

Competition in Local Mexican Politics: A Comprehensive Dataset of Municipal Elections

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December 1, 2025

Preliminary draft, please inquire for a newer version

Abstract

This note introduces a publicly-available dataset of vote returns for Mexican municipal government elections between 1979 and 2025. It covers nearly 37 thousand races and distributes municipality-level aggregates of the votes won by each party or coalition, of void ballots, and of total votes cast; the number of eligible voters registered; the number of candidates competing and the winner's name; the election's date; and ancillary census bureau and election board municipality id codes for merging socio-demographic data as well as results of elections at other levels. Sources are presented, standardization of the time-series cross-section explained, and descriptive statistics performed. Patterns in the data conform to prior knowledge of Mexican elections and demonstrate several interesting applications of the data.

The advent of competition in Mexican politics coincided with a wealth of public data in most areas of government. Naturally, a parallel boom occurred in the study of politics, policy, and process, in areas as diverse as the distributed data: poverty relief, decentralized spending, public health, education, infrastructure, special interest groups, organized crime, and much more.¹ While these examinations are mostly at small units of analysis, such as firms, schools, census tracts, or even individuals, the processes of interest invariably intersect with municipal governments, and multivariate models typically include controls at this level. Municipal election vote returns are therefore one key input for analysis.

*I am grateful for financial support for research from the Asociación Mexicana de Cultura A.C.

¹(See Avitable and De Hoyos 2018; Behrman et al. 2025; Cantú 2019b; De la O 2013; Dell 2015; Díaz Cayeros, Estévez and Magaloni 2016; Dube, García Ponce and Thom 2016; Frenk 2006; Garfias, López Videla and Sandholtz

This research note introduces a dataset of vote returns for Mexican municipal government elections in recent decades. Vote returns are information in the public domain that can be found in the web with relative ease. But primary sources are spread across state-by-state web sites, lack standardized reports, have many missing or incomplete years, and some have been (or are on the brink of being) scrapped due to insufficient funding. Hence the importance of maintaining a secondary source. The present dataset is distributed in a publicly-available repository consolidating municipal government election results nationwide in a single comprehensive source. Data covers all municipalities that elected government officers between 1979 and 2025.

The note proceeds thus. Section 1 describes municipal government and electoral institutions. Section 2 briefly presents the main contenders in municipal party systems. Section 3 elaborates data coverage and its organization in the distributed files. Section 4 discusses the rising frequency of pre-election coalitions in the units of observation. Section 5 performs descriptive analysis of key variables in the data, contrasting patterns to previous scholarship. Section 6 concludes.

1 Municipal governments

As of May 2025, Mexico's thirty-one states were subdivided into 2,460 municipalities, plus 17 municipality-equivalents in Mexico City, the nation's capital. *Municipios* elect the bottom tier of governments in the federal system.

1.1 Policy making and fiscal authority

State capacity in Mexico is remarkably limited, something especially true in municipalities. Municipal governments have constitutional authority over community police, zoning and construction permits, drinking water supply, sewerage and waste disposal, street lighting, pavement, and park management, and regulate public markets, slaughterhouses, and cemeteries.

Municipal governments raise property taxes only and collect fees for public services. Adding insult to the injury of a meager constitutional fiscal endowment, few municipalities in the past invested in the administrative structure for revenue collection (Garfias 2018). Most, especially in rural Mexico, obtain the lion's share of their financial resources from federal revenue sharing and earmarked federal investments (Díaz Cayeros 2006; Figueroa Mansur 2024).

Even if their scope is narrow, elected municipal officers appoint staff and subcontract services and personnel in order to undertake their responsibilities, and these are key sources of patronage in any spoils system. Local political organizations, and the resources they mobilize in pursuit of municipal office, are key to the maintenance of state and national parties (Coppedge 1993; Key

2021; Hernández Trillo and Jarillo Rabling 2008; King et al. 2007; Palmer-Rubin 2019; Timmons and Broid 2013).

1964; Rosas and Lucardi 2020).

Still, bureaucratic capacity varies widely. The median municipal government employed or hired 13 bureaucrats per 1,000 registered voters in 2023, just shy above the lower quartile's 9 or fewer. The top decile, with 32 or more bureaucrats per 1,000, was two-and-a-half times above the median.²

1.2 Government structure

Municipal power is vested to a popularly-elected body, the *Ayuntamiento* (literally ‘yoked together’). The council or *cabildo* and a mayor (called *presidente* in some states, *primer regidor* in others) make up the Ayuntamiento, deciding by majority rule. The mayor is executive officer, presides municipal council sessions with voice and the tie-breaking vote, and holds variable municipal appointment powers (Ramírez Millán 2000; Robles Martínez 2009). Cabildo size is proportional to population. Precedence-ordered councilors (called *regidores* or *concejales*) propose and vote municipal policy through ordinances and rules. One or more *síndicos*, officers in charge of the treasury and the municipio’s legal representation, complete the council in some states. Síndicos may be elected or appointed. Appointed síndicos have voice but no vote in the council. Municipalities have no judicial power. States do.

While it is included in the data, I drop Mexico City from the descriptions below due to its special status. Before 1997, the mayor of the Federal District was a presidential appointee, who would in turn appoint delegates for the city’s 16 administrative jurisdictions (called *delegaciones*). Reformers made all these elected offices in 1997. The Federal District did not, however, gain status as a state, nor did delegación executives gain fiscal powers—taxation remains in the hands of the city executive. The city further reformed in 2018, adding councils to its quasi-municipalities (now called *alcaldías*) and renaming the Federal District as Mexico City (Rabell García 2017).

1.3 Electoral institutions

Presidents are elected by plurality. Regidores are elected in two groups: one group by plurality, the other by proportional representation (PR). The plurality-to-PR regidores ratio shifts considerably across states. As of 2010, the ratio in the mean Ayuntamiento was 2 : 1. The state of Guanajuato’s, with the lowest plurality share in the mix, had a 1 : 4 ratio, while Tabasco’s, with the highest, had the inverse 4 : 1 ratio (Gil Ramírez 2010:14). The ratio matter because many PR regidores could leave the president in the council minority. With parity, however, the president has majority status.

This is always so because municipal officers are elected in fused tickets. Voters have a sin-

²Descriptive statistics computed with data from the 2023 Municipal Government Census (INEGI 2023), excluding Mexico City and unelected municipalities.

gle vote, which they cast for a list of candidates including a municipal president at the top of the ticket, ranked regidores, and síndicos where applicable. The vote is fused as it simultaneously affects the vote totals of candidates running for different offices (see Cox 1997:42): the presidency, all plurality regidores, and síndicos (where elected) are allocated to the most-voted list. Remaining regidores are distributed proportionally to the closed lists. Split ticket voting is therefore not technically possible.

1.4 Exceptional electoral institutions

Two notable exceptions are the states of Chihuahua since 1998 and Nayarit since 2008. Voters there have two votes, therefore opening up the possibility of split ticket voting. In Chihuahua, one vote elects the síndico by plurality, another elects the remaining municipal officers as described above (ratio 8 : 5).

In Nayarit, one vote elects a president–síndicos fused ticket by plurality in municipio-wide elections. The second vote elects plurality regidores in single-member districts called *demarcaciones*, into which municipios are subdivided for the purpose. Second votes are then pooled in a secondary district (the municipio as a whole) to distribute PR regidores to the closed lists. While the ratio in Nayarit is 7 : 3, winning presidents could end up in the council minority unless their party secures enough district victories.

1.5 Term limits

Elected municipal officers have three-year terms.³ Up to those with terms ending in 2017, all were single-term limited. To everyone’s surprise, reformers removed Mexico’s eighty-year old constitutional ban on consecutive reelection midway in the last decade. Counter-reformers restated the ban a decade later—so everyone elected in 2030 and after will, again, be single-term limited. In the interim, states could opt for two-term limits for municipal governments. All states except Hidalgo and Veracruz did so, the reform kicking off in the 2018 elections in twenty-three states. Incumbents in the other seven reforming states were gradually able to run again for office since.

With a frankly conservative scope and very much illustrative of the notion of state irresoluteness (Cox and McCubbins 2001), ephemeral reelection should nonetheless leave a systematic mark in municipal politics. Six consecutive years in office falls short of qualifying as the long haul, but doubling up Ayuntamientos’ time horizons ought to encourage more enterprising policy. Much

³Coahuila’s Ayuntamientos elected between 2005 and 2013 (inclusive), Hidalgo’s since 2016, and Veracruz’s between 2013 and 2021 enjoyed four-year terms. Exceptional distortions to three-year terms also occurred whenever state electoral calendars changed, something quite common in the period. See Magar (2017) and <https://github.com/emagar/calendarioReeleccion>.

more fundamentally, the perspective of reelecting for another term should strongly incentivize ambitious mayors and regidores in the period to invest substantially in maintaining their electoral alliances alive and mobilized (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina 1987; Motolinia 2021). Which, in turn, should systematically nurture a degree of responsiveness in municipal distributive politics (Cox and McCubbins 1986; Jacobson and Kernell 1983). The reform, and its dismissal too, therefore offer a unique laboratory to study institutional change at the core of much political theory since *The Federalist Papers* (Madison, Hamilton and Jay 1961; Mayhew 1974; Miller and Hammond 1989; Schlesinger 1966).

1.6 Usos y costumbres

A final note before moving on involves another set of observations that is absent from the data. Of 570 municipalities in the state of Oaxaca, only 152 elect Ayuntamientos by popular vote. The rest, with predominantly indigenous populations, opted out of the electoral process since 1995, appointing authorities through tribal councils instead (known as *usos y costumbres* institutions, see Eisenstadt and Ríos 2014; Elizarrarás 2002). Seven municipalities in three other states achieved the same status in the past decade. For obvious reasons, these 425 municipalities are excluded from the dataset.⁴

2 The parties

The dataset is party-centric, in the sense that it systematically reports the votes that each party won in the race (but see section 5 on pre-election coalitions). A separate dataset reporting incumbent mayors—ie., the names of winning presidential candidates—is also distributed, but this resembles a swiss cheese due to numerous missing observations.

Mexican parties operate in an over-regulated electoral environment. Law, setting up formidable entry barriers, also gives the federal and the state election boards broad scope of power over party life, candidate selection, and campaigns (Estévez 2007). Some regulation is decades-old: one example is party registration, a draconian institution adopted by the PRI at the peak of hegemony to deter defectors, whereby any party with fewer than the 3-percent vote threshold not only earns no proportional representation seats (as in Germany), but it also ceases to exist legally. Most regulation, however, dates from the 1990s, when a system of mostly private (if undisclosed) party and campaign finance was replaced overnight with near-exclusive public (and lavish) subsidies (Poiré 2005). The allotment, which is proportional to the party’s vote share in the last election,

⁴A note ‘To uyc in year’ indicates the period immediately before a municipality exits the electoral process and the time series in the dataset following this route.

is handed yearly to party leaders with discretion on spending. With formidable carrots and sticks, discipline to the party leadership comes as no surprise. A glance at the key parties in the period comes next.

2.1 Major parties

In broad chronological sequence, single-party hegemony gave way to a three-way, competitive, and volatile party system at the end of the 20th century. This gave rise to two decades of divided government, at the end of which a new dominant party arose, leaving the former trio of major parties in shambles in the electoral arena.

Partido Revolucionario Institucional: The hegemonic party for the most part of eight decades, and at times dangerously nearing single-party rule (Molinar 1991), the **PRI** was successfully challenged into competitive politics by the PAN–PRD tandem in the mid-1990s. Traditionally pragmatic and nationalistic, the technocratic neo-liberal faction captured the party in the 1980s (Dresser 1991). The sitting president was the unchallenged national leader, governors were state leaders. Long unmatched, the effectiveness of the PRI’s vote-getting machine eroded slowly when rapid social change was compounded with deeply unpopular austerity policy of the 1980s.

Partido Acción Nacional: The main and, at times, only credible opposition to the PRI’s hegemony, the **PAN**’s core support is in urban middle classes and socially conservative groups, especially in central Mexico. PAN offered its pivotal votes in Congress towards economic reform in the 1990s in exchange for solid guarantees of free and fair elections (Cornelius 1996) and for bigger transfers to states in revenue sharing (Díaz Cayeros 2006; Shirk 2005). PAN won the presidency in 2000 and again, by paper-thin margin, in 2006. Despite never achieving majority status in Congress, PAN left a characteristic imprint by setting up autonomous regulatory agencies in key policy areas (telecomms, energy, education, antitrust, freedom of information, and more; see Magar, Estévez and Rosas 2010). It also led the war on drugs.

Partido de la Revolución Democrática: The fusion of the communist party and a substantial split from the PRI when the technocrats took over, the fractious **PRD** occupied the center-left of the spectrum (Bruhn 1997; Cantú 2019a). It won seven governor races in 1997–2000, most notably Mexico City, often by endorsing defectors in the state’s PRI. AMLO, the twice-defeated PRD’s presidential nominee, eventually broke off from the PRD to form a successful party under his unconditional leadership. PRD ran joint tickets with the PAN

frequently since 2010, at the state level first, later at the federal level too—another factor pushing AMLO away. PRD lost legal registry in 2024.

Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional: AMLO’s bet paid off. His successful third presidential bid in 2018 rallied the rest of the left, and key state machines from the PAN and the PRI too, towards his new party. **Morena** won the presidency, with majority control of Congress, in the critical 2018 elections, and most state governments in subsequent years. A crusade against autonomous regulatory agencies, which former major parties had stacked in their favor and which stubbornly checked the new majority, gained traction in the 2024 campaign. Super-majority status that year allowed Morena and its opportunistic allies to rid the constitution of most separation of power arrangements from the former three-party system, including a full overhaul of the judiciary. The new dominant party has re-unified purpose in Mexican politics in ways unseen since the classic PRIato.

2.2 Opportunistic parties

Institutions set forth incentives to launch new parties in pursuit of very generous public party subsidies. Formidable entry barriers, however, made this enterprise possible only for pre-organized groups (Magar 2015). Three have largely succeeded in a field where many failed. The collapse of the competitive-era party system has opened room for growth in pursuit of larger aims. They are making important inroads into state governments.

Movimiento Ciudadano: The personal machine of a former Veracruz governor, **MC** (formerly Convergencia por la Democracia) has since expanded considerably. As a vehicle of contrast against the moribund former major parties after 2018, MC turned every call to join all-way electoral coalitions. While the resulting opposition discoordination handed Morena many key victories in municipalities, districts, and even states, MC captured populous state governments in Jalisco twice since 2018, and Nuevo León in 2021. Whether its bid as sole credible opposition to Morena’s dominance pays off or not will become clear in coming years.

Green Party: A family-owned venture, **PVEM** stands out among the opportunistic bunch. Its votes may well have given the PAN alliance its presidential election margin in 2000.⁵ The Greens then became the PRI’s reliable electoral partner in the 2003–18 period in races across the board (Spoon and Pulido Gómez 2017). It has since migrated to Morena’s orbit. PVEM won state governments in Chiapas in 2012—the first non-major party governor—then in San

⁵Ballot structure impedes a breakdown of the alliance vote by party. Using the PAN–PVEM relative sizes in the Congressional elections from three years earlier yields a Green party total just shy of the 2000 presidential vote margin.

Luis Potosí in 2021, gaining control of resources to organize further. Green party seats in Congress were necessary for Morena’s coalition’s majority status in 2021–24, and super-majority status in 2024–27.

Workers Party: Morena’s other partner in Congress. Originally an offshoot of urban radical movements from the 1970s in northern Mexico, the PT entered electoral coalitions with the PRD almost systematically in the competitive era. Its leadership unequivocally sided with AMLO, before and after the latter’s split. It has yet to win a state government.

3 Vote manipulation

Elections in the PRI-era were never free and fair. They were not fabrications either, but a heterogeneous mix of genuine mobilization, daunting obstacles to opponents, and blatant fraud (Cantú 2019a; Magaloni 2006; Molinar 1991). Democratization changed this. Major parties set up an autonomous election board with formidable authority where they could check one another, levelling the field (Estévez, Magar and Rosas 2008). AMLO’s failure to concede in the 2006 presidential race was never supported by compelling evidence of wrong-doing (Klesner 2007).

Fraud was never fully eliminated, as probably occurs in any democracy. Cantú’s (2014) systematic study of “contiguous” polling stations in the 2010 local races, where most distrust remains, detected few and exceptional irregularities. Since major-parties had equal opportunity at it when the circumstances arose, fraud cancelled-out in the aggregate. This dataset includes elections since 1979, offering leverage to compare and evaluate pre- and post-1997 municipal elections.

4 The data

The municipal elections dataset has been under construction for some time.⁶ The original seed for the 1970s and 1980s was compiled by Molinar (1991) from official vote returns by the Interior Ministry’s Registro Nacional de Electores. The primary source was systematized by Magar (1994) for northern Mexico and then by Varela (2004) nationwide. Data from the 1990s onwards has been compiled from the state election boards established then, who more or less routinely report vote returns since. When that was not the case, other sources were consulted, most notably Voz y voto (1993) and CEDE-UAM-I (1991).

Units of observation are municipalities in a time point. For each unit, the dataset reports the aggregate votes that each party or electoral coalition won in one periodic election, among other

⁶The repository also includes returns to other federal and subnational races at different levels of aggregation. This note centers on municipal-level vote returns for Ayuntamiento races only.

information of electoral history. Table 1 summarizes data coverage by state. The cross-section time-series matrix is not square. The table column reporting the number of municipalities of each state gives one reason for this: new municipalities were created in most states the period. Seceding from other units, new municipalities have no prior electoral history. Also, election calendars are different across states, so some had more periodic races than others.⁷

State abbreviations are listed in the second column from the left, and are somewhat different from those used by Mexican government agencies. Sorting my abbreviations in a standard spreadsheet retains the Spanish alphabetization of the states, which official abbreviations do not.⁸ For instance, Guanajuato and Guerrero are abbreviated *gua* and *gue*, respectively, instead of the official *gto* and *gro*.

The time-series starts at the 1979–1981 trienium for all 31 states, and slightly earlier for some. (The Federal District, whose populous quasi-municipalities are included in the dataset, is not a state.) The period was inaugurated by a major federal electoral reform lowering legal entry barriers to the electoral arena and adopting a more proportional formula to convert votes into congressional seats (Molinar 1991:116). As a consequence, half a dozen new parties entered the fray, gradually permeating into the municipal arena.

Data can be found online and downloaded by visiting the public repository at:

<https://github.com/emagar/elecRetrns>.

Files are stored in the `data/` subdirectory as text in `csv` format (comma separated values). The format is readable with standard spreadsheet and data analysis software.⁹ The repository's `README.md` file, which loads up to your web browser's screen whenever you visit the web address above, includes a detailed and downloadable codebook with formal definitions of all data fields. Each row of the resulting data matrix reports a unit in time: one municipality in a given electoral year. And the columns are data fields, variables in the unit/year's record. Among other information, data fields include the following:

- unit identifiers, such as the municipality's name, state, ID codes, and so forth;
- the election date;

⁷File `ancillary/mun.yrs.csv` in the repository reports the full listing of municipalities in each election cycle with available municipal election returns. And file `ancillary/new-mun-parents-1989on.csv` reports the parent municipalities from which the new units seceded.

⁸Table column # (state number), called field *edon* in the data, preserves Spanish alphabetization and is the prefix for official ID codes. Note that Spanish alphabetization places the letter Ch after the letter C, hence the state of Colima precedes Chiapas and Chihuahua.

⁹Text is encoded into UTF-8 character encryption. Care has been taken to drop all but one Spanish special characters from text strings. All accented vowels (á, é, í, ó, ú, and ü) are removed. The letter ñ, however, remains to avoid ambivalence, and may appear as a garbled character in machines with other default encryption systems. See

#	Abbrev.	State	N municipalities	Years included
1	ags	Aguascalientes	9–11	1977–2024
2	bc	Baja California	4–7	1971–2024
3	bcs	Baja California Sur	3–5	1974–2024
4	cam	Campeche	8–13	1979–2024
5	coa	Coahuila	38	1978–2024
6	col	Colima	10	1976–2024
7	cps	Chiapas [†]	110–126	1976–2024
8	cua	Chihuahua	67	1974–2024
9	df	Distrito Federal/Mexico City [‡]	16	1997–2024
10	dgo	Durango	38–39	1971–2025
11	gua	Guanajuato	46	1979–2024
12	gue	Guerrero [†]	75–85	1977–2024
13	hgo	Hidalgo	84	1981–2024
14	jal	Jalisco	124–125	1976–2024
15	mex	México	121–125	1978–2024
16	mic	Michoacán [†]	112–113	1977–2024
17	mor	Morelos [†]	33–36	1976–2024
18	nay	Nayarit	19–20	1972–2024
19	nl	Nuevo León	51	1973–2024
20	oax	Oaxaca [†]	152–570	1977–2024
21	pue	Puebla	217	1980–2024
22	que	Querétaro	18	1973–2024
23	qui	Quintana Roo	7–11	1978–2024
24	san	San Luis Potosí	56–58	1970–2024
25	sin	Sinaloa	17–20	1971–2024
26	son	Sonora	69–72	1976–2024
27	tab	Tabasco	17	1976–2024
28	tam	Tamaulipas	43	1971–2024
29	tsa	Tlaxcala	44–60	1979–2024
30	ver	Veracruz	203–212	1976–2025
31	yuc	Yucatán	106	1981–2024
32	zac	Zacatecas	56–58	1970–2024
Municipalities nationwide by election cycle			2375–2477	1970–2024

Table 1: Coverage of the municipal election returns data. [†] Reform in the period withdrew *usos y costumbres* municipalities from periodic elections (see section 1.6): one municipality in Chiapas since 2021, one in Guerrero since 2018 and another since 2024, one in Michoacán since 2011, three in Morelos since 2021, and between 412 and 418 in Oaxaca since 1995. [‡] Administrative jurisdictions in the Federal District became elected offices since 1997, see section 1.2.

C	D	E	F	G	J	K	L	M	N	O
yr	inegi	ife	mun	edon	v01	l01	v02	l02	v03	l03
1998	2001	2001	ENSENADA	2	30660	pan	31951	pri	12441	prd
1998	2002	2002	MEXICALI	2	89354	pan	81676	pri	13899	prd
1998	2003	2003	TECATE	2	4590	pan	9353	pri	4983	prd
1998	2004	2004	TIJUANA	2	116244	pan	98669	pri	25065	prd
1998	2005	2005	PLAYAS DE ROSARITO	2	6055	pan	5058	pri	1367	prd
2001	2001	2001	ENSENADA	2	32262	pan-pvem	31582	pri	12048	prd
2001	2002	2002	MEXICALI	2	95674	pan-pvem	67434	pri	11615	prd
2001	2003	2003	TECATE	2	7796	pan-pvem	7862	pri	2066	prd
2001	2004	2004	TIJUANA	2	108921	pan-pvem	87433	pri	13928	prd
2001	2005	2005	PLAYAS DE ROSARITO	2	6324	pan-pvem	3141	pri	348	prd
2004	2001	2001	ENSENADA	2	32604	pan	30839	pri-pvem-pt-pebc	13537	prd
2004	2002	2002	MEXICALI	2	63855	pan	63892	pri-pvem-pt-pebc	9021	prd
2004	2003	2003	TECATE	2	9216	pan	10331	pri-pvem-pt-pebc	1112	prd
2004	2004	2004	TIJUANA	2	134428	pan	139230	pri-pvem-pt-pebc	9887	prd
2004	2005	2005	PLAYAS DE ROSARITO	2	7056	pan	4170	pri-pvem-pt-pebc	4539	prd

Figure 1: Screenshot with a sample of the data organization

- each party or coalition’s vote tally;
- the total effective vote (equal the sum of all votes cast that year in the municipality minus votes for write-in candidates and void ballots), needed to compute vote shares; and
- the total eligible registered voters in the municipal election (the *lista nominal*), needed to compute turnout rates.

Figure 1 offers a glimpse of the data for the state of Baja California’s five municipalities in three election cycles: $yr=1998, 2001,$ and 2004 . Two official municipal ID codes are reported: the census bureau’s (field `inegi`) and the electoral board’s (field `ife`). Those who wish to further incorporate census information or vote returns of other races into the analysis will rely on these codes for merging the data. Municipal vote returns are stored in column pairs $(v01, l01)$, $(v02, l02)$, etc. for the first candidate reported, the second candidate, and so forth. The `l` column of the pair identifies the candidate’s party or coalition label, while the `v` column contains the total votes the candidate won. So in 1998 in Ensenada, with 31,995 votes the PRI was the plurality winner ($l02 = \text{pri}$ indicates that this party’s vote is stored in field `v02`), trailed closely by the PAN’s 30,660 votes (in field `v01`). The votes-label column pair storage accommodates four decades of state party system heterogeneity, compounded by ephemeral electoral coalitions in a relatively small number of spreadsheet columns. The trade-off is that inspecting one party’s performance across municipalities often requires additional manipulation, in order to arrange its votes into the same column across units.¹⁰

<https://docs.python.org/3/howto/unicode.html> for a primer on character encoding.

¹⁰A standalone R script (still a beta version) extracts a simplified matrix, reporting each party’s votes in a column that is named after it, for a single state-year’s municipal races. The script is located in `code/extract-state-yr-mu-returns.r`.

5 Pre-election coalitions

One obstacle to analysis are electoral coalitions. Mexican election law distinguishes two forms of pre-election coalitions that parties may choose from: joint candidacies and coalitions proper. Voters in the former case can cast their vote for any joint-candidate-nominating party (or combinations of them), which are then added up to determine the candidate's vote total. In coalitions proper, voters cast their vote for the team as a whole, which is reported with no breakdown among the coalition-member parties.

These legal subtleties have effects in public party finance mostly, but substantially complicate voting studies because scholars need to decide how to handle coalitions. To ease this decision, the repository distributes three separate municipal vote files:

- `data/aymu1970-on.coalAgg.csv` systematically aggregates joint-candidate coalition votes, reporting the candidate's total vote as a single quantity;
- `data/aymu1970-on.coalSplit.csv` breaks down coalesced parties' contribution to the candidate's vote total, relying for this purpose on the relative votes each party received (where the ballot structure offers this information), or on the coalition agreement between the parties (where available and when the ballot structure does not offer the latter option), or on the relative votes that coalesced parties received the last time they ran separately in the municipality (when the previous alternatives are impracticable); and
- `data/aymu1970-on.csv` has raw votes, as reported in the primary source (i.e., a vote aggregate for coalitions proper and coalition-member-party breakdowns for joint candidacies).

The files include records for the exact same set of observations and report the same total effective votes.¹¹ Files change in how coalition votes are reported only. The typical analyst will choose between the `coalAgg` and the `coalSplit` files. Those interested in who won the race with what margin will prefer `coalAgg`. Those wishing to study first differences in party support will opt for `coalSplit`.

Banned until the mid-1980s at the local level, and rarely authorized up to the mid-1990s, coalitions have since become a staple of Mexican elections, as Table 2 shows. Each table row reports the coalitional profiles observed across municipal races in a triennium. With few exceptions owed to state electoral calendar shifts,¹² triennial aggregates capture one periodic election per municipality.

¹¹Or near same total effective votes: whenever the primary source does not offer the coalesced-parties vote breakdown, one artificial vote is added to the raw file, itself split among these parties to keep track of relative contributions.

¹²Subnational electoral calendars varied substantially up to 2015, but have since become increasingly aligned with the federal cycle. See <https://github.com/emagar/calendarioReelecion>. Change is discernible in

Coalition profile relative frequency (%)

Cycle	None	Major-minor			Double-major			Triple-major		Total	(Mean coalitions)
		One	Two	Three	Only	& major-minor	& two maj.-min.	Only	& maj.-min.		
1979–81	100.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	100	(0.00)
1982–84	100.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	100	(0.00)
1985–87	100.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	100	(0.00)
1988–90	93.9	6.1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	100	(0.06)
1991–93	98.6	1.3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	100	(0.01)
1994–96	99.8	0.2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	100	(0.04)
1997–99	96.4	2.1	—	—	1.5	—	—	—	—	100	(0.04)
2000–02	77.0	16.7	1.8	—	4.0	0.4	—	—	—	100	(0.29)
2003–05	52.8	29.8	11.8	0.4	1.8	3.3	—	—	—	100	(0.65)
2006–08	20.4	48.1	30.2	0.6	0.1	0.7	—	—	—	100	(1.19)
2009–11	11.2	32.3	14.6	10.4	7.7	23.8	—	—	—	100	(1.54)
2012–14	8.6	50.7	11.6	3.6	3.5	22.0	—	—	—	100	(1.39)
2015–17	24.6	35.6	11.0	0.8	6.1	21.7	—	0.2	—	100	(1.16)
2018–20	6.3	17.3	14.7	7.1	6.5	35.1	12.9	—	—	100	(1.86)
2021–23	26.8	18.5	0.2	—	13.0	9.5	0.3	18.2	13.6	100	(1.05)
2024–26	17.4	19.6	1.6	—	6.1	12.8	0.7	17.1	24.8	100	(1.30)

Table 2: Coalitional profile of municipal races by federal election cycle. Cells report the percentage of municipalities in the cycle, and the cycle’s mean number of coalitions per race in parentheses. Quantities consider coalitions where one partner at least was a major party (PAN, PRI, PRD, or Morena), ignoring coalitions among minor parties only, which were also quite frequent.

The coalitional profile is ‘None’ in the absence of any coalition in the race; it is a ‘major-minor’ arrangement when one, two, or three major parties (i.e. PAN, PRI, PRD, or Morena) nominated a municipal ticket jointly with one or more minor parties; it is ‘Double major’ when two majors ran jointly; and so forth. Three distinct moments can be distinguished. (1) Between the 2000–02 and 2006–08 triennia, inclusive, at least one major party, and increasingly two major parties, would team up with minor parties to gain an edge in the municipal race. By the end of this first moment, four out of five municipal elections had one or more major-minor arrangements. (2) Between 2009–11 and 2012–14, adding frequent ‘double-major’ races, when PAN and PRD forged anti-PRI tickets in over one-fifth of municipalities. Races without any coalition races became ever rarer. (3) Morena’s foray into the party system, especially after 2018, forced frequent full regroupments of erstwhile rivals PAN, PRI, and PRD (‘triple-major’ coalitions) against the new Behemoth. Regroupments shrank the number of coalitions per municipality by widening their scope (the right-most column reports triennial average coalitions per municipality, parenthesized).

Computing the Laakso and Taagepera (1979) index for parties (using `coalSplit` data) and for candidates (with `coalAgg` data) captures the magnitude of coalition incidence neatly. A gap

how municipal vote shares align vertically in the right of Figure 3, increasingly clustered over darker and distinctor columns that correspond with federal elections.

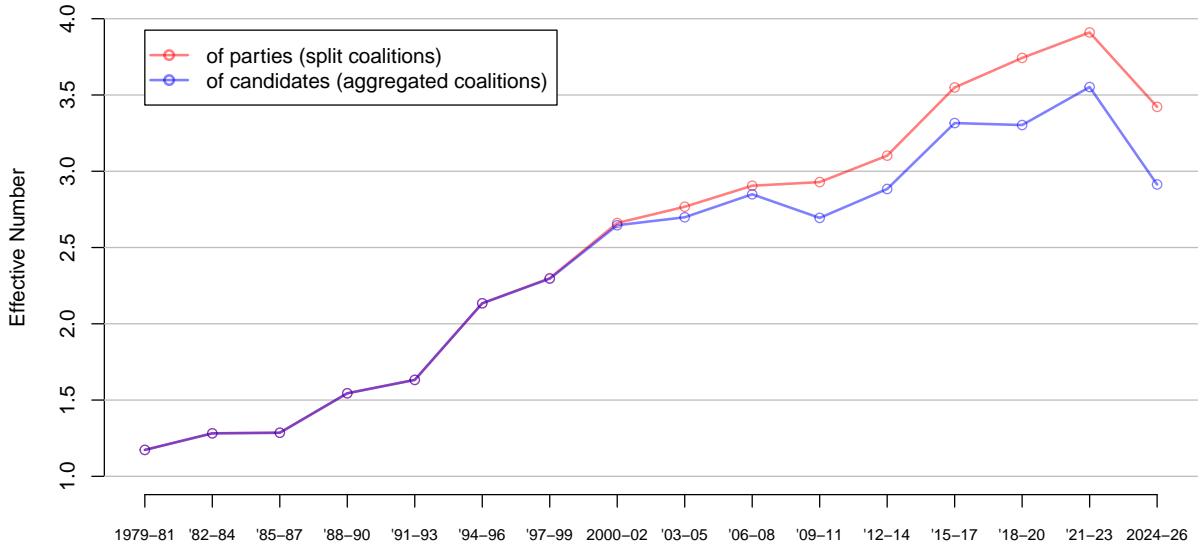


Figure 2: Municipal party system fragmentation by federal election cycle. Circles report the mean effective number of parties across municipal elections in the cycle.

between the measures, portrayed longitudinally in Figure 2, opened after major-party coalitions normalized in 2009. It has been widening since. The distributed file trio lends flexibility to handle coalitions in municipal elections as needed for analysis.

The repository includes federal election vote returns too, for which the discussion in this section is relevant too. But this note centers in municipal elections only.

6 Descriptive statistics

This section summarizes party vote shares across municipalities nationwide. It demonstrates that municipal party support in the distributed files conforms to received wisdom of Mexico’s atypical democratic transition (eg. Cornelius 1996) and subsequent political national-level development (eg. Cornelius and Weldon 2018). Patterns also emerge that are distinctive of municipal politics. Description sheds light over potential applications of the data.

Figure 3 offers a group portrait, plotting every municipal elections since 1979 for which there is data (using the split coalition file). Each minuscule, color-coded circle quantifies a party’s vote percent in one municipal election—137,813 in total, for 30,633 non-missing municipal races. The hegemonic party system of the 1960s and 1970s remained much in place at the start of the series, the PRI’s red circles modally anchored at 100 percent of the vote, ruling uncontested (Segovia 1980). Back then the right-of-center PAN (in blue), as well as the new entrants in the political

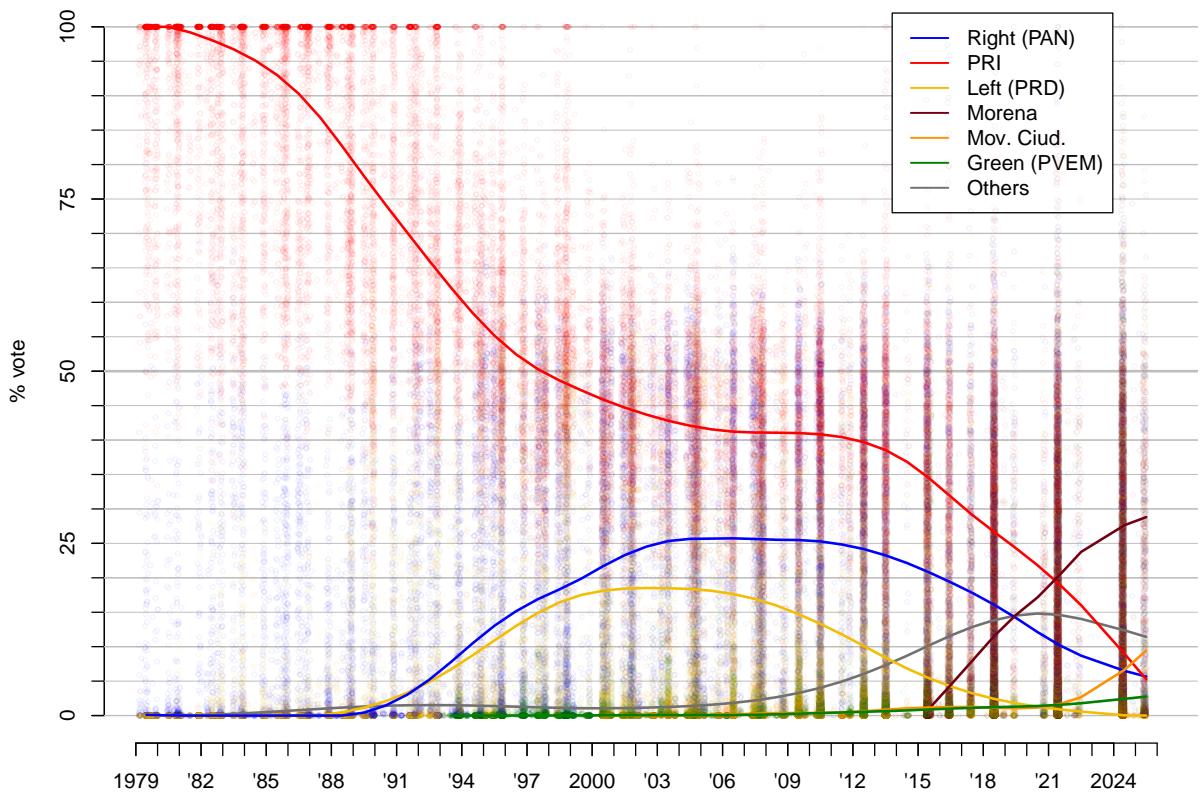


Figure 3: The electoral evolution of parties in municipal races 1979–2025. Color-coded circles report one party’s vote percentage in a municipal election (slightly x-jittered for visibility). Curves are the vote percentage that each party won in the median municipality across time (the trend is smoothed for clarity).

left (in gold), achieved more than a symbolic vote percentage in a few dozen, urban municipalities only.

Opposition parties began picking up steam after the 1982 economic crash, gradually mobilizing social discontent in the electoral arena (Gómez Tagle 1990; Hiskey and Canache 2005; Klesner 1993; Molinar 1991; Segovia 1983). Plot lines, which smooth the parties' vote in the median municipality over time, neatly capture the steady erosion of the PRI's electoral support and the rise of a dual opposition. PAN and left, however, manifest a slower pace in municipal elections than national events in the second half of the 1980s would suggest. This apparent anomaly owes units with massive population disparities. Ecological analyses of voting showed that the most solid predictor of opposition voting in a unit was the share of people living in cities (Ames 1970; Lehr and Pedroza 1985; Magar 1994; Pacheco Méndez 1997; Walton and Sween 1973), few in number but important in size. In a rapidly urbanizing society, this correlation became a harbinger of the challenge ahead for the PRI. It also anticipated a major obstacle for newcomers, as the PRI remained a formidable competitor in enclaves of smaller, rural, low-turnout municipalities. Up to the near end of the series, only the PRI would be capable of getting out votes in numerous units that other parties could only dream to approach. The median municipality was firmly planted in such enclaves until the mid-1990s.

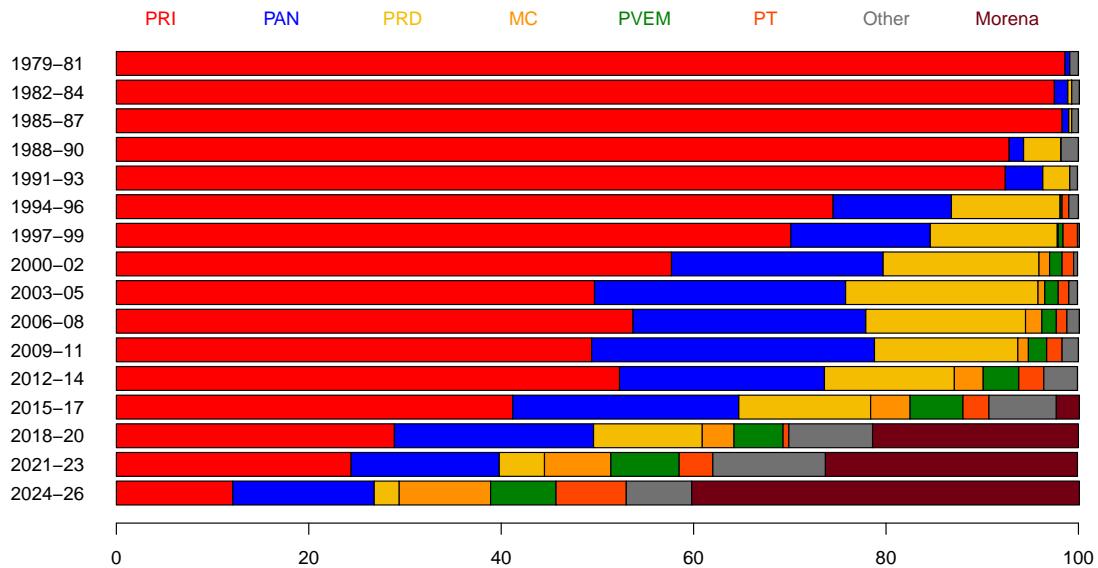
Figure 4 approaches the lag from a slight different angle, winners in municipal races.¹³ Each horizontal bar in Panel A reports the relative number of municipalities that each party won throughout a triennial cycle. For visual simplicity, coalition winners in each election go to the major party, and when two or three majors partnered, the winner goes arbitrarily to the largest of them in the state-cycle. The PRI won nearly every municipal race in the first three triennia in the series. Its slow collapse was barely notable as late as 1993, with subsequent drops punctuated by periods of apparent stability: nine wins out of ten in 1988–1993, then three out of four in 1994–1999, then about half in 2000–2014. Then came the final collapse, when Morena took over. Panel B weights municipalities by their share of all registered voters, thus portraying the population that different parties governed in each election cycle. Up to 2008, the PAN's bars are remarkably bigger in this panel than above, indicative of its distinctive urban bias.

The simultaneous rise of a dual opposition in Figure 3 created a coordination problem for the anti-PRI vote, a factor that played out in extending the PRI's reign despite the loss of its hegemonic status (Garrido de Sierra 2014; Magaloni 2006).¹⁴ Figure 5 reports the share of the three-party vote for the major parties (i.e., subtracting votes won by candidates other than the PAN, PRI, and PRD). Municipalities the PRI won uncontested are bunched at top vertex, and displacements away from

¹³A separate file in the repository, `data/aymu1989-on.incumbents.csv` reports the names of the winning candidates to municipal president in races since 1989.

¹⁴The PAN and left's parallel paths are suggestive of what Cox (1997) terms a 'non-Duvergerian' equilibrium: a tie between challengers that often left the PRI invulnerable in office.

A – Percent municipalities won



B – Size-weighted percent municipalities won

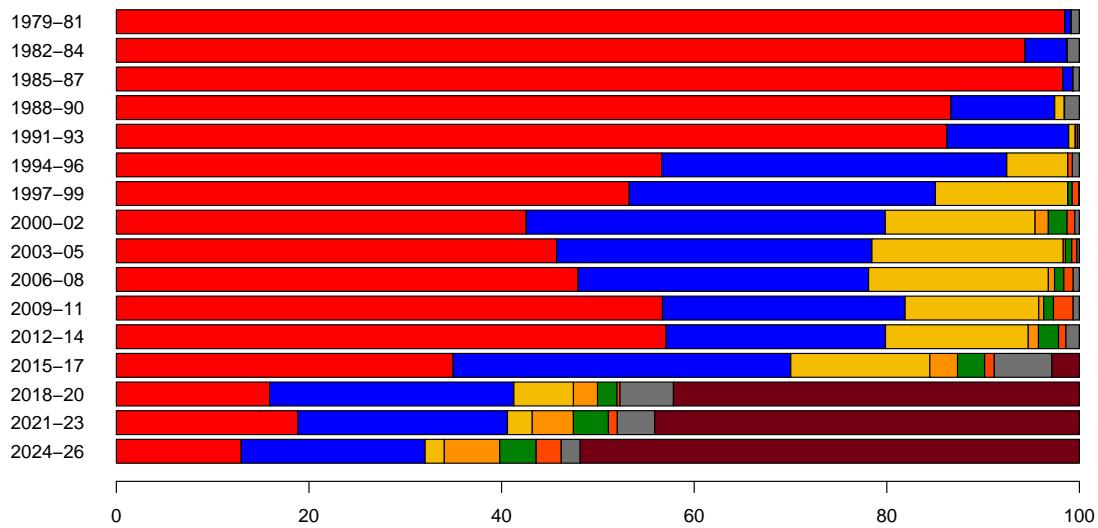


Figure 4: Winners by federal election cycle. Relative frequencies in panel B are weighted by the municipality's population. See text on how coalition coalition victories were dealt with.

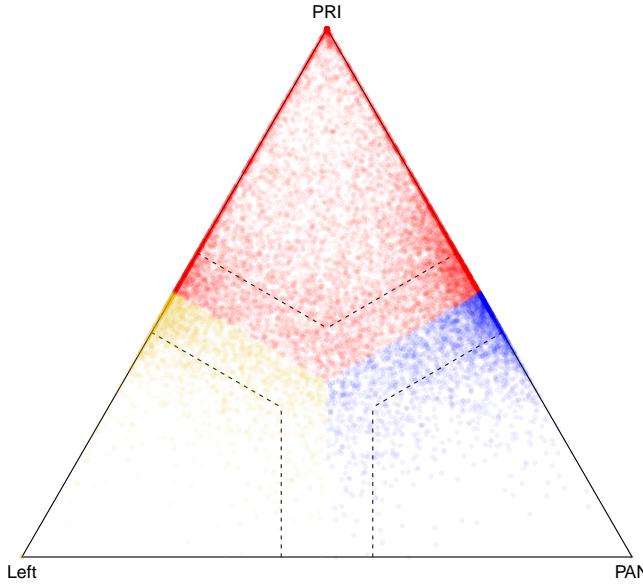


Figure 5: Bipartisan rivalries predominate 1989–2014. The ternary plot reports the share of the three-party vote that major parties won in municipal elections (excluding the Federal District). Points between dotted lines are marginal municipalities, where the margin between two parties was 10 percent or less.

that vertex measure gradual decrements of the PRI vote in favor of the PAN and/or the PRD. The ternary plot echoes a pattern also seen in federal races (Márquez 2014): between 1989 (the year PRD was founded) and 2014 (the year before Morena’s entry), decrements are concentrated on, or very close to either triangle side. Sure, some municipalities populate the inside, but they are relatively rare. The pattern is indicative of local two-party competition. In other words, the oppositions were regionally concentrated, the PRI facing a serious challenge of one or the other, but rarely both. So, in municipal races, the PRI’s persistence was not pure opposition discoordination, but genuine strength.

The final stage portrayed corresponds to the collapse of the party system that brought electoral democracy to Mexico (Estévez, Magar and Rosas 2008; Moreno 2009), and the rise of AMLO’s Morena. Andrés Manuel López Obrador, best-known by his initials, broke free from the left’s proverbial factionalism (Bruhn 1997) by launching a new, personalized party. The gamble paid off. Left elite discoordination gave other parties unexpected victories across the board in Morena’s inaugural 2015 elections. But AMLO’s third bid for the presidency three years later achieved a rallying cry, becoming focal point attracting not just left voters, but independents, leaners from the

PRI and even from the PAN. Morena’s landslide victory in 2018, which gave it unified control of the federal and most state governments, led the former major parties to run desperate three-way coalitions in subsequent races. To little avail: while the rise of Morena appears with a lag in Figure 3 (the party mobilized the larger municipalities first, and extended its dominant mantle towards the rest afterwards), its formidable challenge managed to realign smaller municipality elites away from the PRI—the PRI’s population-weighted bar in Figure 4 finally outsized its sheer frequency in the 2024 cycle.

7 Conclusion

The distributed dataset covers a half-century of recent Mexican electoral history, reporting vote returns for 35,528 non-missing municipal races across the states.

Also the names of xxxx elected municipal presidents.

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