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Learning, Political Regimes and the Liberalization of Trade

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Abstract

We relate the probability of opening to trade with countries' propensity to learn from other countries in the same region. We argue that countries have different motivations to learn, depending on how responsive and accountable their political regimes are. Whereas democracies cannot afford being dogmatic, authoritarian regimes are less motivated to learn from the experience of others, even if they embrace policies that fail. Using data on trade liberalization for fifty-seven developing countries in the period 1970-1999, we find that democracies confronting economic crises are more likely to liberalize trade as a result of learning; among democracies, presidential systems seem to learn more, whereas personalist dictatorial regimes with their small winning coalitions are the most resistant to the lessons that the experience of others offer.

Resumen

Relacionamos la probabilidad de la liberalización del comercio con la propensión de los países para aprender de otros dentro de la misma región. Discutimos que los países tienen diferentes motivaciones para aprender, dependiendo de cuán receptivos y responsables son sus regímenes políticos. Mientras que las democracias no pueden darse el lujo de ser dogmáticas, los regímenes autoritarios están menos motivados a aprender de la experiencia de otros, incluso si implementan políticas que fallan. Utilizando los datos de la liberalización del comercio para cincuenta y siete países en desarrollo en el periodo de 1970-1999, encontramos que las democracias que se enfrenten con crisis económicas son más propensas a liberalizar como resultado del aprendizaje; entre las democracias, los sistemas presidenciales parecen aprender más, mientras que los regímenes dictatoriales personalistas con sus pequeñas coaliciones ganadoras son las más resistentes a las lecciones que la experiencia de otros países ofrece.

Introduction

We explore the relationship between learning, political regimes, and the liberalization of trade. In many developing countries, democratization preceded and accompanied a process of trade liberalization. This finding challenges the established yet controversial view that democracies are at a disadvantage to introduce economic reforms that may threaten leadership survival (Geddes 1995; Haggard and Kaufman 1992, 1995; Bresser *et al.* 1993). On the contrary, according to Milner and Kubota (2005) (see also Guisinger 2005), in developing countries the extension of the franchise implied a shift in the median voter in favor of workers. In turn, labor being the abundant factor in less developed countries (LDCs) benefits from trade liberalization via price equalization and the subsequent rise in salaries. Thus, workers have an interest in trade liberalization. Workers also benefit from cheaper imports that come with trade liberalization. This makes the policy far from unpopular (Stokes 2001; Baker 2003). Thus, even if trade liberalization is a policy with concentrated losers and diffuse winners, democratization and trade liberalization need not be incompatible.

In the literature on economic reforms, it is common to pit the democratization hypothesis against other traditional explanations of trade policy. Coercion is one of them. In particular, important countries in the international system, multilateral institutions, and international organizations can set the rule about what policies are desirable either by spurring imitation or by using outright coercion. Economic crises are taken to be a major reason for countries to liberalize. Crises can break impasses against liberalization by making everybody worse off if action is not taken (Drazen 2000; Williamson 1994; Haggard and Kaufman 1992). Finally, ideational explanations stress ideological change mostly due to learning from failed experiences with protection (Edwards 1995). Controlling for a multiplicity of factors and for potential endogeneity problems, Milner and Kubota (2005) find democracy to be strongly related to lower tariff levels and to a greater probability of opening to trade in general.

We move a step forward in the study of the link between political regimes and trade openness. We argue that democratization, economic crises, and learning are indeed interrelated. We show that one other reason why democracies are more likely to liberalize trade is because democratic leaders cannot afford being dogmatic. Deep economic crises are particularly revealing events: They show which policies do not function. We hypothesize that the chances to adopt a policy change are greater the bigger the size of the winning coalition, that is, the bigger the size of the coalition needed to rule in relation to the selectorate (Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* 2003). Indeed, learning from experience seems to be conditional on the type of political

regime: Democracies are more likely to learn from experience with trade liberalization than dictatorships; presidential democracies seem to have a greater propensity to learn than its parliamentarian counterparts; and among dictatorships, personalist regimes appear to be particularly dogmatic. Thus, the size of the winning coalition matters in that it puts a high bar on leaders' dogmatism by making them accountable to a broader audience. It also makes more costly to stick to permanently failed policies that decrease the welfare of the majority. This finding also helps us understand why despite a general trend toward greater trade liberalization, there are remarkable regional differences (Simmons *et al*. 2008). Whereas some regions of the world have made great progress in the process of trade liberalization, others are proceeding slower. The policy diffusion literature has not explained these differences yet, which we attribute to shared political features. Laggards in the process of democratization, such as African countries, are also laggards in the process of policy reform (Van de Walle 2001).

The paper proceeds as follows. We first discuss the relationship between economic crises, policy learning, and political regimes in the context of trade liberalization. Next, we present our data and methods, with particular emphasis on how to operationalize learning. Finally, we discuss our results showing that, besides other factors, trade openness is positively related to learning, but conditional on being a democracy.

Crises, Learning, Politics and Reforms

A widespread contention in the literature on economic policy reforms is that they are a response to deep economic crises (see inter alia the contributions in Williamson 1994). This argument is not without controversy: Given that crises are by definition the result of a policy failure, that reforms follow crises is as predictable as smoke following fire —using Rodrik's (1996) metaphor. Thus, the argument goes, the so called crisis hypothesis is a tautology. However, other authors contend that there is something to explain if only big fires but not small ones are followed by reforms (Drazen 2000; Toye 1994).

The mechanism by which economic crises may induce policy switches is twofold. From a societal point of view, crises may disarticulate vested interests that oppose reform (Fernández and Rodrik 1991; Haggard and Kaufman 1992; Drazen 2000): Rampant hyperinflation makes obvious that everybody will be worse off if the status quo is maintained. Moreover, the sense of looming catastrophe associated with hyperinflations, burgeoning deficits, and unemployment may open a temporal suspension of normal politics facilitating swift action and policy change. Note, however, that this account of economic crises as facilitating policy switches puts the emphasis on increased state autonomy, and therefore, increased capacity to take action; but it is uninformative about the content of the response to the crisis.

The second aspect has to do with how economic crises affect policy makers' beliefs about the validity of economic models and economic policies. Deep economic crises may induce a revision of beliefs about which policies are feasible and which ones fail. The content of the response is likely to be determined, at least in part, by the diagnosis of the crisis. The mechanism that relates deep crises to the content of the response is, precisely, learning. Tommasi and Velasco (1995) argue that "crises (…) contribute to Bayesian learning about the 'right' model of the world." A period of intense economic disarray leads to a reassessment of the mapping from policies to outcomes, in particular, to a realization of how costly some previous policies were" (1995:17-18). In the same vein, Harberger (1993) asserts that politicians have particular world views that may contain sensible explanations for bad economic outcomes. However, "every now and then, something happens that does not fit the previous image —something that shakes our Bayesian faith in what we used to think" (in Tommasi and Velasco 1995: 18).

In the policy area we explore (trade liberalization in less developed countries [LDCs]), such ideational breakthrough was closely related to the debt crisis of the early 80s. Indeed, although the initial response to the debt crises was an increase in protectionism, starting in the mid 80s the world witnessed a "rush to free trade" (Rodrik 1994). In the period (1970 through 1999) and the sample we survey there was a dramatic increase in countries classified as open (a little over 70% of countries at the end of the period) as well as a clear reduction in the level of tariffs and their dispersion (Guisinger 2005). Regional variation remained important and in some regions only a few countries gave clear steps to open up to trade, though (Simmons *et al*. 2008). In the literature on the diffusion of policies, explaining this regional variation —and the apparent clustering of economic reforms by region— is a pending task.

Ideational explanations for the shift to more open trade regimes are pervasive both in the accounts of scholars and in the accounts of policy makers involved in the process of policy reform. The argument goes that policies changed because policy makers learned the lessons of the past. For instance, in his thorough study of market reforms in Latin America, Sebastián Edwards (1995) points out that there were two successes and one failure crucial in the Latin American road to discovering export orientation (EO) and abandoning import substitution (IS). The two successes were the strong economic performances of East Asia and Chile. Beginning in the mid- and late 1980s, the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) sponsored a series of influential studies contrasting the Latin America and the East Asian development strategies. The strong recovery of the Chilean economy after 1985 persuaded Latin American politicians that an EO strategy could also work in the tropics. As Richard Webb, governor of the Peruvian Central Bank between 1980 and 1985 stated, "this change in perception [in favor of market

reforms]…[had] been reinforced by a broad flow of information on the experience, policies, and opinion in other countries. The Chilean experience has been particularly influential in Peru (1994: 373)."

In turn, the influential policy failures were the initial structuralist responses to the 1982 debt crisis in Argentina under President Raúl Alfonsín (Austral Plan, 1985), in Brazil under President José Sarney (Cruzado Plan, 1986) and in Peru under President Alan García (1985-1990). According to Pedro Aspe (1993: 27), Mexican Minister of Finance under Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-94), the discussion of the 1987 Pacto de Solidaridad was influenced by the failure of the Austral and the Cruzado Plans in Argentina and Brazil respectively. Aspe stated that "the government had followed closely the evolution of those South American economies [Argentine and Brazilian] trying to learn from their mistakes to make sure that Mexico did not suffer the same fate"[1] (see also De la Madrid 2004: 619, 699). Enrique Iglesias, former president of the Inter-American Development Bank (1992: 52) asserted that "…a considerable degree of consensus has been achieved (…) concerning the origins of and solutions to the crisis [Latin America] experienced in the 1980s, a consensus that emerged from the lessons the Latin American countries learned at so high a cost." And Corbo states that (2000: 65) "[i]n the area of structural reform there is a base of knowledge on both the theory and the practice of policy reform. It was this accumulated knowledge and experiences with the previous policy that led most governments in Latin America to ease trade restrictions by lifting non tariff barriers and reducing the mean and variance of import tariffs." Thus, past experience and the experience of others supposedly triggered a learning process that could explain the convergence toward more open trade regimes in the 1980s. At the end of the 1980s, the collapse of communist rule in Eastern Europe struck the final blow to the idea that inward orientation and heavy state intervention was a requisite for development. By the early 1990s, even these countries had become engaged in the opening of their economies.

Whereas the so called "learning hypothesis" is pervasive in the literature on public policy in general (see the review in Freeman 2006) and of market reforms in particular (Kahler 1990, 1992; Krueger 1993; contributions in Williamson 1994), it is difficult to test. Anecdotal evidence based on policy makers' accounts does not constitute a convincing empirical test. In designing the latter, the challenge is to come up with some operationalization of learning that can be employed in cross national research. Moreover, whereas learning as a concept is overtheorized (Bennett and Howlett 1992; Levy 1994; Stone 1999), learning as a mechanism of policy change remains undertheorized (Meseguer and Gilardi 2009b; see however Weyland 2007;

[1] Translated by the authors.

Volden *et al*. 2008; Gilardi 2009). We know little about the political conditions that may spur or preclude learning from others.

On the first front, that of operationalization, the recent literature on policy diffusion has made several attempts to measure learning from others. The most frequent way to proceed is to add to the right hand side of an equation that explains a particular policy choice (in our case, trade liberalization) the average rates of growth of a subset of units whose performance is taken to provide particularly useful information —such as the average policy stance of some best performing countries, states or cities (Simmons and Elkins 2004; Milner and Kubota 2005; Shipan and Volden 2008). Rarely has the operationalization of learning taken into account that policy decisions usually entail several policy alternatives, nor that policy failures may be as informative as policy successes (see however, Lee and Strang 2006).

On the second front, that of building theory about the conditions under which learning is more likely to occur, an incipient literature has focused on the role of partisanship and prevailing norms as a mediating variable that may bias the way in which learning proceeds: Governments have been shown to incur in ideological biases in the processing of information. For instance, Lee and Strang (2006) showed that the good outcomes of countries that downsized the public sector in the 1980s and 1990s weighted more in politicians' choice of policies than the good outcomes of countries that upsized the public sector. The authors interpret this bias as politicians evaluating performance in the light of economic ideas that in a particular historical context are regarded as "good" policies. In turn, Gilardi (2009) holds that whereas rightist parties seem to care and learn more about political outcomes of policies, leftist parties care and learn more about the policy results of policies.

We contribute to the debate on these two fronts —operationalization and theory building. We argue that Bayesian updating can be used as a tool to generate a proxy of learning to be in turn employed as independent variable in cross-national research. Starting with some prior beliefs about the expected growth outcomes that would follow the liberalization of trade, we hypothesize that governments look at the actual performance of countries that liberalized and countries that remained closed in the same region.[2] With that information, governments are stipulated to rationally update their initial beliefs, which combine prior beliefs about outcomes with observed performance to produce posterior beliefs. We take those posterior beliefs to be reasonable proxies of rational learning. In particular, we take the difference in posterior beliefs about growth under trade liberalization with respect to trade protection to be the proxy for learning. Moreover, as we

[2] For the purposes of this paper, we focus on learning from the experience of policies of those countries in the same region; but see Meseguer (2009a) for models in which learning is from the own past experience, the experience in the region, and the experience in the world.

explain below, this model of sequential updating of beliefs in the light of evidence can be altered to take into account external shocks by increasing the uncertainty of policymakers' beliefs. Indeed, increased uncertainty about the right economic model is stipulated to be a likely consequence of an intense economic deterioration. Thus, we can test whether learning is a permanent fact of policy making or, alternatively, whether economic crises spur governments to learn from the experience of others.

On the theory side, we start opening the black box that connects more democratic polities with more trade liberalization (Mansfield *et al.* 2000; Milner and Kubota 2005; Guisinger 2005) and with more policy reform in general conditional on bad economic times (Pitlik 2008).

We interact the proxy of learning that takes into account economic shocks on the formation of posterior beliefs with regime type. We contend that the size of the winning coalition relative to the selectorate, that is, the size of the group to which politicians are directly accountable and whose support is needed to rule, is positively related to less dogmatism and to the adoption of a policy that benefits the majority of the population. As Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* (2003: 195-197) explain, polities with large winning coalitions relative to their selectorates have incentives to provide public goods as opposed to those polities in which the survival of the leader depends on very small coalitions, which instead distribute patronage. Trade liberalization is a public good and, therefore, it will be underprovided in political regimes which rely on a few cronies. Subject to the periodic scrutiny of citizens through elections, democratic rulers are more compelled to revise past policy choices and to react to generalized economic crises by adopting trade liberalization in view of other countries' performance. Thus, we hypothesize that democratic regimes are more prone to learn from regional experience, and to open up to trade as a consequence, than authoritarian regimes are.

Democratic regimes can be further divided into presidential and parliamentary systems. It is not obvious to derive clear predictions about winning coalition sizes in each of these subtypes without taking into account electoral rules and other institutional features (Mansfield *et al.* 2000). For instance, voting rules in presidential systems and list-voting systems imply the necessity of a larger minimal coalition than do single-member district parliamentary systems (Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* 2003: 72). Thus, more public goods provision would be expected in presidential democracies of that sort. Under presidential regimes, both the executive and the legislative are directly elected and, hence, directly accountable to voters, whereas in parliamentary regimes the executive is accountable to the legislature (so only indirectly to voters). This particular institutional arrangement, plus stronger checks and balances, may provide presidential democracies with more immediate incentives to learn from experience and to react to crises applying a change in policy. Furthermore, competition between power branches, more present in

presidential regimes, allows the voters to obtain more information from the decision-making process due to diminished likelihood of collusion and to reduced legislative cohesion (Persson *et al.,* 1997, 2000).

On the other hand, power concentration is thought to be higher under parliamentary regimes. Moreover, the government possesses most of the proposal powers over legislation.[3] This feature may facilitate the adoption of new policies in crucial moments. Under a system with strong separation of powers, agreement on public policy between the executive and the legislature is required (Persson *et al*. 1997). This comparative advantage in decision-making capacity may be overshadowed by a greater tendency to fall into a dogmatic way of reasoning, as it is less subject to persuasion, debate, and information flows that discussion and bargaining with another political body is likely to provide.

We empirically compare the mediating effect of presidential and parliamentary democracies in order to assess which of the two factors prevails in the process of learning and the adoption of a liberalized trade policy: Either increased accountability or decision-making capacity. We summarize the above arguments in the following general hypothesis: presidential democracies are expected to learn more from others' experience than parliamentary systems and than dictatorial regimes.

Concerning dictatorships, their distinction into personalist, single-party and military types has recently gained much theoretical and empirical relevance (Geddes 1999; Brooker 2000). Personalist regimes are typically sustained by extensive patronage networks aimed at buying the loyalty of their supporting elites (Geddes 1999; Ulfelder 2005). The winning coalition in this case usually comprises a reduced set of individuals with family, ethnic, or clan ties to the leader. Very limited administrative capacity and weak institutionalization render these regimes extremely dependent on revenue streams like taxes on international trade and non-tax revenues for the buying of their cronies' loyalty (Bates 2008; Escribà Folch 2009).[4] This political logic in neopatrimonial regimes further translates into a distinctive set of policies often referred as 'control regimes' comprising *i)* a closed economy, *ii)* the distortion of key prices in the macroeconomy, *iii)* the promotion and regulation of industries and *iv)* the regulation of markets (Ndulu *et al*. 2007; Bates 2008). The direct linkage of these distortionary policies to the very survival of rulers lies behind the predicted 'dogmatism' of personalist regimes

[3] See Persson *et al.* (2000) for a discussion of the institutional features and economic consequences of different democratic regimes and electoral rules.

[4] Indeed, following our recodification of authoritarian regimes (see below), personalist regimes' (including monarchies) reliance on those two revenue streams is much higher than other regimes types. Between 1970 and 2000, average taxes on international trade represented 5.06 percent of GDP for personalist regimes, 4.76 percent for single-party, and 4.23 for military regimes. Regarding non-tax revenues, the average over the 1970-2000 period has been 7.60 percent of GDP for personalist regimes, 5.84 percent for single-party regimes, and 2.88 for military regimes. Revenue data are from World Bank's World Development Indicators.

in maintaining their economies closed independently of ongoing crises or the experience of others. In contrast, single-party regimes have larger winning coalitions and are hence more prone the deliver targeted public goods to their key constituencies, while military regimes rule predominantly by repression. Therefore, we anticipate that personalist dictatorships are less likely to learn from experience than other types of dictatorship (and than democracies).

Data and Model

Data

To operationalize the dependent variable, we use a database on trade liberalization covering the period 1970–99. This database uses the Sachs–Warner (1995) index of trade liberalization and the update of the index by Horn and Wacziarg (2003). According to Sachs and Warner's definition, an economy is closed if *(1)* average tariff rates are 40% or more, *(2)* non trade barriers (NTBs) cover more than 40% of trade, *(3)* the black market exchange rate depreciated by 20% or more relative to the official exchange rate during the 1970s or 1980s, *(4)* the economy could be described as socialist or *(5)* there was a state monopoly on exports. The Sachs–Warner database has information for eighty-seven developing countries (listed in the Appendix), which we grouped in six regions – Latin America, Caribbean and Non Iberian Latin America, North Africa/Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and South East Asia.[5] The database has 2,418 country-year observations of which 743 correspond to countries and years with an open trade regime.

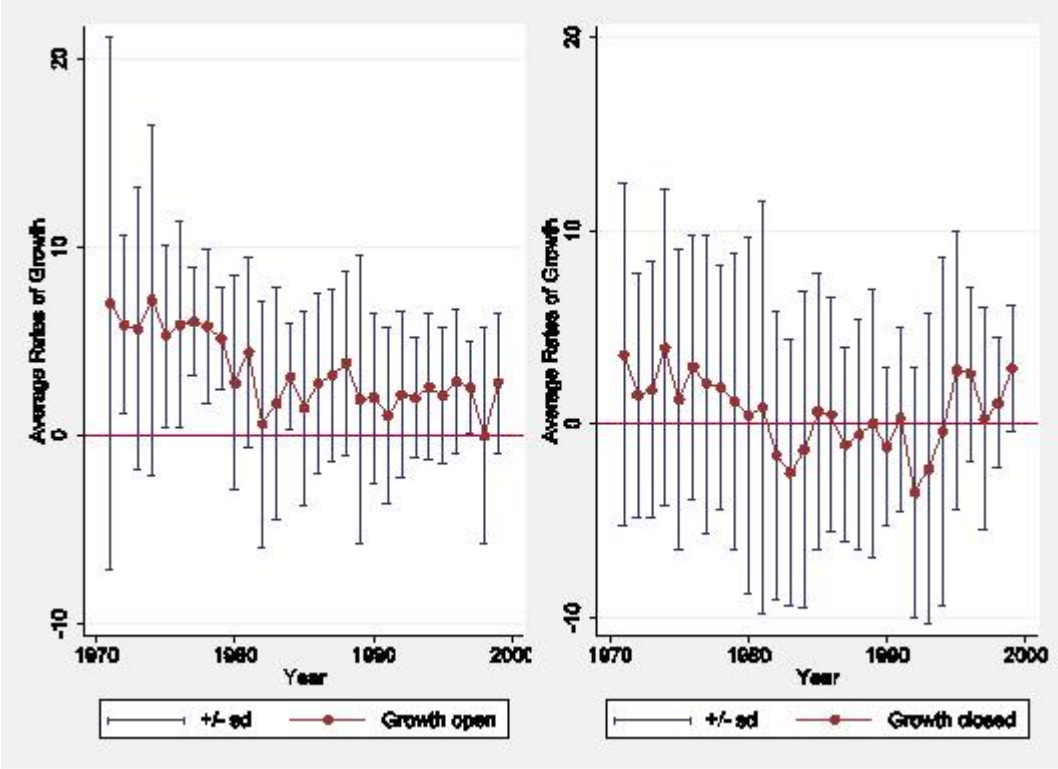
During this period, policy stances converged. Toward the beginning of the 1980s, less than 20% of the countries had a liberal trade regime. This figure exceeded 70% at the end of the 1990s. However, important regional differences remained. Latin America and South East Asia concentrated most of the reforming activity whereas at the end of the period half Africa still exhibited barriers to trade. As we explained above, these regional differences reflect underlying political conditions and processes.

To make compelling the learning argument based on the performance of others, it is necessary to have a sense of the relative growth outcomes under both closed and open trade regimes. Figure 1 unambiguously shows that the average rates of growth of developing countries with an open trade regime outperformed their counterparts with a closed trade regime (see also World Bank 2005). Of course, this information is merely descriptive and only shows correlations. There may be many other factors and policies responsible for the better performance of the open countries. Also, the figures are uninformative about the direction of causality in the relationship between

[5] Due to missing values in the independent variables, we end up with fifty-seven countries in our estimations.

growth and trade openness. The figure also shows that the 1982 debt crisis hit countries under both trade policies but that the countries with a closed trade regime were already experiencing declining rates of growth after 1976. Also, developing countries under a closed trade regime experienced a new trough around 1992 following the financial crisis in Europe in the aftermath of the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The figure also reveals that yearly performance under closed trade regimes varied more (was less consistent) than under open trade regimes. This variation in outcomes only makes it more difficult to attribute responsibility to policy for observed outcomes.

FIGURE 1. AVERAGE RATES OF GROWTH AND DISPERSION UNDER AN OPEN AND A CLOSED TRADE REGIMES, 1970-1999



Learning is the main independent variable in this study. We shall condition learning on different types of political regimes in order to probe our hypothesis of a learning advantage in democratic regimes.

Suppose that governments want to learn about the expected rate of growth that would follow the application of two alternative policies, *A* and *B* - in our case, trade liberalization vs. trade protection. Governments are uncertain about the outcomes that will result from the adoption of each

policy. But they have some prior beliefs about the results. The distinctive feature of the Bayesian approach is the operationalization of prior beliefs in a probability distribution.

There are two conditions in which we can be confident that the impact of prior beliefs will be minimal: If information is abundant and the data is consistent (has little noise), the latter will override prior beliefs in the formation of posterior beliefs. This result entails that different policymakers with different prior beliefs will converge in their posterior beliefs because the data will eventually overwhelm the prior beliefs, whatever they are. For instance, suppose that the Costa Rican and the Chilean finance ministers are exposed to the same information about the results of reducing tariffs and import quotas. It does not matter whether the Costa Rican policymaker was more or less certain than her Chilean peer about the anticipated results of opening up to trade. If they are rational learners confronted with the same data, their posterior beliefs about the results of trade liberalization will converge. Also, provided these policymakers choose policies on the basis of what they learn, they will converge not only in their posterior beliefs but also, and importantly, in their policy choices. Thus, Bayesian updating anticipates the policy convergence that we observe in reality.[6]

In our attempt to make the model accessible to all readers, we keep the jargon to a minimum and rely instead on examples. We assume that governments can express their initial uncertainty about the expected economic growth following the implementation of alternative policies, $j = \{A, B\}$, by means of a probability distribution. Growth, X, is assumed to be a random variable, normally distributed, with an unknown mean, M, and an unknown variance, V. Governments learn about these two unknown parameters by observing the results of other countries under alternative policies. These two parameters are random variables too.

In the prior specification for this kind of set up, the conditional distribution of the mean is normally distributed.[7] The marginal distribution of the variance is *scaled Inverse-*χ^2. In this prior *Normal/scaled Inv-*χ^2, the distributions of the mean and the variance are interdependent.[8] Thus, for alternative policies $j = \{A, B\}$

[6] Prior beliefs can be non-informative –flat, diffuse, reference priors– or informative. With uniform priors, classical inference and Bayesian inference give the same results because the posteriors are driven by the data –the prior beliefs convey no information. Conjugate priors entail selecting prior distributions such that the posterior distribution belongs to the same class of prior distributions. They are convenient because they guarantee the analytical calculation of the posterior distributions of the parameters of interest. Natural conjugate priors arise by taking the class of prior distributions to be the set of all densities having the same functional form as the likelihood (Gelman *et al.* 2004; Gill 2002).

[7] For a thorough discussion of the model, see Meseguer (2009a).

[8] This is a strong assumption but it does not seem to be unrealistic. The dependency means that if σ^2 (which is the sampling variance of growth) is large, then a prior distribution with high variance is induced on μ.

$$X_j \sim N(M_j, V_j) \quad (1)$$

$$M_j \mid V_j \sim N(\mu_j, \sigma_j^2 / \tau_j)$$

$$V_j \sim Scaled\ Inv - \chi^2(\upsilon_j, \sigma_j^2).$$

The four parameters are the location (μ) and the scale (σ^2/τ) of the mean, *M*, the degrees of freedom (υ) and the scale (σ^2) of the variance, *V*. τ_j is the factor that relates the prior variance of the mean to the sampling variance.

At time *t*, governments observe the performance of alternative policies *A* and *B* in other countries. Suppose that n_A countries followed policy *A* and that n_B countries followed policy *B*. Hence, the following information about performance of policies *A* and *B* becomes available at time *t*.

$$X_t^j = x_{t1}^A, x_{t2}^A, ..., x_{tnA}^A, x_{t1}^B, x_{t2}^B, ..., x_{tnB}^B; j = \{A, B\} \quad (2)$$

These new data are assumed to be drawn from normal distributions (i.i.d.). The sample mean, $\overline{x_j}$, and the sample sum of squares, S_j, are sufficient statistics to summarize the information in the sample of countries under each of the policies *A* and *B* (again, trade protection and trade liberalization in this illustration).

New information in combination with prior beliefs produces updated beliefs embodying observed policy results under *A* and *B*. The useful feature of Bayesian updating is that it offers a mechanism of rational learning based on Bayes' theorem. Bayesian updating provides updating equations for the parameters of interest, that is, mean and variance, after observing n_j outcomes of policy. In this study, and for ease of interpretation, we shall use the more intuitive posterior beliefs about average growth under trade liberalization and trade protection.[9]

In common parlance, governments start with certain prior beliefs about average growth for trade liberalization and trade protection. New information is gathered and governments update their beliefs about growth under the alternative policies. Equation (3) provides the posterior point estimates for the *mean*. In the statistical analysis, we use the posterior belief for the average growth rate as operationalization of learning. These posterior beliefs become priors the following year. Based on the posterior beliefs, we assume

[9] See Meseguer (2009a) for a use of this model in which both learning from average results and variance of results – used as a proxy of governments' attitude toward risks– is modeled.

that policymakers choose a policy. The rational updating of beliefs proceeds sequentially.[10]

With a *Normal/scaled Inv-*χ^2 conjugate prior and a normal likelihood as described above, the posterior value of the mean (location) (4) has the following shape.[11] For each country *i*, time *t* and policies *j = {A, B}*

$$\mu_{it} = \frac{\tau_{it-1}}{\tau_{it}}\mu_{it-1} + \frac{n}{\tau_{it}}\overline{x_{it}} = \rho\mu_{it-1} + (1-\rho)\overline{x_{it}} \;; 0 < \rho < 1 . \quad (3)$$

$$\tau_{it} = \tau_{it-1} + n$$

where *n* is the sample size and τ_{it} is the posterior for the factor that relates the prior variance of the mean to the sampling variance.

The above equation (3) may look rather obscure, and an immediate reaction to it is that no real policymaker would ever undertake the heroic task of calculating posterior beliefs in order to make a decision. Yet, equation (3) simply implies that posterior beliefs are a compromise between prior beliefs (μ_{it-1}) and the information conveyed in the observed sample of countries carrying out alternative trade policies ($\overline{x_{it}}$). The bigger the sample size, *n*, the more weight the sample information has in forming posterior beliefs compared with prior beliefs. In other words, the greatest the amount of evidence, the more weight observed outcomes will be given in the formation of posterior beliefs relative to the initial beliefs.

We use empirical data to propose governments' prior beliefs. We take as priors the average rate of growth and the variability of growth rates observed in the world under a particular policy the year before a country enters the database. For instance, the prior belief about growth under export promotion for Chile is taken to be the average rate of growth and the variance of results under export promotion in the world the year before Chile enters the database.[12]

We focus on learning from the experience with trade liberalization and trade protection in the *region* a country belongs to. For instance, the Chilean government updates its beliefs about trade liberalization yearly using as

[10] A similar example can be found in Gill (2002: 72-73).

[11] Gelman *et al.* (2004: 79).

[12] Note that, although this choice of priors is intended to be non-intrusive, these priors are informative. We use the observed mean and variance of growth under trade liberalization and protection –to which we in turn attribute a variance– and the method of moments to obtain prior values for all parameters. For example, the average rate of growth for countries under a protected trade regime in 1970 was 3.6 per cent with a variance of 60.5. After attributing some uncertainty to these parameters, it is possible to obtain values for τ_{it-1}, which is smaller the larger the prior variance relative to the sampling variance (See Meseguer [2009a], chapter 2, for a detailed description of the procedure). Note that with a large *n,* the weight of the prior beliefs is very small.

information the average rates of growth of countries with an open and a closed trade regime respectively in Latin America. The focus on learning from the experience in the region a country belongs to is justified on two grounds: First, methodologically speaking, most of the time there is a sufficient number of countries *(n)* under one and the other trade strategy to secure that the influence of priors does not determine the posteriors. And second, substantively speaking, we want to explore whether the different enthusiasm with which different regions of the world embraced trade liberalization is related to some shared institutional feature that mediates the impact of learning and the probability to switch the trade regime.

The last component of our sequential model of learning takes into account the possible impact of economic shocks on policy makers' beliefs by increasing the uncertainty of prior beliefs. With vague priors the rate of adaptation to new data, $(1-\rho)$ in equation (3), converges very fast and policy makers stop being receptive to new information very soon. However, an intervention allows the incorporation of external information that carries with it a high level of uncertainty —for instance, an external shock (West and Harrison 1997). Recall that the argument that relates learning to market reforms revolves crucially around the idea that economic crises are likely to spur a revision of beliefs by showing how mistaken the previous economic model was (Tommasi and Velasco 1995). By changing the priors to account for the uncertainty that accompanies a shock, the rate of adaptation to new data reaches a new peak. Modeling the uncertainty attached to a shock —attributing a greater uncertainty to the parameters of the model— makes the decision-maker automatically more attentive to new data. From a substantive point of view, this is reasonable. Policymaking occurs mostly under a pattern of continuity in which mild ups and downs do not bring into question the validity of the economic model. However, a shock that affects the performance of the economy increases dramatically the uncertainty about the "correct" model. Reasonably, this increased uncertainty makes policymakers more receptive to the information that actual outcomes could reveal about the validity of one or the other trade strategy.

Figure 2 shows the effect on the rate of adaptation to new data $(1-\rho)$ of modeling an intervention in the years 1975, 1983, and 1990[13] —that is, of altering the updating process by introducing prior beliefs about average growth conveying great uncertainty.[14] The uncertainty has the effect of increasing dramatically the weight given to observed data in the formation of new posterior beliefs. As it is possible to see, due to the introduction of this intervention a new peak of 'attention' is given to those respective years'

[13] For the sake of this illustration, we used the variable ECRIS2 (Milner and Kubota 2005) to decide the timing of interventions. ECRI2 is a dummy variable that takes value 1 if a country's inflation rate was more than 40% and it increased by more than 25% from the year before, or per capita GDP fell by more than 15% from the previous year. In the series that we construct later on, we modeled an intervention in the year 1983 (following the 1982 debt crisis) and in 1990 (following the 1989 collapse of Communist rule).

[14] For simplicity, we use the same prior beliefs as in t_0.

average growth rates and the years immediately following in the formation of posterior beliefs. Thus, what we have is a series of posterior beliefs (posterior point estimates of average growth) about expected performance under trade protection and trade openness, punctuated by moments of crises, which in the Bayesian framework are characterized as junctures of increased uncertainty in the beliefs concerning the connections between policies and their outcomes.

FIGURE 2. CHILE: RATE OF ADAPTATION TO AVERAGE REGIONAL EXPERIENCE (1-P) IN EQUATION (3) AFTER MODELING AN INTERVENTION TO ACCOUNT FOR THE 1975, 1982 AND 1990 SHOCKS, TRADE PROTECTION

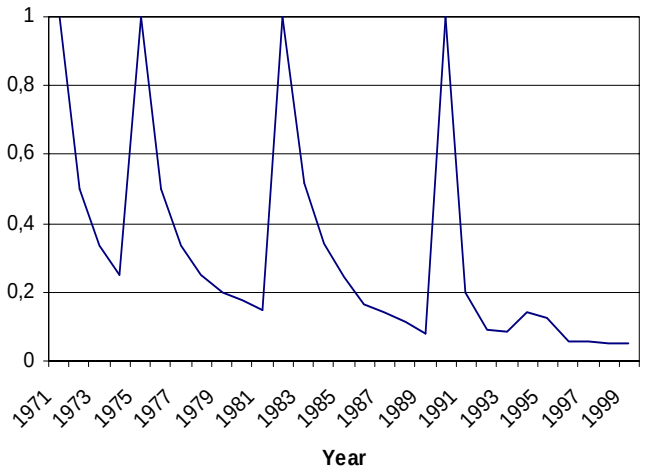
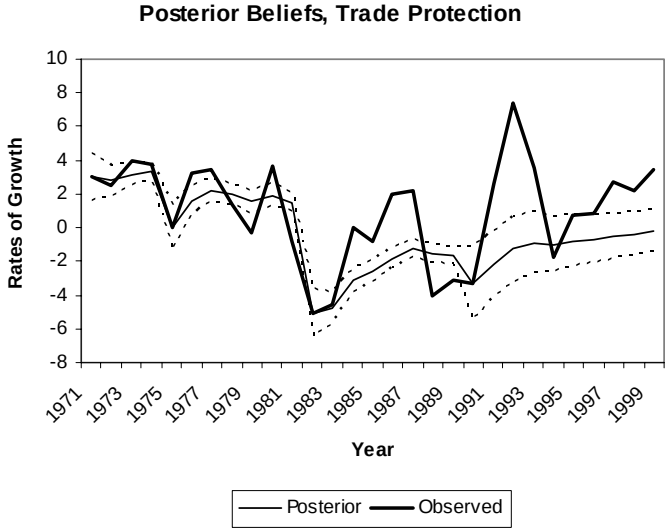


Figure 3 shows the average performance by year in Latin America (excluding Chile) of those countries that pursued trade protection (bold line). It also shows the posterior belief series calculated using equation (3) (solid line), plus/minus one posterior standard deviation. As it is possible to see, the posterior series is smoother than the original series (peaks and troughs are taken anecdotally most of the time, which is consistent with the observation that rarely do radical policy switches occur); yet, when a shock is modelled by increasing the uncertainty of prior beliefs (when *(1-ρ)* reaches its peaks in Figure 2), the posterior beliefs and the observed experience are practically equal. Note that the uncertainty of the beliefs that had been decreasing with accumulated evidence increases as a result of modelling the shock. In other words, this is a model of belief updating that stipulates that learning from the performance of others mostly occurs around critical times.

FIGURE 3. OBSERVED AVERAGE GROWTH RATES AND POSTERIOR BELIEFS ABOUT GROWTH IN PROTECTED LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES, 1970-1999



Thus, for each country in our database, we calculate a series of posterior beliefs based on the average regional experience of those countries that liberalized their trade regimes. And we calculate another series of posterior beliefs for those countries that *did not* liberalize their trade regimes, based on their performance. We compare both series of posterior beliefs and propose a simple decision rule: Governments choose the trade policy for which the posterior beliefs about expected growth is greatest. However, we make this statement conditional on the type of political regime in line with the substantive hypotheses spelled out above.

Model

Policies tend to be highly inertial, and policy switches are exceptional. Thus, the most accurate way to depict the policy choice process over time is to drop the assumption that policy choices are independent by specifying the problem as one of learning and dynamic choice. The last step in this modeling process is to relate learning from experience to the observed path of trade policy choices, using a dynamic version of probit.

The empirical test consists of, first, producing posterior beliefs for average results under alternative strategies using Bayesian updating; second, comparing those posterior beliefs; and third, relating the difference in posterior beliefs to *observed* policy choices by using a dynamic model. In this model of transitions, current policy choices of country *i*, y_{it}, are modeled as a

function of a country's prior history of policies, y_{it-1} (first order Markov chain).[15] The transition matrix for this type of model with a binary outcome is

$$\begin{bmatrix} p_{AA} & p_{AB} \\ p_{BA} & p_{BB} \end{bmatrix}$$

where p_{AB} indicates the probability of a policy switch, or the probability that $y_{it}=A$ given that $y_{it-1}=B$. Given some set of predictors $Z_{it-1,}$ these conditional transition probabilities can be estimated by

$$\Pr(y_{it}=1|y_{it-1}) = F[\mathbf{Z}_{\mathbf{it-1}}\beta + y_{it-1}\,\mathbf{Z}_{\mathbf{it-1}}\alpha]$$

where F is a probit link. β indicates the effect of the independent variables on the probability of adopting a particular policy, *A*, at time *t* given that this adoption did not occur at *t-1*. In practical terms, we calculate a probit model conditional on values of the lagged dependent variable equal to zero. *De facto*, this model is equivalent to a discrete-time exponential hazard model in which all that matters for a transition to take place is the previous period.

Our independent variables of interest are the learning series based on regional experience calculated as explained above. Each government each year updates its beliefs about the outcomes of the alternative policies "trade liberalization" vs. "trade protection." The learning series are the difference in those posterior beliefs. We hypothesized that the greater the posterior beliefs about growth outcomes under an open trade regime with respect to posterior beliefs about results under trade protection, the more likely a switch to trade openness is expected to be.

Our argument anticipates that the propensity to learn should be contingent on the costs of not doing so, which in turn we stipulated to be related to the type of political regime. The cost of dogmatism, that is, the cost of not learning amid bad economic performance is a luxury likely to be found in less accountable and little responsive political regimes (see Van de Walle's [1999] study of partial reforms in Africa). Thus, learning should be conditional on the type of polity (democracy vs. dictatorship). And among political regimes, learning should be conditional on the size of the winning coalition, that is to say, on the size of the group whose support the leader needs to rule. To account for this possibility, we include the learning variable interacted with several operationalizations that distinguish between regimes as well as between types of democracies and types of dictatorships. The first one is a dichotomous measure of political regimes that gives value 1 to

[15] Note that the dynamic probit model is an event history/survival model. In fact, it is equivalent to a discrete-time exponential hazard model in which all that matters for a transition to take place is the previous period.

democracies and value of 0 to dictatorships. This regime variable is taken from an updated version of the ACLP database compiled by Przeworski *et al*. (Przeworski *et al*. 2000; see also Cheibub and Gandhi 2004). We expect democracies with their large selectorates and winning coalitions to be more likely to switch policies as a result of learning than dictatorships. As a robustness check, we estimate an additional model which uses the POLITY IV continuous measure of democracy.[16] Our second specification acknowledges that there are differences among types of democracies and types of dictatorships in relation to the size of the winning coalition relative to the selectorate. We distinguish between parliamentarian and presidential democracies, and we use dictatorship as the base category. Data on democratic regimes is again taken from the updated ACLP dataset (Przeworski *et al*. 2000).

Finally, we use a third specification in which we distinguish between types of non-democracies. This variable is a recodification of political regimes as coded by Geddes (1999) and recently updated by Wright (2008), which distinguishes between single-party, personalist, and military dictatorial regimes. Specifically, we have grouped different authoritarian regimes into three basic categories. First, we group monarchic and personalist regimes into a single category named "personalist" (Brooker 2000). The second category is "single-party" and comprises pure single-party types, single-party/personalist hybrids, single-party/military hybrids and "triple threat" regimes.[17] Finally, the third category comprises military and military/personalist regimes.

We expect personalist regimes to have the lowest propensity to liberalize the trade regime as a result of learning. In other words, we expect dictators to be more dogmatic than democratic leaders, and among them, we expect personalist dictatorships to be particular unreceptive to the actual outcome of trade policies. Interestingly, Sub-Saharan Africa —the largest region in the sample— comprises 40 per cent of total country-year observations under personalist regimes, and about 33 per cent of single party and military authoritarian regimes.

We include other independent and control variables that are standard in the literature on the political economy of trade liberalization. In our base model, we include an operationalization of learning that does not distinguish between crises and non crises periods. We then estimate two models that consider learning from the 1982 debt crisis through modeling an intervention as explained above, and learning from both the 1982 crisis *and* the 1990 economic and especially political watershed.[18] These operationalizations

[16] The Polity IV composite index ranges from -10 to 10, being 10 the maximum level of democracy. We have transformed it to range from 0 to 20, where 20 stands for the most democratic regimes.

[17] "Triple threats" are regimes that contain single-party, military and personalist characteristics.

[18] Indeed, 75 per cent of country-year observations under economic crises (as defined by ECOCRI2, see ftn 13) occurred in the 1990s.

address falls in average rates of growth around critical economic and political times. We hypothesized that learning is more likely to be an influential source of policy switches around these bad times, contingent on political regimes being responsive to a large selectorate.

We control for alternative operationalizations of crises that refer to other macroeconomic variables besides average growth rates, such as the balance of payments (BoP crisis, World Development Indicators [WDI]), hyperinflations (Log INFLATION rate, WDI), and the constraints imposed by high levels of DEBT service and its related urge to increase exports (DEBT/GNI, WDI). The size of the country is alleged to have a negative relationship with the probability to open. Smaller countries have a greater probability to liberalize (SIZE, log Population, WDI; Log GDP per capita, WDI). External factors, such as the volume of international aid (Log AID per capita, WDI) and agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF, update of Vreeland 2003) as well as coercion derived from multilateral arrangements (GATT/WTO, Milner and Kubota 2005) are expected to have a positive impact on the probability to become open. Finally, one established contention in the literature on the political economy of market reforms is that new governments have an advantage when it comes to launching reforms, especially if they represent or want to represent a radical break with the past (Weyland 2002; Williamson 1994). To account for this possibility, we control for the executive time in office (TIME IN OFFICE, Database on Political Institutions, Beck *et al*. 2000). We expect the probability of embracing trade liberalization to decrease as governments 'get old'. Finally, we included two decade dummy variables to account for the two major liberalization waves in the 1980s and the 1990s. To control for unobserved heterogeneity, we clustered standard errors on country. To control for time dependence, we include polynomial transformations of the duration countries have stayed under a closed trade system up to time *t* (Carter and Signorino 2007). All variables are lagged one year.

Results

The results are indeed suggestive that the impact of learning is contingent on political regimes. More specifically, our results do back up our hypothesis that regimes with larger selectorates have a greater propensity to learn and to open up to trade. The dependent variable is our dichotomous indicator of trade liberalization. The independent variable of interest is LEARNING and its interaction with a dichotomous indicator of political regimes and with the POLITY IV composite index (Table 1). We then distinguish among types of democracies, and types of dictatorships (Table 2). A positive sign of LEARNING means that the greater the difference in posterior beliefs about growth opening to trade with respect to protecting, the more likely a switch to an

open trade regime; since we hypothesize that dictatorships exhibit a greater dogmatism, we expect this variable to have a negative effect in this type of political regimes.

Table 1 shows the results of estimating three different models. In column (1), our main independent variable, LEARNING, was interacted with our dichotomous regime indicator. The particularity of this estimation is that economic crises were *not* modeled in the construction of the learning series. In specifications (2) and (3), we interacted the regime variable with two series of learning, one in which an increase in uncertainty was modeled in the year 1983 only (column 2) and one in which two interventions were modeled in the years 1983 and 1990 (column 3). Finally, in specifications (4) and (5), we interacted the learning series with a continuous indicator of political regime. For the dichotomous indicator of regime, we report the net coefficient of the impact of learning on the probability of opening in democracies and the corresponding standard errors at the bottom of the table (Brambor *et al*. 2005).

Our findings are in line with our expectations, thereby confirming our first hypothesis: Democracies are more likely to open up to trade than dictatorships as a result of learning from the experience of other countries in the same region. However, the impact of learning holds only when economic crises are modeled (models (2) and (3) vs. column (1)). As it is also clear, these results are robust to an alternative, continuous operationalization of regime type using POLITY IV (columns 4 and 5). Note that the coefficient of learning refers to our base category (DICTATORSHIP) and thus the negative and significant coefficient. All in all, dictatorships are four percentage points less likely to open, taking the interactive effect with learning into account, and placing the rest of the variables at their means (Model 2).

Table 1. Probability of Opening, Democracy vs. Dictatorships

	PROBABILITY OF OPENING	PROBABILITY OF OPENING 82	PROBABILITY OF OPENING 82, 90	PROBABILITY OF OPENING 82	PROBABILITY OF OPENING, 82, 90
	1	2	3	4	5
DEMOCRACY	**0.868**	**0.203**	**0.225**		
	[0.316]***	[0.331]	[0.337]		
LEARNING	**0.012**				
	[0.049]				
DEMOCRACY*LEARNING	**-0.078**				
	[0.122]				
LEARNING 82		**-0.130**		**-0.172**	
		[0.048]***		[0.059]***	
DEMOCRACY*LEARNING 82		**0.260**			
		[0.070]***			
LEARNING 82/90			**-0.120**		**-0.161**
			[0.045]***		[0.058]***
DEMOCRACY*LEARNING 82/90			**0.253**		
			[0.072]***		
POLITY				**0.025**	**0.025**
				[0.025]	[0.024]
POLITY*LEARNING 82				**0.014**	
				[0.004]***	
POLITY*LEARNING 82/90					**0.014**
					[0.004]***
TIME IN OFFICE	**0.003**	**-0.003**	**-0.000**	**-0.003**	**-0.001**
	[0.018]	[0.018]	[0.018]	[0.020]	[0.019]
LOG(AID PER CAPITA)	**-0.074**	**-0.121**	**-0.146**	**-0.142**	**-0.162**
	[0.130]	[0.137]	[0.141]	[0.137]	[0.140]
BoP CRISIS	**0.041**	**-0.005**	**0.005**	**0.057**	**0.066**
	[0.238]	[0.237]	[0.237]	[0.238]	[0.238]
GATT/WTO	**-0.589**	**-0.630**	**-0.607**	**-0.607**	**-0.604**
	[0.249]**	[0.269]**	[0.265]**	[0.260]**	[0.260]**
UNDER	**0.332**	**0.382**	**0.409**	**0.317**	**0.349**
	[0.213]	[0.230]*	[0.231]*	[0.231]	[0.234]
LOG(POPULATION)	**-0.042**	**-0.104**	**-0.106**	**-0.078**	**-0.083**
	[0.093]	[0.094]	[0.095]	[0.092]	[0.093]
DEBTSERVICE	**0.042**	**0.038**	**0.040**	**0.043**	**0.043**
	[0.019]**	[0.021]*	[0.022]*	[0.020]**	[0.021]**
LOG(INFLATION)	**0.631**	**0.688**	**0.648**	**0.701**	**0.675**
	[0.228]***	[0.240]***	[0.251]***	[0.236]***	[0.246]***
LOG(GDP)	**-0.035**	**-0.163**	**-0.152**	**-0.180**	**-0.169**
	[0.181]	[0.203]	[0.198]	[0.216]	[0.211]
1980	**-0.555**	**-0.652**	**-0.635**	**-0.640**	**-0.629**
	[0.335]*	[0.353]*	[0.363]*	[0.338]*	[0.352]*
1990	**0.662**	**0.600**	**0.487**	**0.567**	**0.541**
	[0.513]	[0.582]	[0.572]	[0.604]	[0.607]
Constant	**0.459**	**3.767**	**3.682**	**3.049**	**3.116**
	[2.894]	[3.087]	[3.022]	[3.224]	[3.188]
LEARNING, NET EFFECT IN DEMOCRACY	**-0,006**	**0.130**	**0.133**		
	[0.102]	[0.050]***	[0.057]**		
Log Pseudolikelihood	-84,443	-81,39	-81,164	-81,051	-80,993
Observations	707	707	707	707	707

All variables lagges one year

Robust standard errors in brackets, clustered on country

*** significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%**

Table 2 disaggregates the types of regime into several categories. In columns (1) and (2), we distinguish the effect of learning on trade liberalization conditional on being either a parliamentarian or a presidential democracy, and make dictatorships our base category. In columns (3) and (4), the distinction is among personalist, single party, and military dictatorships. We take democracies as our baseline category in this case. The bottom rows of Table 2 show the net effect of learning on the probability of opening up to trade, conditional on the different categories. Two results are robust across different calculations of the learning series, albeit one of them is significant at the 90% confidence level. First, presidential democracies seem to have an advantage when it comes to learning and to open up to trade as a result. Thus, it seems that the mechanism relating higher accountability and checks and balances with these regimes prevails over reinforced decisional capacity often associated with parliamentary systems. This finding is in line with our second hypothesis and with Bueno de Mesquita *et al.*'s findings (2003). And second, personalist authoritarian regimes are significantly less likely than democracies to learn from their regional neighbors and to open up to trade as a result. This finding largely confirms our third hypothesis. As expected, those regimes whose survival depends on the smallest coalition size have the least incentives to adopt policies that increase the welfare of the majority. Single party and military regimes appear indistinguishable from each other in their propensity to learn from vicarious experiences.

In both tables, most of the other controls are not significant. High inflation is indeed associated with a greater probability to liberalize the trade regime. This result accords with accounts of policy reform closely linked to the disruptive effect of hyperinflations (Drazen and Easterly 2001; see Brooks and Kurtz's study (2008) in Latin America). The same applies to the level of indebtedness. A very robust result across models is that belonging to the GATT/WTO is also significant but it is has a counterintuitive (negative) sign: Joining this club reduces rather than increases the probability of trade liberalization. According to some accounts, countries unilaterally reduce their trade barriers before entering the GATT/WTO. Pedro Aspe, Finance Minister under Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-94), stated that "the first part of the process of [trade] liberalization that includes the removal of non tariff barriers and the reduction of the level and the dispersion of tariffs generally has to be unilateral…" (1993: 141). The contradictory sign may also have to do with the fact that once in the system countries take advantage of the myriad of exceptions to reductions in trade barriers (Milner and Kubota 2005). Neither do the log of per capita aid nor being under an agreement with the IMF (UNDER) influence the probability of opening to trade.

In sum, democracies are more likely to liberalize their trade regimes because, among other things, they are less dogmatic. Especially in hard times, democracies look and learn from the relatively better experience of

those countries in their regions that liberalized their trade regimes. As shown above, different political regimes have different propensities to learn and to react to bad economic times. Thus, the fact that trade liberalization has diffused at a different pace within different regions of the world may well be reflecting the fact that political regimes also concentrate regionally.

Table 2. Probability of Opening, by types of Democracy and Dictatorship

	PROBABILITY OF OPENING, BY TYPE OF DEMOCRACY, 82	PROBABILITY OF OPENING, BY TYPE OF DEMOCRACY, 82/90	PROBABILITY OF OPENING, BY TYPE OF DICTATORSHIP, 82	PROBABILITY OF OPENING, BY TYPE OF DICTATORSHIP, 82/90
	1	2	3	4
PARLIAMENTARISM	**0.109**	**0.333**		
	[0.523]	[0.495]		
PRESIDENTIALISM	**-0.176**	**-0.111**		
	[0.473]	[0.453]		
LEARNING 82	**-0.151**		**0.132**	
	[0.049]***		[0.052]**	
PARLIAMENTARISM*LEARNING 82	**0.284**			
	[0.092]***			
PRESIDENTIALISM*LEARNING 82	**0.466**			
	[0.173]***			
LEARNING 82/90		**-0.142**		**0.129**
		[0.046]***		[0.060]**
PARLIAMENTARISM*LEARNING 82/90		**0.227**		
		[0.098]**		
PRESIDENTIALISM*LEARNING 82/90		**0.416**		
		[0.154]***		
PERSONALIST			**0.355**	**0.365**
			[0.494]	[0.486]
SINGLE PARTY			**-0.418**	**-0.434**
			[0.372]	[0.373]
MILITARY			**-0.911**	**-0.974**
			[0.522]*	[0.546]*
PERSONALIST*LEARNING 82			**-0.353**	
			[0.087]***	
SINGLE PARTY*LEARNING 82			**-0.183**	
			[0.061]***	
MILITARY*LEARNING 82			**-0.121**	
			[0.097]	
PERSONALIST*LEARNING 82/90				**-0.356**
				[0.088]***
SINGLE PARTY*LEARNING 82/90				**-0.168**
				[0.062]***
MILITARY*LEARNING 82/90				**-0.087**
				[0.086]
TIME IN OFFICE	**-0.005**	**-0.002**	**-0.007**	**-0.006**
	[0.018]	[0.017]	[0.021]	[0.021]
LOG(AID)	**-0.198**	**-0.209**	**-0.110**	**-0.136**
	[0.140]	[0.139]	[0.155]	[0.160]
BoP CRISIS	**-0.097**	**-0.107**	**0.015**	**0.029**
	[0.221]	[0.224]	[0.245]	[0.246]
GATT/WTO	**-0.761**	**-0.718**	**-0.657**	**-0.624**
	[0.288]***	[0.283]**	[0.296]**	[0.293]**
UNDER	**0.426**	**0.441**	**0.327**	**0.336**
	[0.239]*	[0.236]*	[0.241]	[0.242]
LOG(POPULATION)	**-0.139**	**-0.132**	**-0.079**	**-0.085**
	[0.104]	[0.101]	[0.087]	[0.089]
DEBTSERVICE	**0.053**	**0.055**	**0.042**	**0.042**
	[0.021]**	[0.021]**	[0.023]*	[0.023]*
LOG(INFLATION)	**0.681**	**0.643**	**0.681**	**0.642**
	[0.255]***	[0.276]**	[0.241]***	[0.250]**
LOG(GDP)	**-0.279**	**-0.273**	**-0.085**	**-0.079**
	[0.237]	[0.232]	[0.231]	[0.230]
1980	**-0.937**	**-0.882**	**-0.661**	**-0.631**
	[0.439]**	[0.434]**	[0.360]*	[0.369]*
1990	**-0.142**	**-0.420**	**0.578**	**0.475**
	[0.679]	[0.581]	[0.584]	[0.578]
Constant	**6.227**	**5.719**	**2.973**	**2.992**
	[3.415]*	[3.295]*	[3.007]	[3.026]
LEARNING, NET EFFECT PARLIAMENTARISM	**0.133**	**0.084**		
	[0.070]*	[0.852]		
LEARNING, NET EFFECT PRESIDENTIALISM	**0.314**	**0.274**		
	[0.174]*	[0.149]*		
LEARNING, NET EFFECT PERSONALIST			**-0.220**	**-0,227**
			[0.054]***	[0.053]***
LEARNING, NET EFFECT SINGLE PARTY			**-0,051**	**-0,039**
			[0.041]	[0.036]
LEARNING, NET EFFECT MILITARY			**0.011**	**0.041**
			[0.082]	[0.052]
Log Pseudolikelihood	-76,796	-76,509	-77,74	-77,22
Observations	703	703	700	700

All variables lagged one year
Robust standard errors in brackets, clustered on country
*** significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%**

Conclusions

Recent research on policy diffusion has emphasized the role of learning (rational or bounded) in the adoption of policies (Weyland 2007; Simmons *et al*. 2008; Shipan and Volden 2008; Meseguer 2009a; Gilardi 2009). Whereas this literature has been successful at demonstrating through a variety of methods that the experience of others matters, little is known about the political conditions under which learning is more likely to influence policy making.

Parallel to the research on learning and policy diffusion, the political economy of trade liberalization has suggested that, contrary to the conventional wisdom, democracies may have an advantage when it comes to adopting a policy with concentrated losers. Besides other alternative explanations that relate to the changing character of the median voter in new developing country democracies (Milner and Kubota 2005) or the legislature's role in making trade policy in democracies (Mansfield *et al*. 2000), we have argued and demonstrated that the greater propensity of democracies to open up to trade has to do with the high costs of dogmatism —that is, of not learning— for those political regimes which rely on a big coalition to govern, which in turn benefits from lower barriers to trade.

Using data on fifty-seven developing countries for the period 1970-1999 and a rational approach to estimate learning from others, we find that democracies are more likely to open up to trade as a result of learning. We also find that learning is particularly relevant during critical times. This research also shows that dictatorships are more dogmatic, that is, they are unreceptive to the experience with trade liberalization of other countries in the same region even in periods of economic hardship. Personalist dictatorships appear the most unreceptive to the lessons of others.

Finally, this finding throws light as to why liberal trade policy has certainly diffused during the last two decades; yet it has not been embraced with the same enthusiasm in different regions, especially in those regions where democratic politics has not been the norm, at least until recently.

Appendix

LIST OF COUNTRIES IN THE SAMPLE, TRADE LIBERALIZATION

AFRICA	SOUTH ASIA	SOUTH E. ASIA	NORTH AFRICA/ MIDDLE EAST	LATIN AMERICA	NON-IBERIAN/ CARIBBEAN
Angola	Bangladesh	China	Algeria	Costa Rica	Barbados
Benin	India	Indonesia	Egypt	Dom. Republic	Haiti
Bostwana	Nepal	Korea	Morocco	El Salvador	Jamaica
Burkina Faso	Pakistan	Malaysia	Tunisia	Guatemala	Trinidad and Tobago
Burundi	Sri Lanka	Myanmar	Iran	Honduras	Guyana
Cameroon		Philippines	Iraq	Mexico	
Cape Verde		Singapore	Israel	Nicaragua	
CAR		Thailand	Jordan	Panama	
Chad			Syria	Argentina	
Congo			Yemen	Bolivia	
Ethiopia			Turkey	Brazil	
Gabon				Chile	
Gambia				Colombia	
Ghana				Ecuador	
Guinea				Paraguay	
GBissau				Peru	
Côte d´Ivoire				Uruguay	
Kenya				Venezuela	
Lesotho					
Liberia					
Madagascar					
Malawi					
Mali					
Mauritania					
Mauritius					
Mozambique					
Niger					
Nigeria					
Rwanda					
Senegal					
Sierra Leone					
Somalia					
South Africa					
Swaziland					
Tanzania					
Togo					
Uganda					
Zaire					
Zambia					
Zimbabwe					

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