

# Electoral Accountability and Particularistic Legislation: Evidence from an Electoral Reform in Mexico\*

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June 30, 2020

## Abstract

Being able to hold politicians accountable is the hallmark of democracy and central to this is the notion that politicians can run for reelection. Most research on reelection incentives compare politicians who are term-limited with those who are not. These studies concentrate mostly on relatively senior politicians in candidate-centered electoral systems. We leverage a quasi-natural experiment posed by the staggered implementation of the 2014 Mexican Electoral Reform, which lifted an eighty-year-old ban on reelection. We conduct a difference-in-difference analysis of the hypothesis that reelection encourages legislators to focus more on policies with the highest “electoral yield”: namely, particularistic legislation. Applying a correlated topic model to a new collection of transcripts from 6,890 legislative sessions in 20 Mexican states between 2012-2018, we find compelling evidence that it does, that the effect is synchronized with the electoral cycle, and that it is larger when the legislators’ political horizons are longer.

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\*We benefited tremendously from excellent comments by Amy Catalinac, Pablo Querubin, Arthur Spirling, Alistair Smith, Peter Rosendorff, Hye Young You, Julia Payson, Dimitri Landa, David Stasavage, Antonella Bandiera, William Godel, Jose Maria Rodriguez-Valadez, Tine Paulsen, Taylor Mattia, Arturas Rozenas, Jessica Preece, Nikolas Schoell, Scott Abramson, and Horacio Larreguy. We also thank the anonymous reviewers for useful feedback and participants at APSA 2019, the Comparative seminar at New York University, the Quantitative Text Analysis Workshop in Dublin and PolMeth XXXVI. Carlos Villaseñor provided superb research assistance.

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## INTRODUCTION

Comparative politics scholars have found that candidate-centered electoral procedures contribute to more legislative particularism (Cox and McCubbins 1993; Carey and Shugart 1995; Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita 2006), which we define as benefits given to specific constituencies in a discretionary manner. At the same time, legislators seem to have a lower need for particularism in party-centered electoral systems. Candidate-centered electoral systems lead to more legislative particularism because promising and delivering targeted benefits is fundamental for incumbents cultivating their bases in order to get reelected. Therefore, being able to run for reelection is critical in shaping legislative incentives to pursue particularism. When legislators do not have this option, usually because they have reached the end of their term or they are retiring members of Congress, their enthusiasm for particularism recedes unless they are seeking another elective office (Carey, Niemi and Powell 1998; Herron and Shotts 2006; Bagashka and Clark 2016).

In this article, we study the case of Mexico, where elections center around parties, whose dominance over candidate selection and campaign resources is undisputed, and we examine how reelection incentives affect legislative particularism when an 80-year old constitutional ban on reelection is lifted. As we explain in more detail below, the 2014 Electoral Reform, which lifted the ban on consecutive reelection, was not designed to weaken party control and shift towards a more candidate-centered system. Both before and after the ban was lifted, candidates were subject to similar degree of party control over their careers: candidates needed to submit to their party for nomination (and renomination) and depended on their party for campaign funds. Hence, the reform, agreed by Mexico's three main parties at the time via the Mexican Pact Accord, allows us to estimate the effect of introducing consecutive reelection as the essential feature changing legislative incentives to provide particularism.

With party-centered elections, because parties do the heavy lifting in getting legislators elected, the marginal benefit that they get from legislative particularism is

considered substantially smaller (Primo and Snyder Jr. 2010).<sup>1</sup> However, introducing consecutive reelection presents legislators to a new principal: the voters. Ultimately, even when parties decide who runs, voters determine who stays in office. We find that even in the context of a highly centralized party system, being able to seek reelection increases the amount of attention devoted to particularistic legislation. Our findings suggest that legislators use particularized benefits to cultivate their personal bases, even when they seem to have little incentive to do so.

The study of reelection incentives has mostly compared office holders facing binding term-limits to those who do not (Lott 1990; Tien 2001; Snyder and Ting 2003; Dal Bó and Rossi 2011). Since elections select for more competent types (Dal Bó et al. 2017; Samuelson 1984), incumbents that have won more elections have on average a higher-quality type than those who have not. Thus, this approach confounds the effect of reelection with that of political types. Because type affects performance (Hirano and Snyder 2014; Besley and Reynal-Querol 2011), electoral selection is problematic for scholars seeking to disentangle the effect of reelection incentives using term-limits.

Important steps have been made by scholars to address this concern. For example, Ferraz and Finan (2011) study the effect of reelection on corruption practices of Brazilian mayors. To address the problem of electoral selection, the authors compare second-term mayors with a subset of first-term mayors who were then able to get re-elected. They find that mayors with reelection incentives are significantly less corrupt. To avoid the confounding effect of different political types, Alt, Bueno de Mesquita and Rose (2011) hold the tenure in office constant to estimate the effect of reelection on the performance of American governors. By comparing incumbents in the same term, they find that economic growth is higher while taxes, spending, and borrowing costs are lower under reelection-eligible governors. Most recently, Hall and Fouirnaies (2018) hold individual types fixed by using a within-person, within-state difference-in-

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<sup>1</sup>Parties also use legislative particularism as an electoral strategy to stay in office. However, for parties, providing public goods to gain support across different districts and constituencies may be more electorally profitable (Cox 1997).

differences design to examine the change in productivity of US representatives serving in state legislatures. They find that legislators who can no longer seek reelection are less productive in terms of sponsored bills, committee service and attendance to floor votes.

We build upon this research by leveraging the 2014 Mexican Electoral Reform, which provides an unique opportunity to study reelection incentives in a party-centered electoral system, overcoming the problem of electoral selection. To test our hypothesis, that introducing reelection incentives encourages legislators to focus more on particularistic legislation, we employ a difference-in-differences estimator that leverages the staggered implementation of this one-of-a-kind reform and cross-state variation in the number of consecutive terms that legislators can serve. To estimate the proportion of legislative discussion devoted to particularistic legislation, we apply a Correlated Topic Model to a new collection of transcripts of 6,890 legislative sessions in 20 Mexican states from 2012 to 2018. We find that reelection incentives increase the attention allocated to particularistic legislation, that the effect is larger when the legislators' political horizons are longer, and we document the emergence of an electoral cycle, in which legislators focus on legislation that enhances their personal vote closer to the next election.

Our findings contribute to multiple literatures in political science. For comparative politics, we lend strong support to previous research focusing on candidate-centered systems that documents a positive relationship among reelection incentives and legislative particularism. We show that, even in the context of a highly centralized party system, introducing consecutive reelection increases the amount of attention that legislators devote to particularistic legislation. Our results suggest that legislators use particularized benefits to cultivate their personal bases, even when parties control candidate selection and campaign resources. We provide evidence that the increased focus on legislation with higher electoral yield can be attributed to the new electoral rules and not merely to changes in legislator's preferences.

At least ten countries in Latin America since the early 2000s have attempted to

reform or have succeeded in reforming their constitutions to either extend, limit, remove or impose term-limits. While arguments favoring consecutive reelection maintain that it foments accountability and responsiveness, arguments in favor of term-limits claim that unlimited reelection engenders corruption and the perpetuation of political elites. We contribute to this debate showing that the type of electoral incentives is crucial to understanding legislative behavior. Our results show that political horizons matter and the expected length of the term in office impacts how legislators respond to reelection incentives. Legislators with Short-Term Reelection Incentives (being able to contest up to two consecutive terms in office) appear to be less responsive to reelection incentives than Legislators with Long-Term Reelection Incentives (up to four consecutive terms in office).

For the methodological literature, this study contributes to the research that uses legislative discussions to evaluate parliamentary and legislative behavior (Proksch and Slapin 2012, 2014; Lauderdale and Herzog 2016). In particular, this article advances the use of causal inference to examine substantive quantities of interest generated with text analysis. In addition, we offer insight on how to overcome common challenges that crop up when applying text analysis to documents in Spanish language.

Finally, we offer two main takeaways for Mexican politics scholars. One, we address a heated debate in Mexico regarding the party-switching ban, the clause that prevents legislators from switching parties when running for reelection.<sup>2</sup> While parties claimed that the ban aimed to halt party-switching, a widespread phenomenon among Mexican politicians (Kerevel 2017, 2014), Mexican civil society organizations argued that it would hinder the reform from having the desired effect in making legislators more responsive to voters. Our results show that, despite the inclusion of the party-switching ban, designed to enhance the party-centric system, legislators with reelection incentives increase their focus on legislation that caters to their new principal, revealing a surging link between legislators and their bases. Two, since federal legislators will be able to

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<sup>2</sup>This restriction does not apply to legislators who renounced or lost their party membership before half of their term.

run for reelection in 2021, characterizing the changes that occurred at the state level will stand us in good stead to anticipate what might happen at the national level when the new rules go into effect.

## THEORETICAL EXPECTATIONS

### REELECTION AND PARTICULARISTIC LEGISLATION

The classic theory of legislative particularism suggests that reelection-seeking legislators cater to their constituents with particularized benefits that they can credit-claim (Mayhew 1974) because they enhance the legislator's personal vote (Hicken and Simmons 2008; Fiorina 1977), which corresponds to the proportion of a candidate's vote that we can attribute to their individual popularity, personal record, reputation and characteristics (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina 1987). Particularized benefits are usually given to specific constituencies in a discretionary and non-programmatic fashion. Construction projects, such as dams and bridges, are the typical example of particularistic projects. Legislation that delivers group benefits also falls in this category, since legislators can easily claim credit for legislation that benefits organized voters, who can use their resources to reward legislators that support their agenda. An example of group benefits is legislation that favors labor unions. When particularistic legislation is considered to increase electoral returns, legislators are induced to focus on policies that can be directly credit-claimed given their restrictions on time and resources. The central assumption is that officeholders need to cultivate and maintain their personal base to get reelected.

Reelection makes office-seeking legislators cultivate their personal reputation even in party-centered electoral systems because party fortunes are uncertain. Even when legislators depend on their party for campaign funds and need to submit to their party for renomination, introducing a new principal allows legislators to diversify their risk. Therefore, it makes sense for legislators to pursue votes based on their individual popularity to insure themselves from their party's potential reputation misfortunes.

Leveraging the staggered implementation of the 2014 Mexican Electoral Reform, we test the effect that introducing reelection incentives has on the attention that legislators give to particularistic legislation.

**H1:** The introduction of reelection incentives increases the proportion of speech that legislators allocate to particularistic legislation.

#### LEGISLATIVE PARTICULARISM AND THE ELECTORAL CYCLE

Research on political-business cycles suggests that reelection-motivated incumbents behave differently in election years and that shifts in policies are connected to the cyclical nature of elections (Rogoff 1990). Political cycles endogenous to the electoral calendar emerge when there is voter bias towards impending elections and retrospective voting. Scholars studying legislative behavior and elections usually assume that voters have short-term memories, that their attention to the incumbent's behavior is greatest closer to the election and lowest at the beginning of the term (Shepsle et al. 2009; Muthoo and Shepsle 2010). Election proximity changes legislative behavior because of this voter bias. Moreover, retrospective voting, when voters evaluate their representative's behavior in office and incorporate their past actions into their voting decisions, induces incumbents to behave according to the preferences of their constituents in anticipation of otherwise being punished at the polls. Because voters give more weight to their perceptions of incumbents' actions as an election approaches, incumbents have incentives to design and pursue policies strategically to their electoral advantage.

Previous research has explored how election proximity impacts ideology and fiscal opportunism. Senators in the US become more ideologically moderate as an election approaches (Elling 1982; Bernhard and Sala 2006), and incumbents increase visible expenditures in electoral years (Klein and Sakurai 2015). Contributing to this research, we examine the effect that reelection incentives have on legislative particularism, the most electorally attractive behavior, as elections approach. We hypothesize that if the introduction of reelection incentives increase the proportion of speech that legislators

allocate to particularistic legislation, then the effect will tend to be higher leading up to elections.

**H2:** The effect that reelection incentives has on the proportion of speech legislators allocate to particularistic legislation is synchronized with the electoral cycle and increases as the next election approaches.

#### POLITICAL HORIZONS AND LEGISLATIVE PARTICULARISM

Term lengths create incentives that affect individual legislative behavior and policy outcomes by providing legislators with a time horizon to achieve their goals ([Titiunik 2015](#); [Barro 1973](#)). Previous research examining term lengths has shown that longer terms increase legislative effort. For example, [Dal Bó and Rossi \(2011\)](#) exploit a natural experiment, where the duration of terms was randomly assigned among senators in Argentina, and show that legislative effort is higher when terms are longer. Similarly, [Titiunik \(2015\)](#) analyzes the effect of term length in the Texas, Arkansas and Illinois Senates, where after redistricting senators were randomly assigned into two-year or four-year terms. She finds less bills introduced and more abstentions when terms were shorter.

A similar argument would apply to expected term lengths, which correspond to the maximum number of terms that legislators can expect to be in office if they win reelection every time they run. If holding office generates the legislator positive utility, then more and longer terms generate a higher expected utility of being in office than shorter and fewer terms. Thus, expected term length provides legislators with the time horizon of their political careers as representatives, affecting how much they value running for reelection. Legislators with longer political horizons may be more responsive to reelection incentives than legislators with shorter ones. We seek to address this question by analyzing the variance on expected term lengths that the 2014 Mexican Electoral Reform created. Because longer horizons are more valuable than shorter ones, we expect legislator's efforts to get reelected to be higher in the former

case. Thus, we hypothesize more legislative particularism when legislators have longer political horizons.

**H3:** The effect of reelection incentives is larger when the political horizons of legislators in office are longer. The effect on the proportion of speech allocated to particularistic legislation is larger for legislators with Long-Term Reelection Incentives compared to those with Short-Term Reelection Incentives.

#### THE 2014 ELECTORAL REFORM

In December 2013, the Mexican Federal Congress lifted an 80-year old constitutional ban on reelection for federal and state legislators and municipal mayors.<sup>3</sup> Reelection was initially banned to ensure the subordination of all office-holders to the ruling hegemonic party, the PRI (former PNR) ([Nacif 1997](#)) after the Mexican Revolution. The subsequent Electoral Reform, approved in February 2014, was part of the Mexican Pact Accord, a set of structural reforms negotiated by the three main political parties in Mexico at the time (PRI, PAN and PRD) ([Torres-Ruiz 2014](#)). The pact sought to accomplish reforms that had been obstructed by political gridlock. Arguments in Congress in favor of introducing consecutive reelection claimed that it would increase legislative efficiency, improve accountability and that it would professionalize political careers. In particular, legislators argued that expanding the political horizons of politicians would facilitate long-term projects and increase accountability, which would ultimately strengthen democracy. The reform imposed some federal restrictions, but states had discretion to determine *how* and *when* to introduce consecutive reelection.

A common misconception is to characterize the reelection ban as a mere legacy of the Mexican Revolution. While the revolutionary slogan was “Effective suffrage, No-reelection”, it was only intended against the unlimited reelection of the President. Initially, local parties (the PNR was comprised by 148 local parties), legislators and senators were in favor of reelection ([Nacif 1997](#)). The Constitutional ban at the federal

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<sup>3</sup>The ban remains in place for Governors and the President.

level was introduced by PNR leaders<sup>4</sup> to centralize and consolidate the power of the ruling party. Banning reelection was part of PNR's strategy to weaken "local political bosses" and consolidate itself as the main driver of political careers in the three levels of government (Weldon 2003).

The Electoral Reform imposed a federal mandate on states to introduce consecutive reelection for local legislators (Congreso de la Unión 2014) and gave them restrictions on how the laws modifying their local electoral codes regarding reelection needed to be enacted. First, the constitutional amendment determined that once the ban on reelection was lifted, consecutive reelection for local legislators could be attainable for up to four terms with a maximum of twelve years. This gave state legislatures discretion to define the number of terms within the twelve years restriction. Short-Term Incentives (being able to contest up to two consecutive terms in office) imply that legislators are only able to face their constituents in the polls one time before concluding their tenure in the legislature. Meanwhile, Long-Term Reelection Incentives (up to four consecutive terms in office) involve three elections where voters can reward or punish their legislators. For example, legislators in Tabasco elected in 2015 can run for reelection on three occasions: 2018, 2021 and 2024.

Second, the constitutional amendment dictated that the possibility of reelection would not apply to those state legislators in office when the reform was enacted in 2014. While the reform stipulated that federal legislators elected in 2018 would be eligible for reelection, it did not determine when reelection was to be implemented for local legislators. Thus, some states determined that legislators elected in 2015/16 could already run for reelection in 2018 while in other states, only those elected in 2018 will be able to run for reelection in 2021. Table 1 shows the distribution of states by the maximum number of terms local legislators facing elections in 2018 can contest and the distribution of states by the first year local legislators can run for reelection.

Third, legislators interested in running for reelection can only do so with the same party (or any party in the electoral coalition) that got the legislator elected in the

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<sup>4</sup>The ban was introduced as an amendment to the Constitution in 1933.

first place. The law establishes that this restriction does not apply to legislators who renounced or lost their party membership before half of their term.<sup>5</sup> This party-switching ban, introduced in Commission negotiations in the Senate, was designed to ensure party control over renomination. It has been referred to by Mexican Civil Society Organizations as the “parties’ lock” ([Méjico Evalúa 2013](#)) since they argued it would undermine the link between constituents and local legislators, who need to be responsive to partisan interests if they aspire to run for reelection.

**Table 1: Variation in reelection incentives. Maximum number of terms local legislators facing elections in 2018 can run for office.**

States	Number of States	Number of Terms
Ciudad de Mexico, Puebla	2	No reelection
Aguascalientes, Chihuahua, Colima, Hidalgo, Oaxaca and Zacatecas	6	2
Morelos	1	3
Baja California Sur, Campeche, Chiapas, Durango, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Jalisco, Estado de Mexico, Michoacan, Nuevo Leon, Queretaro, San Luis Potosi, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tabasco, Tlaxcala, Veracruz and Yucatan	18	4
Total	27	

Sources: Data is drawn from the state’s constitutions and electoral codes.

The variance in the number of terms seems to come from differences in negotiations in the state legislatures. The less contentious model, implemented by most states, was to follow the federal example: introduce the possibility of reelection for up to four terms, starting with legislators elected in the next immediate term. States which

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<sup>5</sup>Since this is determined in the federal law, it applies to all states.

selected only one additional term had PRI governors<sup>6</sup> who controlled on average 62.5% of the local legislatures.<sup>7</sup> The PRI had historically been against lifting the reelection ban.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, states who followed the federal example had governors from all parties who on average controlled only 55.8% of their legislatures.

On balance, the available evidence suggests that the variation in timing is in part a function of the staggered calendar of gubernatorial elections. Since gubernatorial elections are staggered, when the reform was discussed in 2014 at the state legislatures, some governors were at the beginning of their term, while others were at the end. Because sitting governors have considerable influence in their party's selection of candidates (Rosas and Langston 2011), for governors whose term ended in 2015/16, introducing reelection in 2018 was the longest that they could exert political influence after leaving office through people of *their* choosing, who owed them their political careers. Similarly, governors who were finishing their terms in 2018 preferred delaying reelection until 2021, since it enable them to place candidates of *their* choosing at the end of their term. This accords with interviewed politicians that were involved in the negotiations.<sup>9</sup> Thus, states with gubernatorial elections in 2018 were more likely to delay the introduction of reelection to 2021, while all states that held gubernatorial elections in 2015/16 introduced reelection in 2018.

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<sup>6</sup>With the caveat that Oaxaca's governor was ex-PRI and not affiliated with the PRI when elected.

<sup>7</sup>Proportion of seats controlled by the governor's party/coalition.

<sup>8</sup>The PRI blocked lifting the reelection ban originally proposed in President Felipe Calderon's 2012 Political Reform.

<sup>9</sup>According to a former local deputy, governors influence the selection of candidates in important districts and get to pick candidates for the top positions in their party's PR (proportional representation) list. Interview with a former local deputy (2012-2015). November 15, 2019. Mexico City.

## LEGISLATIVE BEHAVIOR AND THE PARTY-CENTERED SYSTEM

Local legislators in Mexico, much like federal legislators, provide policy direction through legislation and oversee the implementation of regulatory acts of the executive (Casar 2002). The Mexican Constitution also grants state legislatures authority to introduce legislation in the federal congress. Governors can designate and depose cabinet members without congressional approval. However, state legislatures need to approve the appointment of magistrates to state courts, the state's electoral institute board members, the state's human rights commissioner, and the state's transparency institute board members. Moreover, local legislators have exclusive control over the negotiation and approval of the state's budget. State legislatures are also endowed with the power to supervise and audit other government agencies through specialized committees drawn from its body and can convoke special commissions to investigate the activities of independent and decentralized organisms. So far, research on legislative behavior in Mexico has mostly focused on the federal congress, with less attention being paid to local legislators. Relevant studies that focus on state legislatures have mainly addressed the dynamics of divided governments (Lujambio 2002), the influence of governors in legislative productivity (Pérez Vega 2009; López Lara 2016) and the ideological positioning of legislators, party identity and party discipline (López Lara 2012).<sup>10</sup>

Previous research on legislative particularism in Mexico suggests that before the reform legislators had few incentives to cater to their constituents because of their lacking electoral connection (Weldon 2002; Casar 2002; Freidenberg 2013). However, no conclusive evidence has been presented on the matter. Most relevant are the studies of Ugues, Vidal and Bowler (2012) and Kerevel (2015), who leveraged Mexico's MMM (mixed-member majoritarian) system to compare the legislative behavior of federal legislators elected by PR (proportional representation) and those elected in SSDs (single-seat districts). Ugues, Vidal and Bowler (2012) hypothesize that SSD

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<sup>10</sup>For a more in-depth review, see Reveles Vázquez (2011); Patrón Sánchez (2014).

legislators would be more likely to focus on committees that influence the allocation of funds that could benefit their districts. The authors find no significant difference in the types of committees term-limited legislators serve irrespective of how they were elected. In contrast, Kerevel (2015) finds that SSD deputies who do not seek a future elected position sponsor more budget amendments than PR deputies. Yet, the author finds no significant difference among SSD deputies who seek a future elected office and those who do not, which he suggests is because even when term-limited, legislators face pressures to represent local interests.<sup>11</sup>

Research on the candidate-selection process in Mexico has consistently pointed out that parties hold centralized control over candidate selection rules (Wuhs 2006; Langston 2006; Kerevel 2013). Before the reelection ban was lifted, all nominations were party-based (Bruhn and Wuhs 2016). Because the constitution also barred independent candidacies,<sup>12</sup> candidates had to run with one of the political parties officially registered at the state's electoral institute. Even though independent candidacies are now permitted, laws still favor parties over independent candidates, who generally have a higher bar to register as such than new political parties and get less public funding. Legislators in Mexico are career-oriented politicians (Kerevel 2015). About 72% of term-limited legislators in our data got a party-appointed job, either as a public or party official (42.7%) or a candidacy for another elective office (29.3%), which were mostly for municipal president or federal legislator.

Even with the introduction of reelection, parties still hold control over renomination. Interviews with local deputies and party leaders suggest that most legislators that could run for reelection wanted to do so,<sup>13</sup> but parties were very selective in their renomination strategies, especially in highly competitive districts.<sup>14</sup> This is consistent

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<sup>11</sup>If they do, the effect of introducing consecutive reelection would be smaller.

<sup>12</sup>The 2012 Political Reform re-introduced independent candidacies, which were banned since 1946.

<sup>13</sup>Interview with a current local deputy (2018-2021). November 15, 2019. Mexico City.

<sup>14</sup>This is in line with previous behavior of Mexican parties, who have shown to be highly strategic

with the incentives that the electoral system generates. In single-ballot MMM, where a single vote is used to determine both the SSD winner and the allocation of seats in PR, parties benefit from popular candidates. Parties can win PR votes only by running SSD candidates ([Catalinac and Motolinia 2019](#)). The more votes the candidate gets in the SSD race, the more votes her party gains in PR. Thus, popular legislators have higher chances of being re-selected to run.

Hence, office-seeking local legislators have incentives to increase their popularity with their constituents. Media reports indicate that local legislators aiming to cultivate their personal vote engaged in constituency service ([Cambio Digital 2020; Campos 2020](#)) and credit-claiming particularized benefits ([Diario Cambio 2020; Linea de Contraste 2020; Llave-Anzures 2020](#)) in their districts.<sup>15</sup> Only 25% of SSD legislators in our data that could run for reelection in 2018 were able to pursue it. A difference in means test shows that legislators who ran for reelection were elected with significantly higher vote shares than those who were not renominated by their parties, which confirms that popular legislators got re-selected to run again.<sup>16</sup> The pattern is particularly relevant in the context of the 2018 election when MORENA represented a substantial threat of loss for the three traditional main parties (PRI, PAN and PRD).

Mexican parties also control campaign resources. Political parties finance electoral campaigns through public funding allocated by the National Electoral Institute (INE)<sup>17</sup> and its state counterparts. Private funding is limited and subject to strict regulations. Public funding was set to thwart undue influence from wealthy individu-

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in their candidate selection procedures in competitive districts ([Serra 2011; Freidenberg 2013; Bruhn and Wuhs 2016](#)).

<sup>15</sup>For example, [Diario 90 Grados \(2020\)](#) reports that “in order to meet the most felt demands of the population in her district, local deputy Wilma Zavala held various meetings and delivered school supplies, food, wheelchairs, and housing equipment, among others. With the implementation of her footwear program, the legislator has benefited more than 3 thousand families.”

<sup>16</sup>We present results for this test in the online Appendix.

<sup>17</sup>Multi-partisan federal and state commissions who coordinate elections in Mexico.

als and to guarantee a minimum level of fairness among parties in the electoral race. Public funding is allocated to parties proportionally based on their previous electoral returns, which favors Mexico's biggest parties. When parties are extremely centralized in terms of resources, candidate selection, and office appointments, political competition is oriented towards parties rather than candidates (Larreguy, Marshall and Snyder 2017; Chong et al. 2015; Langston 2003). By keeping these structures intact, the 2014 Electoral Reform was designed to introduce consecutive reelection while preserving the party-centered system.

## DATA

We apply quantitative text analysis to a new collection of transcripts from 6,890 legislative sessions between 2012 and 2018 on 20 Mexican states out of the 27 states that held elections in 2018 when some state legislators were able to run for reelection for the first time.<sup>18</sup> We include the near universe of states where data was available in an electronic format, either through the state's online repositories or by request through the transparency portal.<sup>19</sup> Since each state's legislature independently manages the transcripts, there is little consistency on their format and how they are stored online.

We collected all the available transcripts in each state. We scraped the transcripts from

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<sup>18</sup>States in Mexico are required by law to make their legislative discussions publicly available ([Congreso de la Unión 2015](#)).

<sup>19</sup>We could not find any data in the online repositories of Baja California Sur, Michoacan, Morelos, San Luis Potosi, and Yucatan by September 2018 when data collection was concluded. In these states data was only physically available in the archives of the legislature in the state's capital or requests were never responded. Sonora responded to our data request, but most of the provided links did not work. Our follow up request was not answered by September 2018. Nuevo Leon's data is available, but documents from four legislatures are stored together. We were not able to order them by date and classify them by legislature.

each website either using the site grabber Internet Download Manager or implementing an R script written for this purpose that uses the package *Rvest*.

Accessibility, format and the quality of the transcripts varies widely across states. We show in the online Appendix examples of differences in format and quality between the transcripts, as well as the distribution of documents across states. Discussions are organized in legislative sessions; each document in our data corresponds to the transcript of one session. Our unit of observation corresponds to the document, the full discussion during one legislative session. Thus, we are not able to identify each legislator's individual interventions. We digitized the original scanned transcripts using an Optical Character Recognition reader. Because some documents are formatted in two columns or include plenty of watermarks, headers and footers, we had to thoroughly clean the texts before the analysis.

When in office, keeping the levels of effort constant, legislators face a choice regarding their legislative agendas: to push for particularistic legislation or to address more general public policy needs. Research on this matter has mostly used data on earmarks (Crespin and Finocchiaro 2013) and on the content of introduced bills (Bagashka and Clark 2016; Gamm and Kousser 2010). Using this type of data in Mexico runs into two main problems. First, earmarks are not universally employed. Second, sub-national data in Mexico on bills introduced in state legislatures is only available for a handful of states. Even when accessible, it is usually in inconvenient formats that make the task of linking bills to legislators very laborious.<sup>20</sup> Thus, we get around these data challenges by analyzing the transcripts of legislative discussions.

We exploit the different types of reelection incentives that legislators elected in 2015/16 had, as determined by the 2014 Electoral Reform. We consider that legislators had Short-Term Reelection Incentives when they were able to run for one additional term in the 2018 election. Legislators had Short-Term Reelection Incentives

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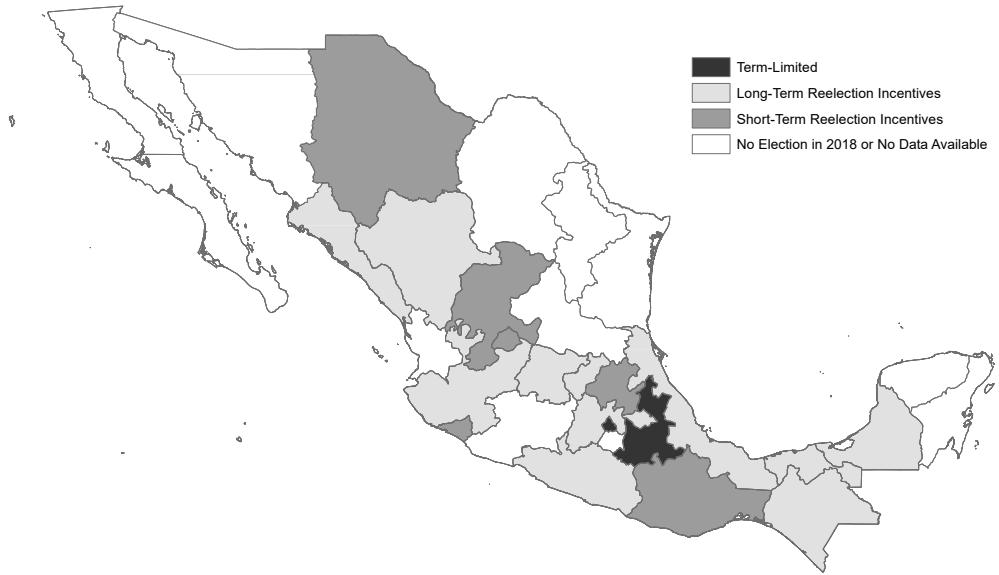
<sup>20</sup>Campeche is one of the few states where data on initiated bills is available but with an inconvenient format. See <http://www.congresocam.gob.mx/index.php/trabajo-parlamentario?id=241>.

in Aguascalientes, Chihuahua, Colima, Hidalgo, Oaxaca and Zacatecas. We regard as Long-Term Reelection Incentives when legislators elected in 2015/16 would be able to run for reelection in up to three occasions, starting in the 2018 election. Legislators had Long-Term Reelection Incentives in Campeche, Chiapas, Durango, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Jalisco, Estado de Mexico, Queretaro, Sinaloa, Tabasco, Tlaxcala and Veracruz. In Puebla and Mexico City, where reelection was deferred to start in 2021, legislators elected in 2015/16 were term-limited and had no reelection incentives in the 2018 election. The geographical distribution of the type of reelection incentives is displayed in Figure 1.

To test our hypotheses, we first estimate the proportion of each legislative session devoted to discussing particularistic legislation using a Correlated Topic Model. Second, we use this proportion as our dependent variable and apply different difference-in-differences estimators that leverage the staggered implementation of the 2014 Mexican Electoral Reform and cross-state variation in the number of consecutive terms that legislators can serve. The key identifying assumption of our research design is that the trends of the proportion of discussion allocated to particularistic legislation in the term-limited group are a good counterfactual for the trends in the treatment group. Since the difference-in-difference focuses on change, the treatment and control groups can differ in levels of the outcome as long as their trends are the same. Our parallel trends analysis, presented in the results section, show that this is the case.

#### METHODOLOGY: CORRELATED TOPIC MODEL (CTM)

The quantity of interest is the proportion of each legislative session devoted to discussing particularistic legislation. We obtain it using a Correlated Topic Model (Blei and Lafferty 2007). We chose a CTM over supervised learning-based approaches because CTM does not require the researcher to have prior knowledge of which topics are to be observed in the collection of documents. For example, we know that construction projects that benefit a certain constituency classify as particularistic legislation; however, we do not know the universe of what these projects could be. Since we are



**Figure 1: States by type of reelection incentives.**

studying legislation, we would have to know in advance how to recognize the universe of legislation that classifies as particularistic. Thus, we use CTM to discover the distribution of topics discussed in the documents. The model estimates for each document and each word the probability that each topic is composing them. CTM is more appropriate than other unsupervised topic models because it allows for topic correlation via the logistic normal distribution. Thus, CTM is able to model that a session discussing *teachers* is more likely to also discuss *education* than *energy*.

The model uses the frequencies with which words appear in each document to make inferences about the topics in the collection of documents that determined the use of those words. We applied a dictionary-based lemmatizer to group words referring to the same basic concept. This reduces the conjugated verbs into their infinitive form and the nouns into their singular masculine form. Following Denny and Spirling (2018); Catalinac (2016b); Grimmer (2013) we removed punctuation, stop words, numbers, names, municipality names, less common words (words that do not occur in at least

1% of the sessions) and most common words (words that occur in over 90% of the sessions). Most work that uses text analysis to analyze legislative and parliamentary discussions has focused on English language (Proksch and Slapin 2012, 2014; Herzog and Benoit 2015; Lauderdale and Herzog 2016).<sup>21</sup> We expand on this literature by focusing on legislative discussions in Spanish.

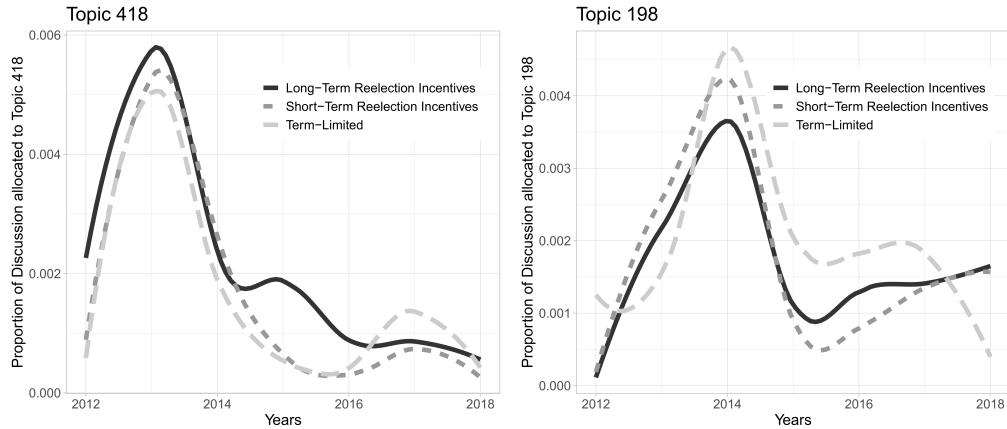
To fit the model, CTM requires selecting the number of topics. Previous research has usually selected the number of topics based on whether the topics produced were substantively meaningful (Catalinac 2016b; Grimmer 2010; Quinn et al. 2010). Conceptually, when analyzing legislation, fitting fewer topics produces broader themes (e.g. education). Whereas, the more topics we fit, the narrower the themes that the model produces (e.g. scholarships for students) (Blei 2012). According to Grimmer and Stewart (2013), the substance of topics is determined by reading the words and documents with a high probability of belonging to each topic and using relevant information of the documents to ensure coherence. We adopt the same approach in choosing the number of topics. We fit our CTM with 450 topics, the lowest specifications that produced topics with enough nuance to resemble legislation that we could classify into general or particularistic. With fewer topics, it was not always possible to determine into which category each topic fell. Because the sum of probabilities of topics composing each document equals one, we are able to interpret these probabilities as proportions.

As a way to validate our specification, we conduct in-depth qualitative interpretations of each topic by reading the 15 words and five to ten sessions with the highest probabilities of belonging to each topic. We used the characteristics of states and the timing of certain nationally-relevant events to show that topics are substantively meaningful. For example, Figure 2 displays the proportion of discussion allocated to

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<sup>21</sup>Some research of this type has been performed in German (Greene and Haber 2016; Bäck and Debus 2016; Proksch and Slapin 2012), Italian (Giannetti and Pedrazzani 2016), French (Greene and Haber 2016) and Scandinavian languages (Bäck and Debus 2016; Bäck, Debus and Müller 2014; Bächtiger and Hangartner 2010).

two federally approved laws/programs: The 2014 Safe School Program<sup>22</sup> and the 2013 Energy Reform Law<sup>23</sup>. Since state legislators were reacting to events happening at the federal level, we expect them to be discussed the most around 2014 and 2013, respectively. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the proportions of these topics. Results suggest that the estimates are face valid and our specification has discovered substantively meaningful topics.



**Figure 2: Validation Checks for topics discussing the 2013 Energy Reform (Left) and the 2014 Safe School Program (Right).**

After the topic model was estimated, validated and interpreted, we proceeded to classify topics into types of legislation following (Bagashka and Clark 2016). To implement the classification, we first classified the 450 topics into either policy or procedural. We classified every not strictly-procedural topic as policy. Since our unit of observation is the legislative session (document), protocol and procedures make a substantial part of the proportion of the discussion in a document. We found 147 topics (around 33%) to be procedural. These include topics on protocol, voting, and internal rules. For example, the top five words of a topic on voting procedures are “ballot box, to place, alphabetical, count and tally”<sup>24</sup>, while the top five words of a topic referring

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<sup>22</sup>Topic 198.

<sup>23</sup>Topic 418.

<sup>24</sup>Topic 4.

to the intonation of the Mexican National Anthem are “intonate, anthem, protocol, intonation and message”<sup>25</sup>.

Next, we classified topics identified as non-procedural into either general or particularistic. We take a broad approach to identify topics that classify as particularistic (Gamm and Kousser 2010). We include all topics that pertain to only a fraction of the state constituents, regardless of whether they contain distributive benefits. We adhere to the following criteria: topics representing policies that reasonably affect only a fraction of the population, were labeled as particularistic (this criterion has been previously used by (Catalinac 2016*b,a*) to classify candidate manifestos), while all other policies were considered general.<sup>26</sup>

We classified 249 topics (55%) as general and 54 topics (12%) as particularistic. Examples of topics classified as particularistic are those referencing the renovation of a highway section<sup>27</sup>, the construction of an aqueduct<sup>28</sup> and re-paving of certain streets<sup>29</sup>. We classified as general legislation all topics that fell into neither procedural nor particularistic. General legislation concerns to most of the state’s population and is not consider to target individual constituents.

Examples of topics that refer to general legislation are those addressed in the validation check, as well as topics regarding the military<sup>30</sup> and the custody and guardianship

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<sup>25</sup>Topic 29.

<sup>26</sup>In practice, particularistic legislation usually affects a smaller fraction than 40% of the state population, the threshold set by Catalinac (2016*b*) to be considered particularistic. It mostly targets particular groups, individuals, communities and at most municipalities. To accurately classify topics, we researched information on the original legislation extracted from the five to ten documents with the highest probability of belonging to the topic.

<sup>27</sup>The top five words for Topic 391 are “highway, section, freeway, walking, and kilometer”.

<sup>28</sup>The top five words for Topic 442 are “watershed, aquifer, dam, aqueduct, and cubic”.

<sup>29</sup>The top five words for Topic 449 are “work, paving, rehabilitate, infrastructure, and kilometer”.

<sup>30</sup>The top five words for Topic 22 are “air force, weapon, navy, army and fire”.

of children<sup>31</sup>. English language translation of the five words with the highest probabilities of belonging to each topic, their policy classification and the descriptive labels assigned to the topics are reported in the online Appendix. We find considerable variation in the proportion of discussion allocated to particularistic and general legislation across states and legislatures. While the mean proportion of discussion devoted to particularistic legislation in Zacatecas is around 12.8%, it is only 3.6% in Aguascalientes. We report in the online Appendix the proportion of discussion allocated to the different types of legislation by state.

To clarify the process used to classify topics into policies, we have included in the online Appendix snippets of the original texts translated to English for topics on Health, Education, and Unions. These include general and particularistic topics, depending on the reach of the policies they are capturing. As an example, let us take two topics, one regarding school bullying<sup>32</sup> and another concerning scholarships<sup>33</sup>. While both topics discuss issues on education, the former is classified as general, and the latter is classified as particularistic. The first one focuses on discussions about the prevention of school violence and bullying; the quoted snippet corresponds to Tlaxcala's law initiative to combat bullying. In contrast, the second topic focuses on policies regarding scholarship programs; the quoted law corresponds to Durango's legislators seeking to extend scholarship programs.

Analyzing legislative discussions is relevant because the structure of policy discourse constrains the set of feasible policy actions ([Schmidt 2008](#)). There is a low probability of implementing a policy that was never discussed. Previous research has noted the consequential nature of speech for policy-making and points to the relevance of legislative speech as a form of legislative behavior ([Maltzman and Sigelman 1996; Morris 2001; Harris 2005; Grimmer 2013](#)). Since legislators tend to spend a great deal of their

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<sup>31</sup>The top five words for Topic 33 are “adolescent, childhood, guardianship, custody and DIF (Institute of Family Development)”.

<sup>32</sup>Topic 198.

<sup>33</sup>Topic 349.

time preparing, delivering, and listening to speeches, they clearly think that legislative debates matter to voters (Proksch and Slapin 2014). Legislative debates provide information and interpretation to constituents (Grimmer 2013), and even when discussions are just cheap talk, they may influence decision-making through information revelation (Austen-Smith 1990). Moreover, scholars have shown that legislative speeches impact citizen's political engagement, mainly political knowledge, partisanship and turnout (Salmond (2014)).

As a form of validation, to determine whether discussing certain legislation translates into policy outcomes, we evaluate whether a higher proportion of discussions on certain topics leads to more spending in the same topics. We collected data on state spending per year from Mexico's national statistical office ([Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía \(INEGI\) 2018](#)). Legislators influence state spending because each state's Expenses Budget is exclusively negotiated and approved by local legislatures. First, we identified and classified topics from our CTM into four subjects that we could map into spending: agriculture, farming and fishing<sup>34</sup>, health<sup>35</sup>, education<sup>36</sup>, and tourism<sup>37</sup>. Second, we calculated the mean proportion of discussion allocated to each subject per state-year. Third, we merged our estimates with state spending on programs and institutions on the selected subjects.

Figure 3 plots the correlation of the mean proportion of discussion per state-year and spending on each subject. The plots reveal different levels of positive correlations. The patterns suggest that legislators are putting the money where their mouth is. Overall, this advances the proposition that allocating a larger proportion of discussions to specific policies has real policy consequences.

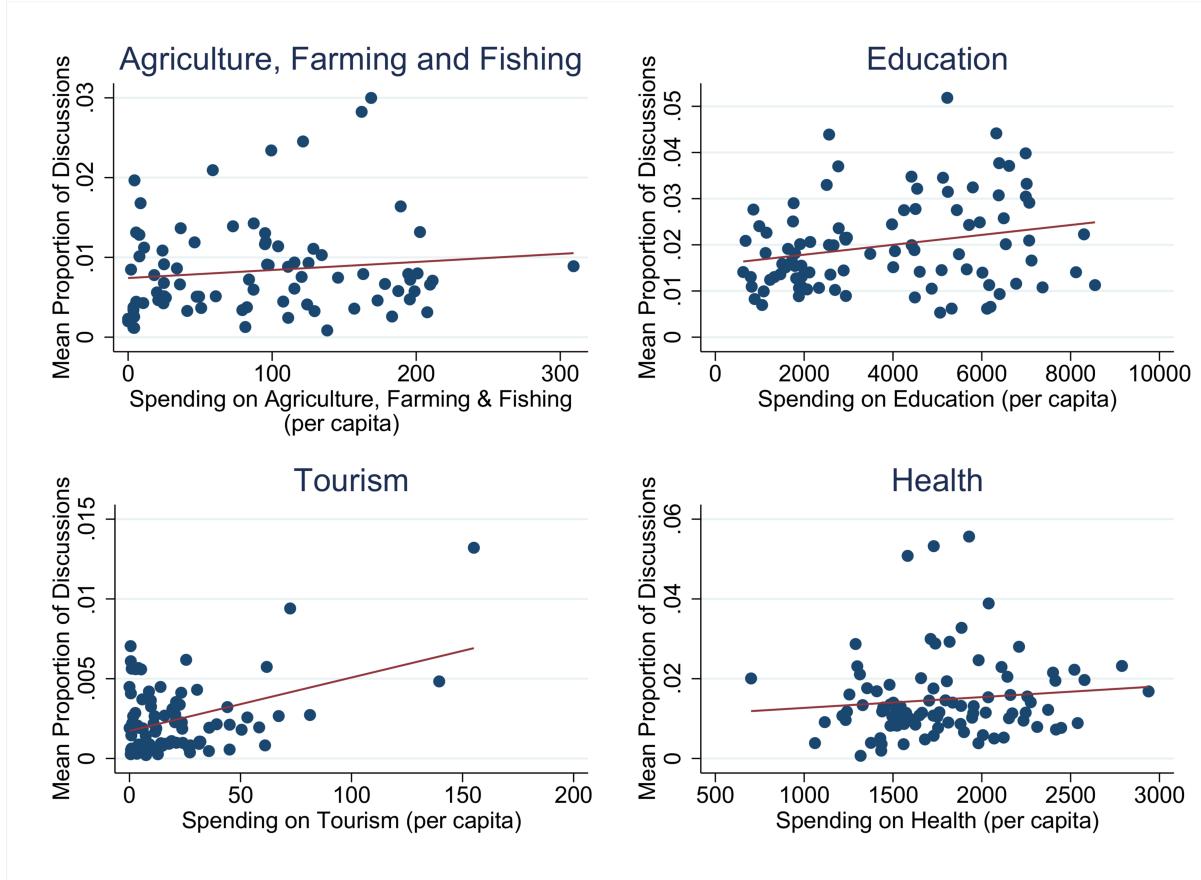
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<sup>34</sup>Topics 97, 148, 156, 310 and 376.

<sup>35</sup>Topics 49, 90, 102, 123, 131, 246, 265, 347, 352, 397, 402, 406 and 434.

<sup>36</sup>Topics 72, 125, 198, 267 and 398.

<sup>37</sup>Topic 192.

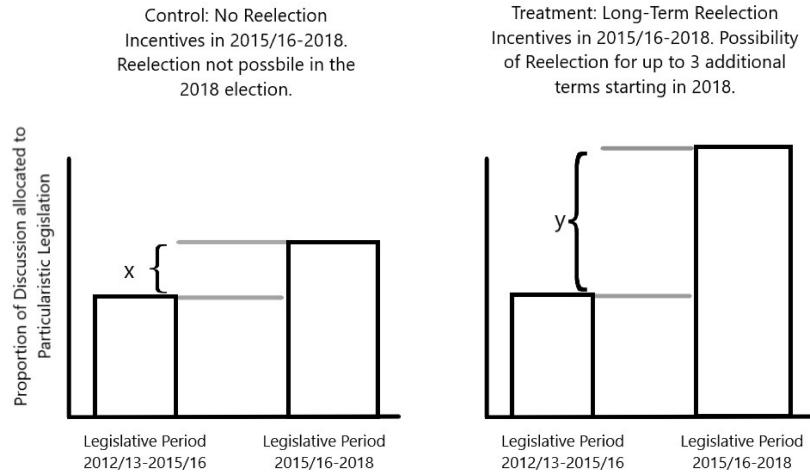


**Figure 3: Correlation plots between the average proportion of discussion and spending for different subjects.**

#### EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

To examine the effect of long-term reelection incentives in the proportion of speech allocated to particularistic legislation, we employ a difference-in-differences estimator. Figure 4 shows a visual representation of the difference-in-differences design. We identify  $\beta$  by comparing within-state changes in the proportion of particularistic legislation being discussed. If the average proportion of discussion allocated to particularistic legislation in the treatment group (Long-Term Reelection Incentives) changed by  $y$  between the two legislative periods, and the average proportion of discussion devoted to particularistic legislation in the control group (No Reelection Incentives) changed by  $x$ , then  $\beta = y - x$  corresponds to the average treatment effect of Long-Term Reelection Incentives over time. We hypothesize that  $\beta > 0$  (H1). Causal identification

of the treatment effect  $\beta$  relies on the parallel trends assumption. Thus, we show that estimates obtained from placebo treatments during the 2012/13-2015/16 legislative period, before the constitutional ban on reelection was lifted, are consistent with the assumption of no differential trends.



**Figure 4: Visual Representation of the Difference-in-Differences Design.**

We implement the difference-in-differences estimator using the following specification:

$$Y_{i_s,t} = \alpha + \beta T_t \times R_s + \gamma_t + \mu_s + \epsilon_{i_s,t} \quad (1)$$

where  $i$  denotes an individual session,  $s$  represents a State, and  $t$  indicates the month-year when the session was discussed. The outcome variable,  $Y_{i_s,t}$  corresponds to the proportion of discussion allocated to particularistic legislation during session  $i$  in state  $s$  at the month-year  $t$ . On the right hand of equation 1, the main independent variable of interest is the interaction of two variables:  $R_s$ , whether legislators in state  $s$  got long-term reelection incentives and  $T_t$ , whether the session took place in the 2015/16-2018 legislative period.  $R_s$  represents the state's time-invariant relative

assignment of treatment. It is a dummy that equals 1 for all sessions  $i$  in state  $s$  where legislators discussing them were able to run for reelection in 2018 had Long-Term Reelection Incentives, and 0 for all sessions  $i$  in state  $s$  where legislators could not run for reelection in the 2018 election.  $T_t$  is a dummy that equals 1 for all sessions that took place during the legislative period 2015/16-2018 when reelection incentives were introduced for those in the treatment group, and 0 otherwise. We also refer to  $T_t$  as the *post-election dummy*. The estimation includes two fixed effects, one for each state ( $\mu_s$ ) and another for each month-year ( $\gamma_t$ ). These fixed effects control for all time-invariant state  $s$  attributes, such as the state-specific rules that govern the legislative discussion, as well as state-specific time trends that could confound the estimate of  $\beta$ . We cluster all standard errors at the state level.

To address H2, we examine the dynamic pattern of the treatment effect  $\beta$  over time. We want to determine whether the effect of Long-Term Reelection Incentives increases as the 2018 election approaches. Thus the election date, July 2018, is used as a reference for this analysis. We present the results for all states that had Long-Term Reelection incentives in the 2015/16-2018 legislative period. We employ the difference-in-differences estimator in equation 1 in three different regressions, one per year in office, where we restrict the sample in each regression to compare only analogous years in each of the legislative periods.<sup>38</sup> By focusing only on analogous years, we compare legislators with the same experience in office and avoid confounding the effect of reelection with general increases in activity at the end of the terms.<sup>39</sup> We hypothesize  $\beta$  to be positive and largest in  $t + 2$ .

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Finally, we test whether Long-Term Reelection Incentives have a larger impact

<sup>38</sup>The first coefficient ( $t$ ) restricts the sample to compare observations from October 2012-June 2013 to October 2015-June 2016. The second coefficient ( $t + 1$ ) restricts the sample to compare observations from July 2013-June 2014 to July 2016-June 2017. The third coefficient ( $t+2$ ) restricts the sample to compare observations from July 2014-June 2015 to July 2017-June 2018.

<sup>39</sup>The implicit assumption is that, with and without reelection incentives, the baseline increases in activity at the end of the terms are the same.

than Short-Term Reelection Incentives in the proportion of discussion allocated to particularistic legislation (H3). For this analysis, we drop from the sample all sessions where legislators could not run for reelection in the 2018 election, and we restrict the analysis to compare states with Long-Term reelection incentives and states with Short-Term Reelection Incentives. We construct variable  $LS_s$ , which is a dummy variable that represents the state's time-invariant relative assignment to either Long-Term or Short-Term Reelection Incentives.  $LS_s$  equals 1 for all sessions where legislators had Long-Term Reelection Incentives, and 0 for all sessions where legislators had Short-Term Reelection Incentives. We substitute variable  $R_s$  in equation 1 with variable  $LS_s$ . We expect the estimated coefficient on  $T_t \times LS_s$  to be positive. Identification of this coefficient also relies on the parallel trends assumption. Thus, we show that the difference in outcomes have the same trend among states with Long-Term Reelection Incentives and states Short-Term Reelection Incentives. Descriptive statistics for all variables in the analysis are available in the online Appendix.

## RESULTS

First, we examine whether the proportion of legislator's discussion devoted to particularistic legislation increased in states where legislators had Long-Term Reelection Incentives, compared to term-limited legislators in the states where reelection remained banned during the legislative period 2015/16-2018. We provide the mean value of the dependent variable before 2015/16 to set the size of the effect in context. The positive, significant coefficient on the interaction of Long-Term Reelection Incentives and the Legislative Period in Table 2 is consistent with our hypothesis. Results show that Long-Term Reelection Incentives increase the proportion of discussion allocated to particularistic legislation by around 1.5 percentage points. Since legislators in the sample devoted on average around 7.4% of the sessions to discussing particularistic legislation before 2015/16, a 1.5 percentage point increase represents around a 21% increase from the average time allocated to particularistic legislation. The effects we find here confirm H1, suggesting that Long-Term Reelection Incentives increases the legislators'

attention to legislation that enhances their personal vote. Our identification strategy lets us estimate the effect of reelection without the confounding effect of electoral selection. However, a source of concern might be that different types of legislators ran in 2015/16, compared to those running in 2012/13. We show in the online Appendix that there is no significant difference among legislators in terms of their education and political experience in both cycles.

**Table 2: Difference-in-differences estimator of Long-Term Reelection Incentives on the proportion of discussion allocated to particularistic legislation. Long term reelection incentives significantly increase the proportion of legislative discourse devoted to particularistic legislation compared to term-limited legislators.**

Dependent Variable: Proportion of Discussion allocated to Particularistic Legislation	
Legislative Period	0.0153**
X Long-Term Reelection Incentives	[0.007]
State Fixed Effects	Yes
Month-Year Fixed Effects	Yes
Observations	4,899
R-squared	0.0805
Mean of dependent variable before 2015/16	0.0741

Robust standard errors clustered on the State level in brackets

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

To test our mechanism, that legislators elected in SSDs seeking to cultivate their personal vote in order to get reelected drive the effect, we conduct three additional tests that we present in the online Appendix. The first test shows that the average marginal effect of the difference-in-differences estimator increases as the percentage of the legislature elected in SSDs is larger. Because a greater proportion of legislators elected in SSDs implies more legislators looking to cultivate their personal vote, this suggests that legislators elected in SSDs drive the effect. The second test shows that the type of particularistic policies driving the effect are fiscal transfers and the provision of

programs/goods, which correspond to the two forms most suggested by media accounts of how local legislators cater to their constituents. Since we have no reason to believe that the introduction of reelection made parties more responsive to particularistic demands,<sup>40</sup> the third test shows that the effect disappears when restricting the sample to the *licencias* period, the time before elections when candidates holding public office need to take a temporary leave from their posts. By the start of the *licencia* period, parties have already selected which legislators are running for reelection. If engaging in particularistic discussions was a party strategy, engendered by the introduction of reelection, we would observe a positive significant effect during this period, which is not the case. This suggests that legislators seeking to run for reelection are driving the effect.

The difference-in-differences estimator identifies the effect of treatment under the assumption that the difference between the treatment and control groups is time-unvarying before the implementation of treatment. To show the validity of results for H1, we need to probe that states in the control group serve as a proper counterfactual for the treatment group had the reform not been implemented. Thus, we need to show that there are no differential trends in outcomes between groups in the direction of the treatment effect during the legislative period 2012/13-2015/16.

We test the parallel trends assumption by running placebo treatments before the ban on reelection was lifted.<sup>41</sup> Figure 5 plots the placebo tests by month and year and presents the difference-in-differences estimator to show the size of the effect in the context of the parallel trends. Only two out of the 33 point estimates are significant at the 95% level. However, the direction of the effect is negative, which would only make it more challenging to identify the effect of treatment during the 2015/16-2018 legislative

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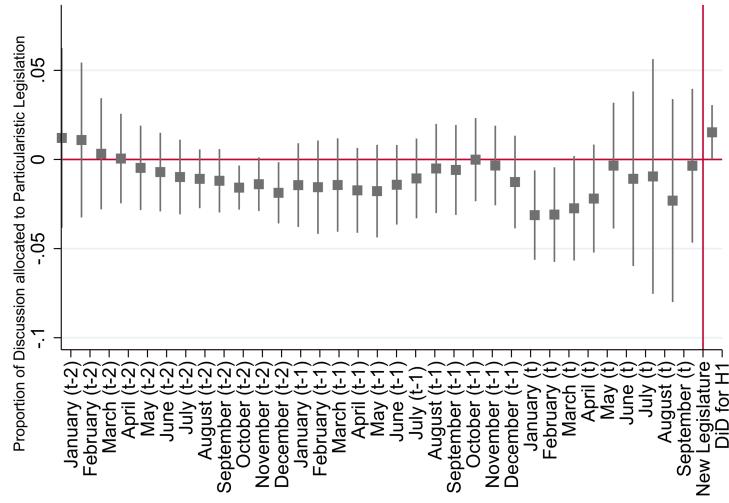
<sup>40</sup>Our implicit assumption is that parties' attention to particularism is the same before and after the introduction of reelection incentives for legislators.

<sup>41</sup>We derive these results by performing similar difference-in-differences estimators to compute the effect of being in the treatment group at every month (and every year) before treatment was implemented. Positive and significant effects would represent a threat to the validity of our results.

period. Overall, we observe that without treatment, the differences in outcomes have the same trend in both groups. In addition, we show in the online Appendix that, in terms of legislator characteristics, observed relevant covariates are very similar in the treatment and control groups. Legislators with Long-Term and No Reelection Incentives are virtually the same in their years of education and political experience. Therefore, we do not need to worry that these characteristics are driving the differential change.

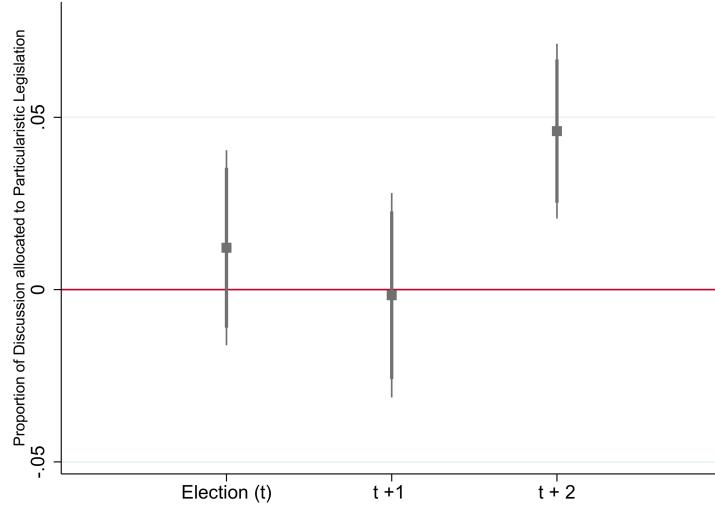
As previously mentioned, selection into the term-limited group could be correlated with having gubernatorial elections in 2018. This would be a threat to our identification strategy only if having gubernatorial elections in 2018 explains the differential change in the proportion of discussion allocated to particularistic legislation after 2015/16. To ease this concern, we show in the online Appendix that the coefficient in Table 2 is robust to controlling for a dummy indicating whether the state had gubernatorial elections in 2018 interacted with a *post* 2015/16 election dummy. In addition, although it is unlikely that other state characteristics explain the differential change in the dependent variable after 2015/16, we show that the effect is robust to controlling for a wide range of state indicators set at a pre-treatment baseline interacted with a *post* 2015/16 election dummy. Finally, to address the empirical concern that the effect is simply the result of a spurious correlation, we repeat the analysis evaluating the effect of treatment at other points in time. We report the results in the online Appendix. We find that none of the other positive outcomes is significant and that none of the other specifications reaches the size of the effect, which supports the validity of our findings.

Next, we examine whether the effect found for Long-Term Reelection Incentives increases as the 2018 election approaches. Figure 6 presents the results. The coefficient estimates show that the effect of Long-Term Reelection Incentives is largest as legislators get closer to the 2018 election. This pattern suggests that, as an election approaches, incumbents running for reelection have incentives to pursue policies strategically and favor legislation that can get them rewarded at the polls. Thus, an electoral cycle emerges, in which legislators pay more attention to legislation that enhances their



**Figure 5: Parallel trends by month and difference-in-differences estimator in Table 2 (H1).**

personal vote when closer to the electoral period.<sup>42</sup> Results not only show that reelection is consequential for particularism, but that it is the most consequential just before an election.



**Figure 6: Difference-in-differences estimator of Long-Term Reelection Incentives on the proportion of discussion allocated to particularistic legislation at diverse periods of the electoral cycle.**

<sup>42</sup>Results hold when the analysis is performed separately for states with a three-year and those with a two-year legislative period. These can be found in the online Appendix.

Finally, we turn our attention to examine how the expected length of tenure in office impacts the manner legislators respond to reelection incentives. We do this by analyzing the effect of Long-Term Reelection Incentives compared to Short-Term Reelection Incentives. The Type of Reelection Incentives takes the value of 1 when legislators have Long-Term Reelection Incentives and 0 when legislators have Short-Term Reelection Incentives. Table 3 presents the results. We find that Long-Term Reelection Incentives increase the proportion of discussion allocated to particularistic legislation compared to Short-Term Reelection Incentives by around 2.6 percentage points. The effect represents a 35% increase from the average time allocated to particularistic legislation and is consistent with our theoretical expectations (H3). Results show that legislators with longer political horizons are more responsive to reelection incentives than those with shorter ones. Therefore, expected term lengths are important determiners of legislative effort.

**Table 3: Difference-in-differences estimator of Expected Term Lengths on the proportion of discussion allocated to particularistic legislation. Long-Term Reelection Incentives significantly increase the proportion of legislative discourse devoted to particularistic legislation compared to Short-Term Reelection Incentives.**

Dependent Variable: Proportion of Discussion allocated to Particularistic Legislation	
Legislative Period	.0262***
X Expected Term Lengths	[0.0052]
State Fixed Effects	Yes
Month-Year Fixed Effects	Yes
Observations	6,062
R-squared	0.0814
Mean of dependent variable before 2015/16	0.0759
Robust standard errors clustered on the State level in brackets	
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1	

As we did before, to show that the difference-in-differences estimator for H3 is

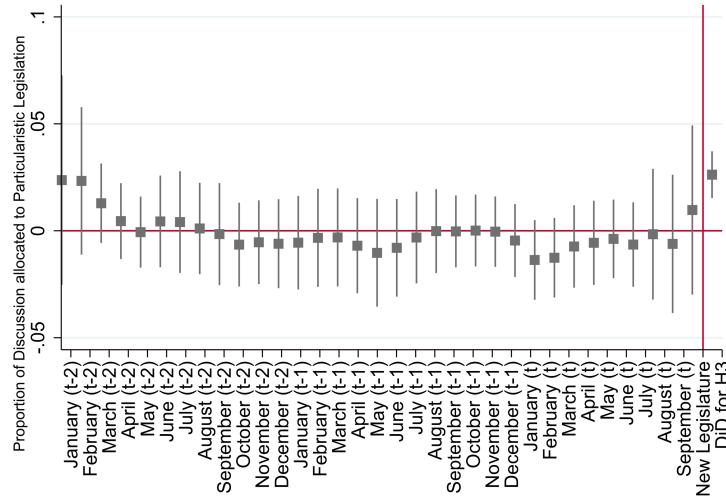
unbiased, we should observe that states with Short-Term Reelection Incentives and states with Long-Term Reelection Incentives had no differential trends in outcome in the direction of the treatment effect. None of the 33 interactions is significantly different from zero at the 95% level. Because selection into the Short-Term group could be correlated with having a PRI governor, we show in the online Appendix that the coefficient in Table 3 is robust to controlling for a dummy indicating whether the state had a PRI governor interacted with a *post* 2015/16 election dummy. When comparing the distribution of covariates in terms of legislator characteristics, we find that legislators with Short-Term Reelection Incentives had significantly more years of political experience than those with Long-Term Reelection Incentives. Thus, we show that the effect is robust to controlling for these legislator covariates and a large battery of state indicators set at a pre-treatment baseline interacted with a *post* 2015/16 election dummy, which probes that these characteristics are not driving the differential change after 2015/16. We report these results in the online Appendix. Finally, we should be cautious of giving a substantive interpretation to the difference in magnitude of coefficients in Tables 3 and 2 because we can not reject the null hypothesis that the coefficients are equal to each other.<sup>43</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Reelection is considered fundamental to the concept of electoral accountability. We expect incumbents eligible for reelection to behave differently in office than those who are term-limited. In this study, we examined whether incumbents eligible for reelection focus on policies that have the highest electoral yield in the context of a highly centralized party system. Applying quantitative text analysis to a new collection of 6,980 transcripts of Mexican legislative sessions, we estimated a CTM to discover the distribution of topics in our collection of documents. Topics were classified into types of legislation to get the proportion of discussions devoted to particularistic legisla-

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<sup>43</sup>Hausman test presented in the online Appendix.



**Figure 7: Parallel trends for the differences-in-differences estimator in Table 3 (H3).**

tion. We classified non-procedural topics into general or particularistic. Leveraging the staggered implementation of the 2014 Mexican Electoral Reform, we identified a quasi-natural experiment and implemented a difference-in-differences design to estimate the effect of reelection incentives using the proportion of discussions allocated to particularistic legislation as dependent variable.

Our results showed that, despite the party-centered electoral system, politicians in office prioritize particularistic legislation when eligible for reelection. We presented evidence on the emergence of an electoral cycle, where legislators focus on legislation that enhances their personal vote as the electoral period approaches. Finally, our results showed the impact that political horizons have on reelection incentives. We identified that the difference in expected term-length in office is an important determiner of how responsive incumbents are to reelection incentives.

Understanding how reelection incentives interact with other institutional dynamics and affect incumbent behavior is crucial and highlights several avenues for future research. The first is to evaluate how reelection affects party dynamics, incentives, and electoral strategies. In addition to changing party cohesion, reelection may be directly affecting party's performance. If reelection is shifting legislative attention at the ex-

pense of party priorities, we can expect parties to change their behavior, to maintain their members disciplined, and keep their policy concerns a priority.

The second line of research is to better understand the underlying link between reelection and accountability and address how changes in incumbent behavior affect the quality of democracy and governance. On the one hand, it seems worth noting that particularistic legislative debate does not equate to constituent service, and the follow-through to service is where the real substance of democratic accountability lies. On the other hand, we do not consider legislative particularism to be necessarily bad for democracy. In general, similarly to spending in pork, which usually represents a small fraction of the total budget, the proportion of discussion allocated to particularistic legislation is quite small. Yet, particularistic legislation could have a non-trivial effect in the targeted district. Legislators focusing on local or targeted legislation can generate positive spillovers benefiting beyond the population receiving the particularized benefits. Future work should address this question and examine how electoral rules can increase legislative responsiveness and accountability more broadly, for which micro-level data would be extremely helpful.

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects. The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

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