

# Party Influence in Presidential Primaries: Evidence from Mexico\*

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Forthcoming at *Party Politics*<sup>‡</sup>

## Abstract

Over recent decades, an increasing number of presidential candidates across the world have been nominated in primary elections. Yet, our understanding of presidential primaries outside of the U.S. remains very limited. This paper advances a theoretical argument linking presidential primary outcomes to the strategic behavior of subnational party elites, particularly those with the resources to mobilize primary voters in their regions. I provide support for this claim using an original dataset from the 2012 presidential primary of the Mexican *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN), in which one of the candidates was very closely linked to (and informally endorsed by) the PAN leadership. The results show the levels of support for this candidate were higher in places with PAN officeholders. Additional evidence suggests this pattern is driven by PAN officeholders (1) investing resources into electoral mobilization and (2) tampering with the lists of registered voters. (143 words)

**Key words:** primary elections; candidate selection; intraparty politics; governors; electoral mobilization

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\*I am grateful to Gretchen Helmke, Tasos Kalandrakis, Bonnie Meguid, Bing Powell, and Yannis Vassiliadis for their feedback and encouragement, and to Carlo Varela for kindly sharing the results of a pre-electoral poll by Varela y Asociados. I thank audiences at the University of Rochester and the 21st Latin American Social and Public Policy Conference at the University of Pittsburgh for helpful comments on very early versions of this paper. Any mistakes remain my own responsibility.

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<sup>‡</sup>Accepted for publication on July 9, 2020

Over recent decades, an increasing number of presidential candidates across the world were nominated in primary elections (Shugart, 2004; Freidenberg, 2005). Out of seventy-eight presidential elections held in Latin America between 1978 and 2004, there were thirty in which at least one party voluntarily selected its candidate in a primary (Kemahlioglu, Weitz-Shapiro and Hirano, 2009). This trend extends beyond Latin America. The Union of Democratic Forces in Bulgaria and the Social Democratic Party of Finland have used primaries to select their presidential nominees since the mid-nineties (McCann, 2004), and more recently, the Union for a Popular Movement and the Socialist Party in France, as well as the People's Party in South Korea, have followed suit.

This movement towards intraparty democracy in presidential nominations motivated the emergence of a literature that studies why party leaders relinquish control over candidate selection and adopt primaries (e.g., Kemahlioglu, Weitz-Shapiro and Hirano, 2009; Serra, 2011). At the same time, a paper by Carey and Polga-Hecimovich (2006), which argues Latin American primaries have resulted in the nomination of stronger presidential candidates, sparked a debate that has moved away from this work's original context to consider the electoral consequences of legislative and local-office primaries in several regions (Ichino and Nathan, 2013; Ramiro, 2014).

Despite these efforts, most of what we know about the dynamics of competition and participation in presidential primaries comes from the U.S. experience. American politics scholars have explored several topics in this area, including primary-voters' behavior (e.g., Vavreck, 2001), party-elites influence (e.g., Cohen et al., 2008), primary divisiveness (e.g., Kenney and Rice, 1987), candidate strategy (e.g., Gurian and Haynes, 1993), media influence (e.g., Barker and Lawrence, 2006), and the effects of endorsements (e.g., Rapoport, Abramowitz and Stone, 1991).<sup>1</sup>

While this extensive literature can contribute to the comparative study of presidential primaries, the assumptions and logic of some American politics arguments might not hold in other contexts. For example, the concept of momentum, which is at the core of work on presidential nominations (Aldrich, 1980; Norrander, 2006), has little application outside of the U.S., as primaries in other

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<sup>1</sup>Barbara Norrander counts 1,023 works on presidential nominations in the US (see [http://www.u.arizona.edu/~norrander/PPLIST\\_March2012.pdf](http://www.u.arizona.edu/~norrander/PPLIST_March2012.pdf), accessed March 2017).

countries usually take the form of one-day nationwide races.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the American experience might not help us understand presidential nominations in settings where clientelistic practices are a key part of intraparty elections (De Luca, Jones and Tula, 2002; Ichino and Nathan, 2013).

Although a number of works provide narratives of presidential primaries outside the U.S. (e.g., Colomer, 2003; Wuhs, 2009), the lack of data has limited the ability of comparative politics scholars to conduct empirical research.<sup>3</sup> The only exceptions of which I am aware are McCann (2004) and Buquet and Piñeiro (2011), who use survey data to study voting behavior among primary voters in Mexico and Uruguay, respectively. Data availability has been such a significant obstacle that we do not have answers to even simple questions. Who participates in the primaries? How do candidates campaign? What factors shape their mobilization efforts?

This paper takes a step towards answering these questions. I develop an argument linking primary election outcomes to the strategic behavior of local party elites. The main goal of presidential-primary candidates, I argue, is to assemble a coalition of local party elites, who control the party organization and have the capacity to mobilize primary voters in their regions, to support their presidential bets. Because the local elites' effectiveness to support a candidate's campaign depends on their access to material and organizational resources, I argue primary candidates will seek the backing of local party elites who hold office, since they enjoy several resource advantages relative to local elites out of office. Therefore, the main claim of this paper is that presidential primary outcomes are shaped, to a large degree, by the efforts of local party officeholders.

I provide support for the argument using an original dataset from the 2012 presidential primary of the Mexican *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN), in which one candidate was very closely linked to (and informally endorsed by) the party leaders. The dataset combines municipality-level primary results with data from local and federal elections during 2006-2012, which allows me to identify the number and type of PAN officeholders in each municipality at the time of the primary. The main finding is that the presence of PAN governors is associated with a large increase in the electoral

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<sup>2</sup>There are some exceptions. Some parties follow an American-style format (e.g., PAN-Mexico 2005, People's Party-South Korea 2017); others allow the possibility of runoffs (e.g., Republicans-France 2006).

<sup>3</sup>For an informative discussion of this point see Hazan and Rahat (2010, 7).

support for the party leaders' candidate. I also document a similar, but weaker, association between electoral outcomes and the presence of PAN mayors.

Since it is possible the findings are explained by confounding factors, I undertake several checks that suggest the observed patterns are driven by the actions of PAN officeholders. First, I exploit the staggered electoral calendar used to elect Mexican governors as an exogenous source of variation in their time horizons, which in turn affects their incentives to intervene in the primary. The results show PAN governors approaching the end of their terms have a substantively lesser impact on primary outcomes than those who have more time left in office. Second, I present results of a regression-discontinuity design, which helps isolate the causal effect of PAN mayors on different primary outcomes. Finally, I examine the potential mechanisms driving these results. The findings are consistent with PAN governors influencing the race by (1) investing resources into electoral mobilization, and (2) tampering with the lists of registered voters.

This paper contributes to the study of presidential nominations in comparative perspective. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first empirical analysis of a presidential primary outside of the U.S. to use disaggregated results.<sup>4</sup> Although my evidence comes from one country, Mexico, these findings should be relevant for other presidential democracies, particularly those where strong sub-national executives dominate their local party organizations and control key resources to mobilize the vote in their regions (De Luca, Jones and Tula, 2002; Samuels, 2000). While previous research argues governors exert considerable sway over the nomination of legislative candidates (Carey and Reinhardt, 2004; Jones and Hwang, 2005; Langston, 2010), this work shows that presidential primaries can further extend their influence on candidate selection.

This work also contributes to the study of party patronage (e.g., Folke, Hirano and Snyder, 2011; Kopecky, Mair and Spirova, 2012). Recent research motivated by Latin American parties emphasizes the role of patronage as a tool politicians use not only to win elections but also to prevail in intraparty battles (Kemahlioglu, 2006; Benton, 2007). This paper provides empirical

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<sup>4</sup>The only study of which I am aware of is Wuhs' (2009) analysis of the PAN 2005 presidential primary, which uses state-level results ( $n = 32$ ).

evidence consistent with this view. Specifically, my findings uncover different mechanisms by which having control over patronage allows politicians to consolidate power within their parties.

Finally, this work is part of a literature that studies how elected officials influence higher- or lower-tier elections, a phenomenon usually called “coattail effects” (e.g., Miller, 1955; Ames, 1994). This paper studies whether, and how, elected officials influence intraparty elections. While an incumbency advantage in primaries is well documented (Ansolabehere et al., 2007), to the best of my knowledge this is the first study to find “spillover incumbency effects” in primaries, i.e., evidence of incumbents helping *others* secure the party’s nomination in primary elections.

## **President Felipe Calderón’s PAN, 2006–2012**

Since its foundation in 1939, and until 2012, the PAN relied on participatory nomination rules to select its presidential candidate. Traditionally, this took the form of small delegate conventions, but after Vicente Fox’s victory in the presidential election of 2000 the convention was replaced by a closed primary in which only party activists could vote. The first candidate nominated under the new system was Felipe Calderón, who would go on to win the 2006 presidential election.

President Calderón became the informal leader of the PAN soon after assuming office, when the *calderonista* faction won a majority in the party’s National Council in June 2007 (Michel, 2007). Later that year, Germán Martínez, one of the most influential members of Calderón’s cabinet, won an uncontested election to become party chairman. In 2009, following a series of electoral defeats, Martínez was replaced by César Nava, Calderón’s private secretary. Nava led the party for over a year and was replaced by Gustavo Madero in December 2010. Although Madero was not perceived to be as close to Calderón as his predecessors, journalistic accounts suggest the president played an instrumental role in his election (Alemán, 2010; Saliderna and Garduño, 2010).

Calderón’s influence over leadership selection was key to controlling other areas of the party’s life, most notably candidate selection. Starting in 2000, the PAN experimented with different rules to select its 300 legislative candidates running in single-member districts. For decades, these candidates were nominated in local conventions but, in each federal election during 2003-2009, a subset of these candidates were handpicked by the party’s National Executive Committee (CEN,

by its Spanish initials), and the rest were nominated in closed primaries. In practice, this meant Calderón, through his control over the CEN, exerted sizable influence on the party's nominations.

It is in this context that on February 5, 2012, the PAN held a primary to select its presidential nominee. The other two major parties in the country at the time, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) and the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD), had nominated their candidates well in advance. Thus, the thousands of PAN activists who participated in the primary knew exactly who would be the rivals of the party's nominee in the general election. Below, I provide some relevant information about the primary.

**Rules.** Two rules deserve special mention. First, for a candidate to be declared winner one of the following had to be met: (1) win more than 50% of the vote, or (2) win more than 37% of the vote with an advantage of at least 5 percentage points (p.p.) over the runner up. If neither was met, the top two contenders would compete in a runoff election. The second aspect relates to the make-up of the electorate, i.e., the people authorized to vote in the primary. At the time, the PAN classified its members into *activos* and *adherentes*.<sup>5</sup> The latter had limited participatory rights in the party's life, but since 2000 the party had "alternately included and excluded the *adherente* members, who greatly outnumber the *activos*" (Wuhs, 2006, 40) from closed primaries. Although this point was contentious, in the end, both types were allowed to participate in the primary.

**Candidates.** By July 2011, seven high-profile *panistas* had thrown their hats into the ring but when the campaign officially started, in December, only three of them actually entered the race: Josefina Vázquez Mota, Ernesto Cordero, and Santiago Creel.<sup>6</sup> I briefly describe the backgrounds of the candidates who eventually were the top two contenders.<sup>7</sup>

Josefina Vázquez Mota entered politics in 2000, when she was nominated as an "external candidate" to the Chamber of Deputies by the PAN. She did not officially join the party until a few months later, when she left her seat in the chamber to serve as Secretary of Social Development in President Fox's cabinet. She remained in that position until January 2006, when she resigned to

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<sup>5</sup>To become *activo* it was necessary, among many other requirements, to be an *adherente* for at least 6 months.

<sup>6</sup>The other aspirants were Heriberto Félix, Emilio González, Javier Lozano, and the charismatic Secretary of Education, Alonso Lujambio.

<sup>7</sup>Appendix A1 provides a description of Santiago Creel's political career.

work with Felipe Calderón, first as manager of his presidential campaign and then as his Secretary of Education. In 2009, after numerous clashes with Calderón, Vázquez Mota resigned and ran for a seat in the Chamber of Deputies, where she served as leader of the PAN caucus until September 2011, when she left in order to compete for the party's presidential nomination.

Before the primary, Ernesto Cordero held several high-level appointments in the federal government but had never run for office. He became one of President Calderón's closest collaborators in 2001, while working as an advisor to the PAN's legislative caucus, led by Calderón at the time. When Calderón left the chamber to be Director General of Banobras, a state-owned development bank, and then Secretary of Energy, Cordero followed him, serving as Director of Risk at Banobras and later on as an Under Secretary at the Ministry of Energy. Cordero was also part of Calderón's presidential campaign team and held several appointments in his cabinet, from Under Secretary at the Ministry of Finance, through Secretary of Social Development, to Secretary of Finance.

**Campaign.** Vázquez Mota dominated the polls from beginning to end. She was the most popular candidate among potential primary voters and perceived to have the best chances of winning the general election. Table 1 summarizes the results of multiple surveys conducted among potential primary voters. Panel A shows answers to the question "If the primary were held today, who would you vote for to be the PAN's presidential nominee?" Although the August 2011 poll shows signs of a close race between Vázquez Mota and Creel, all the polls conducted after the campaign officially began put her clearly ahead by at least 35 p.p. over her closest rival.

Panels B and C show answers to the questions "Who do you think will win the primary?" and "If nominated, who has the best chances of winning the general election?" respectively. The answers mirror those in Panel A, with the exception of the January 11 poll, which ranks Cordero as having the lowest chances of winning the primary *and* as being the weakest general-election candidate. The view of Cordero as a weak candidate matches figures from polls conducted among the (general-election) electorate. A tracking poll from the time shows that, had the primary been open to self-identified PAN sympathizers, Cordero would have finished in a distant third place.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>See Appendix Figure A1.

Ernesto Cordero’s main asset was his relationship with President Calderón. Panel D shows answers to the question “What primary candidate is most closely associated with President Felipe Calderón?” As can be seen, Cordero was the most common answer. Furthermore, in December 2011 respondents were asked if they thought President Calderón had remained neutral during the campaign. While the percentage of respondents who answered “No” was relatively low (only 21% of sample), 76% of the those within this group indicated Calderón supported Cordero.

**Table 1:** Vote intentions for primary candidates among PAN activists

	PRE-ELECTORAL POLLS				RESULTS
	August 2011*	December 2011†	January 11 2012✓	January 31 2012†	February 2012
Panel A. If the primary were held today, who would you vote for?					
Josefina Vázquez Mota	44	62	57	65	<b>53.2</b>
Ernesto Cordero	7	15	22	17	<b>39.4</b>
Santiago Creel	33	14	18	11	<b>6</b>
Panel B. Who do you think will win the primary?					
Josefina Vázquez Mota	32	61	56	65	–
Ernesto Cordero	33	18	16	16	–
Santiago Creel	11	13	24	11	–
Panel C. Who has the best chances of winning the general election?					
Josefina Vázquez Mota	–	61	51	–	–
Ernesto Cordero	–	16	15	–	–
Santiago Creel	–	15	24	–	–
Panel D. Who is most closely associated with President Felipe Calderón?					
Josefina Vázquez Mota	–	23	22	–	–
Ernesto Cordero	–	48	47	–	–
Santiago Creel	–	11	18	–	–

**Sources of information:** \*–Varela y Asociados, †–Poll by national newspaper Reforma, ✓–Poll by Buendía & Laredo, published in national newspaper El Universal. In the poll from August 2011 respondents had the option of giving the names of other candidates (not listed) who, at the time, were still in the race.

**Election day.** Traditionally, candidate selection in the PAN involved the use of internal elections as part of a “democratic commitment . . . characterized by an emphasis on voluntary individual participation” (Wuhs, 2008, 42), but the party’s improving electoral prospects made candidate selection more conflictive, and the use of illicit practices in the party’s internal elections became increasingly common (Rodríguez Doval, 2005; Bruhn, 2010). The 2012 primary was no exception;

the race was surrounded by controversy, with allegations of different types of electoral manipulation, including vote- and turnout-buying, ballot stuffing, tampering with the list of voters, and even some isolated violent episodes (Sin Embargo, 2012).

There is no official data on the prevalence of irregularities, but media reports documented several accusations (Animal Político, 2012; El Universal, 2012). Vázquez Mota and Cordero denounced each other's use of illicit mobilization tactics, such as hiring buses to take people to the polls and using public resources for electoral purposes. Other charges involved harassment and intimidation. In Puebla and Veracruz, states governed by the PAN, armed robbers stole ballot boxes from polling stations that, allegedly, had overwhelmingly supported Vázquez Mota. In many other regions, there were claims of state and municipal bureaucrats being coerced into voting for Cordero. Finally, there were multiple accusations that the list of voters were manipulated; the most notorious of these was made by Creel, whose family was excluded from the list, and thus prevented from voting, despite having proof they were PAN members in good standing.

Despite the irregularities, Cordero and Creel accepted their defeat on election night and Vázquez Mota became the PAN's first female presidential candidate. Of note, the race was much closer than the polls suggested (see Table 1), with Vázquez Mota and Cordero receiving 53.2% and 39.4% of the vote, respectively. Thus, although the outcome was as expected, Cordero obtained almost 40% of the vote even though most polls put him at around 20%.

## **Presidential Primaries: Candidates and Party Elites**

This section presents an argument linking primary outcomes to the strategic behavior of subnational party elites. The starting point of the argument is that having an effective electoral machine, i.e., an organization capable of mobilizing voters on the ground, is essential for winning not only general-election races but also, and perhaps more importantly, intraparty contests (De Luca, Jones and Tula, 2002; Ichino and Nathan, 2013). Presidential-primary candidates do not have machines of their own at the *national level*; while some might have regional campaign organizations, mobilizing the vote across the country requires a more extensive organization. Therefore, a key challenge faced by aspiring candidates is assembling a nationwide electoral machine.

Candidates are strategic actors and thus will use their resources optimally to this end. Since building a machine from scratch would be expensive, and most likely ineffective, candidates will focus their efforts on getting the support of local party actors who have their own electoral machines and can effectively deliver the vote. Ideally, a candidate would build a coalition that is large enough to secure the nomination while spending the least amount of resources. This consideration is analogous to that of parties deciding what citizens to mobilize, best explained by Rosenstone and Hansen, “constrained by limited money, limited time, and finite other resources, [parties] *target their efforts* . . . they mobilize people who are known to them, who are well placed in social networks, *whose actions are effective*” (1993, 162, emphasis added).

The main claim of this paper is that primary candidates will focus their efforts on getting the support of local party officeholders—in the case at hand, this group includes PAN members who hold executive office, i.e., PAN mayors and governors. These actors control key financial and political resources that enable them to influence elections to a degree that cannot be matched by other local-level party actors. Holding office gives access to state resources, which can be invested into electoral races and, equally important, into building and sustaining stronger party organizations. Notably, control over public sector employment can help to assemble more extensive and loyal clienteles (e.g., Calvo and Murillo, 2004), and to “build and maintain the infrastructure required for political parties to function, as government jobs can be used to compensate party members” (Brollo, Forquesato and Gozzi, 2017, 2). Similarly, control over patronage has been linked to more unified parties, as potential challengers or dissidents can be excluded or bought off (De Luca, Jones and Tula, 2002; Langston, 2010). Overall, then, in places where the party holds office, local elites should have more resources at their disposal and the party organization should be stronger.

There are several channels by which these resource advantages allow local party officeholders to influence primary outcomes more effectively than other local elites. I briefly discuss three of these. First, the importance of local party branches in regular get-out-the-vote efforts is well documented (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1992; Whiteley and Seyd, 2002). To achieve the goals of informing and mobilizing the electorate, party organizations execute several tasks, such as conduct-

ing grassroots campaigns and holding rallies. Party branches with strong organizations, such as those that control the local governments, are better able to perform these tasks (Frendreis, Gibson and Vertz, 1990; Ames, 1994). Second, where electoral politics are clientelistic, party branches' mobilizational efforts also involve irregular practices (e.g., vote- and turnout-buying). In practice, these activities involve giving cash and gifts in exchange for turning out and hiring buses to drive supporters to the polls, among others. An extensive literature shows incumbent parties have a comparative advantage in clientelism (e.g., Szwarcberg, 2013; Núñez, 2018), and thus local party officeholders should be particularly effective at influencing primary outcomes where these practices are common.

Third, when primaries are organized by political parties themselves, local party elites have extensive room to influence the process through administrative decisions. Election administration policies, such as the location of polling stations or the kind of voting machines used, have important electoral consequences (Brady and McNulty, 2011; Desai and Lee, [Forthcoming](#)), and are thus subject to strategic manipulation. A common practice involves party elites influencing intraparty races through their control over voter registration; parties often recruit new members “with the sole intention of participating in the... candidate selection process” (Hazan and Rahat, 2010, 99) and can also remove supporters of rival candidates from the list of voters. These forms of manipulation are easier carried out when the local elites hold office, not only because they exert considerable influence over the party branch, and thus the administration of the race, but also because they control key resources necessary to execute these tasks.

So far, the discussion has focused on the local party elites' capacity to shape primary outcomes, but has not considered their incentives to support a particular candidate. How do local elites decide whether to campaign in favor of a candidate? I conceptualize this strategic decision as a function of three factors: (1) immediate inducements provided by the candidates, (2) the possibility of future access to the spoils of office, and (3) electoral considerations. I discuss each of these in turn.

**Immediate inducements.** This category includes any incentives that candidates can provide before the primary that do not depend on their likelihood of being elected. Three such incentives

stand out. First, local politicians might have preexisting attachments towards the candidates. For instance, they might believe that, due to factional alignments, a particular candidate winning the nomination would strengthen their position within the party. Second, serious contenders should be able to provide material resources. As mentioned above, candidates rely on local party branches but putting these organizations to work is costly. While some local leaders could be willing to pay these costs, a resource-rich candidate should be able to supply these funds. This arrangement should be attractive for local politicians since, given imperfect monitoring, these resources could be used to finance their own campaigns or pocketed as rents.

Third, recent work motivated by Latin American parties shows that politicians distribute patronage not only for winning elections but also for prevailing in intraparty battles (Kemahlioglu, 2006; Benton, 2007). This type of patronage can come in different forms, including jobs in the state bureaucracy, positions in the party branch, and nominations for office, among others. Thus, a local politician might support a candidate in exchange for a nomination to higher-level office or because she fears that her job in the party depends on doing so.

**Future spoils of office.** Although some candidates might not be able deliver the type of patronage just described, all candidates can promise future patronage. This, however, does not mean that all candidates are equally capable of benefiting from such promises; their ability to accomplish this goal depends on their electability, since it determines how likely they are to actually deliver these benefits. A primary candidate who, if nominated, does not stand a chance of becoming president should be less effective at promising future patronage than one who seems more electable. At the same time, because a candidate's electability is partially shaped by her party, the extent to which aspirants of the same party will vary in terms of their chances of winning the presidency is possibly limited and dependent on context.

**Electoral considerations.** Local party elites might consider the quality of the potential nominees not because of the prospects of future patronage but because of the potential electoral gains from having a high-quality presidential candidate. Specifically, they might expect to benefit from potential presidential coattails (Miller, 1955). Therefore, even if two aspirants are equally likely

to win the presidency, perhaps because their party is very popular, the local elites might prefer to support the candidate of higher quality (e.g., more popular, charismatic, etc.) as this could result in additional electoral gains in local races for them.

How do local party elites balance these different considerations? Below, I use contextual information from the Mexican case to answer this question and derive hypotheses.

First, it should be noted that the promise of future patronage should not have played an important role in the PAN 2012 presidential primary. Although Table 1 shows the primary candidates were perceived to be of different quality, polls from the period show that the chances that any of them would win the presidency were practically nonexistent. Throughout 2011, the PRI was well ahead of its rivals, and the PAN, which the polls showed as its closest competitor, was always behind by at least twenty-five percentage points (see Appendix Figure A2).

Therefore, I expect the support for the candidates to be driven by other factors, in particular what I called immediate inducements. Due to his personal connection with President Calderón, Ernesto Cordero had a clear advantage in this dimension, and thus he should have been more successful than his rivals at getting the support of local party elites. It is worth noting that, during this period, all Mexican officeholders were banned from running for consecutive reelection, and thus ambitious politicians wishing to advance their careers should be particularly responsive to the types of inducements only Cordero, through his connection to President Calderón, could have delivered at the time. This discussion leads to the following expectation:

**Hypothesis 1.** Support for Ernesto Cordero should be higher in places with PAN officeholders.

As mentioned, for purposes of this paper “local party officeholders” refers to PAN mayors and governors. These offices give access to different types and amounts of resources, and thus some officeholders are better equipped to influence electoral races. In Mexico, there is no office, other than the presidency, that can match the amount of financial, institutional, and political resources controlled by governors. Their influence within their parties has been widely demonstrated, and they are considered the *de facto* leaders of their states’ party branches (Langston, 2010; Rosas and Langston, 2011). Thus, I expect the Hypothesis 1 to apply, in particular, to *panista* governors.

Another important source of variation in access to resources is the existence of competing goals. When deciding whether to invest resources into the primary, local elites must consider other possible uses for those resources, including mobilization efforts in the actual presidential election, other races, or even personal consumption (i.e., pocketing the resources). The relative importance local elites assign to investing resources in the party's primary versus other competing goals should be shaped by their time horizons and prospects of a future political career.

In the case of governors, temporal considerations might come into play in two ways. First, previous research shows the influence of governors within their states' party branches decreases as their time in office approaches its end (e.g., Rosas and Langston, 2011). Thus, governors close to leaving office should be less effective at influencing electoral races relative to those with more time left in office. Second, the number of former Mexican governors who run for office after their terms expire is relatively low. In fact, Ang (2018) shows close to 20% of governors who served during 1990-2016 have been *officially* investigated by state authorities for corruption. This record suggests that, once governors are about to leave office, they should be: (1) less responsive to the type of inducements Cordero could deliver, and (2) more inclined to pocketing any available resources than to investing them into the primary. These mechanisms lead to the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2.** Among states with PAN governors, support for Ernesto Cordero should be higher in those where the governor has more time left in office.

Finally, it is possible that local party elites decided what candidate to support based on electoral considerations and not immediate-inducement motivations. A factor that should increase the relative weight assigned to electoral considerations is the timing of elections. In places where there will be local elections on the same day as the presidential election, the local elites should prefer to have a stronger presidential candidate as they could benefit from potential coattails:

**Hypothesis 3.** Support for Josefina Vázquez Mota should be higher in areas with concurrent local elections.

The next section uses data from the PAN 2012 presidential primary to test these hypotheses.

## Data

The econometric analysis relies on several pieces of data, most importantly: (1) an original dataset with municipality-level results of the PAN presidential primary, and (2) returns from local elections during 2006-2011. These data are supplemented with detailed information on the PAN's internal workings and structure, including data on legislative candidate selection, party membership, party-headquarters' locations, and state-level results from the party's 2005 presidential primary.

**Primary Results.** This dataset was assembled using official reports that state party branches sent to the party's national headquarters. Most reports included vote tallies at the municipal level, but some states only reported aggregate results at the state level. In the end, I obtained results from 1,149 municipalities in 25 (out of the 32) Mexican states.<sup>9</sup> The outcome of interest, labeled *Margin JVM*, is the difference in the vote shares of Josefina Vázquez Mota, the primary winner, and Ernesto Cordero, the runner up and President Calderón's favorite. This variable ranges from -1 to 1 with higher (lower) values indicating more support for Vázquez Mota (Cordero).<sup>10</sup>

**PAN officeholders.** Using local-election returns during 2006-2011, I identify municipalities where PAN candidates got elected to office. As discussed above, the focus of the theory is on PAN members who hold executive offices. Thus, to test Hypothesis 1, I use variables *PAN Governor* and *PAN Mayor*, which indicate whether the governor and the mayor in a municipality competed as PAN candidates, respectively. Additionally, as a control, I use an indicator of whether the municipality's federal deputy is a PAN member.

**Other covariates.** I classify the additional explanatory variables into three categories. The first, groups variables that test the hypotheses linking primary results to election timing. In 2012, the 15 Mexican states that held local elections did so on the same day as the presidential election.<sup>11</sup> To facilitate the interpretation, I use two election-timing variables.<sup>12</sup> *Local election* is an indicator

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<sup>9</sup>Reports obtained in the PAN's national headquarters (Mexico City, 2015). See Appendix A3 for details.

<sup>10</sup>I use this variable, rather than candidates' vote shares, because it contains all the information necessary to test all three hypotheses. Appendix A7 replicates the main analysis using Santiago Creel's vote as dependent variable.

<sup>11</sup>The only exceptions were two municipalities that held "extraordinary" elections four months before the presidential race. In terms of the analysis, this means I cannot compare primary outcomes across municipalities that held concurrent and non-concurrent local elections (as the ideal test of Hypothesis 3 would have required).

<sup>12</sup>Appendix A3 provides a detailed description of the coding of these variables (see, in particular, Table A1).

that takes a value of one for municipalities in states that held any type of local races in 2012 (except gubernatorial) and a value of zero for municipalities in any other states. I expect support for Vázquez Mota to be higher in these areas (Hypothesis 3). Similarly, *Election governor* is an indicator of municipalities in states where there were gubernatorial elections in 2012. Some specifications interact this variable with *PAN Governor*. Because Mexican governors are legally banned from running for consecutive reelection, when this interaction takes a value of one I say the PAN governor is a lame duck. The expectation is that, among municipalities with PAN governors, support for Cordero is greater where the governors are *not* lame ducks (Hypothesis 2).

The second category captures ideological and organizational characteristics of party activists. I use the state-level vote share for Felipe Calderón in the PAN 2005 presidential primary. Support for Calderón came from more traditional *panistas*, and thus this variable should capture some heterogeneity among party activists. The next variable, which measures the share of PAN members who are *activos* rather than *adherentes*, serves a similar purpose. *Adherentes* were described as being less ideologically committed and more office-motivated than *activos* (Rodríguez Doval, 2005; Wuhs, 2008). Thus, I include the share of *activo* members in the municipality as a measure of ideology or party heterogeneity. Additionally, as a proxy of the party's organizational strength, I include an indicator of whether the PAN has headquarters in the municipality.

Also, I attempt to control for the degree of intraparty conflict resulting from the PAN's legislative candidate selection process. In November 2011, the PAN leadership announced the decision to handpick almost half the single-member-district legislative candidates for the 2012 election. This announcement triggered an internal conflict that required the electoral tribunal's intervention, which eventually reversed the leaders' decision. To capture potential divisions between national party leaders and rank-and-file *panistas*, I include *Tribunal*, an indicator of whether a municipality is in a district where leaders intended to handpick the party's 2012 legislative candidate.

The third category includes other controls. *Rural* is an index that combines different dimensions of development using factor analysis, with higher values indicating more rural areas. Finally, since research shows organized-crime violence affects electoral participation (Ley, 2018), I include

a dummy for municipalities where at least one drug-related homicide took place during 2007-2011.

## Results

This section reports results from a set of OLS models with standard errors clustered by state. As mentioned above, the dependent variable is *Margin JVM*, which was built by taking the vote share of Vázquez Mota, the primary winner, and subtracting that of President Calderón's candidate, Ernesto Cordero. This variable ranges between  $-1$  and  $1$ , and takes positive (negative) values in places where Vázquez Mota defeated (lost against) Cordero.

Table 2 shows estimates of these models. The results support Hypothesis 1, according to which support for Cordero should be higher in municipalities with local PAN officeholders. First, I consider the presence of *panista* governors. As expected, the coefficient of *PAN Governor* is negative across all specifications. The magnitude of this estimate in model (1), which does not allow for heterogeneous effects, indicates that Vázquez Mota's margin of victory over Cordero is almost 9 percentage points lower in states with PAN governors than in states governed by other parties; however, this coefficient is not precisely estimated. Interacting this variable with *Election governor*, as in columns (2)-(3), reveals that, within the group of states with PAN governors, the electoral calendar is a key determinant of candidate support. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, among states governed by the PAN, the support for Cordero is greater where the governors are not lame ducks. Figure 1 shows the marginal effects of PAN governors by their lame-duck status.<sup>13</sup> Whereas having a PAN governor with at least one year left in office increases the support for Cordero, lame-duck PAN governors are associated with greater support for Vázquez Mota.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>In Figure 1, the marginal effect of lame-duck PAN governors on *Margin JVM* is 34.17 p.p. ( $p$ -value = 0.061), and the one of non-lame duck PAN governors equals -73.74 p.p. ( $p$ -value < 0.001).

<sup>14</sup>Appendix A7 shows that lame-duck PAN governors supported both Vázquez Mota and Creel, which means that only PAN governors with enough time left in office supported President Calderón's candidate, Ernesto Cordero.

**Table 2:** Determinants of candidate support in PAN 2012 presidential primary

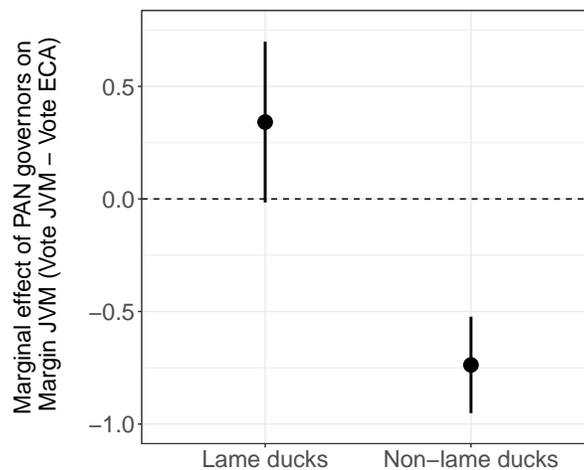
	DEPENDENT VARIABLE: MARGIN JVM		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
PAN Governor	-0.096 (0.201)	-0.737*** (0.109)	-0.776*** (0.124)
PAN Governor × Election governor		1.079*** (0.230)	1.084*** (0.227)
PAN Governor × PAN Mayor			0.080 (0.071)
PAN Mayor	-0.042 (0.029)	-0.023 (0.024)	-0.043 (0.032)
PAN Legislator	0.089 (0.085)	-0.045 (0.073)	-0.049 (0.072)
Local election	-0.067 (0.242)	0.257* (0.134)	0.262** (0.133)
Election governor	0.235 (0.157)	0.052 (0.147)	0.054 (0.145)
Vote Calderón 2005	0.676* (0.372)	0.710* (0.398)	0.714* (0.396)
Share of <i>activos</i>	0.606*** (0.138)	0.533*** (0.139)	0.534*** (0.138)
PAN Headquarters	-0.139 (0.100)	-0.057 (0.087)	-0.057 (0.086)
Tribunal	0.127 (0.081)	0.066 (0.063)	0.068 (0.062)
Rural	-0.011*** (0.004)	-0.011*** (0.003)	-0.011*** (0.003)
Organized Crime	0.028 (0.045)	-0.015 (0.046)	-0.015 (0.046)
Constant	-0.128 (0.233)	-0.092 (0.243)	-0.088 (0.242)
Observations	1,149	1,149	1,149
R <sup>2</sup>	0.189	0.297	0.298
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.181	0.289	0.290
Residual Std. Error	0.425 (df = 1137)	0.395 (df = 1136)	0.395 (df = 1135)
F Statistic	24.042*** (df =11; 1137)	39.909*** (df =12; 1136)	37.028*** (df =13; 1135)

**Notes:** Standard errors (clustered at the state level) are shown in parentheses. Significance levels are as follows:  $p$ : \* $<0.1$ ; \*\* $<0.05$ ; \*\*\* $<0.01$ .

Two things should be noted. First, the staggered electoral calendar, combined with the constitutional prohibition of consecutive reelection, is an exogenous source of variation in the time horizons of Mexican governors. Therefore, these results provide confidence that the observed patterns can be attributed to the influence of PAN governors and are not driven by confounding factors. It is also critical to highlight that the coefficient of *Election governor* in columns (2)-(3) is not statistically significant, indicating that the presence of lame-duck governors from other parties is not associated with the outcome of interest.

The results in Table 2 also suggest that, in comparison, PAN mayors have either lower incentives or less capacity to influence primary results. I do not find a statistically significant association between PAN mayors and support for any primary candidate. Although the estimates of *PAN Mayor* are negative in all specifications, they are not precisely estimated. A potential explanation for this is that the mayors' incentives to influence the race are affected by whether or not their party controls the governorship (Rosas and Lucardi, [Forthcoming](#)); model (3) accounts for this possibility by interacting *PAN Mayor* and *PAN Governor*, but the results do not support this interpretation. The next section presents additional analyses about the potential influence of PAN mayors.

Figure 1: PAN governors and vote for primary candidates



**Notes:** Marginal effects of PAN governors on *Margin JVM*, calculated from Model 2 in Table 2. The dot shows the magnitude of the effect and the lines are 95% confidence intervals.

The findings are also consistent with Hypothesis 3, which states that support for Vázquez Mota should be higher in places with concurrent local elections. The estimate of *Local elections* is positive and statistically significant in Models (2)-(3). The magnitudes of the estimates indicate that Vázquez Mota's margin of victory was about 26 p.p. higher in places that held local elections in 2012. Furthermore, although the coefficient of *Election governor* is not statistically significant on its own, the marginal effect of this type of election in states with *panista* governors is positive and statistically significant.

Finally, I discuss the influence of other covariates of interest. Overall, more involved *panistas* seem to be responsible for Vázquez Mota's victory. The coefficient of *Share of activos* is statistically significant across all specifications, and in no case was the magnitude less than 49 p.p. Paradoxically, these are likely the same activists that gave Felipe Calderón the presidential nomination in 2005. Similarly, the coefficient of *Vote Calderón 2005* is positive and statistically significant, indicating that in states where Calderón got the most support in 2005, Cordero got the least in 2012. Together, these results provide a full picture of the bases of support of the two candidates. Although the party elites threw their support behind Cordero, the party's rank and file and some non-aligned elites (i.e., lame-duck PAN governors) got Vázquez Mota nominated.

## **Additional Results**

The main results support the empirical expectations. This section presents additional evidence of the robustness of these results and the mechanisms driving these patterns.

**Mechanisms.** Although the patterns described above are highly suggestive of PAN governors interfering in the primary, a more thorough test of the theory requires showing the *mechanisms* by which their actions shaped the outcome of the primary. Before, I discussed three channels by which they could influence the race: (1) voter mobilization through regular GOTV efforts, (2) voter mobilization through clientelistic practices, and (3) strategic manipulation of election administration. I assess the plausibility of these mechanisms in two ways.

First, although I cannot directly observe mechanisms (1) and (2), I analyze variations in turnout levels as a proxy for electoral mobilization. If, as claimed, PAN governors intervened by mobiliz-

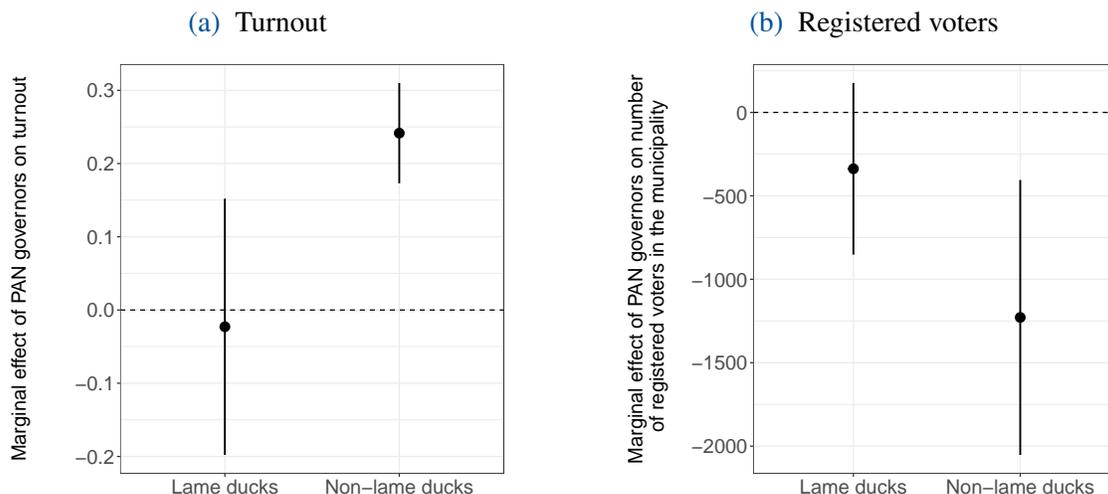
ing the electorate, there should be a positive association between their presence and turnout levels. Moreover, as discussed above, lame-duck governors face significantly different incentives than those with more time left in office. Specifically, when deciding how to use their resources, they should be more inclined to use them for other purposes (e.g., personal wealth accumulation) than to invest them in the primary. Therefore, any positive association between turnout and PAN governors should be predominantly driven by those who are not lame ducks. I replicate the models in Table 2 using *Turnout* as the dependent variable (see Appendix A5). The main finding, illustrated in the left panel of Figure 2, is that the marginal effect of PAN governors on turnout is conditional on their lame-duck status: consistent with the expectation, having a PAN governor is associated with a turnout increase of 25 p.p. *only* if the governor is not a lame duck.

The second analysis checks for irregularities in primary-voter registration. In this instance, the expectations are less clear-cut. On the one hand, the number of voters could be larger in municipalities with PAN governors as a result of mass-affiliation practices. That said, this empirical pattern is not necessarily proof of electoral manipulation. In fact, this finding is to be expected in the absence of irregularities, since parties tend to attract more members where they are electorally successful (Brollo, Forquesato and Gozzi, 2017). In other words, a larger number of PAN members, and thus primary voters, could simply be a reflection of the party's electoral success in the region; this is particularly true for the PAN, which is dominant in urban (more populated) areas. On the other hand, and more clearly linked to manipulation, places with PAN governors could have smaller primary electorates. Such a pattern would be consistent with what the Mexican press calls *rasurar el padrón*, that is, selectively excluding a candidate's supporters from the list of registered voters.

I replicate the previous models using the number of registered primary voters as the dependent variable (see Appendix A5). The main result, shown in the right panel of Figure 2, is that municipalities with PAN governors consistently have smaller primary electorates than those with governors from other parties. Consistent with previous findings, this negative association is only statistically significant in the case of non-lame duck PAN governors. Although this result is not

direct evidence of irregularities in voter registration, these patterns are highly suggestive—as discussed above, in the absence of manipulation, we would expect to observe the opposite pattern.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 2:** Influence of PAN governors on primary outcomes



**Notes:** Marginal effects of PAN governors on: *Turnout* (Panel A), estimated from Model 3 in Table A3, and *Registered voters* (Panel B), estimated from Model 3 in Table A4. Dots are magnitude of effect and lines are 95% CI.

**PAN Mayors.** I present evidence from a regression discontinuity (RD) design, an empirical strategy that can help isolate the effects of PAN officeholders on the primary outcomes of interest. Because of the number of observations necessary to carry out the analysis, I restrict my attention to PAN mayors. Appendix A8 provides details of the estimation.

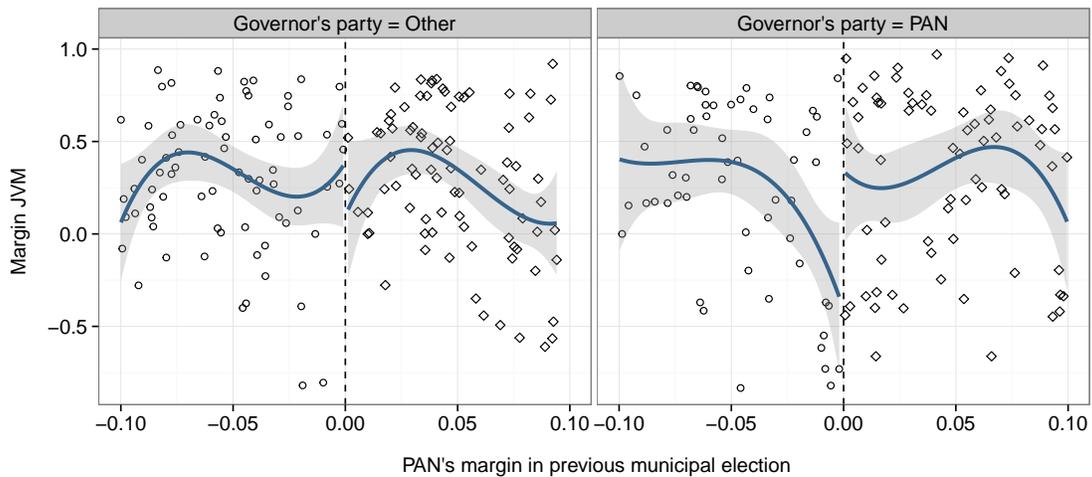
I begin by estimating the effect of interest using the entire sample. Next, I split the data by whether or not the municipality is in a state with a PAN governor, and separately estimate the effects for each subset. The rationale for splitting the sample is twofold. First, recent work suggests the mayors’ have less incentives to interfere in electoral races when their party controls the governorship (Rosas and Lucardi, [Forthcoming](#)). At the same time, a literature on distributive politics indicates mayors receive more resources in states with copartisan governors (e.g., Timmons and Broid, 2013); therefore, differences in access to resources between PAN politicians in and out of municipal office should be more pronounced in states with PAN governors.

<sup>15</sup>Appendix A6 shows these results are not driven by influential observations.

Figure 3 depicts the main substantive finding, which is that a subset of PAN mayors supported Vázquez Mota (RD estimates in Appendix A8). In each panel, the horizontal axis is the margin of the PAN mayoral candidate in the previous municipal election, and the vertical axis shows *Margin JVM*. The panel on the right (municipalities with PAN governors), shows that at the threshold there is a discontinuity of about 35-40 p.p. in Vázquez Mota’s margin of victory over Cordero. Under certain conditions, discussed below, this discontinuity is an estimate of the Local Average Treatment Effect (LATE).

While these results are suggestive of PAN mayors influencing primary results, they should be interpreted carefully. Identification of the LATE requires that the potential outcomes are continuous across the discontinuity, such that as we get sufficiently close to the threshold, places where the PAN won the municipal election are effectively identical to those where it lost. I conduct two standard tests to assess the plausibility of this assumption (see Appendix A8). First, to address concerns about sorting around the discontinuity threshold, I perform McCrary (2008) density tests. Consistent with the identification assumption, the test fails to reject the null hypothesis of equal density on opposite sides of the threshold for the subset of municipalities with PAN governors; this is not true, however, for the subset of municipalities with governors from other parties.

Figure 3: PAN mayors and primary outcomes



**Notes:** The figures shows RD cubic polynomial estimated separately on either side of the threshold around a 10 p.p. bandwidth, along with 95% CI. The panel on the right shows municipalities with *panista* governors, and panel on the left shows municipalities with governors from other parties.

Second, I conduct balance tests between municipalities with and without PAN mayors across a wide set of (pre-treatment) covariates. At the threshold, 2 out of 20 covariates are not balanced. Importantly, one of these variables is *Election governor*, which we know is associated with different primary outcomes.<sup>16</sup> Specifically, among municipalities with PAN governors (right panel of Figure 3), those to the right of the threshold are significantly more likely to be in states with lame-duck governors than those to the left of the threshold. This imbalance violates the key identification assumption of the RD design. In practical terms, this means the RD estimates could be driven by either PAN mayors or the timing of gubernatorial elections in these states (or both).

These results can be interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand, we can interpret the RD estimates as reflecting differences in the behavior of *panista* governors induced by the electoral calendar. This interpretation is consistent with the main results (see Figure 1). Most observations on the right of the threshold are in states with lame-duck PAN governors, who supported Vázquez Mota, whereas those on the left are in states with non-lame duck PAN governors, who supported Cordero. On the other hand, interpreting the RD estimates as driven by the actions of PAN mayors, is consistent with mayors following their governors' lead. Thus, we observe *panista* mayors increasing support for Vázquez Mota because, near the threshold, most of them are in states with lame-duck PAN governors, who also supported this candidate. Overall, although these interpretations differ in terms of the mechanism driving the observed patterns, they both underscore the critical role played by PAN governors in shaping the outcome of the primary.

## Conclusion

This paper presents one of the first empirical studies of a presidential primary outside the United States. I analyze the results of a presidential primary in Mexico, a country where strong subnational executives exert substantial control over their states' party organizations. The main theoretical claim is that, in these settings, primary candidates will focus their efforts on getting the support of these actors, who control key resources that allow them to shape elections to a degree that cannot be matched by other actors within the party. Taking advantage of the staggered electoral calendar

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<sup>16</sup>The other variable that is not balanced at the threshold is the average number of people per household.

used to elect Mexican governors, which affects both their incentives and capacity to intervene in the primary, I present evidence consistent with governors influencing their party's primary by both investing resources in electoral mobilization and tampering with the lists of registered voters.

Several factors differentiate the findings of this paper from what American politics works on the topic would suggest. I discuss two. First, while the idea of party-elite influence is pervasive in this literature, the mechanisms by which parties can affect primary outcomes (e.g., frontloading) are different from the channels suggested here. To my knowledge, no empirical investigation of turnout in presidential primaries in the United States has found an association between turnout levels in a party's primary and officials of that party holding office—not even those that emphasize elite-driven participation (e.g., Rothenberg and Brody, 1988; Atkeson and Maestas, 2016).

Second, a challenge for the study of party influence in the U.S. is the possibility that “party elites are merely joining the bandwagon of a successful candidate” (Hassell, 2015, 76), making it hard to identify whether endorsements have an effect on candidates' vote shares or simply reflect the elites' incentives to support a sure winner. The findings presented here run contrary to this logic, since they show the PAN elites supported a candidate who was expected to lose. This paper advances an explanation for this puzzle that highlights the role of patronage for prevailing in intraparty battles, a mechanism that has been shown to play an important role among Latin American parties (Kemahlioglu, 2006; Benton, 2007).

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