Partisanship among Non-Partisan Experts: An Examination of Mexico's Federal Electoral Institute

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Abstract

Recent scholarship has investigated the political consequences of alternative electoral management bodies. Mexico's *Instituto Federal Electoral* (IFE) is trumpeted as an exemplary organization and credited with nearly flawless oversight and management of Mexico's transition to democracy. The common view is that IFE's institutional design—which empowers a corps of non-partisan experts to decide on all electoral matters—is the reason behind its success. We suggest, instead, that these experts behave as "party watchdogs", reliably representing the interests of the political parties that sponsored them to IFE's Council General. Evidence in favor of the party-sponsorship hypothesis comes from votes cast by members of the Councils General from 1996 to 2005. To validate our view, we use Bayesian MCMC techniques that are appropriate for the examination of roll-call votes in small committees.

1 Introduction

During elections in 1997 and 2000, the Mexican citizenry ousted the party that held uninterrupted power for seven decades. They did so peacefully, through the ballot box. In the aftermath of these critical elections, a good portion of the credit for the success of the Mexican transition to democracy has gone to the authority in charge of planning and executing electoral policy, the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE). A new Council General—IFE's board

of directors—was appointed in 1996 and oversaw the midterm elections of 1997, when the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) lost control of the lower chamber of Congress, as well as the presidential elections of 2000, when the National Action Party (PAN) defeated the old ruling party.

IFE's Councilors personify non-partisan expertise unencumbered . They are thoroughly vetted and recruited from a set of professionals without party affiliations and admitted to IFE's council after winning the endorsement of a qualified majority in the Chamber of Deputies. Once in office, IFE's operational budget, which includes generous public financing for political parties and their election campaigns, is subject to few political whims. Public opinion bolsters IFE's aura of effectiveness, independence, and impartiality. Nearly two-thirds of respondents in a May 2005 survey by *Reforma* considered IFE trustworthy. At the same time, the organizations that IFE regulates, the political parties, were considerably less supported by citizen evaluations which reflect widespread disenchantment with party politics. Only one in three respondents expressed any degree of trust in political parties.[1] In short, IFE's reputation lends credence to a view of electoral management bodies as institutions that work best when staffed by detached, uncommitted experts, in what is known as the "ombudsman" model of EMBs.[2]

Aside this widely-held interpretation, our conclusions cut against the grain. Our view is that, with few exceptions, it is *precisely* the political parties who run the show at IFE. To substantiate this view, we start by describing IFE's institutional setup (section 2) and uncover an array of resources available to parties to influence decisions in the Council General. Parties are the only actors that can nominate candidates to the council; they are also in a position to impeach them. They have voice but no vote in the council and recourse to appeals before an electoral court in case their voice goes unheard. Moreover, the post-IFE careers of more than a few former Councilors suggest continuing links with party sponsors. These and other features suggest that council members will be more sensitive to the goals of their party sponsors than one would surmise from their lack of party affiliation.

We then approach the question of Councilors' partisanship empirically (section 3). We use MCMC estimation techniques to examine the voting record of all Electoral Councilors between October 30, 1996, and March

[1] National face-to-face survey, May 20-22, 2005. See *Enfoque*, June 5, 2005, p. 6.

[2] See Eisenstadt (2004) for a succinct discussion.

16, 2005, spanning two entirely different councils. These techniques permit inferences about the ideal points of council members in one-dimensional ideological space. Our analysis uncovers patterns consistent with a "party sponsorship" interpretation of the Council General's day-to-day business. We conclude by discussing some effects for democratization entailed by the organizational design of Mexico's electoral management body.

2 IFE's Institutional Design: The Party Sponsorship Hypothesis

IFE was established in 1990 as a semi-autonomous bureaucratic agency in charge of overseeing federal elections. Although its original charter called for a preponderant presence of the Executive branch on its board, successive reforms led to the creation of a vigorous agency independent from Mexico's once omnipotent Presidents. Concurrent with its increasing autonomy, IFE took over the years an expanding role in organizing all electoral aspects of Mexico's protracted transition to democracy. Today, IFE's Council General decides on all organizational matters relating to elections, including voter registration, operation of electoral booths, vote counts, monitoring of party and campaign expenditures, and overall regulation of political campaigns and partisan organizations.

IFE took its present form in October, 1996, after the last major election reform.[3] The size of the Council General was set at nine members, all of whom were to be non-partisan "Electoral Councilors" selected and ratified by consensus among congressional parties. The Minister of the Interior—who used to play a preponderant role as Council President in previous IFE incarnations—was removed from the council altogether, replaced by a non-partisan Council President chosen through the same consensual procedures.

[3]To our knowledge, Malo Guzmán and Pastor Nieto (1996) remains the most authoritative analysis of the voting behavior of IFE Councilors before 1996. They code information contained in the minutes of all council sessions from June, 1994, to November, 1995, and analyze the roll call votes of council members in search of the determinants of their individual vote choices. Their major finding is that the six non-partisan Citizen Councilors tended to vote as a bloc, largely isolating the Legislative Councilors who directly represented the major congressional parties. Rosas (2004) inspects the complete voting record of this Council General and finds support for Malo and Pastor's finding. In large measure, IFE's reputation for decision-making that is above partisanship can be traced to this Citizen Councilor era.

In effect, the Executive relinquished day-to-day control over electoral matters and IFE became an autonomous regulatory agency freed from direct interference from the government (Brinegar, Morgenstern and Nielson 1999).

However, the influence of congressional parties over the Council's composition leaves ample room for speculation about potential party-sponsor effects on the voting behavior of Councilors. In order to orient our investigation of voting behavior after the 1996 reform, we turn to a detailed discussion of IFE's institutional design, underscoring those rules that provide incentives for pro-sponsor behavior, in contrast to those that induce cross-partisan consensus.

2.1 Incentives for partisan voting behavior

IFE's appointment rules lend themselves well to analysis within a standard principal-agent framework. Within this framework, parties in the enacting coalition delegate to their appointees authority to interpret the law and run all aspects of federal elections and, in turn, the appointed Councilors act as agents of their enacting coalition. From the perspective of those in the enacting coalition, the critical problem is how to reduce agency losses that result from the Council General behaving in ways that do not serve the principals' common interests. A second problem arises from the fact that the enacting coalition is itself a collective principal, whose members have conflicting interests.[4] We emphasize three aspects of this principal-agent situation that are particularly important in generating pro-sponsor behavior: rules of nomination, signaling devices used by sponsors, and party capture.

Rules of nomination. Councilors are appointed by a two-thirds vote in the Chamber of Deputies to serve seven-year terms. Tenure in office is fairly secure, yet Congress can impeach any Councilor—a possibility we discuss at length below. Legislative parties have informally agreed, in bargaining sessions over Councilor selection since 1994, that each party in the enacting coalition is entitled to propose a share of Councilors roughly proportional to its lower chamber seat share, and that nominees can be vetoed by any other party in the coalition (Alcocer 1995). After the election of a single nominee for Council President, a final logroll in the lower chamber on a closed list of

[4]For a general discussion of the logic of delegation, see Kiewiet and McCubbins (1991, 22-38).

Table 1: Legislative party shares and IFE sponsorship

Party	56th Leg. '94-'97	57th Leg. '97-'00	Woldenberg '96-'00	Woldenberg '00-'03	59th Leg. '03-'06	Ugalde '03-'10
PAN	**24%**	**24%**	2	2	**30%**	4
PRD	**13%**	**25%**	3	2	19%	—
PRI	**60%**	**48%**	3	4	**45%**	4
PT	**2%**	**1%**	1	1	1%	—
PVEM	—	2%	—	—	**3%**	1
CD	—	—	—	1%	—	
N	500	500	9	9	500	9

Enacting coalition in bold. Two Councilors resigned and were replaced in late 2000.

eight candidates (plus a ranked list of replacements) culminates the process. In 1996, all parties with congressional representation (PRI, PAN, PRD, and PT) joined the enacting coalition; in 2003, only three of six congressional parties were included.[5] Table 1 displays information about the coalitions formed in 1996 and 2003, along with the number of candidates that each party in the coalition successfully sponsored to the Council General.

While an informal right to veto eliminates highly partisan and otherwise unqualified candidates proposed by others, it is unlikely that any party would nominate individuals clearly opposed to its own interests and views about electoral regulation. Parties reduce the chances for selecting "bad types"—i.e., individuals whose conduct could hurt the principal's interests—by screening potential agents carefully and proposing candidates who, while politically unaffiliated to them, have preferences in line with the principal's. Screening thus helps mitigate future agency costs. As in Cox and McCubbins's (1993) congressional committees, the resulting Council General can be seen as a microcosm of the enacting coalition in the lower chamber, with Electoral Councilors keeping tabs on each other, as legislative parties would if they were directly in charge of regulating electoral affairs.

[5]The *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD) is the main left-of-center alternative in Mexican politics; PT is the *Partido del Trabajo* and CD is *Convergencia Democrática*. In 2003, PRD and PT were excluded from the enacting coalition, while the *Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano* (PVEM) was incorporated.

Signaling devices used by sponsors. Should Councilors shirk and deviate from their sponsors' expectations about appropriate voting behavior, parties retain a wide gamut of mechanisms to make their preferences known to agents—and ultimately call them to order. The range includes positioning in council and committee debates,[6] public and private communications of all sorts, including threats of impeachment against council members, agenda interference through the filing of formal complaints, and recourse to legal appeals before the electoral tribunal. These mechanisms help make sponsor preferences on issues completely transparent to Councilors.[7]

Party capture. Assuming Councilors are ambitious and have reasonably low discount rates for the future, their expectations of post-IFE careers may be molded by offers of continued sponsorship in the future (or, indeed, by rival offers from other sponsors). The danger of "party capture" was present from the beginning, but the original legislation and its reforms in the 1990s ignored the problem. Not until 2001 did a minor reform impose temporal restrictions on retired Councilors that prevent them from assuming government positions or seeking electoral office immediately upon leaving IFE. Table 2—which includes the "Citizen Councilors" from 1994-1996, not analyzed in this paper, but analogous to today's Electoral Councilors—confirms the need for those legal constraints. Ironically, the parties that most demanded electoral impartiality and citizen control have tended to advance the post-IFE careers of their nominees, while the former ruling party has largely abandoned its own. In any event, along with screening and signaling devices, a party can offer future-oriented incentives to its nominees in the hope of eliciting appropriate voting behavior. Alternatively, parties can exploit the individual expectations of Councilors that future rewards may materialize.

Expected partisan behavior. The mechanisms outlined above lead us to expect

[6]The 1996 reform introduced committees for each of IFE's operational areas, staffed through voluntary participation of individual Councilors, and with chairs assigned by general consensus in the Council. All party organizations with legal registry have non-voting representatives in the Council General and all its committees; in addition, all legislative parties occupy seats with voice but no vote on the Council.

[7]Malo Guzmán and Pastor Nieto (1996) find very mixed evidence regarding the effectiveness of two types of party signals (voting cues by Legislative Councilors and authorship of IFE bills) in contested votes in the 1994-1995 period.

Table 2: Post-IFE Careers of Electoral Councilors

Councilor	Sponsor	Post-IFE career
Carpizo Council (1994-1996)		
Creel	PAN	PAN Deputy (1997-2000), PAN candidate for Federal District Gov't (2000), Minister of the Interior (2000-2005).
Woldenberg	PAN	PRI nominee for Council President (1996).
Granados	PRD	PRD gubernatorial candidate in Hidalgo (1998).
Ortiz	PRD	PRD Deputy(1997-2000), PRD cabinet member in Mexico City Gov't (2001-).
Zertuche	PRD	PRD nominee as IFE's Secretary-General (1999-2003).
Pozas	PRI	Returned to academic life.
Woldenberg Council (1996-2003)		
Barragán	PRD	Returned to academic life.
Cárdenas	PRD	Returned to academic life.
Zebadúa	PRD	PRD Secretary of the Interior in Chiapas (2000-2003), PRD Deputy (2003-).
Cantú	PT	PRD nominee (vetoed) for Council President (2003).
Lujambio	PAN	PAN appointee as IFAI Commissioner (2005).
Luken	PAN	Returned to private business.
Molinar	PAN	PAN Under-Secretary of the Interior (2000-2002), PAN Deputy (2003-).
Merino	PRI	Returned to academic life.
Peschard	PRI	Returned to academic life.
Rivera	PRI	Returned to academic life.
Woldenberg	PRI	Returned to academic life.

Councilors to represent the views on electoral regulation of their sponsoring party in the Chamber of Deputies. Councilors should manifest partisan behavior, as a matter of course. But it is also true that the broad lines of much of the Council General's day-to-day business are inscribed in election law which has seen few significant changes since 1996 and which contains norms that reflect the principals' mutual interests in electoral regulation. From this perspective the Council General can be said to operate on *autopilot*, executing previous, and still standing, agreements among the members of its enacting coalition. In consequence, a large volume of decisions should be characterized by consensus among council members. In addition, Councilors retain substantial control over IFE's agenda and conceivably use it to prevent items that confront their principals from entering debates and votes in the Council General.

So open conflict in the Council General should only occur at the margin. It involves three general types of items which escape the gate-keeping control otherwise exercised by the council: issues imposed on the agenda *de jure*regarding internal agency matters, such as administrative appointments and budgetary decisions; issues brought by actors outside the enacting coalition on any electoral matter, which must be processed by IFE under threat of judicial reprimand; and issues whose emergence and divisive potential could not be anticipated by the principals when they delegated authority to the council.

A preliminary inspection of roll call votes at the Council General confirms the presence of strong consensual tendencies. The general lack of conflict among Councilors can be ascertained from Figure 1. Vertical lines indicate changes in Council membership, the first marking the exit of Councilors Molinar and Zebadúa, who assumed government appointments in 2000 and were replaced by Councilors Luken and Rivera, the second marking the beginning of a completely renovated Council General in November, 2003. The top line in Figure 1 represents all roll-call votes observed each semester in the period analyzed. The volume of IFE decisions is substantial—1332 votes are included in our dataset—and peaks, as one would expect, in federal election years. The middle line represents the number of **contested votes**, i.e., those in which at least one Councilor voted differently from the others or abstained, for a total of 627. The incidence of unanimous votes above that middle line represents fully 53% of all roll calls. The lower line in Figure 1 follows a slightly stricter definition of conflict. It represents all contested votes in which at least two councilors voted against the majority, excluding

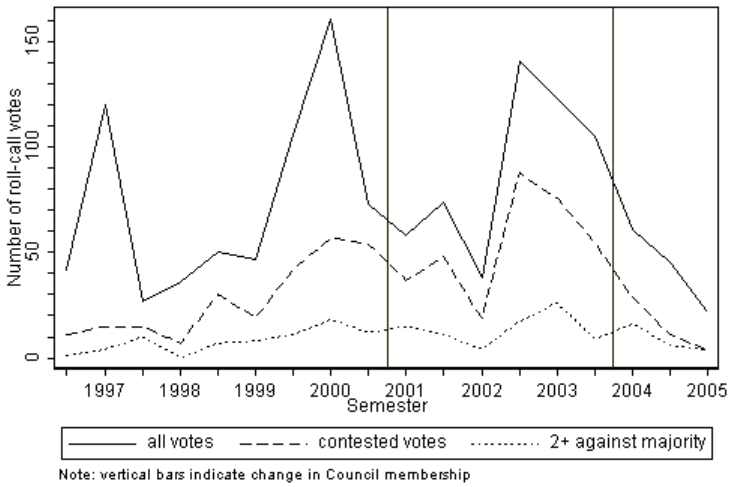

Figure 1: Unanimous, contested, and minimally conflictive Council General votes, 1996-2005

abstentions. On this still modest definition of conflict, less than 15% of all roll calls at IFE would qualify as divided votes in the period under scrutiny.

If enacting coalition members could anticipate all future conflicts in electoral regulation, and if the Council General had perfect control over its agenda, all decisions would possibly be reached by consensus—the autopilot analogy. Our research takes advantage of the real-world limitations in both the capacity to anticipate the future and in the Council's agenda power, which allow latent conflict to transpire and become observable. We expect that this conflict, however low its frequency, will nonetheless expose the ideological divergence and partisan predispositions of Councilors. When conflict arises, votes by any Councilor should in all likelihood dovetail his or her sponsor's interests and preferences.

We therefore entertain the expectation that same-sponsor nominees should exhibit similar voting behavior in the council. Even allowing for slack due to vote-trading and idiosyncratic intensities, we still expect to find that same-sponsor Councilors are closer in behavior to each other—for example, on an ideological scale— than to council members sponsored by other parties. From the perspective of the nominating rules, voting behavior that does not conform to this pattern can be considered agency costs. This hypothesis will

be tested in Section 3 when we examine roll-call behavior in the Council General. Before doing so, we discuss other features in institutional design that play against our chances of detecting partisan behavior at IFE.

2.2 Incentives for cross-partisan behavior

The consensual tendencies discussed so far are the product of ex-ante agreement among congressional parties in the enacting coalition. Inspection of IFE's institutional design reveals additional incentives of an ex-post nature for Councilors to vote together, in cross-partisan coalitions. Here, we refer to two such incentives: the threat of impeachment and the existence of a last-instance electoral tribunal.

Rules of impeachment. Although the stated objective of the 1996 IFE reform was to grant the Council General autonomy from parties and government, the contract retains one important element to constrain behavior: the threat of impeachment. An impeachment trial of any Councilor can be ordered by a simple majority in the lower chamber, although a two-thirds vote in the Senate is required for actual impeachment. In principle, an alliance of any two of the three large parties could have sustained a majority vote against any Councilor in the Chamber of Deputies at any moment since the fall of 1997; before that date, the PRI alone sufficed. Mustering a qualified-majority vote in the upper chamber would be more difficult, but initiating the trial in the lower chamber might well suffice to destroy the career of any council member. Impeachment threats by party representatives and leaders have not been uncommon events.[8]

Under these circumstances, even ideologically-motivated Councilors would shirk to some degree in order to protect their flanks against accusations of flagrant partisanship. In order to secure their tenure, Councilors should strive to act in ways that do not systematically hurt the interests of parties with combined majority support in the lower chamber.[9] This can be achieved by

[8]No Electoral Councilor has yet to undergo an impeachment trial, although the so-called "Councilor Magistrates" elected to eight-year terms in 1990 were summarily dismissed upon the approval of the election reform of 1994, thereby setting an ominous precedent against the security of tenure at IFE.

[9]Indeed, threats of impeachment have all been characterized by charges of overt partisanship by offending Councilors. A recent example illustrates the maneuver. In March, 2005, five members of the council (three PAN nominees and two PRI), after voting down

sometimes failing to toe the party line and accommodating the interests of other parties and their IFE nominees. Table 3 categorizes roll-call votes by the degree of unity manifested by party contingents of Electoral Councilors. For example, in the first half of the Woldenberg Council, the PAN was represented by a bloc of only two Councilors. In 206 contested votes with both present, this pair voted in the same direction, while in 26 votes they parted company. All party contingents have shown some level of division in roll call votes, but there is wide variation across parties (with the PRD blocs by far the least unified) and across Councils (Ugalde's showing a strong surge in disunity for PAN and PRI blocs). Shirking of this sort is surely, in many if not most cases, a matter of sincere preference revelation by individual Councilors. But whatever the motive, deviation from the party line is necessarily alignment, for the issue at stake, with another partisan contingent.

Vetoes by a court of last resort. Most discussions of IFE's institutional incentives tend to overlook the impact of a second actor, namely, the *Tribunal Federal Electoral* (TRIFE). Any Council General decision can be appealed to this electoral court in the last instance. All political parties, whether in or out of the enacting coalition, national political associations, and even ordinary citizens in some cases, have standing before TRIFE to challenge IFE's decisions. Indeed, the tribunal has over the course of its history shown a growing interest in revising IFE's agreements, sometimes rewriting the tribunal's own jurisprudence in order to force its criteria on IFE and at other times denying IFE any expansion of its decision-making power. In many

PVEM's statutory changes as anti-democratic, were subjected to impeachment threats by the official representatives of the PVEM and the PRI. These parties were alliance partners in the 2003 midterm elections and control 48% of lower chamber seats. Within a week, the Senate unanimously passed a resolution urging electoral authorities to desist from intervention in internal party affairs, while in the Chamber of Deputies PRD Deputy and former Councilor Zedadúa introduced a motion of no confidence in IFE. Two weeks later, the electoral tribunal summarily dismissed the PVEM's appeal, in support of IFE's decision, but the significance of the well-orchestrated display of multi-partisan displeasure has not been lost upon all electoral authorities.

But the most notorious examples come from the 1998-1999 period, when the PRI staged a four-month walkout from IFE, filed suit to appeal the decision to undertake a new investigation of the PRI's campaign finances from the 1994 presidential elections, and threatened to move impeachment trials against seven Councilors for their alleged anti-PRI voting(Eisenstadt 2004, Schedler 2000). In the end, the PRI filed complaints against four of the involved Councilors, which remained frozen in commission in Congress until a new Council General was appointed in 2003.

Table 3: Unified and divided party blocs in the Council General (contested votes with no absent bloc members)

Sponsor	# Dissenting Votes in Contingent	Woldenberg I		Woldenberg II		Ugalde	
		Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
PAN	0	206	89%	252	82%	17	38%
	1	26	11%	54	18%	25	56%
	2	—	—	—	—	3	7%
	Total	232	100%	306	100%	45	100%
PRI	0	228	94%	281	86%	10	22%
	1	13	5%	39	12%	18	40%
	2	2	1%	8	2%	17	38%
	Total	243	100%	328	100%	45	100%
PRD	0	18	8%	84	26%	—	—
	1	212	89%	235	74%	—	—
	2	8	3%	31	10%	—	—
	Total	238	100%	319	100%	—	—

areas of election law, the rulings of the judges have become unpredictable, and IFE decisions before the court face rising odds of being overturned or amended. Moreover, this behavior by the court has spawned litigiousness by those with standing to appeal (Eisenstadt 1994, 2004).

TRIFE, as the evidence in Table 4 suggests, is a busy court, receiving a growing number of appeals since 1996. Of the total of 1332 measures decided by roll call in the Council General, 210 have been challenged in court, involving 229 separate measures in 276 separate suits (IFE logrolls and multiple suits increase the number of appeals). Moreover, the tempo of appeals has risen sharply over time, from one-in-ten decisions challenged during Woldenberg I, to one-in-four for the Ugalde Council. At the other end, TRIFE has also granted appeals, in part or in whole, with increasing frequency, to where it now overrules IFE in one-eighth of all decisions voted by the Council General.

More importantly for our purposes, a Councilor who cares intensely for some resolution has to anticipate all major complaints and make a priori concessions to preempt legal appeals from affected parties. This can be achieved in two ways. One is to craft proposals that incorporate the tribunal's preferences based on precedent and thereby avoid a negative ruling. The second is to reduce the probability that other actors, most prominently parties themselves, will appeal a decision. This alternative calls for compromise and accommodation and, therefore for oversized, cross-partisan and even universal voting coalitions in the council. The obvious strategy for the Councilors, given active engagement by the tribunal and increasing recourse to legal challenge, is to circle their wagons—that is, to seek safety in broad co-partisan consensus.

Table 4 also reports the average size of council majorities ("winsize") broken by the sense of TRIFE rulings. Although the strategic nature of interactions makes it impossible to ascertain the relation between majority size, legal appeals and court rulings conclusively, the preliminary evidence shows that policy decisions which provoke plaintiff suits before the tribunal have a smaller mean winsize (7.95) than those for which no suit is filed (8.06), over the course of the last ten years. Overall in addition, decisions overturned by the court have smaller majorities on average (7.88) than those which are sustained (8.00). However the Ugalde council has the largest mean winsizes for appeals whether granted or denied by the court; this same council also suffers the highest rate of reversal by TRIFE. It seems that, in order to get a favorable ruling by TRIFE, the Council General now produces larger majori-

Table 4: TRIFE rulings and size of winning IFE coalition, 1996-2005

Council	TRIFE ruling	Mean winsize	N	Pct.
Woldenberg I	No appeal	8.24	572	89%
	Appeal denied	8.22	46	7%
	IFE overruled	8.07	28	4%
	All	8.24	646	100%
Woldenberg II	No appeal	7.80	440	81%
	Appeal denied	7.62	60	11%
	IFE overruled	7.43	40	7%
	All	7.77	523	100%
Ugalde	No appeal	8.13	108	75%
	Appeal denied	8.65	19	13%
	IFE overruled	8.65	17	12%
	All	8.25	144	100%

ties, by half a vote on average, than in decisions where no appeal is expected. But the probability that larger majorities will induce more favorable judicial responses has deteriorated over time, leaving IFE in a quandary as to how to preempt the tribunal's less predictable use of its veto power.

To sum up, incentives for partisan behavior by councilors can be detected in nomination procedures, open signaling, and future rewards. But consensual tendencies, resulting from ex-ante partisan agreement inherited by the Council General, and reinforced by impeachment rules and TRIFE's growing oversight, are also clearly present. Indeed, the high levels of consensus detected in our dataset argue in favor of the null hypothesis, rendering the task of detecting partisan bias more difficult.

We turn now to the estimation of ideal points of IFE's Electoral Councilors during the period 1996-2005. To the extent that consensual incentives are paramount, we expect a distribution of ideal points that are not clearly distinguishable from each other as they overlap into super-majoritarian, cross-partisan coalitions. To the extent that pro-sponsor incentives might be dominant, we expect ideal points to be distributed along an ideological dimension, aligning into adjacent positions for Councilors with common sponsors. In the extreme of the party-sponsor hypothesis, nominees with the same party sponsor should cluster together in distinct blocs which define a partisan cleavage on the council as a whole.

3 Bayesian Estimation of Ideal Points

At the time of Malo Guzmán and Pastor Nieto's analysis of IFE's Council General, political scientists had not yet developed methodological tools to infer the location of bliss points from the voting records of members of small committees. Since the mid-1990s, however, political methodologists have developed various techniques to circumvent what Londregan (2000) calls the "micro-committee problem". In essence, this stems from the relative paucity of divided votes that permit inferences about the ideological positions of small-committee members. Among the new techniques, Bayesian estimation methods have recently challenged the dominance of more traditional tools of ideal point estimation, such as NOMINATE scores (Poole and Rosenthal 1997, **?**), as more appropriate to the study of individual voting

behavior in small committees (Clinton, Jackman and Rivers 2004, Jackman 2001, Martin and Quinn 2002). Since IFE's Council General is a very small decision-making body, and since most of its recorded votes are highly consensual, Bayesian Monte Carlo Markov Chain (MCMC) methods are ideal for generating valid inferences about the preferences of its members.

We present an analysis of IFE's two Councils General in the period 1996-2005. Because two members left IFE in 2000 to take government positions (see Table 2), we have broken down the first one into two halves with partially-overlapping sets of nine individuals each. These three groups are labeled by the names of their respective presidents: Woldenberg I (1996-2000), Woldenberg II (2000-2003), and Ugalde (2003-2005). We estimate ideal points for twenty individuals (seven of whom served throughout the Woldenberg years, so their ideal points are estimated twice). The large number of unanimous votes (705 in total) convey no information about Councilors' ideological leanings and have been dropped from the analysis. The remaining 627 usable votes were coded so that, in each case, a vote in favor of a proposal has a value of "1" and a nay vote, "0". Abstentions and absences are treated as missing values.[10] The data are thus combined into three arrays of 9 columns by 246, 336, and 45 rows, corresponding to the totals of contested votes in Woldenberg I, Woldenberg II, and Ugalde.

We use Clinton, Jackman and Rivers's item-response theory (IRT) model of voting behavior (Clinton, Jackman and Rivers 2004, Martin and Quinn 2002). The identification of IRT models requires imposing restrictions either on item parameters or on Councilors' positions. Traditionally, scholars use a known "extremist" in the committee to anchor the ideological space and solve the problem of rotational invariance. We use the alternative method of restricting the discrimination parameter of two items (i.e., two specific roll calls) per council. In every case, we chose votes whose content we believe pits "left" against "right", thereby imposing some structure on the policy space underlying the individual voting records for each period. Table 5 details these six votes. We stipulate standard normal prior distributions on Councilors'

[10]This standard treatment of abstentions is not a trivial matter, since it is arguably not as justifiable in IFE's case as in the American congressional context. The recourse to a vote of abstention is a costly endeavor at IFE, requiring active intervention by a Councilor after the Ayes and Nays have been called. More importantly, its incidence in council votes is not negligible. In one case, a Councilor abstained in 22% of all contested votes in which he participated over seven years. Another three members, one per council, cast abstentions in 9%, 10% and 16% of all contested votes during their respective terms.

Table 5: Votes used to anchor policy space for each Council

Date (vote number)	Minority vote	Substance
Woldenberg I 1996-2000		
12/16/1997 (vote 28)	PRI, Barragán (nay)	Can Council President propose an administrative nominee to the Council on a take-it-or-leave-it basis?
11/14/2000 (vote 228)	PRI, Barragán (aye)	Should PAN be held responsible and fined for the case of a clergyman who campaigned illegally on its behalf?
Woldenberg II 2000-2003		
4/6/2001 (vote 27)	Cárdenas, Cantú, Luken (nay)	Should IFE drop investigation of complaint by Alianza Cívica against the PRI for clientelistic practices in Chiapas?
12/12/2001 (vote 86)	PRD, Luken (aye)	Should PRI, PAN, and PVEM be fined for damages caused to government-owned assets by electoral propaganda?
5/30/2003 (vote 255)	PRI (aye)	Should PAN be fined for a TV campaign spot that PRI considers libelous?
Ugalde 2003-2005		
8/23/2004 (vote 33)	PAN minus Morales, Latapí (nay)	Should candidate for top-level appointment, proposed by Council President without relevant commission's consent, be ratified?
1/31/2005 (vote 43)	Andrade, López Flores, Morales, Gómez Alcántar (nay)	Must PVEM statutes make party leaders accountable to rank-and-file?

ideal points to solve the problem of scaling invariance. We include a brief technical description of this model in Appendix **??**, where we also explicate our modeling decisions fully.

Table 6 reports Councilors' ideal point estimates. The last column in Table 6 displays the number of votes on which the estimation is based for each Councilor, referring to actual Aye/Nay votes, i.e., excluding abstentions and absences. Note that within each Council, point estimates of the ideal positions of Councilors (the mean of the posterior distribution of the 9×3 location parameters) determine their rank in the list. Thus, for example, the nine Electoral Councilors that served from 1996 to 2000 are aligned as follows, from left to right: Cárdenas, Cantú, Zebadúa, Lujambio, Molinar, Merino, Woldenberg, Peschard, and Barragán.

This distribution of ideal points is largely supportive of the party-sponsor hypothesis, showing tightly adjacent positions for both the two PAN nominees and the three PRI nominees. The glaring anomaly is Barragán at the extreme right of the spectrum, with other members of the PRD contingent occupying the left end of the scale. This outlier would appear to be an example of deficient screening by his party sponsor.

Table 6: Posterior distribution of ideal points

Councilor	Sponsor	Mean	SD	Votes
Woldenberg I				
Cárdenas	PRD	–1.79	0.44	230
Cantú	PT	0.42	0.20	231
Zebadúa	PRD	0.73	0.21	228
Lujambio	PAN	0.90	0.25	233
Molinar	PAN	1.09	0.26	238
Merino	PRI	1.95	0.45	244
Woldenberg	PRI	2.15	0.53	242
Peschard	PRI	2.28	0.60	242
Barragán	PRD	3.25	1.03	204
α_{28}		–1.67	0.79	
α_{228}		1.66	0.78	
Deviance		1071	45.85	

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Councilor	Sponsor	Mean	SD	Votes
Woldenberg II				
Cárdenas	PRD	–1.67	0.23	290
Barragán	PRD	0.40	0.12	246
Cantú	PT	1.70	0.20	308
Luken	PAN	1.98	0.24	294
Rivera	PRI	3.20	0.38	318
Lujambio	PAN	3.50	0.45	323
Merino	PRI	3.60	0.44	330
Woldenberg	PRI	3.70	0.47	330
Peschard	PRI	3.75	0.44	323
α_{85}		0.69	0.35	
α_{207}		–0.94	0.40	
Deviance		1064	29.09	
Ugalde				
González Luna	PAN	–1.80	0.56	45
Sánchez	PAN	–1.62	0.55	43
Albo	PAN	–1.28	0.48	45
Ugalde	PRI	–0.95	0.45	42
Latapí	PRI	–0.94	0.37	45
López Flores	PRI	0.10	0.26	38
Andrade	PRI	0.33	0.35	45
Morales	PAN	0.52	0.40	44
Gómez Alcántar	PVEM	1.08	0.55	45
α_{33}		2.43	1.29	
α_{43}		–4.56	1.66	
Deviance		299.5	13.92	

The partial turnover in council membership after 2000 resulted in some repositioning of Councilor locations. The left's contingent in the council behave with more cohesion than before, with Barragán leapfrogging toward the left.[11] Council members sponsored by the PRI continue to occupy the

[11]In the most generous reading possible, this Councilor's 180-degree shift from the extreme right of the previous council, reduced the agency costs his party sponsor had had to absorb. Barragń's behavior is so erratic, it is nigh impossible to attribute any ideological or partisan logic to the case.

adjacent positions appropriate to bloc voting, but the cohesion of the PAN contingent suffers erosion. We interpret this as a reflection of obvious changes in the issue space that accompanied the replacement of two Councilors. In the first place, the PRI contingent is enlarged by the turnover, which modifies coalitional dynamics in its favor, inducing Councilor Lujambio's move toward a tight-locked coalition on the right. This change in voting power is reinforced by the unexpected salience of the dominant issues resolved under Woldenberg II, involving charges against both the PAN and the PRI of illegal campaign finance operations in 2000.

Our party-sponsorship hypothesis continues to fare well after 2003, even with a much shorter period of time and a reduced number of contested votes for ideal point estimation. Again, the members of the PRI's and the PAN's contingents are deployed in respectively adjacent positions with only one exception. The new outlier is Councilor Morales at the right of the spectrum, quite distant from from his fellow PAN nominees.

It bears noting that the posterior distributions of ideal points (which we call "ideal spaces") in all three Councils overlap in many instances. This feature is easier to appreciate in Figure 2, which shows the first-to-ninth-decile width of the posterior location parameter densities for each Council. These figures standardize the range of each Council's ideological spectrum in order to facilitate the comparison of council members' relative positions. Thus, for example, the ranges of PRI-sponsored council members in both halves of the Woldenberg era are virtually indistinguishable from each other. A similar stacking of ideal spaces can be observed among the PAN's nominees in the first half of the Woldenberg Council and for three of that party's four nominees in the Ugalde Council. Such partisan clustering cannot be claimed for the PRD's blocs (due to the clear extremism of two of its nominees), nor for the PAN's contingent from 2000 to 2003,[12] nor for the PRI's after 2003. In this latter case, the evident split in the PRI contingent possibly reflects factional politics within the sponsoring party in the nomination process and thereafter. In the event, only four of eight multi-member contingents exhibit the clustering of ideal spaces that would indicate a pure form of bloc voting by party sponsor.

[12]Nominated by the PAN in 1996 as a substitute, Councilor Luken went on to take a position as Comptroller in the Federal District Government under PRD leadership before joining IFE in 2000. The case is less one of deficient screening than of unforeseen co-sponsorship. In that sense, his intermediate position between more left-leaning colleagues and Councilor Lujambio is a plausible indicator of mixed partisan predispositions.

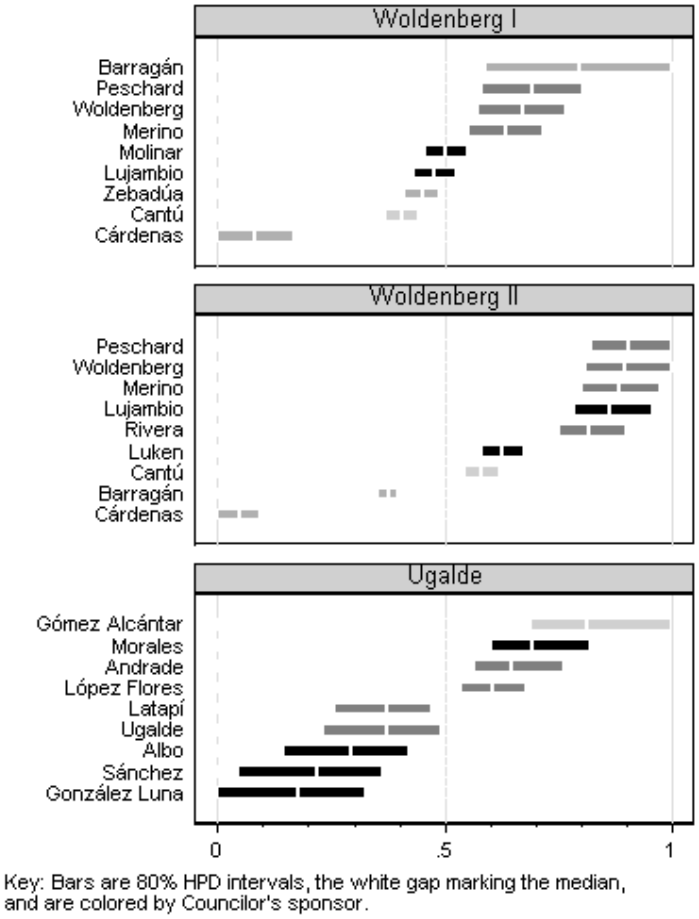

Figure 2: Ideology in IFE's Council General (standardized range)

Table 7: Minimal Connected Winning Coalitions at IFE (frequency and mean size in contested votes)

Council	Leftwing		Rightwing		Other		Votes	
	Pct.	Winsize	Pct.	Winsize	Pct.	Winsize	N	Winsize
Woldenberg I	28%	7.51	45%	7.25	27%	6.48	226	7.13
Woldenberg II	0%	—	60%	7.18	40%	6.85	336	7.05
Ugalde	29%	6.31	0%	—	71%	6.72	45	6.60

An even more extreme statement of the party-sponsor hypothesis would look to the formation of partisan cleavages based on bloc clustering. The evidence in the figures reveal only one instance of such a cleavage, during Woldenberg I. In those early years, a clean divide between the PRI contingent and most of the combined opposition nominees reflected the primacy of the democracy question in the run-up to the 2000 elections. After those elections, with the democratic transition accomplished, the Council General no longer divides into partisan cleavages, but rather into cross-partisan ones.

The mapping of subjacent ideological preferences in accordance with partisan sponsorship does not exhaust the voting data from IFE, of course. A fuller analysis of voting behavior on the Council General must delve into the coalitional dynamics observed over time. Are ideal points and spaces a good guide to the contingent voting patterns aggregated over ten years? Not necessarily.

From a primary reading of the figures above one might derive a prediction of five-member minimal connected winning coalitions (MCWCs) in all three councils, from the left in the cases of Woldenberg I and Ugalde and from the right in Woldenberg II. But the actual incidence of minimal coalitions is very low, with bare majorities produced in less than 11% of all contested votes. If MCWCs are the measure, the incidence rates of five-member coalitions drop sharply.

Table 7 presents the aggregate evidence for connected majorities at IFE. Several points are worth highlighting. First, the proportion of unconnected majorities (with winsizes ranging between four and eight votes) expands over

time until they dominate contested roll calls in the latest council. Second, despite the presence of outliers in every council, in the case of Woldenberg I with extremists on either end of the spectrum, connected centrist coalitions have been extremely rare since 1996 (not shown in the table, but never exceeding two percent of the total for any council). Third, each council shows different patterns of coalition formation. Woldenberg I alternated between left- and right-wing MCWCs, with the latter dominating.[13] Woldenberg II mostly fabricated majorities from the right, while Ugalde generates unconnected coalitions above all and leftwing ones secondarily. It remains the case, however, that the greater share of ideologically coherent coalitions, for each of the councils, entails seven- or eight-member majorities. The direct implication of these patterns for the observation of partisan behavior by councilors is that coalition formation at IFE, whether connected or not, tends to be cross-partisan and is inevitably so as majority size increases. The distribution of ideal points and spaces uncovered by Bayesian estimation is not a convenient shorthand for coalitional dynamics. But the preference distribution uncovered nonetheless underlies and informs the voting observed on the Council General.

Three findings can be highlighted from the foregoing analysis of voting behavior during nearly ten years at IFE. First, consensus dominates the Council General to an inordinate degree. We interpret this as the result of tight agenda control by Councilors, as discussed in Section 2. Second, when conflict does surface, we detect signs of partisanship in Councilor voting. Council members nominated by the same party-sponsor—with a few notable exceptions—routinely align with each other in adjacent positions along the spectrum and often share ideal spaces that cluster into discernible partisan blocs. Third, these underlying ideological predispositions do not translate automatically into predictable coalition formation on the council. The drive toward cross-partisan consensus generates, as a rule of thumb, oversized and increasingly unconnected majorities, crowding out more blatantly partisan voting.

[13]In those years, the scuttlebutt over bargaining within IFE often referred to the "Pentagon", the name given to the group of five Councilors on the left (spanning from Crdenas to Molinar), as the decisive influence on policy. In raw numbers, however, this quintet materialized as a MCWC in only 4 of 226 contested votes.

4 Conclusion

Agenda control needs to be imperfect for research to detect partisan patterns in voting behavior within an EMB. The more perfect the agenda control exerted by the Council General, the thicker the veil through which behavior can be observed and the harder it becomes to discern partisan bias in voting or, indeed, *any* behavior other than cohesion. To our advantage, agenda control is in fact imperfect within IFE, which affords us the opportunity to glimpse the divisions that have underlain IFE decision-making.

Notwithstanding the difficulties entailed by agenda control and powerful incentives towards cross-partisan consensus, we have uncovered important evidence of partisanship in IFE's Councils General from 1996 to 2005. By analyzing the posterior distribution of ideal points, we find that the average Electoral Councilor votes in alignment with other colleagues nominated by the same party sponsor. To that same extent, Councilors are closer to their sponsors' hearts than might be expected in a putatively non-partisan electoral authority.

Our analysis fuels this paradox by suggesting that parties, as principals, effectively constrain their agents' behavior in IFE in predictable fashion. If, as widely perceived, the bulk of IFE decisions are truly above the political fray and free of partisan bickering, it is not because its Councilors are embodiments of technocratic efficiency and impartiality. Rather, they behave as "party watchdogs", rabidly checking each other's moves and assuring compromises that protect their sponsors' interests in the electoral arena. By the logic of anticipation, council majorities propose measures that are controversial among parties if and only if they expect that TRIFE will rule in their favor against legal challenge. Otherwise, compromise and accommodation remain the only insurance against foreseeable resistance. Our analysis suggests that EMBs that embrace political strife, rather than those that purport to expunge politics altogether from electoral regulation, might be better able to guarantee free and fair elections in new democracies.

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