

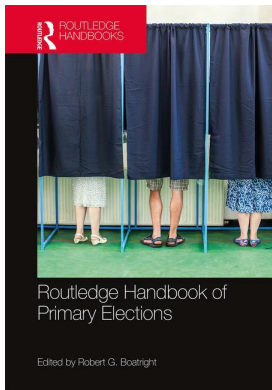
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### **Party Primaries as a Strategic Choice**

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# PARTY PRIMARIES AS A STRATEGIC CHOICE

## The Costs and Benefits of Democratic Candidate Selection

*Kathleen Bruhn*

A recent political cartoon about the 2016 Republican primary season shows an elephant in a negligee sitting up in bed, remarking “Whoa! I just had the worst nightmare!” In the bed next to the elephant lies Donald Trump, smoking a cigarette.<sup>1</sup> Under any system but one of open primaries, Donald Trump would assuredly not have won the nomination of the Republican Party establishment. The Trump nomination illustrates both the fears and the hopes raised by primary elections: the fear of losing control of the process and selecting a potentially risky nominee, and the hope of selecting a more popular candidate capable of winning the general election. Why do parties choose to subject themselves to primary elections – or not – and what are the consequences for electability?

This chapter examines these two questions through an analysis of primary elections in Latin America and particularly Mexico. I begin with an overview of primary elections in Latin America and their progressive adoption as mandatory requirements in a growing number of countries. Second, I look at the decision about candidate selection procedures through an examination of primaries in Mexico. Finally, I look at the results of primary elections for both the ideological positioning of candidates and their ultimate chances of victory.

### **Primary Elections in Latin America**

In the beginning, as Latin American countries were making the transition from authoritarian to democratic regimes in the 1980s, presidential candidate selection was considered far too important to be left to mere voters. Indeed, the dominant concern in many countries was simply to overcome the barriers posed by the lingering political forces of the outgoing authoritarian government, and a negotiated unified candidacy of all the opposition forces was often seen as the best path forward. The origins of the Concertación in Chile, an alliance among the main leftist parties that has governed nearly continuously since the transition in 1989, date to such an effort to unify the progressive opposition behind a single candidate. In Brazil, the selection of Tancredo Neves as the candidate of the Democratic Alliance in 1985 was meant to improve the chances that a candidate not chosen by the military government would win elections. Even in Mexico, where the transition took place amidst vigorous three-party competition, voices calling

for opposition unity were omnipresent (though ignored), and ultimately the transition in 2000 involved a candidate who had not emerged from a primary (Vicente Fox) beating one who had (Francisco Labastida).

Relatively soon after the immediate fears of a coup receded, by the early 1990s, pressures began to mount for parties to democratize internally just as they had democratized the country. Freidenberg (2015, 4) calls internal elections “the queen of reforms,” and refers to them as the fulcrum for the modernization of political parties in Latin America. Often the pressure to adopt more democratic candidate selection methods came from within the parties themselves. Even as they acknowledged the risks of primary elections, they sought to gain partisan advantage by adopting them.

Some of the most important benefits of primaries include the potential selection of a candidate with broader popular support than the national party elite, and therefore in a better position to win the general election. Second, in order to win a primary, activists of all of the party’s main factions may have to mobilize and even recruit new members to put themselves in a better position. As rivals engaged in competitive mobilization, the result could be significant growth of party membership, activism, and enthusiasm. Third, the party could gain democratic prestige by demonstrating internally what it called for externally. Primaries could thus legitimize parties, especially in a post-authoritarian context where parties are often distrusted and vilified. Finally – and as I shall argue, perhaps most importantly – primaries could serve as a means of resolving internal conflicts and rivalries over prized nominations.

Yet the risks were equally evident. As Brown Arraúz noted in the title of his discussion of primary elections in Panama, primaries can offer a guide, “on how to commit electoral suicide” (2013: 142). Primaries in Panama, he wrote, had

left as a consequence a party demobilized by lack of money, fatigued, publicly split, confused ideologically, and [with] a series of arguments well established in public opinion against the chosen presidential candidate, that opportunely and successfully would be used by the principal candidate of the opposition during the electoral campaign.

*Brown Arraúz 2013: 145*

One could hardly summarize better the main arguments against the adoption of primary elections. Primary elections ran the risk of dividing the party. During the course of the campaign, rivals within the party would air dirty laundry that, as party insiders, they were in an advantageous position to know about, making these issues public knowledge that could be used against the party in a full campaign. Primary campaigns take resources, sometimes quite a lot of them, which could alternatively have been used in a general election. Sometimes the losing side finds itself so disillusioned and disappointed that they opt out of the general election altogether, or – even worse – split from the party to run an independent campaign. Within the Mexican ruling party, the risk of such splits was seen as perhaps the party’s worst fear in most general elections.

### ***Presidential Primaries***

When we look at the actual use of primary elections in Latin America, we find a slow but steady trend in their favor. Using published sources (Freidenberg 2015; Alcántara Sáez and Tagina 2013a, 2013b) and online accounts of selection processes, I determined the presidential candidate selection procedure used in the three most recent presidential elections for the continental Latin American countries plus the Dominican Republic for every party/candidate that won at least 5 percent of the vote in the general election. I counted as “primaries” any contests in which either activists or

voters more generally were permitted to vote directly for two or more contending candidates. I counted as “conventions” internally competitive processes where voters chose delegates who then voted among at least two candidates. I argue that the actual existence of competition rather than the statutory name for the process is what results in both the risks and benefits of internal elections; a “convention” with only one candidate has a far lower risk of divisions and problems than one with multiple candidates, but also has foreclosed the possibility that the election will choose the best among several potential nominees. I classified all other processes simply as “noncompetitive.” One of the most frequent subtypes of this category was self-nomination, the case of candidates who ran as independents or created their own parties in order to launch a campaign for president. In other cases, internal negotiations among party elites resolved any conflicts prior to an openly competitive process, resulting in “unity candidates.”

Overall, I found 52 cases of primaries, 13 competitive conventions, and 117 uncompetitive processes. The number of primaries rose from 13 in the earliest of the three elections (usually in the mid-2000s) to 21 in the most recent available election (up to 2016). At the same time, however, parties opted out of primaries at a higher rate than they opted in. The number of relevant parties generally tended to increase over time, with most of these new parties adopting uncompetitive internal candidate selection processes. The number of uncompetitive processes remained relatively stable even as the use of competitive processes increased (see Table 21.1).

One of the most significant causes of the increase in primaries has been the adoption of national laws requiring them. In Argentina, for example, a 2009 law (known as PASO) was passed requiring national parties to select their candidates in primaries. Nevertheless, even after the law, at least one party managed to hold a “primary” with only one candidate; this was the case, for example, in 2011 and 2015 when the governing Partido Justicialista–Frente Para

Table 21.1 Primaries in Latin American Presidential Elections

	<i>Primaries</i>	<i>Conventions</i>	<i>Non-competitive</i>
Most recent election <sup>a</sup>	21	3	39
Second most recent election <sup>b</sup>	18	4	37
Third most recent election <sup>c</sup>	13	6	41
TOTAL	52	13	117
Prior elections <sup>d</sup>	40	31	64

*Notes:*

- a These elections include Argentina 2015, Bolivia 2014, Brazil 2014, Chile 2012, Colombia 2014, Costa Rica 2014, Dominican Republic 2016, Ecuador 2013, El Salvador 2014, Guatemala 2015, Honduras 2014, Mexico 2012, Nicaragua 2016, Panama 2014, Paraguay 2013, Peru 2016, Uruguay 2014, Venezuela 2012.
- b These elections include Argentina 2011, Bolivia 2009, Brazil 2010, Chile 2009, Colombia 2010, Costa Rica 2010, Dominican Republic 2012, Ecuador 2009, El Salvador 2009, Guatemala 2011, Honduras 2009, Mexico 2006, Nicaragua 2011, Panama 2009, Paraguay 2008, Peru 2011, Uruguay 2009, Venezuela 2009.
- c These elections include Argentina 2007, Bolivia 2005, Brazil 2006, Chile 2006, Colombia 2006, Costa Rica 2006, Dominican Republic 2008, Ecuador 2006, El Salvador 2004, Guatemala 2003, Honduras 2005, Mexico 2000, Nicaragua 2006, Panama 2004, Paraguay 2003, Peru 2006, Uruguay 2004, Venezuela 2006.
- d I draw on Flavia Freidenberg’s 2015 classification of presidential selection for elections prior to the third most recent election. I do not count the elections prior to 1990 as many of them were transitional elections and therefore exceptional. There are roughly three elections per country in this group. However, Freidenberg’s criteria for conventions are not strictly comparable to mine, as she uses party statutes to determine the selection process rather than the actual existence of competition. The result may be some coding discrepancies between her classification of a “convention” and what I would term an uncompetitive leader-dominated process of selection.

la Victoria (PJ) presented only one consensus candidate (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and Daniel Scioli, respectively). In the first case, Fernández de Kirchner was a president running for reelection, and in the second, her anointed and endorsed successor sought the nomination of the party that she then dominated. Parties must also hold primaries, by law, in Uruguay, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic, though exceptions occur. In Honduras, for example, parties with only one faction (only one candidate presents himself) do not have to hold a formal primary. In Panama, primaries are only obligatory for the presidential candidate.

Another factor that seems to favor the use of primaries is a political context that discourages the formation of new parties, either legally or de facto, as in the case of traditional party systems where the main parties are long-standing features of the political system. When voters traditionally choose among the same set of parties and it is hard to form a new party, the nomination of existing parties becomes worth fighting over. Colombia, for example, has had until recently an enviable record of holding primaries. Freidenberg (2015) lists the two main historical parties, the PLC and PCC, as holding either primaries or conventions for every election from 1990 to 2014. As new parties began to emerge in Colombia in the 2000s, these new parties were often the vehicle of a particular politician not chosen in an internal contest, but rather “outsider” candidates; President Álvaro Uribe (2002–2010) is a classic example.

Two-round voting, on the other hand, seems to deter the use of primaries by parties. In most of the countries with two-round voting, the first round functions as a de facto “primary” among rivals with similar partisan backgrounds. The ease of registration of new candidates and parties in Peru has led to a situation in which no party feels compelled to hold actual competitive primaries. In Brazil, not even the notoriously organized and pro-democratic Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) held competitive primaries, due in part to the dominance of its founder, Lula da Silva, during the party’s formative phase. And in Argentina, prior to the PASO law requiring primaries, the PJ allowed as many as three candidates to compete under the PJ label, in the 2003 election. In this case, Nestor Kirchner and Carlos Menem, both of the PJ, were the top two candidates that emerged from the first round. Menem dropped out before the second round (*ballotage*), leaving Kirchner the victor.

### ***Subpresidential Primaries***

Use of primary elections for positions other than the chief executive is rare. Most countries have adopted a system of closed-list proportional representation for the legislature, which does not lend itself readily to the use of primary elections. Instead, national party leaders (sometimes with local input) tend to dominate the process of selection for these positions. Primaries to select legislative positions have been most commonly used in Argentina (where it has been the law since PASO) and Mexico. The latter has a fairly uncommon mixed system of plurality and proportional representation seats in its legislature. It also does not have any legal requirements regarding the parties’ candidate selection process. Finally, Mexico does not allow consecutive reelection for legislative or executive positions. As a result, Mexico’s use of primaries varies widely by party and by election, making it an ideal case to analyze the decision to use primaries as well as their consequences.

Mexico presents a valuable case in which to examine candidate selection. Until very recently, the Mexican constitution barred reelection to any political office, meaning that every three years (for local legislatures and the federal Chamber of Deputies) or six years (for the federal Senate, governors, and the presidency) *all* politicians had to find a new job, sometimes within the state bureaucracy, by getting nominated to a different office, or by moving to the private sector. And because the constitution also barred independent candidacies (until 2015), those processes were

party-based. The absence of incumbency created ample opportunities to consider candidate selection: every seat, in every election, was an open seat.

In response to these incentives, parties neither adopted primaries wholesale nor rejected them completely. Rather, at all levels of government, parties chose different methods of selection with some care and precision, varying the procedure even within the same party and election. In the case of governors, for example, the long-ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) first experimented with primaries in 1991, selecting its candidates for governor in Colima and Nuevo León but not in other states. These experiments did not work out terribly well; though both candidates were eventually elected, the government's preferred candidate lost the Colima primary and open confrontation between party factions contributed to the rising strength of the conservative opposition party Acción Nacional (PAN) in the state. Nevertheless, particularly after electoral reforms in 1996 provided parties with more funds to support regular internal elections, the use of primaries in the PRI began to rise.

Simultaneously, the PAN continued its long-standing tradition of selecting candidates in state-level conventions, but these conventions became more and more competitive as the PAN's chances of actually winning governors' races increased and more aspiring candidates applied for the nomination. Between 1997 and 2011, over half of all PAN gubernatorial candidates were chosen in some type of internal election, compared to 41 percent of PRI candidates. The leftist Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) also tried its hand at primaries, albeit for only about 24 percent of its gubernatorial candidates (Bruhn 2014, 220–221).

Variation is also evident in the selection of federal legislators. In the 2015 national elections, one-quarter (75) of PAN candidacies for the Chamber of Deputies were decided by direct designation of the CEN, distributed across about two-thirds of Mexico's states (13 states used no designation processes). The PRI relied on designation to select candidates for 173 out of 300 relative majority seats, using conventions to decide the rest. The party showed laser-like precision in naming the districts in which competitive processes would be used. A comparison of the Federal District and the State of Mexico is telling. In the former, the PRI used delegate conventions in only 9 of 27 districts, while in the latter it used them in 19 of 40.

State-level elections show diversity of rules and strategic decision-making as well. In the 2015 elections in Chiapas, for example, the PRI relied on conventions to select candidates in 22 of the 24 local legislative districts in the state and designated candidates in the two remaining districts. Likewise, in 11 of the 27 state-level legislative elections for which we have information about the PAN's selection rules, the PAN used at least two types of rules, with open selection procedures in some, but not all, districts. The PRD has been more likely to use one rule per state, but has also split states into districts with competitive processes and others with designation in some cases.

### Choosing to Hold Primaries

Clearly, party leaders make strategic choices about where and whether to hold competitive internal elections. What principles determine this strategic choice? I argue that the main source of pressure to hold internal elections comes from the desire to resolve party rivalries over desirable candidacies, rather than from any deep-seated belief that such elections select better candidates or that voters necessarily reward more internally democratic parties with their support. If such were the case, we would see far more internal elections than we do. Instead, internal elections seem frequently to be held as a last resort, to be avoided if possible by internal negotiations and pressure on weaker candidates to drop out of the race.

Second, internal factionalism plays a complicated role in the choice of selection mechanism. On the one hand, internal ideological homogeneity tends to lower the costs of internal elections by reducing the risk that elections will select a candidate who is out of touch with the preferences of the party elites. The more similar party members are to one another from the top of the party to the bottom, the more likely activist preferences and elite preferences are to resemble one another, and the less likely a “Trumpian” outcome becomes. This should make parties more open to the idea of holding internal elections.

On the other hand, without some internal factionalization, there is less pressure to hold primaries in the first place, and if they are held, they are less likely to be genuinely competitive. De Luca, Jones and Tula (2009, 293) argue that larger and more internally divided parties should choose primaries, in part because they can use primaries as a way to channel internal conflicts. The legitimacy of “democratic elections” can make it harder to reject the eventual nominee; as one PRD leader put it, “people get mad if they feel cheated out of a candidacy by the central organization, but are willing to accept defeat in elections.”<sup>2</sup> This argument is similar to that of Kemahlioglu, Weitz-Shapiro, and Hirano (2009) regarding primaries in Latin American presidential elections.

I contend, therefore, that one of the key factors influencing party strategies is the likelihood that the party will win a general election. The prospect of winning the general election, combined with the desirability of the office, will tend to bring potential candidates to the fore. We should expect that, other things being equal, parties are more likely to hold internal elections to select their candidates in districts where they have a reasonable chance of winning. Larger parties should also be more likely to hold internal elections. The more competitive the district, the narrower the margin, the more we might anticipate that parties will do everything in their power to avoid the risk of a divisive primary; however, their ability to maneuver may be constrained by the ambitions of their members. Exceptions to this rule should occur when one party faction has a commanding presence in the district (such as in the case of incumbency) or when the party has sufficient resources to successfully negotiate the creation of a “consensus” candidate by buying off rivals for the nomination. In the case of Mexico, for example, the ruling PRI often had in its safe districts the ability to purchase the loyalty of disappointed rivals for a price, though when negotiations failed the consequences could be a fatal party split.

### ***Gubernatorial Elections in Mexico***

We can examine these propositions, first, through analysis of gubernatorial candidacies. In Bruhn (2014), I looked at 265 cases of the choice of election type during a period ranging from 1997 to 2011 in Mexico. This is close to the universe of 267 cases: 89 gubernatorial elections with a decision made by each of the three major parties.<sup>3</sup> For all three parties, although statutes *recommended* the use of internal elections (particularly in the PAN and PRD), party leaders had the authority to determine how each specific nomination would be handled, whether through a competitive internal election, nomination by the party leadership, or negotiations to convince potential competitors to decline in favor of a consensus candidate (*candidato de unidad*).<sup>4</sup>

The models included five factors: whether the state had a governor of the same party (a proxy for incumbency), whether it was a national election year with federal legislative races held simultaneously (which elevates the stakes of the race), the absolute previous margin of victory/defeat (a measure of competitiveness), and whether other parties held internal elections (to measure the significance of pressures for emulation). In addition, I included dummy variables for the main parties, which covers a multitude of internal characteristics including party culture, commitment to internal democracy, and factionalization. Unfortunately, it was not possible to



get state-level data on degrees of factionalization. Finally, I included variables for rural population and for the natural log of the number of voters in the state, both of which capture aspects of the logistical challenges of internal elections. I expect state-level elections to be more costly and difficult in more rural states, and in more populous states.

The results indicate a statistically significant effect of election competitiveness. Where the previous election in the district was highly competitive (less than 10 percent margin of victory) we see the strongest likelihood of an internal election. Curiously, parties were less likely to hold internal elections in either very safe or hopeless states. I see this finding as in part an artifact of the contextual conditions of “safe states”: the opposition had very few of these, so we are mostly looking at PRI states during an earlier period of competition (before 1997) when the PRI still controlled candidate selection firmly from above in states where it held hegemony and could therefore afford to buy off disgruntled losers in the candidate selection process. As opposition parties became stronger and more capable of winning elections, exit options increased for losing PRI candidates, raising the pressure on the PRI to hold democratic candidate selection processes when multiple rivals for a nomination existed.

Second, we find statistically and consistently significant effects of the party dummies. The PAN was by far the most likely to hold internal elections (competitive conventions) compared to the PRI and the PRD. The PAN was also ideologically the most homogeneous party, as anticipated. The PRI has historically been a catch-all party with wide variation in the ideological positions of its various factions. The PRD owes its foundation to a legal merger between a heterogeneous coalition of leftist parties, urban popular movements, peasant organizations, and former members of the PRI. It has openly solicited members of both the PRI and PAN to run for election under the PRD label. It also presents as few barriers as possible to membership. Although it maintains a member registry, which determines who can vote in internal elections, it has frequently been possible for people to join the party and vote in an internal election moments later.

In contrast, the PAN closely monitors admission to party membership and limits the right to participate in internal elections to a subset of its sympathizers, known as “active members.” These members have been sponsored for party membership by a current member, have taken a course in party doctrine, and have served an apprenticeship as “adherents” before being accepted into active membership. The PAN, therefore, should have the smallest gap between the ideological preferences of elites versus likely primary voters. Moreover, although the PAN leans to the right of the PRI on most issues, the party remains quite close to the center and demonstrates substantial internal coherence. A 2006 survey of congressional candidates found that the PAN’s median category – center-right – held 48 percent of respondents, while no category held more than 32 percent of PRD respondents (the PRI refused to participate in the candidate survey).<sup>5</sup> On all these grounds, the PAN should be the most likely to hold primaries.

Moreover, the PAN’s preferred method of holding an internal election – state-level conventions – posed considerably lower costs and risks than open primary elections; the PRI also preferred conventions to open primaries in most cases when an election had to be held. At a convention, all the actual voting takes place in one location and at one time, enabling easier monitoring of vote counts than when polling stations have to be watched across an entire state. The chances that someone will denounce fraud decrease correspondingly, although they do not disappear entirely.<sup>6</sup>

The interesting thing about this preference is that conventions, while they limit the risks of internal elections, also limit the benefits to be gained from mobilizing large numbers of new activists into a primary. There are still some benefits: packing conventions by recruiting new activists that entitle one to more delegates is a known tactic complained about by some PAN



activists (interview with PAN CEN member, 2008). Yet actual mobilization is comparatively limited. It is thus worth noting that primaries and conventions were both more likely in national election years, in two out of three models (Bruhn 2014, 226). The benefit of mobilization must increase when other offices are at stake in the election.

Finally, when we add a variable for previous protests around the nomination process, we find positive and significant effects. If the party in question had previously experienced public protests over its nomination process in the state, it was significantly though modestly *more* likely to hold an internal election to choose its gubernatorial candidate (Bruhn 2014, 227). Instead of avoiding a potentially divisive election where previous problems occurred, parties tended to react by holding more primaries. I read this as evidence that factionalization does contribute to the likelihood of parties being forced to hold internal elections, once we take into account other variables (such as party culture and the type of internal election under consideration). For the most part, these were instances where a prior internal election resulted in public protest: 62 percent of the PRD's primaries resulted in protests, versus just 23 percent of candidate selections when no primary occurred. For the PAN, internal elections culminated in protests 38 percent of the time (versus 30 percent of non-elected nominations), and for the PRI, protests occurred after 31 percent of internal elections (versus 17 percent of noncompetitive processes).

### **Legislative Primaries**

When we look at selection procedures for federal deputies, Bruhn and Wuhs (2016) find that party strength in a state has a positive and significant effect on the likelihood of internal elections in the PRD and PAN, and a significant but *negative* effect on the likelihood of internal competition in the PRI. Likewise, internal elections are more likely for the PAN and PRD in states where the governor was of their own party, but significantly less likely for PRI candidate selection in PRI-governed states. Part of the puzzle is explained to us by Langston (2001, 2003, 2006), who tells us that PRI governors have seized unusual latitude in controlling federal deputy selection since democratization has been underway in Mexico. They seek to lay claim to federal resources by owning as many deputies as they can. The PAN and PRD governors, fewer to begin with than in the case of the PRI, cannot hope to significantly influence the national legislature by dominating the contingent of their own state because they are less likely to logroll successfully with like-minded governors. More pertinently, the PRI's long undemocratic history may give its governors some leeway in insisting on what has been a traditional privilege in the party – the privilege of nominating legislative candidates by *dedazo* (pointing the finger) – where the PAN and PRD's internal commitments to democracy make it harder for them to resist pressures for competitive elections.

Finally, we can look at the selection patterns for local (state-level) deputies (Bruhn and Wuhs 2016). The analysis is based on a sample of cases from the Calderón administration (2006–2012) rather than the full universe of cases due to the difficulty of getting information about selection procedures in local deputy races when compared to governors' races. The sample includes 18 states that vary in terms of their level of economic development, their demographics, and their histories of party competition. We focused our attention on the MR seats rather than the party-dominated PR lists.

What we find is that when we consider all parties, primaries are most likely in “stronghold” states; conventions are most likely in competitive states; and noncompetitive processes are most likely in weak states (see Table 21.2). State party leaders are in fact the most likely body to name local legislative candidates. These overall trends, however, mask significant divergence among the parties in their competitive practices. Most importantly, the PAN and PRD appear to opt

Table 21.2 Local Legislature Selection Procedures

	<i>National Party Designation (%)</i>	<i>State Party Designation (%)</i>	<i>Convention (%)</i>	<i>Primary (%)</i>	<i>N</i>
<b>STRONGHOLD</b>	11.4	35.7	14.3	42.9	14
PRI	33.3	33.3	33.3	0	3
PAN	11.4	33.3	5.3	50	6
PRD	0	40	0	60	5
<b>COMPETITIVE</b>	17.4	35.4	38.7	8.6	31
PRI	7.2	23.3	57.9	11.6	19
PAN	66.7	12.2	16.7	4.5	6
PRD	0	97	0	3	6
<b>WEAK STATE</b>	18.1	30.1	27.9	26.2	39
PRI	6.7	27.7	63.6	20	15
PAN	42	13.6	0	43.6	12
PRD	8.3	63.8	11.1	16.7	12

Source: Bruhn and Wuhs (2016).

out of competitive internal elections in the states where they face a narrow margin of victory in the previous election. They still find themselves holding primaries in their stronghold states, where pressures to do so may be strongest, but party elites (either national or local) attempt to control nominations in cases where primaries might expose them to a risk of defeat. The PAN then reverts to conventions when it has little chance of victory, in accordance with its traditional norms.

The PRI, meanwhile, uses conventions about equally in competitive and hopeless states, but attempts to control nominations more from the center in stronghold states. As in the case of federal deputies, the PRI's behavior in legislative candidate selection diverges from the other two parties and is consistent with its behavior in stronghold states in gubernatorial primaries. Thus, where this historically hierarchical party dominates its competitive environment, it tends to follow historic norms against competitive candidate selection. Only where it faces electoral pressure does the PRI respond by opening up the selection process (see Table 21.2; Bruhn and Wuhs 2016, 828).

This analysis has generally confirmed expectations that external competition tends to motivate parties to choose more competitive internal candidate selection processes, and to validate the significance of internal rivalries. These findings imply, furthermore, that larger parties should have more frequent internal challenges that lead to primaries; small parties are more likely to choose their candidates in less competitive ways. However, parties' political culture also seems to matter in predictable but non-numerical ways. Incumbency should also mitigate the effect on potential rivals of a promising electoral scenario, limiting the number who would decide to challenge an incumbent for reelection. Overall, parties do consider the benefits and costs of primary elections when deciding whether or not to use them.

### The Consequences of Primary Elections

Once parties have decided to use primaries to select their candidates, what are the effects on the types of candidates they select? Carey and Polga-Hecimovich argue that presidential candidates in Latin America who emerged from a primary earn what they call a "primary bonus" – that is, other things equal, primary-elected candidates are stronger than those selected by other

procedures” (2006, 530–532). The effect is largest when the candidate was the only one to emerge from a primary. However, they do not explain why, if primaries are so successful, more parties do not choose them. Their data cover elections from 1978 through 2004, a total of 826 presidential candidates of whom 47 had been selected in primary elections (Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006, 535). Moreover, the effect of incumbency overwhelms the effect of primaries – a 23 percent boost over the party’s expected vote share versus a seven percent boost for a candidate nominated in a primary. Finally, in using electoral success rather than candidate characteristics as their dependent variable, they necessarily skip over the question of whether primaries select better candidates, or simply provide parties with democratic credentials – a “stamp of legitimacy” in a post-authoritarian context (Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006, 534). In other words, it is not clear *why* these candidates get a primary bonus.

Mexico again offers significant advantages for distinguishing the effects of primaries on candidates, since there is no incumbency effect. In a 2013 article, I examined the ideological characteristics of candidates for the lower house of the Mexican Congress, the Chamber of Deputies, who stood for election in the 300 relative majority seats. I drew upon two surveys of candidates and legislators from the PAN and the PRD.<sup>7</sup> These parties used internal elections to select some but not all of their candidates in 2006; specifically, the PAN chose 52 percent of its candidates in state-level conventions with locally elected delegates, while the PRD chose 36 percent of its candidates in open primary elections. National leaders designated the remaining candidates. We can therefore compare the characteristics of candidates chosen via internal election to candidates chosen by national party elites, holding constant the election year, the party, and the national context.

The first survey took place during the 2006 campaign itself and resulted in 151 completed surveys. A second survey done after the seating of the congress (in order to boost the number of winning candidates and candidates chosen in primary elections) added 40 new legislators. The result was 92 PRD candidates and 96 PAN candidates, a bit less than a third of the total candidates for each party; however, the candidates came from 25 of the 28 states where the PAN elected candidates and from all 25 of the states where the PRD elected candidates, resulting in a generous geographical distribution. Forty-one percent of the PAN members surveyed and 55 percent of the PRD members surveyed lost their legislative race.

I then constructed a dependent variable based on the ideological self-placement of the surveyed candidate on a seven-point scale from Left to Right with one being “very Left” and seven being “very Right.” In order to examine the degree to which candidates diverged from the center, I recoded the Left-Right scale as the absolute value of the distance between a respondent’s answer and the center of the scale (4). Thus, a candidate who answered with “very Left” would get a score of three, and so would a candidate who answered “very Right.” Higher scores indicate more extreme candidates rather than more conservative or liberal ones.

Information about selection procedures was obtained directly from the parties. In addition, I controlled for three demographic variables that might affect ideological position: university education, religiosity, and party identification. University education was coded 1 if the candidate completed college. Religiosity measures the frequency of church attendance, with a 1 indicating that the candidate attended church more than once a week, and 5 indicating that the candidate never attended. I calculated religiosity in terms of the distance from the mean category of once a month. Extreme values on religiosity (either never attending or attending more than once a week) should be associated with more extreme ideological positions. I included party membership (either PAN or PRD) to test whether members of one party were more likely to hold extreme values in general, as opposed to reflecting method of selection. In fact, PAN members had an average extremism score of 1.02 versus 1.81 for the PRD (a statistically

significant difference). I also included two district-level variables, on the grounds that extremism might reflect characteristics of the district rather than the selection method. These variables are similar to the individual level characteristics: average level of education, and the strength of the candidate's party in the same district in 2003.

The analysis found that internal elections resulted in significantly *less* extreme candidates than designation by the national leadership. As a result, the predicted probability of extremism varies according to whether there was or was not an internal election. Overall, the predicted probability of a PAN member self-locating as a moderate (value of extremism zero or one) rises from .69 to .81 if she came out of an internal election versus a designation. For the PRD, the predicted probability of moderate self-location rises from .32 to .47 with an internal election versus a designation.

I also found some significant differences in the characteristics of candidates in terms of length of party membership and previous leadership experience by whether or not there had been an internal election. Generally speaking, those elected in a primary were significantly more likely to have been party insiders: they belonged to their party longer (12 versus 4.5 years) and were more likely to have held a prior post in the party leadership. The differences are significant at the .01 level. These positions were almost always local level leadership positions rather than posts in the national leadership (there was no difference between elected and non-elected candidates in terms of the likelihood of prior national leadership experience). Interestingly, there is no significant difference between the two candidate groups based on previous elective office: both internal elections and national party leaders have a tendency to prefer those with local elective experience.

I interpret these results to suggest that far from selecting outsiders with rare charisma, internal elections – at least for federal legislators – tended to select party insiders with the knowledge and networks to mobilize successfully in an internal election campaign. There was very little evidence in Mexican newspapers of public promotion of these primaries, even for the PRD which held the most open primaries. Rather, candidates mostly had to mobilize party insiders and activists in order to win. Turnout was typically low and limited only to the most active party members even when it was technically possible for voters in general to participate.

The insider nature of primaries also explains why I find that the candidates chosen in this way were more likely to have moderate political views. In an internal election campaign, it was usually necessary to mobilize the support of more than one internal faction; this task was easier when the candidate in question was acceptable to a broader variety of people. In contrast, the process of designation by national elites usually involved log-rolling among various factions, such that each faction was able to place its leaders into a number of candidacies (to be negotiated) without having to compromise ideologically. Ironically, party primaries in the U.S. may result in more extreme candidates precisely when they go outside of the party establishment in search of new voters, not because they appeal only to party activists as some of the existing literature would have it.<sup>8</sup>

Electability is a tougher nut to crack. The selection of moderate candidates does not necessarily imply the selection of more electable candidates. At first blush, there seems to be a strong association between having emerged from a primary and winning the general election. In 2006, 70 percent of PRD candidates selected in a primary won their seats, compared to just 19 percent of those chosen by the CEN. Similarly, 64 percent of PAN candidates chosen in a competitive convention won their seats versus 25 percent of those who were not internally elected. These differences are statistically significant at .01. However, we know from our previous analysis that the potential electability of the party in a district is a major driver of the decision to hold a primary in the first place: internal elections are more likely in districts the party expects to win. We therefore have a massive problem of endogeneity to contend with.

This difference cannot be entirely controlled for by projecting the party's expected victory margin based on its vote in the district in 2003 and determining the difference between the expected and the actual vote. In 2006, the presidential election race between PRD candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador and Felipe Calderón resulted in significant coattail effects, particularly in the case of the PRD, which dwarf any differences that might result from the type of election held. The PRD mobilized its core vote much better in 2006 than in the midterm elections of 2003, and this happened in precisely the areas where it already had more strength. Thus, differences above the expected vote could be attributable to the type of election of the legislative candidate, but could also result from the excitement created by the presidential race itself. Any findings of an above average increase in the vote could well be falsely attributed to the election type.

In any case, the evidence suggests that internal primaries do not boost the performance of parties, and can even hurt it outside the urban areas where parties are better organized. In a previous article (Bruhn 2010), I analyzed the shift in party vote, controlling for the baseline vote from the previous election, in districts with and without internal elections. The analysis controlled for whether the governor of the state was from the same party, on the grounds that co-partisan governors may add extra help to the party's legislative candidates. Second, I controlled for the strength of party infrastructure in the district. For the PAN, I used the party's internal calculations of the percentage of designated "pollwatchers" who turned up on election day to monitor the voting. PAN leaders argued that this variable better measures the party's ability to mobilize activists than mere membership lists. However, this measure is not available for the PRD, so I was forced to use membership lists to calculate a district-level measure of the number of members per one thousand registered voters as an indicator of party organizational density. Finally, I controlled for several contextual variables, including economic growth rates in the state, the percentage of the population living in communities of more than 2,500, and migration rate to the district. Districts with high in-migration rates should be less subject to the influence of past voting patterns, and offer parties a higher percentage of mobilizable new voters who could be won over by an outstanding candidate. Open primaries should thus be more likely in high migration districts.

I ran the models separately by party (since the measures were not entirely commensurate) but the results are similar. For the PAN, internal elections had a positive effect on the PAN vote share after accounting for other factors (albeit only at .1 significance). For the PRD, there was no significant effect of having held an internal election. Unsurprisingly, measures of the party's strength in the district had strongly positive and significant effects on the party's 2006 vote (that is, vote share in 2003 and the measure of party organizational density used). Urban population is significant in both models, though it is negative for the PRD and positive for the PAN. These findings are consistent with general impressions of the voting base of each party: urban and relatively educated for the PAN, and rural for the PRD (with the exception of its greatest electoral redoubt, Mexico City itself).

The conditions under which elections are held seem to matter. Specifically, the effects of internal elections helped the PAN only in districts where 90 percent of the population or more lived in towns of more than 2,500 citizens. At around 86 percent urban, the effect of primaries turned insignificant. For the PRD, the turning point was about 75 percent urban; in districts with 75 percent or more urban population the effects of primaries are negligible. Below 75 percent urban, the impact of holding primaries becomes significant, but is *negative*: primaries actually reduced the expected PRD vote over the baseline. I interpret this result as a consequence of the logistical problems associated with holding elections in rural areas, particularly for a party like the PRD which generally held open primaries rather than conventions. The challenges of

setting up polling stations in more rural locations, monitoring the vote, and avoiding the appearance of fraud must have been significant. As the president of the PRD noted at a 2005 meeting to prepare for the 2006 legislative elections,

unfortunately in the party in all of the processes of direct consultation [primaries] it has meant invariably internal conflict. I would dare to say that if the *compañeros* of Guerrero [a very rural state] had not held primaries for municipal presidencies [mayors], many presidencies that we lost because of internal divisions we would have won as a party.

*PRD 2005, 58*

In 2009, both the PRD and the PAN chose fewer legislative candidates by primaries than in 2006.

Looking at the presidential races discussed at the beginning of this chapter does not offer much positive evidence that primary elections improve electability either. In the last three presidential elections, roughly 31 percent of candidates who emerged from a primary won the presidential race, compared to 33 percent of candidates who emerged from a noncompetitive contest. One of the problems is that a number of countries have now adopted obligatory primaries, reducing the size of any expected “primary bonus” effect (Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006) and resulting in the same proportion of winners and losers in every presidential race regardless of the effectiveness of primaries. In the case of noncompetitive selection processes, many of these involved incumbents running unopposed from within their own parties, who as incumbents had a much greater chance of election than challengers (Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006). This does not mean that noncompetitive processes in general are better ways of picking candidates.

In short, I find no evidence that primary elections consistently result in the selection of more competitive candidates. We can say that they do not necessarily lead to the selection of extremists, but whether this translates into greater electability is an open question.

## Conclusions

This chapter has drawn on data from Latin America to make three general points about the causes and consequences of internal elections. First, primary elections are more likely (absent a legal requirement to hold them) in contexts where the party in question expects to do well in the general election. The prospect of victory excites internal rivalries within the party and encourages ambitious politicians to challenge one another for the nomination. The more ideologically homogeneous the party, the less such internal elections will be seen as a threat to the coherence of the party or the interests of party elites. However, even in such cases primary elections are not seen as the first choice of most parties; rather, they tend to be the result of otherwise irreconcilable internal divisions over the candidate selection.

Second, parties are quite rational in avoiding primaries in the light of the absence of evidence proving they have a systematically positive effect on the chances of success in the general election. They do not necessarily select better candidates, they run the risk of dividing the party just before the election, and their mobilizational impact can be a two-edged sword – mobilizing activists on behalf of alternative candidacies can backfire in the general election if the supporters of the losing candidate cannot be brought back into the fold.

However, the candidates chosen in internal elections are also not systematically worse than candidates designated by party elites. In fact, there is some evidence that they may be more moderate than candidates chosen in uncompetitive ways, precisely because they have had to earn their election by appealing across party factions. The more campaign effects apply



(as opposed to mobilization of the party base), the less predictable this outcome becomes, and the riskier internal elections become for the party elites. Small wonder they so frequently prefer to control the nomination process despite the democratic credentials to be gained by holding primaries.

### Notes

- 1 See <http://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2016/05/23/political-cartoonists>.
- 2 Confidential interview with national PRD leader, June 2008, Mexico City. Of course, the risk of protests by disgruntled losers is the other side of the coin, and the reason for party leaders' attempts to negotiate outcomes.
- 3 I am especially indebted to Joy Langston for generously sharing her data on PRI gubernatorial elections since 1997. Other key sources included *La Jornada*, *Milenio*, and *El Universal*.
- 4 This situation is similar to the observation by Serra that, "a large fraction of supposed primaries in the United States end up being uncompetitive one-candidate races," largely based on whether or not party elites decide to endorse a candidate and swing party resources behind him or her (2011: 22).
- 5 Based on a survey by Bruhn and Greene (2006).
- 6 Generally, accusations of fraud in conventions related to the selection of delegates and who was qualified to vote on the nomination.
- 7 The PRI chose none of its 2006 candidates by internal elections and also refused to participate in the surveys. It is therefore necessary to exclude this party.
- 8 See for example Crotty and Jackson, who summarized the initial findings of researchers on this topic by remarking that "strong partisans turn out for the primary vote at higher rates than the weak partisans or the independents," and that these voters are "ideologically more extreme and take issue positions that are unrepresentative of the parties' mass bases and of the electorate as a whole" (1985, 89). See also Brady and Schwartz 1995; Gerber and Morton 1998.

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