Competition, Decentralization, and Candidate Selection in Mexico

Kathleen Bruhn¹ and Steven Wuhs²

Abstract
This article examines how political context affects the strategic choice of nomination rules, using data from federal and state-level legislative elections. Our analysis indicates that competition affects the selection rules parties adopt. Overall, parties are most likely to use open selection rules when they think they will win, largely due to the effects of activist competition over coveted nominations. However, state-level party leaders have not been consistently empowered by decentralization. Although state-level party leaders do have nonnegligible influence when it comes to the selection of local legislative nominees, they have more influence in those states that are the most dependent on the federal government for resources. Competitive context continues to be a stronger predictor of selection rule choice than decentralization.

Keywords
candidate selection, political parties, democratization, Mexico

Mexico presents an interesting contrast to the other cases in this volume. While in Europe, federalism generally came about as a result of mobilization from below, decentralization in contemporary Mexico followed a more top-down path, beginning with reforms at the federal level in the 1980s and 1990s. Taxation authority remains centralized in the federal government, even as over half of spending now takes place at the state and local level. Much state-level spending, however, is not discretionary, but rather comes in the form of federally mandated spending grants. Thus, the extent

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to which state and regional party leaders gain leverage over national party leaders as a result of control over state and local governmental resources remains an empirical question.

Mexican political parties also demonstrate a wide range of variation in the selection rules they use to pick candidates for national- and state-level legislative positions. Party leaders choose different rules strategically depending on the political context, offering the analyst an opportunity to see how such contextual variables are associated with different selection rules.

In this article, we consider how decentralization shapes candidate selection procedures in Mexico, drawing on data on nomination rules in state and federal legislative elections, interview data, and documentary evidence. We find that though decentralization may have an indirect effect on candidate selection, the competitiveness of a party system had a significantly more influential impact on the rule chosen, with parties more likely to use open selection rules (such as primaries) where they are strong in the electoral competition. Finally, party cultures had a modest mediating effect on rule choice. Parties where activists assumed that the default rule should be open selection were—by and large—more likely to use open selection rules in competitive contexts than parties where leaders traditionally had the exclusive right to choose nominees.

The Mexican Case in Theoretical Context

Party leaders focus on the rules they deploy to pick their nominees with good reason, since they shape quality of representation, party discipline, and internal distribution of power in parties (Bille, 2001; Cordero & Coller, 2015; Gallagher & Marsh, 1988; Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Rahat & Hazan, 2010; Siavelis & Morgenstern, 2008). Mexico presents a valuable case in which to examine how parties evaluate different candidate selection rules. Until very recently, the Mexican constitution barred reelection to any office, meaning that every 3 years (for local legislatures and the federal Chamber of Deputies) or 6 years (for the Senate, governors, and the presidency) all politicians had to find a new job. And because the constitution also barred independent candidacies until 2015, nominations were inevitably party based. The absence of incumbency thus created ample opportunities for parties to consider candidate selection rules: Every seat, in every election, was an open seat.

During the authoritarian period, gaining a nomination from the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) assured a candidate of winning because of the uneven playing field engineered by the hegemonic party. In contrast, for opposition parties like the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), serving as a candidate was an act of martyrdom (Loaeza, 1999; Mizrahi, 2003). The prolonged transition of the 1990s, during which opposition parties gained incrementally more local, state, and federal seats, transformed candidacies into more highly valued commodities. Over the course of the transition, Mexico developed a regionalized party system characterized by uneven competition. All three major parties today have zones of hegemony where a candidate’s selection all but assures her of victory, areas where they are competitive with
one of the other two major parties (there are few regions with three-party systems), and zones where candidacy remains an act of sacrifice. Competitive conditions thus vary dramatically.

Party selection rules also vary widely. During the transition, all parties moved toward more open selection processes. The PRI, which historically relied on centralized imposition via the dedazo (literally, the pointing of the finger), shifted by 2000 to conventions for most of its relative majority (RM) candidacies, similar to those held historically by the PAN. The PAN’s closed conventions opened further in the context of the transition (see Wuhs, 2006), especially for presidential and gubernatorial contests, while the leftist Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) opted for open primaries. The past decade, though, shows an important shift in the opposite direction: Parties have closed off selection processes from the voting public (e.g., Martinez Valdes, 2013), yielding today a varied and shifting landscape of candidate selection rules in Mexico.

Such variation suggests that party leaders make deliberate choices about the adoption of selection rules based on potential costs and benefits. Party leaders themselves share conflicting opinions about the benefits and costs of primaries. Some argue that primaries raise the profile of lesser known candidates and allow candidates to make earlier appeals to voters beyond the activists that attend conventions (e.g., PAN CEN, National Executive Committee). Opening the selection may enable a party to appear as a party of the community, rather than a narrow clique (PAN 1). Primaries may also boost turnout for the general election (e.g., Mayer, 1996), and some argue that primary-selected candidates are more successful on election day, though Bruhn (2010) casts doubt on that argument as have some party leaders (e.g., PAN CEN 2).

Primaries can also be “craziness, disorganized, with disordered participation” and are more vulnerable to fraud than conventions (PRD 1). Such contests also give power to party militants, who are susceptible to the influence of powerful factional leaders (PRD 2), and they may produce candidates who are ideologically distinct from party leaders (Mayer, 1996; McCann, 1996; Meinke, Staton, & Wuhs, 2006). PAN leaders refer to that outcome as a failure to “take care of the party” by ensuring the selection of “good panistas” (PAN 2)—candidates who are more familiar with party doctrine and history (PAN CEN 2 and PAN 1). It can also constrain leaders’ ability to place their allies into positions of power and to control their behavior once in office.1

Furthermore, open processes can generate intraparty rivalries, splits, and negative publicity for the party. Safe seats are always contested. The stakes are raised higher by the fact that aspiring candidates have to use their own money in primary campaigns. According to one PRD leader responsible for organizing the party’s internal elections, since precandidates may spend as much as a million pesos (US$100,000) on a primary, “Why should you play clean? Why should you expect others to?” Thus, he said, the candidate who wins the primary is often the richest candidate or the local cacique, not necessarily the best or most electable (PRD 3).

Finally, open selection processes force organizationally weak parties to try to monitor the behavior of competitors—a nearly impossible task. In general elections, the Mexican state provides one polling station per electoral section, which smaller parties
cannot replicate. Thus, fewer polling stations are set up, and their location provides advantages to some competitors over others, giving the winners an opportunity to pack the vote. Once the primary is over, there are “a lot of very disappointed people” who have spent a lot of money for nothing” (PRD 3), who have nothing to lose (and often truth on their side) by accusing the winners of cheating. Such accusations undermine the democratic legitimacy that primaries are supposed to provide.

Rules with less inclusive selectorates—conventions or designations—may thus seem more manageable to risk-averse party leaders than primaries. The PAN, for example, historically limited the right to participate in internal processes to elected delegates to a state convention. The PRD, once the staunchest defender of open primaries, has increasingly resorted to designations by the state party, sometimes guided by public opinion polls, as a way of escaping the cost, logistical nightmares, and public relations risks of open primaries while still giving party leaders the political cover of having consulted a mass base. And the PRI—currently, the party most likely to use open selection rules—holds conventions almost exclusively, not primaries.

Overall, national party leaders seem skeptical that they need the advice of regional leaders to select good candidates. While they want the public relations benefits of announcing that they will select their candidates democratically, they make every effort to ensure that actual competition does not occur, worried about party splits. In 2005, at a meeting held to discuss the selection of legislative candidates for the 2006 national elections, the president of the PRD noted that

Unfortunately in the party in all of the processes of direct consultation [primaries] it has meant invariably internal conflict. I would dare to say that if the compañeros of Guerrero had not held primaries for municipal presidencies [mayors], many presidencies that we lost because of internal divisions we would have won as a party.

On another occasion, while interviewing a member of the CEN of the PRD, one of the authors observed him taking a call from a party leader in a southern state and exhorting him to negotiate a deal with rivals for a local nomination, stating that a primary would cause bad feelings. In other words, such matters are not left to regional leaders to resolve. Similarly, a PAN CEN member acknowledged that national leaders prefer to designate the candidate in districts where there are “strong divisions” at the local level (PAN CEN 3).

**Hypotheses**

The potential trade-offs among different rules prompted Mexican party leaders to constantly adapt their selection procedures. As winning general elections became more achievable for the historic opposition, running for office began to seem less the thankless sacrifice it had once been. Meanwhile, sore losers within the PRI began to see an alternative to grudgingly accepting defeat: seeking an offer of candidacy in another party. These contextual factors put pressure on leaders to open up the selection process
in order to resolve conflicts over nominations (Bruhn, 2014). We thus suggest this as our first hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** In contexts of increased intra-party competition (where the party expects to win the seat), open selection rules will be more commonly used.

Party competition is not the only factor that might reshape the incentive structures of party leaders and potential candidates. The territorial politics perspective developed in Europe in cases like the United Kingdom, Spain, and Belgium has demonstrated that decentralization can have powerful effects on party system attributes, election results, legislative behavior, and governance (including but not limited to Bermúdez & Cordero, 2014; Field, 2014; Hopkin, 2003; Hough & Jeffery, 2006; Swenden & Maddens, 2009). Decentralization may empower regional and local party leaders vis-à-vis their national counterparts in nomination processes. We examine that hypothesis here, while noting that Mexican decentralization did not result from mobilization from below as was common in Europe. Indeed, the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups that typically pushed for decentralizing reforms in Spain, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere do not exist in the same form in Mexico. While regional minorities exist (principally, indigenous groups), they have not made coordinated efforts to shift power from the federal to state/local level.

Instead, decentralization in Mexico initially came as a response to the onset of the debt crisis in the early 1980s via a presidentially initiated constitutional reform that gave municipalities greater responsibilities. Local autonomy was not the underlying goal of decentralization—off-loading budget items from an indebted central government was (Wuhs, 2013). Local and state governments remained dependent on federal transfers (Castañeda & Pardinas, 2012; Courchene & Díaz-Cayeros, 2000), though the portion of national expenditure under state control has increased.\(^2\)

We suggest that if decentralization has an effect on candidate selection, it is a conditional one. By transferring resources to state and local governments, decentralization has the capacity to reshape local patterns of political competition by creating prizes worth capturing, and by incorporating state and local political life into the development of career trajectories, patronage networks, and the like. Therefore, we suggest that

**Hypothesis 2:** Where local governments are better prizes, more competitive candidate selection processes should be adopted.

**Explaining Selection Rules for National and Local Legislatures**

Mexico represents a particularly interesting case for analysis because the methods by which the main parties choose candidates has varied substantially—by party, by office, and over time. The formal statutes of the major parties allow party leaders to decide which rule to use in a given contest; thus, we can evaluate which of several possible
strategic logics best explains actual patterns in selection rules. In this section, we analyze how Mexico’s three major parties chose candidates for the national legislature and for state-level congresses. We find that open selection rules were more likely when internal competition over the candidacy was more intense, which, in turn, was most likely in states where the party had enjoyed greater previous electoral success. In contrast, open selection procedures did not appear more likely in states with higher levels of fiscal decentralization.

Candidates for the National Legislature

To examine patterns associated with candidate selection rules for federal legislative deputies, we analyze comprehensive data on candidate selection in the 2006 and 2009 national elections. These elections are representative of the modern democratic period in Mexico (after alternation at the presidential level in 2000). National party elites chose candidates for 200 PR seats in all three parties. However, selection rules for the 300 RM candidates differed by party and year. In 2006, the PRD used a primary to select 36% of its RM candidates; the PAN used state-level conventions to choose 52% of RM candidates; and the PRI’s National Executive Committee (CEN) designated all RM candidates. In 2009, the PRI reported using state-level electoral conventions to select candidates in 97% of districts, according to the National Electoral Institute (Aparicio Castillo, 2011). However, multiple precandidates registered to compete in these “elections” in only 17.7% of districts. Thus, the actual number of competitive conventions held by the PRI in 2009 is 17.7%: remaining districts were negotiated, or dictated, as “unity candidates.” Use of open selection rules declined in 2009 to 33%, for the PAN and 16.3%, for the PRD.

Why so much variation in the choice of selection method? Our first hypothesis posits that national leaders choose open selection procedures in part to resolve conflicts over highly prized nominations, especially in districts where the party expects to win the seat (Bruhn, 2010, 2013; Wuhs, 2006). If this is the case, then we should see more open selection procedures in districts (and states) where a party is stronger. We use a variable, partystrength, calculated as the margin between the party’s vote and the vote of the winner in the previous congressional election (positive or negative). It is possible however, that in states governed by the party, the governor assumes control over nomination of candidates, perhaps especially for the PRI (see Langston, 2003, 2001; Rosas & Langston, 2011). If so, then designation may be the order of the day. We ran models using partystrength as alternative specifications.

Alternatively, when states have relatively greater fiscal autonomy from the national government, national political leaders may feel obligated to delegate selection powers to states, particularly when the party controls the state government. States that manage to collect additional resources beyond those received from the national government may be in a better position to help the party with patronage and other electoral aids, such as the distribution of public goods during campaigns. We measured fiscal autonomy using two alternative measures: ownrevenues (the percentage of total state revenue generated by the state, from Castañeda & Pardinas, 2012), and debt per capita
(publicly contracted by the state). Although we report only results for the former in Table 1, the measures are correlated at .63.

Finally, we explored a variety of demographic variables to control for possible confounding conditions that might make primaries harder to stage in particular states. As Bruhn (2010) argues, for example, holding elections in rural areas may make internal elections so fraught with risk that parties will opt for more centralized methods. The results reported below are for average years of education, but none of the control variables were significant, nor did the direction of the main independent variables change when different measures were used.7

Because our measures of decentralization are available only at the level of state aggregation, we ran separate models for each party.8 We converted district-level data on party strength into averages for each state, across the 2006-2009 election years. All models used logit with robust standard errors, and report results for the average percentage of districts using primaries in 2006 and 2009 federal legislative elections (see Table 1).

Party strength is consistently significant across all parties, but it is associated with more open candidate selection for the PRD and PAN, and more closed candidate selection methods in the PRI. The effect becomes significantly stronger when we substitute PRI governments for general PRI party strength, nearly doubling the overall pseudo $R^2$, all of the effect due to the impact of PRI governors. When the PRI governed the state, the party was extremely unlikely to use open selection rules. In contrast, both the PAN and the PRI were significantly more likely to hold primaries in states where the party was competitive and where the party governed the state; the marginal impact of holding the governorship was not as dramatic as in the case of the PRI.9

The fact that the PRI’s response to competition seems so different from that of the PAN and the PRD suggests that there is a missing mediating variable between selection procedures, on the one hand, and competitiveness, on the other: partisan norms. Langston (2001, 2003, 2006) has argued that within the PRI, loss of the presidency in

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### Table 1. Average Percentage of Districts Using Primaries to Select Federal Deputies, 2006-2009: Decentralization Versus Competition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PRI</th>
<th>PAN</th>
<th>PRD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party strength</td>
<td>−0.13**</td>
<td>0.11***</td>
<td>0.05**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentralization (own revenues)</td>
<td>0.07 (12.1)</td>
<td>0.20** (0.09)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociological (average years of education)</td>
<td>−1.13* (0.69)</td>
<td>−1.48*** (0.59)</td>
<td>−0.92 (0.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>7.74 (5.32)</td>
<td>13.11*** (4.64)</td>
<td>7.04 (5.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N$</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo $R^2$</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td>.21*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
2000 led to a decentralization of control over federal legislative candidacies to state governors. Our results confirm her analysis. Yet the normative expectation of democratic internal selection processes as the ordinary procedure in the PAN and PRD seems to trump the efforts of PRD and PAN governors to influence the selection of federal legislative candidates (see Wuhs, 2008). The expectation of democracy may expose the PAN and PRD to higher costs when they try to avoid open selection. In contrast, the PRI has no such normative expectations. On the contrary, the historical expectation of the dedazo as an executive right may help governors in stronghold states withstand competitive pressures to open up selection processes. Only where PRI governors face a real threat of defection by losers to a credible opposition, however, might they find themselves forced to hold internal elections.

By comparison, the contribution of fiscal decentralization measures was small. Ownrevenues is significant and positive for the PAN in only one model. Models using debt per capita as an alternative measure of fiscal autonomy—giving us more cases—actually have higher significance on most variables, in the same direction, but decentralization does not itself have a significant effect.¹⁰

State-Level Legislative Candidates

Do regional party leaders feel similar pressures to open up selection procedures to mollify candidates who aspire to run for positions in state legislatures? The answer is a complicated one, made even more so by the challenge of collecting comprehensive state-level candidate selection processes across parties. Our sample includes 23 states (see the appendix), that while not a random slice of Mexico’s states, was chosen to vary in terms of economic development, demographics, and histories of party competition. Although our sample is not random, we were careful to gather data from states where each of the parties we analyze is strong, competitive, and weak. We have information for the PRD in 27 state-years, PAN in 27 state-years, and PRI in 33 state-years. Most of our sample is drawn from the Calderón administration (2006-2012), and thus matches our federal-level data. However, in the interest of drawing a larger sample, we also include some more recent data. We focus our attention on the RM seats as a cleaner test of the arguments we present; PR candidates are historically named by party committees and are thus resistant to the dynamics we consider.

We coded rules according to four types: primaries, conventions, state party designations, and national party designations. In a few states/years, parties nominated some of their candidates by one rule and some by another. In these cases, we attempted to reflect the diversity of choices by assigning partial percentages to each rule. The PRI was the most likely to choose an open selection rule (usually conventions)—about 71% of the time—followed by the PAN (46% of contests) and the PRD (24%). Overall, about half of local deputy contests in the sample were subjected to competitive processes.

Our hypotheses suggest that parties should use democratic processes (primaries or conventions) in their areas of strength. We ran the same multivariate models for local nomination procedures as we did for federal deputies, using the percentage of open
selection rules as our dependent variable. However, due to the smaller number of cases, as we did not have information for all states, we ended up with 14 or 15 cases for some parties, we generally got insignificant results for all variables.11

We then put cases into one of three categories: strongholds (states where the party won districts in the state by an average of at least 10% in the prior federal elections, 2003 and 2006), weak states (where the party lost by more than 10%), and competitive states (where the margin was plus or minus 10%). Since all of our state-level elections took place after 2006, we are in effect looking at the party’s strength in elections preceding decisions about candidate selection.

Table 2 shows the distribution of designations and democratic processes in areas of greatest party strength and weakness.

Table 2. Frequency of Rule Type by Party Strongholds, by Party.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National party designation</th>
<th>State party designation</th>
<th>Convention</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stronghold</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td><strong>66.7%</strong></td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td><strong>97.0%</strong></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak state</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td><strong>30.1%</strong></td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td><strong>63.6%</strong></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td><strong>43.6%</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td><strong>63.8%</strong></td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. PRI = Partido Revolucionario Institucional; PAN = Partido Acción Nacional; PRD = Partido de la Revolución Democrática. Largest percentage per row, in bold type.

Source. Competitiveness calculated by authors from data available at www.ine.org.mx;12 district type calculated from data on selection method using sources listed in the appendix.

We then put cases into one of three categories: strongholds (states where the party won districts in the state by an average of at least 10% in the prior federal elections, 2003 and 2006), weak states (where the party lost by more than 10%), and competitive states (where the margin was plus or minus 10%). Since all of our state-level elections took place after 2006, we are in effect looking at the party’s strength in elections preceding decisions about candidate selection.

Table 2 shows the distribution of designations and democratic processes in areas of greatest party strength and weakness.

Before making observations based on this table, it is worth noting the relative infrequency of strongholds. The PAN and the PRI have four stronghold states each, the PRD only three. That speaks to the volatility the Mexican party system has experienced since transition. Due to the small overall number of cases and the difficulty in pooling all cases (since parties respond only to their own competitive conditions), we are unable to generate comparisons at conventional levels of statistical significance. Despite this limitation, Table 2 tells some important stories about candidate selection. An initial observation is that national party leaders rarely imposed their candidates in party strongholds. Overall, national-level designations occur 11% of the time in party strongholds versus 17% of the time in competitive states, and 18% of the time in weak states. State-level leaders are more able to assert their authority to designate candidates in party strongholds or in competitive states (36% and 35% of the time, respectively).
And local activists are able to get all party leaders to commit to internally open selection processes most frequently in party stronghold states, over 57% of the time. This is consistent with our central proposition—that in party strongholds competitive forces within parties require leaders to agree to either conventions or primaries.

More surprisingly, the lowest rate of open selection rules occurs in competitive states. Where the margin of electoral success or failure is slim, the willingness of the PRD and the PAN to risk open selection processes drops dramatically, from 50% to 60% in stronghold states to about 21% for the PAN and only 3% for the PRD. The PAN turns primarily to national leaders to guide the selection of good candidates, whereas the PRD turns mostly to state party leaders, but both find the rewards of open selection in local contests not worth the costs. The PRI, on the other hand, seems to relish the opportunity to demonstrate its “democratic” credentials. The near-total ban on open selection rules for federal legislative seats in PRI-governed states seems to vanish in the less important local venue.

For all parties, national (and state) leaders loosen the reins over local contests as their competitive position in a state worsens, suggesting that the need to do well, rather than the actual costs of holding internal elections, drives the decision to centralize candidate selection in competitive contexts. Bivariate correlations between party strength and percentage of local primaries are weak for all parties, probably reflecting this curvilinear relationship.

We also reviewed the relationship between decentralization and rule choice, with particular attention to the question of whether decentralization empowers regional party leaders in candidate selection. We looked across rule types separated by states at the highest and lowest levels of fiscal autonomy, where the states are more than 1 standard deviation from the mean of debt per capita or own revenue. Even at these extremes of the distribution, no compelling or statistically significant patterns of rule types appeared. Table 3 shows the entire distribution of our sample by rule type and level of fiscal autonomy, measured as percentage of revenue derived from the state’s own resources, with “high” fiscal autonomy interpreted as states in the top 30% of the sample, “low” fiscal autonomy as states in the bottom 30%, and the remaining states classified as average.

Again, and contrary to ideas presented elsewhere in this volume, higher levels of fiscal autonomy did not seem to empower state party leaders. If anything, at least for the PRI and PRD, state party leaders had more freedom to designate candidates where the states had less fiscal autonomy—perhaps, the less at stake, the less national leaders cared to intervene. Indeed, designations also rise in low autonomy states compared with high autonomy states, suggesting that the size of the prize may matter to local contenders for power as well, reducing incentives to fight over nominations when states have fewer resources. However, we do not find statistically significant correlations between decentralization and selection rules. At all levels of autonomy, the PRD relies most on its state-level leaders. The PAN relies most on national party leaders (tending to go straight to primaries at the lowest levels of autonomy), while the PRI, surprisingly, relies heavily on open selection rules at all levels.
Conclusion

What explains the choices Mexican party leaders made about how to select candidates? Our analysis indicates that competition has a powerful effect on the rules parties adopt. In federal deputy contests particularly, parties tend to employ democratic procedures when and where they are likely to win, that is, when and where there is significant competition within parties for nominations. That holds, though, only for the PAN and PRD. The PRI shows inclinations in the opposite direction—internal competition in the PRI makes the party less likely to adopt democratic rules.

These general findings substantiate our core logic, but also highlight an additional factor that needs further investigation: party institutional culture. Our analysis suggests that in addition to political competition and, potentially, to decentralization, different parties approach candidate selection differently. The PRI demonstrated a fondness for conventions, the PRD strongly favored state party designation, and the PAN relied particularly on primaries rather than conventions in its democratic contests, though mostly in noncompetitive areas. We suspect that the underlying variable here concerns institutional culture. To the degree that promotion within parties depends on adhering to internal institutional norms, aspiring nominees at the local level may be less willing to demand open selection processes if to do so would challenge important party norms against the wishes of party leaders. In the case of the PAN and PRD, the desire of leaders to control more nominations conflicted with party norms, which favored (in principle) open nominations, giving ambitious activists some leverage to challenge attempts to silence them. In the PRI, however, long traditions justifying designations in the name of party unity made it more difficult for activists to defy

Table 3. Effects of Fiscal Autonomy on Selection Rules, by Party.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National party designation</th>
<th>State party designation</th>
<th>Convention</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High fiscal autonomy</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>71.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average autonomy</td>
<td>24.36%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>16.12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low fiscal autonomy</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>72.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. PRI = Partido Revolucionario Institucional; PAN = Partido Acción Nacional; PRD = Partido de la Revolución Democrática. Largest percentage per row, in bold type.
Source. Fiscal autonomy calculated by authors, from data in Castañeda and Pardinas (2012); selection method type calculated by authors from sources listed in the appendix.
powerful governors who sought to retain power over nominations to the federal legislature in their home states, particularly, since these same governors had considerable influence to affect their future careers. However, fully exploring this issue goes beyond the scope of this article.

Fiscal decentralization had little measurable effect on rule choice in the case of federal deputies—significant for the PAN in only one model. In the case of local deputy candidates, higher levels of fiscal decentralization did not seem to translate into higher levels of state party control over nomination. State party leaders enjoyed maximum discretion at lower levels of state fiscal autonomy, and—if anything—state governors intervened less in candidate selection, reflecting the lower relevance of local congressional deputies to governance in Mexican states.

That said, our consideration of decentralization has raised a related proposition for future research. While fiscal decentralization had minimal effects, there may be regional effects on candidate selection as mediated through governors. The presence of PAN, PRD, and PRI governors had notable effects on selection rules for federal deputies, though these differed by party. While fiscal federalism itself may not determine rule choice, party leaders are clearly thinking about the local and national effects of their nomination processes.

Mexican party leaders demonstrate real ingenuity as they weigh their options—not just selecting a rule but also pairing multiple rules (e.g., using designations for some districts in a state and democratic processes for others), tweaking membership and participation rules to broaden or narrow the selectorate, or even using instruments like surveys or convention stacking to shape the outcomes of selection processes. In the end, Mexican party leaders approach the crucial task of candidate selection armed with a sophisticated toolkit to help them advance their institutional and electoral interests.

Appendix

List of State-level Congressional Elections With Data on Selection Procedures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Year (parties)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baja California</td>
<td>2010 (PAN), 2013 (All)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baja California Sur</td>
<td>2011 (PRD, PRI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campeche</td>
<td>2009 (All), 2012 (All), 2015 (PRI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiapas</td>
<td>2007 (All), 2010 (All), 2012 (All)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coahuila</td>
<td>2011 (PRD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrito Federal</td>
<td>2009 (All), 2012 (All), 2015 (All)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durango</td>
<td>2015 (PRI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guanajuato</td>
<td>2012 (All), 2015 (All)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guerrero</td>
<td>2012 (PRD, PRI), 2015 (PRD, PRI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hidalgo</td>
<td>2011 (All)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalisco</td>
<td>2012 (All)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>2012 (All), 2015 (All)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
### Appendix (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Year (parties)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michoacán</td>
<td>2011 (All), 2015 (All)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morelos</td>
<td>2015 (PRI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nayarit</td>
<td>2011 (PRD, PRI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuevo León</td>
<td>2012 (PAN, PRI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oaxaca</td>
<td>2010 (All), 2013 (All)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Querétaro</td>
<td>2012 (PAN, PRI), 2015 (PAN, PRI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabasco</td>
<td>2012 (All)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamaulipas</td>
<td>2013 (PAN, PRI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veracruz</td>
<td>2012 (PRI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yucatán</td>
<td>2015 (All)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zacatecas</td>
<td>2013 (All)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[N = 27 \text{ elections (PAN); } N = 27 \text{ elections (PRD); } N = 33 \text{ elections (PRI)}\]

**Note.** PRI = Partido Revolucionario Institucional; PAN = Partido Acción Nacional; PRD = Partido de la Revolución Democrática.

**Source.** Include state electoral institute websites, journalistic accounts, webpages for the state and national parties, and—occasionally—information found in the judgments of the regional courts of the Electoral Tribunal.

State electoral institutes:
- Baja California: Instituto Electoral y de Participación Ciudadana, Baja California (hard copy furnished by Mexican colleagues, available on request from authors).
- Campeche: [www.ieec.org.mx](http://www.ieec.org.mx)
- Chiapas: Instituto de Elecciones y Participación Ciudadana (hard copy furnished by Mexican colleagues, available on request from authors).
- Distrito Federal: [www.iedf.org.mx](http://www.iedf.org.mx)
- Guerrero: [www.iepcgro.mx](http://www.iepcgro.mx)
- Hidalgo: [ieehidalgo.org.mx](http://ieehidalgo.org.mx)
- Jalisco: [iepcjalisco.org.mx](http://iepcjalisco.org.mx)
- Michoacán: [www.iem.org.mx](http://www.iem.org.mx)
- Oaxaca: [www.ieepco.org.mx](http://www.ieepco.org.mx)
- Zacatecas: [www.ieez.org.mx](http://www.ieez.org.mx)

Electoral tribunal (regional panels):
- [www.trife.gob.mx/acercate/salas-regionales](http://www.trife.gob.mx/acercate/salas-regionales)

National parties (with links to state party websites):
- [www.prd.org.mx](http://www.prd.org.mx)
- [www.pri.org.mx](http://www.pri.org.mx)
- [www.pan.org.mx](http://www.pan.org.mx)

Newspapers and informational websites:
www.elfinanciero.com.mx
www.elsoldenayarit.mx
www.eluniversaledomex.mx
www.eluniversalqueretaro.mx
www.excelsior.com.mx
www.jornada.unam.mx
www.launion.com.mx
www.laverdad.com.mx
http://ljz.mx (La Jornada Zacatecas)
www.noticiasnet.mx
http://pagina3.mx
http://yucatan.com.mx (Diario de Yucatán)
http://admininformativo.mx
http://ajuaa.com
http://www.escaparatepolitico.com
http://www.igeteomx.info
www.propuestaoaxacapolitica.blogspot.com/2010/04/celebran-intervencion-de-dirigencia.html
http://www.la-verdad.com.mx


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**Notes**

1. In the Mexican case, external candidates (in the PAN, “citizen candidates”) and the proportional representation (PR) nominations to the federal legislature historically served as much-needed reserves of party leader influence (PAN 3, PAN 4).
2. According to Castañeda and Pardinas (2012, p. 4) in 1990, “states and municipalities together spent 20% of the nation’s total budget. Currently, their share of general government spending is 57%.” In fact, states and municipalities took advantage of the 1997 Fiscal Coordination Law to claim credit for spending and slack off on previous efforts to raise more local revenue, escaping the political costs of raising taxes. State government tax revenue declines as a percentage of GDP after 1997 as does the share of property taxes in total municipal revenue (Castañeda & Pardinas, 2012).

3. This was probably a result of efforts by the PRI’s presidential candidate, Roberto Madrazo, to prevent internal rivals from gaining seats in the next legislature. In the 2005 PRI primary, a group self-titled Everyone United Against Madrazo tried to block his nomination; on failing, they refused to cooperate with Madrazo’s campaign, contributing to his humiliating defeat. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that Madrazo wanted to keep the selection of legislative candidates to himself. Data on party selection procedures obtained directly from the parties, and from the website of the Federal Electoral Institute, www.ife.org.mx, since renamed the National Electoral Institute.

4. See procesos históricos 2008-2009, then preparación, then precampañas electorales (www.ine.mx).

5. This was a common practice in the PRI historically: Conventions were held to crown, unanimously, the preselected slate of candidates decided on by party leaders.

6. Calculated by author with data obtained from www.inegi.org.mx, and www.ife.mx, which published maps of congressional districts by municipio that were redistricted between 2003 and 2006.

7. All demographic variables were obtained from www.inegi.org.mx.

8. While we could, technically, pool all of the parties with a dependent variable expressed simply as “percentage of primaries held in the state” and control for party ID with a dummy variable, the value of the variable for decentralization would be entered three times, once for each of the three parties (since they each have a different value of the dependent variable, percentage of primaries held in the state). This would create the misleading illusion that the universe contains 96 cases of states when in reality it contains only 32. Such triple-counting would not produce reliable estimates of the effects of fiscal decentralization. We therefore run each party model separately.

9. Results of these models are not shown, but are available on request.

10. Results of these models are not shown, but are available on request.

11. Although we have information on 27 elections for the PRD, for example, we have information from only 17 states, albeit from multiple years. The problem is that “cases” in this instance are states, not election years. Since all of the independent variables remain the same (do not vary) by election year, while the percentage of districts with given selection rules does vary, using election year data as the dependent variable would lead inevitably to null results. The dependent variable thus is an average of the percentage of districts with open selection rules for states where we have information for more than one election.

12. Adjusted for redistricting in 2003 with assistance from mapping information also supplied by the National Electoral Institute (formerly the Federal Electoral Institute) and sociodemographic data from www.inegi.org.mx.

13. Although using own revenue rather than debt per capita necessarily eliminates some states from the sample, we view it as a somewhat cleaner measure of states’ efforts to seek independent income; debt per capita skews necessarily toward wealthier states that are able to persuade potential creditors to buy their bond issues.
14. The strongest correlation is between the average percentage of PRI local conventions and own revenue, with a Pearson’s $r$ of .26. PRD primaries and own revenue is correlated at .17, and PAN open selection rules and own revenue is correlated at just .05.

References


Interviews

PAN CEN 1: Interview with PAN CEN Member, 2000.


PAN CEN 3: Interview with PAN CEN member responsible for election organization, 2008.


PAN 2: Interview with former PAN National President Carlos Castillo Peraza, 2000.


PAN 4: Interview with PAN Secretary General Federico Ling, 2000.


PRD 3: Interview with former PRD member responsible for election organization, 2008.


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Kathleen Bruhn is professor of political science at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her areas of expertise are party politics, social movements and protest, and democratization,
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