, lo mismo nos da un régimen que otro

For surveys conducted as part of the LatinBarometer project (1996-2010), the wording changed slightly, as follows (Spanish in parentheses):

> With which of the following phrases do you most agree? (¿Con cuál de las siguientes frases está Ud. más de acuerdo?)
>
> - Democracy is preferable to all other forms of government (La democracia es preferible a cualquier otra forma de gobierno)

> - In some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one (A la gente como yo, nos da lo mismo un régimen democrático que uno no democrático)
>
> - To people like me, it does not matter whether there is a democratic regime or a non-democratic regime (A la gente como yo, nos da lo mismo un régimen democrático que uno no democrático)

To account for any possible difference caused by this wording or the LatinBarometer questionnaire, I included a dummy variable for all LatinBarometer surveys.

In the first survey in the series conducted in 1980 the item unfortunately included the additional response option, "All other forms of government are preferable to democracy." While few respondents actually chose this option, its addition changes the underlying scale. Survey research suggests that scale length can significantly affect respondents in signaling a range of appropriate responses (Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwarz 1996, 64-66). As a result, it is possible that the wording difference in 1980 artificially depressed democratic responses relative to a question in which the additional response option was not provided. To the extent that this occurred in the 1980 survey, the 1980 political context estimate will be lower than estimates based on an unbiased measure of democratic support.

Further, there appeared to be significant confusion among respondents and interviewers about this question, since some respondents indicated more than one answer choice, resulting in an unusually large number of respondents providing a non-valid response (33%). Although in other cases theoretically it makes sense to include "don't know" responses in the non-democratic category, these considerations suggest that excluding these respondents from the analysis would be appropriate, as does Torcal (2007). Including them would suggest only 50 percent of respondents expressed support for democracy in 1980. Although there was a decline in democratic support in 1980 recorded in other items conducted by other survey firms (see Figure 3), such data suggest only a small difference (<10 percentage points) relative to years immediately before and after 1980. Excluding these non-responses leads to aggregate levels of democratic support in 1980 that is much more consistent with the other existing measures of support. Although it is tempting to exclude the 1980 survey from the analysis, the data in the early 1980s is very sparse for this question to begin with, as the question was not asked again in comparable form in a national sample until 1985. As a result, I argue that we would be losing too much information by excluding it from the analysis. The full text of this item is as follows (Spanish in parentheses):

> In general terms, of the following statements, with which are you most in agreement? And with which are you most in disagreement? (En términos generales, de las siguientes afirmaciones, ¿con cuál está Vd. más de acuerdo? Y ¿con cuál más en desacuerdo?)
>
> - Democracy is preferable to all other forms of government (La democracia es preferible a cualquier otra forma de gobierno)
>
> - In some cases, dictatorship can be preferable (En algunos casos, la dictadura puede ser preferible)
>
> - All other forms of government are preferable to democracy (Cualquier forma de gobierno es preferible a la democracia)
>
> - To people like me, it does not matter whether the government is one regime or another (A las gentes como yo, lo mismo nos da un régimen que otro)

Since CIS did not include the standard democratic support item in surveys prior to 1980 or between 1980 and 1985 and because the 1980 item likely produced downwardly biased results, the models produced somewhat unstable estimates for early political contexts and for contexts in the early 1980s. To help stabilize the results, I included responses from a different, although arguably similar, for the years 1979, 1982, and 1983. Including this item ensures that we have data covering the 1978-1979 and 1982-1983 political contexts and also significantly stabilizes the estimates. Note that the inclusion of this item does not change the broad conclusions from the analysis; however, it does significantly reduce the uncertainty surrounding the estimates. The wording is as follows:

> Do you believe that it is better for one person to have all of the authority and decide for us or that political decisions be made by a group of persons elected by all citizens? (¿Cree Vd. que es mejor que una sola persona tenga toda la autoridad y decida por nosotros o que las decisiones políticas las tome un grupo de personas elegidas por todos los ciudadanos?)

Those agreeing with the former or saying don't know were coded as 0 and the latter as 1. Individual level data for this question is available from 1979-1982, resulting in the addition of data from three surveys conducted during this period. I include a dummy variable in all models to account for the difference in question wording.

In the surveys included in the analysis, ideology was usually measured using an 11-point scale ranging from 0-10. Due to significant skew toward the center of the distribution, I coded 0-4 as left, 6-10 right, and 5 or don't know as center. In a few surveys, the scale length differed (e.g. 7 point, 10 point), although this did not fundamentally change the coding of the three dummy variables.

The education variable was recoded from the raw data into four educational groups. Negative 1 indicates less than primary education complete, 0 equals primary education complete, 1 equals secondary and/or lower level professional training complete, and 2 equals post-secondary and/or advanced professional training complete. The gender indicator variable is coded as 0=male and 1=female.

There is a long-standing debate about the best way to conceptualize and measure political sophistication in the literature (e.g. Converse 1964, Luskin 1987). Although scholars have put forth a number of different measurement techniques, perhaps the best way to assess an individual's political sophistication is to test her level of political knowledge (Luskin 1987). Unfortunately, CIS did not consistently include items measuring political knowledge or even political interest throughout the period of study. As a rough proxy, I employed the respondents' level of formal education to construct the sophistication dummy variables. Those respondents with primary schooling or less were coded as having low sophistication, those with secondary education as having moderate sophistication, and those with post-secondary training being coded as having high sophistication.