

# Why Do Politicians Invest in Education?

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RISE Conference

06.21.18

# the current paradigm

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“**ignorance** on the part of the policy maker often explains why policies fail”

(Banerjee & Duflo 2011, *Poor Economics*)

“key to promoting learning is **evaluating what works** and using that evidence to inform policy change”

(The World Bank 2011, *Education Sector Strategy 2020*)

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→ “what works” approach is based on **assum's** about the **politics of education policy making**

why do govts provide education?  
how do they choose education policies?  
can evidence on what works lead to  
better policy choices?

# who influences education policy?

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politicians respond to:

- technocrats and experts (“what works”)
  - voters
  - interest groups
  - their own interest
- very different implications for what to do

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  - e.g. **inculcate loyalty**, build military power, promote industrialization, etc.



politics matters,  
but it influences education policy  
in counterintuitive ways

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# 1. democracy is not a panacea

# the democracy argument

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“the spread of **democratic voting rights**  
played a leading role in explaining ...  
the rise of primary schooling”

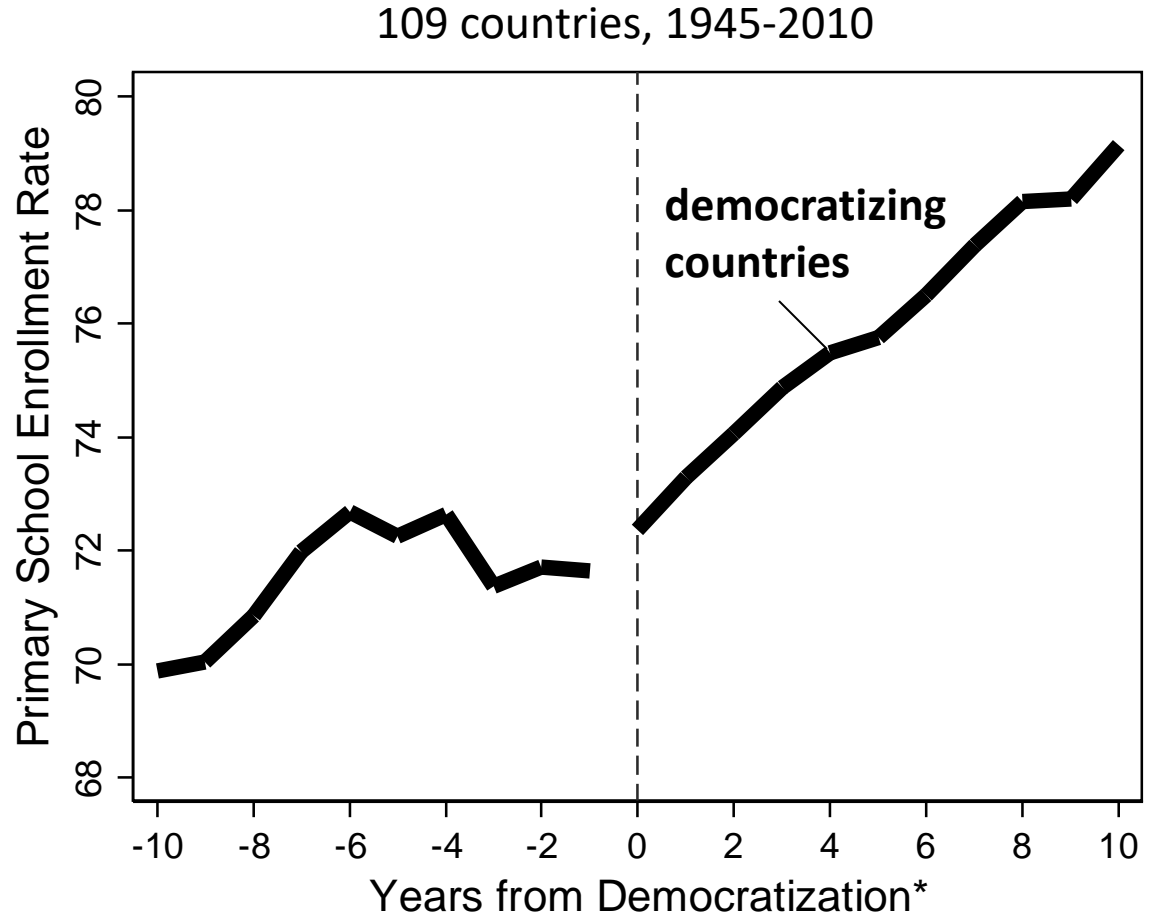
(Lindert 2004, 105)

also: Stasavage (2005), Ansell (2010), Brown & Hunter (2004), Mariscal & Sokoloff (2000), Lake & Baum (2003), Acemoglu & Robinson (2006), Harding & Stasavage (2014), Bussemeyer & Trampusch (2011), Gift & Wibbels (2014), ...

# democracy does not increase access to schooling

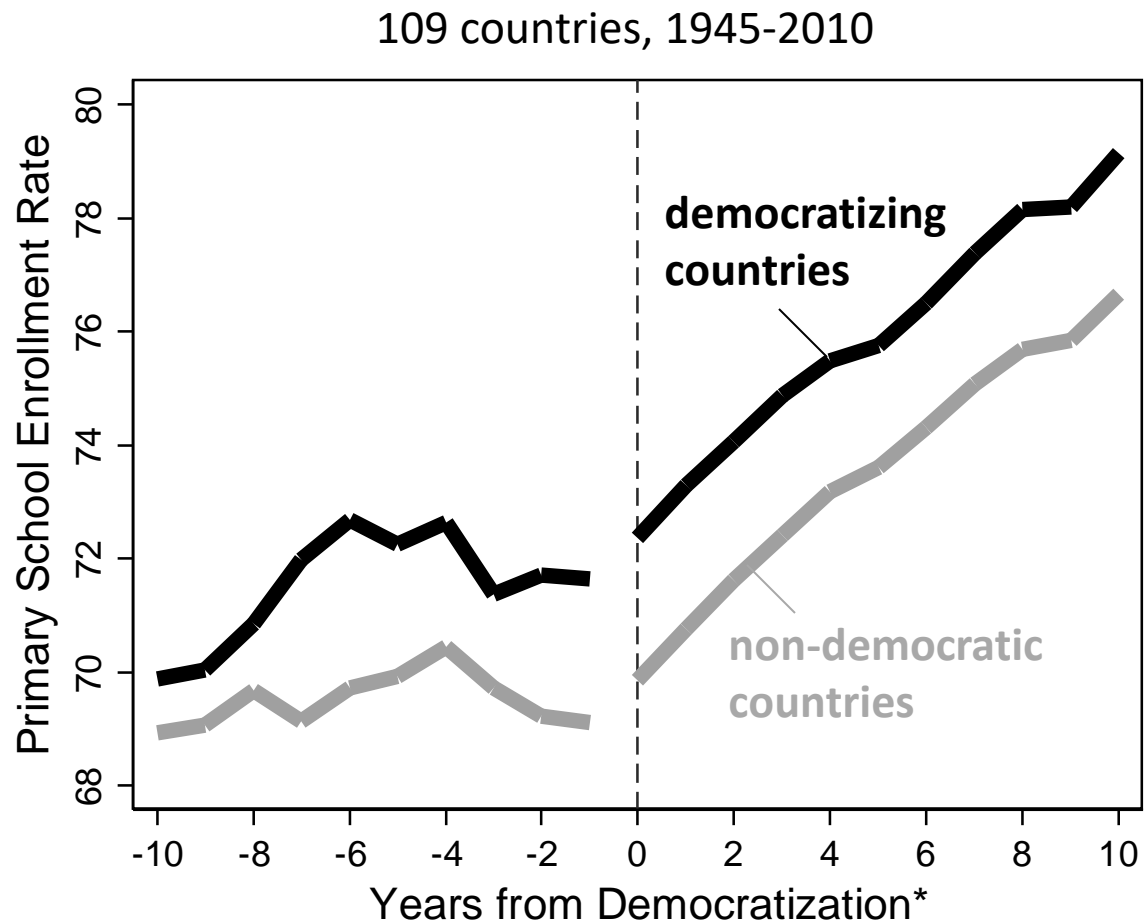
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# democracy does not increase access to schooling



(\*) Finding robust to four different measures of democracy: Polity binary, Polity continuous, Boix-Miller-Rosato, and universal male suffrage.

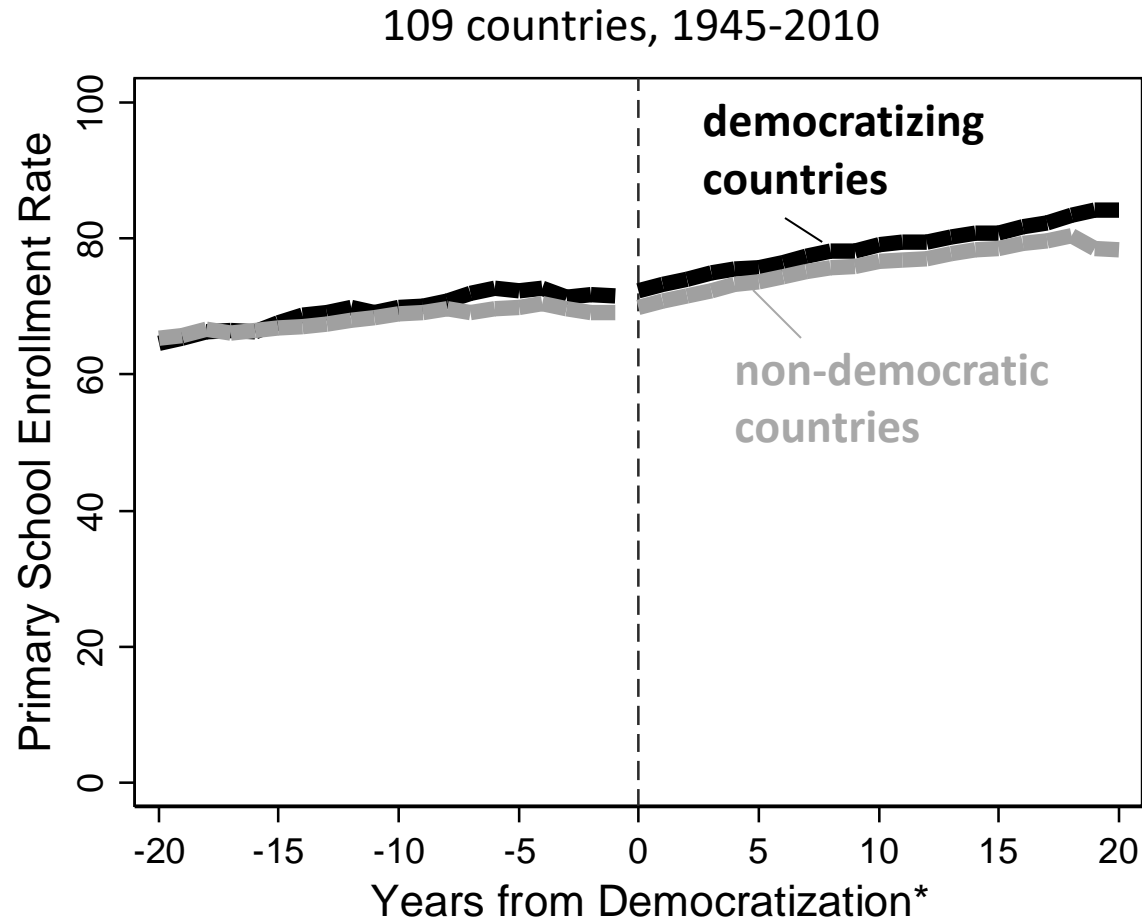
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2. there is considerable variation  
between unions; *and*  
teacher union strength is endogenous

# the argument on unions

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“the most well-positioned and organised interest group exerting pressure on the educational decision-making process is usually teacher unions”

(DfID 2011)

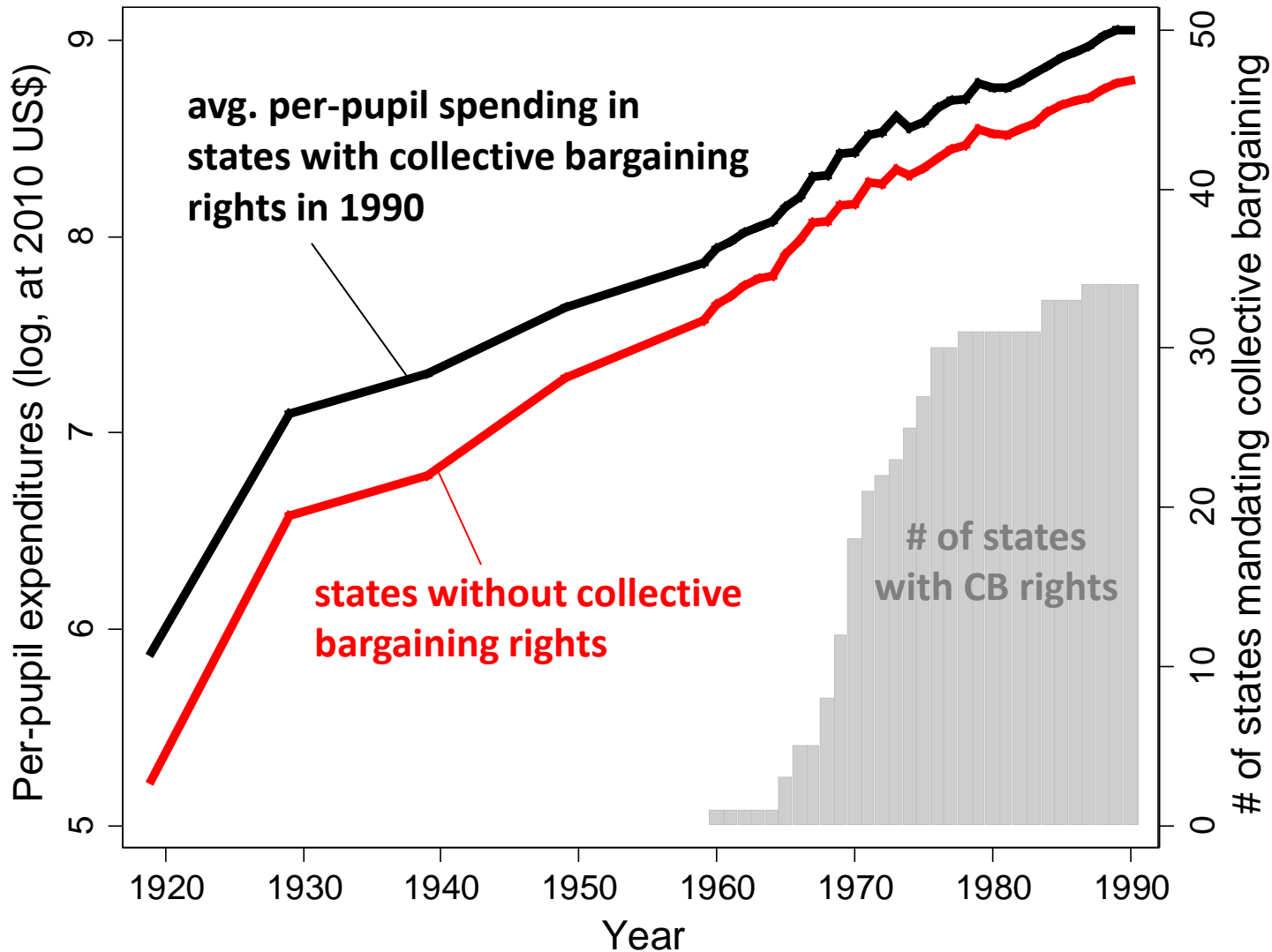
“teachers’ unions [in the U.S.] are primarily **rent-seeking, raising school budgets and school inputs** but lowering student achievement”

(Hoxby 1996, 711;  
cf. Lovenheim 2009)

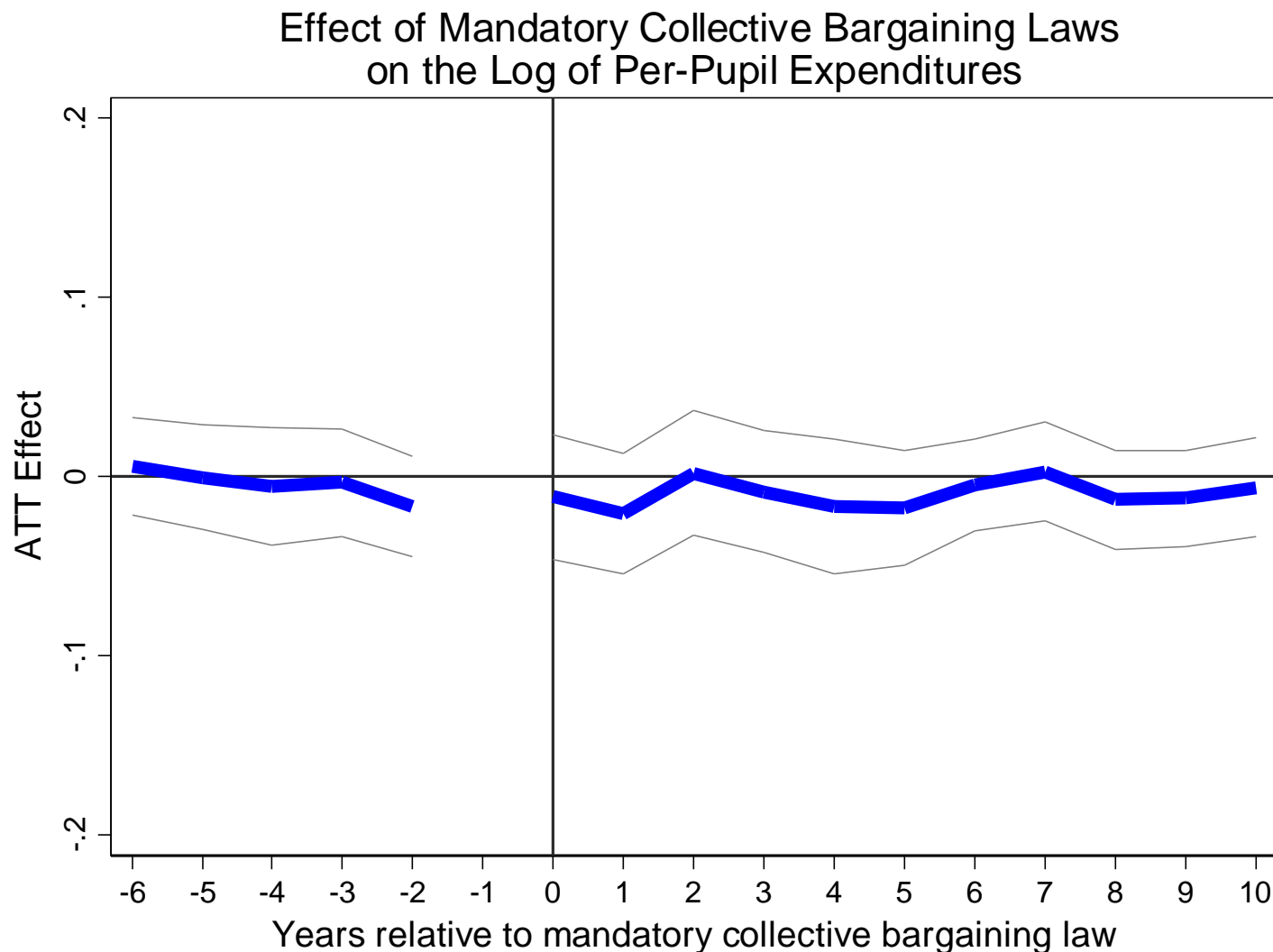
states that historically spent more on education  
gave collective bargaining rights to teachers

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# states that historically spent more on education gave collective bargaining rights to teachers



# mandating collective bargaining w/ teachers did not lead to higher salaries or spending



### 3. in democracies, the policymaking process entails negotiation and compromise

some benefits for unions, some for business groups → **prevalence of status quo** in salaries and spending



# outline

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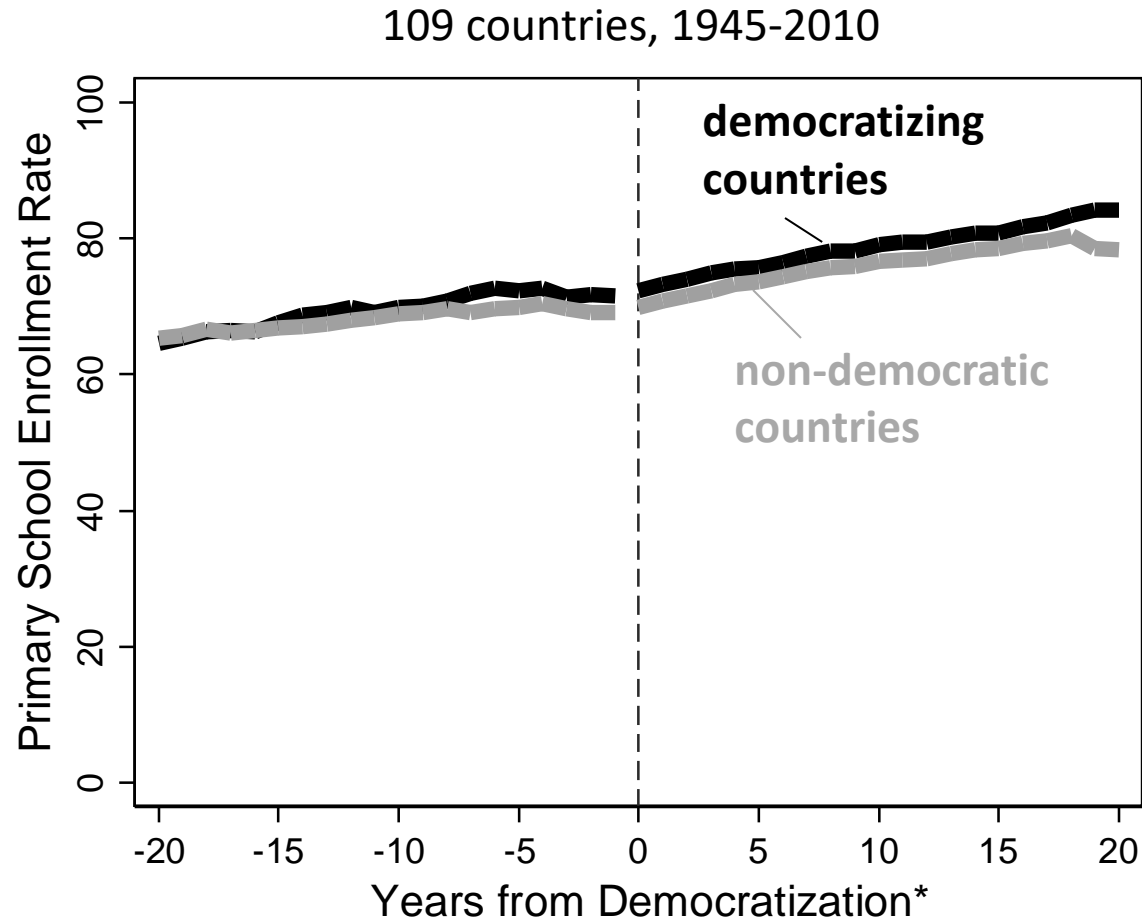
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4. politicians often introduce policies that experts want for reasons of their own; reasons that may have nothing to do with promoting human capital

e.g., **inculcate loyalty**

# education to “moralize the masses”

- **high quantities** of primary education provided by **autocracies**



# education to “moralize the masses”

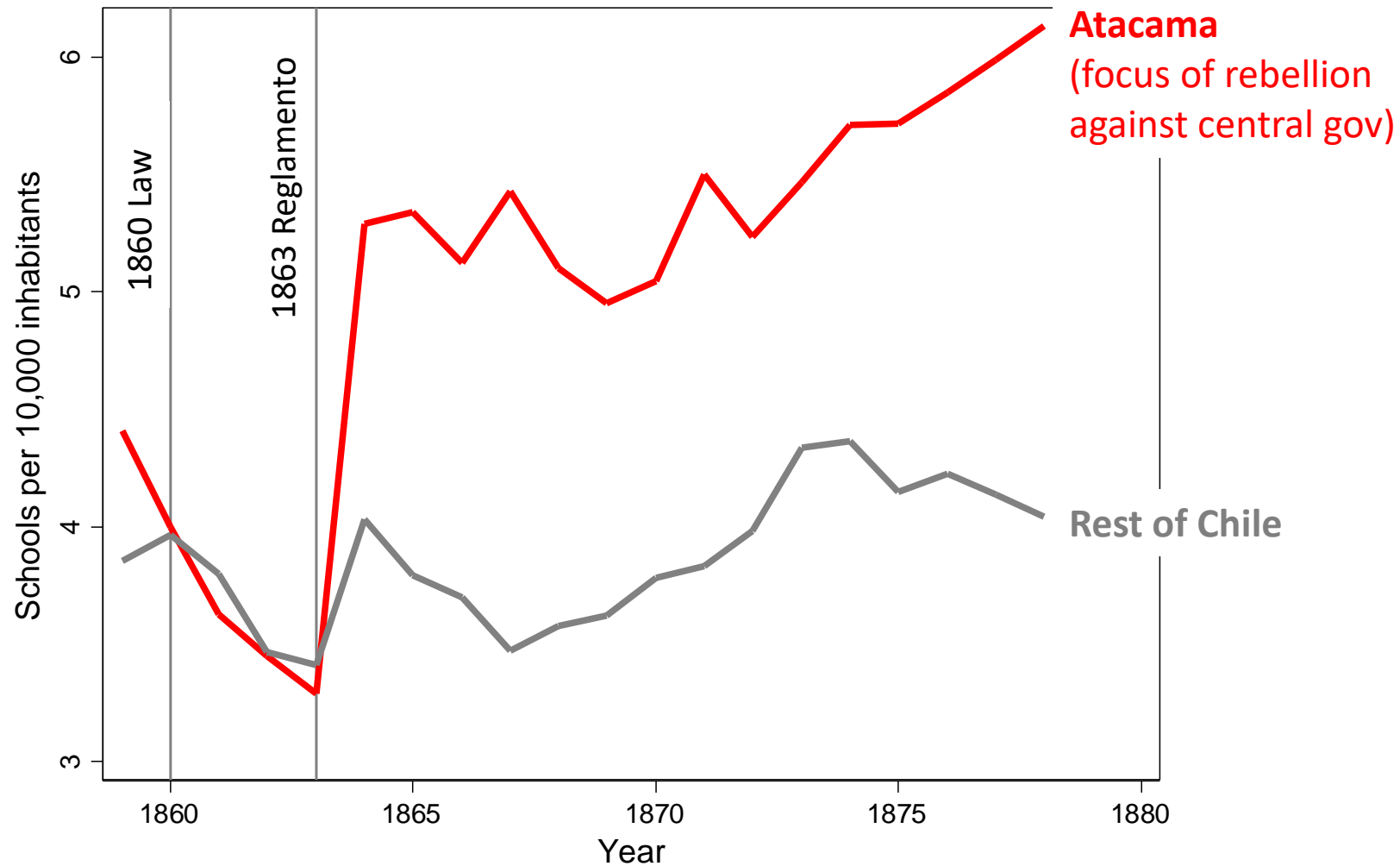
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in Europe and Latin America, **large-scale domestic conflict** created incentives for autocrats to expand primary schooling

- primary schools designed to **“moralize” the lower classes** and **promote orderly behavior** by instilling values and behaviors of obedience, discipline, respect for the rule of law, and respect for authority

# education to “moralize the masses”

- Chile: 1859 civil war → 1860 Law of Primary Education



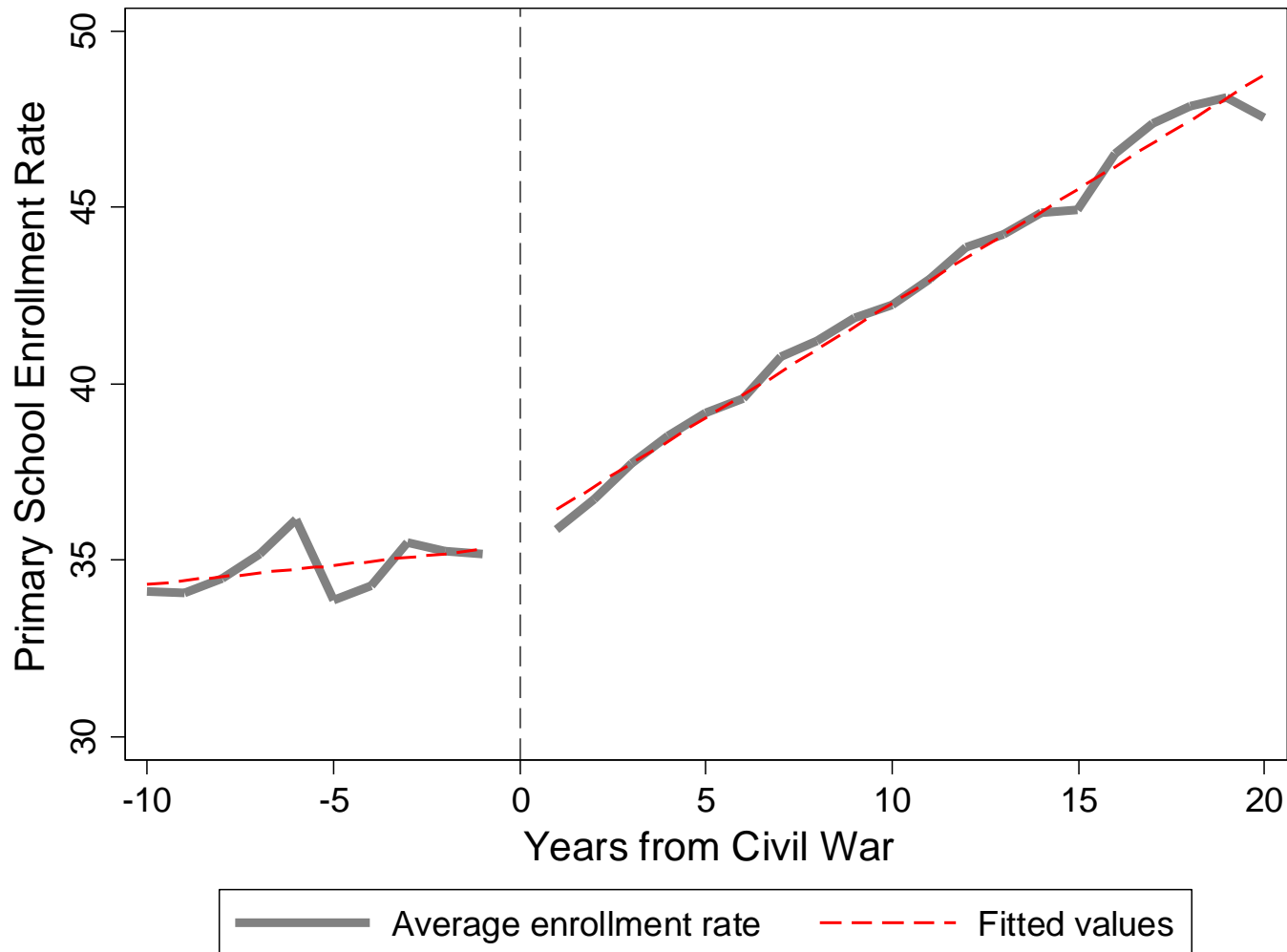
# education to “moralize the masses”

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- **Prussia:** peasants revolts → 1754, 1763 *School Regulations* to teach “**loyalty, obedience, and devotion** to the king” and discourage aspirations for social mobility (Johann Felbiger, quoted in Melton 2002; Boli and Ramirez 1987)
- **France:** July Revolution → 1833 *Guizot Law* “to improve the **moral life** of the poor, learn to **respect the laws** of the country and **its sovereign**, foster a true **patriotism**, and encourage the poor to be satisfied with their material condition” (Guizot 1816)
- **Argentina:** civil wars → 1884 Law: “primary instruction must be exclusively devoted to moral development and to the **maintenance of social order**” (Sarmiento 1849)

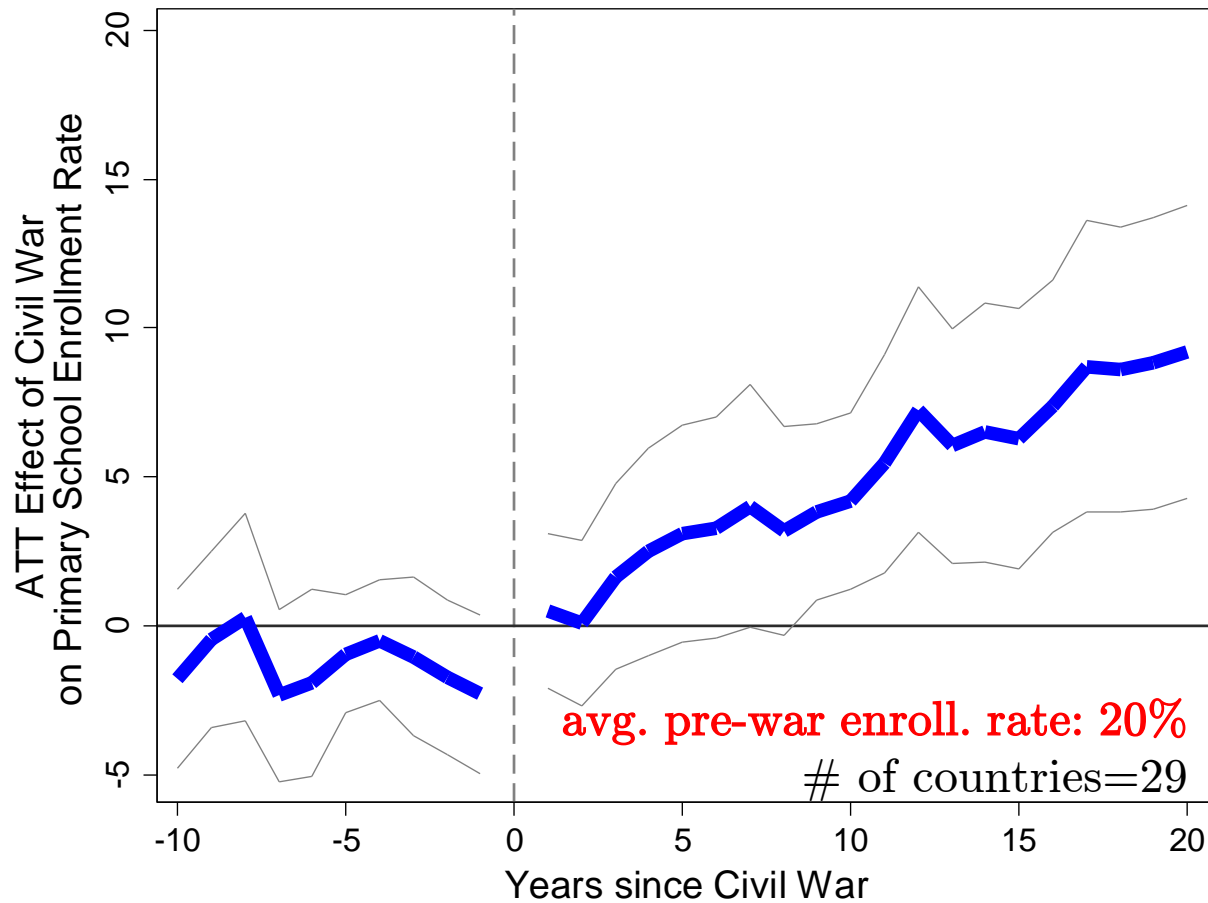
# education to “moralize the masses”

- Europe and Latin America, 1830-1950:



# education to “moralize the masses”

- Europe and Latin America, 1830-1950:



results not driven by liberals winning; or incumbents winning



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# a new paradigm

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**old:** “key to promoting learning is evaluating what works and using that evidence to inform policy change”

(The World Bank 2011, *Education Sector Strategy 2020*)

**new:** key to improving learning is **understanding the politics of policymaking**, and using that knowledge *strategically* to identify favorable conditions and opportunities for reform

**thank you!**

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