

Overcoming Inexperience: How the Opposition Wins in Competitive Authoritarian Systems

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Abstract

How do voters in competitive authoritarian systems learn about opposition parties? Electing opposition parties is risky when their governance quality is uncertain, but voters can reduce this uncertainty by observing and learning from neighboring sub-national governments' experiences with opposition leadership. I examine how opposition governance in neighboring municipalities affects support for opposition candidates in municipal elections in 1990s Mexico. Using a close-election regression discontinuity design, I find that municipalities with exogenous exposure to PRD-governed neighbors increased their support for the PRD by 12-15 percentage points compared to municipalities with PRI-governed neighbors. This effect is specific to the PRD and does not extend to the PAN, a better-known opposition party. These findings provide insight into how governance information spreads across electoral borders and highlight that opposition parties are not necessarily perceived equally in competitive authoritarian systems.

Word count: 7704

“Actions already taken are better evidence
than those merely promised.”

– Downs (1957)

1 Introduction

This paper examines a fundamental challenge facing opposition parties in competitive authoritarian systems: how can they gain electoral support without evidence of governing? In order for incumbents to lose, voters must have acceptable alternative political candidates (Pitkin 2023; Powell 2004). However, opposition parties in dominant-party and competitive authoritarian systems face significant valence (non-policy) disadvantages at the polls (Kuriwaki, Horiuchi, and Smith 2025). One such disadvantage is that these parties lack an empirical record of governance and policy implementation. The lack of experience in office means that opposition campaign promises are seen as less credible than the dominant party’s proven governance track record. Voters, therefore, will ascribe a risk premium to electing opposition candidates simply because they lack knowledge of how these leaders will act once elected. The longer a single party dominates, the larger this problem becomes. How, then, might voters in competitive authoritarian systems gain enough evidence to comfortably vote for opposition candidates?

I argue that exposure to opposition-led government in nearby sub-national governments gives voters information that allows them to update their beliefs about how opposition party leaders govern. Risk averse voters who are interested in opposition parties but unsure of how they will govern once in office can observe nearby elected opposition politicians, giving them more information on the policies implemented by these parties and therefore lowering the risk premium of voting for opposition candidates. I test this theory in the context of Mexico’s center-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, PRD) from 1995-2000, the last years of the Institutional Revolution Party’s (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, PRI) dominance in national electoral politics.

This period in Mexico is among the best-documented examples of risk aversion under one-party rule (Cinta 1999; Morgenstern and Zechmeister 2001; Magaloni 2006; Helmke 2009). I build on this scholarship by (1) using a robust identification strategy to confirm the presence of risk aversion, (2) identifying how information about the PRD spread across municipalities and reduced perceptions of risk, and (3) highlighting that the information diffusion effect did not equally apply to Mexico's other major opposition party. Using a regression discontinuity design (RDD), I show that candidates from a new opposition party (the PRD) in municipalities exogenously exposed to opposition governance in near neighbors experience a 12-15 percentage point increase in support in the subsequent municipal election. This effect weakens when more distant neighbors are included in the analysis and is strongest in municipalities with highly overlapping media markets, consistent with the argument that voters' ability to observe nearby governments drives the increase in support. Additionally, this result holds only for the PRD and not the National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*, PAN), an older opposition party that had already gained executive office in many states and large municipalities in the early 1990s. I provide evidence against alternative mechanisms, and I discuss how the findings in this paper may explain why the current opposition coalition in present-day Mexico has been unsuccessful.

These findings build on past work that has largely relied on inference from correlation and assumptions about unobservables (Cinta 1999; Morgenstern and Zechmeister 2001; Diaz-Cayeros, Magaloni, and Weingast 2003). The results also demonstrate that voter behavior does not respond uniformly to all opposition parties, highlighting that party institutional history and voter familiarity can also contribute to electoral success. These findings thus add to the variety of strategies opposition parties employ in competitive authoritarian contexts (Gamboa 2017; Helms 2023).

The empirical results also provide evidence that voters can learn and update their beliefs about opposition parties by observing officials in other localities. This evidence complements a large literature on the diffusion of democracy through components such as proximity (Huntington 1991; Gleditsch and Ward 2006; Brinks and Coppedge 2006), international networks (Pevehouse 2002; Ahlquist and Wibbels 2012; Goodliffe and Hawkins 2017), and international political and eco-

conomic factors (Houle, Kayser, and Xiang 2016; Abramson and Montero 2020), but examines how diffusion mechanisms operate at the sub-national level (Volden 2006; Shipan and Volden 2008; Gilardi 2010; Lucardi 2016; Lee and Bisbee 2024). Empirically, this paper builds on studies of Mexican politics that document the diffusion of opposition party support both in Congress (Harbers 2017) and during earlier periods of PRI-dominated politics (Lucardi 2016). However, this study departs from existing work in two important ways. First, it focuses on the diffusion of information about governance once elected, rather than campaign activity, as a source of voter learning. Second, it centers on the PRD and its evolving voter support during the decline of Mexico’s one-party competitive authoritarian system, employing a regression discontinuity design to estimate a causal effect.

This paper proceeds as follows. In Section 2, I present a theory of risk aversion and opposition parties in competitive authoritarian systems generally. In Section 3, I connect the theory to the empirical context of Mexican municipal politics in the late 1990s. In Section 4, I describe the data I collect for analysis and the RDD model specification. In Section 5, I present the results of the RDD models for both the PRD and the PAN. In Section 6, I provide evidence against alternative mechanisms for the findings. Finally, in Section 7 I offer a summary of the paper and its contributions to understanding voter behavior in competitive authoritarian systems and provide a brief discussion about how the findings in this paper relate to present-day Mexican party politics.

2 Theory

Risk aversion, in the abstract, refers to a decision maker’s preference for certainty over uncertainty. More technically, a decision maker is considered risk averse if they strictly prefer the expected value of a probability distribution of outcomes over a randomly drawn outcome from the probability distribution. I refer to risk aversion among voters as the tendency to prefer parties with a known track record of governance to those with less experience in government, *ceteris paribus* (Cinta 1999; Helmke 2009). Rational voters making electoral decisions compare not only

the campaign positions of candidates, but also the likelihood that they will successfully implement their platform (Downs 1957; Shepsle 1972). Thus, risk averse voters will prefer parties with lower variance (lower uncertainty) over parties with higher variance (higher uncertainty).

In settings where parties have roughly equal experience in office, voters will have well-formed opinions about how each party governs. In other words, uncertainty about parties is much lower, so voters will vote based on campaign promises alone and neither candidate will be seen as “risky.” Berinsky (2007) show this to be the case in US presidential elections from 1972-1996, during which the two major parties roughly alternate between winning the presidency and risk averse behavior is not observed.

In competitive authoritarian systems, voters are all but certain of the policies that the dominant party (i.e., the party that has exclusively held office for a long period of time) will implement, as they have observed multiple periods in which the dominant party has governed and implemented policy. However, opposition parties have had little to no experience in office, so the voters are uncertain what policies they will implement once elected. Consequently, opposition parties face significant electoral challenges in risk-averse political environments. Even in environments where the population prefers the opposition’s policies, if voters are sufficiently risk-averse they will prefer the certainty of the dominant party over the uncertainty of their preferred policy. In other words, voters associate a *risk premium* with voting for an opposition party.

2.1 Formal Model

I describe a simple formal model to illustrate this dynamic of dominant-party advantage described above. Consider an electoral setting in which there are two parties: a dominant party (D) and a challenger party (C). Each party chooses a campaign platform $P_i \in \mathbb{R}$. However, parties are not able to perfectly implement their chosen policy. Thus, each party has an implementation ability parameter ε_i , which can represent low or high implementation variance. If party i is elected, the actual implemented policy \hat{P}_i is drawn from a uniform distribution $\hat{P}_i \sim U[P_i - \varepsilon_i, P_i + \varepsilon_i]$. This parameter ε_i could represent either ambiguity about whether party i actually intends to

implement P_i , or party i 's competence to effectively implement P_i once in office. Because voters are much more familiar with the dominant party, and the dominant party has much more experience implementing policy, assume $0 < \varepsilon_D < \varepsilon_C$.

Voters must choose whether to vote for D or C . Voters observe P_D and P_C , but not ε_D nor ε_C . The utility voters receive after the election is represented by the quadratic loss utility function $u(x, \hat{P}_i) = -(x - \hat{P}_i)^2$, where x is the voter's ideal point. For a voter with ideal point x , the expected utility from party i being elected is:

$$EU(x, P_i) = E_{\varepsilon_i}[E_{\hat{P}_i}[u(x, \hat{P}_i)|\varepsilon_i]] \quad (1)$$

Given the uniform distribution of implemented policies, for a known ε_i :

$$E_{\hat{P}_i}[u(x, \hat{P}_i)|\varepsilon_i] = - \int_{P_i - \varepsilon_i}^{P_i + \varepsilon_i} \frac{(x - \hat{P}_i)^2}{2\varepsilon_i} d\hat{P}_i \quad (2)$$

This simplifies to:

$$E_{\hat{P}_i}[u(x, \hat{P}_i)|\varepsilon_i] = -(x - P_i)^2 - \frac{\varepsilon_i^2}{3} \quad (3)$$

As can be seen in (3), voters receive dis-utility from higher ε_i for a given P_i . Thus, voters in this model will not simply vote for the party whose platform is nearest to their ideal point. Rather, the party they vote for is dependent on their beliefs about expected value of \hat{P}_i , which is a function of ε_i .

To illustrate the effect of voter uncertainty about implementation on vote choice, consider a simple example. Suppose that $P_D = 0$ and $P_C = -1$. Additionally, assume that voters believe $\varepsilon_D = 0.5$, indicating they believe the dominant party has low implementation variance. The voter with ideal point x will vote for C if and only if the following inequality is satisfied:

$$-(x + 1)^2 - \frac{\varepsilon_i^2}{3} > -x^2 - \frac{0.25}{3} \quad (4)$$

Figure 1: Voter Party Preferences Given Implementation Variance

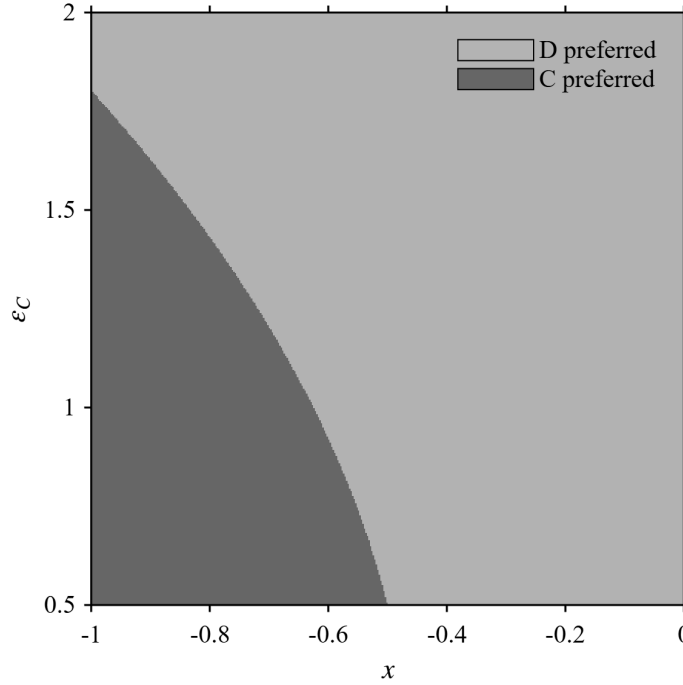


Figure 1 displays voter preferences in this scenario for a given ε_C and x . Two things should be noted. First, if ε_C is perceived to be sufficiently high ($\varepsilon_C \geq \sqrt{3.25} \approx 1.8$), even voters whose ideal point x is equal to $P_C = -1$ will still prefer to elect D . Second, a shock that reduces ε_C will increase C 's appeal to more moderate voters. For example, if a voter has an ideal point $x = -0.65$ and believes $\varepsilon_C = 1.5$, they will prefer to vote for D . However, if the same voter receives information that updates their belief to be $\varepsilon_C = 1$, they will now prefer to vote for C .

2.2 Information Diffusion

How, then, can voters reduce uncertainty about how opposition parties will govern? When uncertainty about opposition parties is high, and voters can learn about them only through direct experience (i.e., by electing them), change occurs only when voter policy preferences are sufficiently extreme to overcome the risk premium. However, in federal systems parties are elected in sub-national governments. Voters can therefore observe opposition party governance outside of the set of elected officials that directly represent their municipality, district, or state.

Geographically proximate municipalities provide a plausible channel for such learning. Empirical evidence shows that local news media tend to cover political leaders and jurisdictions that reflect the composition of their audience (Snyder and Strömberg 2010). Additionally, people routinely travel to neighboring municipalities for a variety of reasons: work, healthcare, shopping, or social activities, during which they may observe local government initiatives or hear about them from residents. Geographic proximity has also long been an important aspect of models of social interaction and migration (Ravenstein 1889; Beine, Docquier, and Özden 2011; Grogger and Hanson 2011; Anderson 2011). As a result, voters are likely to be exposed to information about nearby municipalities through overlapping media markets such as shared newspaper circulation or radio and television networks. Before the widespread adoption of the internet, when local media was comparatively more robust (Djourelouva, Durante, and Martin 2025), this spatial spillover of political information was likely even stronger.

In the context of municipal politics, I argue that citizens pay attention to the performance of opposition parties in nearby municipal governments and incorporate this information into their evaluations of those parties. Consequently, greater exposure to opposition governance should decrease uncertainty about how opposition parties will govern once in office. If voters previously had high uncertainty about opposition parties, and the position and uncertainty of the dominant party remains the same, this information will (weakly) increase the support for the opposition party. Alternatively, when voters are already familiar with an opposition party, additional insights from neighboring municipalities should have little to no impact on said opposition party's support.

3 Background

Having established the theoretical framework, I now turn to the Mexican case to illustrate how these dynamics unfolded in practice. Mexico is an ideal case to test the theory because, until very recently, the constitution barred incumbents at any level from seeking re-election (*sufragio efectivo, no reelección*), leading voters to focus more on party labels than on individual candidate

characteristics (Langston 2003; Larreguy, Marshall, and Snyder 2018). Looking at elections in the late 1990s is particularly informative because this was the beginning of the Democratic Revolution Party (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, PRD), and because major electoral reforms in 1990, 1993, and 1994 leveled the playing field for opposition parties to compete in free and fair elections for the first time in decades.

This section provides historical background on the emergence of the PRD in Mexican politics and explains why this period offers a suitable case study for testing the theory presented above. The first subsection discusses the origins of the PRD's predecessor movement and its initial strength in the 1988 presidential election. The second subsection examines the party's initial organizational and electoral weaknesses and subsequent shift toward moderation. The last subsection discusses how voters able to observe the PRD govern in nearby municipalities would receive information about the PRD's moderation, thereby increasing the PRD's appeal to moderate voters.

3.1 Founding of the PRD

The Democratic Revolution Party (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, PRD) was founded in the late 1980s during the end of Mexico's decades long period of one party rule under the Institutional Revolution Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, PRI). The leaders of the PRD came from a group of former PRI leaders, nicknamed the *Corriente Democrática* (Democratic Current), who were upset with the PRI's rightward shift after the economic crises of the 1980s. Specifically, the *Corriente Democrática* wanted to ensure that social programs were maintained and expanded during the recessions, while then-president Miguel De la Madrid wanted to implement austerity measures to keep international financial commitments (Bruhn 2010).

The 1980s marked a period of growing public disapproval of the PRI as it struggled to manage a series of economic crises. Thus, the *Corriente Democrática* capitalized on this by running one of its founders, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, as a presidential candidate in 1988 against the PRI (Bruhn 2010). Despite evidence of widespread electoral manipulation (Montoya 2002), Cárdenas still managed to obtain an impressive 31% of the vote. Following the election, the PRD was officially

formed, bringing together supporters of *Corriente Democrática* leaders, smaller left-wing parties, and social movements.

The institutional environment of the early 1990s was increasingly favorable to the PRD. In response to widespread criticism following the highly publicized fraud of the 1988 presidential election, the PRI introduced substantial electoral reforms in order to enhance the credibility of the electoral process. In 1990, the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE)¹ was established as an independent agency in charge of organizing federal elections in Mexico (INE 2025). These reforms mandated opposition party participation in the certification of election results. Additional reforms in 1993 and 1994 further strengthened the IFE's autonomy (Klesner 1997). While these reforms were instituted only at the federal level, they were adopted by many states for state and local elections as well (Magaloni 2006).

Given the institutional reforms and the high level of support for Cárdenas and his faction in 1988, the PRD was well-placed to defeat the PRI in the following federal and presidential election in 1994. However, while the electoral reforms resulted in the 1994 federal elections being arguably the most free in Mexican history,² the PRI retained the presidency, majorities in both houses of the legislature, and the vast majority of state and local offices. The PRD was also outperformed by the National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*, PAN), the other major opposition party in Mexico at the time. Cárdenas, who was the PRD's presidential candidate, came in a distant third place.

Why did the PRD flounder electorally, despite the favorable institutional environment? The strong showing for the PRI was not the result of increased PRI approval. After two economic recessions, the PRI had lost credibility on being competent on economic policy and had lost funds to reward party loyalists³ (Greene 2007, 2008). Additionally, the Mexican public saw both major opposition parties as more democratic than the PRI.⁴ Therefore, these electoral results did not indi-

1. Renamed to the National Electoral Institute (*Instituto Nacional Electoral*, INE) in 2014.

2. Most news media in the country, especially major broadcasting company *Televisa* still heavily favored the PRI in coverage. See Mossige (2013) Ch. 2.

3. I will address this further in section 5.1.

4. According to a 1999 survey from *Reforma*, 43.2% of respondents considered the PRI to be

cate continued majority approval; rather, empirical evidence shows that uncertainty about opposition parties among the electorate led many voters to continue supporting PRI candidates (Buendia 1996; Cinta 1999; Diaz-Cayeros, Magaloni, and Weingast 2003; Magaloni 2006; Helmke 2009).

3.2 Public Perception of the PRD

Three major factors contributed to the PRD's disappointing performance in the 1994 federal and local elections (Bruhn 2010; Mossige 2013). First, the PRD was organizationally disorganized. The PRD's broad coalition of former PRI supporters, socialist and communist political parties, and left-wing social movements struggled to find cohesive policies. Even three years after its formation, the PRD did not have a well-defined national party platform.⁵ Second, the PRD's primary election processes were not standardized, leading to poorly run (and sometimes fraudulent) primary elections that led losing factions to question the legitimacy of PRD primaries and in some cases withdraw from the party entirely (Bruhn 2010). Third, the PRD was viewed by many as radical because of the PRD's early leaders extreme rhetoric and preference for "revolutionary" changes to the state.⁶ This perception was reinforced by Cárdenas' embrace of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*, EZLN), a far-left militant group that gained national prominence after an uprising in 1994.

These weaknesses were amplified by media coverage. Television and radio conglomerates with close ties to the PRI highlighted the PRD's disorganization and radicalism, further shaping public perceptions of the party as both extreme and incompetent (Hallin 2000). Although newspapers were increasingly critical of the PRI, television and radio remained far more influential in shaping voter opinion, and their pro-PRI slant heightened voter wariness toward opposition parties (Levy-

authoritarian, while almost half as many saw the PAN and PRD as authoritarian (25.4% and 28%, respectively). Source: Greene (2008)

5. Party leaders explicitly cited this as a problem. In 1992, the president of the party's executive committee resigned because of his concerns about an "inability to overcome divisions in the party" (Bruhn 2010).

6. Cárdenas once said "In no way am I a candidate of the center left. I am a candidate of the revolutionary and progressive forces." (Mossige 2013)

Pinto 2017).⁷

After the 1994 elections, the PRD's leadership underwent a major overhaul. The new leadership was composed almost entirely of "gradualists," who favored moderate pro-democratic reforms over extreme political changes. A 1995 party resolution emphasized "a transition to democracy that is negotiated, peaceful, and constitutional" (Bruhn 2010). It is difficult to determine whether this shifted the perception of the party toward the center, since there wasn't a well established party platform before. What is clear, however, is that the leadership change substantially reduced uncertainty about the party's goals. Unfortunately, these national party-level signals were obscured because of the anti-PRD media environment. Thus, observing how the PRD governed once in office would reduce voters' uncertainty about the party, because the municipalities that first elected PRD governments produced the earliest and most credible information about the party's governing behavior.⁸

3.3 Municipal Politics

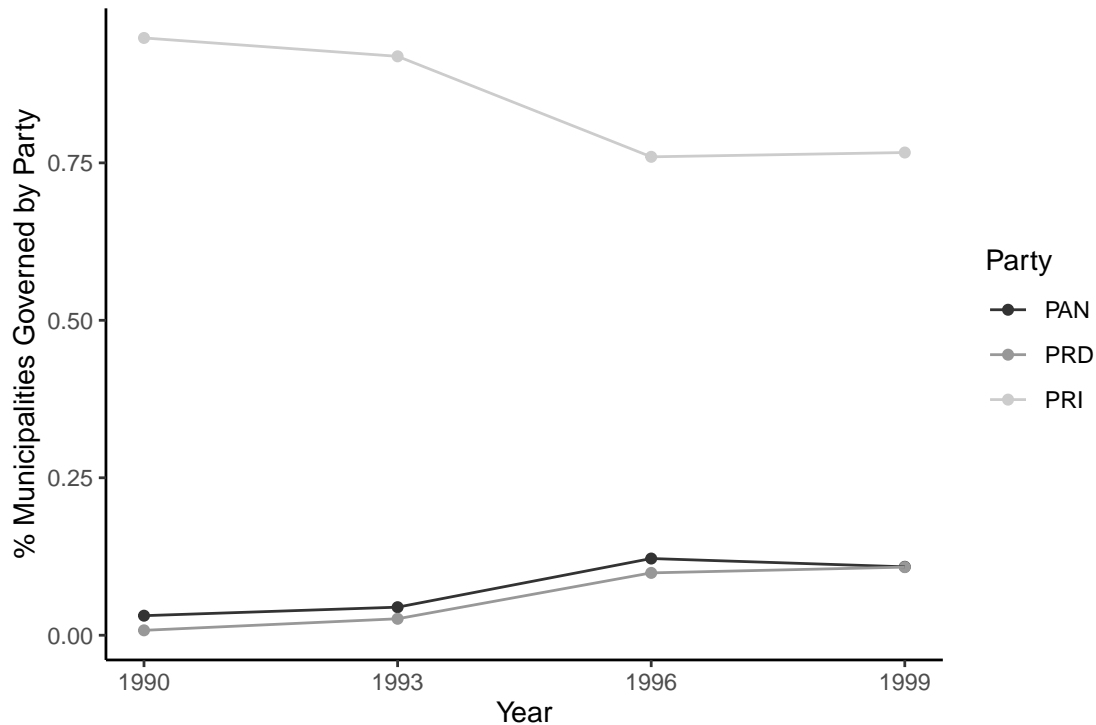
The free and fair elections resulting from the 1990s electoral reforms allowed the PRD to win more municipal elections than ever before. Figure 2 shows the number of municipalities governed by the PRI, PAN, and PRD throughout the 1990s. Although the PRI still controlled the majority of municipalities in 1999, PRD victories increased substantially during this period. PAN victories increased at about the same rate, although the PAN won large city municipalities and state-wide races much more than the PRD. (This will be discussed further in section 5.2.) This increase in opposition victories makes this time period well-suited for testing the effect of information diffusion.

Mexican municipalities are administrative divisions that partition the area of each Mexican

7. The ties between the PRI and Televisa, the largest TV conglomerate in Mexico at the time, cannot be exaggerated. At one point Emilio Azcárraga Milmo, CEO of Televisa, stated that Televisa was "part of the government system" (Castaneda 1993).

8. A full analysis of why these municipalities supported the PRD despite this uncertainty is beyond the scope of this study, but they may have had more left-leaning electorates or higher levels of dissatisfaction with the PRI.

Figure 2: Party Control of Municipalities, 1990-1999



state. Townships or localities (*localidades*) in Mexico are governed by municipalities, making them roughly equivalent to counties in the United States. Each municipality is led by a municipal council (*ayuntamiento*) headed by a municipal president (*presidente municipal*). These leaders are elected by popular vote in a first-past-the-post electoral system. Municipal elections are held every three years, with all municipalities in a given state voting simultaneously. A rotating calendar of state elections ensures that municipal elections are held every year in some subset of states. Municipal governments in Mexico are fully responsible for providing public services to their populations and generally operate free from state and federal level interference, though they often rely on federal and state transfers to fund public investment. As a result, the election of a municipal president carries significant implications for voters, as these officials have control over policies directly affecting local welfare.

Given the substantial authority vested in municipal governments, I argue that voters' capacity to observe political outcomes in neighboring municipalities played a meaningful role in shaping support for the PRD at the local level. Specifically, the information from PRD-governed neighbors

should reduce voters uncertainty about the PRD's ability to implement policy. Assuming that the policy platform and perceived implementation ability of the PRI do not change during this electoral period, this information should (weakly) increase the number of voters that support the PRD over the PRI in subsequent elections. Because the PRI did not substantially alter its positions during this period, with its major policy shifts occurring in the 1980s, the assumption that perceptions of the PRI remained unchanged is well justified.

While not the only mechanism driving the PRD's electoral growth, observation of neighboring governments provided voters with an opportunity to evaluate the party's governing competence and policy positions. Similarly, although policy ambiguity and risk aversion were not the sole factors sustaining support for the PRI, they represented key elements of voters' strategic responses to political uncertainty. For a subset of voters, exposure to PRD governance in proximate municipalities provided credible information about the party's ability to implement its policy agenda effectively. Consequently, spatial proximity to PRD-led municipalities should be associated with higher levels of support for the PRD in subsequent elections.⁹

4 Data and Model

To test the theory presented above, I compare municipalities with PRD-led neighbors to municipalities with PRI-led neighbors. However, a simple comparison would be inappropriate, as areas where PRD candidates are elected may be very different from areas where the PRD loses elections. To address this, I employ a close elections regression discontinuity design (RDD), which compares municipalities with neighbors that narrowly elect an opposition president to municipalities with neighbors that narrowly do not. Under the assumption that municipalities on either side of the electoral threshold are essentially comparable, this quasi-experimental approach provides a robust estimate of the local average treatment effect (LATE) of PRD exposure at the discontinuity.

9. This expectation contrasts with the results reported in Lucardi (2016). However, because Lucardi examines a period prior to the PRD's shift toward moderation, this difference in timing may account for the discrepancy in findings.

The running variable is constructed using data on municipal elections from CIDAC (*Centro de Investigación para el Desarrollo A.C.*), which contains vote totals for all candidates in municipal elections from 1985-2012. I restrict my analysis to elections in the six year period from 1995-2000 in order to focus on elections following the electoral reforms of the 1990s. Given the three-year municipal elections cycle, this period includes two electoral cycles: t (1995-1997) and $t + 1$ (1998-2000).

The running variable is defined as the vote margin of PRD municipal candidates in t :

$$Z_i = PRD_{i,t} - PRI_{i,t}$$

where $PRD_{i,t}$ is the PRD candidate's vote share in municipality i at election t . $PRI_{i,t}$ is the vote share of the PRI candidate in the same election. I exclude municipalities where the PRI is not the first- or second-place party to ensure that $Z_i = 0$ represents the treatment threshold, i.e., a PRD victory occurs in municipality i when $Z_i > 0$. Because of the PRI's hegemony in local politics, this excludes only 24 municipalities from the sample. Results are robust to using the largest non-PRD party as the comparison, even when that party is not the PRI.

A potential threat to the validity of the RDD arises if there is sorting across the electoral threshold (i.e., if electoral outcomes are not continuous at the threshold), because this would put into question whether the discontinuity at the threshold represents an exogenous change in treatment assignment. To address this, I focus on the 1995–2000 period because it follows the major electoral reforms of 1990, 1993, and 1994, which reduced the risk of manipulation by the PRI at the polls. To further assess the possibility of sorting across the electoral threshold, I conduct a manipulation test using the local polynomial density estimator proposed by Cattaneo, Jansson, and Ma (2020) and find no evidence of manipulation at the threshold ($p = 0.24$ for the PRD vote margin; see Appendix Figure 2). Additionally, in the Appendix (Tables 1 and 2), I test for discontinuities in covariates following the recommendations of Cuesta and Imai (2016) and find no evidence of discontinuities at the cutoff for nearly all covariates. I also show in Appendix Table 3 that the treatment does not affect the probability of a PRD candidate running in the municipality.

The treatment measured by the RDD is exposure to PRD governments in neighboring municipalities. I refer to the municipalities used in the running variable as “treatment status” municipalities (i) because these are the units whose election outcomes determine exposure to opposition governance in the “outcome municipalities” ($j \neq i$). In order to capture the effect of exposure to opposition party governance, I restrict the set of treatment status municipalities i to municipalities that have not elected the model-specified party prior to 1995, the beginning of the period of interest.

I restrict the outcome municipalities (j) used in the analysis in three ways. First, I include only outcome municipalities that are in the same state as the treatment status municipality (i). This keeps exposure to the neighboring municipality constant, as all municipalities in the same state will have municipal elections in the same year. This also controls for any other state-specific factors that may affect cross-municipality information spread. Second, I exclude outcome municipalities that have a PRD municipal government prior to 1998, consistent with the theory presented in Section 2 that information from neighboring municipalities is only informative for municipalities that have not yet experienced PRD governance. Third, the outcome municipality must have a PRD candidate in the electoral period $t + 1$. This is because municipalities without PRD candidates will register zero votes, which likely does not accurately reflect underlying support. In Appendix Table 3, I show the probability PRD candidates run in $t + 1$ is not affected by the electoral outcome in t , providing evidence that the omission of these municipalities does not bias treatment estimates.

The main specification of the close election RD focuses on the nearest neighbor outcome municipality (j) of each treatment status municipality (i). Formally, the model is specified as

$$Y_j = \alpha + \tau D_i + \gamma Z_i + \beta_1 Year_i + \beta_2 State_{i,j} + B_3 Distance_{i,j} + \beta_3 PRDNeighbors + \epsilon \quad (5)$$

where Y_j represents the change in PRD vote share between periods t and $t + 1$ in the nearest neighbor outcome municipality j . D_i is the treatment status indicator, equal to 1 if a PRD candidate won in municipality i in period t and 0 otherwise. The coefficient τ captures the discontinuity

at the electoral threshold, representing the causal effect of having a PRD-governed neighboring municipality on PRD support in j . This corresponds to a shock that reduces uncertainty about PRD governance and is therefore the primary coefficient of interest. Based on the theory, I expect this coefficient to be positive and significant.

The model includes several controls to account for potential confounders. $Year_{i,j}$ captures nation-wide trends in opposition support in a given year, while $State_{i,j}$ accounts for state-specific variation in opposition support electoral processes. Both of these are available in the CIDAC dataset. $Distance_{i,j}$ measures the distance between the municipal seats of municipalities i and j , using latitude and longitude data from Mexico’s National Institute of Statistics and Geography (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*, INEGI). Distance is calculated using the Haversine formula, which takes the euclidean distance between two points while accounting for the curvature of the earth. Including this measure is important because the distance between nearest neighbors can vary substantially (see Table 2). The model also controls for the number of already treated neighbors ($PRDNeighbors$), meaning municipalities closer to j than i that had previously elected a PRD municipal president.

5 Results

5.1 Nearest Neighbor Models

I first present the results of the nearest neighbor RDD graphically. Figure 3 plots the change in PRD vote share (y-axis) against the PRD vote margin in the treatment status municipality (x-axis). The y-axis shows the change in opposition vote share from t to $t + 1$. Dark lines indicate the linear trends on either side of the threshold, and shaded regions represent 90% confidence intervals. Dots show binned averages of vote-share changes, grouped into tenth percentile bins. Neither the linear trends nor the points include controls. Consistent with the theory, Figure 3 provides visual evidence that exposure to PRD governance increases support for the PRD in neighboring municipalities.

Next, I move to the robust RDD estimates. I first present the nearest neighbor estimates in

Figure 3: Nearest Neighbor RD with Linear Trends, PRD

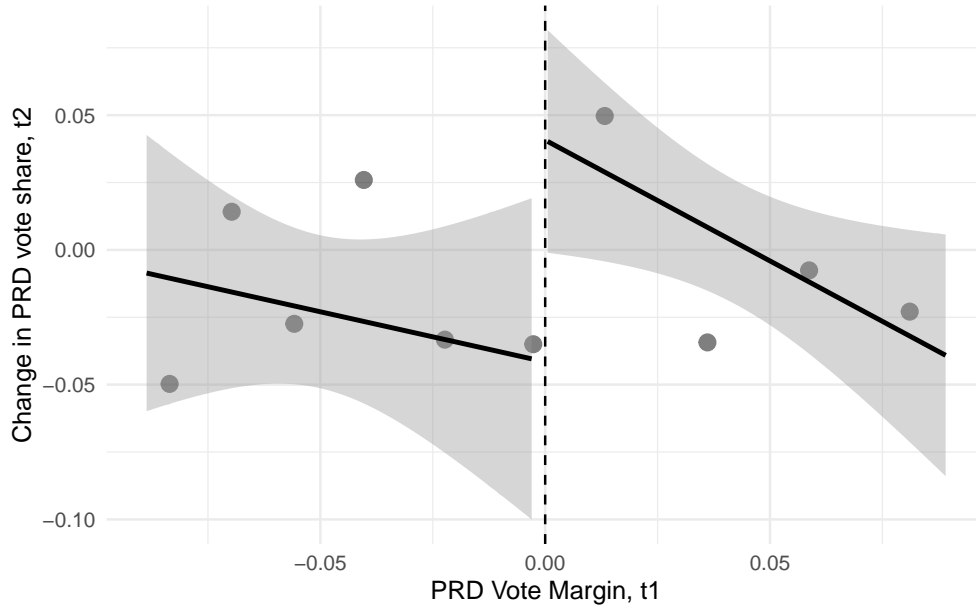


Table 1, columns 1-2. (Columns 3-5 will be addressed in section 5.2.) All models show bias-corrected point estimates calculated using triangular kernels with robust bias-corrected confidence intervals using the method described by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Farrell (2020). Optimal bandwidths that minimize coverage error rate (CER-optimal, see Calonico, Cattaneo, and Farrell 2020) are calculated in order to avoid artificially small standard errors (Stommes, Aronow, and Sävje 2023). Magalhães et al. (2025) find that CER-optimal bandwidth selection perform better when “approximating the curvature of the CEF is more challenging,” making this the preferred bandwidth selection method.

Columns 1 shows the RD model without controls, whereas column 2 includes controls for the year of the election, state of municipalities, distance between nearest neighbors, and number of treated neighbors. Both models show that exposure to PRD governance leads to large increases in PRD support, showing a 12.7-15.3 percentage point (p.p.) increase in vote share for PRD candidates. The point estimates for both models are statistically significant for $\alpha = 0.05$, and the estimate in the model with controls is significant for $\alpha = 0.01$. This provides evidence that municipalities that exogenously experience an increase in neighbors governed by the PRD experience an

increase for PRD candidates in the next municipal election.

Table 1: Nearest Neighbor Results and Diff-in-Disc Summary

Dep. Variable:	Outcome Mun Change in PVS				Diff-in-Disc Summary	
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	
Coefficient	0.127*	0.153**	-0.033	-0.046	Diff-in-Disc	0.199
	[0.035]	[0.002]	[0.455]	[0.274]	Simple 99% CI	[0.032, 0.365]
Party	PRD	PRD	PAN	PAN	Bootstrap 99% CI	[0.029, 0.472]
Controls?	No	Yes	No	Yes	<i>The Diff-in-Disc estimator estimates the difference between models 2 and 4. The estimate is robust at the 99% confidence level using both a simple calculation of the standard error and a bootstrap method with 10,000 bootstrap samples.</i>	
Bandwidth	0.089	0.085	0.083	0.086		
Municipalities	181	165	249	265		
<i>Robust p-values reported in brackets, ** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$</i>						
<i>Controls: year, state, distance between nearest neighbors, and number of treated neighbors closer than this nearest neighbor</i>						

5.2 PAN Comparison

The results in the previous subsection show that municipalities that are exposed to PRD governance show significantly higher support for PRD candidates in their next municipal elections. However, this does not prove that the mechanism for this increase in support is through voters learning about the PRD. To test the mechanism, I compare the evidence of voter learning and PRD governance exposure with governance exposure from the National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*, PAN), the other major opposition party in Mexican politics during this period. The PAN is a center-right party that was solidly pro-democracy during this period. Thus, the PAN was similar to the PRD during this period in that it was largely centrist and pro-democratic reforms.

However, in contrast to the PRD, the PAN was a much older opposition party, having been founded in 1939. This meant that, in contrast to the PRD, the PAN's party platform was well established as a pro-business, pro-Catholic, and pro-democracy party since at least the 1980s (Diaz-Cayeros, Magaloni, and Weingast 2003). Additionally, the PAN had had more electoral success, partly due to grassroots effort in the 1980s (Lucardi 2016). By 1995, the PAN had won four gubernatorial races (Baja California, Chihuahua, Guanajuato, and Jalisco). Further, PAN municipi-

pal presidents had been elected in large cities (including Tijuana, Monterrey, and Guanajuato) and eleven state capitals. Comparatively, the largest municipality governed by the PRD before 1995 had a population of just over 200,000.¹⁰ Because the PAN was more established and experienced, I expect that voters nationally already had well-formed beliefs about the PAN. Thus, local observation of neighboring municipalities governed by the PAN will have a much smaller effect on beliefs about PAN municipal candidates.

To test this, I conduct the same RD analysis as described in the previous section, except that I change the running variable and outcome from PRD vote margin and vote percent to PAN vote margin and vote percent, respectively.¹¹ Table 2, column 3 shows the RD model without controls. Table 2, column 4 shows the model that controls for election year, state, and distance between nearest neighbor pairs. These PAN models show that the effect of exposure to PAN governance is small, negative, and statistically insignificant in both models. In comparison, PRD candidates experience a roughly 15 p.p. boost in vote share when their municipality is exposed to PRD governance. The difference-in-discontinuities between the PRD and PAN models is also statistically significant, as reported in column 5. The absence of an effect for the PAN supports the conclusion that the observed impact in the PRD models does not equally apply to the PAN during this period, consistent with the theory.

5.3 Multiple Municipality Comparisons

To further test the theory, I examine how the impact of exposure to PRD governance varies across model specifications that include more distant outcome municipalities. If the exposure of municipalities to PRD governance is a function of spatial distance, the estimated effect should decrease as municipalities located farther from the treatment status municipalities are included. This expectation follows from the assumption that voters in more distant municipalities have less opportunity

10. The municipality is Cardenas, Tabasco, which had a population of 204,810 in 1995. Data from CIDAC and Mexico 1995 Census Count.

11. I find no evidence of electoral manipulation or discontinuities of relevant control variables, making the RD valid for the PAN (see Appendix Figure 2 and Tables 1 and 2).

to directly observe PRD governance.

I estimate the following model:

$$\bar{Y}_{V_i^n} = \alpha + \tau D_i + \gamma Z_i + \beta_1 Year_{i,j} + \beta_2 State_{i,j} + \beta_3 \overline{Distance_{i,j}} + \epsilon \quad (6)$$

This model is almost identical to (1), with two modifications. First, V_i^n (the set of neighbors, or *[V]ecinos*) denotes the set (V) of n closest municipalities to i that meet the criteria described in Section 3, with models estimated for $n \leq 5$. Second, the outcome $\bar{Y}_{V_i^n}$ is now the average of the change in vote share weighted by the distance between each municipality $j \in V_i^n$. Finally, $\overline{Distance_{i,j}}$ is the average distance between i and j for all $j \in V_i$.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Dist. (km) Between Nth Nearest Neighbor Pairs

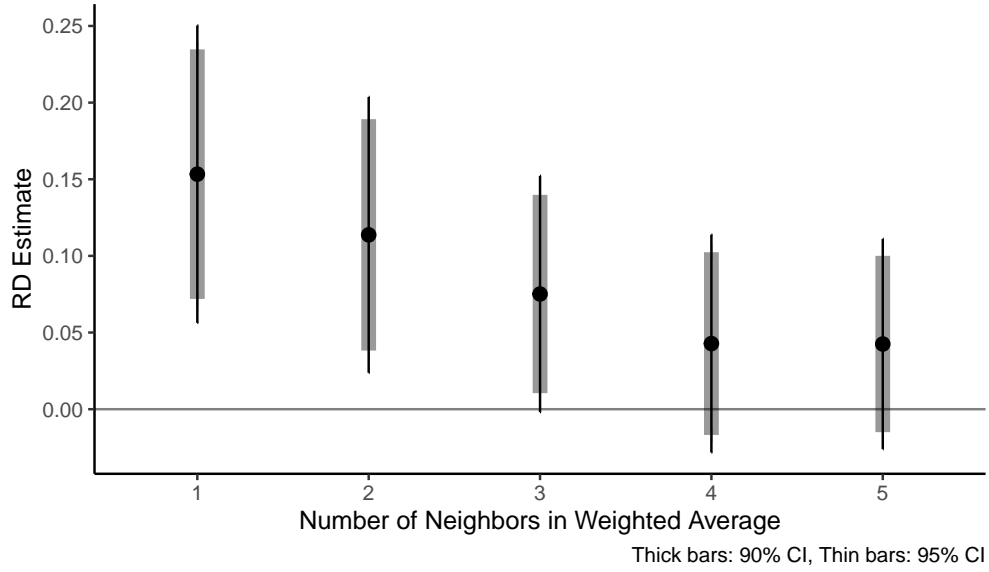
	Nth NN	Min	Median	Mean	Max	SD
PRD	1	0.32	11.79	16.61	175.43	17.58
	2	1.42	17.43	24.18	297.81	23.60
	3	2.65	22.03	30.59	405.74	30.65
	4	3.44	25.94	36.30	541.89	37.76
	5	3.89	30.05	40.48	341.58	35.21

Note: This table shows the descriptive statistics for the Haversine distance (in kilometers) between municipalities that are first–fifth nearest neighbors (NN). The statistics include minimum (Min), median, mean, maximum (Max), and standard deviation (SD) values for each subset. The maximum distance does not increase monotonically because one state (Baja California Sur) only has four municipality pairs that pass the criteria for each party.

If information spreads spatially, models that include more distant municipalities (i.e., larger values of n) should yield smaller estimates of τ . Table 2 reports descriptive statistics for the first through fifth nearest neighbors to PRD treatment status municipalities. As expected, the minimum, median, and mean distance increase monotonically with neighbor order (see Table 2 note for why the maximum distance does not). While the differences in median distance may seem small, they imply large increases in the area over which voters would need to observe information. For example, the increase from the nearest to the second nearest municipality (about 5.5 km) corresponds to a circular area increase of 517.7 square kilometers¹², about one third of the size of Mexico City

12. Computed as $\pi \cdot 17.43^2 - \pi \cdot 11.79^2 = 517.7$ square kilometers, where 17.43 km and 11.79 km are the median distances for the second- and first-nearest municipalities, respectively.

Figure 4: Effect of PRD Exposure for Multiple Municipalities



proper. This increase in area provides an intuitive test of the theory: if information about PRD governance diffuses geographically, its electoral impact should diminish as further neighbors are included.

Figure 4 shows the CER-optimal robust RD estimates for PRD governance exposure across specifications that include between one and five outcome municipalities in the average. As expected, the effect of exposure to PRD governance decreases as a function of the number of municipalities included in the outcome. The effect is positive and significant for models that include up to three outcome municipalities, but beyond that the effect is not statistically distinguishable from zero. This attenuation in effect size aligns with theoretical expectations because citizens are likely to monitor municipalities that are geographically closest rather than municipalities that are further away. Additionally, Appendix Figures 3 and 4 show the null effect for the PAN in section 5.2 remains even when additional municipalities are included in the average.

These findings provide compelling evidence that exposure to PRD governance informs voter behavior in Mexican municipal elections. The results are robust across a range of alternative specifications: Appendix Figure 3 shows that the results are insensitive to the polynomial order

selected for the RDD estimator, and Appendix Figures 4 and 5 show that the results hold under alternative bandwidths.

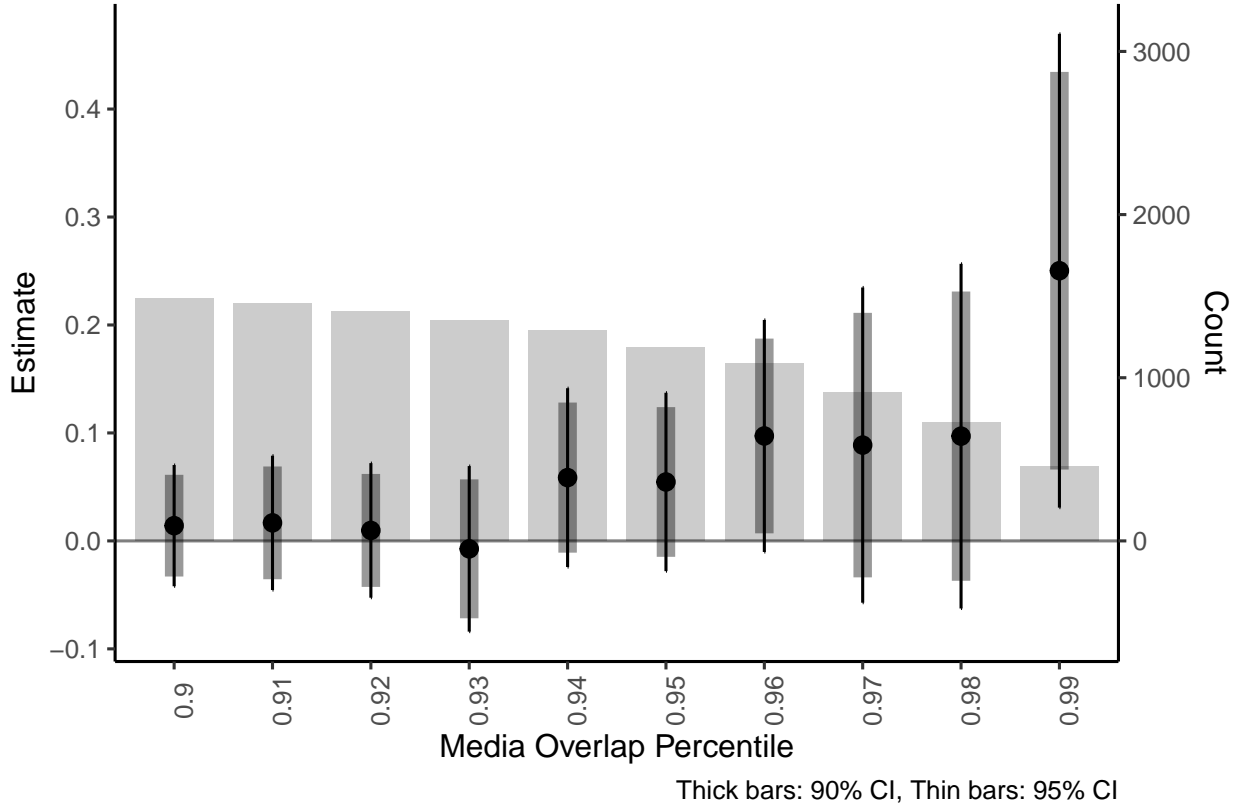
5.4 Local Media

Having established that exposure to PRD governance in neighboring municipalities increases electoral support, in this section I provide suggestive evidence that the presence of local media strengthens the transmission of information about neighboring municipalities. I leverage data on radio signal coverage from Larreguy, Marshall, and Snyder (2020) to measure the overlap of local information. For each municipality, I identify all radio stations whose signals intersect the municipal boundary and calculate the similarity of media environments across municipalities by constructing a Jaccard similarity matrix. Jaccard similarity measures the proportion of shared radio stations relative to the total number of stations available in either municipality, with a value of 1 indicating complete overlap and 0 indicating no shared stations. For example, consider a pair of municipalities that have two shared radio stations and one unique radio station each. Two shared radio stations out of 4 total radio stations indicates a Jaccard similarity of $2/4 = 0.5$.

To estimate how the effect of PRD exposure varies with media overlap, I estimate a model similar to those in Section 5.3, with two modifications. First, for each outcome municipality, I calculate the average outcome for reference municipalities that fall within a given percentile of media overlap. Second, I weight the outcome by media overlap rather than geographic distance. Apart from these changes, the model specifications are identical to those presented in Section 5.3.

Figure 5 shows each of the RD coefficients from the models described above for the 90th through 99th percentile, because this is where most of the variation in estimates is observed. (Appendix Figure 7 shows the results from all percentiles from 50th - 99th percentiles.) This represents an increase from 0.56 Jaccard similarity (90th percentile) to 0.91 Jaccard similarity (99th percentile). The results show a clear pattern where lower levels of radio connectedness (0.91-0.95 percentiles) are associated with estimates between 0 and 0.1, while higher connectedness levels result in larger effects. While only the 99th percentile model's estimate is statistically significant,

Figure 5: RD Estimates by Media Overlap



Note: Points and confidence intervals represent RD estimates of PRD exposure for municipalities within each percentile of media overlap. Histograms show the number of treatment municipalities in each percentile subset.

the results suggest that the strongest effect of PRD governance exposure is concentrated among municipalities with the highest levels of media overlap.

6 Alternative Explanations

The results presented in the previous section provide strong evidence that exposure to PRD governance increases voter support, but it is important to consider alternative explanations that could account for the findings. Assessing these alternative explanations helps establish the credibility of the results. In the following subsections, I address plausible alternative mechanisms and demonstrate why the observed effects are most consistent with spatial diffusion.

6.1 PRI Reward and Punishment Regime

It is well documented that the PRI was known to reward swing states and municipalities that retained PRI leadership with increased federal transfers and social spending in certain periods of its dominance (Diaz-Cayeros, Magaloni, and Weingast 2003). Consequently, there may be concerns that the estimate from the RDD is influenced by districts that narrowly retain PRI leadership being rewarded, thereby convincing nearby districts to retain the PRI as well.

This concern is not substantiated by empirical evidence, which indicates that municipalities that elected PRD municipal presidents from 1995-1998 were not systematically disadvantaged financially. Appendix Figure 1, using measures from INEGI's State and Municipal Public Finances (EFIPEM) database, shows that PRD-governed municipalities did not experience higher levels of taxation or debt, nor did they reduce public investment compared to the previous years in which they were governed by the PRI. Additionally, if such transfers were driving the results, we would expect the within-municipality RD estimate of electing a PRD municipal president to have an effect similar in magnitude to the cross-municipality effect documented in section 5.1. In contrast, Appendix Table 5 demonstrates that electing a PRD candidate in election t has no discernible impact on the subsequent within-municipality change in party vote share.

Several contextual factors corroborate these empirical findings. Most importantly, the economic crises leading up to 1995—particularly the 1994 peso crisis—significantly curtailed the PRI's fiscal capacity to channel rewards to swing municipalities (Greene 2007). Moreover, as the Mexican economy became increasingly internationalized, federal transfers played a diminishing role in municipal finances (Diaz-Cayeros, Magaloni, and Weingast 2003).

6.2 Candidate Explanations

Having addressed concerns that PRI reward or punishment mechanisms could bias the estimates, it is also important to consider the potential role of candidate selection. The data used for the main analysis include only outcome municipalities in which the PRD runs a candidate, mitigating concerns that exposure to opposition governance directly influences candidate entry. However, it

is still possible that higher quality political hopefuls were more likely to run as PRD candidates after observing PRD candidates win in nearby municipalities. Indeed, this was a period in which “defecting” from the PRI to the PRD was not uncommon (Ascencio 2024). These higher quality candidates could be more appealing to voters, more competent at campaigning, or they could have access to clientelistic networks or other resources (Novaes 2018).

While detailed data on the characteristics of municipal presidential candidates during this period is unavailable, several factors cast doubt on candidate quality being the mechanism driving the result. First, a candidate quality mechanism doesn’t explain the sharp discontinuity observed in the main result, because savvy political elites would understand that candidates who barely win an election have virtually identical support to a candidate who barely loses and therefore would be unlikely to make party affiliation decisions based on election results alone. The evidence that local media enhances the effect (Section 5.4) is also not consistent with a candidate supply explanation, since political elites would not be constrained to information obtained through local radio. Additionally, due to Mexico’s no-reelection laws, individual candidate characteristics were less critical to voters compared to party labels (Langston 2003; Larreguy, Marshall, and Snyder 2018; Larreguy, Marshall, and Snyder 2020). Finally, while I find that exposure to PRD governance increased support for the PRD at the polls, I do not find a substantial effect on the probability of a PRD victory (see Appendix Table 6), casting doubt on the result being driven by the defection of major PRI political elites, who in theory would have much more ability to change the outcome of local elections.

A related alternative mechanism is that PRD municipal presidents, once elected, were able to use their resources to improve PRD candidates’ electoral outcomes in neighboring municipalities. This mechanism is unlikely for two reasons. First, as mentioned in section 6.1, this was a financially fraught period in which all Mexican municipalities struggled to receive financial transfers from state and federal government. Thus, it is unclear how or why PRD-led municipalities would use these scarce resources to help candidates in other municipalities. Second, it is unlikely PRD municipal presidents would be able to extend non-financial resources (like clientelistic networks)

to neighboring municipalities, which were not necessarily geographically close (see Table 2).

6.3 Alternative Voter Explanations

There are additional voter-focused mechanisms that could potentially explain the observed effect. One possibility is that exposure to PRD municipal victories signals the parties electoral strength relative to the PAN, thereby attracting votes from former PAN supporters. However, Appendix Table 4 shows that exposure to PRD governance does not reduce PAN vote share. This is consistent with the idea that, given the distinct policy platforms of the center-left PRD and the center-right PAN, shared support for democracy alone is insufficient to shift voters between these parties. Another potential explanation is that the observed increase in support for the PRD is simply the result of voters “joining the bandwagon” as the PRD gains majority support in their geographic area, as in Schuessler (2000)’s theory of expressive voting. Yet Appendix Table 6 shows that PRD candidates are *not* more likely to win municipal elections in outcome municipalities, despite the increase in voter support, indicating that the effect is not simply due to expressive voting.

Finally, it is possible that general exposure to the PRD, rather than governance specifically, drives increased voter support. If this were the case, other forms of exposure—such as frequent PRD candidacies in a municipality—should similarly reduce voter uncertainty and boost support. To test this hypothesis, I run the RD model in three subsets of municipalities categorized by the frequency of PRD candidates running in past elections. If exposure to candidates were equivalent to exposure to governance, we would expect the effect to be smaller in municipalities with longer histories of PRD candidates. Instead, Appendix Figure 6 shows the effect of PRD exposure is smallest in municipalities with the lowest number of past PRD candidates. While caution is warranted due to the reduced sample size in these subsets of the data, the absence of a decline in the effect provides suggestive evidence that exposure to PRD governance, rather than candidacy alone, drives the observed increase in support.

7 Discussion

In this paper, I argue that voters in competitive authoritarian systems can observe nearby municipal governments in order to learn about opposition parties. I test this theory in the context of Mexican municipal elections from 1995-2000, leveraging a close elections regression discontinuity design to estimate the causal effect of exposure to PRD governance in neighboring municipalities. The results show that municipalities exogenously exposed to PRD-governed neighbors increase their support for PRD candidates by 12-15 percentage points in subsequent elections. This effect diminishes when more distant municipalities are added to the analysis, and the effect is strongest among municipalities with overlapping local media coverage, providing strong evidence for spatial diffusion of information. Critically, I find no comparable effect for the PAN, an older opposition party with established governance records in state capitals and major cities, confirming that the mechanism operates through learning about previously unknown or unfavorable opposition parties specifically.

These findings contribute to several important topics in political science. They shed light on the informational barriers facing opposition parties in competitive authoritarian and dominant-party systems and suggest that decentralized governance structures may facilitate democratic competition by providing low-risk opportunities for voters to learn about alternatives. The mechanism identified here may help explain how opposition movements gain credibility and momentum in competitive authoritarian settings where national-level alternation remains unlikely. The results also speak to research on spatial diffusion of political behavior and institutions, employing a regression discontinuity approach to provide clear causal evidence that information about governance spreads geographically. This advances our understanding of electoral accountability by demonstrating that voters evaluate not only their own elected officials but also scrutinize party performance across jurisdictional boundaries. This finding has important implications for how we conceptualize the scope of democratic accountability in federal systems.

Additionally, the results presented in this paper have several important implications for understanding local politics in competitive authoritarian contexts by illuminating how opposition parties

can struggle under conditions of one-party dominance, particularly when voters lack a clear sense of how these parties would govern if elected. Recognizing that voters do not perceive all opposition parties equally in such contexts is also important for understanding opposition dynamics.

A relevant parallel can be observed in Mexico's current era of near one-party dominance. Following MORENA's victory in the presidency and both chambers of Congress in 2018, the PAN joined forces with the PRI and the remnants of the PRD that had not defected to MORENA to form a broad anti-MORENA coalition. Electorally, this strategy proved unsuccessful, as MORENA went on to secure another decisive win in the 2024 general election, gaining super-majorities in both houses of Congress. In local elections MORENA-coalition candidates won the majority of municipal elections (53%) and almost twice as many municipal presidencies as won by PAN-PRI-PRD candidates.

One major challenge facing this coalition has been its lack of consensus on policy priorities. This is largely due to its ideological breadth, which spans from "moderate liberals to hardcore right-wingers" (The Mexico Political Economist 2025). This presents an issue to voters, who may be concerned that they'd be better off with the more well-known MORENA platform (even if they dislike it) than an uncertain big-tent coalition party. On October 18, 2025, the PAN declared the beginning of a "new era," signaling a pivot back to its conservative principles (PAN Official Website 2025). Although the announcement offered few details about the party's prospective policy platform outside the coalition, such a repositioning could give voters a clearer sense of what the PAN represents and potentially improve its electoral prospects. Of course, numerous other factors—including how these candidates govern once elected— will also shape these outcomes.

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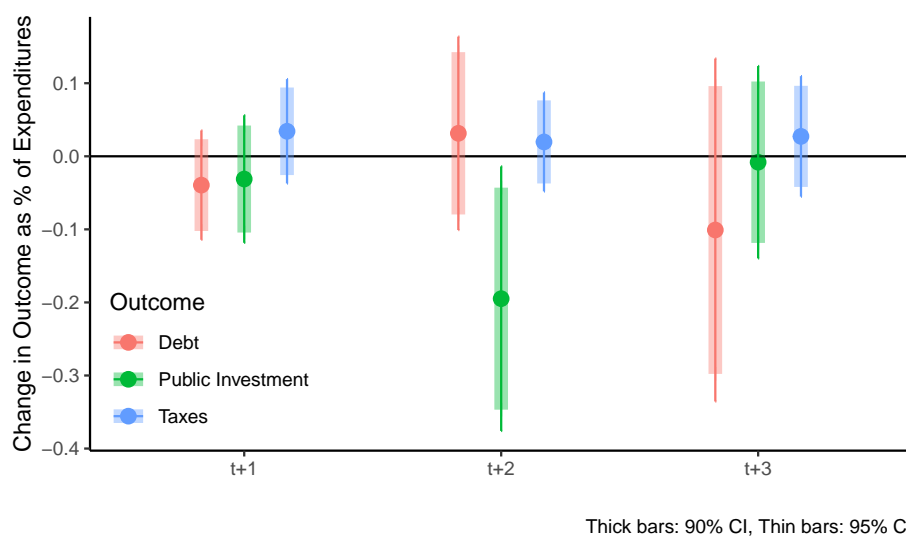
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Online Appendix for “Overcoming Inexperience:
How the Opposition Wins in Competitive
Authoritarian Systems”

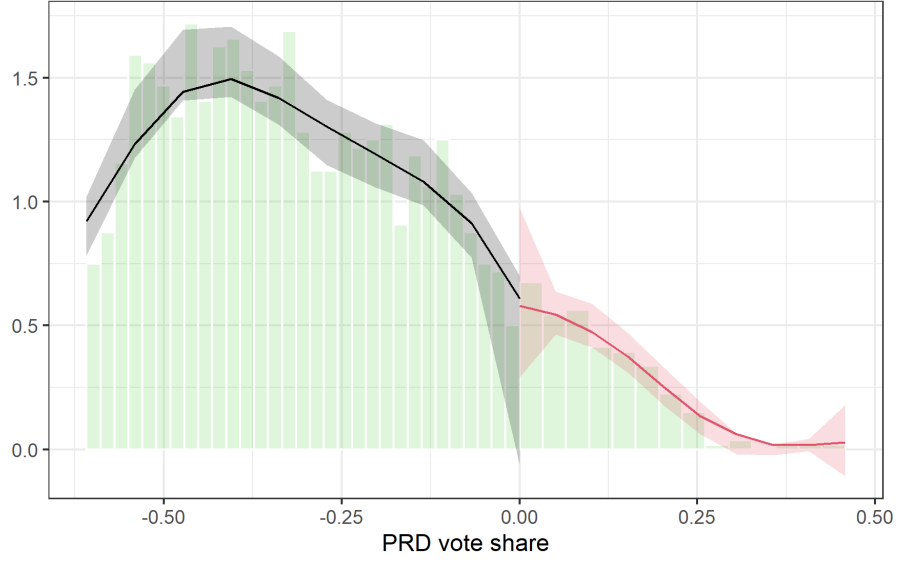
February 2, 2026

Figure 1: Robust RD Coefficients for Economic Outcomes in PRD-Governed Municipalities

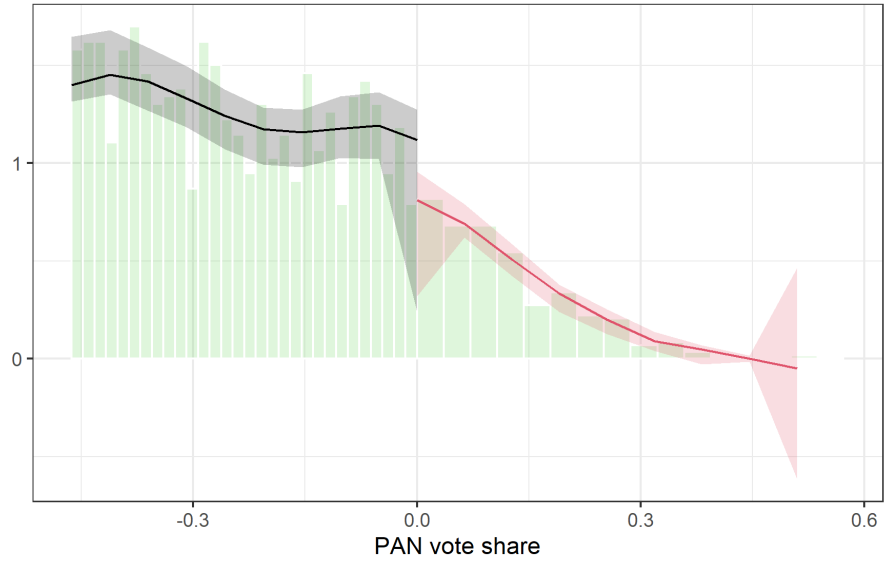


This figure presents the results of a regression discontinuity design estimating the causal effect of electing PRD local politicians between 1995 and 1998 on municipal economic outcomes. Using budget categories from INEGI's EFIPEM database, we find almost no statistically significant differences in taxation, debt, or public investment compared to municipalities governed by the PRI during the first three years of the term. While the small sample size means we can only detect large effects, most estimated differences are small (between -10% and 10%), suggesting that PRD governance was broadly similar to PRI governance.

Figure 2: Manipulation Test for Running Variable by Party



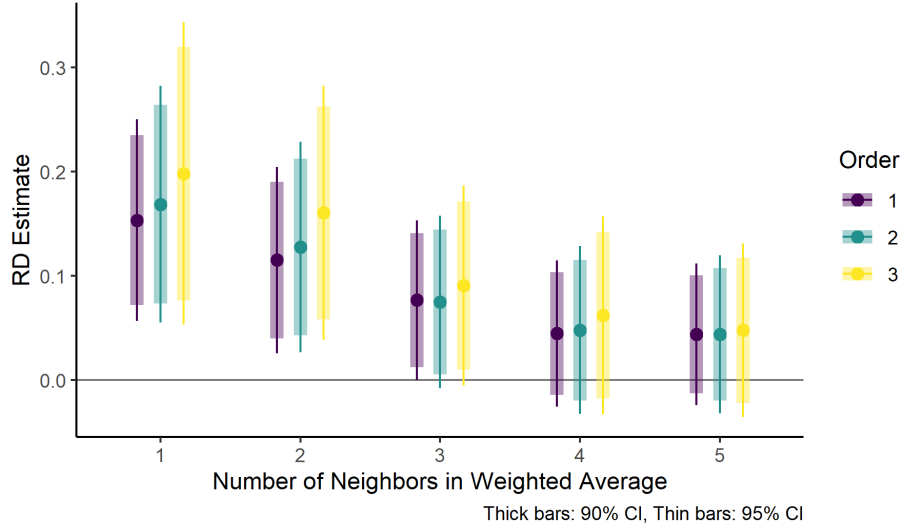
(a) PRD



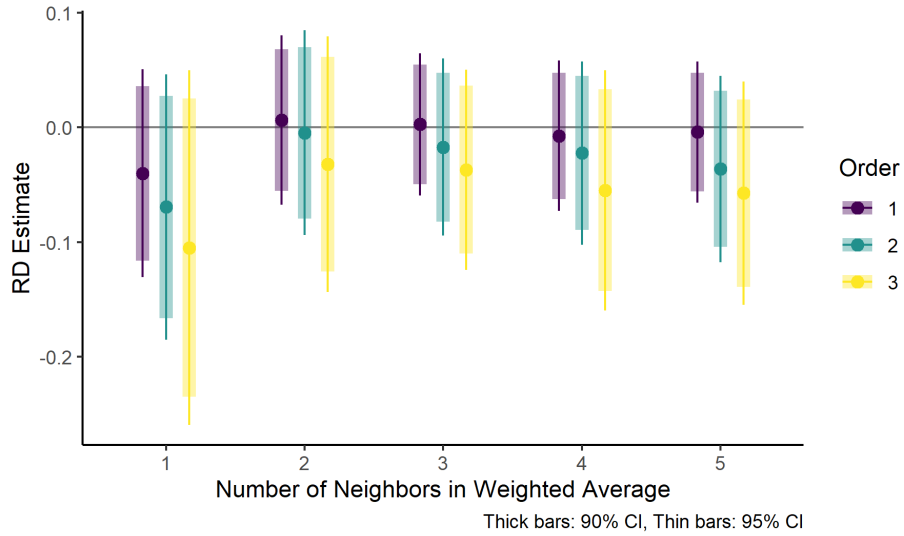
(b) PAN

Placeholder: This figure shows manipulation test using the local polynomial density estimator proposed by Cattaneo, Jansson, and Ma (2020), separately for PRD and PAN. No significant manipulation is detected for either party (p -value = 0.2365 for PRD, 0.708 for PAN).

Figure 3: RD Results with Different Polynomial Estimators



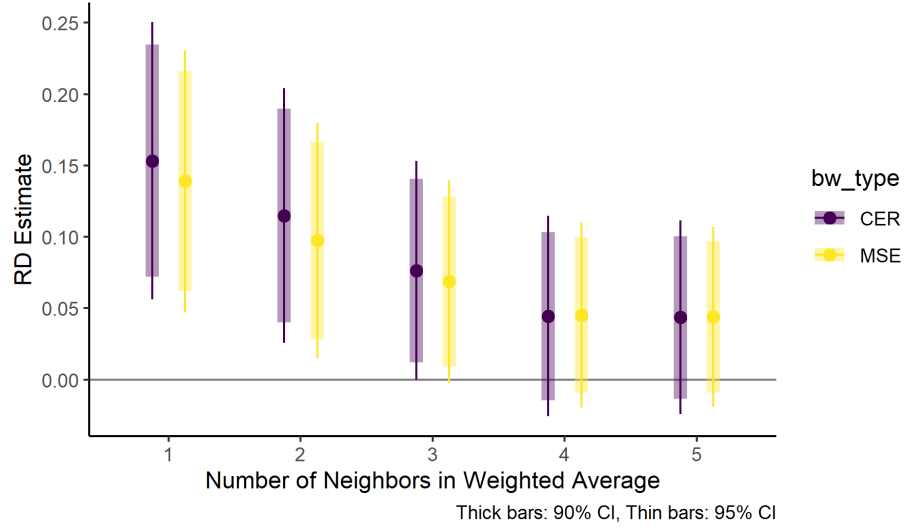
(a) PRD



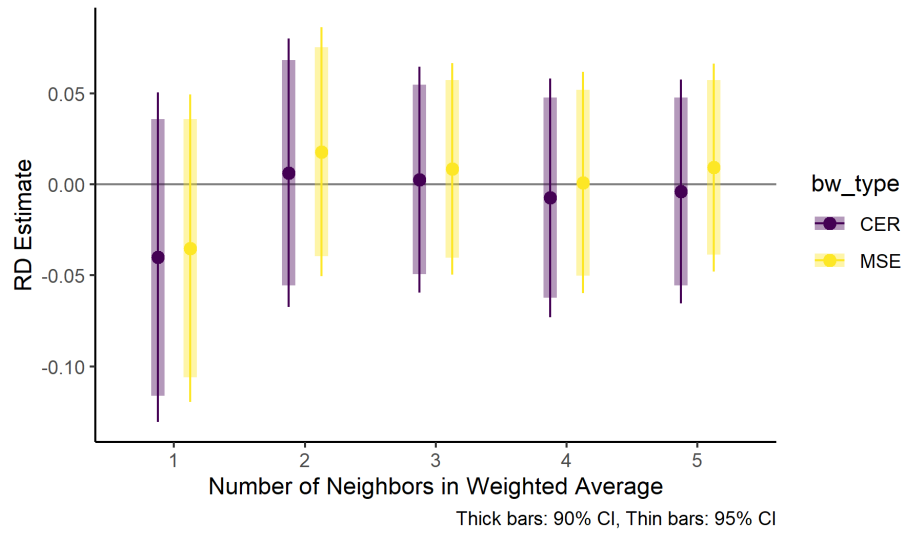
(b) PAN

This figure presents robustness checks using different polynomial orders in the RD estimation for both PRD and PAN municipalities. It illustrates that the choice of polynomial does not change the substantive interpretation of the estimates.

Figure 4: RD Results with Different Optimal Bandwidth Estimation



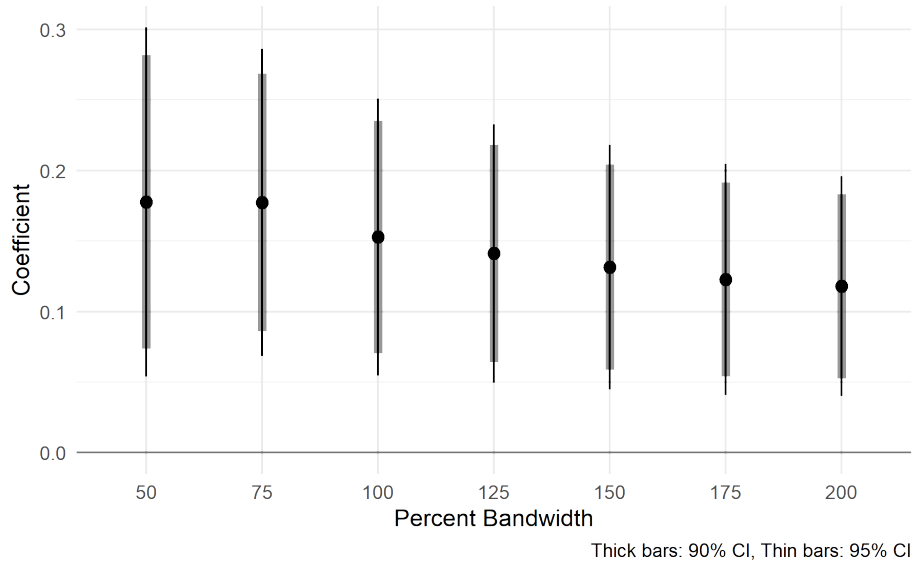
(a) PRD



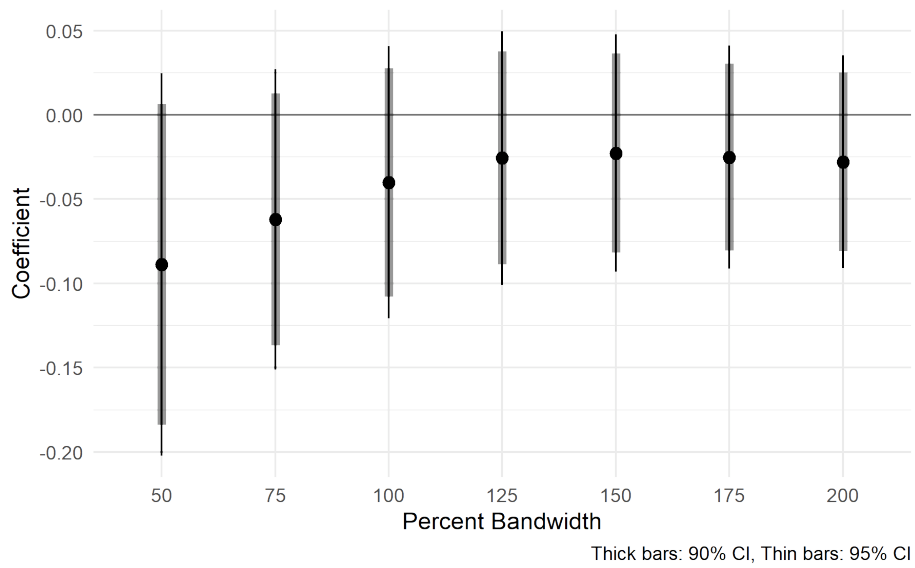
(b) PAN

This figure shows RD estimates using coverage error rate (CER) and mean square error (MSE) bandwidth selection methods for PRD and PAN municipalities. The estimates remain broadly consistent across bandwidth selection methods.

Figure 5: RD Results with Manual Bandwidths As Percentage of BW in Table 2 of paper



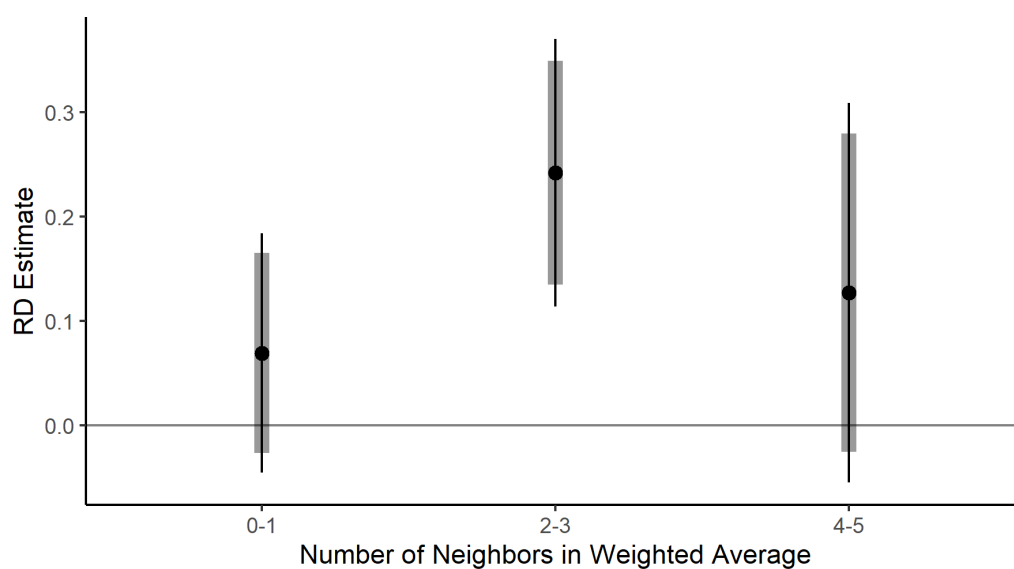
(a) PRD



(b) PAN

This figure presents the RD estimates when manually adjusting the bandwidth as a percentage of the optimal bandwidth from column 2 in table 1 of the main paper. The effect is relatively stable for the PRD, and insignificant for the PAN.

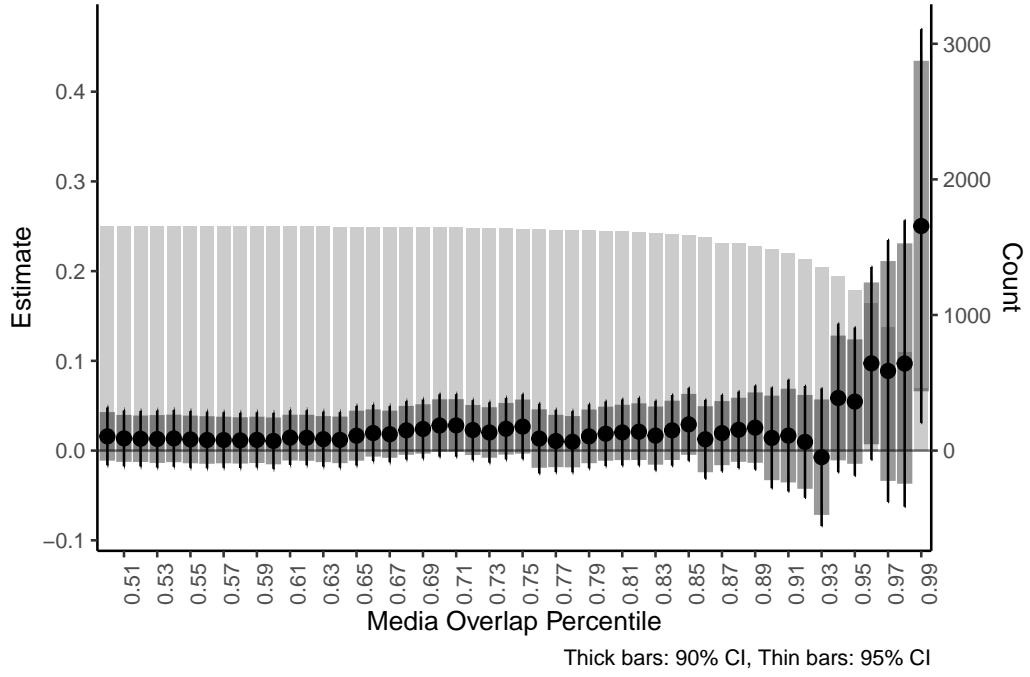
Figure 6: Subset of PRD RD Results by Previous PRD Candidate Exposure



Thick bars: 90% CI, Thin bars: 95% CI

This figure presents heterogeneous treatment effects for the PRD analysis, stratifying municipalities by their level of previous exposure to PRD candidates. The results explore whether the effect of narrowly electing a PRD mayor in a neighboring municipality on subsequent PRD vote shares varies depending on voters' prior familiarity with the party. The results do not show that candidate exposure decreases the effect; if anything, the treatment effect may be stronger in places with moderate to high PRD candidate exposure compared to places with little to no prior exposure.

Figure 7: RD Estimates by Media Overlap, 50th to 90th Percentiles



This plot is the same as Figure 5 in the main paper, but with more estimates for lower percentiles of media overlap. Points and confidence intervals represent RD estimates of PRD exposure for municipalities within each percentile of media overlap. Histograms show the number of treatment municipalities in each percentile subset.

Table 1: PRD Covariate Checks

Covariate	Est.	SE	p-value	N
Aguascalientes				
Baja California				
Baja California Sur				
Campeche	0.042	0.044	0.344	1631
Coahuila	-0.076	0.12	0.525	1631
Colima	0.047	0.045	0.292	1631
Chiapas	0.007	0.007	0.323	1631
Chihuahua	0.001	0.001	0.281	1631
Durango	0.008	0.01	0.421	1631
Guanajuato	0.116	0.063	0.067	1631
Guerrero	-0.121	0.121	0.318	1631
Hidalgo	0.03	0.034	0.372	1631
Jalisco	0.016	0.017	0.329	1631
Mexico	0.093	0.087	0.287	1631
Michoacan	-0.23	0.163	0.159	1631
Morelos	0	0.064	0.998	1631
Nayarit				
Puebla	-0.039	0.076	0.607	1631
Queretaro				
Quintana Roo				
San Luis Potos	0.103	0.065	0.116	1631
Sinaloa	0.004	0.003	0.196	1631
Sonora	-0.046	0.077	0.548	1631
Tabasco				
Tamaulipas	0.069	0.061	0.261	1631
Tlaxcala	0.029	0.028	0.292	1631
Veracruz	-0.092	0.14	0.51	1631
Yucatan	0.028	0.035	0.425	1631
Zacatecas	-0.04	0.025	0.1	1631
Distance km	-3.619	5.763	0.53	1631
1995	-0.157	0.161	0.331	1631
1996	0.033	0.135	0.807	1631
1997	0.087	0.159	0.583	1631
Population	19952.81	22929.606	0.384	849
Income (Mil. Mex\$)	7.022	4.795	0.143	831

States with empty rows lack sufficient municipalities

This table reports covariate balance tests for municipalities in the PRD analysis. It assesses whether treated and control municipalities are balanced on baseline characteristics.

Table 2: PAN Covariate checks

Covariate	Est.	SE	p-value	N
Aguascalientes	0.056	0.054	0.303	1639
Baja California Sur				
Campeche				
Coahuila				
Colima	-0.001	0.025	0.97	1639
Chiapas	-0.034	0.051	0.502	1639
Chihuahua	-0.033	0.028	0.234	1639
Durango	-0.037	0.026	0.152	1639
Guanajuato	0.034	0.073	0.643	1639
Guerrero	0.036	0.041	0.377	1639
Hidalgo	-0.026	0.021	0.218	1639
Jalisco	-0.151	0.097	0.118	1639
Mexico	-0.036	0.056	0.517	1639
Michoacan	-0.052	0.051	0.303	1639
Morelos	-0.018	0.059	0.762	1639
Nayarit	-0.011	0.018	0.549	1639
Nuevo Leon	-0.062	0.05	0.214	1639
Puebla	0.092	0.067	0.17	1639
Queretaro	-0.011	0.066	0.87	1639
Quintana Roo				
San Luis Potos	0.016	0.07	0.821	1639
Sinaloa	0.034	0.041	0.407	1639
Sonora	0.052	0.073	0.482	1639
Tabasco				
Tamaulipas	-0.082	0.067	0.221	1639
Tlaxcala	0.046	0.047	0.328	1639
Veracruz	0.075	0.072	0.296	1639
Yucatan	0.012	0.068	0.859	1639
Zacatecas	-0.002	0.079	0.978	1639
Distance (km)	-18.777	13.869	0.176	1639
1995	-0.037	0.153	0.809	1639
1996	-0.068	0.104	0.511	1639
1997	0.077	0.149	0.607	1639
Population	-8278.018	28020.486	0.768	829
Income (Mil. Mex\$)	-1.66	10.196	0.871	813

States with empty rows lack sufficient municipalities

This table reports covariate balance tests for municipalities in the PAN analysis, similar to Table 1.

Table 3: Within Municipality Results for PRD Candidate Entry

Dep. Variable:	Outcome Mun PRD Δ VS
Model:	(1)
Coefficient	-0.035
	[0.77]
BW Type	CER
Bandwidth	0.087
N	1570
Effective N	173

Robust p-values reported in brackets

Controls: year, state, distance between nearest neighbors, treated neighbors

This table presents the regression discontinuity results for PRD Candidate Entry. It shows the estimated effect of electing a PRD candidate on the probability of a PRD candidate running in the next election. The results indicate a non-significant coefficient of -0.035 with a p-value of 0.77.

Table 4: PRD Nearest Neighbor Results for PAN Change in Vote Share

Dep. Variable:	Outcome Mun PAN Δ VS	
Model:	(1)	(2)
Coefficient	0.014	0.01
	[0.762]	[0.818]
Controls?	No	Yes
Bandwidth	0.073	0.072
N	1605	1605
Municipalities	150	145

Robust p-values reported in brackets

Controls: year, state, distance between nearest neighbors, treated neighbors

This table presents the nearest neighbor PRD RD results for PAN municipalities. It shows estimated effects of a neighboring municipality electing a PRD candidate on the change in PAN vote share in the subsequent election. Both models show no significant effect.

Table 5: PRD Within Municipality RD Results

Dep. Variable:	PRD Party Vote Share, $t + 1$
Model:	(1)
Coefficient	-0.028
	(0.259)
BW Type	CER
Bandwidth	0.082
N	1748
Effective N	221

Robust p-values reported in parentheses

Controls: year, state

This table presents the within-municipality effect of electing a PRD candidate on the PRD vote share in the subsequent municipal election. The results show no significant effect.

Table 6: PRD Win Probability RD Results

Dep. Variable:	PRD wins in nearest neighbor
Coefficient	0.034
	(0.813)
BW Type	CER
Bandwidth	0.084
N	1570
Effective N	163

Robust p-values reported in parentheses

Controls: year, state, distance, treated neighbors

This table presents the effect of electing a PRD candidate on the PRD candidate's probability of winning in the nearest untreated neighbor's subsequent municipal election. The dependent variable is binary, where the outcome is coded as 1 if the neighboring municipality's PRD candidate wins the subsequent municipal election. The results show a small increase in win probability (3%) that is statistically insignificant.