

## **Electing Extremists? Party Primaries and Legislative Candidates in Mexico**

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### **Abstract**

When parties adopt internal elections to choose their candidates, power shifts from party leaders to party activists. The consequences of this shift are not well-understood. On the one hand, some authors suggest that primaries result in more ideologically extreme candidates because voters in primaries are motivated more by ideological considerations than party leaders, who focus on getting elected. On the other hand, primary voters may be more open to outsiders, where party leaders care about loyalty and party service. If internal elections affect characteristics of candidates, there are implications for governance as well as candidate electability. Based on surveys of candidates to the lower chamber in Mexico's 2006 national elections, this article has two main findings. First, candidates chosen via internal elections were significantly more moderate than those selected by party elites. Second, successful primary candidates were more likely to be party insiders than candidates chosen by party leaders. These results suggest that governance outcomes may actually be improved by the wider adoption of internal elections: due to their party backgrounds, internally-elected candidates are no less likely to be disciplined in office, and their presence may soften legislative polarization.

**Keywords:** primaries, internal elections, Mexico, ideology, candidates

## **Electing Extremists? Party Primaries and Legislative Candidates in Mexico**

In a June 2009 editorial analyzing the causes of California's recurrent fiscal crises, authors Jerry Roberts and Phil Trounstine laid the blame partly on party primaries: "Because primaries draw the most partisan voters, the most conservative Republicans and the most liberal Democrats tend to win the nominations that guarantee election in November. The dynamic locks in ideological polarization in Sacramento, where lawmakers have little motivation to compromise." According to this view, the introduction of democratic selection methods for choosing candidates can have strikingly undemocratic and unrepresentative effects on political systems more broadly. Can one have 'too much' democracy? Or have a few well-publicized cases persuaded us of something that ultimately is a political myth?

### **Hypotheses**

The argument that primary elections result in more ideologically extreme candidates comes primarily from studies of U.S. politics, though even here, as we shall see, it is not uncontested (see Aldrich 2009 for a review of this literature). The argument rests largely on hypothesized differences between those who turn out in primary elections and those who vote in general elections. Crotty and Jackson (1985: 89) summarized the initial findings of researchers, that: "primary voters are likely to be unrepresentative in demographic characteristics, compared to the total electorate," that "strong partisans turn out for the primary vote at higher rates than the weak partisans or the independents," and that "those who turn out in the primaries are ideologically more extreme and take issue positions that are unrepresentative of the parties' mass bases and of the electorate as a whole" (see also Brady and Schwartz 1995, Gerber and Morton

1998). In primaries, such voters will tend to choose candidates who reflect their own views, resulting in the selection of extremist candidates who are less representative of the views of the broader electorate. In contrast, party leaders, whose main goal is maximizing the party vote and therefore the party's power, should choose more moderate candidates that appeal to the public, not just the party faithful.

Further opening up of the selectorate from a subset of activists to all voters should mitigate these effects by more closely mirroring the electorate at large. Closed primaries should reflect the views of the most intensely motivated activists, with caucuses a subset of even these motivated voters. Open primaries, in contrast, by allowing the participation of independent voters as well as partisans, should produce candidates that are more representative of the public (Crotty and Jackson 1985: 85; but see Cherry and Kroll 2003 for a dissenting view). Again, the public is argued to be more moderate than motivated activists.

This hypothesis has been contested even within the U.S. literature. Bartels (1988) finds only small differences between primary voters and non-voters in terms of ideological positions. Other authors similarly found few ideological differences between primary voters and voters in the general election (e.g. Norrander 1986, Geer 1988). Instead, interest in politics was the main substantive distinction, leading Norrander to conclude that "primary voters are not the extremist minority; they are the slightly better informed minority."

Norrander also raises the prospect that primary voters choose their candidates not based on ideological compatibility, but on evaluations of the candidate's valence qualities: since primaries are "intraparty contests in which most candidates hold similar issue positions," primary voters should tend to focus more on candidate qualities (such as competence) than issue positions

(Norrander 1996: 888, 891). Party leaders obviously should care about competence too, but the qualities visible to voters and the public at large may be less relevant to party leaders, who have more information about those people that have participated in party leadership and who also care substantially more than primary voters about a candidate's partisan reliability—will he or she toe the party line, or turn into a maverick Tea Party independent if elected?

Adams and Merrill (2008) make a similar point with respect to U.S. presidential primaries, arguing that primary elections put a premium on campaign skills and appealing personalities, something that party leaders may know little about in advance of an actual campaign test. When party leaders select candidates, therefore, they may lack good information about a potential candidate's campaign skills and must rely more on information obtained from interactions in party contexts. Only if candidate has prior elective experience would this information gap be reduced. Under these circumstances, both primary voters and party leaders would arguably have similar information and similar incentives. Prior elective experience should therefore benefit candidates in either type of selection procedure.

Summing up these three hypotheses, then, candidates selected in primary elections should be more extreme and have less party administrative experience than candidates selected by party leaders, but there should be no significant difference in the likelihood of previous electoral experience.

### **Previous tests of the hypotheses**

Among scholars of American politics, only the first hypothesis has been extensively tested, and then largely indirectly, by looking for evidence of extremism among primary voters

compared to the general electorate. Because most analyses have focused on presidential elections (a point to which we return below), there are too few candidates to permit a statistical treatment of the candidates themselves. Moreover, since primaries for presidential contests were adopted by both U.S. parties at roughly the same time and have been universally implemented, “the United States does not provide much leverage for comparing the viability...of primary selected candidates against candidates selected by other methods” (Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006). However, even if primary voters are more extreme than voters in the general election, it does not necessarily follow that the candidates chosen in primaries are more extreme than candidates chosen via other procedures. It is clear, for instance, that primary voters also consider electability in the general election, as candidates in the 2008 U.S. primaries repeatedly emphasized.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is unclear what the implications of primary voter extremism (if it exists) might be for actual candidate choices.

Students of comparative politics have generally supported the dominant argument that primaries select extremists, but again lack direct evidence of the ideological positions of candidates and so they often resort to the indirect implications of subsequent electoral success. If primaries choose candidates that are more extreme than the general electorate would prefer, they should lose in the general election. Thus, because primary voters “favor more extreme candidates,” the “candidates selected in primary elections tend to be less popular or lose in the corresponding presidential elections” (Colomer 2002: 121, 119).

In contrast, Carey and Polga-Hecimovich (2006) criticize what they call the “primary penalty” argument. Based on analysis of presidential primaries in Latin America, they conclude that candidates selected in primaries actually won a “primary bonus—that is, other things equal, primary-selected candidates are stronger than those selected by other procedures.” (Carey and

Polga-Hecimovich 2006: 530-32) Why? Among other reasons, in a post-authoritarian context where not all parties have adopted primaries, primaries reassure voters about the democratic credentials of parties. But this argument, persuasive though it is, does not help us very much with understanding how the candidates chosen by primaries might differ, ideologically or otherwise, from candidates chosen by party elites.

Like most of their U.S. counterparts, Carey and Polga-Hecimovich focus on presidential primaries. This presents two problems. In the first place, the dynamics of choosing a presidential candidate may differ significantly from the dynamics of choosing candidates for other offices. Most importantly, the effects of capturing (or failing to capture) the presidency substantially magnify the consequences for parties and voters of selecting poor candidates. In particular, voters should pay more attention to presidential primary races.<sup>2</sup> Second, presidential primaries limit the researcher to anecdotal analyses, because the number of viable presidential candidates is too small for meaningful statistical comparisons. Carey and Polga-Hecimovich increase the number of cases by using cross-national samples of Latin American elections, but as a result, they have to look at election success rather than ideological differences because differences between parties (and countries) trump any hypothetical effects of having emerged from a primary election versus selection by party leaders. Thus, they necessarily elide the principal question analyzed in this article: the impact of primaries on the candidate's ideological and personal characteristics.

Finally, in focusing on presidential primaries, analysis is diverted away from some of the most important potential consequences of primaries suggested by the literature, such as declining party strength, lower discipline in the legislature, decreasing ideological consistency within parties (in favor of legislators that focus on personal campaigns), and legislative deadlock

resulting from the polarization produced by candidate selection methods. Yet few studies have looked at how primaries affect legislative elections, in part because of high rates of incumbent re-election in the United States and limited use of primaries in Europe.

### **Legislative Primaries in Mexico**

The case of legislative candidate selection in Mexico offers a rare window into the implications of candidate selection methods. Unlike in the United States, the use of primary elections varies both across and within political parties. This paper focuses on legislative candidates for the lower house of the Mexican Congress, the *Cámara de Diputados*, who stood for election in 300 relative majority (RM) districts, a first-past-the-post system as in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Mexico's constitution prohibits the consecutive re-election of legislators, eliminating the thorny problem of incumbency from the analysis. In the absence of incumbents, who are significantly more likely to be re-selected almost regardless of their personal views or competence, candidates must fight for nomination on other grounds.

What is unusual about the Mexican case is the wide degree of variation within parties in terms of candidate selection methods. Two of the three major parties—the National Action Party (PAN) and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) used a form of primary election to select some, but not all, of their legislative candidates in 2006.<sup>4</sup> We can therefore directly compare candidates chosen in primary elections to candidates chosen by party leaders, holding constant the party, the political system, and the salient issues in the campaign. The PRD used a closed primary to select 36% of its RM district candidates in 2006, while the PAN used state-level conventions, with locally-elected delegates, to choose 52% of its RM district candidates. National party leaders designated the remaining candidates, although in some rare cases, public opinion polls or consultation with state party leaders helped guide their choices.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to note that because of differences in procedures (closed primary versus convention), the size of the selectorate varied significantly between the PAN and the PRD. The PAN limits the right to participate in internal elections (including elections for convention delegates) to a subset of its sympathizers, known as ‘active members.’ These members have been sponsored for party membership by a current member, have taken a course in party doctrine, and have served an apprenticeship as ‘adherents’ before being accepted into active membership. The PRD, in contrast, does not require any preliminary steps. Although it maintains an official party registry of members, which theoretically determines who can vote in internal elections, it has frequently been possible for people to join the party and vote in an internal election just moments later. Generally speaking, the party presents as few barriers as possible to membership.

As a result, the PRD selectorate in 2006 was on average 97.5 potential electors per 1000 registered voters versus 3.3 potential electors per 1000 registered voters for the PAN.<sup>6</sup> Reliable data on internal voting results is virtually impossible to obtain (even for national party leaders), but analysis of PRD voting in the state of Mexico suggests that turnout rates for its 2006 primaries in this state ranged between 8% and 53%, with an average turnout of 28%; for the PAN, turnout is probably higher (since it restricts participation to the most motivated members), but the absolute number of participants would still fall far below the number of participants in PRD primaries.<sup>7</sup> If the size of the selectorate matters, then the PAN’s closed internal election with ideologically screened voters should result in more extreme candidates even if PRD primaries do not.

## **The Data**

To analyze the impact of selection method on the ideological position of candidates, the analysis draws upon data collected in two telephone surveys.<sup>8</sup> The first, fielded a few weeks before the 2006 national election, tapped 151 congressional candidates of the PRD and the PAN. The second survey, conducted in February and March 2008, added 40 new RM legislators and resurveyed an additional 15. Overall, these two surveys obtained responses from 92 PRD candidates and 96 PAN candidates, a bit less than a third of the total RM candidates for each party. The dependent variable is constructed from a question about the candidate's self-placement along a 1-7 scale, with 1 indicating farthest to the left and 7 indicating farthest to the right. Indices constructed from responses to specific policy questions did not produce substantially different results.

Information about the candidate selection procedure in each congressional district was obtained directly from the parties.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the author conducted interviews of party leaders at both national and state levels about their selection processes, to determine which bodies actually selected the non-primary candidates and to understand why they chose to hold primaries in some districts but not others.

The surveys also asked candidates about their previous party and elective experience. These variables will be used to test the second two hypotheses: that party experience and party leadership should particularly benefit candidates chosen by party elites, while elective experience should benefit both types of candidates equally. In the first model testing ideological position, however, number of years in the party serves primarily as a control variable, on the grounds that longer party membership might indicate more doctrinaire and dedicated activists with closer ties

to party elites. Both the PAN and PRD have been known to poach disgruntled but well-known individuals that have been denied candidacies in their own parties, offering them the opportunity to run under a new label. These last-minute party members may be less in tune with the party's official ideology.

The model of ideological position also includes three controls: university education, religiosity, and party vote in the district in 2003. "University education" is a dummy variable that takes on a value of one if the candidate completed college and zero if she did not. It should be noted that the rate of college completion is lower in Mexico than in the United States; 25% of PRD candidates and 21% of PAN candidates in 2006 had not finished college. University education is widely expected to result in more moderate ideological positions. Religiosity is measured on a scale of 1-5, with 1 indicating that the candidate attended church more than once a week and 5 indicating that he never attended church. Low values on religiosity should be associated with more conservative positions, and high values with more leftist positions.

Finally, I calculated the party's vote in the same district in the previous legislative election, for two reasons.<sup>10</sup> First, people might portray themselves differently in safe districts than they do in districts where the outcome of the vote is more uncertain. The larger the party base in a district, the more likely an appeal to the base could be a winning strategy, while those running in more competitive districts need to present themselves as moderates in order to win. Moreover, voters in more competitive districts may be sensitive to the implications of a vote for an extremist candidate. Where the party's base is smaller, voters may vote strategically, reacting to the electability of potential candidates as well as their sincere ideological preference.<sup>11</sup>

Second, separate analyses confirm that ‘party vote in 2003’ is the only variable that consistently predicts which districts would hold competitive internal elections, not the socio-demographic character of the district.<sup>12</sup> The decision about whether to hold a primary reflects intra-party rivalries to secure candidacies in more promising districts (hopeless districts being not nearly so desirable). Thus, if districts with primaries produce ideologically different candidates, it is because of the type of selection, not because of demographic differences.

### **Internal elections and candidate ideology**

The most straightforward way to test the first hypothesis is to construct a model on the equation  $Leftright = \beta_0 + \beta_1\text{primary} + \beta_2\text{years in party} + \beta_3\text{university} + \beta_4\text{religiosity} + \beta_5\text{party vote 2003} + \epsilon$ . Because ideology differs more across parties than within parties, and because the meaning of ‘internal election’ is different for the two parties analyzed here, I first ran a separate model for each party, using OLS.<sup>13</sup> For the PAN, no variables were significant. For the PRD, the number of years in the party had a significant and negative effect. Given the structure of the dependent variable, this finding suggests that those who belonged to the PRD longer placed themselves farther to the left than relative newcomers, a finding anticipated by Greene’s (2007) argument that early joiners of a new party hold more extreme views in situations where the new party faces long odds against success. The PRD certainly fits this description. It was founded in 1989 amid a climate of rampant electoral fraud and repression. Its relatively young age means that many founding members are still active in the party. The second significant variable—albeit only for the PRD—is university education; those with a complete university education were more moderate than those who did not finish college. In neither the

PRD nor the PAN models was internal election a significant predictor of ideological extremism.

[Table One about here]

However, the sign on the internal election variable in both models suggests increased moderation as a result of internal election rather than increased extremism. For the PRD, the coefficient for the variable is positive, indicating self-placements more toward the center of the 1-7 scale, while for the PAN, the sign is negative, again indicating self-placements more toward the center. I therefore re-ran the model with an alternative specification of the dependent variable as the absolute value of distance from the center of the scale (4). A PRD candidate who placed herself at 1 would get a score of 3 on the extremism scale, and so would a PAN candidate who placed herself at 7; higher scores in both cases indicate more extreme candidates.<sup>14</sup> Using this specification, I was able to combine the two parties into a common model.

The new specification and the larger number of cases in this model produces significant results on the internal election variable at  $p < .05$  (see table 2). However, the direction of the effect is the opposite of what the primary penalty argument would predict: candidates who emerged from an internal election were more moderate than candidates chosen by the party leadership, even though for both parties ‘internal elections’ limited the selectorate to party members (see Table Two, below). Clearly, open primaries were not necessary to produce significant (at .015) though modest moderating effects, at least when compared to selection by party leaders. Going from selection by leadership to selection by internal election produces a change of nearly half a point (.42) in the left-right scale. Interestingly, party vote in 2003 is insignificant in predicting extremism; evidently, voters in districts where the party has a smaller base are no more inclined to choose ideologically moderate candidates than voters in safe

districts, despite their apparent incentives to vote strategically in order to maximize the party's chances of winning the general election.<sup>15</sup> [Table Two about here]

University education retains marginal significance when candidates from both parties are included and is associated with increased moderation, though the effect is less than the effect of internal election. Interestingly, religiosity gains significance, but the sign of the variable suggests that lower religiosity is associated with political extremism (given that higher values on this variable indicate less church attendance). This finding is probably driven by the inclusion of the PRD, where leftism and non-religiosity are associated. Conservative social issues like abortion rights and the death penalty are substantially less salient in Mexico than in the United States. Finally, the variable "years in party" loses significance; evidently, only for the younger PRD did this factor matter.

Why did internal elections select more moderate candidates than party leaders? One possibility is that activists are more moderate than party elites. Bruhn and Greene (2007) have shown that Mexican voters who said they 'sympathized' with either the PAN or the PRD were in general more moderate, and closer to the average voter, than the candidates running for office. While "sympathizers" are not activists, local activists may have more contact with sympathizers and adopt their views. Moreover, if moderate candidates reflect either moderate activists or districts, one might expect candidates in less heavily PRD/PAN districts to be more centrist, voters in these districts being more strongly attracted to the PRI. Yet extremists were not less (or more) likely to inhabit districts where the party's base was larger.

A second reason is institutionally-oriented. There may be more moderation among candidates chosen in internal elections as a result of the dynamics that occur when candidates are selected by central committees. When the national leadership chooses candidates, members of

factional groups negotiate with other factions to place their representatives, balancing the party ticket by selecting candidates who represent competing ideological factions. In contrast, candidates who won internal primaries usually had to win support from more than one faction. They had to appeal to activists across factions rather than merely to party faction insiders. In this way, internal elections may encourage the selection of less ideologically-driven candidates than factional bargaining.

The implications are potentially quite significant. Mexico's prohibition of re-election inhibits the construction of political careers based on appealing to constituents. Aspiring politicians can move directly from one elected position to another (at a different level or in a different chamber of Congress), but this is uncommon across multiple electoral cycles. More frequently, career politicians move between positions in the government, the party, and the bureaucracy. Their careers depend less on moderation in the eyes of voters than on their connections with other politicians who can get them positions in the party or state bureaucracy. Factional ties—which are less susceptible to pressures to moderate—are key. In this context, primary elections are a rare moment of potential accountability to a broader political audience. Winning election to public office provides politicians with resources to build their networks of political support. These networks then translate into potentially attractive assets for faction leaders, enhancing the status of a politician and his or her claim on positions within the party. The ability to win a primary election may thus channel more moderate politicians into the stream of successful electoral candidates, offering an alternative to mere factional loyalty for aspiring politicians. If so, the expansion of internal primaries may, surprisingly, function as a check on polarization in Mexican politics.

## **Internal elections and candidate competence**

The second two hypotheses predicted that candidates selected through internal elections should have less party experience than candidates chosen by the leadership, but that both types of candidates should be equally likely to have prior elective experience. The evidence based on an aggregate analysis suggests that the first hypothesis should be rejected, but the second is confirmed (see Table Three). However, there are significant differences between the two parties in terms of the relevance of these criteria. [Table Three about here]

The analysis relies on comparison of means tests. Since party leadership and experience are causally prior to the internal election, it seemed inappropriate to use them as a dependent variable; rather, the test looks at whether there are statistically significant differences in terms of these variables between candidates selected in different procedures.

In a comparison including all candidates for which information was available, candidates chosen through internal elections had significantly more rather than less party experience, whether measured as the number of years in the party or having held a previous party post. The differences are significant at the .01 level. Candidates chosen through internal elections had on average belonged to their party for 12 years and 71.4% of them had held at least one party post; most importantly, they had held local leadership positions (44% of them, versus only 28% of candidates selected by the party). There was no significant difference between the two candidate groups in terms of having held a national position. Instead, having held state and local positions distinguishes those candidates selected in internal elections from their counterparts.

In contrast, there is no significant difference between the two candidate groups based on having previously held elective office. Although 58% of candidates chosen in internal elections had held prior office, versus 51% of designated candidates, the difference is not statistically meaningful. The results hold true regardless of the office (municipal, state, or national).

The explanation of the surprising party backgrounds of candidates chosen in primaries rests in part on the prior decision about where to hold them. Models designed to predict whether a party would hold a primary election (not shown here) consistently demonstrate that only the party's vote in the district in 2003 had a significant effect after controlling for other district characteristics.<sup>16</sup> Interviews suggest that two factors explain party decisions to hold elections in safe districts. In the first place, parties are better funded and better organized in states where the party has done well previously. Mexican parties receive public funding in rough proportion to previous electoral results. State-level parties that did well in the past get more resources to hold internal elections in the present. In contrast to the United States, where primaries are publicly funded and held in conjunction with general elections, Mexican parties have full responsibility for organizing and paying for internal primaries. Thus, the key difference is not will but capacity: districts where the party has enjoyed electoral success in the past have stronger party organizations up to the challenge of holding internal elections, whereas state parties in hopeless districts struggle with the cost and logistical problems of primaries.

Second, party strongholds attract more aspiring candidates. Campaigns for the legislature—and even more so, campaigns for primary elections—are largely self-financed. In 2006, 33% of PAN congressional candidates and 28% of PRD candidates said that “most” of the funding for their general election campaigns came from their “own resources.” An additional 25% of PAN candidates and 23% of PRD candidates said that “a good part” of their campaign

funds came from their own resources.<sup>17</sup> Few potential candidates are willing to invest their own money in hopeless campaigns; hence, party leaders must often draft people to make the sacrifice of running in less-promising districts. In contrast, the prospect of winning a lucrative congressional seat in a safe district requiring little personal campaigning brings aspiring candidates out of the woodwork. In one case, a PRD organizer said, 116 candidates registered to compete for a single candidacy to the city council in a PRD stronghold in Guerrero.<sup>18</sup> In Mexico City, where the PRD has governed since 1997, more than 1,200 aspiring candidates registered for 38 local Assembly candidacies, 22 congressional candidacies, and 16 “*jefes delegacionales*,” who serve more or less as mayors of districts within Mexico City (Romero et. al. 2006).

Under these circumstances, party leaders are under pressure to hold internal elections in order to resolve conflicts of ambition. In the large and important municipality of Ecatepec, for example, national PRD leaders initially announced that the party would not hold elections to choose the federal legislative candidate because, “some problems were foreseen.”<sup>19</sup> But they were forced to hold internal elections after all when agreement on a suitable candidate could not be reached by negotiation.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Mexico City’s mayor in 2006 proposed to negotiate at least some of his party’s candidacies in order to “avoid the problems that an internal election could generate;” however, the different factions preferred to take their chances in elections rather than negotiate shares of candidacies (Romero Sánchez 2005). Where a party like the PRI could once afford to simply buy off disgruntled activists who failed to secure a candidacy (generally by employing patronage resources or promising a certain future election), out-of-power parties in Mexico had to find other ways to resolve competition over scarce candidacies.<sup>21</sup> Internal elections were a potential mechanism to help minimize divisions in the party. As one PRD leader put it, “people get mad if they feel cheated out of a candidacy by the central organization, but are

willing to accept defeat in elections.”<sup>22</sup> This argument is similar to that of Kemahlioglu, Weitz-Shapiro, and Hirano (2009) regarding the use of primaries in presidential elections.

The result of these decision-making dynamics meant that the national party was more likely to designate candidates in districts where the party had less presence, there were fewer loyal members from which to choose, and any actual party loyalists were not interested in the relatively low-probability candidacies in RM districts. Strategically, their chances of election would be maximized by seeking a spot on the national PR list or a candidacy for the Senate, both of which were more likely to result in election.<sup>23</sup> So party leaders did not ask loyalists to make the sacrifice of running in hopeless districts; instead, they turned to outsiders—often defectors from other parties or leaders of local popular movements—to (hopefully) boost the party vote.

A second and perhaps more intriguing reason for the long party experience of candidates selected in primaries would be that party experience itself confers a competitive advantage on aspiring candidates, precisely because the need to mobilize internal support for the primary rewards those with extensive networks among party activists. This was particularly true for the PRD (see Table Four, below). In the PRD, party leadership came close to a requirement; 80% of its internally-elected candidates had previously held a party post. Similarly, candidates who emerged from internal elections had joined the party much earlier than candidates selected by national party leaders. In the PAN, candidates selected by convention had on average 11.6 years experience in the party compared to 4.1 years for the designated candidates. In the PRD, candidates who won primaries had 13.1 years of experience compared to 5.1 years for designated candidates. The long activism of PRD primary winners is especially remarkable given that as of 2006, the party itself was only 17 years old.<sup>24</sup> [Table Four about here]

Why might party insiders do better in primary elections? Primary campaigns in Mexico target activists rather than the general public. Local newspapers in the State of Mexico, where the PRD held many primaries and the PAN held a state convention, published only a handful of news items related to internal elections in the lead-up to the 2006 elections, nearly all of them referencing accusations of internal fraud or colorful conflicts such as fistfights during a primary election.<sup>25</sup> There were no ads, no articles about campaign rallies, no debates between opposing candidates. Rules limiting the selectorate to party activists would make efforts to reach the broader electorate a wasteful approach.

Under these circumstances, those who could mobilize activists to turn out for the election should benefit from their party ties. The scale of internal primaries made these ties particularly important for the PRD. Although internally-elected candidates had more previous party leadership experience than designated candidates in both parties, only for the PRD is this difference statistically significant. PRD candidates had to mobilize potentially thousands of voters during primary elections, while PAN candidates had to marshal at most a few hundred votes in an internal convention. Even the previous stage of making sure one gets friendly delegates selected to the convention posed fewer problems for aspiring PAN candidates due to the radically smaller size of the selectorate (though one national PAN leader complained about the phenomenon of ‘convention-packing’—getting one’s family and friends to join the PAN so that they could vote in internal elections and generate a higher number of friendly delegates).

The same dynamics may also help explain why internally-elected candidates tended to be more moderate. Mexican parties—again, especially the PRD—are organized around rival factions whose primary purpose is to promote faction members to candidacies and positions of party leadership (e.g. Bruhn 2008, Wuhs 2008). Newspaper reports releasing the names of PRD

candidates often listed their factional affiliation (e.g. Polavnski 2006). This model of political action went far beyond a mere battle for endorsements. It obligated faction members to support internal candidates that faction leaders propose if they hoped to draw on faction votes to support their own political ambitions in the future. The closed nature of Mexico's party primaries enhances these effects by limiting the selectorate to party members.

It should be noted that the effect proposed is not the kind of clientelistic mobilization described by De Luca et. al. (2002) in the case of Argentina. Factions in the PRD and the PAN have a more ideological flavor, or at worst association with an individual politician, but are not supported primarily by their access to government resources and patronage as has been the case with party machines in Argentina. To the degree that some politicians use clientelistic resources to mobilize support, the large number of factions in Mexican parties means that one can always jump ship and join another faction if necessary, while Argentine factions appear to have more of a monopoly on clientelist resources. Ideological components to factions help stabilize factional membership over time. Thus, factional mobilization is less a matter of buying votes than of mobilizing loyalty along ideological lines.

However, mobilizing only a single faction would rarely be enough to win an internal election. Successful candidates had to try to form alliances across factional lines. This strategic necessity may advantage candidates who—being more moderate—were acceptable to multiple factions. In the case of selection by party elites, in contrast, log-rolling dynamics predominate. Negotiations occur around the question of how many candidacies a specific faction should get versus other factions; each faction has considerable autonomy to promote its own internally preferred candidates for the positions it is allotted. Thus, these candidates reflect primarily the ideological preferences of faction leaders rather than a broader subset of party activists. The PRD

may even benefit more than the PAN from these moderating dynamics, as its large number of factions made the existence of a majority faction in a specific district more unlikely, enhancing rewards for pre-election coordination across factions.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has argued that internal party competition over candidacies can produce candidates who are both more moderate and more experienced in party organization than candidates selected by party elites. If these candidates win general election, we should not expect them to be less loyal to the party, less disciplined in the legislature, or more likely to push the legislative bench toward extremist behavior. All of this is good news for those parties considering primaries to select their legislative candidates.

However, the selection of insiders should only occur when the procedures themselves privilege specific skills: the ability to mobilize other party insiders. If the selectorate were broader (which might occur, for instance, if polls were used rather than primaries or if the costs of the primaries were covered by the state), candidates might or might not be more moderate and reflective of the public at large, but party insiders would not find themselves as advantaged.

Likewise, the selection of moderate candidates could occur either if the bulk of party insiders are themselves moderate (the less interesting outcome), or if the party is highly factionalized, such that primaries encourage an ‘averaging across the factions’ effect. Ironically, more highly factionalized parties may have more to gain from the introduction of internal elections than their more coherent counterparts.

Nevertheless, primaries under such conditions—highly factionalized parties that reward party organizational skills in internal elections—may also be among the most dangerous in terms

of risks to party unity, as they necessarily pit some factions against others and could deepen organizational divisions. Contrary to the common assumption that electoral success serves as a proxy for the selection of superior candidates, the selection of moderate candidates does not guarantee that they will win the general election. Particularly in the case of Mexican legislative elections, these benign outcomes in terms of moderation and party backgrounds may not translate into broader public support. Legislators serve only one term and must then sit out a term before standing for election again. Moreover, the power of legislators to funnel patronage resources to their districts or to propose major policy reforms has traditionally been limited, although these powers increased with democratization. Party label and coattails from co-partisan presidential or gubernatorial candidates matter as much in the general election as the legislative candidate herself. Further research must therefore address whether the findings of this paper apply also to races with higher stakes, such as gubernatorial races. Yet at a minimum, we have shown that primaries do not necessarily lead to “ideological polarization in Sacramento [or Mexico City],” nor legislatures that are populated by anti-party mavericks (Roberts and Trounstein 2009). In fact, primaries may actually help reduce these risks.

**TABLE ONE**

**Impact of Internal Elections on Left-Right Self-Placement**

	PRD	PAN
Internal election	.22 (.276)	-.36 (.229)
Years in party (2006)	<b>-.04**</b> (.018)	.00 (.013)
University education	<b>.57**</b> (.255)	-.15 (.26)
Religiosity	-.13 (.094)	-.17 (.116)
Party vote 2003	.01 (.009)	-.004 (.009)
R <sup>2</sup>	.15	.05
	N = 81	N = 87

\*\* significant at .05 level

Standard errors reported in parentheses

**TABLE TWO**

**Impact of Internal Elections on Political Extremism**

Internal election	<b>-.42**</b> (.172)
Years in party (2006)	.007 (.01)
University education	<b>-.31*</b> (.181)
Religiosity	<b>.19***</b> (.068)
Party vote 2003	-.003 (.006)
R <sup>2</sup>	.12
	N = 168

\*\*\*significant at .01

\*\* significant at .05

\*significant at .1

Standard errors reported in parentheses

**TABLE THREE**

**Differences between Candidates by Selection Method<sup>1</sup>**

	Internal Election	Selected by CEN
Previously elected	57.7% (N=175)	51% (N=145)
<b>Previous party leadership***</b>	<b>71.4%</b> <b>(N = 175)</b>	<b>56.6%</b> <b>(N = 145)</b>
<b>Years in party (2006)**</b>	<b>11.6</b> <b>(N = 68)</b>	<b>4.1</b> <b>(N = 81)</b>

\*\* significant at .05 level

\*\*\* significant at .01 level

<sup>1</sup> For previous electoral/party experience, results from the surveys have been supplemented by information for elected (but not interviewed) *diputados*, at [www.congreso.gob.mx](http://www.congreso.gob.mx) and crosschecked against the Sistema de Información Legislativa, <http://sil.gobernacion.gob.mx/portal>. For years in party, the surveys provided the only data, which explains the lower N.

**TABLE FOUR**

**Differences between Candidates by Selection Method<sup>2</sup>**

	Internal Convention	Selected by CEN
<b>PAN</b>		
<b>Years in party (2006)**</b>	<b>11.6</b> (N = 68)	<b>4.1</b> (N = 81)
Previous party leadership	67.5% (N = 114)	61.3% (N = 62)
Previously elected	54.4% (N = 114)	46.8% (N = 62)
<b>PRD</b>		
<b>Years in party (2006)**</b>	<b>13.1</b> (N = 27)	<b>5.1</b> (N = 63)
<b>Previous party leadership***</b>	<b>78.7%</b> (N = 61)	<b>53%</b> (N = 83)
Previously elected	63.9% (N = 61)	54.2% (N = 83)

\*\* significant at .05 level

\*\*\* significant at .01 level

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<sup>2</sup> For previous electoral/party experience, results from the surveys have been supplemented by information for elected (but not interviewed) *diputados*, at [www.congreso.gob.mx](http://www.congreso.gob.mx) and crosschecked against the Sistema de Información Legislativa, <http://sil.gobernacion.gob.mx/portal>. For years in party, the surveys provided the only data, which explains the lower N.

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<sup>1</sup> For academic analyses, see Bartels, 1988; Abramowitz 1989; Grafstein 2003.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, reforms in the Democratic and Republican parties to add "superdelegates"—party leaders and elected officials—to the mix of selectors choosing the presidential candidate may have been intended to dilute the effect of

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those ideologically purist voters who, left to themselves, might choose too radical a candidate, like McGovern in the 1972 U.S. presidential race.

<sup>3</sup> There is a parallel proportional representation system with 200 seats, but none of the candidates for this system were chosen via primaries, so they do not enter the analysis.

<sup>4</sup> The formerly dominant Institutional Revolutionary Party (or PRI) did not hold primaries to select any of its legislative candidates. Until 2000, this party governed Mexico virtually unchallenged, and has a long history of preferring top-down selection of candidates over democratic methods.

<sup>5</sup> The extent of consultation varied by state, with most state party committees having only limited influence. In four of the 300 districts, the PRD used opinion polls to help the leadership select the candidate. For the PAN, polls were used in relatively few cases—in six of 40 districts in the State of Mexico for example, according to newspaper reports in *El Sol de Toluca*, 9 December 2005. PAN data was not as complete on this point as PRD data, but it appears to have been a fairly uncommon practice, aimed mostly at securing internal party unity and keeping internal rivals from challenging the party's designated candidate (confidential interview with State of Mexico PAN leaders, members of CEE, the Consejo Ejecutivo Estatal, June 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Calculations based on lists of party members available on both parties' websites, matched to district registration counts from the IFE.

<sup>7</sup> Author's calculations, based on data provided by the PRD. National party organizers were frank about their inability to provide me with results for some states, admitting that the state party refused to forward the data because of (probably reliable) accusations of internal fraud in one or more districts. The PAN simply said they did not keep national records of voting results from their conventions and advised me to check with each state party committee.

<sup>8</sup> Based on the initial contact list (which had some missing phone numbers for each party), the response rate for the first survey was 47.7% for the PAN and 46.4% for the PRD. Based on the universe of candidates for RM districts, our response rate is still quite respectable for this type of survey, 28% for the PAN and 25.7% for the PRD. Response rates for the second survey were lower, only 22% for the PAN and the PRD, due in part to the introduction of a major energy reform during the second week of the survey, which occupied much of the legislators time.

<sup>9</sup> However, it is also possible to tease out this information from data on the Federal Electoral Institute website, due to a quirk in Mexico's electoral law. Since 2000, Mexico has required one-third of candidates to be female, but provides exemptions for parties in cases where the candidate was chosen via an internal election. Therefore, the parties submit lists of exempted districts for the RM seats where it has been difficult (especially where elections were actually held) to guarantee this one-third representation.

<sup>10</sup> This was a trickier operation than it sounds because of congressional re-districting between 2003 and 2006. In a few cases, the district boundaries did not change. Where they did, I used maps from the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) comparing districts before and after the redistricting to determine which municipalities ended up within the 2006 district. Each new district had a list of municipalities in a spreadsheet. I then found the party vote for those municipalities from 2003 (also obtained from IFE) and calculated vote percentages for the 2003 elections.

[www.ife.org.mx](http://www.ife.org.mx).

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that substituting a variable measuring the margin between each party's vote and the vote of the first ranked party produced identical results to the results presented here. I therefore used party vote share as the more intuitively understandable term.

<sup>12</sup> Although I attempted to use a Heckman two-stage selection model to analyze ideological outcomes, the fact that only one variable turned out to be significant in the first stage (where primaries are held) causes the second stage of the model to collapse statistically as too similar to the first.

<sup>13</sup> The results presented here use non-robust standard errors. In the absence of significant heteroskedasticity or autocorrelation, neither of which is expected in this case, as Croux, Dhaene, and Hoorelbeke suggest (2006), robust errors would be less efficient estimators under these circumstances.

<sup>14</sup> I re-calculated "party vote in 2003" to attach the correct party vote to each candidate respondent.

<sup>15</sup> I also tested this relationship with an interaction between internal election and party vote in 2003; it was not significant.

<sup>16</sup> For these models, I included the percentage of the district that lived in towns of more than 2500 people (on the grounds that it would be easier to hold an internal election in an urban area than in a rural one), the number of party members in the district (a measure of party organization level, since more organized local parties should be more capable of holding internal elections), whether the party faced a democratic rival (that is, another party held internal elections) on the grounds that this might put pressure on the party to hold an internal election of its own, and in-migration rates. This last variable was added after interviews suggested that parties view high-migration districts differently than others: previous vote means less, and internal elections may be a way to mobilize party support.

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<sup>17</sup> Cite temporarily cut to preserve author anonymity.

<sup>18</sup> Confidential interview with national PRD leader, June 2008, Mexico City.

<sup>19</sup> Violeta Huerta, "Elegiré hoy el PRD a 95 candidatos para alcaldes," *El Sol de Toluca*, 10 December 2005: 6A.

<sup>20</sup> Confidential interview with PRD member of the CEE, the Consejo Ejecutivo Estatal, in Toluca, State of Mexico, June 2008.

<sup>21</sup> The PRI's loss of presidential power severely reduced the resources and plum government positions available for this purpose, but the party still controls the majority of Mexico's state and local governments. In addition, with the loss of the Nominator in Chief (the president), governors have more power to promise nominations to those who lose in a given round.

<sup>22</sup> Confidential interview with national PRD leader, June 2008, Mexico City. Of course, this is not always true. The risk of protests by disgruntled losers is the other side of the coin, and the reason for party leaders' attempts to negotiate outcomes.

<sup>23</sup> Mexico's complicated system of electing senators gives the first two seats in a state to the plurality winner. Another seat goes to the second-place party, and there are 32 'national' seats decided by proportional representation. Getting nominated to the Senate would therefore bring a higher probability of election than running for a plurality seat in a legislative district since you had merely to come in second.

<sup>24</sup> It is possible that some people counted membership in previous parties. However, the question explicitly asked them when they joined the PRD/PAN, so this kind of confusion is unlikely to account for the difference.

<sup>25</sup> The PAN's format of internal elections necessarily produces less public coverage of competition among candidates, as it mostly takes place during the convention.