Partisanship in Non-Partisan Electoral Agencies and Democratic Compliance: Evidence from Mexico's Federal Electoral Institute

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Abstract

Scholars argue that electoral management bodies staffed by autonomous, non-partisan experts are best at providing credible and fair elections. We inspect the voting record of Mexico's *Instituto Federal Electoral* (IFE), an ostensibly independent bureaucratic agent regarded as extremely successful in organizing clean elections in a political system marred by fraud. We argue that "autonomous" IFE has been successful precisely because its putative non-partisan experts behave as "party watchdogs" that represent the interests of their political party sponsors. To validate this "party sponsorship hypothesis", we examine roll-call votes cast by members of IFE's Council-General from 1996 to 2006. Aside from shedding light on IFE's failure to achieve democratic compliance in 2006, our analysis lends credence to the claim that election arbiters that embrace partisan strife, rather than those that expunge party politics from electoral regulation altogether, are better able to organize free and fair elections in new democracies.

"Democracy is a system in which parties lose elections."

Przeworski (1991, p. 10)

Przeworski's dictum implies that parties that lose elections in a democracy should concede victory to winners. The reasons why losers choose to comply with the voters' verdict, however, remain a matter of debate. Some emphasize the key role of a civic culture shared by the citizenry (e.g. Putnam 2000); others the need for democracy loyalists to stick together when extremists perform disruptive actions (e.g. Linz and Stepan 1978); still others underscore the importance of electoral rules and institutions in facilitating negotiation (e.g. Jones 1995). As in Przeworski's classic formulation, we emphasize the importance of trust in the fairness of the electoral process. Losers abide by the ballot box because they retain a fair chance of winning a future election.[1] Compliance requires guarantees that election referees will remain *impartial* toward all parties. Thus, credibility and compliance should in principle be achieved by making electoral management bodies (EMBs) independent of and unaccountable to political parties.

Indeed, the scholarly literature on "agencies of restraint" portrays EMB independence as a solution to impart credibility to electoral processes routinely marred by fraud (Hartlyn, McCoy and Mustillo forthcoming, Schedler, Diamond and Plattner 1999). Scholars and practitioners suggest that technical experts that oversee a professional civil service staff, are secure in their tenure, and enjoy ample, non-political budgets are in an optimal position to guarantee fair electoral processes (cf. references in López-Pintor 2000, Mozaffar 2002). Instead, we suggest that electoral credibility and compliance with electoral outcomes can be achieved by granting political parties strong influence within EMBs, provided that all main parties see themselves represented in their deliberations.[2]

[1]Future victories are not the only source of compliance. Losers also accept defeat because they retain some degree of influence on policy until the next election.

[2]Molina and Hernández (1999) refer to this setup as the "party watchdog" model; Mozaffar and Schedler recognize the potential advantages of the "party watchdog" model: "Parties may develop a quasi-consociational scheme of "power sharing" with a pluralistic "partisan" body of electoral administration that includes opposition representatives as powerful "veto players" alongside representatives from the ruling party" (Mozaffar and Schedler 2002, p. 16). López-Pintor raises a similar point when describing the "politics

To substantiate this interpretation, we study electoral regulation in Mexico during the last decade. Mexico provides an interesting case-study into the organization of credible elections. In a view prevalent among pundits and scholars, Mexican elections became credible once the PRI, which had been losing votes for at least 20 years, finally relinquished control over electoral regulation to an autonomous electoral management agency, the *Instituto Federal Electoral* (IFE) in 1996. IFE's Council-General personified non-partisan expertise unencumbered by direct political interference from government. Councilors were thoroughly vetted and recruited from a set of professionals without party affiliation and admitted to the council after winning consensual endorsement in the Chamber of Deputies. Once in office, IFE's operational budget, which includes generous public financing for political parties and their electoral campaigns, is subject to few political whims. Consistent with the view that EMB autonomy is paramount in guaranteeing fair elections, IFE is often heralded as exemplary of the "ombudsman" model of electoral management (Eisenstadt 2004), which welcomes delegation of electoral authority to agencies staffed by detached, non-partisan experts.

IFE's Council-General ran three competitive elections in which incumbents suffered important losses. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) lost control of Congress after seven decades of uninterrupted rule in the 1997 midterm election, and then lost the presidency to the center-right Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) in 2000. The PAN was relegated to second place in Congress in the 2003 midterm election. Yet, political losers accepted the outcomes of federal elections in these years. But the new Council-General, inaugurated in 2003, lacked consensual support in the Chamber of Deputies. At the last minute, the center-left Party of Democratic Revolution (PRD) broke off negotiations and was ignored by the other major parties during the process of councilor selection. The PRD immediately

of co-participation" that characterize the Uruguayan EMB: "Whatever negotiations take place in the political arena influence the Corte's decisions; conversely, decisions adopted by the Corte can easily be assumed by the parties as their own. This applies to both informal politics and to law-making. Consequently, once a decision is taken, all the parties usually implement it" (López-Pintor 2000, p. 23).

accused IFE of lacking autonomy from political parties.[3] More importantly, the 2006 election acquired a distinctly anticlimactic flavor when loser Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the PRD's presidential candidate contested the front-runner's razor-thin margin of victory, and resorted to mass mobilization to challenge the electoral outcome.

We do not contest the claim that IFE's Council-General brought credibility to elections during Mexico's protracted transition to democracy, but are not persuaded that this is the consequence of non-partisan impartiality, as the ombudsman model assumes. Nor do we agree with the view that the post-electoral debacle of 2006 is the result of replacing an autonomous IFE with a particised one. Instead, we analyze IFE's institutional setup as a response to standard problems of delegation: parties carefully select their representatives to IFE and have tools to induce them, within limits, to act in accordance with their interests. Our view is that political parties, not non-partisan technocrats, have always been the ones that run the show at IFE. In this regard, IFE should be considered to be closer to a checks-and-balances "party watchdog" model than to the ombudsman model of EMB organization. And it was precisely the lack of full checks-and-balances—*not* a rebirth of undue partisan influences—that made IFE's authority questionable.

To substantiate the view that parties never relinquished control over the agent in charge of regulating their own behavior, we start in Section 1 by fleshing out the various dilemmas that politicians confront in delegating authority to a regulatory agency. We describe IFE's institutional design in Section 2. We show how, despite central guarantees against majority tyranny, parties avail themselves of an array of resources to influence decisions in the Council-General. Ultimately, IFE's institutional setup suggests that councilors will be sensitive to the goals of their party sponsors, even in the absence of formal ties to political parties. We refer to this as the party sponsorship hypothesis. We then inspect councilor behavior for traces of partisanship in Section 3. We employ Bayesian MCMC estimation

[3]The failure of the PRD to obtain representation has prompted PRD charges against IFE of partisan bias. Most notably, López Obrador has accused current councilors of being "employees of the PAN and PRI" (*Reforma*, Sept. 17, 2005).

techniques to examine the voting record of all Electoral Councilors between October 30, 1996, and August 24, 2005, spanning two entirely different councils. Based on this analysis, we can make relatively precise inferences about the ideal points of council members in one-dimensional ideological space. Our statistical analysis uncovers patterns consistent with the party sponsorship interpretation of councilors' voting behavior both before and after the 2003 renewal of the Council-General.

1 Delegation Dilemmas

We see IFE as an agent of political parties in the Mexican legislature, who have the power to appoint and remove the organ's governing board. Consequently, we analyze its institutional setup within the canonical literature on delegation.[4] In this light, parties in the enacting coalition delegate authority to interpret the law and run federal elections to their appointees in IFE's Council-General. Two critical delegation problems arise from the perspective of the enacting coalition. The first problem is that appointees may behave in ways that do not serve the principals' common interests, i.e., delegation is open to moral hazard. The other problem arises from the fact that the enacting coalition is itself a collective principal, whose members have conflicting electoral interests.

The enacting coalition would like to set ample *agency discretion* to take advantage of the agent's specialization, while at the same time limiting the possibility of excessive *agency loss* (Epstein and O'Halloran 1999, Hamilton, Jay and Madison 1788, Huber and Shipan 2002, Miller 2005). The literature on delegation dilemmas has uncovered various, and often ingenious, ways of mitigating this tradeoff. But the heterogeneous nature of the enacting coalition complicates delegation by broadening the definition of agency loss. In this sense, IFE is a regulatory board that must serve the interests of a very broad constituency—legislative political parties with opposing electoral interests and views on electoral law that are often incompatible—while striving to achieve credibility and trust in elections.

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

For political parties in the enacting coalition, the relevant question is how much influence on IFE can they retain while still achieving credibility in the eyes of the electorate. We interpret recent work on "agencies of restraint" (Eisenstadt 2004, Schedler, Diamond and Plattner 1999) as suggesting that anything short of full abdication ("autonomy") impedes trust and credibility. It is important to ask who is involved in the credibility game to evaluate this conclusion. The tacit premise is that citizen's trust in IFE's independence and impartiality matters most.[5] Instead, we start from the premise that trust in the fairness of the electoral process is most important to political parties, who are after all directly subject to IFE's regulatory and procedural decisions. Unless political parties believe in IFE's aura of effectiveness and fairness, they will not be willing to concede defeat in the competition for power.[6] From our view that winning the trust of political elites is more important than generating confidence among the electorate, *it is crucial that IFE remains subject to partisan influence.*

We argue that, in structuring IFE, parties have managed to both retain influence in the Council-General while at the same time checking each other's ambition. The solution takes advantage of the agent's collective nature: the Council-General is a nine-member body sitting atop IFE's bureaucracy. By ensuring that all relevant political parties have Council representation, the enacting coalition imposes a checks-and-balances solution to the afore-mentioned dual delegation problem. Minority representation, rather than an autonomous ombudsman, protects the interests of parties with IFE representation while simultaneously

[5]Before the 2006 presidential election, public opinion decidedly backed IFE; for example, in a May 2005 survey nearly two-thirds of respondents considered IFE trustworthy, more so than any other political institution in the country. The organizations that IFE regulates received much less support in citizen evaluations, as only one in three respondents expressed any degree of trust in political parties. See national face-to-face survey, May 20-22, 2005, in*Reforma*'s supplement *Enfoque*, June 5, 2005, p. 6.

[6]Not that citizen trust is unimportant, but public opinion tends to follow party cues in this respect. Panel surveys reported by Estrada and Poiré (2007) allow comparisons of democratic attitudes among supporters of losing candidates. PRD voters were more distrustful to begin with, a quarter of them expressing that Mexico is not a democracy both before and after the election, compared to 13% of PRI voters. But differences accentuated after July 2. Another quarter of PRD voters, who had originally expressed trust in democracy, joined the distrustful camp after losing. Only 10% of PRI voters did the same. So after the election 1 in 2 PRD voters declared disbelief in Mexican democracy, compared to slightly less than a quarter of PRI voters (and 16% of PAN voters). Differentials are likely products of elite cues in the pre- and, especially, post-electoral disputes.

ensuring that no single party will be able to manipulate elections.

2 IFE's institutional design: The party sponsorship hypothesis

IFE was established in 1990 as a 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, district boundaries, operation of electoral booths, vote counts, monitoring of party and campaign expenditures, and overall regulation of political campaigns and party organization.

IFE took its present form during the last major election reform in 1996. The size of the Council-General was set at nine members, eight of whom are non-partisan "Electoral Councilors" selected and ratified by consensus among congressional parties. The Minister of the Interior—who chaired the council *ex officio*—was removed from the council altogether and replaced by a non-partisan Council President chosen through the same consensual procedures. In effect, the Executive relinquished day-to-day control over electoral matters and IFE became an autonomous regulatory agency.[7]

Scholars ultimately explain delegation to IFE technocrats as a constrained but purposeful move by PRI leaders to benefit from clean elections, given their calculus that the party would maintain sufficient support to win them (Magaloni 2006). While that calculus proved wrong, the battle for credibility was clearly won. However, the influence of congressional parties over

[7]Malo and Pastor (1996) analyze roll call votes from1994-1995 in search of the determinants of individual vote choices. They find that the six non-partisan Citizen Councilors, selected by the consensual procedures retained in the 1996 reform, 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 analysis. In large measure, IFE's reputation for decision-making free of partisanship can be traced to this Citizen Councilor era.

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 that 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 voting or even outright universalism.

2.1 Incentives for partisan voting behavior

Following principal-agent theory, we emphasize three aspects that are relevant in generating pro-sponsor behavior: rules of nomination, signaling devices used by sponsors, and party capture.

2.1.1 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 no single party should designate a majority on the council, 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 nominated candidates can be vetoed by any other party in the coalition (Alcocer 1995, Schedler 2000). After the election of a single nominee for Council President, a final logroll in the lower chamber on a closed list of 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.[8] Table 1 shows information about the enacting coalitions formed in 1996 and 2003, the relative strength of legislative parties, and the number of candidates that each party successfully sponsored to the Council-General.

[8]The PT is the*Partido del Trabajo*. In 2003, the PRD and PT were excluded from the enacting coalition, while the *Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano* (PVEM) was incorporated.

Table 1: Legislative party shares, enacting coalitions, and councilor sponsorship

Party	56th Leg. '94-'97	Woldenberg I '96-'00	57th Leg. '97-'00	58th Leg. '00-'03	Woldenberg II '00-'03*	59th Leg. '03-'06	Ugalde '03-'10
PAN	**24%**	2	24%	41%	2	**30%**	4
PRD	**13%**	3	25%	10%	2	19%	—
PRI	**60%**	3	47%	42%	4	**45%**	4
PT	**2%**	1	1%	1%	1	1%	—
PVEM	—	—	1%	3%	—	**3%**	1
Others	—	—	—	1%	—	1%	—
N	500	9	500	500	9	500	9

*Two councilors resigned in late 2000 and were replaced by substitutes pre-selected in 1996.

Enacting coalition in boldface.

Party sponsorship quotas in the Council-General have always been flexible, over-representing the PRD until 2003. In 1994, the PRD received three of six Citizen Councilors. The PRI accepted this distribution shielded behind its control of the then powerful Council presidency. The PRD again demanded a large representation in 1996 and got it, although its third member had to be co-sponsored with the PT (Councilor Cantú). The PAN accepted to sponsor only two members in exchange for strengthening the Council-General's powers vis-à-vis IFE's bureaucracy. In 2003 it was the PRI that demanded four seats in the new Council-General.[9] Since PAN demanded the sponsorship of three members, the PRD insisted on the acceptance of Councilor Cantú as Council-President as compensation, but the PRI was unwilling to lift its veto. At a quarter hour before deadline, PAN and PRI split eight seats among themselves (the PRI sponsoring Council-President Ugalde) and offered the ninth seat to the PVEM.

While the informal right to veto eliminates highly partisan and otherwise unqualified candidates, it is unlikely that any party would nominate individuals clearly opposed to its own interests and views about electoral regulation.[10] Parties reduce the chances of selecting "bad types"—i.e., individuals whose conduct could hurt the sponsor's interests—by screening potential agents carefully and proposing candidates who, while unaffiliated to them, have preferences in line with those of the chamber party. Thus screening helps mitigate 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 councilors keeping tabs on each other by defending their sponsors' interests in IFE's debates and decisions.

Contrary to what had happened in previous negotiations, no major party was willing to concede to the PRD's maximalist demands in 2003, leaving it without representation in

[9]Party leader Emilio Chuayffet was fond of echoing would-be presidential candidate Roberto Madrazo's claim to five seats.

[10]Schedler (2000)expresses a similar view about the selection of council members, but considers that their conduct once in office must demonstrate prudence and impartiality in order to accomplish their task. That they should appear to be purer than Caesar's wife, however, does not necessarily make them so.

IFE's Council. From the partisan perspective we develop this sign was ominous, a harbinger of electoral distrust to come arising from incomplete checks-and-balances in the renewed Council-General.

2.1.2 Signaling devices used by sponsors

Should councilors shirk or deviate from their sponsors' expectations about appropriate voting behavior, parties retain a wide gamut of mechanisms to make preferences known to agents—and call them to order. The range includes positioning in council and committee debates,[11] public and private communications of all sorts, including threats of impeachment against council members, agenda interference through the filing of petitions and complaints, and recourse to appeal before an electoral tribunal (we expand on some of these below). These mechanisms should make sponsor preferences completely transparent to councilors.[12]

2.1.3 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 (or, indeed, by rival offers from other parties). The danger of "party capture" was present from the outset, but the original legislation and its reforms in the 1990s ignored the problem.[13] Table 2—which includes the list of Citizen Councilors from 1994 to 1996—speaks to this issue. 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, a party can offer future-oriented incentives to

[11]The 1996 reform introduced committees for each of IFE's operational areas, staffed through voluntary participation of individual councilors, and with chairs assigned by consensus in the council. Party organizations with legal registry have non-voting representatives on the Council-General and its committees; in addition, all legislative parties exercise voice without a vote on the council.

[12]Voice may be inefficient, of course. Malo and Pastor (1996) find 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.

[13]An initiative to restrict employment of ex-Councilors in government positions or elective office has been frozen in Congress since 2001.

its nominees in the hope of eliciting appropriate voting behavior. Alternatively, parties can exploit the individual expectations of council members that professional opportunities may materialize in the future.

2.1.4 Expected partisan behavior

The rules and devices outlined above lead us to expect that council members will represent their sponsoring party's views on electoral regulation, i.e., councilors should manifest partisan behavior. But it is also true that the broad lines of much of the Council-General's day-to-day business are inscribed in election statutes which have seen few significant changes since 1996 and which contain norms that reflect the principals' shared interests in electoral regulation. From this perspective, the Council-General can be said to operate on *autopilot*, executing 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 extremely divisive items from entering debates and votes in the Council-General.

Thus, 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 regarding internal agency matters, such as administrative appointments and budgetary decisions; electoral issues brought by actors outside the enacting coalition, which must be processed by IFE under threat of judicial reprimand; and issues whose emergence and divisive potential could not have been foreseen by the principals when they designated council members.

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

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), PAN Senator (2006-2012).
Woldenberg	PAN	PRI nominee for Council President (1996).
Granados	PRD	PRD gubernatorial candidate in Hidalgo (1998).
Ortiz	PRD	PRD Deputy(1997-2000 and 2003-2006), PRD cabinet member in Mexico City Gov't (2001-2003).
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 (2003-2006), minor-party candidate for governor of Chiapas who withdrew along with PAN's candidate (2006).
Cantú	PT	PRD nominee (vetoed) for Council President (2003).
Lujambio	PAN	PAN appointee as IFAI Commissioner (2005-2012).
Luken	PAN	Returned to private business.
Molinar	PAN	PAN Under-Secretary of the Interior (2000-2002), PAN Deputy (2003-2006), Director of Social Security Institute (2006-).
Merino	PRI	Returned to academic life.
Peschard	PRI	Returned to academic life.
Rivera	PRI	Returned to academic life.
Woldenberg	PRI	Returned to academic life.

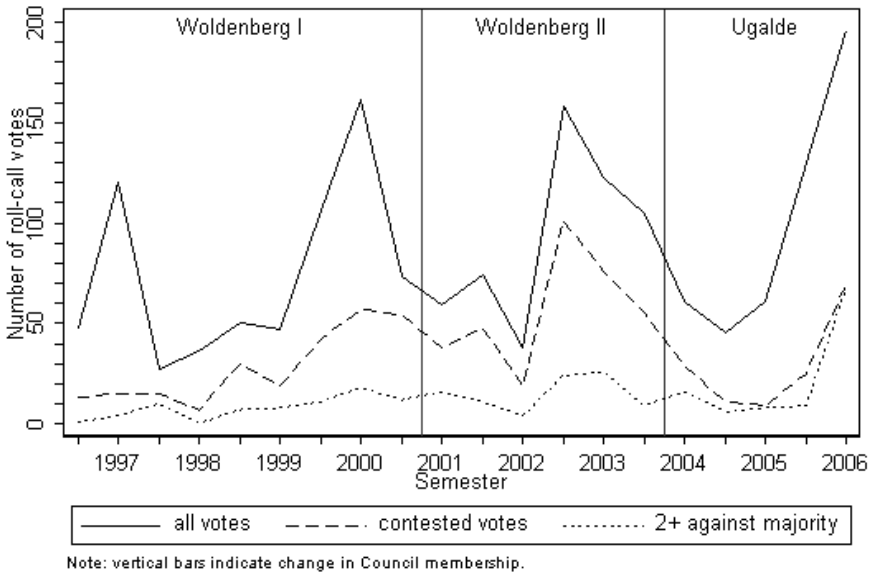


Figure 1: Unanimous, contested, and minimally conflictive Council-General votes, 1996-2006

beginning of a completely renovated Council-General in November 2003. Throughout the article we label these Councils-General by the names of their respective presidents: Woldenberg I (1996-2000), Woldenberg II (2000-2003), and Ugalde (2003-2005). The top line in Figure 1 counts all roll-call votes observed each semester in the period analyzed. The volume of IFE decisions is substantial—1,699 votes are included in the 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 728. Unanimous votes above that middle line comprise 57% of all roll-calls. The lower line in Figure 1 follows from a slightly stricter definition of conflict. It registers all contested votes in which at least two councilors voted against the majority, excluding abstentions. On this still modest definition of conflict, less than 16% of all roll-calls at IFE would qualify as divided votes in the period under scrutiny, although its incidence has grown steadily from 1-in-10 in Woldenberg I, to 1-in-5 in Ugalde.

The high degree of universalism in the Council-General certainly deserves future attention, but one cannot infer that "ideological reasoning" is exceptional in IFE from the

prevalence of consensual votes. After all, if the enacting coalition 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 real limitations both in the capacity to anticipate the future and in the council's agenda power, which allow latent conflict to become observable. *We expect that this conflict, however low its frequency, will nonetheless expose the ideological divergence and partisan predispositions of council members.* When conflict arises, votes by any councilor should dovetail her sponsor's interests and preferences.

We therefore entertain the expectation that same-sponsor nominees will exhibit similar voting behavior on the council. From the perspective of political parties, deviations from this expected behavior can be seen as agency loss. Even allowing for slack due to vote-trading and idiosyncratic behavior, we still expect to find that same-sponsor councilors are ideologically closer to each other than to colleagues sponsored by different parties. This party sponsorship hypothesis will be tested in Section 3 when we examine roll-call behavior in the Council-General. Before doing so, we discuss other institutional design features that play against our chances of detecting partisan behavior at IFE.

2.2 Incentives for non-partisan behavior

The consensual tendencies discussed so far are the product of *ex ante* agreement among congressional parties in the enacting coalition. Further 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 an electoral tribunal of last resort.

2.2.1 Rules of impeachment

Although the foremost objective of the 1996 reform was to grant autonomy to the Council-General, the delegation contract retains one important element to constrain agency behavior:

the threat of impeachment (Eisenstadt 2004). A simple majority vote in the lower chamber is needed to indict, although a two-thirds vote in the Senate is required for actual impeachment. In principle, a coalition of any two of the three largest parties could have sustained a majority vote in the Chamber of Deputies against any councilor at any moment since the PRI lost its congressional majority in 1997. However meager the likelihood of destitution by the Senate, merely initiating the trial in the lower chamber might well suffice to destroy the career of any councilor. No Electoral Councilor has yet undergone 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 security of tenure at IFE.[14]

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. This can be achieved by sometimes failing to toe the party line, and accommodating instead the interests of other parties and their council nominees. Table 3 categorizes roll-call votes in IFE's Council-General by the degree of unity manifested by party contingents of Electoral Councilors. For example, the PAN successfully sponsored two councilors to the Woldenberg I

[14]Though no Councilor has ever been indicted, formal complaints have been filed multiple times and threats of impeachment invariably characterized by charges of overt partisanship are quite common. A search of newspaper *Reforma*'s database since 1996 uncovered a total of 41 impeachment threats articulated by political parties (28 were issued during Woldenberg I, eight during Woldenberg II, and five so far under Ugalde). Four "official complaints" (a prelude to impeachment) were jointly filed in 1999 by the PRI, PT, and PVEM. There are also reports of four bills of impeachment sent to Congress in 2002, but these were mooted and left no trace in the record. Of the twenty individuals occupying councilor positions since 1996, thirteen received threats of impeachment. The PRI targeted all thirteen, including five members it had sponsored to the Council-General. The PT issued five threats, four of them jointly with other parties and one of these against its only nominee on the Council. The PVEM issued threats against ten different councilors, nine of them jointly with the PRI. The PRD and PRI made three generic threats against the Council-General in order to pressure its members to vote in accordance with those parties' interests. In addition, PRD Deputy and former Councilor Zebadúa filed a motion of no confidence against IFE in early 2005, signaling the availability of the PRD for any alliance to renovate the Ugalde Council, in which the PRD has no voting power. Many of these threats were soon retracted or forgotten. A few, however, have represented more serious outbreaks of conflict and even entailed walkouts by aggrieved parties (one by the PRI from November 1998 to March 1999, and another by the PVEM for three weeks in early 2005).

Table 3: Unity and division in multi-member party contingents (contested votes with no absent contingent members)

Sponsor	Dissenting Votes in Contingent	Woldenberg I 1996*-2000		Woldenberg II 2000-2003		Ugalde 2003-2006*	
		Freq.	Pct.	Freq.	Pct.	Freq.	Pct.
PAN	0	206	89%	261	83%	41	28%
	1	26	11%	52	17%	80	55%
	2	—	—	—	—	25	17%
PRI	0	218	90%	279	87%	51	35%
	1	23	9%	34	11%	67	47%
	2	2	1%	6	2%	26	18%
PRD	0	18	8%	90	27%	—	—
	1	212	89%	243	73%	—	—
	2	8	3%	—	—	—	—

*The series of roll-call votes for the Woldenberg Council starts October 1996; that for the Ugalde Council is truncated in June 2006.

Council. In contested votes in which both were present, the pair voted in the same direction in 206 instances, while in 26 votes they parted company. For purposes of the analysis presented in Table 3, we count an abstention as a dissenting vote, which opens the rare possibility that each Councilor will vote differently in a three-member contingent (this happened eight times in the PRD contingent in Woldenberg I, six times in the PRI in Woldenberg II). All multi-member 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 (the current Ugalde Council shows a strong surge in disunity for PAN and PRI blocs). Shirking of this sort is surely a matter of sincere preference revelation by individual councilors in many cases. But whatever the motivation, deviation from the party line can often signify alignment with other partisan contingents on the issue at stake.

2.2.2 Vetoes by a court of last resort

Most discussions of IFE's institutional incentives tend to overlook the impact of a second actor, the *Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación* (TRIFE).[15] Any Council-General decision can be appealed to this electoral court of last resort. All political parties and their candidates, 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 limiting the scope of IFE's decision-making power. In many areas of election law, TRIFE's rulings have become unpredictable, and IFE decisions on the docket face rising odds of being overturned or amended. Moreover, this behavior by the court has spawned litigiousness by those with standing to appeal (Eisenstadt 2004).

TRIFE is a busy court, as evidence in Table 4 suggests, and has received a growing number of appeals since 1996. Of the total of 1,699 roll-call decisions from the council, 218 have been challenged in court, involving 234 separate measures in 423 separate suits (IFE logrolls and multiple plaintiffs increase the number of appeals). Moreover, the tempo of appeals has risen over time, from 1-in-9 decisions challenged during Woldenberg I, to 1-in-5 for the Ugalde Council. At the other end, TRIFE also grants appeals, in part or in whole, at twice its earlier rate, currently overruling IFE in one out of twelve roll-call votes.

Clearly, TRIFE can be considered a "nonstatutory factor" that limits the discretion of IFE's Council-General (Huber and Shipan 2002). In some principal-agent accounts of delegation, such exogenous factors can assuage a principal's fear about potentially adverse agent behavior. In this case, the ability of parties to challenge unfavorable council decisions *ex post* should make them more willing to delegate power *ex ante*. More importantly for our purposes, nonstatutory factors can also be expected to alter the behavior of agents. In IFE's

[15] An exception is former Councilor Merino, who argues that internal consensus-making helped Council resolutions withstand the scrutiny of TRIFE (Merino 1999).

Table 4: Legal appeals and TRIFE rulings on IFE decisions, 1996-2006

Council	TRIFE ruling	N	Pct.
Woldenberg I	No appeal	572	89%
1996-2000	Appeal denied	46	7%
	IFE overruled	28	4%
	All	646	100%
Woldenberg II	No appeal	440	81%
2000-2003	Appeal denied	60	11%
	IFE overruled	40	7%
	All	540	100%
Ugalde	No appeal	171	79%
2003-2005*	Appeal denied	27	13%
	IFE overruled	17	8%
	All	215	100%

* Appeals to Ugalde's Council tracked until April 2005.

case, councilors who care intensely about some resolution have to anticipate all major complaints and make a priori concessions to preempt legal appeals from affected parties. This can be achieved in two ways. First, councilors can craft resolutions that incorporate the tribunal's preferences based on precedent, hoping to avoid negative rulings in case of legal challenge. Second, councilors can reduce the probability that other actors, most prominently parties themselves, will appeal a decision. This route calls for compromise and accommodation in council decisions. An obvious implication is that council members will tend to form oversized, cross-partisan, and even universal voting coalitions. 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 cross-partisan consensus.

2.3 Party sponsor hypothesis

In a nutshell, consensual tendencies resulting from *ex ante* partisan agreement inherited by the Council-General and reinforced by impeachment rules and TRIFE's expanding oversight

are also clearly present. In fact, the high levels of consensus detected in our dataset argue in favor of the null hypothesis, i.e., that cross-partisan or universal voting will be the norm, and thus that inspection of the voting record will lead us to infer ideological positions that are not reducible to pro-sponsor behavior.

In contrast, incentives for partisan behavior by councilors can be detected in nomination procedures, open signaling, and future rewards. To the extent that pro-sponsor incentives might be dominant we expect Councilors' ideal points to be distributed such that same-sponsor councilors occupy adjacent positions. In the extreme, the party sponsorship hypothesis leads us to expect council members to cluster together in distinct same-sponsor blocs, thus defining a veritable partisan cleavage in the council. Even if we find such clustering, we cannot know whether parties are finding good agents ex ante through nomination procedures, or whether they are eliciting pro-sponsor behavior ex post through threats of punishment and/or signaling devices. For our purpose, however, it suffices to show that the ideal points of electoral councilors are consistent with the ideological location of the parties that sponsored them. We corroborate this hypothesis through estimation of ideal points of IFE's Electoral Councilors during the period 1996-2005.

3 Ideology and partisanship in the Council-General

Political methodologists have developed various techniques to circumvent the "micro-committee problem", i.e., the difficulty of estimating parameters of interest when the number of committee members is small, even if the committee has produced a long list of contested votes (Londregan 2000). Among these techniques, Bayesian methods (Clinton, Jackman and Rivers 2004, Jackman 2001, Martin and Quinn 2002) are more appropriate to the study of individual voting behavior in small committees than other tools of ideal point estimation. Since IFE's Council-General is a very small decision-making body—and, to further complicate matters, a highly consensual one—Bayesian Monte Carlo Markov Chain methods provide the best way to generate valid inferences about councilors' ideological profiles, provided that

our models are appropriately specified through suitable priors.

We present an analysis of IFE's two Councils-General in the period 1996-2005, but we break up the Woldenberg Council into two separate entities, as discussed in Section 2. We estimate ideal points for twenty individuals (seven of whom served throughout the Woldenberg years, so the ideal points of these individuals are estimated twice). Our decision to study these councils separately stems from our interest in understanding whether councilors' ideologies stack in ways consistent with the party sponsorship hypothesis, even after some councilors leave and others replace them. The large number of unanimous votes (971 in total) convey no information about councilors' ideologies and have been dropped from the analysis. The remaining 728 usable votes are coded so that, in each case, an Aye vote is coded "1" and a Nay vote "0".[16]

We base our inferences on Clinton, Jackman and Rivers's voting behavior model (Clinton, Jackman and Rivers 2004, Martin and Quinn 2002). The identification of this model requires imposing restrictions either on item parameters or on voters' positions. Traditionally, scholars use a known "extremist" in the committee to anchor the ideological space, thus solving the problem of rotational invariance. We use the alternative method of restricting the discrimination parameters of two items (i.e., two specific roll-calls) per council. In every case, we chose votes with substantive contents that pit political liberals against political conservatives, thereby imposing some structure on the ideological space underlying the individual voting records for each period.

A discussion of this structure is in order. Most issues voted on at IFE fall in two general categories. The first category comprises decisions about the pace of reform to liberalize political competition. This category corresponds to the second dimension of Mexican politics described by Molinar Horcasitas (1991) and Lujambio (2001), among others, and substantiated empirically by Moreno (2003) and Magaloni (2006). Two examples of relevant items comprised by this category are: How easy should it be to replace top- and mid-level IFE bu-

[16] Abstentions and absences are treated as missing values.

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

Date (vote number)	Minority vote	Substance
Woldenberg I		
12/16/1997 (vote 28)	PRI, Barragán (Nay)	Agenda power for President (PRI-sponsored): Should Council-General ratify President's appointee for one administrative office?
11/14/2000 (vote 228)	PRI, Barragán (Aye)	Scope of IFE authority: Should PAN be held responsible and fined for the case of a clergyman who campaigned illegally on its behalf?
Woldenberg II		
4/6/2001 (vote 27)	Cárdenas, Cantú, Luken (Nay)	Money in elections: Should IFE drop investigation of complaint by Alianza Cívica against the PRI for clientelistic practices in Chiapas?
5/30/2003 (vote 206)	PRI (Aye)	Scope of IFE authority: Should PAN be fined for a TV campaign spot that PRI considers libelous?
Ugalde		
8/23/2004 (vote 33)	PAN minus Morales, Latapí (Nay)	Agenda power for President (PRI-sponsored): 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)	Scope of IFE authority: Must PVEM statutes make party leaders accountable to rank-and-file?

reaucrats appointed by the PRI before the electoral reform? Should IFE have full authority to penalize vote-buying? The second category includes decisions on IFE's scope of authority to defend citizen rights against party encroachments (cf Cárdenas 2004): Should IFE intervene to ban negative campaigns ads, seen by many in Mexico as contrary to citizen interest? Or to defend the rights of rank-and-file party members against party leaders? Interviews with former Councilors Lujambio and Molinar corroborated that our choice of anchors, listed in Table 5, corresponds to their perception of the principal themes discussed during their tenure at IFE and afterwards.[17] According to our interviewees, issues in the first category were dominant in the first years, issues in the second in the latter years, especially in the Ugalde Council. Yet, party positions on these categories should overlap substantially, with the PRD and PRI standing on opposite ends of the spectrum, and the PAN somewhere in between, at times voting with the PRD, at others obtaining key concessions from the PRI in exchange for policy support in the Chamber of Deputies.

Table 6 reports councilors' ideal point estimates. The last column in the table displays the number of votes on which we base our estimation of each councilor's ideology. Note that point estimates of ideal positions (the mean of the posterior distribution of the 9×3 location parameters) determine individual ranks and relative ideological distances within each council. For example, the nine Electoral Councilors that served from 1996 to 2000 are aligned from left to right as follows: Cárdenas, Cantú, Zebadúa, Lujambio, Molinar, Merino, Woldenberg, Peschard, and Barragán.

The distribution of ideal points in the Woldenberg I Council is largely supportive of the party sponsorship hypothesis, showing tightly adjacent positions for both the two PAN nominees and the three PRI nominees. The glaring anomaly is Barragán's position at the extreme right of the ideological spectrum, when other members of the PRD contingent (and

[17]We stipulate standard normal prior distributions on councilors' ideal points to solve the problem of scaling invariance. For each of our datasets, we ran 200,000 iterations of the WinBugs sampler, discarding 100,000 as burn-in and thinning the resulting chain so as to keep 10,000 draws from the posterior distribution for inference purposes. We monitored convergence through Geweke's statistics. Samples and convergence results are available from the authors for inspection. We provide a brief technical description of the model in a web appendix.

the sole councilor sponsored by a smaller leftwing party) clearly occupy the left end of the scale. This outlier would appear to be an example of deficient screening by his party sponsor, a singular exception to partisan segmentation of the council.

The partial turnover in council membership after 2000 resulted in some repositioning of member locations. New entrants Luken and Rivera occupied Zebadúa's vacant slot between Councilors Cantú and Lujambio, while Molinar's departure left Councilors Lujambio and Merino as ideological neighbors. The PRD's contingent in this council behaved more cohesively than before, with Barragán leapfrogging toward the left.[18] Council members sponsored by the PRI continue to occupy the closely adjacent positions appropriate to bloc voting, but cohesion in the PAN contingent erodes.[19] We interpret this as a reflection of changes in the issue-space that accompanied the replacement of two councilors. In the first place, the PRI contingent was enlarged by the turnover, which modified coalitional dynamics in the PRI's favor, inducing Lujambio to seek a tight-locked alliance on the right. This change in voting power is reinforced by the unexpected salience of the dominant issues resolved under Woldenberg II, which involved charges of illegal campaign finance operations in 2000 against both the PAN and the PRI.[20]

Our party sponsorship hypothesis continues to fare well after 2003. Again, members of the PRI and PAN contingents are deployed in respectively adjacent positions with only one exception. The new outlier is Councilor Morales near the conservative end of the spectrum,

[18]In a generous reading, this councilor's 180-degree shift from the extreme right of the previous council reduced agency costs to his party sponsor. Barragán's behavior is so erratic, however, that it is nigh impossible to explain it within an ideological or partisan logic. A two-dimensional rendering of ideal points helps make sense of this case, but we prefer to show results of a one-dimensional fit because it is simpler, and because degrees of overlap as predicted by the party sponsorship hypothesis do not vary substantially in a two-dimensional model (cf. Rosas, Estévez and Magar 2005).

[19]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 inefficient screening than of unforeseeable co-sponsorship. In that sense, his intermediate position between left-leaning colleagues and Councilor Lujambio is a plausible indicator of mixed partisan predispositions.

[20]Former Councilor Cárdenas consistently refused to join the majority in the resolutions on both controversies, and defends his minority position in a way that clarifies the distribution of preferences in the council, at least from 1996 to 2003 (Cárdenas 2004). In his view, the fundamental division among council members concerned questions of citizen control versus vested partisan interests in electoral regulation, corresponding in our analysis to liberals versus conservatives. Of course, Cárdenas's persistent position on the liberal end of the spectrum for seven years dovetailed the ideological position of the PRD, his sponsoring party.

Table 6: Posterior distribution of ideal points

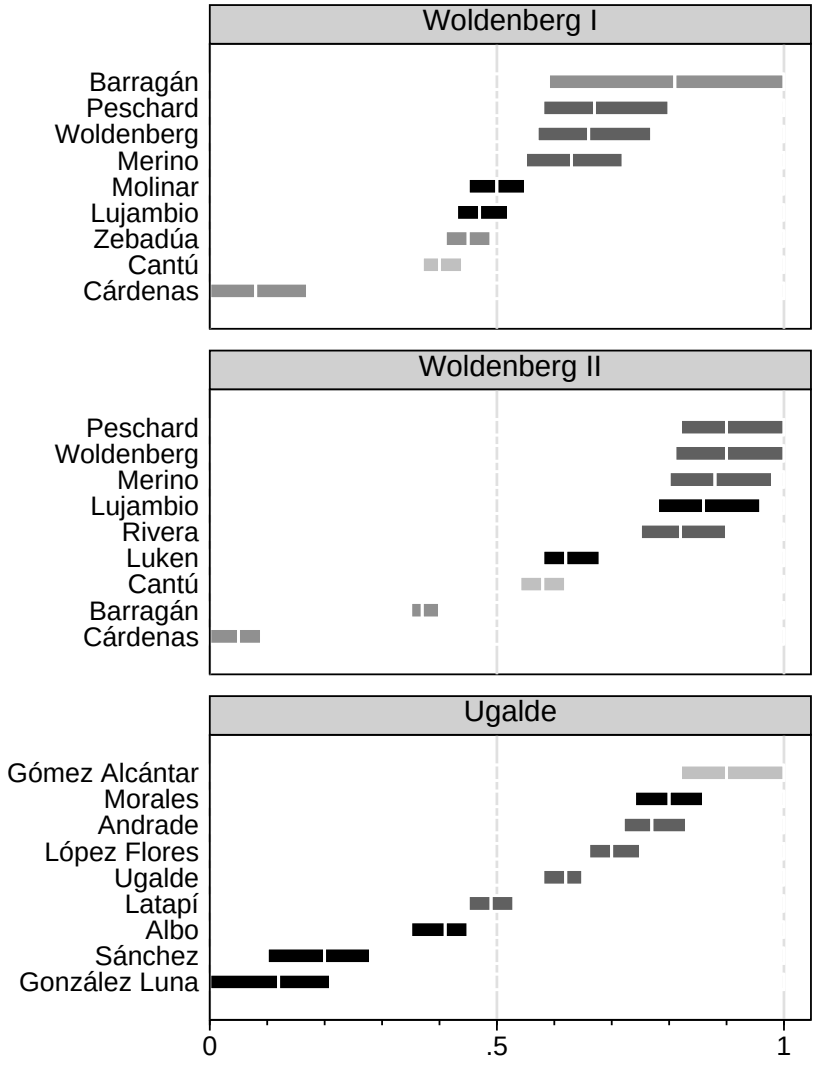
Councilor	Sponsor	Mean	SD	Votes
Woldenberg I				
Cárdenas	PRD	–1.79	0.44	230
Cantú	PT	0.42	0.20	231
Zebadúa	PRD	0.73	0.21	228
Lujambio	PAN	0.90	0.25	233
Molinar	PAN	1.09	0.26	238
Merino	PRI	1.95	0.45	244
Woldenberg	PRI	2.15	0.53	242
Peschard	PRI	2.28	0.60	242
Barragán	PRD	3.25	1.03	204
Woldenberg II				
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
Ugalde				
González Luna	PAN	–2.61	0.47	145
Sánchez	PAN	–2.14	0.39	143
Albo	PAN	–0.97	0.22	146
Latapí	PRI	–0.47	0.17	146
Ugalde	PRI	0.23	0.16	141
López Flores	PRI	0.71	0.19	137
Andrade	PRI	1.09	0.25	146
Morales	PAN	1.24	0.27	143
Gómez Alcántar	PVEM	1.85	0.39	145

quite distant from his fellow PAN nominees. The ideological positions of Councilors Barragán in the Woldenberg I and Morales in the Ugalde Councils are not consistent with the party sponsor hypothesis. However, eighteen Councilors have ideological positions consistent with those of their sponsors, which suggests that parties are mostly able to reduce agency costs, either by screening ex ante or signaling ex post.

Also noteworthy is the finding that the posterior distributions of ideal points (which we also call "ideal point ranges") 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 councilor in the three discrete time periods. These figures standardize the range of each council's ideological spectrum reported in Table 6 in order to facilitate the visual inspection of ideal points and ranges.[21] We hasten to add that neither the ideal points nor the measures of spread are directly comparable across councils. One can appreciate in the figures, for example, that PRI-sponsored council members in each half of the Woldenberg Council are virtually indistinguishable from each other, with overlapped ideal point ranges a sure sign of coalescent voting patterns in contested roll calls. Stacking of ranges in the Ugalde Council dropped significantly for all members, including those sponsored by the PRI. The ideal point ranges of PAN nominees were stacked in the first half of the Woldenberg Council, but not afterwards. The ideal point ranges of PRD nominees were never stacked. In the event, only four of eight multi-member contingents appear to exhibit the clustering of ideal point ranges that would signify fully consistent partisan bloc voting. It is also interesting to note that member stacking dropped after the 2003 Council renewal. If bloc voting is a trait of partisanship, then the latest Council appears *less* partisan than any of Woldenberg's Councils, which contradicts the view widely held during the campaign and post-election disputes that Ugalde's Council was inordinately partisan.

An even stronger statement of the party sponsorship hypothesis would look to the formation of partisan cleavages based on bloc clustering. We can address this expectation more

[21] In the standardized spectrum, the left end of the left-most councilor's 80% highest posterior density takes a value of 0, the right end of the right-most councilor's a value of 1.



Key: Bars are 80% HPD intervals, the white gap marking the median, and are colored by Councilor's sponsor.

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

Table 7: Analysis of variance of councilors' ideal points by party sponsorship

Council	Councilors from PAN, PRD, PRI	Excluding outlier
Woldenberg I	$F_{2,5} = 0.628$	$F_{2,4} = 5.218$
	$Pr(> F) = 0.571$	$Pr(> F) = 0.077$
Woldenberg II	$F_{2,5} = 17.212$	
	$Pr(> F) = 0.006$	
Ugalde	$F_{1,6} = 0.349$	$F_{1,5} = 4.816$
	$Pr(> F) = 0.576$	$Pr(> F) = 0.079$

systematically by performing analyses of variance of the point estimates of councilors' ideologies in each council, using party sponsorship as the predictive categorical variable. To the extent that significant inter-party differences can be found in the mean positions of councilors, we could conclude that parties have succeeded in selecting representative agents whose like-mindedness undergirds partisan cleavages on the Council-General. We report ANOVA results in Table 7, which considers only the ideal points of multimember contingents for each council. In the first column of results, only the Woldenberg II council appears to be significantly divided by a partisan cleavage that cleanly separates its three contingents ($F_{2,5} = 17.2$, $Pr(> F) = 0.006$). In the last column in Table 7, we report ANOVA results which censure the two ideological outliers in Woldenberg I (Barragán) and Ugalde (Morales). Only by excluding the anti-sponsor positions of these two councilors do we obtain results for their respective councils that support the stronger version of the party sponsorship hypothesis. The partisan segmentation of IFE would appear to be a fact of life.

The mapping of subjacent ideological preferences in accordance with partisan sponsorship does not exhaust the voting data from IFE. A fuller analysis of voting behavior on the Council-General must delve into the coalitional dynamics observed over time. To the extent that councilors who are ideologically close can agree on common policy goals, the natural prediction is that they should coalesce in ideologically connected coalitions (Axelrod 1970). In spatial theory, when the status quo lies to the right of the median in a unidimensional

spectrum, the left bloc votes together to bring policy towards the median member's ideal point, with coalition size increasing monotonically with the distance between the status quo and the median. Table 8 presents the aggregate evidence for connected majorities at IFE. Note that in constructing this table we reverse our empirical strategy. We first used roll-calls to infer ideological positions; we now use inferred ideologies to decide which of the observed voting coalitions are ideologically connected.[22] In doing so, we do not ask whether inferred councilor ideologies account for individual voting patterns (by construction, our results are the "best" one-dimensional fit); instead, we ask how well our best model fits group voting patterns according to the criterion of ideological connectedness.

Several points in Table 8 are worth highlighting. First, even in the presence of extremists on either end of the spectrum, as in Woldenberg I, connected centrist coalitions have been exceedingly rare since 1996, which conforms to theoretical expectations for a one-dimensional spatial model of voting. Second, each council shows a different pattern of connected coalition formation. Woldenberg I alternated between oversized "leftist" and "rightist" coalitions.[23] Woldenberg II constructed majorities preponderantly from the right (comprising PRI and PAN contingents), while Ugalde has generated connected coalitions only from the left. Third, the proportion of unconnected majorities expands over time until they dominate contested roll-calls in the latest council. Over ten years, unconnected coalitions are smaller than connected ones by half a vote on average. When non-extremist members drop out of a coalition, *winsize* is reduced but the broad ideological range of the coalition remains constant. Overall, fully 37% of contested votes were decided by unconnected coalitions since 1996.

[22]This strategy is commonly employed in the US congressional literature whenever NOMINATE scores are used to predict vote choice. Burden, Caldeira and Groseclose (2000) show that NOMINATE scores correlate highly with other indicators of ideology, even though they are built from observed roll-calls.

[23]In those years, the scuttlebutt over IFE considered the "Pentagon"—the group of five councilors on the left spanning from Cárdenas to Molinar—to be decisive in policy-making. However, this quintet materialized as a minimal connected coalition in only 9 of 246 contested votes, while eight-member coalitions from the left accounted for 57 votes. Coalitions from the left dominated those from the right until late 1999, but the latter easily prevailed afterwards. We hasten to clarify that we employ "leftist" ("rightist") and "from the left" ("right") as synonymous, and strictly as directional qualifiers. We do not mean to say that coalitions from the left represent the PRD's interests. Indeed, there are no PRD-sponsored councilors in Ugalde's Council, but we still refer to coalitions formed from the left.

Table 8: Connected Winning Coalitions at IFE (mean size and frequency)

Council	Leftwing Winsize (*Pct.*)	Centrist Winsize (*Pct.*)	Rightwing Winsize (*Pct.*)	Unconnected Winsize (*Pct.*)	Contested votes Winsize (N)
Woldenberg I	7.51	6.37	7.28	6.51	7.13
	(*28*)	(*3*)	(*45*)	(*24*)	(246)
Woldenberg II	6.00	6.40	7.23	6.83	7.05
	(*< 1*)	(*2*)	(*56*)	(*42*)	(336)
Ugalde	6.50	—	—	6.58	6.56
	(*30*)	—	—	(*70*)	(54)

The direct implication of these patterns for the observation of partisan behavior by councilors is that coalitions at IFE, whether connected or not, tend to be cross-partisan and are inevitably so as majority size increases. But regardless of coalition size and coalitional dynamics, the underlying preference distribution on the council nonetheless informs contested votes in a consistent and predictable fashion. The distribution of ideal points and their ranges props one inescapable conclusion, that councilors are ideologically diverse but, with two notable exceptions, consistently aligned with their party sponsors.

4 Conclusion

Notwithstanding the difficulties entailed by agenda control and powerful incentives towards consensual decisions, which crowd out more narrowly partisan voting, we have detected important evidence of partisanship on IFE's Councils-General from 1996 to 2006. The analysis of the posterior distribution of ideal points of these councilors provides evidence that the average Electoral Councilor routinely votes in alignment with other colleagues nominated by the same party sponsor. Moreover, there is partial evidence that council members grouped by party sponsor share ideal point ranges that cluster into discernible partisan blocs. To

that same extent, councilors are closer to their sponsors' hearts than might be expected in an ostensibly non-partisan electoral authority.

Our findings jibe with a view that legislative parties select IFE's Councils-General so as to retain control over agent behavior. We conclude that if the bulk of IFE decisions have been above the political fray and free of partisan bickering, as is widely believed, this is not because its members were embodiments of technocratic efficiency and impartiality. Instead, councilors behave as "party watchdogs", able to check each other's moves and assure compromises that protect their sponsors' interests in the electoral arena. Thus, the paradox of Mexico's success story, at least until 2006, is that IFE has been and remains a *dependent agent*. Parties have not given away full control of the levers of electoral regulation and yet benefit from the reputation that elections are clean.

However, for this power-sharing model to work, all major parties should be represented. The absence of the PRD in the enacting coalition that named the most recent Council-General was cause for concern that materialized in the aftermath of the 2006 presidential race. Because parties anticipate that their interests will be guarded by their sponsored council members and can be reasonably sure that agency losses will be minor, they are willing to obey the occasional ruling that hurts their short-term interests. Parties may more adamantly oppose technocratic regulation if they suspect that their preferences will not receive a fair hearing. In short, our analysis lends credence to the broader theoretical claim that election arbiters that embrace partisan strife, rather than those that purport to expunge party politics altogether from electoral regulation, might be better able to guarantee free and fair elections in new democracies.

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