



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS  
JOURNALS + DIGITAL PUBLISHING

**Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México**  
**University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States**

---

Democratization and the Dynamics of Candidate Selection Rule Change in Mexico, 1991–2003

Author(s): Steven T. Wuhs

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Winter 2006), pp. 33-56

Published by: [University of California Press](#) on behalf of the [University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States](#) and the [Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/msem.2006.22.1.33>

Accessed: 17/12/2012 11:31

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*University of California Press, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

## Democratization and the Dynamics of Candidate Selection Rule Change in Mexico, 1991–2003

---

Steven T. Wuhs  
*University of Redlands*

Party leaders in Mexico face the challenge of maintaining party unity while remaining competitive in a democratizing context. Candidate selection rules are central to achieving both objectives. I argue that leaders must decide between “open” rules that nominate electable candidates and “closed” rules that build strong party organizations, and suggest that strategic interests are the most powerful determinant of rule choice. Despite an evident trend toward greater openness, however, party leaders have taken advantage of Mexico’s mixed electoral system to preserve their own influence and placate party activists, while reaping the benefits of open rules.

Los líderes de los partidos políticos en México se enfrentan al reto de mantener la cohesión de sus partidos mientras buscan seguir ganando las elecciones. Los procesos de selección de los candidatos son cruciales para lograr los dos objetivos. Planteo que los líderes deben elegir entre procesos “abiertos” que producen candidatos atractivos y procesos “cerrados” que fortalecen los partidos mismos, y que las metas estratégicas de los partidos tienen la mayor influencia en la selección de las reglas. A pesar de una tendencia hacia mayor apertura, los líderes, por medio del sistema electoral “mixto” de México, han conservado su propia influencia, conciliando con los activistas, mientras se aprovechan de los beneficios electorales de los procesos abiertos.

\*The author acknowledges helpful input from the participants of the “Challenges to Democratic Consolidation in Mexico” conference, particularly Todd Eisenstadt and Yemile Mizrahi, as well as its sponsors. I also thank Kimberley Coles, Scott Meinke, Jeffrey Staton, Joy Langston, and Barbara Morris for their insights

*Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* Vol. 22, Issue 1, Winter 2006, pages 33–55. ISSN 0742-9797 electronic ISSN 1533-8320. ©2006 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press’s Rights and Permissions website, at [www.ucpress.edu/journals/rights.htm](http://www.ucpress.edu/journals/rights.htm).

Mexico was lucky to experience its democratic transition while maintaining an intact party system. Across the Third Wave cases, the construction of a functional political society with parties capable of aggregating and representing interests has been a primary post-transition obstacle.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, in Mexico two pro-democratic opposition parties (the Partido Acción Nacional, or PAN, and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática, or PRD) were keys to forcing the authoritarian regime (led by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI) from power, and the loss of power for the PRI transformed it into a competitive political party in its own right. Party leaders in Mexico now face the challenge of maintaining party unity and remaining competitive with their opposition. Candidate selection rules are central to achieving both objectives. In this article I argue that Mexico's party leaders face a difficult choice when contemplating selection rule changes. They can opt for "open" selection rules oriented toward nominating electable candidates, or retain (or adopt) more "closed" selection rules that have been shown to build strong and cohesive party organizations. In all of Mexico's parties, a trend toward more inclusive rules is evident, suggesting a prioritization of party electoral objectives. I argue that party leaders cede control over selection processes because they perceive large electoral gains and small risks to the types of candidates selected, and because they are able to preserve their own power by adopting heterodox rules for Mexico's different political offices.

### Candidate Selection Rules and Party Politics

Rules governing candidate selection designate the formal bureaucratic process that potential candidates must navigate and the "selectorate" of actors responsible for making nomination decisions. In Mexico, selection was for years epitomized by the *dedazo*, the PRI's informal process for presidential candidate selection in which outgoing PRI presidents simply "pointed" to their successors from among their close advisors. The *dedazo* occupies one pole of a continuum that also includes the smoke-filled backroom negotiations of the nineteenth-century United States, caucuses, conventions, and closed and open direct primaries.

Like other dimensions of party organization, selection rules reflect party leaders' weighing of competing goals. While party leaders clearly juggle various objectives, candidate selection processes compel them

1. Transitions from authoritarian, sultanistic, or totalitarian rule occurred in countries where parties had either never been strong (e.g., in Central America), had once been strong but had been decimated (as in Chile), or had in fact been part and parcel of the non-democratic regime itself (throughout the Eastern Bloc).

to focus on two primary types of goals. First, they have electoral goals, seeking to maximize the performance of their party and its candidates on Election Day. Second, they have organizational goals, such as advancing the party's agenda and protecting their own influence in party affairs. Selection rules can be used to advance either type of goal, but it is not clear that leaders can simultaneously maximize both goals through the choice of a particular rule. In fact, these rules typically present parties with a general choice between *fully* advancing either their electoral goals or their organizational goals.

Expanding participation in candidate selection offers a series of potential benefits to party leaders and parties. While more open selection rules obviously increase the scope of participation in the process itself, they have also been shown to increase voter participation in the general election (Mayer 1996: 124–27; Kanthak and Morton 2003). Beyond increasing the size of the selectorate, open selection rules also transform its ideological diversity, in turn affecting selection outcomes. As selection processes grow more inclusive, the selectorate begins to resemble the voting public—that is, their preferences begin to approximate those of the median voter. All things being equal, more open selection processes should result in the nomination of more “electable” candidates who can perform better in the general election. More open candidate selection processes also can have benefits where transparency is concerned. By moving the naming of candidates from smoke-filled back-rooms to public ballot boxes, party leaders can gain the confidence of the voting public by demonstrating the democratic character of the selection process. This final set of benefits was a principal motivation behind the adoption of state-administered direct primaries in the United States during the Progressive Era.

While the potential benefits of broader participation in candidate selection seem clear, there are also substantial possible costs that need to be weighed against those benefits. Opening the candidate selection process threatens party leaders' control over one of the most important responsibilities of parties in electoral regimes. Forfeiting their influence over candidate selection weakens both individual party leaders and the power of the party bureaucracy responsible for in-house nomination decisions (usually the central party office). Opening selection processes thus requires party leaders to undermine their own power. The same decision may also alienate party activists, the group typically empowered by caucuses and conventions and also the group typically most sympathetic to the preferences of party leaders (Mayer 1996; McCann 1996). Finally, more open selection rules also may have longer-term consequences for parties in government. The flip-side of the benefit of “electability” mentioned above is the cost of having public officials who are only weakly

partisan in their politics and are only weakly accountable to the party central office. Parties' and party leaders' abilities to structure government and formulate policy thus may also be threatened by open selection rules.

Mexican party leaders face the same set of benefits and costs as those in consolidated democracies, with a couple of complicating factors, as they weigh options for candidate selection. First, in many countries, primary campaigns can be negative and ultimately divisive for parties, and their public nature can impact party performance in the general election. In Mexico, the effect is compounded by weak party loyalties; losers in primaries (even very elite losers) often leave the party ranks following their defeat. Three of the PRD's most visible leaders (Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and Ricardo Monreal) split from the PRI following defeat in selection processes, and they are merely the trendsetters. Primaries can damage and drain the party leadership. A second potential cost of primary elections relates to their administration. When well-run, primaries add transparency to the political process. When they are not (as is more often the case in Mexico, particularly in the PRD and PRI), they have deleterious effects on public confidence in political parties and political institutions more generally.<sup>2</sup> As Mexican party leaders contemplate their options for candidate selection procedures, in addition to weighing party performance against party development, they are also bearing in mind concerns about party schisms and the party's public reputation.

### Analytical Framework

In spite of the complicated character of the decisions that Mexican party leaders face, the PAN, the PRD, and the PRI all adopted increasingly open selection rules during the period of democratic opening in Mexico in the 1990s, suggesting an across-the-board prioritization of electoral goals. "Opening" can occur through two potential avenues. First, and most clearly, opening occurs when the size of the selectorate is increased—for example, shifting from a closed primary (where only party members can participate) to an open primary (where all voters may participate). A second more subtle opening can result from a change in the mode of

2. An emerging tendency to impugn the results of candidate selection processes has triggered efforts in all parties at more effectively bureaucratizing the administration of these processes. In the PRI's *Reglamento para la Elección de Dirigentes y Postulación de Candidatos*, for example, there is a lengthy discussion of the processing of post-selection disputes, or *quejas*. The PRD's Comité General de Servicio Electoral y Membresía is the strongest of the supervisory institutions. It is difficult to measure the credibility of such claims, but doubtless there are substantial costs to public confidence in parties as a result of those claims.

selection (e.g., shifting from a convention to primary voting). This sort of change can remove effective barriers to participation in the candidate selection process, including, for example, the costs associated with traveling to conventions. Other party regulations have important mediating effects on how inclusive or open selection processes actually are. Restrictive delegate selection rules, for example, can transform conventions into plebiscitary meetings, while different membership rules can make one closed primary much “more closed” than another. Candidate selection rules may establish the process and the naming of the selectorate, setting the contours for participation in nomination decisions by designating the “how” and the “who,” but delegate selection rules and membership rules determine the conditions under which party members and voters may participate. My data for measuring the openness of party rules is drawn from a plurality of sources including party documents, interviews with elite party members, secondary sources, and expert interviews.<sup>3</sup>

I argue that party leaders structure their decision-making about opening selection rules around three principal factors.<sup>4</sup> First, I consider whether or not party leaders have autonomy in their decision-making and, specifically, the constraints that rank and file members of parties and other actors can place on leaders. Where party members are easily able to remove and replace party leaders, those leaders behave more cautiously, particularly when their desired actions contradict the preferences of party activists and members (Samuels 2004; Kitschelt 1994). This sort of “vertical” autonomy may be too narrowly conceived, however; a variety of actors may have the ability to “punish” party leaders, including factional rivals and other political elites (Burgess 2004). Where other actors have this sort of punishing power, I expect leaders to acknowledge those interests in their actions. For example, where party activists have

3. In the figures that appear later in this article, I quantify my measurement of selection rule openness on a rising eight-point scale. The eight categories are: 1) individual imposition, 2) national elite decision-making, 3) local elite decision-making, 4) closed convention with high membership threshold, 5) closed convention with low membership threshold, 6) closed primary with high membership threshold, 7) closed primary with low membership threshold, and 8) open primary. Intermediate codings do not exist; in the figures I have slightly adjusted some values in order to make all trends visible throughout the time period. For example, where multiple parties employ closed primaries with low membership thresholds, I code them as 6.9, 7.0, and 7.1.

4. There are relatively few theoretical analyses of candidate selection rule choice that endogenize rule adoption in the manner accomplished here. The framework used here is an adaptation to Mexico of the framework set forward by Meinke et al's (2006) work on state-level delegate selection rules in the United States. Many prior studies of candidate selection rule outcomes (including Gallagher and Marsh 1988 and Lundell 2004) draw associations between patterns of historical development or institutional arrangements and rule outcomes, without inserting rules into the logic of party politics.

the clear capacity to hold leaders accountable, leaders will be less apt to open up selection processes and disempower those activists. My measurement of leadership autonomy is based on party statutes and regulations, interviews with party elites, and prior analyses of the factional structure of the parties.

Second, for the trade-off to be necessary, achieving electoral and organizational goals must be mutually exclusive for party leaders; if party leaders can simultaneously further their party's electoral goals and safeguard the organization and their position of power within it, they will do so. But this simultaneity will only hold where party leaders and voters espouse similar political views. Where an ideological gap exists between leaders and voters, leaders will be cautious about ceding decision-making power to voters. All things being equal, as the ideological distance between party leaders and voters grows, those leaders should be increasingly unlikely to open their candidate selection processes (Meinke et al. 2006). Some parties are more likely to encounter this trade-off than others: centrist parties with moderate leaders face fewer risks in this sense than do ideologically extreme parties. Likewise, party leaders from pragmatic or electoralist fractions within their party are more likely to support opening than are more doctrinaire leaders. I rely on party programs, survey data, secondary analyses, and interviews with party leaders and party activists in my discussion of ideological divergence.

Finally, I argue that party leaders also think strategically about patterns of political competition as they contemplate opening or closing selection rules. Scholars have suggested that political competition has triggered parties to open their rules (Langston 2001). Party leaders likely adopt a nuanced perspective on rule development, given the potentially high costs associated with opening. They may favor opening rules for some offices and not others. In some contexts, party leaders may be focused on the mere survival of the party, while at the same time they might see opportunity for party building elsewhere. It might be analytically convenient to believe that party leaders are consistent in the type of selection rule they favor, but it seems quite likely that they are strategically pragmatic as they mull over their options. My discussion of competitive strategy relies principally on prior analyses of party development as well as interviews with party leaders.

#### *Candidate Selection Processes in the Mexican Parties*<sup>5</sup>

The question of whether or not to open internal party processes to greater popular participation was debated in all three parties through-

5. In this article I focus on the rules governing selection of SMD legislative candidates, gubernatorial candidates, and candidates for the presidency of the Republic, leaving

out the 1990s and continued after Fox's election in 2000. Party leaders of all stripes acknowledged the difficult decision they face when contemplating opening their candidate selection processes, citing it as among the principal sources of tension in their parties. It was particularly important in the PAN, where conflict among pragmatist and doctrinaire teams within the party had structured party politics for the better part of the party's history. In all three parties, discussions revolved around how to select winning candidates without sacrificing the party's identity and leadership power.

*PAN.*<sup>6</sup> Mizrahi (2003) argues that the PAN's closed selection rules resulted from the sectarian nature of the party, itself a function of the marginalization of the party and its corps of activists in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. The rule used to select the party's presidential candidate until the late 1970s was indicative: candidates were required to gain 80 percent support at the party's closed national electoral convention. As the pragmatic faction in the party grew stronger in the late 1970s and early 1980s (and as the electoral system was opened to greater opposition-party representation), the PAN began to contemplate different sorts of rules. For the Single-Member District (SMD) legislative seats (in both houses), the PAN had relied on conventions of party delegates to pick the nominee. As the party grew in the late 1980s and 1990s, however, those conventions grew increasingly unwieldy for the party.<sup>7</sup> While the PAN's SMD Chamber candidates continue to be selected at conventions now run at the state level, the process was opened to a closed primary for Senate candidates after the 2000 election.

As was the case for the PAN's legislative candidate selections, the party historically has employed a closed convention to select its presi-

---

aside for reasons of space the selection of the PR candidates for the upper and lower houses of Congress. I continue to refer to legislative posts I consider in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate as "SMD" seats because in the conclusion I make selective reference to the PR rules in the parties. By the late 1990s, the Mexican legislature consisted of a 500-seat Chamber of Deputies (300 single-member district seats and 200 proportional representation seats [grouped in 5 high-magnitude districts]) and a 128 member Senate (with 96 SMD and 32 PR [a single national district] seats).

6. The rules for the selection of candidates in the PAN are specified in two party documents, its statutes and its body of regulations (or *reglamentos*), and executed by the party's Comité Ejecutivo Nacional and Consejo Nacional. Party statutes are debated at the triennial National Assemblies of the party, while the regulations result from the work of the Consejo Nacional and its subcommittees.

7. The PAN in the 1990s grew highly factionalized at the state level because of the improving prospects of PAN candidates. The March 1997 national electoral convention was particularly chaotic, competitive, and divisive, generating negative publicity for a party that promoted itself as programmatically coherent and politically and ethically sacrosanct.

dential and gubernatorial candidates.<sup>8</sup> However, in 1999 the PAN abandoned the national convention for selecting its presidential candidate and adopted a closed primary conducted at the district level.<sup>9</sup> As it happened, Vicente Fox Quesada was the only candidate to register, so the primary amounted to a plebiscite on Fox's popularity among PAN militants.<sup>10</sup> In 2001, the PAN shifted to a closed primary for its gubernatorial candidates as well. Prior to that rule change, they were selected in state-level conventions. As was the case for presidential candidate selection processes in the past, multiple rounds of voting were possible, and the required proportion of the convention vote dropped, from two thirds in 1986 to a simple majority.<sup>11</sup> Since 2000, the PAN also has experimented widely in the rules used for gubernatorial candidate selection by using, at the discretion of the Comité Ejecutivo Nacional (CEN), open primaries, closed primaries, and diagnostic public opinion surveys to gauge pre-candidates' respective electability.

A demonstrable trend toward opening is evident in PAN, particularly in the executive positions. At the same time, PAN leaders continue to employ conventions for their nominations for the Chamber of Deputies' 300 SMD seats. In a sense, those conventions have grown even more selective. Until the 1990s, PAN conventions were open to any *panista* who could travel to the convention. By the 2003 midterm elections, delegate selection in the PAN had grown increasingly complicated and bureaucratized, requiring delegates to demonstrate municipal party support and gain the approval of municipal party committees. This requirement seems motivated by a desire to drive down the number of delegates attending conventions, but it likely has the additional political effect of strengthening the presence of doctrinaire voices at the convention.<sup>12</sup>

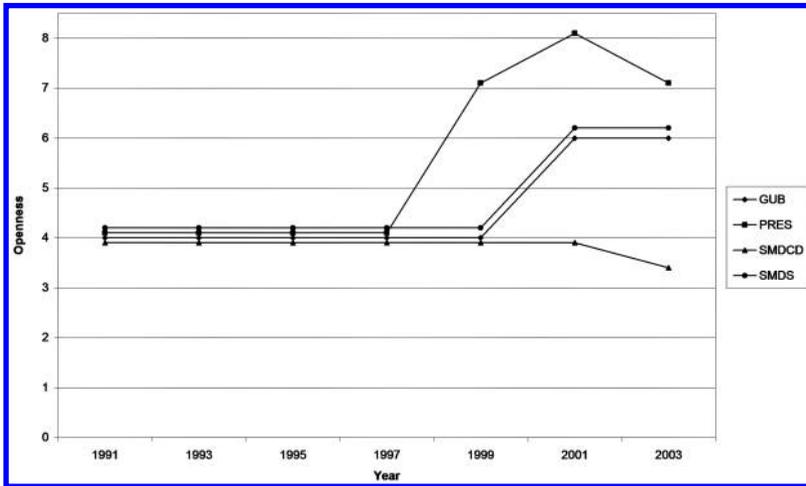
8. After the failure of the presidential selection rule in 1976, PAN leaders reduced the required proportion of the convention vote, reaching 2/3 in 1986 and 3/5 by 1992. However, the process remained closed and included costs (including traveling to the convention) that prevented all but the most ardent of PAN supporters from participating.

9. Notably, this is not a presidential preference primary (i.e., to select delegates to a national convention, as in the US case), but a direct primary to select the presidential candidate. Also crucial is the change in structure of PAN membership in the late 1990s, when under the leadership of Felipe Calderón Hinojosa the PAN created a second-tier membership (called *adherentes*) who have limited rights to participate in party life. Closed primaries prior to 2000 usually excluded the adherentes, and since 2000 the CEN has alternately included and excluded the adherente members, who greatly outnumber the *activos* who have full participatory rights.

10. Fox had mobilized such a strong extra-party campaign organization, Amigos de Fox, that he effectively sidelined any potential opponents who might have thrown their hats in the ring.

11. See Article 40 of the PAN's *Estatutos*.

12. See Articles 47-55 of *Reglamento de los Organos Estatales y Municipios*. In the figures used throughout this article, I abbreviate the name of the different candidate

Figure 1. *Candidate Selection Rules of the PAN, 1991-2003*

*PRD*.<sup>13</sup> In its short fifteen-year history as a party, *PRD* leaders have significantly altered most of the party's selection rules. In keeping with the party's founding statutes, legislative candidates for the 1991 midterm elections were selected at a national electoral convention. After the poor performance of the party in those elections, party leaders led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas chose to open processes of candidate selection. In the wake of that contest, party leaders adopted a model structured around direct, universal, and secret vote of party members (i.e., closed primaries) for the *SMD* seats in both chambers of the Congress. Likewise, in anticipation of the 1994 presidential race the party opted for a closed primary to select its candidate, a rule it employed again for the 2000 election.<sup>14</sup> Through the 1990s, gubernatorial candidates for the *PRD* were also selected through closed primaries within their states.

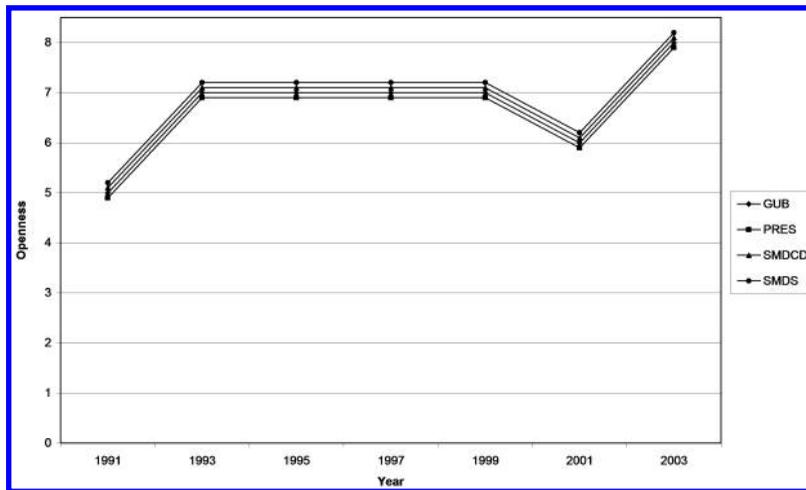
Since the election of Fox, the party has taken new steps to remove barriers to participation in its selection contests. In the 1990s the *PRD*

---

selection rules. *PRES* and *GUB* refer to presidential and gubernatorial selection rules; *SMDS* and *SMDCD* refer to the single-member district seats in the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. Where multiple parties' rules are presented in a single figure, I attach a party prefix to the rule type, so that *PRD-S* refers to the *PRD*'s selection rule for Senate seats, and *PRI-GUB* refers to the *PRI*'s gubernatorial selection rule.

13. In the *PRD*, the Consejo Nacional, the party's 200+ member deliberative body, is responsible for elaborating the specific regulations that govern candidate selection processes. The party's statutes, which articulate the general framework for candidate selection, are revised in triennial meetings of the National Congress.

14. In both cases Cárdenas was the foregone conclusion of whatever selection process was utilized.

Figure 2. *Candidate Selection Rules of the PRD, 1991–2003*

allowed only registered members of the party to participate in selection processes, but at a 2001 National Congress the PRD adopted a rule that empowered the Comité Ejecutivo Nacional of the party to choose between a closed or an open primary for *all* posts (except the Proportional Representation—PR candidacies). That rule was further revised in 2004, when selection processes were opened to the entire voter credential-carrying citizenry, including all SMD legislative posts as well as gubernatorial and presidential selection contests (termed the *voto abierto a la ciudadanía*). Like the PAN, the PRD also increasingly turned to alternative modes of candidate selection in the interest of picking “electable” candidates; under Party President Rosario Robles (2000–2003), party leaders made frequent use of public opinion polls to measure the popular support of pre-candidates for the party; while selection decisions were not made on the basis of those polls, party leaders used them to encourage some pre-candidates to seek the party’s nomination (and to discourage others).

The PRD’s process of opening has been much more dramatic than the PAN’s. The openness of PRD processes is particularly noteworthy given its membership rules. Unlike the PAN, the PRD had lax rules for affiliation through 2000, allowing same-day registration and participation in internal decision-making (including candidate selection). Open membership created spaces for opportunistic politicians to mobilize their supporters to gain nominations (especially in the district-level primaries), resulting in the colonization of PRD local offices by outsiders (often times, *priistas*). Consequently, closed primaries in the PRD were

in fact not very closed. After 2000 the PRD amended its membership rules and installed a six-month waiting period for participation in internal elections.<sup>15</sup> However, that reform was immediately followed by the opening of most selection processes to any Mexican voter (undermining the effect of higher membership requirements).<sup>16</sup>

*PRI*.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, the PRI's selection rules have been the most centralized of the three parties, and despite changes in the Mexican political environment, that centralization remains the defining characteristic of the party's legislative selection processes. Where PRI leaders have moved to open selection processes, those leaders are typically still perceived as stacking the deck in favor of particular candidates.

Before 2000, the PRI's candidates for the SMD Senate posts were formally determined by the Comité Ejecutivo Nacional. Informally, these candidates were imposed by the incoming president (i.e., the PRI's presidential candidate). The selection process for candidates to the SMD seats in the Chamber was less centralized, formally speaking. A plurality of methods was employed prior to 2000, including conventions of delegates, consultations with the militant base, or "*usos y costumbres*" (in indigenous Oaxaca only).<sup>18</sup> The selection rule used in any given district was determined by a *convocatoria*<sup>19</sup> issued by the CEN (shaped to produce results favorable to the national party leadership). By 2003, the party was relying on one of two methods for SMD candidate selection: district-level primaries or district-level delegate conventions (with the *convocatoria* still ultimately determining which was employed in any given contest). Very few of the party's 2003 candidates were selected through these procedures because of the party's use of candidates of unity (i.e., cases where only one candidate registered within a single district) and the 2003 alliance of the PRI with the green party (because al-

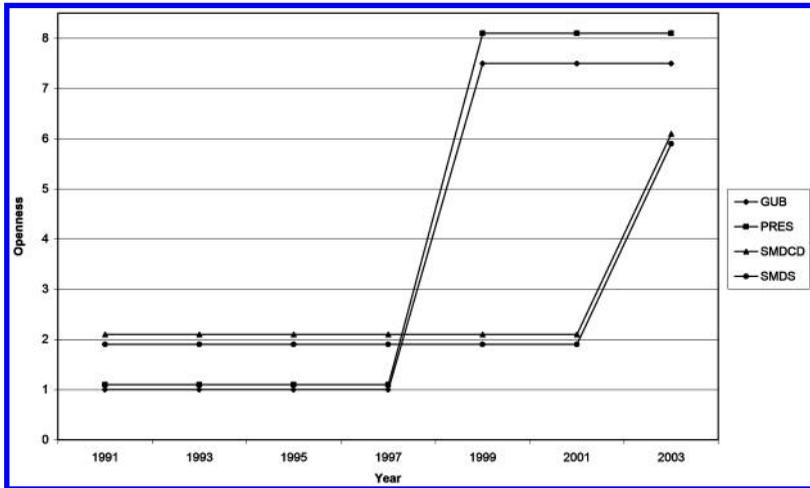
15. See *Reglamentos*, Chapter 2, Article 5. This regulation is similar to the PAN's membership requirement.

16. Because of the significance of the 2004 revision to PRD selection processes discussed above, it has been incorporated into Figure 2.

17. The guidelines for candidate selection in the PRI are outlined in the *Reglamento para la Elección de Dirigentes y Postulación de Candidatos*, drafted by the party's Consejo Nacional and implemented by the Comisión Nacional de Procesos Internos with the support of the party's Comité Ejecutivo Nacional.

18. Because of the strength of indigenous community organization in Oaxaca, the PRI makes special allowances that enable those communities to use their own rules (based on historical practice) to select their candidates for public office. The author thanks Joy Langston for her help in understanding candidate selection in the PRI.

19. The PRI's leaders use an instrument called the *convocatoria* to shape the dynamics of a given selection process. While the term simply means convocation, its distinct deployment by PRI leaders makes it much more significant. As such, I refer to it by its Spanish name throughout this article.

Figure 3. *Candidate Selection Rules in the PRI, 1991-2003*

liances needed the approval of the national party office and so were formed outside normal selection channels).

For decades, presidential candidate selection in the PRI was nothing more than the *dedazo*, in which the outgoing president simply designated his successor. Electoral pressures clearly altered the calculus of PRI leaders when they considered the 2000 election: for the first time, the PRI conducted an open primary from which Francisco Labastida emerged victorious. As an open primary, all Mexicans were eligible to participate in the voting. The PRI also imposed new qualifying restrictions on potential pre-candidates for the 2000 contest, requiring them to have service not just in the executive bureaucracies but also in elected positions. During the PRI's hegemonic period, the Mexican president also had effective *dedazo* power at the state level, naming gubernatorial candidates and engaging in frequent governor-switching. Electoral pressures again required a tactical shift aimed toward selecting better candidates, and after 1998, the PRI instituted a primary system to select gubernatorial candidates, the specifics of which (e.g., open or closed nature) also are open to *convocatoria* determination.

Membership rules have not had significant effects on the PRI's selection rules: the party always has had very open membership rules—in fact, under the authoritarian regime, a common joke was that all Mexicans were members of the PRI until they declared otherwise. The party continues to have open membership rules, but they have minimal effect given that processes are either very closed or very open in the PRI. Delegate selection, however, does influence the openness of processes, as

**Table 1:** *Summary Table of Independent Variables*

	PAN	PRD	PRI
Leader autonomy	<i>High</i> (indirect election of CN, CEN, and presidency)	<i>High</i> (indirect election of CN, CEN, and presidency 1989–1995); <i>Low</i> (direct election through internal PR system 1995–2003)	<i>Very High</i> (imposition of party leadership by presidency)
Ideological divergence	<i>High</i> (strong doctrinaire faction in CN, CEN 1989–1999); <i>Medium</i> (pragmatic party leadership 1999–2003)	<i>Low</i>	<i>Low-N/A</i> (ideological flexibility of party throughout period)
Competitive strategy	<i>Aggressive federalist</i> strategy (1988+); presidency (post 1994)	<i>Presidentialist</i> (1989+); federalist (1994+)	<i>Maintenance</i> (1991–2000); <i>Recovery</i> (2000+)

mediated by the convocatoria issued by the CEN. For each contest, the CEN issues a convocatoria dictating how convention delegates will be named and, in SMD Chamber cases, what voting method will be used. The CEN individualizes the convocatoria for each contest, accounting for a given district's particularities to ensure selection outcomes favorable to the party's central office (Langston 2001: 494). Instead of being a means of democratic participation, participation in selection as a PRI delegate amounts to being used as a political tool.

#### *Explaining Candidate Selection Rule Outcomes*

Three factors explain the actions taken by the leaders of the PAN, PRD, and PRI as they contemplated their selection rules: the vertical and horizontal autonomy of those leaders, the degree of ideological divergence between party leaders and voters, and the competitive strategy of those leaders. In this section, I offer explanations of the actions in the three parties and pool the results by rule type to further highlight the careful calculations Mexican party leaders made.

*PAN.* As Figure 1 suggests, there are two periods that demand explanation in the PAN, a period of stability in the rules between 1991 and 1999, and a period of greater dynamism in selection rules between 1999 and

2003. In that first period, there are important changes in selection processes but no substantial changes either toward opening rules or toward closing them. Leaders in the PAN were (and remain today) very autonomous in their decision-making; the PAN's indirect leadership selection rules protect leaders from punishment by party activists. If party leaders had favored opening selection rules, they could have done so without fear of sacrificing their positions of power, yet they do not. In part, this stability reflects the ideological position of the PAN's leadership bodies in much of the 1990s. While the party's new leaders (and in fact its party president from 1989 to 1996, Luis H. Alvarez) were entrepreneurial pragmatists, the CEN and Consejo Nacional were still in the hands of the founding families of the PAN (Wuhs 2001). Those bodies were indeed quite wary of allowing individuals who were not "good panistas" to run on the party label, while also rewarding individuals from their own ranks who had served the party during its decades as the "loyal opposition."

By the late 1990s pragmatic forces had increased their representation in the CEN and Consejo Nacional of the party while retaining the party presidency. 1999 was a key year because it marked a transition from the more conservative leadership of Felipe Calderón Hinojosa to that of Luis Felipe Bravo Mena, who was the PAN's president through 2003. That is, although the formal mechanisms for selecting party leaders remained stable, the preferences of elected leaders shifted in the late 1990s from the right toward the political center. Given their stable position in the leadership, party pragmatists were anxious to reap the electoral benefits of open rules. They focused on the presidential and gubernatorial rules, a reflection of two strategic goals of the party during the 1990s. First, like the PRD, it hoped to "own" Mexico's democratic transition by defeating the PRI presidential candidate in 2000.<sup>20</sup> Second, it continued to follow the "federalist" strategy of organizational growth it developed after the 1989 gubernatorial election in Baja California by opening selection rules for those candidates after 2000 (Lujambio 2001). But party leaders did not ignore more doctrinaire members of the Consejo Nacional and their activists, taking care to preserve the SMD Chamber candidacies for those activists and forestalling the opening of the SMD Senate slots until after 2000.

*PRD.* The PRD's rules can be broken into three periods: one of increas-

20. The strong showing of PAN candidate Diego Fernández de Cevallos in the 1994 presidential election (in part based on his performance in Mexico's first-ever televised presidential debate) woke PAN leaders up to the possibility that even a conservative panista had the potential to oust the PRI from the presidential palace.

ing openness in the early 1990s, a second period of stability through much of the 1990s, and a third of radical opening after the 2000 election. That first shift, from using a national electoral convention to a system of closed primaries for SMD legislative and executive posts, came on the heels of the 1991 midterm elections, in which the PRI managed to contain the expansion of Cárdenas's party. Cárdenas effectively controlled the party's development during this early period—not yet counterbalanced in party politics by the factions that emerged in the mid 1990s (Greene 2002; Bruhn 1997). The explanation for the opening of selection rules after 1991 lies in the competitive strategy of the party, conditioned by the autonomy of Cárdenas and ideological factors. The PRD encountered locally heavy repression from the PRI in the early 1990s. Cárdenas recognized that local politics, and perhaps even state politics, were a literal dead end. Using his charismatic authority and presidential powers, he pushed through a set of rule changes designed to take advantage of an ideological convergence between the party and Mexican voters; the PRD sought to broaden its support base by attracting pro-democratic voters who indicted the PRI's authoritarian tactics. From that initial opening through the 2000 election, the PRD's rules were stable, with closed primaries (that were in fact fairly open because of lax registration requirements) for executive and SMD legislative posts. That stability held despite a radical reform to the rules governing leadership selection in the PRD that instituted direct election of party leaders through a PR formula called the *planilla* system. Those open candidate selection rules were an effective mechanism for bringing new cadres into the organization during that period—reflecting the electoralist orientation of the dominant coalition of the party in the mid-1990s, still revolving around Cárdenas.

After 2000, the PRD increased its membership requirements but proceeded to open to all Mexican voters all processes discussed here. This change occurred despite the maintenance of the *planilla* system; if party activists had strongly opposed the complete opening of nomination decisions, party leaders would likely have held back from this dramatic reform. The first years of the Fox Administration were marked by repeated corruption scandals in the PRD, events that increased PRD leaders' concerns with the party's public image. Given the ideological convergence of party leaders with the electorate, those leaders may have opened in the interest of building the confidence of the electorate. This logic is consistent with strategic issues in the party after its poor performances in the 1994 and 2000 presidential elections. The party was forced to defend its center-left territory from the PRI (which moved to the left in opposition to Fox's center-right government); open rules were embraced

as a means of building popular sympathy for the party despite the potential consequences to party identity. One party elite acknowledged, for example, that open selection rules could weaken party identity, but that in areas of the country where the party was a marginal presence leaders were willing to take the gamble.<sup>21</sup>

*PRI.* The PRI's selection rules fall into two periods, moving from extremely closed processes in the early 1990s to extremely open ones around 2000. The PRI was, and continues to be, an ideologically unstable party. Its flexibility in that sense extends both across time and throughout the party, meaning that concerns about ideological divergence between the preferences of party leaders and Mexican voters likely never entered into the calculations of party leaders. Given the indiscriminate nature of PRI membership, it is also unlikely that open and closed primaries, for example, would even produce distinct voter or candidate pools. Leadership autonomy and competitive strategy, however, do offer insights into the transformation of PRI rules during the 1990s and since 2000. PRI leaders acted with extraordinarily high-level autonomy; the party was either led by the Mexican president or accountable to the president, with little other vertical or horizontal accountability. A narrow band of national party elites shaped party rules. During the 1990s, that band of elites prioritized maintaining the PRI's dominance over Mexican politics and its own cohesion as a party. As many electoral victories during the period could be engineered through fraud, PRI leaders focused less on the electability of their candidates and more on the distribution of candidacies to loyal PRI members to undermine party schisms; closed rules were a means to that end.<sup>22</sup>

By the late 1990s, however, the pillars of PRI dominance were crumbling; the opposition parties had gained control of the Chamber of Deputies, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas had been elected to lead Mexico City's government, and the PAN and PRD had accrued an impressive number of gubernatorial victories. The fortification of the Instituto Federal Electoral's oversight capacity, compounded with tighter competition from the opposition, required party leaders to focus on selecting candidates for public office who could credibly win. With the radical opening of nomination decisions in the late 1990s and early 2000s, party leaders hoped to find electable candidates and bring new voters into (or old voters back to) the party. While the PRI's rules were dramatically opened, leaders retained tremendous oversight through their ability to shape par-

21. Mauricio Del Valle Morales (president of the Comité Nacional del Servicio Electoral y Membresía, PRD) in discussion with author, July 2004.

22. See Langston 2002 on how PRI leaders worked to control the emergence of party splits during its hegemonic period.

Figure 4. *Proportional Representation Selection Rules, 1991-2003*

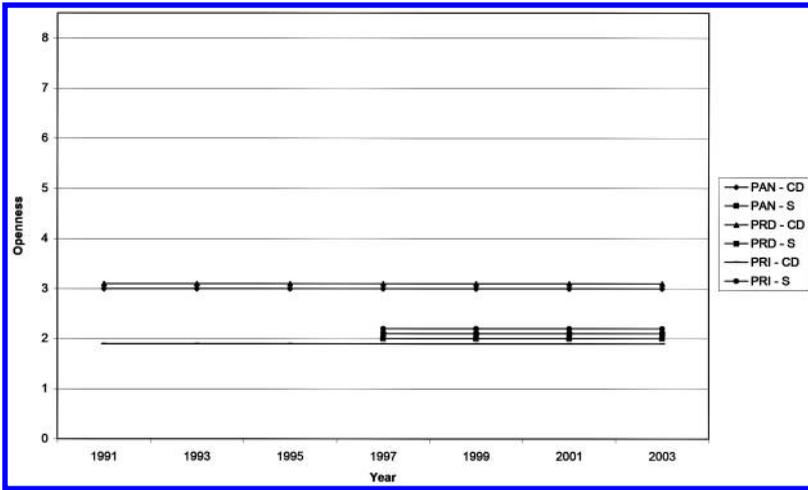
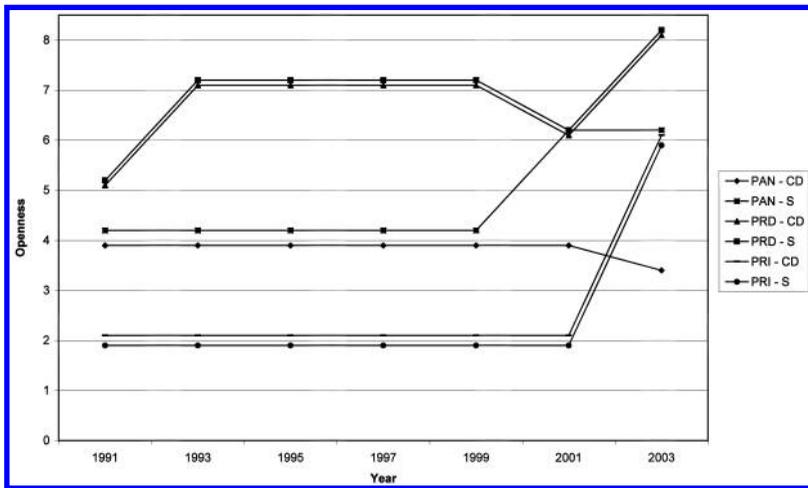
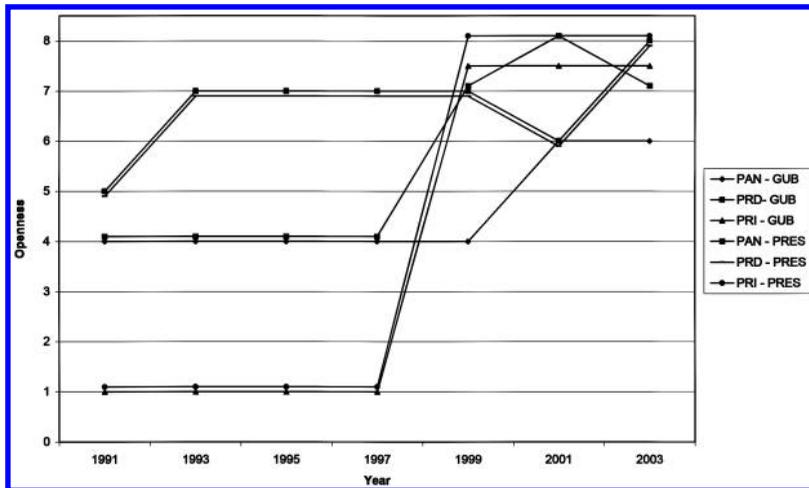


Figure 5. *Single Member District Legislative Rules, 1991-2003*



ticular contests through the convocatorias, their authority to approve alliances, and the like.

While there are interesting trends in the *individual* party data, greater insight into the forces behind changes in rules for candidate selection can be gained by pooling the experiences of the three parties across the different rules. A first very clear tendency is for party leaders to retain their control over PR selection rules. Given the nature of proportional repre-

Figure 6. *Executive Selection Rules, 1991-2003*

sentation as a system (particularly the closed lists of Mexican PR), this is not surprising. These are mechanisms through which party leaders install their allies in the legislature and reward good partisans for their loyalty. Because these candidates are not subject to a candidate-centered popular vote, party leaders may not be subjected to the same sort of trade-off as in the case of the other legislative and executive rules.

Leaders do face a trade off in the case of the SMD legislative candidacies. In these rules we see significant variation among the parties. Overall, the trend is toward more open selection rules; the only counter-evidence is offered by the PAN's Chamber of Deputies candidacies, which are subject to the same rule in 2003 that they were in the late 1970s but are now subject to more stringent delegate selection processes. The Mexican parties are increasingly electoralist, seeking those pay-offs and, in the case of these selection processes, willing to risk the negative side effects. The PAN's rules are curiously heterodox: the rules the party maintains for the SMD Chamber seats are more closed than for their Senate seats. This is likely an effort by party leaders to guard a limited number of spaces for loyal and longtime party activists who may oppose opening.<sup>23</sup>

It is in the executive selection rules that the most dramatic shifts and the strongest overall trend are evident. Across the parties, leaders

23. This may also reflect party performance over time. Until 1997 both the PAN's and the PRD's representation in the Chambers of Deputies were dramatically concentrated in the PR rather than the SMD seats. In 1991, only 10 of the PAN's 89 Chamber seats were in the majority districts, while none of the PRD's 41 seats were. By 1994, the overall total

targeted these offices as mechanisms for party growth (for the opposition parties) and for party maintenance (for the PRI). The consistency of reforms that party leaders adopted suggests that as they weigh electoral and organizational goals, they believe that gubernatorial posts and the Mexican presidency are crucial to building the party in the electorate, but do not directly threaten organizational goals or their own power base. Whether that calculation holds is another question. Fox may have poked a hole in that logic insofar as his term in the presidency has been accompanied by significant tension between himself and the party bureaucracy. In fact, PAN leaders' deliberations in 2004 about the precise selection rule they will use in 2005 for the 2006 election may stem from concerns about the influence of the party in government on the central party office.

### Conclusion

In an increasingly open electoral environment, Mexican party leaders repeatedly redesigned the rules that their parties employed to select the individuals who ran under the party label. As they contemplated the decision to open or to close those selection rules, they balanced their desire to build the party in government and strengthen the party in the electorate against their goals for the central party office, including protecting party ideology and their own positions of power. Party leaders across the board favored opening rules for their executive candidacies and maintaining very tight control over PR nominations, while cautiously opening the SMD legislative candidacies.

Leaders of the PRI sought to preserve their party's dominance prior to 2000 and to reestablish it after the election of Fox. Unchecked by the party rank and file and unconcerned by ideological matters because of their own flexibility, they opted for open rules in order to reap electoral benefits while using centralized control over PR nominations and the convocatorias to preserve elite cohesion in the party.

In the PAN, leaders juggled a complicated and evolving set of internal interests. As the party leadership grew more pragmatic and centrist over the 1990s, party leaders had less to fear from opening. Still, they were tentative in their approach. They maintained their influence over PR nominations and placated activists with legislative nomination powers, while advocating broader opening in executive contests where they

---

seats for both parties had increased (119 for the PAN and 71 for the PRD), but the PAN won only 18 of those in single-member districts and the PRD only 5. It is in the 1997 election that both parties demonstrated improved capacity to win the plurality seats. Data from [www.cidac.org/vnm/db/modules](http://www.cidac.org/vnm/db/modules) and [www.ife.org.mx](http://www.ife.org.mx).

could grow the party without serious risk to their own positions. While those PAN leaders were fairly insulated from rank-and-file members of the party, decisions in the PAN were subject to inter-elite negotiation.

The leaders of the PRD were much more subject to punishment from rank-and-file members of their party after 1995, but that new accountability did little to affect the party's selection rules. Changes in that party's rules occurred following changes in the electoral environment, specifically after a poor performance in 1991 and a third defeat for Cárdenas and the party in 2000. PRD leaders shaped and reshaped their selection rules because of changes in the competitive space the party occupied in the Mexican party system.

Prior scholarship of party rules has found that the autonomy of party leaders significantly shapes rule development. If anything, this analysis suggests that while party leaders are the ultimate decision-makers, the punishing power of rank and file members must be considered alongside that of other actors: opposing factions in the party and elected leaders from the party also have the ability to shape party leader decisions, as evident in the PAN. A second body of work contends that leaders may oppose selection rules that produce candidates who are ideologically distinct from them. I find some support for that contention. In the PAN, doctrinaire actors forestalled the opening of candidate selection rules; it was not until pragmatists gained greater representation in the Consejo Nacional and the CEN *and* controlled the party presidency that the rules were opened. The cases of the PRD and PRI have little to bear on this argument, as the parties are less ideologically distinct from the Mexican electorate (in both cases), or are ideologically pliant (in the PRI's case). The clearest finding from this study is that a party's competitive environment and its strategy shape how party leaders weigh the varied costs and benefits of opening selection processes to greater popular participation. It is the principal explanation for the wide variation in PAN selection rules, for the strong trend across parties toward open executive selection rules, and for the PRI's radical transformations in the late 1990s. That is, strategic concerns are key factors in shaping how party leaders weigh electoral and organizational goals.

The comparative nature of this analysis highlighted a crucial factor in how party leaders make their decisions about candidate selection. The trade-off used to frame this analysis presumes that those leaders are confronted with a choice between prioritizing electoral or organizational goals. The Mexican electoral system, in fact, allows party leaders to achieve these goals simultaneously by adopting heterogeneous selection mechanisms for different candidate posts. To serve party electoral goals, they can open executive contests and benefit from statewide and na-

tionwide primary competition. They can also preserve the unity of partisan elites through the distribution of PR seats among key party leaders and factions. Preserving control of those candidacies also buttresses the power of party leaders themselves. And, most evident in the PAN, party leaders can placate activists who might oppose open rules and elite decision-making with processes closed to the party rank and file (either in closed primaries or conventions).

For Mexico's current democratic experiment to succeed, its parties must focus on institutionalizing their respective places in the political system as well as strengthening the broader party system. One component of that task is the development of stronger, more durable links with voters and citizens.<sup>24</sup> Opening processes of candidate selection allows greater participatory space, and so may be viewed as a means to that end. However, the linkages created by open rules may not benefit parties or democracy in the longer term. In addition to the costs discussed here, open rules also increase populism and individualism and empower the mass media (Rahat and Hazan 2001: 313), leading some to conclude that *exclusive* selection rules are best for parties, and perhaps best for democracy (Hopkin 2001; Hazan 1997). Despite their short-term need to make electoral gains, Mexico's parties may be headed down the wrong path. Open selection rules may build the party in the electorate and "keep the party alive" between elections (Gallagher and Marsh 1988, 273), but they may undercut the effectiveness of the party in government and the party central office. Stated differently, in addition to juggling competing party goals of electoral growth and organizational development, party leaders must also consider regime-level political outcomes as they contemplate the adoption of candidate selection rules.

## References

- Bruhn, Kathleen. 1997. *Taking on Goliath: The Emergence of a New Left Party and the Struggle for Democracy in Mexico*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Burgess, Katrina. 2004. *Parties and Unions in the New Global Economy*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Gallagher, Michael, and Michael Marsh, eds. 1988. *Candidate Selection in Comparative Perspective: The Secret Garden of Politics*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

24. Institutionalized party systems (characterized by stable patterns of competition among parties, strong and autonomous parties with stable roots in society, and broad-based legitimacy for parties and elections (Mainwaring and Scully 1995: 5) are central to ensuring the legitimacy, efficacy and stability of new democratic regimes.

- Greene, Kenneth F. 2002. *Defeating Dominance: Opposition Party Building and Democratization in Mexico*. Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley.
- Hazan, Reuven Y. 1997. "The 1996 Intra-Party Elections in Israel: Adopting Party Primaries." *Electoral Studies* 16: 95-102.
- Hopkin, Jonathan. 2001. "Bringing the Members Back In?: Democratizing Candidate Selection in Britain and Spain." *Party Politics* 7, no. 3: 343-362.
- Kanthak, Kristin, and Rebecca B. Morton. 2003. "Primaries and Turnout." Working Paper. <http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/politics/faculty/morton/KanthakMort.pdf>
- Kitschelt, Herbert. 1994. *The Transformation of European Social Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Langston, Joy. 2001. "Why Rules Matter: Changes in Candidate Selection in Mexico's PRI." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 33, no. 3: 485-511.
- . 2002. "Breaking Out is Hard to Do: Exit, Voice and Loyalty in Mexico's One-Party Hegemonic Regime." *Latin American Politics and Society* 44, no. 3: 61-88.
- Lujambio, Alonso. 2001. "Democratization through Federalism? The National Action Party Strategy, 1939-2000." In *Party Politics and the Struggle for Democracy in Mexico*, ed. Kevin J. Middlebrook. San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego.
- Lundell, Kristin. 2004. "Determinants of Candidate Selection: The Degree of Centralization in Comparative Perspective." *Party Politics* 10, no. 1: 25-47.
- Mainwaring, Scott, and Timothy Scully. 1995. "Introduction." In *Building Democratic Institutions*, eds. Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Mayer, William G. 1996. "Caucuses: How They Work, What Difference They Make." In *In Pursuit of the White House: How We Choose Our Presidential Nominees*, ed. William G. Mayer. New York: Chatham House Publishers.
- McCann, James A. 1996. "Presidential Nomination Activists and Political Representation: A View from the Active Minority Studies." In *In Pursuit of the White House: How We Choose Our Presidential Nominees*, ed. William G. Mayer. New York: Chatham House Publishers.
- Meinke, Scott, et al. 2006. "State Delegate Selection Rules for Presidential Nominations, 1972-2000." *Journal of Politics* 68(1): 180-193.
- Mizrahi, Yemile. 2003. *From Martyrdom to Power: The PAN in Mexico*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Partido Acción Nacional. 2002 (1999). Comité Ejecutivo Nacional. *Estatutos Generales*. Mexico: Partido Acción Nacional.
- . 2002. Comité Ejecutivo Nacional. *Reglamento de los Organos Estatales y Municipios*. Mexico: Partido Acción Nacional.
- . 2002. Comité Ejecutivo Nacional. *Reglamentos*. Mexico: Partido Acción Nacional.
- Partido Revolucionario Institucional. 2002. Comité Ejecutivo Nacional. *Estatutos*. Mexico: Partido Revolucionario Institucional.

- . 2004. Comité Ejecutivo Nacional. *Reglamento para la elección de dirigentes y postulación de candidatos*. Mexico: Partido Revolucionario Institucional.
- Rahat, Gideon, and Reuven Y. Hazan. 2001. "Candidate Selection Methods: An Analytical Framework." *Party Politics* 7, no. 3: 297-322.
- Samuels, David. 2004. "From Socialism to Social Democracy: Party Organization and the Transformation of the Workers' Party in Brazil." *Comparative Political Studies* 20, no. 1: 1-26.
- Wuhs, Steven T. 2001. "Barbarians, Bureaucrats and Bluebloods: Fractional Change in Mexico's National Action Party." In *Party Politics in Mexico: National and State-level Analyses of the National Action Party*, ed. Kevin J. Middlebrook. San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego.

