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The Persistence of the Past: The Class of 1965 Turns Fifty

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Introduction

One perennial, and in some respects, still poorly understood, subject of political research concerns the extent to which, and when, political attitudes tend to stabilize or crystallize over the life-span. A second line of inquiry builds upon -- indeed requires -- the answer to the first: how do ideas about the formation of political generations (Mannheim 1952) help us to understand the over-time dynamics of political aggregates?

One reason an understanding of these phenomena is so elusive is the difficulty of studying them empirically. A convincing analysis of the long-term dynamics of political attitudes requires the rarely available resource of panel data over the life-span. The problems encountered when trying to distinguish generational from life-stage and period effects, using repeated cross-sections or even long-term panels, are well known (Menard 1991).

This paper revisits the linked questions of attitudinal crystallization and generational formation in an attempt to nudge the understanding of these matters forward. Our goal, put most generally, is to bring ideas about the formation of political generations into an analysis of the long-term dynamics of attitude crystallization. Although scholars have quite often tried to trace the long-term development of political generations, and often employ comparison groups (e.g., Alwin, Cohen, and Newcomb 1991, Cole, Zucker, and Ostrove 1998, Elder 1974, Fendrich and Lovoy 1988, Jennings 1987, Markus 1979, Stewart, Settles, and Winter 1998), less common are analyses of attitudinal crystallization that bring ideas about political generations to bear. We do this in the paper in two ways.

First, our analysis distinguishes within an age-cohort between those who were politically engaged and those who were politically unengaged during their early adult, and presumably politically formative, years. The former resemble the "generational unit" Mannheim (1952) described far better than does the age-cohort as a whole. We explore the importance of this distinction to how attitudinal stability and constraint develop over time.

Second, we compare age cohorts to suggest how the crystallization process produces age-related differences in the response to political events. Age, in this analysis is treated as a marker both of political experience and of political generation. This effort demonstrates how the unfolding of political history can influence the extent to which attitudes crystallize within a political generation.

Although our focus, here, is on long-term dynamics and outcomes, we conclude by suggesting possible implications of our arguments and findings for research into the short-term dynamics and static properties of public opinion and political behavior.

Data

We draw upon the four-wave socialization project, which had its origins in the spring of 1965 with a national survey of 1669 high school seniors and their parents (Jennings and Niemi 1974). Subsequent surveys of both generations were conducted in 1973 and 1982. A fourth wave of data collection from the younger generation, in the form of computer assisted interviews, occurred in the spring and summer of 1997. Self-administered data were also collected from their spouses or partners and, as an innovation, from their offspring aged 15 years and older as well. This paper relies primarily on the four-wave data from the class of 1965.

A total of 935 respondents were reinterviewed in mid-1997; they comprise the four wave panel. The unadjusted retention rate of 56% from the original pool of respondents is a strikingly successful figure for

a national study spanning thirty-two years.¹ Excluding the 68 known deaths from the base raises the retention rate to 58%. It seems likely that some of the original respondents we were unable to locate during one of the post-1965 waves (n=324) were also deceased, which would elevate the adjusted retention rate a bit higher.

Previous analyses demonstrated only minor differences from wave to wave of those who dropped out compared with those who remained in (Jennings and Niemi 1981, Appendix A). Moreover these differences did not increase over time. Indeed, the respondents in the 1982 wave bore a slightly higher resemblance to the original 1965 interviewees than did the 1973 respondents (Jennings and Markus 1984). For the new data collection the crucial comparison is between the 935 four-wave panel respondents with the 734 respondents surveyed in the 1965 study but not included in one or more of the post-1965 waves. Because we have observations on both sets of respondents as of 1965, it is possible to see how similar the four-wave respondents are to those who dropped out somewhere along the way. As with earlier comparisons, the new ones are quite reassuring also, with the magnitude of the differences on both background and political variables being quite modest.

The timing of the four surveys bears comment. Three of them occurred in the year following a presidential election, thus holding constant the political calendar. Although the third wave occurred in 1982, whatever contamination might have been generated by electioneering is minimized by the off-year nature of the election and by virtue of the survey having taken place well before the fall campaign. A second important temporal feature is that while the first two panel periods differ by only one year in terms of their duration, eight and nine years, respectively, the third panel period traverses fifteen years. This departure was not necessarily by design, but from a life-span perspective the departure seems relatively benign. That is, the politically relevant transitional and formative stages contained within the 18-26 and 26-35 age ranges encompassed by the earlier panels equals, and most probably surpasses, those contained within the 35-50 year age range encompassed by the third panel.

Any analysis of this cohort should keep in mind both life history and political history. In terms of life history, the class of 1965 has aged from around 18 years of age to 50 years of age. Along the way a majority of them have married, and often remarried, had children, changed jobs and residences, and have experienced the various rewards and setbacks that typically accompany the aging process. At age 50 many of them stand at or near the peak of their occupational achievements. They have also had ample interactions with the political world, whether of a passive or active variety.

In terms of political history, the class of 1965 lies at the heart of the protest generation, ushered into adulthood by the cacophony of voices and angst surrounding the Vietnam War and political assassinations, and the sweeping social changes signalled by the civil rights and women's rights movements. And then, just after the majority of them had a chance to vote in their first presidential election, the Watergate scandal broke, followed by President Nixon's resignation. Succeeding years witnessed such nationally absorbing events as the oil crisis, recession, the eight-year reign of Ronald Reagan, the Iran-Contra affair, and the Gulf War.

These events raise the possibility of cohort-centric effects that threaten the generalizability of findings emerging from the study. To some degree the presence of the parent panel component of the project lessens the cohort-centric problem. Then, too, the project has a decided advantage over the two NES

¹ Strictly speaking the number of interviewees totals 927 because eight individuals completed self-administered questionnaires. Of the 927 interviews, 51% were face to face and 49% were by telephone. The Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan carried out the field work, with the bulk of interviews occurring in May-July of 1997.

panels in terms of its long-term nature, and over the Bennington (Alwin, Cohen, and Newcomb 1991) and Terman gifted children studies (Sears and Funk 1999) in terms of its national scope and heterogeneous sample. In any event, we draw on data from the parent sample as well as data from the National Election Studies when cohort heterogeneity is desirable.

The Stability of Political Affiliations and Attitudes

Two models of stability over the life span appear to characterize a sizeable number of political attitudes (Alwin 1993, 1994; Sears 1983). The impressionable years model posits considerable fluctuations during the late adolescent and young adult years, followed by a period of crystallization that more or less holds throughout the rest of the life cycle. The mid-life stability model is similar except that it is curvilinear, and predicts a tapering off of stability in the years beyond mid-life. Both models rest on the belief that repeated trials with the political environment and the development of "affective mass" with respect to affiliations and attitudes lead to increased stability before middle age (Sears 1981). Because the 1965 seniors have not yet reached the latter stages of life, neither model can be fully tested, although some leverage can be gained by utilizing the earlier waves of the parent samples contained in the study.

We have observations across all four waves for several measures and across three waves for many others, thus permitting us to look at the patterns of persistence across a substantial chunk of the adult life cycle (e.g. Alwin 1994). Table 1a presents three sets of continuity coefficients (r) for seven attitudinal measures developed at each point in time.² (See Appendix for details concerning the measures.) Although the other three sets of coefficients merit attention (i.e., '65-'82, '65-'97, and '73-'97), we confine ourselves here to those three based on adjacent years of observation. In order to convey a sense of life stage progression the cohort's age range has been affixed to each panel's calendar time.³

As the correlations clearly show, the second panel period records very substantial gains in stability over the first time frame. The addition of the third time frame shows that these gains tend to remain very much in place, a particularly arresting fact given the much longer time span represented by that third period. Significantly, the seven measures range widely in terms of attitude objects, question format, the number of items contained within the measures, and the varying political vicissitudes that have accompanied the phenomena reflected by these measures since 1965. Notwithstanding these plentiful variations, strong similarity marks the developmental patterns. This similarity is not to deny the likelihood of interaction effects involving life stage, political history, and the stability of particular attitudes (Sears and Funk 1999, Sears and Valentino 1997).

Nevertheless, these results fit neatly within either the impressionable years or mid-life stability models, but leave unresolved a choice between the two due to the cohort's having only reached age 50. Drawing on the parent panels from the same project sheds light on the topic. In order to make the parent cohort somewhat more similar to the "youth" cohort on the very important social characteristic of education, we report results only for those parents with at least a high school education--who comprise 62% of the

² At this stage of our analysis we are not adjusting the continuity coefficients for measurement error, in part because our focus is on patterns of development across various kinds of attitudes rather than differences in the magnitudes of stability across various kinds of attitudes. In any event, adjustments for measurement error are unlikely to lead to sizeable changes in the patterns of development over time.

³ Our analysis throughout will be based on respondents who have no missing data on the variable under consideration. In the present case that means no missing data at four points in time. Although that rule reduces the N , rather modestly, it has the great virtue of working with exactly the same cases across all observation points.

parent sample.⁴ On average these parents aged from a mean of 54 to 63 during the 1973-1982 period, which means that they pick up in 1973 at just a shade older age than where their children leave off in 1997.

For the most part the parents displayed modest gains during the second panel period, a finding again consistent with either an impressionable years or mid-life stability model (last two columns of Table 1a). However, if the latter is to be supported, stability would have to start decreasing fairly quickly, for as noted above, the mean age of the parents was 63 as of 1982. Moreover, as a comparison of columns 3 and 5 indicates, even in absolute terms the parent cohort during its last panel period substantially exceeded the stability of the younger cohort on some measures during its last panel span--thus adding more support for the notion that the class of 1965 may not have yet reached its peak of attitudinal continuity.

Beginning with the second wave in 1973 a number of new attitudinal questions were added to the survey instrument and were repeated in 1982 and 1997. Armed with some well-grounded propositions based on the analysis of the four-wave measures, we can further assess the impressionable years and mid-life stability models. Table 1b presents the continuity coefficients for an additional eight measures, most of which are based on self-locations on the traditional NES seven point scales anchored by explicit verbal cues.

The major story emerging from this analysis is that stability either remained essentially the same across the two spans or showed modest to sizeable increases as in the cases of liberal-conservative self-designation and opinions about the role of the U.S. in world affairs. Given the patterns displayed in Table 1a, a very safe guess is that these stability levels represent substantial increments over the (unobserved) levels of the first panel period. Additionally, they lend further credence to both the impressionable years and mid-life stability models.

Again, a comparison can be drawn with the parent panels (column 3). Due to the fact that parents were not resurveyed in 1997 (natural attrition having heavily reduced their numbers), we need to capitalize on the proximity of the younger cohort's age in 1997 and the older cohort's (mean) age in 1982. A comparison based on these "adjacent" cohorts (i.e., columns 2 and 3) reveals trivial differences on four of the measures and very modest ones on two others, thus pointing again toward a plateauing effect in the middle to late middle years. What catches the eye, however, are the two dramatic exceptions to this pattern. Stability proves to be much higher in the youth sample in regard to evaluation of the women's liberation movement and opinions about the legalization of marijuana. Both of these topics constituted new, salient issues as the class of 1965 came of political age. Political identities could form around such issues. By contrast, the issues hit the parent generation when it was already into middle age and found itself trying to graft these issues on to previous identities. One surely runs all kinds of risks in a genetic splicing of these two generations, but the exercise is instructive and the results similar to those based on highly specialized populations (Alwin, et al. 1991 and Sears and Funk 1999), though departing somewhat from those based on synthetic cohorts derived from the National Election panel studies in the 1950s and 1970s (Alwin 1994).

Political Engagement and Stability

At first blush both the impressionable years and mid-life stability models would predict that those individuals most engaged in the politics of the time would be more likely than those less engaged to exhibit greater stability over time. Being more sensitive to and involved in politics when coming of political age would presumably lay down a somewhat firmer attitudinal base for them than for the less involved.

⁴ Results based on the full parent sample are quite similar.

However, that process should be most evident after the initial period of political adulthood which, in terms of our project, covers the first panel period, when the respondents aged from 18-26. As just demonstrated, the 26-35 year span witnessed considerable firming up of attitudes. Indeed, given the generally modest to moderate levels of stability observed during earlier years, plus the dramatic political history accompanying their entry into adulthood, we could imagine that the more involved would show less stability during the initial panel. Young adults more caught up in the political action of those turbulent years, when challenge and protest occupied center stage, might have found their prior or loosely formed attitudes more subject to challenge and, thus, to change.

To test these ideas we developed an index of political engagement that reflected the level of political participation over the 1965-1973 period as reported by the respondents in 1973. As contrasted with other traditional measures of engagement -- such as subjective political interest, media consumption, or political knowledge -- participation has the advantage of representing concrete acts to achieve a political, usually collective, outcome. Another distinct advantage is that it captures activities occurring between 1965 and 1973, as the erstwhile high school seniors made their transitions into young adulthood, rather than indicating a state of mind at the time of the interview.

The index ranged from 0-9 purposive political acts.⁵ For present purposes (and recognizing the accompanying loss of information) we have divided the index at the median, which resulted in 53% of the sample being categorized as the more engaged. Obviously, other factors can be affecting stability levels. Our present purpose is not to provide a full accounting of what prompts higher stability. Rather, it is to assess the importance of political stratification, especially whether those with an early, more active profile provide a pool of more stable attitudes over the long haul due to their earlier initiation.

We first look at attitudes assessed at all four time points. Three features stand out when examining continuity according to early levels of political engagement (Table 2a). First, a parallel developmental pattern characterizes the more and less active individuals. Regardless of activity levels, stability rose from the first panel period to the second and tended to level out at that point. Political maturation via interaction with the political system, media exposure, and the like exerted common effects regardless of initial entry participation levels. Living makes a difference.

A second, more intriguing feature rests in the several reversals of the relative positions of the two participation strata over time. Much as we speculated, those who were politically engaged during the 1965-1973 period tended to be either less stable or just as stable as those who were relatively unengaged (Table 2a, first column). The more active were noticeably less consistent over the 1965-1973 period in their stances with respect to partisan identification, political trust, prayers in school, and in their evaluation of big business relative to labor unions. Yet in the post-73 period, the relative stability levels of the two groups are reversed (Table 2b, second and third columns). The active group tended to be more stable in their later years than did the less active group, though the differences are not always large and, in the case of party identification, the less active have a tiny though statistically insignificant edge as of the third time span.

What is more compelling, however, are the dynamics involved. On all save the integration issue the active group displayed much greater increases in stability from the first to the second and third panel periods than did the less active group. Illustratively, the party identification correlation for the more active

⁵ Five of these acts dealt with campaigning in regard to any sort of public election and included persuading others how to vote, attending meetings or rallies, displaying buttons or bumper stickers, donating money, and doing other sorts of campaign tasks. The four remaining acts included writing letters to the editor, contacting public officials, engaging in protests and demonstrations, and working with others to solve community problems.

increased from .44 to .65 from the first to the second panel period compared with an increase of from .55 to .65 for the less active. After experiencing more attitudinal fluctuations as they came of age, the more engaged stratum seemed, in effect, to sort itself out.

Adding more support to the points just made are the results based on responses to questions initiated in 1973 (Table 2b). Of the sixteen comparisons at hand, the engaged group displayed greater stability in all but three instances. Some of these differences are quite striking, as in the cases of aid to minorities, providing government job assistance, and protecting the rights of the accused. Unlike the results based on the first panel period, which included an initial sounding in 1965, the results for the second and third time periods reflect the effects of political activity levels captured prior to any attitudinal assessments. Early initiation into the participation system appears to presage greater attitudinal stability for the years ahead.

The Linkage of Issue Positions and Party Identification

We have established that political attachments and attitudes tend to stabilize after the early adult brushes with the political world and that this solidification takes on a somewhat different shape according to how quickly people become actively engaged in politics. Another way of looking at the dynamics of political affiliations and attitudes is to see if the general strengthening of stability over time is matched by a strengthening of the linkage between the two. A quadrennial, if indeed not perennial, subject of inquiry in the public opinion and electoral behavior fields concerns the connection between party identification and issue stances. A major focus in the field, put simply, is whether issue stances drive party identification or whether party identification drives issue stances. More nuanced versions recognize the importance of beginning points in early adulthood, an emergent crystallization with respect to party identification and to at least some types of issues (as witnessed above), and periodic updating of both party identification and issue positions (e.g., Abramowitz 1998, Carmines and Stimson 1989, Niemi and Jennings 1991). Longitudinal data are especially well suited to addressing such phenomena.

Our present concern is with the broad character of the over-time relationship between citizens' particular attitudes toward political groups and issues and their general partisan affiliations. Assuming that individuals are learning machines with updating capacities, and that the political environment they confront is relatively stable in the issues that are being engaged and the choices offered by the parties, we should expect these relationships to increase over time.⁶ As individuals become more familiar with the parties, public policies, and major actors they would presumably come to see the connections amongst them -- providing that the appropriate cues are being emitted. Time, then, stands as a proxy for political experience.

To test this hypothesis, we observed the associations between a variety of political attitudes and party identification across time. Table 3a presents the findings gauged in terms of Pearson correlation coefficients, while Table 3b presents the findings gauged in terms of bivariate regression coefficients.⁷

⁶ This would be true regardless of how and with what strength the direction of influence flows. Moreover, it would be true regardless of the specific learning mechanism involved -- if, for example, political experience brings about a clearer sense of the parties' issue stances, which then drives the enhanced attitude/partisanship tie (e.g., Carmines and Stimson 1989), or if political experience enhances the frequency with which political attitudes become primed, which then generates the tighter attitude/partisanship bond (Sears and Funk 1999). Despite the importance of trying to explicate the causal flows that run between partisanship and other political attitudes, that is not our purpose here.

⁷ Pearson correlations have the advantage of being symmetric statistics, which make no assumption of causal direction. They have the disadvantage, however, of being sensitive to the variables' marginal distributions, which makes cross-time or cross-group comparisons problematic. Bivariate regression coefficients, on the other hand, require an assignment of causal direction but are not sensitive to the variables' marginal distributions. Table 3b

With some important exceptions as noted below, the expected strengthening does occur with the passage of time. Relationships for the first eight measures listed are all demonstrably higher for 1997 -- usually by a very hefty margin -- than are those for 1973. That the pattern across the years is not always monotonic suggests the possibility of period effects, though non-monotonicity is the exception rather than the rule. Overall, these results underscore the importance of sheer adult-level experience with the political system. People experience more politics, and thus make more sense of politics, as they age.

Of course, another possibility is that the class of 1965 was merely responding to push-pull forces that were affecting all cohorts passing through the same historical time. One idea here would involve the possibility that these issues were increasing in salience over the period. This, however, is not very convincing on its face, especially in light of the history of the civil rights movement and women's movement. A more plausible idea is that partisan divisions on these issues have become clearer since the 1960s. Researchers have found increased public awareness of party differences on racial issues in recent decades (Carmines and Stimson 1989) and of the parties' ideological differences in general (Abramowitz 1998). Undoubtedly, these kinds of changes in partisan cues also have contributed to the increased linkages we observe in Tables 3a and 3b. Only by analyzing over-time data for multiple cohorts can one begin to disentangle period from aging effects, a task we take up below. To foreshadow those results: although all cohorts show an over-time increase in the issue/party nexus, the age-related differences in these dynamics continue to suggest the importance of political experience to the strengthened linkages between the two.

The exceptions in Tables 3a and 3b -- one dealing with the U.S. role in world affairs and one with the rights of those accused of crimes -- are notable. Attitudes on both of these issues manifest weaker associations with partisanship than one finds for the first eight, and no tendency toward stronger associations over time. Considering that neither of these issues appeared at all often in party or candidate rhetoric during the years being covered here, the ongoing weak links can be seen as a faithful reproduction of elite (non) discourse. By contrast, the other attitude items concern matters of greater salience throughout the period -- issues concerning racial equality, women's rights, legalization of drugs, government provision of social services, and the like. Further, there is a reversal in the sign of the relationship between party identification and opinion on the U.S. role in world affairs. Whereas in 1973 and 1982 Democrats were more likely than Republicans to express an isolationist point of view, by 1997 it was Republicans who were more likely to do so. Although this reversal is not puzzling -- after all, the 1990s ushered in the end of the Cold War and gave rise to expressions of isolationist sentiment among prominent Republican political candidates and officeholders -- it demonstrates how changes in the political environment can disrupt the tendency for political and partisan attitudes to become more integrated with age.

Political Engagement and the Issue/Party Linkage

As with stability of attitudes over time, it seems likely that early engagement in politics would play a mediating role in the longitudinal development of the political attitudes/party identification nexus. Just as the accumulation of political experience accompanying aging encourages the integration of political attitudes and partisan identification, the build up of experience through active political involvement should usher in such integration as well. Our specific expectations are twofold: (1) that those who became politically active during the late 1960s and early 1970s would have manifested these connections more

presents bivariate regression coefficients where party identification is treated as the dependent variable, but similar findings are obtained if the causal direction is reversed or if an average of two regression coefficients is used. All variables were scaled to range from 0-1, and to run from liberal/Democratic to conservative/Republican. See the Appendix for further details.

quickly and more strongly than those were relatively inactive over the period; and that (2) given the importance of these "impressionable years" for the formation of political identities, these group differences would have endured over time.

The first of these expectations is handsomely met, as the first column of Table 4 demonstrates. As of 1965, at least based on the data we have that reaches back that far, the associations between attitudes toward issues/groups and partisanship were equivalent (and, relative to later years, weak) in both groups. Indeed, in one case (evaluation of business vs. labor), the relationship was noticeably weaker among those who were soon to be galvanized into political action than among those who were not. By 1973, however, a very different pattern was in place. At this point, the connections are stronger for those who were politically active across the intervening period, usually quite decidedly so. In fact, most of the relationships for the less active group are just barely or not at all statistically significant.

The second expectation, that early entrants into political participation would keep their edge in the connection evident between their attitudes and their party ID, receives mixed support. Not surprisingly, the politically active never lose their edge across the years, at least with respect to issues where there was a visible connection at all. However, the differences between the more and less active either stayed essentially the same over time or showed the less active cutting into the edge held by the more active. One reason undoubtedly rests in the fact that some individuals are late starters in the participation game. They would show up as more active in the subsequent surveys and thus heighten the prospect of fitting party image together with political attitudes.

Nevertheless, the importance of early political involvement is very clear in these results, as they were for the stability findings reviewed earlier. Those whose entry into adulthood during the turbulent late 1960s and early 1970s was marked by political engagement emerged with a more crystallized set of political and partisan attitudes. This point is further underscored by looking at how well their specific political attitudes at age 26 predict their general partisan and ideological orientations over two decades later, at age 50, as shown in Table 5. In all but one case, the correlations for the engaged group are 50% to 100% higher than are those for the disengaged group. Indeed, the one case where the difference is trivial, which concerns evaluations of business vs. labor, seems to strengthen the rule. Although the political controversies of the time were wide-ranging, issues concerning business vs. labor took a back seat to those concerning racial equality, women's rights, drugs, morality, and war.

Thus, while the late 1960s and early 1970s were "impressionable years" for this cohort -- as they left their childhood homes and began to establish their adult identities, both personally and politically -- not all members of the cohort were impressed. Those who became politically engaged throughout the period found their initial views challenged and unsettled, but ended up with political attitudes and identities that in important respects still characterize them some 25 years later. For others in the cohort, however, those who were not politically engaged during those impressionable years, the model of development is quite different. To put it simply: who they were, politically, by their mid-twenties was more connected to who they had been in late adolescence, and had little bearing on who they were to become at mid-life.

Cohort-Centric Effects

We have argued that the ties between party identification and political attitudes tend to strengthen over time, and implied that this is a general process, one that is not specific to the class of 1965. We have also suggested that this kind of age-dependent developmental process requires a relatively stable political environment, stable in terms of the issue positions parties are staking out and the groups whose interests they are seeking to advance. This argument by no means rules out inter-cohort differences in terms of what particular attitudes become linked to partisanship or in how strongly the linkages form. Quite the contrary. As cohorts begin to make firmer their partisan allegiances and attitudinal dispositions,

the particular linkages being forged between the two should vary with the societal forces at work at the time. The ways in which issues, groups, and parties get aligned in voters' minds depends in part upon the ways these are aligned in the political environment that marks their coming of age. As such, changes over time in the issues and problems that concern the nation and that become reflected in party agendas should generate inter-cohort differences in the alignment of partisan orientations to issue positions and group sympathies.

This leaves us with two ways in which age figures into the relationships that are formed between party identification and other political attitudes. One way concerns age as an index of political experience. With age comes experience with the political system, an enriched set of policy views and party evaluations, and an evolution of tighter linkages between the two. The second way concerns age as an index of political generation. Because the linkages between policy and partisan attitudes tend to be formed and crystallized in adulthood's early years, they should reflect the associations that were prominent in the political era when the individual came of age.

We saw earlier that the 1965 cohort seemed to form increasingly strong associations between their partisan identification on the one hand and their attitudes on matters concerning race, gender, and social services on the other. According to the arguments set forth above, this development should have, in part, been cohort distinctive. Two specific expectations to this effect are based on age-qua-experience alone: (1) The 1965 cohort should have shown greater increases over time (in the party/issue nexus) than those who were older, and smaller increases than those who were younger, and (2) The connections observed should be stronger among older folks than among younger folks as of any given point in time, so long as there is continuity in the political environment each group has experienced. The more the discontinuity in the political environment that different age groups have faced -- in the issues engaged by the parties and the positions they stake out -- the weaker these age-related differences should be.

This leads to a third expectation based on conceptions of age as a marker of political generation, one that is based on an admittedly rough characterization of how the parties have defined themselves to citizens over time: (3) The late 1960s and 1970s brought new issues into the forefront of the party agendas, issues concerning civil rights, women's rights, and social services provision or "welfare." The Democrats became, or became increasingly, associated with progressive efforts within these domains. Youth coming of age throughout this period should have developed a closer connection between their opinions on these groups/issues and their partisan affiliations than did their elders, whose partisan images and affiliations were largely formed during an earlier era.

To evaluate these expectations we first consider data from the earlier waves of the parent sample in the study. This has the virtue of yielding a comparison across the same questions asked at the same point in time, but the disadvantage of a comparison between only two cohorts, which ends in 1982 (when the parents were last interviewed). We turn second, then, to an analysis of National Election Studies data, which is in many respects ideally suited for the purpose due to its cohort heterogeneity and to the presence of at least a few attitudinal measures that overlap with ours.

In Table 6, we reproduce the linkage results for the youth that were found in Table 3b, adding the comparable findings for the parent generation. Two results, in particular, are important. First, in nearly every comparison that involves civil rights, the women's movement, or government services, the ties found for the youth exceed those found for their parents, though not always by large margins. This is, at least partial, evidence in support of proposition #3 above. Second, the only clear reversal of this pattern concerns the link between party identification and attitudes toward business vis a vis labor. Here the linkage was much weaker for the youth in 1965 than it was for their parents ($v=.36$ vs. $.69$), grew more dramatically over time among the youth than it did among their parents, but still found them lagging behind as of the last time both were interviewed, in 1982 ($b=.75$ vs. $.89$). Because the association of

Democrats with labor and Republicans with big business is long-standing, far more longstanding the associations newly formed during the 1960s and 1970s, this finding is consistent with expectations about age and political development (#1 and #2) laid out above.

An analysis of NES data sheds further light on these issues. To begin, we evaluate the linkage between party identification and a set of political attitudes for three birth cohorts across time. One cohort was designed to be comparable to the sample we have been analyzing, who, for the most part, were born in 1947. In order to ensure a large enough N for analysis, we defined the comparable NES cohort as those born during 1944-1950. We refer to this cohort, below, as the "pseudo-65" cohort. The second, and younger, cohort consists of those born after 1962, and who thus entered the electorate sometime between the beginning of Ronald Reagan's Presidency in 1980 and the re-election of Bill Clinton in 1996. Although the 1980s and 1990s were not marked by the widespread mobilization and conflict over race, gender, and war that characterized the 1960s and 1970s, they nonetheless were decades that presented the electorate with party differences sorted along these lines. The Democratic party, more than the Republican, was the party working to advance civil rights, women's rights, and to protect or enhance programs providing social services or "welfare." The post-1962 group had less experience with the political system than the pseudo-65 cohort, but in many respects found themselves facing a comparable political terrain. The third, and older, cohort consists of those who were born between 1904 and 1932, those who had reached their mid-twenties during the 1930s-1950s. Here, we have isolated a group whose political affiliations had already been forming, and presumably crystallizing, well before the transformative time of the 1960s and 1970s.⁸

We look, for each cohort and over time, at how strong an association was evident between party identification and seven political attitude measures: government assistance to minorities, evaluation of blacks, opinion on women's role, evaluation of the women's movement, opinion on government job assistance, evaluation of labor unions, and opinion on the U.S. role in world affairs. Table 7 presents estimates of the party/issue connection for the three cohorts, on the seven measures, and across three points in time chosen to be comparable to our study years: 1972, 1982, and 1996.

Although some anomalies are evident, the overall pattern is consistent with expectations. There is a general tendency for all of the relationships to increase over time (with the exception of attitudes on the U.S. role in world affairs, where, as we pointed out earlier, it is sensible to find no increase). Thus, something of a period effect characterizes the 1972-1996 period: the parties were increasingly associated in the voter's minds with issues concerning, race, gender, social services and labor.⁹ This pattern is overlaid, however, with others.

Closer scrutiny of Table 7 shows that the overtime increases on issues concerning blacks, women, and social services tend to be much stronger for the youngest cohort and the pseudo-1965 cohort than they are for oldest cohort. Everyone is responding, to some extent, to the "new" political issues, but not everyone is responding to the same extent. Consider, in illustration, the findings for government assistance to minorities. The coefficient for the pseudo-cohort of 1965 grows from .08 in 1972 (when the

⁸ Dividing this cohort into two smaller subgroups, or changing the years marking the boundaries of each cohort produces no substantial difference in the results.

⁹ As developed in Abramowitz's (1998) analysis, the parties were not changing their positions over time, but rather sending out clearer cues about where they stood. This kind of over-time change in the political environment is likely to enhance the connections that all voters see between issues and parties, while still showing an age dependent trace; if the cues parties send are ambiguous, the more experienced older voters are more likely than the inexperienced younger voters to have figured the parties positions out.

cohort was, on average, 25 years old) to .22 in 1982 (age 35) and to .45 in 1996 (age 49). Among the oldest age cohort, the coefficients ranged from .14 to .29 to .33 over the period, as they aged from their mid-forties to their mid 70's on average. Other comparisons in the five-variable "new issues" set are as strong or stronger.

As a consequence of such dynamics, there is a strong trace of curvilinearity across age in the party/issue linkages by 1996. The links are weaker among both those who are younger and those are older than the pseudo-65 cohort -- although, according to our argument, for different reasons in each case. The younger individuals, in their early 20s, have not yet developed crystallized partisan or other political attitudes; they lack the degree of political experience that has helped the 1965 cohort forge tighter connections. By contrast, the older group has had plenty of political experience, in fact too much political experience with another political era, one where the politics of race, gender, and welfare were relatively absent. Their political identities were well crystallized before these changes in the political and partisan landscape, leaving them with partisan affiliations that are relatively detached from the new issues on the political scene.

This interpretation finds further support in the 1996 NES findings concerning labor unions (findings that parallel those found when comparing the youth and parent samples in Table 6). As we would expect because of the long association of the Democratic party with the interests of labor, there is no drop-off in the link between evaluations of labor and party identification across age groups. Indeed, the strength of the relationship between the two climbs sharply and linearly with age. The more Americans like labor the more they like the Democrats (and vice versa); the older the American the more this is true. Figure 1 illustrates this pattern graphically, and for a more fine-grained breakdown of age cohort than was used in Table 5. Figures 2 and 3 present the results for evaluation of blacks and the women's movement for comparison. These convey the contrasting, curvilinear, pattern found for the "new issues" of the 1960s and 1970s.

Our explanation of the differences between Figure 1 and Figures 2-3 stresses the importance of political developments taking place in the impressionable years of early adulthood, and the tendency of attitudes and identities crystallized early to be resistant to change in the later years. Older Americans, socialized in the 30s or 40s to think of the Democrats as aligned with labor -- more, certainly, than they were socialized to think of them as aligned with blacks -- carried that connection forward to the nineties and strengthened it along the way. Later on, they were less likely to integrate their partisan orientations and their attitudes on the new issues of the day, certainly less likely to do so than were younger Americans whose experience with the political system and political parties were largely limited to these new issues.

For this interpretation to be convincing, it would help to replicate the results using many more attitudes toward objects of long-standing association with the parties. Unfortunately, it is harder to find clear examples of such attitudes than it is to find examples of attitudes whose relevance is of more recent vintage; survey researchers, like journalists, become excited about what is new. We plan to continue to pursue this issue with NES and other data, but in the meantime present one final set of results germane to the general argument. These concern age related differences in the link individuals make between their party identification and their evaluations of the military (Figure 4).

If we were to make up findings to help sustain our general point, we could hardly make up stronger findings than those displayed in Figure 4. Among Americans who entered political adulthood during the 1920s and 30s (aged 74+ in 1996), favorable evaluations of the military were aligned with pro-Democratic partisan leanings (negative coefficient, given the scaling of the variables). This relationship progressively weakens among the next two age cohorts (those socialized in the mid-40s through the 50s), at which point it sharply takes on the opposite sign. Beginning with the pseudo-cohort of 1965 -- socialized in the era when the phrase "military-industrial complex" was popularized, the Pentagon Papers were politicized,

and the Republicans came to be associated with the unpopular Vietnam War (Hallin 1984, Zaller 1992) -- unfavorable evaluations of the military became aligned with pro-Democratic leanings. Perhaps more clearly than in previous results, this finding shows how the past helps to define the present, and given the relentless engine of population replacement, the likely future as well.

One general lesson to take away from these demonstrations of age-related differences concerns how events taking place well after the "impressionable years" influence the crystallization process. The class of 1965 shows a dramatic over-time increase in the extent to which they link their political views on race, gender, and welfare with their partisan affiliation because those issues both marked their coming-of-age and persisted on the political agenda, presenting clear (indeed, clearer) party differences. Just as Bill Clinton is from their era, the politics of the 1990s is a politics that makes sense to them.

Conclusion

As research on political socialization has emphasized over the years, the dynamics by which political attitudes evolve over time and are transmitted across generations can have important implications for the polity as a whole. Less appreciated, perhaps, are the ways in which the ideas and findings developed through political socialization research can have important implications for other micro-level research questions in political science. Rather than summarizing findings or restating arguments presented earlier, we conclude by suggesting several "micro-to-macro" and "micro-to-micro" implications that might be drawn from this research.

One macro-level implication concerns political participation. Our analysis has suggested the importance of political engagement in early adulthood to how people mature, politically, and the extent to which their political attitudes crystallize. This implies that changes in the participation rates of young adults could have fairly significant consequences for the political sophistication of the citizenry. Programs like AmeriCorp and policies like MotorVoter, each of which is at least in part aimed at trying to enhance the political participation of young adults, would do more than increase the political representation of this group.

A second aggregate-level implication concerns what we can predict about the future given the process of population replacement. One point is clear: partisan divisions within the electorate on matters of race, gender, and social services will solidify in the years to come. The party affiliations of a large and growing group of American have become strongly linked with their opinions on those issues and will not easily be uncoupled, even if the issue landscape changes or the party differences become obscured.

On the micro-level, one possible implication concerns models of vote choice. Our findings about generational differences in the party/issue nexus suggests that there should be generational differences in the issues that lead to defections from a party-line vote. For example, we would expect older voters, especially those entering the electorate before the 1960s, to be more likely to defect on the basis of issues concerning race, gender, and welfare than would younger voters simply because their attitudes on those issues have not been well integrated into their partisan identification.

A second implication concerns research into the competing sources of political expertise or sophistication. We have argued that early political engagement produces stable political attitudes that are well connected to basic partisan orientations. This raises questions about how early political involvement compares to other possible sources of political sophistication, like political knowledge or education or political involvement in one's later years.

One idea common to these thoughts about macro- or micro-level implications, as well as to the arguments and interpretations in this paper, is the importance of understanding what is past to

understanding the here and now. We are not yet prepared to recommend that survey researchers ask their respondents: "Think back to when you left high school. Did you get involved in politics back then?" But we do think it would be a good idea for political behavior researchers to always ask: "How might political and life history be entering in?"

Appendix: Question Wording and Index Construction

Party Identification

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what? (Strongly, or Not Strongly). [For yourself as closer to the Republican or to the Democratic party?]

Code: 0=strong Democrat to 1=strong Republican

Ideological Identification

We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

Code: 0=extreme liberal to 1=extreme conservative

School Integration

Some people say that the government in Washington should see to it that white and black children are allowed to go to the same schools. Others claim that this is not the government's business. Have you been concerned enough about this question to favor one side over the other? Do you think the government in Washington should see to it that white and black children go to the same schools or stay out of the area as it is none of its business?

Code: 0=see to it that white and black children go to the same schools to 1=stay out of the area as it is none of its business

Civic Tolerance

This variable combines the responses to the following agree/disagree questions:

If someone wanted to make a speech in this community against churches and religion, that person should be allowed to speak.

If a Communist were legally elected to some public office around here, people should allow that person to take office.

(and for the Youth Panel only)

The American system of government is one that all nations should have.

Code: 0=least intolerant to 1=most intolerant.

Political Trust

This variable combines the responses to the following questions:

Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are dishonest, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are dishonest?

Do you think that people in the government waste a lot of the money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it?

How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right -- just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?

Do you feel that almost all of the people running the government are smart people who usually know what they are doing, or do you think that quite a few of them don't seem to know what they are doing?

Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?

Code: 0=least political trust to 1=most political trust

Political Engagement in 1973

This variable was created by summing the number of about nine different kinds of political involvement including: election work for a party, issue, or candidate; attempts at personal political persuasion during election campaigns; attending meetings, rallies, or dinners; displaying campaign buttons or stickers; giving money for campaigns; contacting public officials; writing letters to the editor; attending protest or demonstration; or working with others to solve community problems.

Code: 0=less than or equal to the median number of activities(1 activity), 1=above the median number of activities

Government Aid to Minorities

Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every possible effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks and other minority groups. Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help minorities because they should help themselves. (And other people have opinions somewhere in between). Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

Code: 0=government should help minorities to 1=minorities should help themselves

Evaluation of (Whites-Blacks)

This variable was constructed by subtracting the Feeling Thermometer for 1982), or Thermometer battery was introduced as follows:

Now look at page 11 of the booklet. There are many groups in America and we would like to get your feelings towards some of them using something we call a "feeling thermometer." Here's how it works:

If you have a warm feeling toward a group, or feel favorably toward it, you would place it somewhere between 50 degrees and 100 degrees depending on how warm your feeling is toward the group. On the other hand, if you don't feel very favorably toward a group -- that is if you don't care for it too much -- then you would place it somewhere between 0 degrees and 50 degrees. If you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward a group, then you should place it in the middle, at the 50 degree mark. Of course if you don't know too much about a group, just tell me and we'll go on to the next one. Where would you put (GROUP)?

Code: 0=most pro-black/anti-white to 1= most pro-white/anti-black

Women

Recently there has been a lot of talk about women's rights. Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry and government. Others feel that women's place is in the home. (And other people have opinions somewhere in between). Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

Code: 0=women and men should have an equal role to 1=women

Evaluation of Women

Feeling Thermometer for the Movement

Code: 0=most pro-women -women

Legalization of Marijuana

Some people think that the use of marijuana should be made legal. Others think that the penalties for using marijuana should be set higher than they are now. (And other people have opinions somewhere in between). Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

Code: 0=make use of marijuana legal to 1=set penalties higher than they are now

Prayer in School

Some people think it is all right for the public schools to start each day with a prayer. Others feel that religion does not belong in the public schools but should be taken care of by the family and the church. Have you been interested enough in this to favor one side over the other? Which do you think -- schools should be allowed to start each day with a prayer or religion does not belong in the schools?

Code: 0=religion does not belong in the schools to 1=schools should be allowed to start each day with a prayer

Government Job Assistance

Some people feel that the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living. Suppose these people are at one end of this scale -- at point number 1. Others believe that the government should let each person get ahead on his or her own. Suppose these people are at the other end -- at point number 7. And other people have opinions somewhere in between, at points 2,3,4,5,or 6. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

Code: 0=government see to a job and good standard of living to 1=government let each person get ahead on their own

Evaluation of (Business-Labor)

This variable was constructed by subtracting the Feeling Thermometer for Labor Unions from the Feeling Thermometer for Big Business. See the explanation for the Blacks) -

Code: 0=most anti-big business/pro-union to 1=most pro-big business/anti-union

Rights of Accused

Some people are primarily concerned with doing everything possible to protect the legal rights of those accused of committing crimes. Others feel that it is more important to stop criminal activity even at the risk of reducing the rights of the accused. (And other people have opinions somewhere in between). Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

Code: 0=protect rights of accused to 1=stop crime regardless of rights of accused

U.S. Role in World Affairs

Some people think that the government should pay more attention to our own needs and stop getting involved in other countries' affairs. Others think that a nation as important as ours must play a leading role in foreign affairs. (And other people have opinions somewhere in between.) Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

Code: 0=government should stop getting involved in other countries
play a leading role in foreign affairs

Evaluation of the Military

Feeling Thermometer for the Military.

Code: 0=most anti-military to 1=most pro-military

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