ABSTRACT

This article seeks to expand and broaden our understanding of candidate quality by examining party nominations in an institutional environment that differs from that of the U.S. We focus on gubernatorial nominations in Mexico during an era of changing institutional and competitive environments to understand how the meaning of quality candidate is transformed. We show how a lack of electoral competition under a hegemonic regime dictated the notion of “quality,” and how this definition changed once gubernatorial candidates must win competed, fair elections. We find that competition opened doors for local politicians that allow them to more successfully compete for the gubernatorial nomination.

Keywords: Mexico, nomination, governor, party organization, candidate quality
I. Introduction

The literature on candidate quality focuses on explaining why incumbents hold advantages over their electoral challengers. It is generally noted that quality candidates – that is, those with prior political experience – are less likely to run against well-entrenched incumbents (Bond et al., 1985, 511; Fiorina, 1977; Jacobson and Kernell, 1981). The thrust of this literature is to understand, within the American institutional setting, when higher quality challengers run against seated representatives and executives (Squire 1992, 125). This article seeks to expand and broaden our understanding of candidate quality by examining party nominations in an institutional environment that is different from that of the U.S. We study candidate quality in a regime that has changed from a hegemonic party system to one of burgeoning electoral competition; but due to the prohibition of reelection, all races are “open seats.” To do so, we compare gubernatorial nominations in Mexico during both an era of non-competitive and competitive environments. This allows us to devise a quasi-experimental design in which we can examine how candidate quality changes as the focus of political power and the structure of political opportunities changes. We believe that this extension of the micro-level logic of politicians’ incentives to a context outside the U.S. improves our understanding of candidate quality, because we can measure the effects of changes in the institutional environment, incorporate the interaction of the preferences of party leaders with those of ambitious office-seekers, and finally, because we can abstract from the overriding issue of individual incumbency advantage.

Mexico’s political system has undergone a sea change over the past twelve years, beginning with the dismal performance of the Party of the Institutional Revolution (PRI)
in the 1988 presidential race, and culminating in its defeat in the presidential elections in July 2000, after 71 years as the ruling party. Even before this defeat, the hegemonic party faced enormous challenges at the ballot box that had forced its leadership to select new types of candidates to important elected posts and reformulate its candidate selection procedures. In the heyday of PRI hegemony, the president and the party leadership controlled gubernatorial nominations. Given low levels of electoral competitiveness, securing a nomination was equivalent to winning an election. However, potential gubernatorial candidates of the PRI faced a different world under competitive circumstances beginning in the 1990s. The new demands of competition for the governor’s mansion, together with the constitutional prohibition against consecutive reelection, created incentives for ambitious state politicians to wage battles against their corporatist and bureaucratic party brethren to secure the gubernatorial nomination. National party leaders were forced against their immediate interests in controlling state executives into creating new nomination institutions, allowing state level primaries. We argue this was one way to continue to win governor races under far more competitive circumstances, while at the same time maintaining a unified party at the state level. Over time, these pressures created a new type of quality candidate for the governorship: one who was not necessarily tied into a national faction, but rather a PRI politician who had political experience in the state arena, and so was capable of winning contested elections in that jurisdiction.

To prove that the meaning of a “quality” candidate changed with the advent of competition, we have gathered a data set on professional backgrounds of PRI politicians incorporating both those who successfully won the gubernatorial nomination, as well as...
those who were defeated in their nomination bid for both the non-competitive and democratic eras. We show that to be a quality candidate in a context of a hegemonic regime is to have contact with the president or to an important national faction. Thus, under non-competitive circumstances, nomination winners are high quality (i.e. experienced) politicians with careers at the national (federal) administration. Under a competitive setting, the meaning of “quality” changes, politicians with more experience in state government and electoral contests are more likely to win gubernatorial nominations. Politicians holding only federal administration experience, even with very long political trajectories, are not likely to secure a nomination.

This work is organized in the following way: in the first section, we look at the candidate quality literature and lay out how the Mexican case requires us to take into account two institutional factors different from the US: the prohibition on consecutive reelection and party-controlled ballot access. Then, we discuss the organization and political ends of gubernatorial nominations during the hegemonic era. In that section, we discuss how the effects of electoral competition caused severe dilemmas for PRI leaders because of changing incentives for ambitious politicians. In the third section, we present an explanation for why candidate selection changed in the form it did, given the pressures of electoral competition between 1995 and 1999. The fourth section presents a statistical analysis of all serious contenders for PRI gubernatorial nominations in this period that sheds light on the question of what kinds of party politician are most fit under the new competitive circumstances. We expect the most successful contenders to be politicians with proven electoral track records and strong local connections.

II. Candidate Quality
There is a long-standing debate in the American politics literature on incumbent advantage in winning elective office. An important element of this advantage is “candidate quality”; that is, whether the incumbent is able to scare away qualified challengers with prior political experience because of his advantages in name recognition, resources, institutional perks of office, or personal qualities.

Political experience (however it is measured and weighed) is considered important because those politicians with prior elective posts will enjoy contacts and organizational strength, will be better able to raise money for the campaign, and will run better campaigns (Adams and Squire 1997; Bond, Covington, and Fleisher 1985: 513). To have run and to have held a different elective office allows one to establish one’s credentials as a public servant, and raises one’s name recognition among the electorate (Krasno and Green 1988, 922). Different authors have used distinct measures of quality, but all revolve around prior political experience. Gary Jacobson marks a simple dichotomous relation between having or not previous elective experience (Jacobson 1989). Bond et al (1985) collapse two different elements: the ability to attract money, and prior political experience, which they weight on a three-point scale. Krasno and Green (1988, 922-3) look at a combination of posts that distinguish between those who have or have not held elective office, and finally Squire ranks elective posts from less to more important, and then multiplies this score by the percentage of the state’s voters covered by that elective office (Squire 1992, 129).

Our first task is to expand this incumbency and candidate quality literature outside of the American political system to take into account different institutional and competitive environments. Elements in the Mexican case that are quite different from the
US system include: first, the constitutional prohibition on reelection (consecutive for mayoral and legislative; or any reelection for gubernatorial or presidential posts); second, party control over candidate selection, and third, vastly differing levels of electoral competition. These different aspects matter: they force us to examine ambition in a context in which there is no incumbency; they change the solitary focus on the ambitious politician who makes strategic decisions concerning when to run for higher office to one that includes party leaders; and finally, they oblige us to search for different measures of candidate quality under both non-competitive and competitive conditions.

Schlesinger’s tri-partite framework of ambition suggests that all politicians wish to either retain their public position, advance to a higher post, or serve only one term (1966). The structure of opportunities - that is, the type of posts available and the rules for obtaining them - constrains the actions of politicians. In the Mexican case, the relative costs of running for governor are compared to those of running for a different seat, or winning a new post in the administration. Since there is no consecutive reelection (or any reelection for gubernatorial posts), incumbency is a non-issue, so one must then ask how progressive ambition affects a politician when he must necessarily search out another post at the end of his term.

Second, under the American system of primaries, candidate hopefuls are largely self-starting: with enough money, they can hope to win a spot on the ballot by winning the party’s primary nomination. This sort of individual strategy does not work in Mexico because the parties, in particular the PRI until 1998, held ironclad control over ballot access. And even after primaries had been instituted, the party – not individual politicians – still decided who would appear on the primary ballot. The general literature
on candidate selection notes that if a party label is necessary and/or desirable for winning elections, nomination control implies that he who “controls the sought-after labels will then have important controls over the candidates they choose to nominate” (Czudnowski 1975), and so the ambitious politician must still present himself to party leaders.

There exist a series of possible methods for selecting candidates that range from the most centrally controlled to the least. The open primary is the least controlled method and the imposition from the top party leadership is the most. Party conventions fall in between. Since the 1950s the PRI’s gubernatorial nomination procedures were controlled at the national (and presidential) level through the National Executive Committee’s (the CEN) authority over the state delegate conventions. Informally, the president imposed gubernatorial candidates for his party. Under the primary system that began in 1998, the national party leadership devolved responsibility for candidate selection down to the state level of the party hierarchy, in which it had very little say over the eventual winner. Instead of only focusing on the individual politician’s interests and strategies, one must also examine the interaction in a changing electoral and institutional environment between office seekers and party leaders with control over ballot access.3

Finally, Mexico was not a competitive, fully democratic system until well into the 1990s. Electoral fraud was frequent, and PRI governments held and used overwhelming amounts of public resources during elections to win votes. The steady growth in electoral victories for the opposition parties in the 1990s becomes an important part of the story of why the meaning of quality changed. The different ways of measuring political experience and candidate quality mentioned above are important to distinguish, because this paper proposes measuring quality taking into account distinct combinations of
elective and administrative, local and federal posts that together make up different types of professional paths within the PRI regime. While there is a good deal of disagreement among students of American politics over how to measure “quality”, most agree that prior electoral experience is a central basis of the concept. In order to capture the different structures of opportunity offered by a hegemonic, centralized regime that has undergone significant democratic transformation and decentralization, we highlight two types of experience: “encompassing” careers where politicians have circulated among electoral, federal and local administrative posts, and what we call “local” political careers that do not pass through federal posts, but do have local administrative and elective experience.

Studying changes in governor nominations in Mexico helps to understand how the pressures of elections change the internal workings of a party organization, in particular, recruitment of quality candidates. Both party leaders and ambitious individual politicians responded to the new challenges posed by competition and the opportunities offered by the new nomination institutions. Not only did the new opportunities change the politicians’ calculations, the new institutional arrangements changed the incentives of national PRI leaders.

III. Gubernatorial nominations, institutions and political ambition.

Between the 1950s and the mid 1990s, the president of Mexico, as the de facto leader of the hegemonic party, decided the PRI’s candidates for governor, expecting them to win the elections easily. The authoritarian regime’s success was based to a large extent on the lack of viable exit options for ambitious PRI politicians. Except for sporadically contested municipal races, competition was insignificant until the political “earthquake”
following the 1988 presidential elections. The formal rules of nomination in the PRI’s statutes allowed enormous leeway to the party’s national leadership committee (the CEN) to decide on the nomination method. The statutes established that all gubernatorial candidates would be chosen in state nominating conventions. In practice, however, only one candidate was placed on the slate (called the candidate of unity), so that delegates essentially ratified the president’s choice, rather than selecting among competing options.

_Candidate Quality under Hegemonic Conditions._

Before the onset of electoral competition, national party leaders were selected and monitored by each president, and they worked under the authority of the Secretary of Gobernación. The goals of national party leaders determined the types of candidates chosen to run for state-level executive positions. In both political and fiscal terms, the presidents were not able to simply dictate the behavior of all governors all the time, nor dictate political outcomes in the states. Mexico was not an overly repressive regime; so much of the work of the president was to keep the nation under control. The governors played an important role in achieving this goal. Teachers, industrial union members, service workers, and students voiced their demands and interests to the governors, as well as to the president and his executive bureaucracy. Therefore, governors were chosen not simply to send a close political ally of the president to a particular state (Hernández-Rodríguez 2003, 104). Gubernatorial nominees were chosen by the president in order to create coalitions to support presidential policies (Amezcua and Pardinas 1997), to maintain political order in the state, and only in some cases because of a close personal relationship. These objectives were all tied into a fundamental issue confronting the authoritarian regime: The president had to work to maintain vertical control over his
party and government, and candidate selection was a prime method of achieving this goal. Thus, under the authoritarian regime, “candidate quality” for gubernatorial hopefuls was a fundamentally different beast than under competitive conditions in the United States. Hernandez (1991) suggests that high-quality candidates had to incorporate experience in the federal bureaucracies, elective experience in the federal legislatures, and some local experience – that is – hold an encompassing political background.

Competition complicated the PRI’s nomination procedures in the 1990s. During the administrations of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) and Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000), electoral reforms created a far more level playing field. In addition, more Mexicans were willing to vote against the hegemonic party. In the 1988 federal election, according to the tainted official vote tally, more than half of the voters did not support Carlos Salinas, consonant with the declining trend of party support exhibited during the previous two decades. By 1997 the PRI lost control of the Chamber of Deputies in the midterm elections, obtaining less than 42 percent of the popular vote. Similar patterns of declining support were observed throughout the 1980s and 1990s in most states (Magaloni 1999).

Facing increasing electoral competition, the dilemma for the PRI leadership was to choose gubernatorial candidates who could win clean elections, while not splitting the party at the state level, and at the same time maintaining the hierarchical control of the CEN and the president. If ambitious PRI politicians could gain access to the general ballot through their own efforts and without the influence of the party leadership, then it would be far more difficult for the latter to direct their actions once in office. Under competitive elections, losers in the hegemonic party’s nominations could leave the party,
compete against it, and even defeat the “official” candidate, if an opposition party were willing to nominate them.

The three objectives of the PRI’s leaders in the new competitive circumstances became impossible to achieve simultaneously, even before the defeat of the party’s presidential candidate in 2000. The president and the CEN ceded decision-making power to the rank and file members via the open primary nomination system, and in so doing, allowed the governors to form longer-term state political groups and strengthen their positions vis-a-vis the president and party leadership. As competition changed the calculations of actors within the PRI, the party’s leaders scrambled to develop and test new ways of nominating gubernatorial candidates. This interaction also created a new set of attributes that candidates should fulfill in order to compete for gubernatorial posts. That is, it created a new understanding of “candidate quality”. Instead of an encompassing political career, a candidate with close local links and experience, \( \text{and no national level bureaucratic path} \), was better placed to win a nomination.

However, it was not immediately obvious which procedure the president would choose in the mid-1990s. A set of specific circumstances helped determine the first procedural change in the era of competition. The nomination method of elite arrangement of gubernatorial candidates was replaced by conventions of democratically elected delegates for a short period in 1995, during the darkest days of the financial crisis of 1994-1995. This method failed to take hold because PRI politicians at the state level simply did not trust the national party to select delegates in a representative fashion. When the candidate hopefuls lost the nomination, they complained bitterly and publicly about the unfairness of the process.
After stunning defeats in the three states in which fair nominating conventions were attempted, the leader of the CEN lost her job and the president returned to deciding candidates for governor. These candidates (from mid-1995 to early 1998) were selected by the time-honored method of “investigating” the political situation within the state in general and among the state’s PRI political factions in particular, and then searching for the “correct” candidate that had the requisite experience and connections with the state level political class or a major national figure.

As the party began gearing up for the 1998 gubernatorial races, the most important year in sheer numbers of elections held (ten), its leaders confronted two serious problems – rising levels of electoral competition and the 1996 electoral reforms that took the organization and management of national elections out of the hands of the PRI. In early 1998, however, the party leadership saw a good opportunity to win back for the PRI a state lost to the opposition in 1992. A particular gubernatorial candidate, Patricio Martínez, was popular with state voters, but did not control the party machinery in the state, which “belonged” to another gubernatorial hopeful. The CEN was faced with a dilemma: if it unilaterally imposed the popular candidate, the party boss would cause an up-roar, and perhaps even leave the party. If the party wrote out a fair set of rules for a delegate convention, as it had tried to do in 1995, the party boss would have taken the nomination easily, because of his dominance in the state party organization. Yet, if he were allowed to become the candidate, the PRI would in all likelihood lose the election.

The open primary method was seen as a credible solution to these problems. By allowing all registered voters to participate, the most popular pre-candidate would be chosen, and the loser could in no way argue that cheating, finagling, or favoritism on the
part of the CEN had caused his defeat. In fact, by demonstrating clearly the overall lack of popularity with the voting population, the loser would have to think hard about splitting off from the PRI to run for another party. Furthermore, by losing a fair primary election, the opposition parties might be unwilling to offer their party’s candidacy to an unpopular candidate. Another advantage became clear as the PRI primary heated up: the enormous amount of free press the two PRI pre-candidates received as they fought to win the nomination meant that the winner was far ahead of the opposition candidate in terms of name recognition when he began the general campaign. The president of the party, Mariano Palacios Alcocer, proclaimed that the primaries in fact strengthened the party, and demonstrated to the voters that the PRI was adapting to more competitive conditions faster than the other two opposition parties (Excélsior May 16, 1998). Thus, the primary held out great promise to resolve two of the PRI’s central dilemmas: it selected popular candidates and if done well, could also resolve the problem of state party ruptures. Furthermore, in the year before the presidential nomination was to be decided, it became apparent that the old method of the president imposing his successor was going to be met with extreme resistance. Therefore, many analysts and party leaders began to mention an open primary as a possible way of choosing the next PRI presidential candidate.13

At the same time this drama was being played out, the president and members of the CEN bungled an elite arrangement in a state considered a sure win for the PRI, by not allowing the most popular state-based politician the right to compete. This politician left the party, and competed for the center-left party, defeating the official PRI candidate. The PRI could no longer use its decades-old form of imposing candidates, expecting the losers to accept the decision, because the most popular candidates had an alternative, and
could chose to further their personal ambitions, rather than accept the nomination defeat meted out by the party. In stark contrast to this outcome, the state where the open primary was enacted was recovered by the PRI from the hands of the opposition.

In a decisive moment of the history of the PRI, the president decided that the party would use the primary form to choose the gubernatorial candidates in the next batch of four states. According to Socorro Díaz, General Secretary of the party at this time,\textsuperscript{14} many leaders of the CEN were not happy with the primary. One would expect party leaders not to devolve nomination decisions to registered voters, as this would divest them of important controls over politicians’ future behavior, since these elected officials now owed their posts to the state’s voters and not the good will of the president. However, the president, in planning his own succession for the year 2000, made a strategic decision to force the party to continue primaries so he could assure a new selection procedure in the presidential nomination of his party’s candidate. By obliging the CEN to continue gubernatorial primaries, Ernesto Zedillo paved the way for the historic 1999 presidential primary.

Despite the initial successes of the new nomination experiment, in a world without external enforcement of party rules, primaries constituted a serious problem. When the seated governor was from the PRI, he had strong incentives to bias the primary contest in favor of his ally. Because primaries are not regulated by the Federal Electoral Commission (IFE) or the state commissions, there was enormous room for unfair practices. The PRI governors had incentives and resources to tilt the primaries in favor of their favorites, as the new governor would protect the former executive, and because this kind of dynasty making would force state politicians to make political arrangements with
the governor, and not the national level party leaders. As a result, several primaries ended in splits (such as the case of Baja California Sur, later in 1998) and defeats in the general elections. Once the PRI lost the 2000 presidential elections and were forced out of office, the party was free to return to its more top-down arrangements which are far cheaper, an important consideration now that the PRI has lost control over the federal bureaucracy and its resources. Between mid-2000 and 2004, approximately half of the gubernatorial candidates have been chosen through primaries, and the other half were selected through elite arrangements.

**IV. Empirical Evidence: The Consequences of Competition.**

The previous section suggests the reasons behind the change in gubernatorial nominations within the PRI. In this section we address whether the competitive challenges the PRI faced in the 1990s were reflected in a change in the nature of “candidate quality”, specifying the attributes characterizing successful PRI nominees and their competitors. In order to address the question of candidate quality, we do not limit ourselves to simply measuring previous elective experience, but we rather characterize the attributes of politicians seeking the nomination according to their career paths that include party, bureaucratic, and elective posts at both the federal and the local levels.

A dichotomous categorization of previous experience does not exploit the wealth of information concerning the overall pattern of a career followed by an individual before contesting a nomination. We propose an improvement in the indicators of candidate quality by offering a better understanding of the skills and assets a candidate brings to a given race. In particular, candidate quality is given by a combination of posts held, rather than the specific offices held in isolation. In general, career paths can go through three
types of posts: a) elective legislative posts; b) federal executive posts; and c) local executive posts. We single out two types of “high quality” candidates: a type with an “encompassing” career path (in which all three types of experiences are present), and a type with a “localist” path, which combines office in the local executive with federal elective experience in the national legislatures, but no posts held in the federal bureaucracies. If electoral competition had an impact on the PRI nominees, localist types of candidates should be more likely to secure a nomination in the new political environment. Under competition, we hypothesize that belonging to a prominent national faction (*camarilla*) within the PRI, patiently queuing for the party nomination from a senate seat, or capturing the favor of the current president, should *not* increase the likelihood of attaining a nomination.

We expect successful contenders in the era of hegemonic decline to be politicians with strong local roots, capable of commanding a majority of voters at election time. Connections with the bureaucracies in Mexico City were less important than a firm local base of voter support. Belonging to the national corporatist organizations in the party should not give an advantage to a candidate, since corporatist membership and discipline can harm the party’s chances because of their reputation for corruption. An explicit or implicit endorsement by the president should not ensure a nomination either, since good candidates required local connections to command support that could be garnered from a state convention or a primary. Even if a potential candidate believed that primaries or conventions were going to be manipulated, he needed local followers to out-maneuver his rivals, who would presumably also try to manipulate the nomination outcome.
Who competes for nominations? A dataset of all winning and losing gubernatorial nomination candidates is unavailable for the complete era of PRI hegemony. However, Camp (1977) provides a snapshot of 92 PRI gubernatorial pre-candidates and losing nominees during the Echeverría administration (1970-1976), competing for 20 state elections. Assuming this is a representative sample for the hegemonic era, we can compare the career paths of candidates during the era of hegemony, with our dataset of 147 contenders to 28 gubernatorial races between 1994 and 1999. The dataset comprises individual level career data on contenders to all Mexican gubernatorial elections, except for Chiapas, Tabasco, Yucatán and the Federal District.

Table 1 compares the relative frequency with which contenders held specific posts at some point in their careers during the PRI hegemonic era (column 2) and the competitive one (column 3). These frequencies can be compared with those corresponding to governors (i.e. successful contenders who secured the nomination) from 1965 to 1994 (column 1). Although the pattern of career experience of contenders is not too different from that of successful nominees, the comparison between the first two columns confirms Camp’s (1977) finding that losing contenders had less experience overall. In contrast, a comparison between columns 1 and 3 shows that contenders in the competitive period were, on average, more experienced in political office than both contenders from the past, and even the PRI governors (i.e. successful nominees) who preceded them.

[Table 1 around here]

Except for federal cabinet posts, the experience of these contenders, as measured by these frequencies, was always higher in the competitive era. Three quarters of them
had been federal deputies, half had been senators, and a third had been mayors. Perhaps more tellingly, a comparison between columns 2 and 3 suggests that the most striking change in career profiles occurred in local offices: the percentage of contenders having held the unelected Lieutenant Governor\(^{19}\) (or chief of staff) post (the most important post in the state cabinet) increases fourfold; local deputy experience increases threefold and municipal president frequencies are twice as high. The only experience that decreases is federal cabinet membership. Contenders in the competitive era had more local political experience than both PRI contenders and governors of the past. For the first time since the “taming” of the governors by national PRI leaders, that took place sometime in the 1940s and 1950s\(^{20}\) a local career path seemed to be a better experience from which to attempt to win a gubernatorial nomination.

No single post of previous experience seems to be sufficient to secure a nomination for the 147 gubernatorial hopefuls in the competitive era.\(^{21}\) The highest success rate (39 percent) was observed among individuals who occupied at some point in their careers the post of Lieutenant Governor, the most important cabinet position in state governments. Hence, having worked under a previous governor was an important resource for a successful nomination, which is what one would expect if there were some incumbency advantage for current office holders, when elections were a serious threat.

Federal cabinet membership is commonly regarded in the traditional literature on Mexico as the ultimate objective for an ambitious politician, since it provides a chance to contest for the presidential succession (Smith 1979). However, many cabinet members move into governorships once they fail to achieve the highest office. Cabinet members could thus have high success rates either because of the influence of the president in their
nomination, or because they were prominent politicians who moved into the national political arena, without losing relevance in their states. The success rate coming from the Federal cabinet was, however, only 25 percent, not much higher than a random draw. The least successful contenders were individuals who had headed a federal agency (9 percent). While at the heyday of PRI hegemony heading a federal agency, like the oil monopoly PEMEX, the national utility CFE or the social security administration IMSS, involved the command over vast resources and power, national bureaucrats with little connection to state politics do not seem to make for good candidates in a competitive electoral environment. Contenders belonging to the corporatist organizations of the party had success rates of 19.3 percent. They were no more likely to become nominees than a random draw. Politicians affiliated to those organizations probably did not make good candidates for elective office, given the poor reputations of corporatist leaders and candidates among the electorate at large.

It is worth noting that despite their low success rates, national level figures were still interested in competing for local nominations. Yet, none of the contenders whose immediate previous posts were in the federal government (including sub-cabinet positions) was able to secure a nomination; and not a single cabinet member of president Ernesto Zedillo even attempted to compete for a governor nomination. This suggests that being a cabinet member or an official in the federal government did not constitute an asset to become nominated, and perhaps it was even a liability.22

Of the 56 candidates who were senators immediately before competing for the nomination, only 12 were nominated, around one fifth. The frequency of success of senators is the same as that observed for the pool of all candidates, regardless of their
career paths. This is rather surprising. Traditionally, senate seats provided a favorable stepping-stone into governorships in the heyday of PRI hegemony. Ambitious politicians once conceived of the senate as the post they had to win before their “turn” would come to become governors. In competitive elections, instead, nominations according to an informal rank in a waiting list at the senate seem to be no longer respected.

Individual level statistical analysis can be used to understand what produces a successful bid for a governor nomination. We perform a maximum likelihood logit estimation of the determinants of nomination. The dependent variable is the success of a contender, indicated by the party nomination, regardless of whether that nominee eventually came to win the gubernatorial election.

The independent variables are the following: first, a dummy variable indicating whether a candidate had previously contended for the nomination in his or her state. Out of the pool of contenders for whom information was available, 23 of them had tried to become governors in the previous election. Experience in a previous contest should give a candidate a chance to ‘get to know’ the local power brokers before actually winning the chance to compete for the party. We expect this variable \((\text{prior candidate})\) to have a positive sign, indicating a higher probability of nomination.

The second variable is whether the immediate post before the nomination race was a senate seat \((\text{senate})\). We expect this variable to be non-significant, indicating the breakdown of the traditional queuing system of the hegemonic PRI in the competitive age. The third variable is the type of contender, categorized according to his or her full career profile. We use dummy variables for \(\text{localist}\) and \(\text{encompassing}\) career paths, which mean that the base category of the estimation are what we conceive as “low
quality” individuals with no bureaucratic experience in local government.\textsuperscript{26} A positive significant effect of these dummy variables would be interpreted as an increase in the probability of nomination, as compared to the base category. We expect local and encompassing types to be high-quality candidates, and hence the respective dummies should have positive signs. However, we expect the size of the localist coefficient to be larger than the one for the encompassing category.

Finally, we include some additional variables related to alternative hypotheses. We test whether a contender belonging to corporatist organizations (\textit{corporatist}) was more likely to be successful. We include a variable for whether an individual’s immediate post before the nomination race was in the state bureaucracy (\textit{gobest}). This variable would reflect the strength of the sitting governor, and his intention to have a close collaborator securing the nomination, and probably continuing his influence and legacy in the state. We include a variable for whether the contender was heading a federal agency just before the nomination (\textit{agency}). Since there were no contenders directly emerging from the presidential cabinet, this is the closest variable we have that might reflect the intention of the president to have one of his collaborators securing a nomination. We do not expect any of these variables to be significant.\textsuperscript{27}

Table 3 reports three models estimated in STATA. As expected, successful contenders to governor nominations were seasoned politicians who had attempted to secure the governor nomination from the party in the previous election and whose political careers involved experience in local administrative posts. Politicians with no local experience were unlikely to obtain the nominations. This was a fundamental change in Mexican politics.
The estimates confirm that having previously contended in a nomination increased the chances of being selected. There is a positive and highly significant effect, which remains regardless of the control variables used. Queuing at a senate seat does not seem to provide any advantage as it once did. If anything, the negative sign suggests senatorial posts might be a handicap, although the effect is barely significant from a statistical standpoint. Hence, during the period of increased electoral competition the expectation that a Senate seat is a good place to patiently wait for a gubernatorial nomination does no longer seem to hold. Local and encompassing career paths are both positive, although only local careers are consistently statistically significant.

[Table 2 around here]

Finally corporatism shows a negative sign, suggesting that belonging to corporatist organizations might decrease the chances of being a gubernatorial candidate. This effect, however, fails to reach statistical significance. Being a close collaborator of the sitting governor shows a positive, but also insignificant effect. In contrast, having previously headed a federal agency is a predictor of failure: the sign is negative and statistically significant.

The size of the effects cannot be interpreted directly as conventionally done with coefficients in a regression. Table 4 calculates the predicted probabilities of the model, using CLARIFY (King, Tomz and Wittenberg, 2000), according to specific values for the independent variables. It shows some combinations of attributes for a contender, and the probabilities predicted by model (1). The simulation reports a predicted probability, together with 95 percent confidence bands for a candidate who was not occupying a senate seat and did not belong to corporatist organizations.
The first column in table 4, which is labeled as the “base category” candidate, represents the probability of selection for an individual with no local career experience. This is a somewhat typical contender in the heyday of PRI hegemony: a politician likely to secure a nomination due to his or her connections to the president. If this type of candidate had not tried to become a governor in the previous nomination, the model predicts she would have had a 10.6 percent probability of being nominated. That probability would have been even lower if she was a senator from a corporatist organization. If that politician had previously contended to become a governor, her probability increases to almost a third. Hence, our model predicts rather low chances of nomination for individuals without local career experiences.

[Table 3 around here]

There is a dramatic change for someone with either an encompassing or a local career path. Without having contended previously for the same post, local politicians are almost 40 percent likely to win a nomination. That probability goes all the way to two thirds when they have contended before. The confidence intervals of the probabilities are rather wide, given the small number of observations in the model. However, the lower bound of the local politician who had previously contended (34.6 percent) is even higher than the expected probability of someone with federal, but no local, career.

V. Conclusions.

Candidate quality is an important concept for explaining incumbent advantage in US politics. The micro-logic dictates that ambitious politicians will weigh the risk of running for a higher office or challenging a seated official against the possible gains of holding that office. This article has taken the concept of candidate quality out of this
institutional context and used it to understand the interaction among ambitious PRI politicians and party leaders in a changing electoral environment with no consecutive legislative reelection. In doing this, the paper has highlighted differences that help us use candidate “quality” in a new way. First, one has to take into account that the constitutional prohibition against consecutive legislative reelection removes the safer option of “statically” building a legislative career, and forces politicians to search out electoral posts. Second, we have emphasized the importance of the interaction of politician and party leader when the party organization controls (to a greater or lesser extent) ballot access. Finally, we have shown how a lack of electoral competition under a hegemonic regime dictated the notion of “quality,” and how this definition can change once gubernatorial candidates must win competed, fair elections.

For several decades of hegemonic rule, the party and its leaders were able to control the actions of the ambitious politicians by controlling nominations in a non-reelection environment, with little to no electoral competition. Pressures at the ballot box, however, gave the politicians an exit option and so party leaders had to struggle to find a nomination method to choose popular candidates for more competitive races, while avoiding splits within the PRI. In the initial stages, national PRI leaders and the president of Mexico attempted to maintain their hierarchical prerogatives over nominations. During this struggle, several methods were chosen and rejected, in large part because they were not perceived as fair, or they led to bad nomination choices, or they led to splits, or some combination of the above. Primaries were finally accepted as a possible method of choosing popular candidates and maintaining party unity. Since the 2000 presidential
defeat, the party has used all nomination methods in an effort to maintain control while not splitting the party organization.

The statistical evidence presented in this work demonstrates how the pressures to win competitive elections led party leaders and ambitious politicians to rethink gubernatorial nominations. Because we have data on both winners and losers in this process, we can identify both those who aspire to the nomination, and those who win it. We find that competition opened doors for local politicians that allow them to more successfully compete for the gubernatorial nomination. This is much as one would expect: “good” candidates are those who are known in the state, which means those who have held posts in state administration or in the local congress. The paradox of candidate quality is that localist contenders are better than contenders with more “experience”, whether having previously contended or with the additional virtue of having served in the federal government.

The consequences of the new state politics will be profound, because political stability in Mexico under the hegemonic regime was predicated on vertical control over both the party organization and the different levels of government (federal, state, and municipal). High levels of electoral competition, culminating in the loss of the presidency in 2000, and changing nomination procedures, are leading to a new role for all Mexican governors, regardless of party affiliation. Because voters, not the president, now elect governors, it will be far more difficult for the federal executive to remove state executives at will. This strengthens the governors, and allows them to demand greater resources from the federal budget. Governors (especially those from the PRI) will be able
to form stronger political groups in their entities because of the greater openness in nominations.

**References.**


Table 1

Career Experience of Gubernatorial PRI Nominees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senator</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Deputy</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>74.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Agency</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local deputy</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lieutenant Governor</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled by authors from data published in Camp (1995) and the Diccionario Biográfico del Gobierno Mexicano of 1994 for governors during the hegemonic era; Camp (1977) for nominees in the hegemonic era; and newspaper reports for nominees in the competitive era.

Note: Does not add to 100 since nominee can have held several posts in the past.
Table 2
Logit estimates for determinants of nomination success, 1994-1999
(Standard errors in parenthesis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contender</td>
<td>1.288**</td>
<td>1.141**</td>
<td>1.315**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.557)</td>
<td>(0.543)</td>
<td>(0.570)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator</td>
<td>-0.472</td>
<td>-0.123</td>
<td>-0.263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-507)</td>
<td>(0.570)</td>
<td>(0.523)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>1.767***</td>
<td>1.578***</td>
<td>1.580***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.636)</td>
<td>(0.607)</td>
<td>(0.645)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encompassing</td>
<td>1.030*</td>
<td>0.701</td>
<td>1.288**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.602)</td>
<td>(0.585)</td>
<td>(0.633)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporatist</td>
<td>-0.047</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.571)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State government</td>
<td>0.628</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.639)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.448*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.859)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.218***</td>
<td>-2.289***</td>
<td>-2.131***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.517)</td>
<td>(0.543)</td>
<td>(0.504)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log likelihood</td>
<td>-51.979</td>
<td>-55.807</td>
<td>-50.236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi2</td>
<td>11.94**</td>
<td>11.83**</td>
<td>15.43***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R2</td>
<td>0.1030</td>
<td>0.096</td>
<td>0.1331</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Statistically significant at 90 percent level
** Statistically significant at 95 percent level
*** Statistically significant at 99 percent level
Table 3

Simulation of effect of career path on nomination success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base Category</th>
<th>Encompassing</th>
<th>Local</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Contended</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[3.8, 23.4]</td>
<td>[10.7, 45.5]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contended</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[11.5, 53.1]</td>
<td>[25.0, 79.1]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 The PRI officially won the election, but few observers believe that the election was clean. Whether electoral fraud was used to boost Carlos Salinas’ victory, or to overturn a victory by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas is a hotly debated topic in Mexico.

2 Mexico is formally organized as a federation with 31 states and a Federal District. While party organization has mainly been studied at the national level, party organizations at the state level have increasingly played greater role. See Mizrahi, 2003.

3 Independent candidates are prohibited under Mexican electoral law.

4 The Secretary of Gobernación was, under the hegemonic PRI regime, an extremely important political portfolio in the President’s executive Cabinet. The ministry was charged with the political management of the administration.

5 Interview with Carlos Sepúlveda, former member of the CDE of Jalisco, April 27, 1997.

6 Interview with Mario Tarango, former president of the CDE in Chihuahua, February 2, 1998; and with Salvador Rocha Díaz, former Lieutenant Governor of Guanajuato and senator, February 23, 1999.

7 For more on changing voting patterns in Mexico, Domínguez and McCann (1996); and Domínguez and Poiré (1999).

8 The CEN had to find a nomination method that was both acceptable and credible among the state party leaders. It does no good to choose candidates democratically if the losers do not accept the results as fair. This would lead to splits or simple inactivity on the part of losers among the state party during campaign season and in turn, to disastrous electoral results.
For space considerations, this work will not consider President Salinas’s short-lived 1990 party reform. Two states were used as experiments for more open nomination procedures following this reform in 1991, but when the state delegates chose a candidate in the state of Colima who was not the presidential favorite, the experiment was abandoned.

Except for the case of the nomination for the head of government for the Federal District, a post that is equivalent to a state governor. For these 1997 elections, held concurrently with the mid-term legislative elections, a delegate convention was held with three viable candidates.

One of the PRI’s eventual pre-candidates for the nomination, Mayor of the capital Gustavo Ramos Becerra said that “the leadership and formal structure of the party has been organized and will work for the former leader of the party, (Iglesias).” Lucero Ramírez, *El Universal*, January 19, 1998.


The open form of primary (all registered voters) was chosen by the PRI over the closed form (party members) because the party did not have a reliable membership list, and there would have been enormous pressures on all the actors involved to inflate the membership numbers.

Interview, April, 2002.

When asked why the CEN did not make more of an effort to keep the seated PRI governors out of the primary process, a former PRI leader stated that the CEN had few instruments with which to keep the governors in line. The Secretary of *Gobernación* had traditionally been the actor that maintained order by enforcing vertical decisions, while
the CEN had operationalized these decisions. Because Francisco Labastida wished to maintain a cordial relationship with the PRI elite in the months preceding his bid for the presidential nomination, he was unwilling to impose order. Interview with Mariano Palacios Alcocer, June 18, 2003.

16 Authors’ own data.

17 By “successful” we mean those politicians who were able to secure the party nomination. Whether they were able to win the election is a separate issue we do not address. For the best treatment of this question see Poiré (2002, ch. 4).

18 Career paths were coded using the political biographies published by the Mexican Government (1994), Camp (1995), and newspaper accounts for specific nomination contests. It is important to note that our database does not sample in the dependent variable, since we include both successful and unsuccessful politicians seeking the nomination. Inferences about nomination processes which only include individuals who secured them are not valid from a statistical standpoint. To our knowledge, the only other studies including data of losing gubernatorial nominees are Camp (1974) and Poiré (2002).

19 This is our translation of Secretario General de Gobierno.

20 See Brandenburg (1964), Scott (1964), and Camp (1977).

21 The prevalence of federal legislative experience in virtually all candidates, either as Senator and/or Deputy, is virtually a necessary condition to compete, consequence of the so called “locks” (candados) for gubernatorial nomination approved in the 16th Party Assembly, September, 1996.
It is important to note that there was a statutory rule change in gubernatorial nominations in 1996. Only those with elective experience could stand for the nomination. This took many technocrats in the federal bureaucracy out of the running.

This is a surprising finding, given that the senate has traditionally been a preferred post from which PRI politicians traditionally queued for their turn to the governor seat (see Langston and Diaz-Cayeros, 2003).

The estimate is analogous, from a statistical viewpoint, to making a multivariate description of the expected value of nominations, according to the career paths and previous experiences of candidates. However, if we believe that career and institutional characteristics explain nomination success, the model provides an inference of the causes of nomination (see Deaton 1997, 64). Such inference is grounded on theoretical expectations, based on ambition theory.

Unfortunately, coding whether contenders had tried to run for election in their states before the immediate previous election was unfeasible, so we only have information of a previous effort at nomination in the last gubernatorial race.

All possible career profiles cannot be included in the statistical analysis as dummy variables, particularly paths that predict failure completely.

We also included, but do not report, measures of the margin of victory in the previous state election, as interactive variables with the career path dummies (margin*encompassing and margin*local) in order to test whether the effects of career paths were mediated by electoral competition. We did not find any of these variables to be significant.