LECTORAL INSTITUTIONS AND SINGLE PARTY POLITICS IN THE MEXICAN CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES
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One of the key factors impinging upon the performance of a body like the Chamber of Deputies is the way its members are elected. Without a proper account of the institutional framework in which legislators seek office and advance their political careers, it is not possible to understand the forces shaping the operation of the Chamber of Deputies. The coordination of deputies, which is necessary for the regular functioning of the assembly, is not spontaneously produced in a political vacuum. It takes place within a system of sanctions and rewards that stems from the arrangement of electoral institutions, as they regulate access to office and bear upon the prospects of political promotion. Political parties play a central role in such system. They are vehicles for recruitment and promotion of politicians, and also mechanisms for coordinating collective action within the Chamber of Deputies. In performing these functions, parties are highly dependent on the nature of electoral institutions, which are crucial in defining their relative strength and internal structure.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the development of political parties in connection with the institutions regulating the election of the members of the Chamber of Deputies. Firstly, I argue that the long-standing ascendancy of a single party in Mexico has been sustained through a system of fast and comprehensive rotation in office established since 1933. This system was drafted in order to allow the vast coalition of office holders formed in 1929 around the PNR (National Revolutionary Party) to consolidate itself and grow into a highly centralized national political organization. Rotation of office in a context where public officials were elected by territorial constituencies under the first-pass-the-post principle created the conditions for central control of the nomination process for all elective offices in the government. Secondly, I discuss the long-term effects on the party system of this institutional arrangement. I content that rotation in office removed the grounds on which existing local parties and regional electoral organizations had flourished, and set up a structure of institutional incentives and disincentives that deterred the development of national opposition parties.

Finally, I analyze the effects of the introduction of a partial system of proportional representation in the Chamber of Deputies in 1963. This institutional change has been the main driving force behind the growth in the number and size of opposition parties during the last two decades. Proportional representation has provided incentives for the creation of new minority parties and the development of the existing ones, thereby fostering a tendency toward diversity and greater balance in the party system. This tendency has been reinforced through increases in the number of seats apportioned through proportional representation. However, there are still powerful institutional tendencies at work in the opposite direction. Rapid rotation of office operates as a disarticulating force limiting the consolidation of national opposition parties in specific territorial constituencies, which find...
it extremely difficult to compete with the dominant party for first-past-the-post seats in
the Chamber of Deputies.

**Rotation of office and the consolidation of a single-dominant party**

The creation of the PNR is one of the major political events in twentieth century
Mexican history, for it triggered a thorough and long-standing transformation in the
operation of the political regime. The PNR has changed its name twice, adopting its
current denomination as the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in 1946, but its
control over the great majority of elective offices in the national government at all
levels has been maintained for over 65 years. The PRI has been a powerful
centralizing force, coordinating offices constitutionally designed to work and operate
separately, such as the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate and the Presidency. By
consolidating separated constitutional powers, the party has sustained the practice of
strong and unitary federal governments headed by the President of the Republic.

The idea of an inclusive political coalition incorporating the vast majority of
politicians holding office was first introduced by President Plutarco Elias Calles. It was
originally devised as an initiative to solve the deep political crisis that followed the killing
of president elect Alvaro Obregón in 1928. According to the Constitution, the Congress
had to appoint a interim president, who was to occupy the office during the 14-18 months
period in which elections for a new Chief Executive to complete the presidential term had
to be held. The huge congressional coalition forged to elect Emilio Portes Gil as interim
president was the main political precedent on which the initiative to create an inclusive
national political party was built.

Although the Constitution required only an absolute majority of both the Chamber
of Deputies and the Senate convening together as an Electoral College, the freshly elected
members of the 33rd Legislature delivered a unanimous vote for governor Portes Gil.
This outcome reflected the intense negotiations between the outgoing president Plutarco
Elias Calles and the leaders of the Obregonista Bloc in the Congress. The Obregonista
Bloc was formed after the assassination of the president elect, and joined by the majority
of deputies and senators. It was a political association with no institutional links, driven by
the interest to put in the presidencysomeone representing the groups and forces that
supported Alvaro Obregón. However, the Obregonista Bloc became more than just a
congressional movement to promote Portes Gil; following an initiative by president
Calles, the Obregonista Bloc dissolved itself in order to create the National Revolutionary
Bloc. Almost every member of the Congress joined the National Revolutionary Bloc at
once. It was probably a loose and rather symbolic association, which meant very little in
terms of the regular politics of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. However, this
novel undertaking clearly shows an unprecedented attempt at building mechanisms to
organize congressional majorities on a regular basis.

The organization of the National Revolutionary Party, however, was prompted by
the imminent elections for the presidency, and had very little to do with the Congress itself
in the beginning. In fact, the Constituent Convention of the PNR was also the occasion to nominate a presidential candidate running to complete the remaining of the term for which Alvaro Obregón was elected. The nomination of a common presidential candidate was the initial driving force that unified the vast collection of regional parties and local electoral organizations dominating politics in the federal states and controlling seats in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. According to the documents of the PNR, 148 political parties of varying size and importance were represented in its Constituent Convention¹. They all subscribed to the constitution of the PNR and agreed to support the candidacy of Pascual Ortiz Rubio. Perhaps as a token that a new era was beginning, the PNR candidate and the strongest contestant for the presidential office, was someone with no personal political authority of his own, completely dependent on the emerging party organization².

The PNR proved quite effective at coordinating and unifying a vast array of regional forces and, thereby, it won control over the presidential electoral process. The presidential elections of 1929 were the first trial for this enormous electoral machine that brought together political organizations from nearly every state of the Federation; and the extensive territorial control achieved since then has remained undisputed by any other party until the present day. However, the major challenge to the unity of the coalition of regional parties forming the PNR was yet to come as it still had to deal with the coming congressional elections.

The 1930 federal elections for the Chamber of Deputies and half of the Senate showed that a political enterprise such as the PNR could hardly prosper within the existing electoral framework. Deputies and Senators were elected individually by territorial constituencies; their position and political careers hinged on the local parties controlling their constituencies. Local parties were personality-oriented electoral organizations deeply rooted in the politics of the states, and led by an array of local bosses, caciques, revolutionary caudillos and social reformists forming a new breed of politicians that emerged in the 1920s after years of social unrest and political instability.

The nomination of PNR candidates for the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate were much more difficult to handle for the party leadership than that of the presidential candidate. In fact, the district and state PNR conventions were characterized by intense confrontations between local parties for control over the nomination process. In a number


²President Ortiz Rubio was no inexperienced politician as it is some times believed. He had been member of the Congress, governor of his native state and head of department in the federal administration. However, as he had spent five years abroad in the diplomatic service before his nomination to the presidency, he was detached from Mexican politics and has no personal basis of power. For a history of the intrigue that surrounded his nomination and sudden demise when he resigned to the office see among others: Tzvi Medin, El minimato presidencial, la historia del maximato. (Mexico D.F., ERA, 1981)
of cases, nominating conventions resulted in divisions and splits, with the candidates of the "losing" factions subsequently running independently of the PNR. The national leadership of the party had very limited influence on the outcome of the nomination process. Its role was that of conciliator, arbiter at most, in disputes over the nomination of candidates. The most powerful weapon in the hands of the national leadership was that of disowning the convention and the resulting candidate. This was used in some cases, but with disastrous consequences; congressional elections prompted the resignation of the national leadership of PNR in 1930.3

The creation of the PNR did not have an immediate impact on the regular operation of the Congress. Even though the PRN became from the start a hegemonic electoral coalition, with its candidates winning most of the seats, the Congress was still organized and run by local parties. Local parties formed unstable non-partisan coalitions vaguely identified under the labels of "rojos" and "blancos" as they attempted to articulate governing majorities in the Congress. It was common for deputies and senators to shift from one faction to the other, as there were no institutional mechanism of sanctions and rewards holding coalitions together and providing some form of internal cohesiveness. In fact, the PNR did not become a congressional party until the mid 1930s, after the local parties integrating it dissolved. It was the division between rojos and blancos, and their fight for control over the governing organs of both houses of the Congress which characterized legislative politics, although both factions were part of the National Revolutionary Bloc.

After the first experiment in congressional elections in 1930, the national leadership of the PNR began to discuss the idea of rotating its large political cadre in the elective offices of government. Too many incumbents in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate running for re-election was seen as a source of conflicts and party division in the nomination process. Office rotation was no alien idea in Mexican politics at the time. The institution of "no re-election" of the national Chief Executive was a central element of the 1917 Constitution, despite the fact that it had been recently amended in 1927 to allow presidents to run for the office again after one term break in service.4 The long tenure of the presidential office was regarded as conducive to personalization of power and dictatorship; and "no re-election" was one of main tenets associated with the 1910 Revolution, as this was prompted by an armed movement to oust president Porfirio Diaz who was entering on his seventh term of office. No re-election of the executive office had already become part of the constitution of all the states of the federation.

However, before the initiative to create the PNR came to the fore, no re-election was a practice strictly limited to the executive arm. The 1916 Constitutional Convention did not consider its application to members of the legislature, nor even did the Anti Re-electionist Party advocate limiting legislative terms. In fact, long congressional careers could not have developed by the end of the 1920s, as the Revolution produced a

3 Garrido ibid. p 149
4 The amendment to the Constitution was part of the campaign to reelect ex-president Alvaro Obregón.
thorough and rapid turnover of the political class in the legislature. In the 1920s, institutions were still too weak to mould political ambition. Armed rebellions, plotted with suspicious regularity at the end of the presidential term, were a tempting opportunity for political promotion. They broke many congressional careers, and were an indirect cause of political mobility. Therefore, the real issue at stake when the national leadership of the PNR began to promote the idea of no re-election of legislative officers was the unity and strength of the emerging party.

Rotation of office was so significant for the consolidation of the PNR that before the 1932 congressional elections the first attempt was made to bring about a comprehensive change in the electoral legislation of every state to achieve enforceability of rotation. The leadership of the PNR organized the Congress of National Legislatures in January 1932 to discuss the introduction of a new electoral framework for federal and state governments that would include: non-consecutive re-election of legislative offices, prohibition of "independent" candidacies for elective posts, and the transferral of the administration of federal and state elections from the municipios to upper levels of government. The issue of "no re-election" spawned strong opposition among members of the federal and state legislatures, and the Congress failed to reach any conclusive agreements. The PNR organized the nomination of candidates for congressional seats for the second time in 1932, with incumbent legislators still having the legal right to run for re-election. Thus, despite the policy of the national party organization to promote the circulation of its political cadre, a significant number of legislators retained their offices in the Congress.

As the attempt to change electoral legislation—which according to the Constitution was a matter of state governments—through the National Congress of Legislatures failed, the leadership of the PNR pursued a different strategy: they promoted a constitutional amendment. The Constitution provided such a powerful regulative instrument, that could be used to force upon the states a sweeping change in their electoral institutions. The campaign for constitutional amendment began with the 1932 Extraordinary National Convention of the PNR, which was explicitly called to deal with questions related to the principle of no re-election. In sharp contrast to the Congress of Legislatures, the delegates to the Convention were not officeholders, but party affiliates. They delivered a massive vote in favour of the leadership's proposal for amendment to the Constitution including:

1. A strict lifetime limit of one term in office for the president of the Republic and state governors
2. Prohibition of continuous re-election of members of the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate and all elective offices in the state and municipal governments
3. Extension of the term in office for members of the Senate from 4 to 6 years

Garrido mentions that as many as 52 members of the Chamber of Deputies were removed from office after they have publicly subscribed the armed rebellion headed by General José Gonzalo Escobar in 1929. *Op. Cit.* p.120
4. Extension of the term in office for members of the Chamber of Deputies, state legislatures and all elective offices at the municipal level from 2 to 3 years

5. Suppression of mid-term senatorial elections, whereby federal states were to elect two senators in a single ballot, in concurrence with the presidential elections

6. Prohibition of state governors running for the Congress before the term for which they were elected had elapsed

The national leadership of PNR drafted the proposal as a bill of constitutional amendments, and submitted it to the Chamber of Deputies. The bill was discussed and voted upon during an extraordinary period of session of the Congress specially called for that purpose. The initiative sparked an intense debate among the members of the Chamber of Deputies, but it was approved by a large majority and then sent to the Senate without a single amendment. Senatorial approval was granted without discussion.

According to Alejandra Lajous, the 1933 constitutional amendments were part of a strategy of the PNR national leadership to "open up" the party and promote the involvement of groups from the outside. Ex-President Calles, the leading figure of the no re-election movement within the PNR, justified the amendments in the following terms: "It is necessary to attract many of the revolutionary groups that still remain apart from the government and even believe themselves to be in the opposition". And certainly, the immediate effect of the non-consecutive re-election clause was to open up the list of party nominees for elective office and provide complete freedom to party slate makers. However, the consequences of the 1933 constitutional amendments were more complex and far-reaching. It transformed Mexican politics into what can be described as a regular "game of musical chairs", thereby affecting the operation of every single office at federal, state and municipal level, and re-structuring the patterns of political careers.

In some respect, the constitutional banning of continuous re-election was an early experiment with "institutional engineering", devised in pursuance of calculated effects on the operation of the emerging hegemonic party. No re-election changed the "institutionally available options" for politicians to pursue political promotion. Rapid and comprehensive rotation in office clearly came to preclude the development of "internal" careers in the national Congress, state legislatures and municipal governments. By institutionalizing the game of musical chairs, no re-election reinforced the role, and therefore the power, of the PNR's national organization. The PNR became central in the strategies of politicians to continue and advance their careers. To develop a political career winning office was no longer sufficient. No re-election rendered "external promotion", that is to say the moving from one office to another, a prime goal for politicians to survive in politics. In the context of rapid rotation of office, the traditional vehicles of political promotion --local parties and constituency-oriented electoral organizations-- became of extremely limited political use. To accomplish their ambitions, as moulded by the new electoral institutions, local politicians came to depend entirely on a...
national party organization, such as the PNR, which regulated access to a wide spectrum of rotating offices, from municipal, to state and federal governments.

The 2nd National Convention of the PNR, held seven months after the package of constitutional amendments was passed by the Congress in 1933, provided the occasion for what is perhaps the most significant change in the history of the party that has controlled and dominated Mexican politics for the last 65 years --the dissolution of the vast array of regional and local parties that had joined the PNR, and their consolidation into a single national organization. The National Convention was called to deal with the nomination of PNR candidate for the 1934-40 presidential term, and the ratification of the first sexennial plan --a Stalinist fashion that the party adopted in those years. But the national leadership also presented an ambitious and radical motion to reform the party constitution, whereby all discrete political organizations within the PNR had to dissolve themselves in the following six months if their members were to remain within the party. Most local parties followed suit and embraced the cause of a single national organization, in what could be described as a massive and coordinated act of institutional dismantling. But it was not a leap in the dark; the PNR was providing a new institutional framework and guaranteeing that seniority would be the main criterion in the nomination of candidates. Politicians did not lack incentives to dismantle their "old" organizations. For as long as they were concerned about their careers, they knew that the time of the local political machines back at home was to pass.8

The transformation of the PNR from a national confederation of regional parties with separated identities into a single political organization set in motion powerful centralizing tendencies within the party. In describing the consequences of this change in the party constitution, Garrido concludes that:

The dissolution of the multiple organizations constituting the PNR meant that, from then on, local party leaders would yield to the decisions taken at the National Executive Committee and that the margin available for them to put pressure on the party apparatus would be narrowed.9

However, the sources of the overwhelming powers that the PNR national leadership was gathering did not lie in the new formal structure of the party, but rather in its position as central coordinator of an institutional device for the management and control of the circulation of political cadres in elective public offices. The "no re-election" constitutional amendments allowed the PNR to build a comprehensive system of office rotation which put in the hands of the national leadership powerful weapons to punish and

8 Naturally, there was more than just self-interest in the dismantling of local parties. The experiment with single national political parties in Italy, Germany and the Soviet Union had a strong appeal among leading Mexican politicians. Also, the identification of localism with political instability, and the powerful idea of the Mexican Revolution as a single national movement, played an important part in the process political centralization around the PNR. See Garrido and Lajous Op. cit.

9 Op. Cit. p 201
reward individual politicians. Office holders became completely vulnerable; they became entirely dependent on the most extensive mechanism of political promotion —the PNR.

Rotation in office not only strengthened a centralizing tendency inside the PNR; it also sustained a tendency to integrate emerging political organizations. Both tendencies have coexisted and reinforced each other. Rapid rotation allowed the national leadership of the PNR to carry out the policy of "open door" in order to incorporate political movements and associations generated independently of the party. The policy was adopted as early as 1936 in order to deal with the nomination of candidates for state legislatures and the Senate. It was specially devised to accommodate the leaders of the Mexican Confederation of Workers (CTM) in the renewal of elective government bodies. The CTM was a growing national organization of workers formed through the consolidation of the increasing number of local and regional trade-unions, in a pattern similar to that of the PNR. The CTM was seeking a place in Mexican politics, and the PNR had the institutional capability of promoting its leaders into public office. The policy of "open door" deterred CTM leaders from seeking office through independent mechanisms, and perhaps it also prevented the development of a second national party based on trade union organizations.

The policy of open door evolved into the granting of a quota of seats in the Chamber of Deputies for the 1937 mid-term congressional elections, which the CTM was free to allocate among its own candidates. The quota system divided the PNR in three sectors: the CTM, the peasant organizations prompted by the land reform programme and the remainder of party. The system was then tried in a number of state elections, and proved a satisfactory arrangement to deal with internal disputes arising in the nomination process. Eventually, the PNR swallowed the CTM and in the process organized a national confederation of peasant unions to accommodate the campesinos in the party as well. This massive and rapid assimilation of political forces led to a profound change in the constitution of the party. What began as a system to nominate candidates for public office developed into an arrangement for the governing bodies of the party based on three sectors: the workers, the peasants and a third one, originally designed for the military, that later developed into the "popular sector" —a collection of a wide variety of political organizations ranging from public employees, professional associations to specific interest groups. However, the tendency to assimilate emerging political organizations did not stop with the creation of the three sectors. In some respect, the "open door" policy has persisted until the present day, as a significant number of political movements have been integrated into the party over the years. This process of assimilation underpinning the ascendancy of the PNR, and its successors, has been sustained through an enormous institutional capacity of co-option built on the system of comprehensive rotation of office.

10 The 1936 mid-term senatorial elections were the last of this sort. The senators then elected were to hold office for an extraordinary four year term. After 1940 the whole house began to be renewed every six years.

11 The CTM had announced the constitution of the Mexican National Front in 1935, but the project was dropped after the PNR launched its "open doors" campaign. See Garrido pp. 264-271
Regulating access to the ballot and the development of opposition parties

As the PNR grew more powerful, controlling most offices in the federal government and encroaching into state and municipal politics, profound changes were taking place among other political parties. The consolidation of the PNR and the no reelection constitutional amendments were followed by the steady extinction of the local and regional parties that were in politics in the late 1920s. Some of them were organized political forces that had been in operation for about ten years or so, and resisted assimilation. A few local parties, although finding the PNR appealing at the beginning, refused to dissolve after the Second National Convention in 1933; they first withdrew to local politics and later disappeared. The emergence of the PNR even prompted some opposition from parties which had a political tradition and national platform such as the National Agrarian Party (PNA) and the Mexican Labour Party (PLM) which were created in 1919 and 1920 respectively. They organized a coalition to oppose the PNR in the 1932 congressional elections, which did not prosper. Both the PNA and the PLM disappeared in 1940, not before most of their original leadership migrated to swell the rank and file of the PNR/PRM.12

As the "old" parties were extinguished, new political organizations kept emerging, but they proved extremely short-lived. Up to 1946, elections were fairly unregulated. Parties were entirely "informal" institutions. They could be created and operate without restrictions. Most opposition parties were in reality something like campaign committees formed by candidates or groups of candidates from the same state running for office independently of the PNR/PRM. They had no institutional life. Parties emerged as elections approached and disappeared as their sponsors failed to attain office. In the few cases where independent candidates made it to the Chamber of Deputies, the prohibition to reelect them must have ended with their parties or campaign organizations.

The complex constitution of the legislative branch of government, has rendered congressional elections fairly unattractive and unlikely to arouse much controversy or opposition. Clearly, the most visible part of Mexico's government is the presidential office. It is held by a single individual and elected by a single constituency -- the national electorate. Thus, opposition movements to the PNR and its later successors (the PRM and the PRI) have gathered around well-known politicians running for the presidency, rather than candidates running for congressional seats in hundreds of separated territorial constituencies. Vincent Padgett coined the term "transient political opposition" to refer to these opposition movements which arose and disappeared according to the approach and passing of presidential elections. These movements were particularly evident in the 1940, 1946 and 1952 presidential elections. They did not develop into permanent political organizations intending to participate regularly in electoral processes and had no persistent impact on Mexican politics. Padgett describes transient political opposition as

12 The PLM was basically formed by the Mexican Regional Confederation of Workers (CROM). The CROM eventually joined the workers sector of the PRM, and it has remained a part of the PRI until the present day.
having a pattern of personalism as its salient characteristic; all attention and loyalty was focused on the leaders, who were formerly important figures within the governing party and withdrew because their aspirations for the presidential nomination were frustrated.13

Transient opposition movements had no effect on either the Chamber of Deputies or the Senate, even though the presidency and the Congress were renewed in concurrent elections. Certainly, the first-past-the-post system partly accounted for the fact that the votes cast for the parties supporting independent presidential candidates were not transformed into opposition seats in the Congress (see Annex Figures 1 and 2). But the most important reason lies in that these parties were only temporary arrangements improvised to run presidential campaigns; they did not have candidates running for the Congress in most of the districts and states. In the 1930s and 1940s, party acronyms constantly replaced each other as the presidential elections came and went. Opposition parties were highly volatile, unable to survive the political movements from which they emerged.

The 1946 Federal Electoral Law was the institutional response to this situation. It introduced partisan nomination of candidates running for elective office in the federal government as a formal institution. Partisan nomination restricted access to the ballots by forcing individual politicians seeking elective office to obtain nomination by a legally recognized political party. Judged by the scant significance and political impact of independent candidacies, which the 1946 electoral regulations ruled out, the institution of partisan nomination might seem inconsequential. However, partisan nomination was the key stone of a new regulatory framework that granted political parties the legal monopoly of political representation. The 1946 Federal Electoral Law was announced as the beginning of the era of modern political parties.14 At the same time that parties were vested with exclusive rights to register candidates running for office, legal requirements for political organizations to be granted status as political parties were established. The law provided that political parties have their own constitution and regulations, and express a public commitment to basic legal principles. The most significant requirements were those related to their membership, size, and territorial distribution, whereby local parties were excluded from taking part in federal elections on their own.

The 1946 Federal Electoral Law was a complex piece of legislation regulating various aspects of the electoral process, from administrative matters to the adjudication of electoral disputes. However, its main concern was the institutionalization of the opposition to the PRI, a party that was in control of nearly every office in the federal government. Partisan nomination served as an incentive to encourage the formation of national political parties with stable internal institutions providing for some permanency. It was an incentive in the sense that it forced politicians seeking office to do so through a political party complying with standards specified by law. However, partisan nomination also led to the awkward situation in which an administrative department of the federal

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government had the power to give or deny political parties the legal right to participate in federal elections. The law regulated and restricted this power by detailed specification of the requirements parties had to fulfill to attain registration. Nevertheless, partisan nomination created a new governmental function: that of administrating party regulations. This function has become increasingly significant as political parties have received more privileges such as special representation in the Chamber of Deputies and public subsidies.\(^\text{15}\)

The 1946 electoral regulations caused a significant reduction in the number of parties taking part in federal elections. When it was first introduced, as many as 11 organizations applied for registration as national political parties. Only the PRI was able to meet the requirements; all the other parties were granted probational legal recognition. Only two parties of the opposition, the National Action Party (PAN) and the Popular Party (PPS)\(^\text{16}\), confirmed their application to take part in the 1949 mid-term elections to renew the Chamber of Deputies. Other political parties registered for subsequent elections, but the overall number became fairly stable, oscillating between 3 and 4 until 1977, when the requirements for registration were substantially relaxed. A more significant consequence of the 1946 Federal Electoral Law was the stability of some of the registered opposition parties, rather than just a reduction in their number. The PAN and the PPS managed to survive, and continued recruiting candidates running for federal office, despite their low chances of succeeding. The incentives provided by the electoral regulations were rather weak, and do not entirely account for the survival of the PAN and the PPS; other parties registered in the 1950s disappeared after one or two elections.\(^\text{17}\) However, taking into consideration that, of the large number of parties created in the period from 1917 to 1943, only the PRI and the PAN were still in operation for the 1946 elections, it is clear that the electoral regulations did make a difference. The PAN, created in 1939, was by all means a small political force when the 1946 Electoral Law came into effect. It is likely that the regulations helped the PAN to escape the fate of previous opposition parties (see Figure 3).

The regulation and control of access to the ballots through the institution of partisan nomination had a significant impact on the operation of the PRI, reinforcing discipline among its rank and file. There was a tendency for discipline to relax as the presidential term expired and PRI politicians began to seek promotion in the next political cycle. Despite the greater chances of promotion provided by rotation in office, the nomination process within the PRI regularly produced some dissidence. PRI dissidents

\(^{15}\) The 1977 Federal Electoral Law created a new body to perform this function: the Federal Electoral Council. It was formed by representatives of registered political parties and presided by the Secretary of Interior. The constitution and performance of this body has caused of much controversy. See Juan Molinar Hocasitas, *El tiempo de la legitimidad. Elecciones, autoritarismo y democracia en México.* (Mexico D.F., Cal y arena, 1991)

\(^{16}\) This was the name given to the party when it was founded, however in 1968 adopted its current denomination --Socialist Popular Party (PPS).

\(^{17}\) Such is the case of the FPPM and the Nationalist Party of Mexico.
evolved into electoral opposition as they had the opportunity to run for office as independent candidates. The 1946 Electoral Law removed this option and the practice of independent candidacies altogether; it forced PRI dissidents to seek nomination by a registered opposition party. Partisan nomination was the more significant in the case of candidates running for the presidency. The most important electoral opposition that the PRI presidential candidates had faced in previous elections did not come from other parties, but from politicians holding top positions in the federal administration, who had failed to obtain the PRI nomination. The 1946 Electoral Law made it more difficult for end-of-the-term PRI deserters to reach the polls, as dissident politicians had to seek nomination by a political party registered at least one year before the election. This provision, however, did not prevent Miguel Henríquez from promoting the creation of the Federation of Mexican People's Parties (FPPM) in 1952 to nominate him for the presidency, once it was clear that he was not the PRI candidate. Internal PRI dissidence stopped evolving into electoral opposition in the presidential ballot after 1952. However, no single regulatory provision alone can account for the end of "transitory opposition movements", as Padgett termed them. Certainly, partisan nomination and the increasing legal requirements for the formation of new political parties, worked as a deterrent to PRI dissidents. But in addition, the authoritarian method of nominating PRI presidential candidates was reinforced by the development of practices and conventions which have provided for strict discipline until it was too late to organize opposition against the resulting candidate. Two crucial conventions were established: 1) the presidential cabinet provides the pool from which the nominee will be chosen, and 2) public campaigning in favor of any the possible candidates is strictly forbidden before the national executive committee of the PRI pronounces.

The exclusive right to register candidates to federal elective office proved in practice a very weak incentive for the development of emerging opposition parties. In the period between the coming into effect of the 1946 Electoral Law and the introduction of proportional representation for minority parties in 1963, five federal elections took place. Two out of the three surviving opposition parties, the PPS and the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM) were splinters from the hegemonic PRI. Their performance as separate political parties was very poor indeed. They achieved only marginal representation in the Chamber of Deputies. In fact, they survived in a state of inanimation.

18 Francisco José Paoli argues that the timing of party registration was devised to prevent "last-minute splits in the revolutionary family" before the presidential elections. See "Legislación electoral y proceso político, 1917-1982" in Pablo González Casanova (ed.), *Las elecciones en México: evolución y perspectivas*, (Mexico D.F., Siglo XXI, 1985) p. 47.

19 The practice was to revive 36 year later, when the Democratic Current within the PRI, led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and Profrío Muñoz Ledo, developed from an internal dissident movement into electoral opposition to the PRI presidential candidate in 1988.

without being able to grow and at times obtaining no public office at all. More representative of the endemic weakness of the PPS and the PARM was their limited capability to recruit politicians to run for seats in the Chamber of Deputies. In the period from 1955 to 1963, the PPS managed to cover only 40 to 45 percent of the electoral districts, with the exception of the 1952 concurrent congressional and presidential elections when it registered an extraordinary number of contestants in 80 percent of Chamber of Deputies districts. In this respect, the performance of the PARM was even poorer. Its capacity to recruit candidates enabled it to cover hardly 30 percent of the disputed seats. The PPS and the PARM were separate opposition parties only on paper. To some extent, they were from the beginning legal creatures that never took root in the national electorate (see Figure 3).

The emergence of a stable and independent opposition to the PRI has to be traced back to the foundation of the PAN in 1939. The PAN was formed by a small and highly influential group of intellectuals and professionals. Inspired by Catholic social teaching, PAN leaders began an ideological movement in opposition to the PRM, with which the government was completely identified, and to the policies of state-controlled education, nationalization of industry and collectivization of land tenure. Donald Mabry described the PAN as the "Catholic alternative to the Mexican Revolution". The PAN entered politics mobilizing electoral opposition to the semi-official PRM, whose monopoly over government offices was then running into a second decade. When the 1946 Electoral Law came into effect, the PAN was the only existing independent political organization prepared to take advantage of the incentives that the new legislation brought about. In the period from 1946 to 1963, the PAN experienced a substantial growth in its share of the vote cast and consolidated its position as the second electoral force and first opposition party (see Figure 3). Nevertheless, the PAN attained this position with a share of the national vote far below the dominant PRI. What is more, PAN's performance at recruiting politicians to run against the PRI was not very impressive either. It covered only an average of 50 percent of the electoral districts in mid-term elections for the Chamber of Deputies. In the case of concurrent congressional and presidential elections, when the possibility of gaining office on the coat-tails of the party's presidential candidate made running for the Congress more attractive, the PAN registered candidates in 80 percent of electoral district. The PAN's performance in this respect was better than that of the other opposition parties, but well below that of the PRI. As the PRI managed to prevent its internal discord from developing into electoral opposition in the presidential contests, the PAN became the only source of opposition candidates for the presidency, and the only existing alternative to the PRI at the national level. From 1958 to 1973 no other

21 The information about party coverage of electoral districts is taken from Molinar Horcasitas' analysis of party competitiveness. See *El tiempo de la legitimidad*, Tables 1.2 and 1.7.
22 *The National Action Party*, (Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1973)
opposition party registered presidential candidates, which contributed to the growth of PAN's share of the national vote. However, in congressional electoral districts individual PAN candidates performed rather badly. PAN's representation in the Chamber of Deputies only grew from 4 to 6 seats from 1946 to 1963, although the overall vote cast for the party tripled in the same period. The 1946 Electoral Law produced a stronger, but heavily under-represented PAN, with the difference between its share of the vote and its share of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies running above 60 percent (Figure 4).

One likely effect of the 1946 electoral regulations was a reduction in the levels of competitiveness in specific electoral districts. In his analysis of the number of candidates running for office in individual districts Juan Molinar finds that a varying but significant proportion of constituencies had no choice in the ballots other than the PRI nominee.\(^{24}\) In the 1955 and 1961 mid-term elections the percentage of seats in the Chamber of Deputies for which PRI candidates ran unchallenged was around 20 percent. Elections with no choice were the result of partisan nomination, and the inability of registered opposition parties to recruit politicians at the local level to run for office. While the new regulations curtailed individuals' right to bid for federal elective office, and barred local parties from federal elections, the national opposition parties were not prepared to cover an important number of electoral districts. Despite having exclusive control of access to the polls, registered opposition parties did not experience any significant change in their actual capability to recruit candidates from the 1946 to the 1961 elections. In 1949, the PAN registered candidates for the Chamber of Deputies in 47 percent of electoral districts. Comparing this figure with that of a similar mid-term congressional election twelve years later shows that PAN's coverage of Chamber districts rose to just 55 percent, even though the PAN was the most successful opposition party.

There were powerful institutional tendencies inhibiting the development of opposition parties and counteracting the incentives provided by the 1946 Electoral Law. Attention has been focused on the fact that the first-past-the-post electoral system did not have a favourable effect on the opposition.\(^{25}\) Certainly, it deterred individual politicians from running for office, unless they had some chance of winning, thereby making the task of recruiting candidates more difficult for opposition parties. However, it was the combined effect of the first-past-the-post system and comprehensive rotation in office which undermined any prospect for the consolidation and growth of opposition parties. National opposition parties had very little to offer to local politicians seeking office, apart from access to the ballots. Local politicians had to mobilize resources in their own local districts to campaign for seats. But with rotation in office ruling out the possibility of a legislative career, the incentives to make a substantial personal investment running for a three-year position in the Chamber of Deputies were not particularly attractive. Running for the Congress was worthwhile only as part of a long term strategy of political promotion, and this opposition parties could not possible provide. Opposition parties entered politics in a position of disadvantage in dealing with the institution of no re-


\(^{25}\) See Juan Molinar Op. Cit.
election and rapid rotation in office. They enjoyed very few incentives to recruit politicians to run for office under their banner. Even in the cases where opposition candidates were successful, non-consecutive re-election put them out of the race, disarticulating the electoral alliance that sent them to the Congress. Successful opposition politicians faced enormous difficulties surviving in politics; pursuing promotion to a higher office after a brief experience in municipal government or the Chamber of Deputies was regularly beyond their capabilities, and there was no access to patronage positions in the federal, state or municipal administrations.

Other factors inhibiting the development of opposition parties were the tendencies that rotation in office and the first-past-the-post system set at work within the PRI itself. The opposition parties were competing against a highly centralized hegemonic party that had an extraordinary capability to co-opt and absorb emerging political movements. The PRI was able to cover every single electoral district and keep replacing them with new recruits every term. The PRI had established control over state and municipal politics through its capacity to promote local politicians to higher office. Rotation in office had a profound effect on local politics, suppressing the possibility of locally based political careers and forcing politicians to join in larger schemes of political promotion. Long before the PAN and other opposition parties were created, the PRI was already functioning as a centralized organization coordinating the circulation of political cadres in a system in which every elective office was a stationary position in an endless game of musical chairs.

In this context, there was very little institutional space for a regular partisan opposition to build on. Rotation in office had changed the meaning and significance of electoral competition for government offices, so that a single political party was able to accommodate and deal with most of the political ambitions and conflicting interests that elections involve. The PRI was capable of performing this role despite its highly centralized, arbitrary, and at times venal nomination process, often prompting division and dissidence inside the party, because rotation in office provided the leadership with an enormous capacity for conflict resolution and a powerful means to reward discipline. With the PRI nearly exhausting the demand for political promotion at local level, the "political market", as it were, for opposition parties was reduced to ideological opposition to the PRI regime and the co-option of PRI dissidence. The PAN recruited most of the ideological opposition to PRI from the 1940s until the late 1970s when left-wing ideological opposition entered electoral politics for the first time. The PPS and the PARM have always offered refuge to dissent PRI politicians.

Finally, opposition parties faced even greater difficulties for consolidation as their candidates ran for office with few guarantees that electoral results would be respected. From 1946, federal elections have been organized by a federal administrative agency run by officials appointed by PRI-controlled presidency and recruited on the basis of political

26 Manuel González Oropeza makes a very similar point in his thoughtful commentary to Article 59 of the Constitution in Eduardo Andrade Sánchez et al., Constitución política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, comentada. (Mexico D.F., Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1985) p. 146
patronage. Furthermore, state tribunals and the Supreme Court systematically refused to hear cases against the constitutionality of elections for executive and legislative officials, on the grounds that to do so would be an infringement to separation of powers. As a consequence of this ruling, the only judicial authority with the power to settle electoral fraud allegations was the legislature itself, in its role as Electoral College.\textsuperscript{27} But, it was clear that opposition parties' cases were not likely to prosper in PRI-dominated electoral colleges. All this notwithstanding, it is very difficult to assess the real impact and significance of electoral fraud in inhibiting the development of opposition parties. It is not clear whether the persistent lack of institutional mechanisms providing for reliable electoral process is the cause or the consequence of the weakness of opposition parties.

The argument that the PRI has based its long term dominance on systematic manipulation of electoral results is a gross simplification of the complex structural forces leading to low levels of electoral competitiveness in Mexican politics. Ballot rigging was rampant before the creation of the PRN, as local political machines enjoyed unchecked power over the handling of elections. There is no evidence that the formation of the PRN in 1929 changed the manner in which balloting was conducted by municipal governments; and nevertheless other contending parties disappeared over the following decade. The sort of centralized management of elections often associated with systematic manipulation of electoral results was achieved by the federal administration through the Electoral Law of 1946, and put in effect for the first time in the 1949 congressional elections --two decades after the period of single-party dominance began. Certainly, the centralized organization of the ballots through an agency of the federal administration did not render the electoral process more reliable. However, the 1946 electoral reform was followed by a significant growth in the PAN's share of the vote cast, rather than the suppression of opposition parties through centralized electoral manipulation. On the other hand, the arbitrariness with which PAN's allegations were dismissed by the government confirms that there was no independent legal control over the actions of electoral authorities; this may have prevented some opposition candidates from being elected to the Chamber, but certainly discouraged politicians from seeking office through parties other than the PRI.

\textit{Proportional representation}

In 1963, the Congress passed a presidential initiative allowing for some form of proportional representation in the Chamber of Deputies. The bill was a comprehensive change in electoral legislation, involving the amendment of the Constitution and large parts of the existing Federal Electoral Law, and yet it consisted mainly of the creation of "party seats" in the lower house of the Congress. This institutional innovation was designed as a complement to the system of representation based on single-member territorial constituencies which was adopted in Mexico in the nineteenth century. The 1963 electoral reform was prompted by

\textsuperscript{27} Miguel González Avelar, \textit{La Suprema Corte y la política}, (Mexico D.F., UNAM, 1979)
deep divisions and bitter disputes arising within the PAN after the frustrating results obtained in 1962, in a mid-term congressional election plagued with accusations of ballot rigging. However, the reform had structural causes related to the long-term inability of opposition parties to establish solid bases for development. The conflicts within the PAN showed that opposition politicians would not persist in organizing and working for political parties that had no realistic chances of electoral success. The government responded by changing the rules of electoral competition. It provided opposition parties with a minimum of offices to allocate among their political cadres and made them less dependent on the ability of individual candidates to win majorities in electoral districts.

The system of party seats

The rules adopted in 1963 to apportion party seats in the Chamber of Deputies guaranteed at least five seats to those parties attaining 2.5 percent of the national vote cast. In addition, they provided one more seat for every extra half percent of the vote until the total number of seats gained by one party—including seats won by relative majorities in electoral districts—amounted to up to 20. Party seats temporarily closed the gap between the opposition parties' share of the national vote and their portion of offices in the legislature. However, proportionality was not what the drafters of the reform intended to achieve. Party seats were an institutional device designed to provide a "safety net" for minority parties within the framework of political representation in which officials were elected individually by territorial constituencies. It was assumed that opposition parties with more than ten percent of the vote would be able to compete with the incumbent PRI for relative majorities in electoral districts. This assumption proved mistaken. As the PAN's share of the vote cast in federal elections rose after the reform, the PAN's ability to win majorities in electoral districts did not increase, on the contrary it plummeted (Figure 6).

In terms of the immediate effects of the party-seat system, the 1963 electoral reforms seemed very successful. They met the demands of an exhausted electoral opposition, which promptly endorsed the change and prepared to play under the new rules. Party seats provided an attractive incentive for the national leadership of opposition parties to recruit candidates and campaign for office in as many electoral districts as possible. Under the new electoral rules, there were 20 seats at stake, to attain which every single vote counted, even if individual candidates failed to win majorities in their districts. The results of the 1964 concurrent presidential and congressional elections showed that the reform had begun to work directly after its introduction. Opposition candidates sprang

\[\text{28} \] The national leadership of the PAN publicly protested against the manipulation of the ballots and asked its five winning candidates not to take their seats in the Chamber of Deputies. The PAN deputies refused to follow the directives of the leadership, emphasizing that they, not the party, won the offices. See Mabry, Op. Cit.
up in every single electoral district. The following congressional elections confirmed the new tendency that party seats set in motion within the opposition parties. Mid-term elections to renew the Chamber of Deputies had usually attracted fewer opposition candidates; however, in 1967 no single seat was uncontested. The incentive provided by party seats proved powerful enough to guarantee that individual constituencies had a choice other than the candidate of the incumbent party in elections to renew the Chamber of Deputies.

The performance of the PAN in the five elections in which the party-seat system operated show the spectacular immediate effects of the 1963 electoral reform, and its shortcomings and limitations as a sustainable electoral framework in the long term. In 1964 the PAN won pluralities in only two districts but it was rewarded with 18 party seats because of its share of the national vote. Altogether, the PAN attained four times as many seats as in the previous legislature, by any standards an unprecedented record for a party that in the past had only achieved a maximum of 6 seats. However, the real problems for the PAN lay in the possibilities for growth and development, and in this respect nothing changed with the 1963 electoral reforms. The PAN easily exhausted the 20-seat upper limit within which it could benefit from the party-seats system. The problem for the PAN with the new rules was to win the 21st seat, for then it needed relative majorities in 21 electoral districts. And paradoxically the PAN's ability to win majorities in electoral districts decreased as the party-seats system began to operate. In 1970, the PAN won no single plurality seat in the Chamber of Deputies, even though its share of the vote cast was higher than ever before. Thus, from 1964 to 1970 the 20 seats controlled by the PAN in the Chamber remained fixed. Eventually, the growing disparity between the PAN's share of the national vote and its representation in the Congress, led the government in 1971 to increase the limit of seats available under the party-seats system from 20 to 25. The PAN exhausted the new limit in the following mid-term elections.

The other opposition parties, the PPS and the PARM, also benefited from the party-seats system although they did not qualify to do so in the beginning. In 1964, neither of them won the minimum amount of votes to pass the 2.5 percent electoral threshold to gain party seats in the Chamber of Deputies. However, the PRI-dominated Electoral College decided in a rather farfetched interpretation of the "spirit" of the law that the PPS and the PARM were entitled to proportional representation in Chamber of Deputies. The arbitrary resolution by the Electoral College allowed the PPS and the PARM to subsist, controlling 10 and 5 seats respectively. But as they were repeatedly unable to obtain 2.5 percent of the vote cast, the government reduced the electoral threshold to 1.5 percent in 1971.

The 1963 electoral reform re-oriented the long term development of opposition parties. Politicians in the opposition began to structure party organizations around the opportunities provided by party seats rather than simple-majority seats, for proportional representation entailed much higher chances of achieving office. In this sense, opposition parties evolved quickly into vehicles of political promotion to the offices contested through the party-seats system at national level. They began to register candidates in most
electoral districts as part of a strategy to maximize their chances to win office through the party-seats system. Seats disputed at the level of local territorial constituencies did not become more attractive in themselves, but suddenly took on great instrumental significance. Parties could not collect votes for the allocation of party seats if they did not have candidates running for office in districts. Not surprisingly, the average number of candidates per district rose from 2.5 in 1961 to 3.6 for the 1964-76 period, a figure close to the total number of parties. However, this increase was based on nominal candidacies, as most candidates registered by opposition parties had no realistic chances of winning seats.

The practice of nominal candidacies was not new at all. Access to the ballots had never involved any cost for electoral "adventurers". In the past, it was the possibility of winning office by riding on the coat-tails of opposition presidential candidates which encouraged many nominal candidacies to the Congress. Nevertheless, the party-seat system decisively encouraged the practice of nominal candidacies, as they became instrumental for opposition parties. More significant in terms of the development of opposition parties, however, was the fact that behind nominal candidacies there were also nominal party organizations in electoral districts. The system of party seats did not encourage the creation of local party organizations to compete for the seats disputed at the district level. On the contrary, politicians in the opposition had every incentive to concentrate organized effort on the party-seat system, where the rewards, though limited, were much greater than those obtained by trying to win majorities in electoral districts. Furthermore, as winning pluralities in electoral districts did not yield any extra seat for parties like the PAN, the incentives to develop party organizations at the local level were even lower than before.

The partial system of proportional representation

The 1963 electoral reform was only the first sign of a series of recurrent changes in basic institutions regulating competition for offices in the Chamber of Deputies. The rather erratic pattern of change that has characterized "electoral reformism" in Mexico reflects the shifting interests in the short term consequences of electoral regulations. The party-seat system was designed for the exhausted opposition parties of the early 1960s. But political parties evolve as they react to changes in the institutional environment. The growth of the PAN and the poor electoral performance of the PPS and the PARM prompted the reforms of 1971. The party-seats system

29 Molinar Horcasistas Op. Cit. Table 2.2, p. 71
30 Miguel Henríquez Guzmán's presidential campaign increased the average of candidates for the Chamber of Deputies per district to 3.9 in 1952. Ibid.
operated during five federal elections. But by 1976 the incoming López Portillo administration was convinced that the party-seats system was an institution whose time had passed. The executive drafted a broad legislative proposal, involving the amendment of 17 constitutional articles and a highly elaborated brand-new federal electoral law. It was by far the most comprehensive change in electoral legislation ever attempted since the 1933 constitutional amendments. It not only affected elective organs of the federal government; using the power of the national Constitution the federal government introduced new electoral institutions for state legislatures and municipalities.

The 1977 electoral reform sought the transformation of groups and political organizations of various kinds into political parties by relaxing access to the ballots and enhancing opportunities to achieve office in the Chamber of Deputies. The notion of political representation that animated this legislative change built on the assumption that political parties—particularly those in the opposition—were the exclusive carriers of abstract ideological views. Jesús Reyes Heroles, head of the administrative department that drafted the reform, announced it as a commitment to "enhancing the possibilities of political representation so that the complicated ideological mosaic of the nation ... can be captured through the representative organs of the State". 32 In some respects, the electoral framework introduced in 1977 ran against the tendencies towards stability in the party system set in motion since 1946, by encouraging the registration of new political parties to take part in federal, state, and municipal elections.

The first part of the reform consisted of a substantial reduction of the legal requirements for emerging political organizations to have access to the ballots. The overall number of party affiliates and the distribution of party membership in federal states and electoral districts necessary to attain registration were cut down. Furthermore, the new electoral framework provided for the legal status of "political organization" to regulate groups aspiring to registration as political parties but unable to meet the requirements; thereby making it clear that every ideological group was regarded as a potential political party. Kevin Midlebrook's characterization of the 1977 electoral reform as opening an "incorporating" stage in the evolution of the Mexican party system emphasizes the short-term effect pursued by the administration. 33 However, it fails to capture other important consequences, such as the factionalist and dispersing tendencies that the new institutional framework set in motion as it enticed small political groups and radical minorities to seek elective office as separate organizations.

The most significant institutional change introduced with the 1977 political reform touched on the structure of electoral competition and the opportunities provided for minority parties to win office in the Chamber of Deputies. The rather simplistic idea of party seats was replaced by a more comprehensive arrangement based on a partial system

of proportional representation. Minority parties were to compete for a fixed portion of offices in the Chamber of Deputies; 100 out of 400 seats were to be apportioned according to the share of the national vote obtained by each party. The other 300 seats remained to be disputed in federal electoral districts through the traditional system of simple majority. The party winning the majority of these seats was to be excluded from the allocation of proportional representation seats. The electoral threshold was kept at the symbolic level of 1.5 percent, allowing for rather small minority parties to achieve seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

The 1977 federal electoral law did not aim at improving levels of representation in the Chamber of Deputies in relation to share of the vote cast, as it is sometimes believed. In this respect, it followed the same line as the system of party seats -- providing a minimum of offices in the Chamber of Deputies to small political parties. The difference is that in 1977 the government sought to accommodate a greater number of parties in the partial system of proportional representation. For medium-sized parties like the PAN the new rules were not very favourable, as the 100 PR seats began to be allocated among a growing number of minority parties, the possibilities of improved representation for the PAN actually decreased. Dislodged from PR seats by emerging parties and unable to compete for relative majorities in electoral districts, the PAN experienced high levels of under-representation in the legislatures elected in 1982 and 1985 (Figure 4).

What is unique about the changes in electoral institutions introduced in 1977 is that they were devised in pursuance of certain effects on the non-institutional behaviour of radical political groups. The government justified the new electoral regulations as a preventive measure, aiming to mitigate the threat of social violence posed by political movements that, not having access to the ballots, were reduced to non-electoral and clandestine political action. Institutional incentives were to be used to re-orient the revolutionary activities of radical minorities to the less threatening purpose of seeking public office. Political analysts trace the origin of these movements back to the 1968 student mobilizations, met by the government with resounding violence. The bloody repression of the student movement in 1968 prompted the radicalization of groups identified with the socialist and revolutionary left. Despite the conciliatory policies of the Echeverría administration, known as the apertura democrática, they were still operating in some parts of the country by the mid-1970s. Thus, the 1977 political reform was presented as an institutional effort to reach out to these movements and encourage their participation in electoral and party politics. Apparently, the initiative met the target. A number of organizations from the revolutionary left were "incorporated into the system", as they were granted legal recognition as political parties and began to register candidates to the Chamber of Deputies in the 1979 mid-term elections.

34 Federal Law of Political Organizations and Electoral Processes was best known at the time as the LFOPPE.
However, the 1977 electoral reform was a highly elaborate and comprehensive legislative change addressing issues other than the incorporation of the left, which could have been achieved with a few amendments to the old electoral framework. The 1976 federal elections evinced the still fragile nature of Mexican electoral institutions, which undermined sustainable and organized political participation outside the PRI. Not that PRI government officials wanted a challenging and strong opposition, but there was then—as there has been before—the understanding that for the PRI to survive in the long term other political parties were necessary. And the PAN's failure to nominate a presidential candidate in 1976 came as a warming signal that the existence of opposition parties was not to be taken for granted. The deep internal divisions that paralysed the PAN in 1976 led to the first uncontested presidential elections in Mexican history, and were threatening to dismember the only working opposition party. Certainly, the PPS and the PARM were still around, but in 1976, as in all previous presidential elections, they supported the PRI nominee for the Presidency. An inability to nominate their own presidential candidate came as a confirmation that the PPS and the PARM were not working political parties. Thus, the 1977 political reform was an ambitious attempt to spawn party-building activities outside the existing opposition parties and without affecting the functioning and regular operation of the PRI. Government officials were prepared to extend the privileges of organizations registered as political parties and provide them with public funding and limited government-sponsored access to private and public TV and radio.

The major short-term effect of the electoral framework introduced in 1977 was a substantial increase in the number of parties taking part in federal elections. As many as seven political parties were able to achieve office in the legislature elected in 1979. Furthermore, a good number of "political organizations", ready to try their luck in the next elections, were on the waiting list of the Federal Electoral Commission.36 The parties that emerged after 1977 were in fact small political organizations, which joined the PPS and the PARM in their struggle to win a few seats in the Chamber of Deputies by making the most of a marginal electoral support. The most important incorporation achieved by the 1977 electoral reform was that of the Mexican Communist Party (PCM)37 Expectations ran high after its relatively good performance in 1979, for the PCM was the axis of a potentially promising unification of various socialist factions acting as separate political organizations. And, in effect, there were a number of attempts, promoted by the PCM leadership to unify the political forces identified with the socialist cause, turning the PCM into the PSUM in 1981 and the PMS in 1987.38 However, the unification of the

36 The CFE was the executive body charged with the implementation of the regulatory framework for federal elections. It evolved from a purely executive agency into a highly politicized organ with representatives of both houses of Congress, political parties and presided by the Minister of the Interior. The constitution of this body and the balance power within it have been one of the most sensitive issues concerning the administration of electoral processes. See Molinar Horcasistas Op. Cit.
37 Strictly speaking it was rather a "re-incorporation" as the PCM had been involved in federal elections campaigning for PRI (PRM) candidates in 1940 and 1946. See Barry Carr, Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico, (Lincoln. The University of Nebraska Press. 1992) p. 437
38 Barry Carr provides a detailed and insightful account of this process in Op. Cit.
socialist left proved not only a difficult task to fulfil, for deep divisions persisted, but also a disappointing electoral venture. As the socialist left grew more united in the 1980s its share of the national vote became ever smaller (Figure 5).

The extended system of proportional representation

Rather than the development of new political parties, what followed the 1977 political reform was the rapid and unexpected recovery of the PAN. In the 1982 federal elections the PAN returned to the levels of electoral support that it had in the early 1970s, and the old problem of under-representation of the expanding major opposition party reappeared. The 1985 mid-term elections sent to the Congress the largest number of parties ever, and delivered the highest level of under-representation for the PAN since 1961 (Figure 4). Government officials in the de la Madrid administration reacted quite promptly, convinced that the electoral framework enacted in 1977 needed some mending. The administration drafted an initiative that basically extended the partial system of proportional representation from 25 to 40 percent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies; that is to say, from 100 out of 400 to 200 out of 500 seats.

The reform increased the potential rewards for opposition parties, whose inability to compete with the PRI at district level made them entirely dependent on the seats disputed through the proportional representation system. The drafters of the reform worked on the assumption that the PRI, having a firm hold of more than 90 percent of the 300 seats contested at the level of electoral districts, could afford an increase of 100 seats in the size of the opposition, without any significant diminution of its control over the Chamber of Deputies. And in case the PRI's grip of electoral majorities at district level dropped below historical patterns, a special provision was introduced, called the "governability clause", whereby the party winning pluralities in the largest number of districts would be apportioned enough seats to attain an absolute majority in the House.

The results of the 1988 elections, when the new electoral framework was tested, came as a big surprise for both the government and the opposition. The PRI had an unexpected drop of 15 percent in voter support. This sudden change in electoral preferences was not followed by an increase in the vote cast for the major opposition party, the PAN. Instead, it was the group of small opposition parties which came to the fore. The PPS, the PARM and the PST (PFCRN) which formed the National Democratic Front (FDN), to campaign for presidential candidate Cuauhtémoc Cardenas, reached unprecedented levels of electoral support. The brief history of the FDN evinced a new closer connection between presidential and congressional elections resulting from the enlarged proportional representation system in the Chamber of Deputies.

The extraordinary performance of the parties forming the FDN was the by-product of the electoral mobilization aroused by presidential candidate Cuauhtémoc Cardenas. The PPS, the PARM and the PFCRN returned to their low historical levels of electoral support in the following elections (Figures 3 and 5). But presidential elections have never
been so significant for opposition parties in the Chamber of Deputies. Even though the vote gathered by Cárdenas split among several political parties, his candidacy in 1988 produced the longest coat-tails in Mexican electoral history. The 1986 reform allowed for the voter support gained by opposition candidates to the presidency at national level to be reflected with greater accuracy on their party’s share of seats in the legislature. Under the 1977 electoral framework, the 1988 presidential elections would have had no important repercussion on the Chamber of Deputies. As it happened, the PRI majority in the house shrank to ten seats, even though it still had won the majority in over 75 percent of the electoral districts.

The electoral mobilization aroused by Cárdenas’ presidential campaign in 1988 shows remarkable similarities to the old form opposition movement which Vincent Padgett described as "transient political opposition". Cárdenas headed a dissident movement within the PRI emerging on the occasion of the presidential nomination. He then ran for the presidency as an independent candidate, since the nomination of the FARM and the support of the other parties forming the FDN was merely nominal. There was, however, something significantly new in the cardenista movement —it did not disintegrate after the elections. The leadership of the socialist left, the PMS, put forward the initiative to form a new political party drawing on the nucleus of the electoral opposition movement led by presidential candidate Cárdenas. The formation of the new party was driven by the wide range of opportunities opened by the enormous potential of a Cárdenas’s second run for the presidency in the 1994 elections. But also the new party could build on the organized effort to win state and municipal offices in the regions where Cárdenas gathered significant electoral support. Additionally, there were great potential returns in the Chamber of Deputies provided by the system of proportional representation, if a cardenista coalition ran in the following mid-term elections on a single party slate.

However, the efforts to coordinate politicians from different parties entering the Congress on Cárdenas’s coat-tails failed, making it clear that the nucleus of the cardenista movement was reduced to the small group of dissidents who left the PRI on the occasion of the 1988 presidential nomination. No other political party endorsed the PMS initiative. And as the FDN dismembered in the Chamber of Deputies, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and the PRI dissidents forged an alliance with the PMS leadership to create the new party in 1989 -the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). The PRD began performing well in some state and municipal elections, promoting politicians to offices where opposition parties barely existed in past. The 1991 mid-term congressional elections, however, showed that it was much more difficult for the PRD to capture the electoral support gathered by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas at the national level. The new party gained only one third of the vote cast for Cárdenas in 1988, far below the expectations of the party founders.

The PMS was the last party to get on the cardenista tide in 1988 and benefited the least from it. The PMS’s share of the national vote in 1988 was hardly above its historical level (Figure 5).

This is the case of legislative and municipal elections in federal states such as Michoacan, Mexico and Guerrero.
Nevertheless, the PRD doubled the old PMS's share of the national vote and asserted its position as the third congressional party, below the PAN.

The 1988 presidential contest was the most competitive in the era of PRI dominance. The PRI presidential nominee, who campaigned for what seemed a highly predictable triumph, saw a substantial drop in his party's historical levels of electoral support, and took office amid massive mobilizations against ballot rigging and electoral fraud. The political forces aroused by the 1988 federal elections immediately pointed to the electoral institutional framework, which seemed as weak and ill-devised as never before, and prompted a process of intense piecemeal institutional change during president Salinas' administration. The extended system of proportional representation in the Chamber of Deputies did not escape revision. Change was driven in this respect by the PRI's interest to provide to the party winning the majority of the congressional districts access to the allocation of the 200 PR seats in order to attain "manageable" majorities in the Chamber. The rules approved in 1987 guaranteed that this party have enough seats to control the absolute majority in the house. However, the experience in the legislature elected in 1988 convinced PRI officials that a bare 10-seats majority made the task of governing a large body like the Chamber of Deputies far too complicated.

The arrangement negotiated between the PRI and the PAN in 1989 limited the application of the "governability clause" by stipulating that the largest party needed 35 percent of the vote cast to attain the absolute majority in the house (251 seats), and then that such party be granted two additional seats for every percentage point of the vote obtained above the 35 percent lower limit. The new rules were definitely a compromise and, therefore, they reflected the bargaining position of the two parts. The PRI insisted that the major party should attain "manageable" majorities in the house irrespective of its ability to control a large percentage of the districts. The PAN's achievement in this particular respect was perhaps minor --fixing a 15 percent limit to the level of over-representation of the largest party, though its leaders claimed concessions on other areas. Nevertheless, the new rules were an artificial concoction blatantly reflecting the immediate interests of the PRI, and they were not to last.

As the bargaining position of the parties involved changed in 1993, the arrangement hammered out four years earlier was replaced. The idea of a governability
clause was dropped altogether. Instead the largest party was allowed to take part, with its share of national vote, in the allocation of the 200 PR seats, originally reserved for minority parties. Two limitations were established, however. First, if the majority party’s share of the national vote is less than, or equal to, 60 percent, it cannot attain more than an overall number of 300 seats (60 percent of the house). Second, if the majority party gains more than 60 percent of the vote, a “maximum representation clause” provides that no single party can have more than 315 of the Chamber’s seats (63 percent of the house). These arrangements still reflect the immediate interests of the PRI as the party that dominates in the competition for seats disputed through the first-past-the-post system at district level. They protect the PRI from having its majority in the Chamber of Deputies reduced to compromising levels by an eventual drop in its control over the 300 simple-majority seats, such as that produced in 1988. However, the new rules also guarantee that opposition parties have at least 185 PR seats to be distributed exclusively among themselves; and this number can easily go up to 200 as the PRI is finding it increasingly difficult to retain levels of electoral support of more than 60 percent.

The rules introduced in 1993 also imply that, given the historical level of simple-majority seats controlled by the PRI, an increase in other parties’ capability to win relative majorities at district level will render a proportionate reduction in the number of PR seats to be allocated among opposition parties. This is so, because, up to a certain level, fewer simple-majority seats for PRI only means that this party will be able take more of its share of PR seats. Accordingly, the PRI’s majority in the Chamber of Deputies cannot be threatened simply by a sudden increase in the opposition’s share of the national vote; it will require a substantial advancement from other parties in the competition for pluralities at district level. But, taking into consideration that the record of simple-majority seats captured by the opposition, as it was achieved in 1988, is only 67 out of 300, we can appreciate that the PRI’s domination in the Chamber of Deputies is far from being threatened (Figure 6). Thus, allowing the largest party to take part in the allocation of PR seats works in practice as an enhanced “governability clause”, although in theory the possibility exists that no party attains the absolute majority of seats in the house.

The 1988 federal elections aroused much speculation about a major realignment in Mexican party politics. The long-standing ascendency of a single party seemed to have reached a stage of dissolution. As the movement headed by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas evolved into a political party, a new significant electoral force came to the fore. The rise of the new cardenista movement and the PRD, along with the slow, but sustained, advance of the old opposition represented by the PAN, were posing the most important challenge ever faced by the PRI. In some federal states the change toward a two party system apparently took place shortly after the 1988 national elections, as PRI nominees confronted for the first time opposition candidates—running under the banner of either the PAN or the PRD—with realistic chances of winning office. However, the performance of

43 In a few cases like Baja California and, more recently, Chihuahua, PAN candidates actually won the gubernatorial office. In other federal states such as Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí and Michoacán.
opposition candidates in the 1991 and 1994 federal elections to renew the Chamber of Deputies show that the tendency toward single party politics at district level has overwhelmed the moderate advances made by opposition parties in 1988. In the 1991 mid-term congressional election the PRI won relative majorities in 290 of 300 house districts, recovering its historical level of territorial electoral control. And in the general election of 1994, despite significant increases in the PAN and PRD's share of the national vote, prompted by the electoral support gathered by their respective presidential nominees (Diego Fernández and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas), PRI candidates to the Chamber of Deputies retained relative majorities in 92.6 percent of the 300 house districts (Figure 7). The performance of opposition parties at district level has been highly unstable, inconsistently surging to win majorities in different places, and then retreating to give way to normal single party politics. There has been no such thing as a safe seat for the PAN, nor has this party been able consistently to win relative majorities in more than a couple of districts during the last four elections. As for the PRD, it won its first five simple-majority seats in the 1994 general elections.

Conclusions

The party that has dominated Mexican politics for the last 65 years emerged as a large coalition of officeholders. In the beginning, the party functioned as the coordinator of a large congressional majority acting as an Electoral College to select an interim president. Later the same coalition was used to nominate its first presidential candidate. However, the politicians who joined the emerging political party were highly autonomous. They led independent political organizations created to seek offices disputed at state and district levels. This is the reason why the PNR -- as this party was first named -- failed to operate in the Congress as a regular and cohesive governing coalition.

The role and functions of the party were substantially enhanced as the Constitution was amended to prohibit consecutive re-election of all offices in the federal, state and municipal governments. The institution of no re-election brought about a system of binding rotation in office, which transformed the dominant party from a weak coordinator of locally elected office holders, into a powerful mechanism of political promotion, operating in a context of rapid circulation of political cadres.

The consequences of rotation of office inside the dominant party were multiple, but two major structural changes stand out: a tendency toward increasing centralization and cohesiveness, and a higher institutional capability to resolve disputes for the party nomination and absorb potential electoral opposition. With office rotation, the political careers of officeholders became highly dependent on the external party leadership. Political promotion was no longer to be sought in the elective bodies in which there were strong opposition candidates gathering unprecedented electoral support; they all accused the PRI of electoral fraud and led massive mobilizations to prevent the PRI candidate from taking office.
officeholders served, but through the party organization, controlling nomination for higher elective office, or the executive power, controlling access to appointive office in the administration. Therefore, rotation in office laid in the hands of the executive and the party powerful means to sanction and reward the behaviour and performance of individual politicians. With non-consecutive re-election the dominant party in the Congress evolved quickly into a disciplined and cohesive governing majority.

Another important effect of non-consecutive re-election has to do with the institutional capability to deal with conflicting ambitions inside the dominant party and to absorb the leadership of emerging political movements. The regular circulation of officeholders has allowed the dominant party to reduce the disputes among politicians seeking nomination for elective offices, and prevent their development into electoral opposition. At the same time, no re-election has regularly provided the party with an open slate to accommodate and promote to public office leaders coming from external organizations.

The effects of rotation in office upon the existing opposition parties are difficult to isolate from the consequences of other institutions and the advantages that the dominant party has had as a governing majority. Nevertheless, available information suggest that non-consecutive re-election has strongly discouraged politicians from organizing second parties at local level in their attempts to seek offices elected by small regional constituencies through the first-past-the-post system. During the period in which the Chamber of Deputies was entirely a direct-representation body, opposition parties, as organizations led by politicians with realistic chances of winning office, only existed in a handful of districts. Non-consecutive re-election rendered the prospect of seeking elective office attractive only to local politicians as part of a larger scheme of political promotion through which they could advance their careers. Opposition parties have simply been unable to compete with the local PRI in providing ambitious politicians a wider network of promotion. Therefore, the net effect of rotation in office at local level has been to restrict partisan organizational efforts to individual attempts to capture the nomination of the dominant party.

The institutional incentive for the building and development of opposition parties came about with the creation of seats in the Chamber of Deputies to be apportioned through the system of proportional representation. PR seats were designed to sustain and reward the organizational effort displayed by opposition parties, which in the early 1960s were clearly fading away. The enhancement of the partial system of proportional representation through the 1977 and 1987 electoral reforms further encouraged the development of the main opposition party, the PAN, and the creation of new parties. The long-term effect of the institutional experiment with proportional representation has been the expansion of the opposition as a whole vis-à-vis the dominant party. This trend has been sustained by the steady growth of the PAN and the incorporation of new political parties after 1977.

However, in assessing the advancement of opposition parties in the last decades it is important to emphasize that this has been limited to seats in the Chamber of Deputies.
allocated though the system of proportional representation (Figure 6). A separate analysis of electoral results for the seats disputed at district level under the first-past-the-post rule throws a different light on the evolution of the Mexican one-party system. It clearly shows no change at all in the ascendancy of the dominant party (Figure 7). The persistently poor performance of candidates registered by opposition parties in district level elections seems to confirm that the powerful tendencies toward one party politics produced by the system of rapid and comprehensive rotation in office are still at work.

The substantial increases in the share of the national vote of opposition parties in the last general elections are not necessarily a symptom of a party realignment or an irreversible tendency toward a more competitive party system. Recent changes in the behaviour of the electorate have been prompted by unusually strong and appealing opposition candidates to the presidency. But although opposition parties have been the immediate beneficiaries from these changes, it is still uncertain whether they will have permanent repercussions in the party system. Mid-term congressional elections have shown that opposition parties face significant difficulties in capturing the electoral support mobilized by their presidential nominees.
ANNEX

Figure 1

PRI vs. Opposition
Representation in the Chamber of Deputies, 1946-1994

Source: Diario de Debates de la Cámara de Diputados
Figure 2

PRI vs. Opposition
Distribution of the national vote in elections to the Chamber of Deputies

Source: See Figure 1
Figure 3

Share of the national vote of the old opposition parties: PAN, PPS and PARM

Source: See Figure 1
Figure 4

PAN's share of the national vote and representation in the Chamber of Deputies, 1946-1994

Source: See Figure 1
Figure 5

Share of the national vote of the PAN and the parties incorporated after the 1977 electoral reform

Source: See Figure 1
Figure 6

Representation of opposition parties in the Chamber of Deputies

Source: See Figure 1
Figure 7

PRI vs. Opposition
Percentage of plurality seats won at district level

Source: See Figure 1
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