

The dimensions of competition in the Mexican party system (1979-2012)

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Abstract: This article focuses on the major transformations in the Mexican party system that occurred during the protracted process of democratic transition; it is divided into three parts. The first part is a brief review of the factors that contributed to the process of political-electoral change. In the second part, we carry out an analysis of changes in a number of dimensions of the Mexican party system, based on aggregate electoral data at national and district levels, as well as on data from public opinion surveys. The third part presents an analysis of the ideological structure of political competitiveness based on data from surveys on the left-right ideological stances of Mexican federal legislators. The paper shows important changes in the structure and behaviour of the Mexican electorate, such as increasing partisan de-alignment, as well as a growing level of competitiveness and fractionalization of the party system.

Key words: party system change, partisan de-alignment, electoral volatility, party fractionalization, party system nationalization, left-right ideological positioning.

Resumen: El presente artículo se enfoca en las transformaciones relevantes del sistema mexicano de partidos ocurridas durante el prolongado proceso de transición democrática, y se divide en tres partes: en la primera se hace una breve revisión de los factores que coadyuvaron al cambio político-electoral; en la segunda presentamos un análisis de los cambios en diversas dimensiones del sistema mexicano de partidos, basado en datos electorales agregados a nivel nacional y distrital, así como en datos de encuestas de opinión pública; en la tercera parte se realiza un análisis de la estructura de competencia ideológica del sistema de partidos apoyada en datos de encuestas sobre la autoubicación y la ubicación ideológica en la dimensión izquierda-derecha de los legisladores federales. El trabajo muestra importantes cambios en la estructura y el comportamiento del electorado mexicano, incluyendo un creciente desalineamiento partidista, así como una mayor competitividad y fragmentación del sistema de partidos.

Palabras clave: cambio en el sistema de partidos, fragmentación partidista, volatilidad electoral, nacionalización del sistema de partidos, desalineamiento partidista, ideología izquierda-derecha.

Introduction¹

The main objective of this article is to perform a descriptive analysis of the change in the Mexican party system in the context of the prolonged transition from a dominant-party authoritarian regime toward a competitive multiparty system, experienced as of the turn of the century. The central questions are how the competence in the system has evolved and which factors explain the changes in party competence. To do this, we focus on the analysis of two relevant dimensions of political competence: the electoral and the ideological ones. The particular objectives of this work are three: first, make a brief review of the factors that favored the process of political-electoral change; second, present a longitudinal analysis of the changes in a number of dimensions in the structure and behavior of the Mexican electorate, including party fragmentation, nationalization, electoral volatility and the aggregated distribution of the electors' partisanship.

The analysis is supported on electoral data aggregated at national and district level, as well as on public opinion polls. Changes in the dimensions of the party system are analyzed in the light of the comparative literature on electoral dealignment, understood as a set of transformations on the structure and behavior of the electorate which are common to a considerable number of contemporary democracies, both new and advances (see Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Mair *et al.*, 2004; Sánchez, 2007; Dalton, 2008). Such changes include growing levels of party dealignment, electoral volatility, split and crossover vote, abstentionism, and support to emerging parties (Dalton *et al.*, 1984; Hagopian, 1998).

The third objective is to describe the structure of ideological competence of the party system, based on surveys on the self-location and location in the left-right dimension of the federal legislators, in the last six legislatures, in which no political party holds an electoral hegemony nor absolute majority in the House of Representatives, which reflects process of intense competition and political negotiation. The section of the period of study includes the stages of liberalization and democratization of the authoritarian regime (Cf. Labastida Martín del Campo and López Leyva, 2004), as well as the new competitive era of the party system.

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The electoral change in Mexico: from the authoritarian system of a dominant party to the competitive and multiparty one

The Mexican democratic transition differs from the transition model based on a “pact of elites” described in the pioneer literature on democratization (e.g. O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Przeworski, 1991). The main difference of Mexican transition is its starting point. Unlike other authoritarian regimes fully closed to political competence, the Mexican post-revolutionary regime allowed the existence of some institutions that characterize democratic systems, namely: periodical elections, opposition parties that regularly took part in electoral processes and the existence of legislative chambers, etc. These institutions provided considerable legitimacy and stability to the political system, at the same time they allowed the formation and eventual consolidation of a “Competitive Authoritarian Regime” with the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI) as the predominant actor (Levitsky and Way, 2002).²

After its creation in 1929, PRI won every governor election up to 1989, maintain majority in the Congress up to 1997 and won every single presidential election up to 2000. The Mexican case was perhaps the best example of a Dominant Party Authoritarian Regime, DPAR, a particular sort of competitive authoritarianism, which is characterized by “the control of both the executive and legislative powers continuously by one single party for at least 20 years, or else four consecutive elections (Greene, 2007: 12).

The electoral dominance of PRI, even in contexts of greave economic crises and the voters' growing dissatisfaction with the economic performance of the governments in the 1980's and 1990's, was possible because of three sorts of advantages of PRI over the opposition: 1) the asymmetry between the ruling party and those of the opposition parties as a consequence of the systematic public fund diversion for electoral use (Greene, 2007), possible because of: a) the existence of a large public sector; b) the continuous presence of PRI in positions of the Executive power at federal, state and municipal levels, and c) a wide and permissive public bureaucracy and the lack of an independent organ of electoral

² Levitski and Way (2010b: 57) define Competitive Authoritarian Regimes as “civil regimes in which there exist formal democratic institutions and are widely seen as the principal means to access and exercise political power. However, the abuse of State resources by the functionaries of the regime places them at advantageous position in relation to their opponents. Such regimes are competitive because the opposition parties use democratic institutions to seriously compete for power, but they are not democratic because the playing field is heavily biased in favor of officialism. Therefore, competence is real, nevertheless unfair”. (For a revision of the main characteristics of competitive authoritarianism, see Levitski and Way, 2010a.).

administration with efficacious capacities to overlook and sanction (Klesner, 2005; Greene, 2007); 2) advantages related to the capacity of PRI to raise costs and join the opposition parties, by means of denying of selective patronage goods to members and activists of opposition parties, or when the PRI patronage system failed, by means of selective repression against them (Greene, 2007); and 3) institutional and legal advantages related to competition rules that limited the competitiveness of opposition parties, as a highly politicized governmental model of electoral administration, in which elections were organized and validated by the Executive power (Cf. Molinar, 1991b, 1996; Valdés Zurita, 1995; Becerra *et al.*, 2000; Méndez de Hoyos, 2006).

The appearance of party competition and the decline of the dominant party

The increment in electoral competitiveness is one of the most relevant dimensions of the political change process in Mexico, and it is explained, partly, because of the socio-economic modernization of the post-WWII period. The effects of the modernization of the country were particularly important during the 1960's and 1970's and the first half of the 1980's, which became a gradual electoral decline of the dominant party.³ However, the decline of in the electoral decline of PRI accelerated by the end of the 1980's and 1990's (after the country had reached a considerable degree of development). This suggests that in spite of the significant impact of the socioeconomic modernization on the electoral competitiveness, other factors also had a relevant role in the process of political change. Numerous studies have offered evidence that indicates that the increase in party competence in the 1990's was also influenced by factors related to the electoral reforms decreed between 1990 and 1996, as a result of the negotiations between PRI and the opposition parties.⁴

The electoral reforms incentivized the increase in competitiveness, as they leveled the bases of electoral competition; these contributed to decrease the

3 Several analyses on the electoral behavior in Mexico (Ames, 1970; Ramos Oranday, 1985; Molinar y Weldon, 1990; Klesner, 1987, 1993, 1994, 1995, 2005; Méndez de Hoyos, 2006) underscore the role of factors related to socioeconomic modernization, such as: urbanization, industrialization, education, economic affluence, among other, in the increase of social support for opposition parties, and so, in the increase of electoral competitiveness.

4 The study by Méndez de Hoyos (2006) on the determinants of electoral competitiveness from 1997 to 2003 found that socioeconomic modernization factors were important predictors of the increase in electoral competitiveness, especially up to the end of the 1980's. However, their influence dramatically decreased as of 1991. After introducing quantitative measurements of the equity degree in the electoral reforms, she found a positive and significant association between equity and justice in electoral reforms and electoral competitiveness.

advantages in resources of the dominant party, as public autonomous organisms to manage and supervise the elections were established which limited the use of public resources with party ends and also provided the opposition parties with important resources (both financial and media access) to compete against PRI.

Despite their importance, socioeconomic modernization and institutional change are not enough to explain the decline of the electoral performance of PRI in the 1980's and 1990's. Deep economic crises in the mid 1980's, as well as the policies implemented by PRI governments, as a consequence from such crises, also had an important role in the electoral decline of the dominant party. Studies on the economic vote in Mexico indicate that the retrospective economic evaluations did influence on the electoral behavior of the Mexicans in the 1990's (Magaloni, 1999; Poiré, 1999; Buendía, 2004).

However, these analysis also show that the impact of these evaluations on the vote decisions was much weaker in relation to the impact these usually have in established democracies. According to the literature on the retrospective economic vote (Fiorina, 1981), parties in the government tend to lose elections due to the dissatisfaction of the electors with their results in economic management. Nevertheless, in Mexico, PRI survived deep economic crises by the mid 1980's. As a matter of fact, studies based upon surveys carried out by the end of the 1980's and the early 1990's show that the intention to vote for PRI was still high, even among those who expressed greater dissatisfaction with the economic performance of the ruling party (Domínguez and McCann, 1996; Buendía, 2004; Magaloni, 2006).

Two different explanations have been proposed, rather complementary though, on the slow and gradual reduction of electoral support for the dominant party, even after having experienced the consequences of severe economic crises: the first is in the role of the voters to end with the domination of PRI. According to Magaloni (2006), PRI was capable of surviving, in spite of bad economic results because the accumulated experiences of the electors, of many years of stability and economic growth, influenced and tempered the most recent evaluations on the deficient economic performance of PRI. As a result, the youngest voters tended to retire support to PRI faster than the older voters, simply because they had not experienced a long period of economic growth and stability under PRI governments. Conversely, the older electors stopped supporting PRI in a gradual manner, because they tended to balance those development years with the most recent of bad economic management.

By contrast, the prospective vote theories, which state that economic crises also promote heavy incentives to vote in favor of the opposition, Magaloni's model underscores the role of the voters' risk aversion in supporting the electoral

dominance of PRI, as the citizens had a tendency to be afraid of the opposition because they lacked information on the performance of the parties opposing the government. This lack of information also negatively affected the credibility of National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional, PAN) and Party of Democratic Revolution (Partido de la Revolución Democrática, PRD) in terms of their prospective of public policies. Magaloni (2006) states that the electoral prevalence of PRI reached an end only after the second economic crisis of the mid 1990's, once the retrospective weight, of many years, of the economic stability tended to gradually fade and the electors were more willing to risk voting for the opposition.

An alternative explanation emphasizes the role of opposition parties and their strategies in ending with the electoral dominance of PRI. According to this perspective, the economic crises and the posterior response in the form of economic liberalization fostered the decline of PRI. During the 1980's, the dominant party still enjoyed important advantages related to the access to governmental resources and their posterior use with electoral ends, the satiation substantially changed in the 1990's decade as a results from the market-oriented reforms. The privatization of parastatal enterprises deprived PRI from important patronage sources and clientelism to buy support from voters and undermine the competitiveness of opposition parties. However, even if the advantages significantly reduced as for the resources of the dominant party and a large part of the electorate was increasingly dissatisfied with the poor economic performance, the public opinion research carried out by the end of the 1980's and early 1990's, shows that voters were unwilling to vote for the opposition. This contradicts the first explanation, which states that this comes from the electors' fears of the uncertainty of opposition governments, not only is this perspective centered on the changes in the structure of the Mexican electorate and its determinants, but also on the failures of opposition parties in views of responding to electoral change.

It is utterly important for this trend of analysis the transformation of the opposing party organizations from niche to catch-all in the disappearance of PRI dominance and the growth of electoral competitiveness during the 1990's decade (Greene, 2007). From this perspective, the dominance of PRI prolonged due to the limited organizational capacity of PAN and PRD to extend their electoral supportive bases, despite that the magnitude of the advantages of PRI resources had reduced considerably as a result from the deep processes of political and economic liberalization. Both PAN and PRD were too limited by their origins as niche organizations, characterized by a close link with their traditional electoral supportive bases and by "severe obstacles for the affiliation of new activists" (Greene, 2007: 208), to take advantage of the growing dealignment of the electorate

in relation to PRI. These organization models had a key role in the survival of the opposition parties in an extremely adverse electoral context, characterized by massive asymmetries as for resources, access to media and State institutions.⁵ However, there were highly inefficient to generate the necessary organizational changes to appeal a more centrist, misaligned and broader electorate in relation to the dominant party.

In spite of the decline of PRI advantages, the increase in public funding for all parties and the growing opening of the media during the 1980's and 1990's, a series of organizational dynamics of the opposition parties (mechanisms to affiliate activists, selection of candidates, campaign tactics and strategies) kept demonstrating niche characteristics up to the mid 1990's (Klesner, 2005; Greene, 2007). The militants and leaders who joined the opposition parties in their early stages used to utter highly ideologized political messages, aimed at their traditional supportive bases by means of traditional campaigns based on direct interaction with voters.

On the contrary, the more moderate and pragmatic people who joined PAN, after the advantages of the dominant party had reduced, were more willing to convey more centralist messages, directed to the general electorate by means of campaign tactics and strategies based on the intensive use of media (Greene, 2007). Eventually, the gradual diminution of the advantages of PRI and the increase of electoral competence incentivized significant changes in the dynamics to recruit militants and elites in the opposition parties —as well as their internal power balance— which enabled their gradual transformation from niche and sectarian organizations into catch-all organizations capable of defeating the dominant party. This transformation, nevertheless was “slow and paused partly because their organizations were poorly designed for innovation” (Greene, 2007: 208).

5 According to Greene (2007: 208), the models of niche parties were designed by the founders and early activists of opposition parties, “who joined the opposition parties early, when the resource advantages and the use of repression by the dominant party were significant [and] [...] played a key role they were created. These were an important component in the formation of opposition parties strictly distinguished from the dominant party and were peopled by highly committed activists, who had more probabilities to remain active in spite of the high costs and scant benefits”.

Dimensions of change in the party system: the electoral dimensions

Fragmentation and effective number of parties

Now we will examine some of the relevant changes in the Mexican party system. Table 1⁶ shows the results in the elections of Federal Congress since 1979 to 2012, including various indicators of competitiveness, fragmentation, electoral volatility and nationalization of the party system. Up to the 1988 elections, both electoral competence and fragmentation in the party system were very limited, this indicates the Index of Fragmentation (Rae, 1967)⁷ and the Number of Parties (NP) (Molinar, 1991a) (Tabla 1).⁸ As of the mid 1990's the situation significantly changed and both indicators reflect the transformation in the system, from an authoritarian one to a another competitive. While NP averaged 1.2 parties, from 1979 to 1991, in the 1994 election, this indicates for the first time a logic of competence between two fronts, to which a third adds, which is weaker and as of 1997, NP shows a nationwide three-party competence format (see table 1).

In views of providing a more detailed vision of the configuration of the political party system, we now show an analysis of NP at the level of the 300 uninominal districts in elections for Federal Congress. The districts are grouped following the schema proposed by Pacheco Méndez (1997): system of dominant party: includes the districts in which a single party dominates (NP = 1.0 to 1.5); pure bipartisanship: district in which two parties compete effectively (NP = 1.5 to 2.0); plural bipartisanship: districts in which two parties compete and a third adds, which is weaker (NP = 2.0 to 2.5); and, three-partisanship or multi-partisanship: districts in which three (or more) parties compete (NP > 2.5). The analysis shows that PRI maintained its dominant position in the party system up to the early 1990's.

6 All the tables and graphs are in the annex at the end of the document (editor's note).

7 The fragmentation index by Douglas Rae (1993) can be interpreted as the probability that when choosing two electors at random, these vote for two different parties. Fragmentation is calculated with the following formula:

$F = 1 - \sum (v_i)^2$, where v_i is the proportion of votes for each party, over a total equal to 1.

8 NP index is used instead of the Effective Number of Parties (ENP) (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979) since ENP presents problems and measurement biases in single-party systems. It frequently indicates multiparty competence formats, even in situations where disparity between the sizes of the parties is so that the percentage of received support surpasses 50% of the votes (i.e., absolute dominance of a single party) (Taagepera, 1999, 2007). NP index comes from ENP but it allows correcting the overrepresentation of fragmentation produced by ENP, as it counts the winning party separate from the rest of parties, assigning a value of 1. The formula of the ENP is as follows: $1/\sum (v_i)^2 = 1/(1/1 - F)$, where v_i is the proportion of votes each party (from a total equal to 1) and F the fragmentation index. On its own, Molinar's formula is the addition of the percentage of votes to the square (or seats) from the second most-voted party plus one.

The significant growth of fragmentation and competitiveness in the system took place only after the 1994 election, in which the districts were significantly reduced to only a fifth of the total with a logic of dominant party (table 2).

Data also reveal that despite the national three-party system, the dominant tendency in the 1990's and the first decade of the new century has been bipartisan competence (between two or two and a half parties) in most districts (table 2). Because of this reason some authors have argued that the Mexican system can be actually considered three-partisanship arguing that this might be better described as a system with three parties at national level, which coexists with a couple of bipartisan systems with strong regional bases, with PRI, PAN dominating the competence over the north and the central-western, and with PRI and PRD competing mainly in the south of the country (Pacheco, 1997, 2003; Klesner, 2005). However, data presented in this work show that the 2012 election marked an important difference in relation to previous elections, as two thirds of the districts had multi-partisan competence (table 2). The average of NP in these districts was 3.07 parties (standard deviation was 0.45). To sum up, data show a significant increase of the competence between parties at district level.

Volatility

One of the most relevant dimensions in the literature on electoral change and the party systems is related to the degree of instability of the electoral behavior. Electoral volatility allows us to observe the party systems from a dynamical standpoint, as it reports on the variation registered between electoral support for parties in one election and the following one. High volatility levels indicate high electorate availability and also a greater electoral competence as well as greater electoral competence.

However, more often than not they are also an indicator of the low institutionalization levels of the party systems; according to comparative studies on volatility in Latin America (Roberts and Wibbels, 1999; Payne, 2007), volatility levels in Mexico, both in parliamentary and presidential elections are similar to those in Latin American countries, with levels that range from minimal to moderate. Even so, in comparison with occidental democracies, Latin American countries (including Mexico) exhibit average volatility percentages, which might be considered very high or even extreme. A number of studies have stated that volatility in Latin America is considerably higher than in established occidental democracies (Roberts and Wibbels, 1999; Mainwaring and Zoco, 2007; Payne, 2007).⁹

9 For instance, global volatility in the election for the American Congress has been 3.3% between 1946 and 2002, and 11.2% in the presidential elections in the 1948-1996 period; according to a

In views of measuring the stability of the patterns of interparty competence in Mexico, we will use the Pedersen index (Pedersen, 1983), which comes from adding the net change of the votes that each party gains or loses between two successive elections and dividing this figure by two. The range of values goes from 0 (no change) to one hundred (total change).¹⁰ Table 1 presents the electoral volatility levels in Mexico in each congress election from 1979 to 2012. Data show that the electoral dominance of PRI also reflected on minimal volatility levels up to the 1988 elections, when total volatility reached 21.85% (the highest value in the analyzed period. Volatility remained high from 1988 to 1994 and averaged 20%, a fact that reflects the recovery of PRI and the descent of parties comprised in the National Democratic Front (Frente Democrático Nacional, FDN). Despite volatility gradually decreased gradually in later elections, this has never returned to the low characteristic levels of elections before 1988, and it has maintained at mid/intermediate levels.

Nationalization

The study of nationalization of the party systems, understood as the degree of homogeneity of support toward political parties over the territory of a country is still a void in a large part of the comparative literature on parties and party systems in Latin America. Specialists in politics in the region have centered on a number of relevant dimensions of the Latin American political parties, such as volatility (Roberts and Wibbels, 1999; Mainwaring and Zoco, 2007; Payne, 2007), the degree of fragmentation and problem of forming coalitions in multiparty systems (Mainwaring, 1993; Coppedge, 1997; Mainwaring, 1999; Altman, 2000), the level of institutionalization (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995; Mainwaring and Torcal, 2005; Payne, 2007; Jones, 2010), and the ideological dimension of the party systems (Coppedge, 1998; Alcántara Sáez, 2006; Kitschelt *et al.*, 2010).

However, it was not until very recently that the study of party systems in the region included the nationalization of electoral support received by political parties (Jones and Mainwaring, 2003). Previously, a large part of the literature implicitly

recent study on electoral change in eight occidental Europe countries, the average volatility levels in all the cases (with the exception of Italy) were inferior to 12% during the period 1979-2003 (Mair *et al.*, 2004). The contrary, the average volatility levels in Latin America over the same period have been superior to 12% the 17 out of the 18 countries included in a study by Payne (2007) on Latin American party systems.

10 Volatility is calculated by means of the following formula $Vt = \sum | (V_{i2} - V_{i1}) | / 2$, where V_{i1} is the percentage of votes for a party in the first election, and V_{i2} the percentage of votes for the same party in the following election.

presupposed that the electoral support of the parties was quite homogenous over the territory of a country, as well as between the diverse scales and institutional levels and that both the dynamic and structure of competence in the party systems at subnational levels simply reflected the nationwide tendencies (for a broad discussion see Došek, 2011).

Previous studies based on the Party Nationalization Score, PNS, show that the Mexican case exhibit a degree of nationalization similar to countries with federal structure and with middle nationalization levels in their party systems, such as the United States and El Salvador (Jones and Mainwaring, 2003).¹¹

This work uses the Standardized Party Nationalization Score, SPNS, developed by Daniel Bolscher (2010) (based as PNS on Gini coefficient) as an indicator of the nationalization degree of the Mexican Party system, calculated on the basis of the 300 uninominal electoral districts, from 1979 to 2012.¹² The values of the score show (with the exception of the intermediate 2003 election) the considerable degree of nationalization of the Mexican system during the analyzed period (with values that range from middle-high to high), which average 0.88 (SPNS) (table 1).

However, this does not mean that the main Mexican parties have the same nationalization level. The degree of nationalization of PAN and PRD is lower in comparison with PRI, which is still the only party with an organizational structure and social and supportive base actually national. Political institutions such as federalism and the decentralized nature of the party system pose considerable obstacles for a greater nationalization of the party system. According to Cantú and Desposato (2012), by the end of the PRI domination era, the fiscal decentralization (intergovernmental transferences that move incomes from taxes collected by the federal government toward local governments) and the end of the monopolistic political control of PRI over the political careers have strengthened subnational political actors (particularly state governors) at the expense of the national political elites

As a result, what once was one of the most centralized systems on the world, has made room for one of the most decentralized, in which subnational public posts imply considerable power and resources. The decentralization of Mexican

11 The study points out that even though these countries are very far from countries with a minimal degree of nationalization (for instance, Ecuador and Brazil), they are still below countries with high levels of nationalization and unitary state structures (for instance, Chile, Costa Rica, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua and Uruguay) (Jones and Mainwaring, 2003).

12 Such indicator comes from PSN but allows better compatibility between various countries and levels of political competence and fits better when data related to a large number of territorial subunits are used.

politics offers tantalizing incentives for the parties to invest their resources on state with local elections. However, opposition parties with a regionalized supportive base, such as PAN and PRD, concentrate their resources (from public funding) and strategies of party development mainly on those states in where they are electorally competitive, instead of channeling resources to the states where their organizational structures are rather weak, in views of strengthening them and looking for broad electoral support at national level (Harbers, 2012).

Changes in partisanship: the expansion of electoral market

The present section is centered on two particularly relevant issues in relation to the topic of partisan loyalties in Mexico. The first of them refers to changes in the aggregated distribution and the strength of partisanship over time; the second refers to changes in the influence of partisan loyalties on the voters' decisions. An indicator of partisan loyalties in the electorate is party differentiation, understood as an orientation of the affective kind that implies sympathizing for a political party in particular (Campbell *et al.*, 1960).

Partisan identification has two relevant components: the first refers to the direction of identification with a party and the second with the intensity or strength of such identification (this is to say, if the sentiment of sympathy for a party is strong or rather weak). We will examine the first aspect below. Graph 1 shows the aggregated distribution of partisanship (or micro partisanship) in Mexico from 1983 to 2009.

As noticed, the clearest tendency that appears from date is the significant dealignment of the voters in relation to the former dominant party. PRI lost a significant amount of adherents over most of the analyzed period, save for some brief recovery stints (1989-1994 and 1997-1999). The proportion of the electorate that expressed PRI partisan identity dropped slightly more than 50% in the first years of the 1980's decade to circa a third of the electorate by the mid 1990's.

A sizable part of PRI loyalty erosion is explained by generational replacement; however, another part is explained by the dealignment of some PRI partisans who have changed the direction of their identification and many more have moved to nonpartisan contingents.¹³ Partisanship levels in the period from 1983 to the mid 1990's reflect the final stage of the dominant party, characterized by the capacity of PRI to win elections based on the mobilization of its partisan bases (as it probably occurred in the 1991 and 1994 elections).

13 A number of studies (Klesner, 2005; Moreno and Méndez, 2007; Moreno, 2009) point out that the loss of PRI partisans has been significantly correlated both with the increase of the intentent sector as well with the increase of those identified with opposition parties, mainly with PAN.

But this stage also shows a gradual growth of loyalties to PAN and of the independents, a segment that remains the most numerous. The period from 1996 to 2000 reveals that despite macro-PRI-allegiance (*priísmo*) remained as the majority tendency, there was also an increase of the segment of independents, as well as PAN-allegiances (*panismo*). On its own, the distribution of PRD partisanship has been the lowest of the three large parties, which averages 12% over the analyzed period (graph 1). The changes in the distribution of macro-partisanship in this period are very significant. It not until the second half of the 1990's, once *priísmo* drop to a third of the electorate, that both the independents and the voters poorly identified with any party became a sufficiently large proportion of voters to define the outcome of an election. As of 2000, another stage begins in the evolution of partisanship in Mexico; the percentage of nonaligned electors surpasses, constantly, PRI micro-partisanship and that of any other party organization, which means a significant expansion of the electoral market in relation to past (Graph 1).

Dealignment or realignment?

Dealignment, understood as “the weakening of usual affective stable loyalties toward parties among the electorate” (Norris, 1997: 86), is a relatively generalized tendency in contemporary democracies (both old and new) in which the majority of citizens do not strongly identify with political parties any longer. (Dalton *et al.*, 1984; Dalton, 2000, 2008; Mair *et al.*, 2004). In the Mexican case, specialists are still divided in relation to whether change patterns in micro-partisanship shall be considered evidence of a dealignment or a realignment of the Mexican electorate. There are valid argumentations on each side of the debate. Indubitably and contrary to the thesis of dealignment, in the Mexican case not all the parties have experienced in the same manner the loss of electors with party identification (as it is the case of advanced democracies), but mainly PRI, which had the role of dominant party (Moreno, 2003, 2009; Somuano Ventura and Ortega Ortiz, 2003; Klesner, 2005; Moreno and Méndez, 2007). This way, some authors state that changes in the distribution of micro-partisanship in Mexico are the reflection of a realignment tendency and that even the recent domination in the net number of adherents are related to the continuation of the dealignment of voters in relation to PRI (which originated in previous decades), therefore, they should not be interpreted as signals of generalized dealignment (Moreno, 2009) (see also Meixueiro, 2014).

Among the phenomena that suggest a possible realignment in the Mexican party system, we find: a) the strong correlation between the reduction of people identified with PRI and the increment in the proportion of those identified with PAN (Moreno and Méndez, 2007; Moreno, 2009); and, b) evidence of what might be considered a realignment phenomenon, called “rotation”, which refers to the

transfer of adherents, not only from PRI to PAN and PRD, but also from PAN to PRD and vice versa (Moreno and Méndez, 2007).

As a matter of fact, the negative correlation between macro-panismo and macro-perredismo (PRD allegiance) has intensified as of the end of the 1990's (Moreno, 2009). However, other scholars have argued that in spite of the evidence of the transference of partisan loyalties from PRI toward the other large parties, an ample percentage of the electorate still remains nonpartisan, since both PAN and PRD have taken only a limited proportion of the misaligned electorate that comes, not only from the formerly dominant party, but also from the entrance of new young voters to the electoral market (Klesner, 2005). This argumentation is reinforced by more recent analyses of the variations of partisanship at aggregate level in the period from the late 1980's to the first decade of XXI century (Moreno, 2009). Such studies indicate that: a) even though in general the decline of PRI has mainly benefitted PAN and the independents, dealignment has intensified as of the end of the 1990's decade, sub-period in which the segment of independents has captured more dealignment electors of PRI than those realigned with PAN and PRD; and, b) unlike the significant association between the growth of PAN loyalties and the increase of independents, evidence shows that the growth of independents does not only negatively correlate with the diminution of loyalties toward PRI, but also, even though at a much lower extent, with loss of loyalties toward PRD (Moreno, 2009).

Strength of partisanship

Not only has the expansion of the Mexican electoral market implied deep transformations in relation to the direction of electors, but also in important aspects related to the strength with which this partisanship is expressed. Various studies have demonstrated that, as in advanced democracies, in Mexico there exists a positive and significant association between partisanship strength and vote loyalty (Poiré, 1999; Moreno, 2003, 2009; Klesner, 2004; Flores-Macías, 2009, Somuano, 2014), this is to say, the stronger the voters' partisanship identification, the higher the probability of them voting for the candidates of the party they identify with.

On the contrary, weekly identified voters, as well as independents, including those leaning to vote for a determinate party (leaners) are more willing to vote for the candidate they identify the most with or feel closer to (Klesner, 2004), and are more susceptible to the dynamics, effects and factors that in the short term influence on the vote (topics, personality, among other). This is to say, the increase in the number of nonpartisans and the diminution of electors with a partisan identification becomes a broadening of the available electorate, to which parties

and candidates can orient their strategies and tactics to maximize votes. In Mexico, the proportion of electors with a strong identification with a party reduced to about a third of the electorate by the early 1990's, and to a slightly more than a fifth over the 2000's. Therefore, the rest of the electors lack a strong and definite link with any political party (graph).

Party loyalty and vote volatility

The relevance of party identification in the electoral change process not only depends on the strength of partisanship and its distribution among the electorate, but also on its influence degree on the voters' decisions (Bartels, 2000). Even though, in general, party identification has shown to be the most consistent explanatory variable of the electoral behavior in Mexico (Moreno, 2003, 2009; Somuano and Ortega Ortiz, 2003), some researches have provided evidence of a slight weakening of the influence of partisanship on vote (Moreno and Méndez, 2007), as well as substantial individual volatility by the end of the 1990's and the 2000's (Klesner, 2005; Flores-Macías, 2009).

This way, Moreno and Méndez (2007) have demonstrated that the percentage of crossover voting (voted of those identified with a political party in favor of presidential candidates of other party) increase 7% in 2000, to 10% in the 2006 election. By contrast, the percentage of normal voting decreased from 65.3 to 59.3% over the same period. On its own, the percentage of split-ticket voting (votes in favor of candidates of different parties in the same ballot) also increased from 13% in 2000 to 19% in 2006. Such analyses also point out that the change has not affected to all parties in the same manner, as crossover voting in 2006 was higher among those identified with PRI than among the partisans of the other two large parties and split-ticket voting was also higher between the PRI partisans than among those of PAN and PRD in both elections (Moreno and Méndez, 2007).

Consequences of changes in micro-partisanship

Which are the consequences of the changes in the distribution and strength of partisanship for the behavior of parties and candidates in Mexico? Even if it the degree of dealignment or realignment of the Mexican electorate is still uncertain, there is one certainty, parties cannot depend on their own supportive bases to win elections. Considering that voters who have a strong partisan identification are much less susceptible to the campaign dynamics and party strategies, and this considerably makes room for party competence, it can be affirmed that in the Mexican case, both the unaligned and weekly identified voters are a highly available labor electoral market, as well as a portion of voters sufficiently large to define the result of an election.

Since over most of the 1990's and over this century there are more independent voters and fewer strongly identified voters in relation to previous decades, the three main parties more often than not have been in need of appealing independent and weakly identified voters to generate winning electoral coalitions by means of catch-all electoral strategies, which tend to prioritize aspects relative to the candidates' image, topics and assessments of retrospective nature, among other short-term factors that influence on the vote, over partisan labels (Klesner, 2005).

Influential studies on change and adaption of political parties to electoral dealignment in occidental democracies consider the erosion of party loyalties as an expansion of electoral market that generates strong incentives for organizational change in the parties, as it decreases the traditional supportive bases on which they used to rely (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Mair *et al.*, 2004). A number of authors (Dalton *et al.*, 1984; Hagopian, 1998) also point out that partisan dealignment can eventually turn into electoral dealignment, characterized by growing levels of fragmentation and electoral volatility, as well as an increment in the rates of crossover and split-ticket, abstentionism and support to other parties.

Dimensions of change in the party system: ideological dimension

Ideological structuring of the Mexican party system

This section focuses on the structure of ideological-programmatic dimension of the Mexican party system. Following Sani and Sartori (1980/2000), the dimension utilized for analysis of such structure is the left-right continuum. This dimension of spatial competence (Downs, 1957), within which PRI, PAN and PRD compete, can be measured by means of attitudes and perceptions expressed by the representatives of the three parties in the surveys of the Project of Latin American Elites (PELA) over the years of the LVI (1994-1997), LVII (1997-2000), LVIII (2000-2003), LIX (2003-2006), LX (2006-2009) and LXI (2009-2012) Mexican legislatures. The left-right dimension is highly relevant to understand the dynamics of interparty competence in Mexico, as in like manner to other party systems, this "constraints and conditions competition and cooperation between political parties" (Llamazares and Sandell, 2001: 48).

Likewise, the changes in the attitudes of Mexican legislators have received scant attention in recent decades (Weldon, 2006). Even if it is true that a large part of the strategic actions of the Mexican political parties are guided by pragmatism, so is it that such actions are heavily influenced by the ideological-programmatic structure in which these unfold.

The validity of left and right categories lies, as Sani and Montero (1986: 155) mention, in that these allow the political actors to simplify the political universe. What is more, as these authors point out, the use of such categories “indicates that something is situated in one or other end of the continuum, or somewhere in-between, it is as providing the object with a ‘political identity’ and establishing proximity and distance relations with other political elements” (Sani and Montero, 1986: 155).

It is important to underscore that these images of left and right are not precise and because of this ambiguity concepts become flexible, so it is possible to understand them in order to include new contents in them and fit the, to new circumstances. As argued by Kitschelt (1994, 2001), the ideological dimension is important to understand the dynamics of party systems. However, the context in which the contemporary ideological competence unfolds is not the traditional one of bipolarity, product of cold war. Values in “modern” societies have changed and this introduces new topics in the political agenda. For instance, Alcántara (1995) has demonstrated that the left-right differentiation is valid in Latin America, even if the use of this dimension was intended to be seen as a Eurocentric interpretation.

This way, some studies warn that it would be wrong to assume that left-right labels in Latin America have a meaning of the economic kind in all Latin American countries (Zechmeister and Corral, 2010).¹⁴ Research on the topic has identified three different dimensions capable of being recognized as left-right in the countries of the region, including: 1) the degree of economic intervention of the State; 2) the role of the Church in politics; and, 3) attitudes towards authoritarianism and democracy (Llamazares and Sandell, 2001). Table 3 shows the self-identification of Mexican representatives and the scale they assigned to their parties in the left-right dimensions, as well as the degree of ideological homogeneity over a 6-legislature period (1994-2012).

From the previous data it is deduced that the PAN, PRI and PER interviewees have important variations in relation to their self-identification and that of their party. This way, PRD is the farthest to the left in the ideological continuum. PRI at times moves at the center-left (4.71), according to self-identification, and center-right, regarding the party (5.61). The opinions of PAN representatives are more moderate in self-identification compared with the location of the party; this way, it moves to the right. To sum up, with the exception of PRD representatives, the interviewees are in moderate position contrasted to that of their party. Data

14 Zechmeister and Corral (2010: 6) have demonstrated that in some countries support for a more active role of the State in economic policy is not recognized as a left-wing stance, as neither do supportive attitudes for free trade necessarily become a right-wing stance.

also show that the three main political parties in Mexico have experienced a predominantly centripetal competence.

Notwithstanding, we notice differentiated behaviors, possibly influenced by the electoral-political context in which these elected federal representatives were interviewed. PRI, for instance, seems to be the party with the shortest distance between the opinions of self-identification and position of the party over time, consistently locating at the center-right in 2000-2003, so they represent opposition. On the contrary, PRD shows significant changes in opinions and we notice a party further to left in 2006 (the most polarized electoral process so far witnessed) and a more centrist opposition in 2009.

On its own, PAN moves to the right of the ideological continuum with a more centrist position after winning the 2000 federal election. The party with dual competence is PRI because, on the one side, it competes in the center-left with PRD, and on the other, in the center-right with PAN (graph 3). It is also important to distinguish that the most ideologically similar parties are PRI and PAN, which can help in the interpretation of how they have accomplished, in the legislative sphere, the great confluence that enabled the liberal reforms (in economic topics) in the last two decades.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that the Mexican left, for instance, is characterized by being statist in economic matters, more distrusting of electoral intuitions and more liberal in moral issues (Vivero, 2006), which contributes to the argumentation that the Mexican party system presents a structure of ideological competence and programmatic, heavily marked by the statist-liberalism economic cleavage.¹⁵

Results and conclusions

The political-electoral change in Mexico was a long, complex process that involved various factors (economic modernization, changes in the economy, economic liberalization, electoral reforms, changes in the electoral organization and strategies of the opposition parties, among other). The longitudinal analysis of several relevant dimensions of the party system clearly shows the transition from an authoritarian system with a dominant party to another more democratic and competitive, characterized by increasing fragmentation both at national and district level. One of the main findings of this work is that party competence in the 300 uninominal districts in the federal Congress election was significantly stressed during the 2012 electoral process, as for the first time, most of the districts showed a multiparty format, a fact that did not occur in previous elections, independently from the experienced alternation. This datum is not negligible, mainly if we consider

that, in spite of the national tri-partisanship and in the congress, the format or party competition at district level that prevailed for most of the 1990's and the 2000's is bipartisanship. The increase in the number of districts with effective competence between three or more parties suggests that the party system can be gradually evolving toward an actually multiparty system.

However, other studies also show the difficulties faced by the main opposition parties with a regionalized supportive base (PAN and PRD), in a highly decentralized political system, to strengthen their local organizational structures in the south and the north of the country, respectively, in views of finding electoral support at national level, which might limit a greater fragmentation and nationalization of the party system. Despite that the flexible system exhibits a considerable degree of nationalization, significant differences still persist in the degree of electoral support received by parties across the country. PAN and PRD still have a lower nationalization level, compared to PRI.

The data presented on the evolution of the competence of the Mexican party system over the last 30 years suggest a significant relation between the increase of party competence and the changes in the aggregate distribution of the electors' partisanship, particularly with the dealignment process. As it was shown in this work, those with a weak party identification and those with no sympathy for any party are the most electors.

The weakness of party loyalties among the electorate incentivizes the electoral volatility (mainly at individual level), and on its own this has had important consequences for political competence and the current configuration of the party system. Although the evidence is inconclusive, and it will have to be verified whether the displayed tendencies remain in the long term, the presented data suggest that the changes observed in a number of dimensions in the party system might be part of a broader change process of electoral dealignment, similar to that observed in a considerable number of democracies in the world, both consolidated and emerging, characterized by growing levels of partisanship dealignment, electoral volatility, crossover/spilt-ticket voting and partisan fragmentation, etc. (Dalton *et al.*, 1984; Hagopian, 1998).

Other empirical evidence takes place in the ideological dimension of the system, measured by means of the left-right continuum. Against the opinions that state that "all parties are alike", we affirm, with these data that Mexican parties compete for an ideological space in the legislative sphere, which allows affinities or distances inside the left-right continuum approve, in certain topics, the formation of legislative alliances, as the one between PAN and PRI in liberalization policies, mainly in economic matters. The ideological competence in the party system is

centripetal, which also has enabled the reduction of ideological distances and at certain conjunctures, hold PAN-PRD alliances, as the one seen in the 1997-2000 legislature.

To sum up, the findings of this work are a contribution in the discussion on the change of the Mexican party system, in which a complex configuration of various political, economic and social factors became a growing electoral competence. On their own, political parties, have adapted to an increasingly competitive electoral market, by means of introducing changes in its organizational structures, particularly in their mechanisms to select candidates, campaign tactics and strategies and in the public policies proposals they present to the electors. However, a large part of these topics are a research agenda still to be developed in the literature on parties and party systems in Mexico.

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Annex

Table 1
Electoral results, Federal Representative Chamber, 1979-2012 (%)

Year	PAN	PRI	PPS	PARM	PDM	PST				PVEM	PT	Other	Fragmen- tation (F)	Number of parties (NP)	Volatility (vt)	National- ization (SPNS)		
						PCM	PSUM	PMS	PRD								PFCRN	PC
1979	11.4	74.2	2.7	1.9	2.2	5.3	2.2	-	-	-	-	0.43	1	-	0.89			
1982	17.5	69.3	1.9	1.3	2.3	4.4	1.8	-	-	-	1.3	0.49	1.1	7.55	0.89			
1985	16.3	68.2	2.1	1.7	2.9	3.4	2.6	-	-	-	2.9	0.5	1.1	3.45	0.88			
1988	18	50.4	9.2	6.1	1.3	4.5	10.2	-	-	-	0.5	0.69	1.6	21.85	0.84			
1991	17.7	61.4	1.8	2.1	1.1	8.3	4.3	1.4	1.1	1.1	1.5	0.58	1.2	18.05	0.89			
1994	26.8	50.3	0.7	0.9	0.4	16.7	1.1	1.4	2.6	0.3	0.65	0.65	1.8	18.75	0.91			
1997	25.8	38	0.3	-	0.7	25	1.1	3.7	2.5	0.1	0.72	0.72	2.7	12.9	0.88			
2000	39.1	37.8	-	0.8	-	19.1	-	-	-	2.1	0.67	0.67	2.6	15.25	0.9			
2003	31.8	38.1	-	-	-	18.2	-	4.1	2.5	5.3	0.72	0.72	2.7	9.55	0.78			
2006	34.4	29	-	-	-	29.8	-	-	-	6.8	0.7	0.7	3	15.7	0.9			
2009	29.7	38.9	-	-	-	12.9	-	6.9	3.8	7.8	0.74	0.74	2.62	21.6	0.88			
2012	27.26	33.6	-	-	-	19.3	-	6.4	4.3	8.5	0.77	0.77	3.21	7.92	0.9			

Source: authors' own calculation based on results provided by Centro de Estadística y Documentación Electoral of Metropolitan Autonomous University for 1979-1988, and Instituto Federal Electoral for 1991-2012.

Table 2
Federal Electoral Districts by number of parties (NP), 1979-2012 (%)

Number of parties	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1997	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012
Three-party system (NP > 2.5)	0	0	1	30	0	11	19	23	21	32	36	64
Plural bipartidism (2.0-2.5)	2	8	9	13	7	35	37	34	38	36	36	27
Pure bipartidism (1.5-2.0)	18	23	24	14	31	30	36	33	33	24	23	9
Dominant party (1.0-1.5)	81	68	66	43	62	24	8	10	8	8	5	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300

Source: for 1979-2003: Klesner (2005: 108); for 2006-2012, authors' own calculations based on with official electoral results from Instituto Federal Electoral.

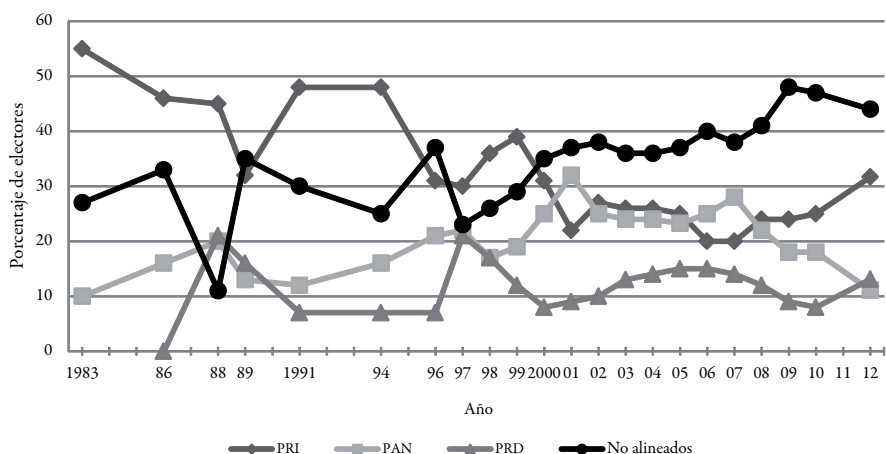
Table 3
Self-identification and location of the party

LVI Legislature (1994-1997)					
Self-location			Party location		
Party (N)	Mean	Deviation	Party (N)	Mean	Deviation
PAN (28)	6.15	1.62	PAN (28)	6.45	1.48
PRD (17)	3.65	1.44	PRD (17)	3.27	.99
PRI (73)	4.94	1.46	PRI (71)	5.40	.96
Total (119)	5.04	1.67	Total (116)	5.35	1.46
LVII Legislature (1997-2000)					
Self-location			Party location		
Party (N)	Mean	Deviation	Party (N)	Mean	Deviation
PAN (31)	5.90	1.39	PAN (31)	6.00	.85
PRD (31)	2.77	1.62	PRD (31)	3.00	1.43
PRI (59)	5.29	1.46	PRI (59)	5.42	1.07
Total (121)	4.80	1.91	Total (121)	4.95	1.62
LVIII Legislature (2000-2003)					
Autoubicación			Party location		
Party (N)	Mean	Deviation	Party (N)	Mean	Deviation
PAN (48)	5.88	1.16	PAN (47)	6.38	1.03
PRD (12)	3.08	1.08	PRD (11)	4.18	1.32
PRI (52)	4.71	1.44	PRI (52)	5.25	1.18
Total (112)	5.04	1.55	Total (110)	5.63	1.34
LIX Legislature (2003-2006)					
Self-location			Party location		
Party (N)	Mean	Deviation	Party (N)	Mean	Deviation
PAN (36)	6.44	1.59	PAN (36)	6.94	1.37
PRD (24)	2.82	1.14	PRD (24)	3.14	.99
PRI (53)	5.22	1.16	PRI (54)	5.61	1.25
Total (113)	4.82	1.29	Total (114)	5.23	1.20

LX Legislature (2006-2009)					
Self-location			Party location		
Party (N)	Mean	Deviation	Party (N)	Mean	Deviation
PAN (51)	6.19	1.35	PAN (51)	6.66	1.49
PRD (33)	2.25	1.19	PRD (33)	2.43	1.26
PRI (27)	4.46	1.13	PRI (27)	4.96	1.09
Total (111)	4.30	1.22	Total (111)	4.68	1.28
LXI Legislature (2009-2012)					
Self-location			Party location		
Party (N)	Mean	Deviation	Party (N)	Mean	Deviation
PAN (28)	6.47	1.50	PAN (28)	7.41	1.41
PRD (14)	3.57	1.40	PRD (14)	4.77	1.42
PRI (45)	5.02	0.97	PRI (41)	5.28	0.81
Total (87)	5.02	1.29	Total (83)	5.82	1.21

Source: own elaboration from PELA data. For self-identification, the questions asked was: “as you know, when talking of politics the expressions left and right are normally used. In this card there is a series of boxes from left to right, in which box would you place yourself, considering your political ideas? The scale ranges from 1 to 10; 1 being left and 10, right. For the location of the party the question was: “and in this same scale, where would you place your own party?” For a more detailed description of PELA project, look at: <http://americo.usa.es/oir/elites/>

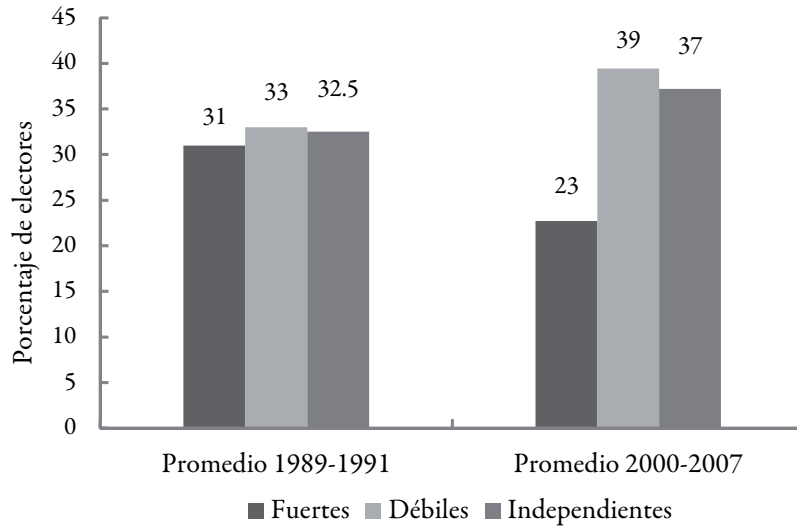
Graph 1
Partisanship in Mexico, 1983-2012 (%)



Sources: 1983: survey by Miguel Basáñez; 1986: New York Times survey, 1988: Gallup survey; 1989 and 1991: Los Angeles Times-Prospectiva Estratégica A.C. survey; 1994: survey by Belden and Russonello with Ciencia Aplicada; 1996: Encuesta Reforma-Los Angeles Times; 1997: survey by ITAM-Arcop; 1998-2009: annual averages obtained from quarterly surveys in Reforma reported by Moreno (2012). Percentages do not add 100, because there is no “other party” option. The question utilized as of November 1999 is: “Generally, do you consider priista, panista or perredista?”, followed “are you very or somewhat...?”. In previous surveys different versions of the question on sympathy with a political party were used.

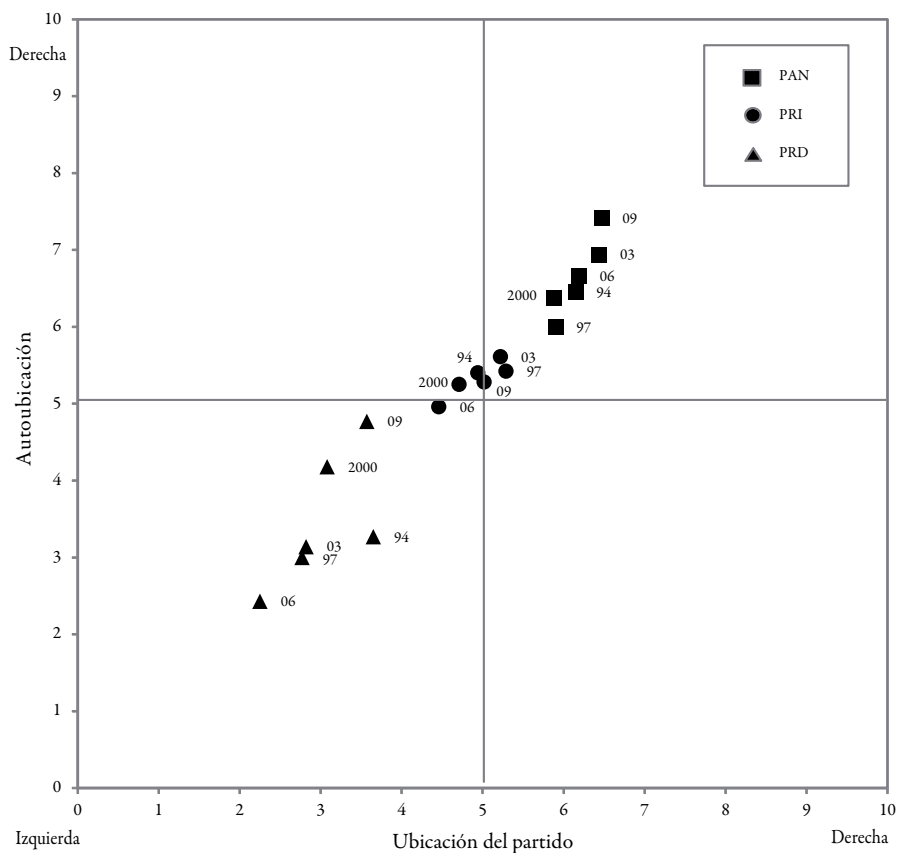
* Data for PRD for 1988 correspond to the addition of the percentage of identified of the parties comprised in National Democratic Front and are only offered as a reference indicator.

Graph 2
Strength of partisanship in Mexico, 1989–2007 (%)



Source: 1989 and 1991: Los Angeles Times-Prospectiva Estratégica A.C. survey; 2000-2007: quarterly surveys by Grupo Reforma reported in Moreno (2009).

Graph 3
Location of the legislators' party in the left-right scale (1994-2012)



Source: own elaboration from PELA data. For self-identification the question was: “as you know, when talking of politics the expressions left and right are normally used. In this card there is a series of boxes from left to right, in which box would you place yourself, considering your political ideas?” The scale ranges from 1 to 10; 1 being left and 10, right. For the location of the party the question was: “And at the same scale, where would you place your own party?” For a more detailed description of PELA project, look at: <http://americo.usal.es/oir/elites/>

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¹⁶ The names of the authors do not follow any order, both contributed in equal measure to the production of the work.

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