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THE PRI'S CHOICE

Balancing Democratic Reform and Its Own Salvation

Adam Brinegar, Scott Morgenstern and Daniel Nielson

ABSTRACT

This article explores the puzzle of why Mexico's long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) implemented a series of electoral reforms in 1996 that precipitated its own downfall. Previous work explaining the process of Mexican democratization focuses on foreign pressures, interparty bargaining and a unified PRI. Alternatively, we argue that internal divisions in the PRI – conjoined with the threat of a presidential deal with the opposition – determined the particular shape of the reform. The article uses a bargaining model to illustrate the conjunction of interests between the President and PRI hard-liners while taking into account the shadow role played by the opposition. We argue, finally, that the model can be extended to aid explanations of other democratic transitions, as well as general cases of majority-party decision-making and coalition bargaining.

KEY WORDS ■ Mexico ■ electoral reform ■ democratization

The forerunners of Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) consolidated their power in the 1920s and the party held its legislative majority until 1997 and the presidency until 2000. While many factors conditioned the collapse of PRI hegemony, we focus here on the 1996 reforms of the electoral system which compelled a qualitative change in the electoral campaigns of both the PRI and the opposition parties, the PAN and the PRD. Mexico began reforming its electoral system in 1977, but the 1996 reforms provided an unprecedented leveling of the playing field. Previous reforms had reduced electoral fraud and increased representation for the opposition, but they allowed the PRI to safely remain in power because of its grip on the media, its massively disproportionate share of campaign expenditures and its continued ability to rely on fraud in many parts of the

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country. In addition to dealing with the gross over-representation, corruption, and other factors, the 1996 reform provided very generous campaign funds and extensive free media time to the parties, thereby allowing the opposition to run professional campaigns for the first time. Charges of corruption, the long economic crisis, social conflicts, and other contextual factors led voters away from the PRI, but the reforms allowed the historic opposition victories.

The reform process is particularly interesting because it was the PRI itself that approved the reforms that led to its own demise. What conditions led PRI members to agree to reforms that were, in effect, political suicide? We derive our answer from consideration of a bargaining game between the President, hard-line factions in his own party, and the opposition, with the latter group playing a shadow, but still central, role. While the President had much to gain by implementing democratizing reforms, such reforms threatened PRI electoral dominance. At the same time, because the PRI hard-liners were concerned with their falling finance opportunities from legitimate private donors and illegitimate sources including government coffers, the prospect of public campaign finances was important to their survival. Oscar Levín, a PRI negotiator on the final reform package, argued, 'On the issue of financing, it was the life of the party that was in play.'¹ This, however, does not explain why the conservative PRI legislators – 'the dinosaurs' – came to support a plan that, in addition to guaranteeing themselves public funding, also gave such great support to the opposition as to foster the PRI's own demise. Our response is that while conservative members of the party did succeed in imposing several important modifications to the reform package, the dinosaurs calculated that pushing too hard would lead the President to turn against his own party and cut a deal with the opposition. The President did have a preference for working with his own party, but the key to explaining the outcome of reform comes in recognizing the preferences of the players involved (President, opposition, and dinosaurs) and the differential level of utility the President would gain from working with the dinosaurs versus working with the opposition.

In conclusion, the dinosaurs went along with the reform process in an attempt to save a potential party split and an even more extensive reform. These reforms may well have contributed to the PRI having to deal with its unfamiliar minority status in the legislature for 1997, 2000, and 2003 (if not their presidential loss in 2000), but the reforms also assured the PRI a long-term source of campaign finance, perhaps helping the party to position itself for a future return to power. The PRI's success in recent state and local elections shows that the party will be a serious contender in the 2006 presidential election.

While this article focuses on the political transition in Mexico, this case can be seen as an example of political bargaining between the legislature and executive (e.g. Cox and Morgenstern, 2001). The specific example that we consider also parallels some of the literature on democratic transitions

that asks why those in power initiate reforms that lead to the end of their own rule (e.g. Przeworski, 1992). As we argue in the conclusion, our study helps elucidate both of these issues by providing a framework to consider the bargaining between a leader, that leader's coalition, and other groups.

We employ a spatial model to help explain the bargaining outcome in a way that contrasts with prior accounts of similar transitions. Unlike standard spatial models, our model takes account of partisan issues involved in the dealings by considering the relative benefit that the bargainers derive from striking deals with one group relative to another. That is, while most models assume that bargainers accept deals based only on a policy's relative distance from the bargainer's ideal, we argue that bargainers also consider the political effects of coalition partners. In this case, we argue that while the President and his followers could have won a policy position quite similar to their ideal by working with the opposition, such a move would have come with very high political costs. The President, therefore, gained more utility by compromising somewhat on the policy position and dealing with his party's hard-liners. To conclude, we tell the tale of Mexican electoral reform by considering the preferences and bargaining positions of the President, the PRI hard-liners, and the opposition parties, using a spatial model to sharpen the logic.

The Reform and the Context

As the 1994 presidential election neared, the PRI's prospects were mixed. The outgoing President Salinas had recouped significant popularity, but the PRI was dealing with the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas and then the assassination of the party's presidential nominee, Luis Donaldo Colosio. Still, the PRI finished the 1994 elections with higher credibility than it did in the previous presidential election in 1988, as a majority of voters believed *Priista* Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000) had actually won the presidency without fraud (Camp, 1999; Eisenstadt, 1998). Zedillo prevailed with a bit less than 50 percent of the vote; however, owing to the divided opposition, he won by a wide margin over second place finisher, *Panista* Diego Fernandez de Cevallos.

In his inaugural address, Zedillo presented the case for 'the definitive [electoral] reform.' 'The time has come for democracy to embrace every sphere of social coexistence . . . Mexico is demanding reform which, based on the broadest political consensus, will eradicate the suspicions, recriminations and distrust that cloud the electoral process' (Zedillo, BBC Broadcast, 1 December 2004).

But behind the calls for increased democratization was a gloomy electoral picture for the PRI. Although the PRI had won the presidency and maintained its majority in Congress, its long dominance had eroded (see Table 1). Furthermore, the PRI's dominance over state governorships was also being

Table 1. Percentage of total vote won by candidates for Congress by major party, 1985–2000

<i>Year</i>	<i>PRI</i>	<i>PAN</i>	<i>PRD</i>	<i>PPS</i>	<i>PARM</i>	<i>PFCRM</i>	<i>Other</i>
1985	65	15.5	–	2.0	1.7	–	15.8
1988	50.4	17.1	–	10.5	6.2	10.5	5.3
1991	61.4	17.7	8.3	1.8	2.1	4.4	4.3
1994	50.3	25.8	16.1	0.7	0.9	1.1	5.1
1997	39.1	26.6	25.7	0.3	0.7	–	7.6
2000	36.9	38.2*	18.7#	–	0.7	–	5.5

Source: Camp 1999; IFE.

Parties: PRI = Institutional Revolutionary Party; PAN = National Action Party; PPS = Popular Socialist Party; PARM = Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution; PRD = Democratic Revolutionary Party; PFCRM = Cardenista Front for National Reconstruction Party.

* Aggregate vote for Alliance for Change (PAN + Green Party).

Aggregate vote for Alliance for Mexico (PRD + Labor Party + Convergence for the Democracy + Social Alliance Party + Nationalist Society Party).

challenged for the first time, a result that was important for many reasons, including the state government's role in providing funds to the national party and media exposure within their own state.²

Soon after Zedillo took office, the party faced new problems that further eroded its political support. Most notably, the new President had to confront a major economic crisis. On top of this, Salinas and his brother were implicated in corruption scandals, sending the ex-president into self-imposed exile and the brother to jail. The end of the PRI's era of dominance was near.

The downward spiral overtook the PRI in the mid-term elections of 1997 when the PRI fell 12 seats short of the 251 needed for a majority in the Chamber of Deputies (see Table 2). The elections were largely contested on the issue of democratization (Klesner, 1997a), though economic issues also played a role. The PRI had not proven particularly vulnerable to economic retrospective voting in the past (Dominguez and McCann, 1996), but given the hardships that followed the 1995 peso crisis (Dominguez, 1999), these issues were in play in 1997. Furthermore, voters may have been less risk-averse because of the recent successes of opposition parties at state and local levels, and voters had increased familiarity with opposition governance (Morgenstern and Zechmeister, 2001).

While certainly affected by these contextual factors, the outcome was also significantly influenced by the 1996 electoral reform, which improved both the competitive position of the opposition parties and the integrity of the vote. The 1996 electoral reform comprised sweeping changes in both the constitution of the republic and the federal election law, the *Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales* (COFIPE). Along with other analysts of the Mexican transition, we argue that the 1996

Table 2. Electoral results for the Chamber of Deputies in 1997

<i>Party</i>	<i>Vote %</i>	<i>District Seats Won</i>	<i>PR Seats Won</i>	<i>Total Seats</i>
PRI	39.1	165	74	239 (47.8%)
PAN	26.6	64	57	121 (24.2%)
PRD	25.7	70	55	125 (25.0%)
PVEM	3.8	0	8	8 (1.6%)
PT	2.5	1	6	7 (1.4%)
Others	2.1	0	0	0
Totals		300	200	500

Source: Instituto Federal Electoral (<http://www.ife.org.mx>)

Eligible Vote = Total vote less annulled votes and votes for parties failing to achieve 2%.

electoral reforms made the difference in the 1997 elections (see Weldon, 2001a, b; Lujambio, 2000).

The new electoral law affected the PRI's failure to maintain control of the Congress by reducing over-representation, reorganizing the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) to guarantee its independence, setting up the direct election of the mayor of Mexico City and altering the method for electing senators (see Klesner, 1997a). We focus, however, mainly on another aspect of the reform: the politics behind and the influence of the public funding of campaigns and the provision of generous amounts of free media time. The funds are first interesting for their sheer magnitude – \$264 million – an amount that was not only the most generous (per capita) public campaign funding in the world, it was five times the amount that all parties claimed to have spent in 1994 (Dominguez, 1999)!³ Also intriguing was the way in which the funds were distributed to the parties; the final bill required that 30 percent of the funds be divided in equal shares to each party, with the remaining funds parsed according to the parties' vote share in the prior election (1994). This compromise gave the PRI a large financial advantage, but it still gave the PAN and PRD sufficient funds to run much more professional campaigns than had been previously possible. What is more, increased capacity to monitor the elections meant that the PRI could not spend campaign money in the controversial ways that had assured its victories in past elections.

In addition to the cash, the 1996 reforms guaranteed the opposition much freer access to the media. With the reforms, 250 free broadcasting hours on radio and 200 broadcasting hours on television during the presidential election cycle (50 percent less for legislative elections) plus an additional 10,000 radio and 400 television spots of 20 seconds each were allocated to the parties according to the same 30/70 split as was used to distribute the campaign funds (with a lottery to select the specific times) (IFE, <http://www.ife.org.mx>).

Despite the PRI's advantage in funding and media time, the fact that the opposition had increased access to the media and enough money to get its message out was critical to the PRI's loss of the Congress in 1997. In the negotiations over the reforms, the opposition did not want the PRI to receive credit for democratization and vigorously protested against the excessive amounts of public funding that the government had allocated. In spite of their opposition, 'a crucial factor [in the opposition victory] had been the huge campaign budgets they (the opposition) received from the government, funds they had attacked Zedillo for demanding. Once the parties realized how their appeal was amplified by the television and radio time they could buy with the windfall, they had quietly dropped their objections' (Preston and Dillon, 2004: 298). Camp (1999: 190) agrees, noting that the two things that had prevented the opposition from winning more in the past were its lack of resources and the PRI's total dominance of the airways (see also Lawson 2002). The reforms allowed the PRI to maintain its advantage, but perhaps the PRI members failed to read Jacobson (1978), who argues that spending has a much greater marginal impact for challengers to the incumbent party than the incumbent party itself. That is, the PRI's advantage in funds was more than offset by the greater relative impact the new funds had for the PAN and PRD.⁴

The Puzzles of Reform

In most previous studies of Mexican politics there is an explicit assumption – with much evidence to support it – that the president was the undisputed leader of the party and PRI legislators always voted with the president. As a result, explaining policy changes in the traditional period required little more than a specification of the president's preferences. As we substantiate below, Zedillo had a clear preference for a democratizing reform package, but his preferences are insufficient to explain the 1996 reform, because Zedillo had granted the party and its congressional delegation much more independence than had his predecessors.

Zedillo often talked about creating a 'healthy' distance between himself and the party, and the consequences were evident. For example, in contrast to his predecessor, who had removed or reassigned 19 of the country's 31 governors, Zedillo proved unable to remove two recalcitrant governors. With reference to the modifications of the 1996 reform imposed by the PRI's congressional delegation, Deputy Jorge Moreno proclaimed: 'This is not a matter for the president of the republic. This is what we [the PRI's congressional delegation] want.'⁵ The conflict and independence did not end with the 1997 election loss, as thereafter the dinosaurs moved to block any further political reforms (Rubio, 2004).

Given the majority status of the PRI in Congress and the greater independence of the party from its president, two puzzles emerge out of the 1996

electoral reform. First, why did the PRI legislative delegation agree to *any* reforms that ceded their considerable electoral advantages to the opposition? Second, why were the actual reforms so extensive?

The solution to the first puzzle is relatively straightforward; in addition to domestic and international pressures for reform and the PRI's continued need to co-opt the opposition and placate the public, the party needed a continuing and secure source of funds. Until that time, the PRI had been able to count on the president to provide funds from the treasury, but the new relationship of the president with the party meant a loss of that source. Preston and Dillon (2004: 10) report that the PRI's 'most strategic reserve came from a secret discretionary fund controlled by the President. Soon after Zedillo took office, he realized that Carlos Salinas had secretly paid millions of dollars to Colosio's – and by extension his own – presidential campaign. As Zedillo argued in public for generous government financing of campaigns, he told PRI leaders privately to get ready to break their dependence on cash from *Los Pinos*.'

Likewise, the party could not count on the state governors, owing to the opposition's control of many state governorships and legislatures. The PRI's widespread use of state coffers to finance its political activities was revealed after the opposition's victories. For example, after winning Baja California in 1989, the PAN discovered that the PRI had diverted more than \$10 million in government funds to its 1989 gubernatorial campaign (Cornelius, 1996: 58). Julio Hernandez López, the former director of the PRI's state executive committee in San Luis Potosí, claimed the state governments 'sent surreptitiously between 200,000 and 1 million pesos monthly to the (state executive committees) of the PRI.'⁶ Further, the increased domestic and international oversight of campaign finances increased the PRI's need for a new and above-board source of funds.⁷ Zedillo in particular seemed to champion the notion of public financing, because of the need to reduce the party's dependency on narco-trafficking and other illicit business. Loss of state governorships also meant less media time for the PRI. In the 1995 gubernatorial election in the Yucatan, for example, the PRI had a 9 to 1 advantage in media access (Cornelius, 1996). In addition, loss of access to electoral office meant that the PRI had fewer resources to offer its followers, resulting in a breakdown of party discipline (Rubio, 2004).

International pressures and the PRI's need for cash explain why there was a reform to the financing system, but those pressures do not explain why Zedillo's proposal was so beneficial to the opposition or why the PRI conservatives were successful in limiting those benefits in important ways. The solution here requires a further consideration of the inter- and intra-party bargaining process, which became evident in the last-minute changes that the PRI legislative delegation made to the reform package. These changes – made while Zedillo was out of the country – both reflect differences between the preferences of the president and his party's legislators, and those legislators' significant, but circumscribed, negotiating leverage.

The amendments watered down the reform in several ways. First, the PRI delegation significantly increased the total amount of money to be distributed among the parties. More interestingly, they further benefited themselves by increasing the proportion of funds to be divided based on the parties' electoral support from 60 to 70 percent (thereby reducing the share to be divided equally among the parties from 40 to 30 percent). They also altered the distribution of the media time in a similar manner.

A number of other changes also point to retrenchment. First, the last-minute additions restored the government's ability to tout its public works projects through the media in the five months prior to an election. The changes also placed the enforcement of electoral law violations, and vote buying in particular, under the purview of the Attorney General, a PRI appointee, as opposed to the independent IFE. Additionally, Mexicans living abroad – totaling nearly 8 million, many of whom were expected to support the opposition – were prevented from voting in the 2000 presidential election. Finally, spending in excess of the mandated campaign finance limits was decriminalized, and other enforcement provisions loosened. Essentially, this meant the PRI – which needed to spend more than other parties to support its clientelistic network – would be able to skirt the campaign finance laws with relative impunity. Related to this, the amendments eliminated a special committee to audit party finances. They also imposed restrictions for parties on fielding joint candidates. This was a point of major importance for the PRI, because they won against a divided opposition in 1994 and understood that a united opposition candidate would probably prevail.

The disintegration of the consensus was the hard-liners' response to electoral defeats on November 10 in the states of México, Hidalgo, and Coahuila and their sense of empowerment after successfully pushing through a number of substantial changes to the PRI's rules and policies at the seventeenth national PRI congress. Zedillo's faction of the PRI seemed to publicly accept the hard-liners' changes, as the hard-liners asserted themselves and gained control of the PRI caucus.

Immediately after a committee report detailing the hard-liners' changes to the reform was released, the PAN backed out of the deal and refused to vote for the reform. The PAN negotiator, Alejandro González Alcocer, argued that the changes were the result of the 'fear of the hard-line sector of the PRI and a lack of vision that they have of the changes that are occurring in the country. The reforms are reactions to losing prebends, but they do not want to take into account that with this attitude they are going to lose more, because the changes in the country are not going to stop.' The PRD's decision to vote against reform, however, was more difficult because of the extent to which they believed they would benefit from the reforms. Much of the PRD's ultimate choice was based on how a compromise would look publicly if the PAN left the negotiations but the PRD did not. On the one hand, the PRD would be seen as moderates, playing the role the Panistas

had played in other electoral reforms; on the other hand, the PAN might be able to take up the democratization mantle the PRD had previously owned and monopolize any gain to be had for publicly pushing for even greater reform. But the PRI refused to give in to last minute negotiating efforts by the PRD, and the PRD voted against the new reforms in a party caucus, with only 7 legislators voting in favor. PRD negotiator Jesús Zambrano argued that the new reforms were the 'result of the PRI, as an immediate expression of the results of the [state] elections of Sunday the 10th. They read into this that they are ceding too much power and that they may not have total control over the exercise of power.'⁸

The result, then, was that in spite of Zedillo's great effort in generating a bill that would draw the support of both the opposition and his own divided party, he largely failed on both accounts. The degree of reform and retrenchment continued to divide the PRI and the bill that Zedillo eventually signed was passed through the Chamber with only the PRI membership (less one dissenter) voting in favor, and passed in the Senate with the votes of the *Priistas* plus 22 *Panistas*.

We have already explained the lack of inter-party consensus, but we still need an explanation for why Zedillo gave in to the retrenchment. There are at least four important reasons for Zedillo's decision. First, he believed he had achieved his 'definitive reform' and that the PAN and PRD had scuttled the consensus simply for electoral gain.⁹ Second, the retrenchment took place only three months prior to the congressional elections, and Zedillo had to take into account the electoral costs of opening a strong intra-party rift. Third, he continued to need a unified PRI to advance his legislative agenda. Fourth, the reform package resolved the need to guarantee the PRI's solvency.

If we accept that Zedillo had to align himself with his party's hard-liners, an even more critical question is why the retrenchment was not even more profound? Spending, for example, could have been tilted even more towards the PRI's favor. If, for example, the proposed bill had moved to a 100 percent division of the money based on electoral shares, as is common elsewhere, the party still could have claimed credit for a democratizing bill while shoring up its precarious financing position under reduced electoral threat from the opposition. The solution to the puzzle of limited retrenchment, we believe, lies with the bargaining positions and leverage held by Zedillo, the PRI delegation, and the opposition. Below we use a spatial model to argue that the *Priistas* did not go farther for fear that Zedillo could veto their changes and negotiate with the opposition to gain a deal closer to his ideal point. In broader terms, our explanation of the reform does not rely on the miscalculation of reformers, but instead on identifying the equilibrium that emerged out of a complex bargaining process.

A model of Intra- and Inter-Party Bargaining

Simple one- or two-dimensional spatial models of bargaining use circular indifference curves to represent the idea that actors gain equal utility with outcomes that are equidistant from their bliss point. As such, these models assume that players work to assure a final policy that is as close to their ideal point as possible, unconcerned with whether the final deal implies compromises with players to their left or right (in one dimension).

These assumptions, however, ignore too many aspects of politics. Some players will gain more utility from a little more spending than a little less. And, even more clearly, players' utility depends crucially on the partners with whom they compromise. Coalitions are premised on this idea, in that coalition partners see advantages in working continually with given parties in long-term alliances rather than negotiating with whomever will offer the best potential deal after a specific election.

President Zedillo faced such a choice in 1996. His preferred reform package was closer to the wishes of the opposition parties than to the preferences of the hard-liners in his own party. He had to choose, therefore, between his more preferred policy negotiated with the opposition or a less-preferred policy that would win assent from the dinosaurs of his own party.

Along a spatial model of political reform, the players are arrayed as shown in Figure 1. Their posited ideal points reflect the idea that all players favor some kind of reform. Even the dinosaurs (D), given the external pressures, electoral dynamics, and their need for an infusion of campaign funds, favored some reform. However, the figure is also drawn to represent a vast difference in the degree of reform preferred by the dinosaurs and the opposition (O). We propose that Zedillo and his followers – the *Zedillistas* – fall in between these two extreme positions (at point Z). Further, Zedillo and his followers are pivotal, since Zedillo's signature is necessary for passage and his followers plus either the opposition or the dinosaurs form a majority voting coalition.

The diagram represents the President's ideal reform proposal as R1. That position includes electoral reform at national and local levels but skews the financing scheme to benefit the PRI more than its rivals. This position is far to the left of the dinosaurs' ideal (R2), since that group is concerned with the high political cost of losing control of the political machinery and the decrease in their financial advantages. The opposition's preferred policy, R3, would entail a fairer distribution of public financing, and an independent IFE with the ability to control not only the national but also state and local elections, and to enforce electoral rules vigorously. The addition of state and local elections would help prevent the continued persistence of 'authoritarian enclaves' in areas that are dominated by the PRI, such as the more rural, southern states.

Simple models of this sort predict the outcome to be at the median player's ideal point if all players can make policy proposals. In this example

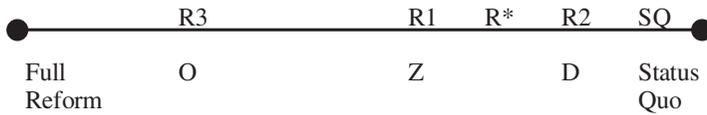


Figure 1. Simple spatial representation of preferences

the dinosaurs would vote against R1 (since the status quo is closer to their ideal than is R1), but the opposition would then join the President and his *Zedillistas* at R1 as a significant improvement for them over the status quo. No alternative policy could defeat R1, since the President would decline moves away from that point. R1, however, was not the end result of the 1996 reform. Instead, the last minute changes imposed by the legislature yielded an outcome somewhere between D and R1.

Key to the outcome was the President's preference to work with the PRI dinosaurs but willingness to negotiate with the opposition. To model this process, Figure 2 adds three curves to the spatial model that represent alternative levels of utility the President would realize; the lowest curve represents dealing with the opposition and the upper two represent different potential levels of the president's utility from working with the PRI dinosaurs. The President's benefit from dealing with the dinosaurs relative to the opposition is the vertical distance between the curve indicating utility from working with the opposition and whichever of the higher curves better portrays the utility from working with the PRI dinosaurs.¹⁰ If the difference in the utility curves is high enough, then the President gains more utility from a deal that results in the dinosaurs' ideal point than a deal that results in his own point, if the latter were negotiated with the opposition. According to the figure, if the highest utility curve were a good depiction of the President's utility function (i.e. the President had a very strong preference for working with the PRI dinosaurs), then if he worked with the dinosaurs he would receive U_2 utiles for accepting policy D, while the best the opposition could offer is just U_1 utiles, even though that payoff is associated with the President's most preferred policy, R1. If the middle indifference curve were a better representation of the differential the president received, then the president would be indifferent between a deal with the opposition at his own ideal point and a deal negotiated with the dinosaurs at R^* .

The crucial implication of this model is the relevance of the opposition: they define the limits of the retrenchment. If Zedillo were unwilling to negotiate with them, then the outcome of the model would be point D, the median of the status quo, the dinosaurs' ideal point, and Zedillo's optimum outcome. Adding the opposition to the model, however, yields an outcome that is perhaps much closer to R1, dependent on the relative costs of dealing with the opposition and the PRI hard-liners. The tale of the 1996 electoral reform, we believe, shows that these costs were not excessive, thus explaining an outcome analogous to R^* .

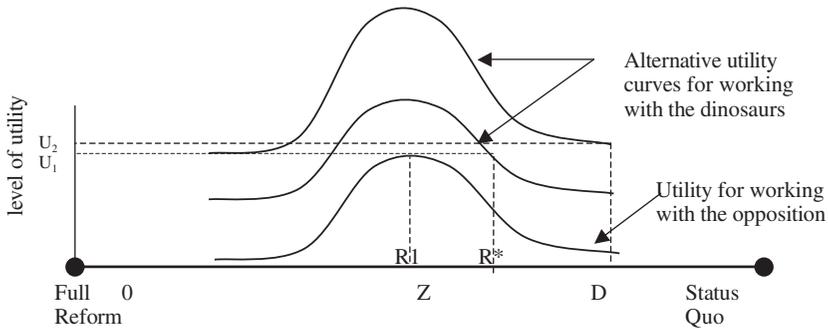


Figure 2. The President's utility curves

Evidence For for The the Model: Preferences And and Utilities In in Historical Context

In this section we explore historical and interview evidence for the model. In order to do so, we must account for three parts of the game: Zedillo's democratic inclinations that set his policy preferences apart from the hard-liners in his party, his willingness to work with the opposition, and his preference for working with the PRI's legislative delegation over the opposition.

Zedillo's Interest in Democratization

While it is hazardous to specify an individual's preferences, evidence from Zedillo's background, his speeches, his actions, and interview responses from PRI legislators and Zedillo himself all help corroborate the view that he was highly motivated to pursue democratizing reforms.

Zedillo's rhetoric and actions provide evidence of his reform goals. In his inaugural address Zedillo acknowledged that his own election had been flawed, an unprecedented admission for a PRI president that reflected his determination to win legitimately. Then, once in office, Zedillo became an outspoken advocate of democratization. He repeatedly called for 'definitive electoral reform' and worked continually to build consensus among all parties, including the PRD, which had historically opted out of the negotiations. He also indicated that the PRI probably needed to lose before true democratization could take place. Many of his actions complemented his rhetoric. Not only did he put the electoral reforms into play, he relinquished one of the president's key disciplinary devices: the 'secret' funds that the PRI president normally funnels to the party.¹¹

Zedillo's apparent willingness to pursue a policy detrimental to the PRI may have been influenced by his limited experience within the PRI, where he was not a long-time insider and therefore lacked the strong clientelistic base that characterized past presidents. He was a classic technocrat,

beginning his career at the central bank and rising to become the Secretary of Education in 1992. Zedillo was never expected to be in line for the presidency, but the assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio made him the most capable PRI official eligible to run for the office. He thus had fewer debts to pay to the individuals who brought him to power (Cornelius, 1996). Further, since the Mexican president can only serve a single six-year term, Zedillo may not have feared electoral punishment or retribution. International pressures also helped influence Zedillo to favor reforms to limit fraud, and to mitigate the influence of narco-traffickers.

When asked why Zedillo favored the extensive electoral reform, an ex-PRI deputy argued that Zedillo was 'obsessed with going down in history as the democratizing president. The fate of the party did not concern him.'¹² This argument does not mean that Zedillo wanted the PRI to collapse; he wanted the party to win, but in a more democratic way. 'It was not lost on him, as well, that if the election went smoothly, his reformist legacy would be secured regardless of the outcome: if the PRI won, Zedillo would be remembered as the President who gave Mexico its most open elections and re-elected his party. If the PRI lost, he would be the father of Mexican democracy' (Preston and Dillon, 2004: 18).

Working with the Opposition and Conflict with Dinosaurs¹³

Our model also depends on Zedillo's willingness to work with the opposition in the event that the dinosaurs had insisted on a weaker reform than R*. We argue that this was the case by fleshing out the intra- and inter-party bargaining over the reform. We focus on two main points. First, while he was not a PRI insider, Zedillo did worry about maintaining Priísta support and doing well in the 1997 mid-term elections in order to further his legislative agenda. But second, his actions and his words indicate that in order to pursue his commitment to democracy he was willing to pay the costs of a possible electoral defeat and the degradation of relations with members of his own party.

The intra-party conflicts on which our model depends were evident throughout Zedillo's term. The conflict was perhaps the result of Zedillo's unorthodox movement up the PRI hierarchy, which separated him from members of the party's conservative wing, many of whom had built their careers with the aid of the party's electoral machinery, pork, patronage, and corruption. Also, considering that Zedillo had already reached the pinnacle while the dinosaurs' future political advances continued to depend on a strong PRI, the conservatives had good reason to fear giving up the resource advantages that the PRI had always maintained.

The conflict-ridden intra-party game showed itself in the tension between Zedillo and the PRI's state apparatuses. Voting irregularities had marred elections in the state of Tabasco and Chiapas. Zedillo had tried to get the election in Tabasco overturned, but was met with strong resistance from his

own party, thus marking a crucial tension between the *Zedillista* and dinosaur factions of the party that would persist throughout the reforms. Essentially, in the states, Zedillo adopted a policy of non-interference, even though he had, under party precedent, the prerogative to intervene at the local level.

The conflict between the President and the dinosaurs also manifested itself at the party's seventeenth national assembly in September of 1996. At the assembly, the dinosaurs' disaffection for Zedillo led them to pass a new party plank that required nominees for the PRI presidency and state governorships to have held public office at least once and been a PRI militant for at least ten years. The dinosaurs wanted to ensure that an outsider like Zedillo never took the helm of the party again (Preston and Dillon, 2004).

In the intra-party game over the final reform package, the opposition also noted that the hard-liners had been given the upper hand and that negotiations thus had become impossible. Speaking of the committee report on the electoral reform that the PRI sent to the full house, PRD negotiator Jesús Zambrano claimed,

The report was elaborated by the PRI majority. Since last week I raised directly with the President of the Committee on Government and Constitutional Points, Saúl González Herrera (PRI), that we ought to work to develop the report in a plural way, as we had worked on the constitutional reform. He was in agreement, but internal differences within the PRI resulted in a meeting last night without the report. The priistas ended it, alone, today in the early morning.¹⁴

PAN negotiator Alcocer argued the last-minute changes were because of the 'fear of the hard-line sector of the PRI and a lack of vision that they have of the changes that are occurring in the country.'¹⁵

Despite these internal party conflicts, our model relies on Zedillo's preferences for working with the PRI to find an acceptable solution to both wings of his party rather than with the opposition in a partnership with his followers in the legislature. This assumption seems straightforward, given that Zedillo had been elected as the PRI's presidential candidate and he had to rely on the PRI to support his other legislation. The PRI lost its house majority in 1997, but in the second half of Zedillo's term (1997–2000) the PRI was part of the winning legislative coalition on 126 of 133 votes in the house. It is notable that among those seven votes where the PRI was rolled was another important reform of the electoral system.¹⁶ It is also notable, however, that the PRI successfully blocked those seven bills in the Senate where it still maintained majority control.

Although the preference for working with the dinosaurs seems uncontroversial, the model also posits that Zedillo would have been willing to deal with the opposition if the hard-liners of his party proved recalcitrant. This willingness was evident throughout Zedillo's term, given his ability to ignore dinosaur pressures to interfere with local and state elections, his decision to placate the PAN over charges of PRI fraud in an election loss in

Puebla and to draw the PRD, which had abstained in previous reform attempts, into the negotiations. While the dinosaurs were powerful and asserted themselves at the seventeenth national assembly and in the last-minute changes to the reform package, Zedillo had the opportunity to disavow the hard-line faction of his party and work with the opposition. The fact that he did not suggests that the hard-liners anticipated his response and moderated their final demands.

In February 1996, the PAN left the bargaining table over the reforms, claiming that it could not bargain in good faith with the PRI because of electoral fraud over the disputed mayor's race in Huejotzingo, Puebla. Needing the PAN to legitimize any reform deal, Zedillo eventually removed the PRI mayor and allowed the PAN candidate to take office. Zedillo's action helped seal the participation of the PAN in the electoral reform, but it also angered hard-line members of his own party. Zedillo was determined that the final reform package would include all parties, regardless of the positions of the hard-line faction of the PRI.

Zedillo's version of a 'definitive' electoral reform also included the PRD, which pushed for even greater electoral reforms than the PAN. A continuation of the PAN-PRI negotiations would likely have made the reforms less dramatic, benefiting both the hard-liners of the PRI and, perhaps, the more confident members of the PAN who felt they could win elections in both 1997 and 2000 and use the PRI's incumbent advantages for their own electoral gain. The inclusion of the PRD, however, immediately changed the dynamics of the negotiation, moving the opposition's demands in an even more democratic direction against the wishes of the hard-line faction of the PRI. The PRD also gave Zedillo more coalition partners from which to bargain if the hard-liners proposed an unacceptable reform.

While the PAN immediately backed out of the deal after the hard-liners imposed their reforms, the PRD voted in a party caucus to vote in favor of the reform if the PRI retracted its offer and returned to Zedillo's initial offer. The caucus vote demonstrated that had Zedillo wanted to keep his original negotiating point, he could have called for moderates of his own party to unite with the PRD and, possibly, members of the PAN to block the new electoral law and to pass the bill that was initially negotiated.

Zedillo thus had the opportunity for cross-party coalition making and evidenced substantial willingness to overrule the hard-line members of his own party and push reform negotiations much further than the dinosaurs had wanted. On the other hand, he also was willing to give up some ground to the hard-liners, particularly after suffering electoral losses before the vote on electoral reform, in an attempt to keep the PRI unified ahead of the 1997 elections. The role of a robust, united opposition that shared many of Zedillo's democratization goals was thus to moderate the demands of the hard-liners; if they had been insignificant to Zedillo's plans, the dinosaurs would have insisted upon a less extensive reform (or greater retrenchment).

Two Final Puzzles

Our model does not yet explain why the dinosaurs accepted point R1 in the first round. This seems to us a less important question, but still an interesting puzzle. There are four potential answers. First, the dinosaurs may have understood the median voter theorem and feared a *Zedillista*-opposition coalition. Second, the dinosaurs' preferences may have shifted right as a result of changing electoral tides during the intervening months between the initial proposal and final passage. Third, the dinosaurs may have reassessed their bargaining power, vis-à-vis the President's two utility curves. In other words, while they may have realized that if they countered the President's proposal at the late date, the President would have had little choice but to sign the bill. To veto it and sign with the opposition against the demands of an important branch of his own party would have been too costly. Fourth, the PRI may have accepted the initial package, fully expecting to modify it later.

One last caveat regards the opposition's strategy. According to Figure 1, they should have supported the reform package, since it moves them closer to their ideal point. There was a strong incentive, however, for the opposition vocally to oppose – and to vote against – many packages such as R* or even R1. The opposition achieves significant electoral benefits from running against the foil of a corrupt PRI. Thus, even though R*, the eventual act, benefits the opposition substantially, it provoked a negative vote because its apparent favoritism of the PRI could be used effectively as an electoral issue. Further, the vote passed without the need for opposition support, and thus there was no incentive for the opposition to give its assent and tacit support to a PRI-dominated policy. As we did for Zedillo, these considerations could be incorporated into a spatial model by using non-circular indifference curves to represent the preferences of the opposition.

Discussion and Extensions

In this article we have attempted to provide an account of and explanation for the crucial 1996 electoral reforms in Mexico. By focusing on divisions within the PRI, we are able to explain three puzzles that have eluded previous research: the extent of the reforms, the last-minute retrenchment, and the important role of the opposition parties given that they voted against the final package.

While we have focused here on a single case, we see our model as generalizable to many other cases of executive-legislative bargaining. First, our model can provide insight into cases where a president's party holds a legislative majority, but the party suffers from internal divisions. This type of case follows Cox and Morgenstern's (2001) theory about how presidents adjust their strategies in anticipation of the legislature's response. Second,

the model also applies to cases of coalition government in parliamentary settings, where prime ministers must either compromise with coalition members or risk a confidence vote and the fall of the government. Similarly, though presidents are not subject to votes of confidence, when their party lacks a legislative majority, they must consider how to maintain support. Brazil's President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, for example, showed an unwillingness to risk his coalition by siding with the right on one issue and the left on another; instead Cardoso worked to maintain his center-right coalition, seldom making overtures to the left – in spite of his avowedly leftist leaning ideas (see Kingstone, 1999).

To an important extent, our analysis also squares with prior studies of democratization (e.g. Przeworski 1992), where internal divisions between soft- and hard-line factions of autocracies become important to the story. In our case hard-liners did see benefit to some reform, but all that is necessary for the model is the willingness of the median player to cut deals with reformers. This implies that, given certain conditions of strategic interaction, some democratization is not only possible, but likely.

Thus, the model developed here may very well be generalizable to a large set of cases involving gradual democratization, though it would require a more complete consideration of the divisions among governing factions and a more nuanced specification of the strategic interaction that occurs among them. It appears that in many cases, such as Brazil, Chile, Korea, South Africa, and Taiwan, hard-liners were not cut out of the deal at all, and indeed played important roles in determining the democratic institutions that resulted. The model we develop here suggests a general logic for such gradual democratization.

In short, our model is applicable to all cases where only two assumptions are necessary. First, contestation occurs (meaning that there is some sanctioned political opposition) over the issue of political reform. And second, a moderate and decisive part of the leadership is willing to cut a deal with the opposition over the issue of reform. The key, again, is whether the moderates, if pushed, are willing to break with their co-partisans and cut a deal with the opposition. This was apparently the case for Mexico in 1996. At that time, since their reform-minded president was willing to compromise with the opposition, Mexico experienced its first alternation of legislative – and, later, executive – power in almost 70 years.

Notes

- 1 Cited and translated from Albarrán de Alba, Gerardo, *Proceso*, 17 November 1996.
- 2 This claim is based on interviews with multiple high-ranking members of the PRI and the former government, who asked to remain anonymous.
- 3 In addition, the reforms prohibited anonymous campaign contributions, and set the limit for private financing at just 10 percent of the public financing.

- 4 Jacobson's theory was developed in the American political context where most incumbents run for re-election. Re-election is prohibited in Mexico, but the theory is applicable if we assume that the incumbent party, the PRI, was concerned with re-election.
- 5 Cited from *Financial Times*, (16 November 1996). For other examples, see Anderson, (28 September 1996) and *Economist*, (28 September 1996). New modifications by the *dinosaurios* to the reform package made it impossible for PRI party members that had not been members of the party for at least ten years or held elected office to be named the party's candidate for presidency or state governor.
- 6 Cited from Delgado, Alvaro, *Proceso*, 8 December 1996.
- 7 This information comes from our interviews with PRI officials.
- 8 Citations from Albarrán de Alba, Gerardo, *Proceso*, 17 November 1996.
- 9 Zedillo himself provided this explanation in response to our written question (8 January 2003).
- 10 The two utility curves parallel one another, as loosely portrayed in the figure, in order to represent the (non-necessary) assumption that the costs are constant across the space.
- 11 The secret funds were large, unaccountable funds that the president could use arbitrarily for personal or political uses. Some of the funds went to salaries of patronage officials and targeted social projects; other funds are suspected of being used for personal gain and to buy the support of certain groups (Gómez, 1996).
- 12 The *diputado* was responding to our written question in the summer of 2002.
- 13 In addition to the cited sources, information for this section was gleaned from numerous journalistic accounts including: *Voz y Voto* (1 September 1996); Preston (8 June 1996), *Washington Post*, (5 June 1996); *Times-Picayune*, (1995); Diebel (20 October 1996); *Financial Times*, (2 August 1996); Preston, (16 November 1996); *The Arizona Republic*, (1 December 1996); *Financial Times*, (16 November 1996); Althaus, (4 June 1995); and *New York Times* (2 August 1996).
- 14 Citations from Delgado, Alvaro, *Proceso*, 8 December 1996.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Information from Lujambio (see Table 2).

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