Incumbency advantage upon removal of single-term limits: Mexican municipal elections

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Abstract

En route

1 Introduction

En route

2 Reform, consequences

2014 reform surprising removal of term limits. Adopted in 1934, cornerstone of partisan centralization of power under the PRI. Removed immediate reelection at all levels.

PAN placed removal among its requests, as was standard. Unlike the past, when left and PRI would veto, it was adopted along other changes.

Federal deputies can reelect for up to four consecutive three-year terms, senators for two consecutive six-year terms. Fearing that members of Congress might gain too much independence from party leaders, reformers retained some control: incumbents must be renominated by the same party in whose ticket they originally ran. Elaborate.

Kick-off in the 2021 mid-term election.

At subnational level, reformers left some discretion to state legislatures. State law-makers: either 2-, 3-, or 4-term limits. For municipal officers single- or 2-term limits. Two states only retained single-term limits for municipal presidents, Hidalgo and Veracruz. Unelected municipal officers in Oaxaca's *usos y costumbres* Party clause mandatory. Variable election calendars: incumbents on the ballot progressively.

Figure 1 reports relative frequencies of incumbents with shifting electoral horizons since the reform. Each vertical bar accounts for all municipalities with elected officeholders—a handful of new municipalities were carved out in the period, so column totals vary between 2,016 and 2,039. Gray segments include municipalities in Hidalgo and Veracruz, states that retained single term limits, as municipalities nationwide did before 2014. Non-reformers account for nearly 15 percent of yearly observations. The first batch of returning incumbents arrived in 2018, in darker green
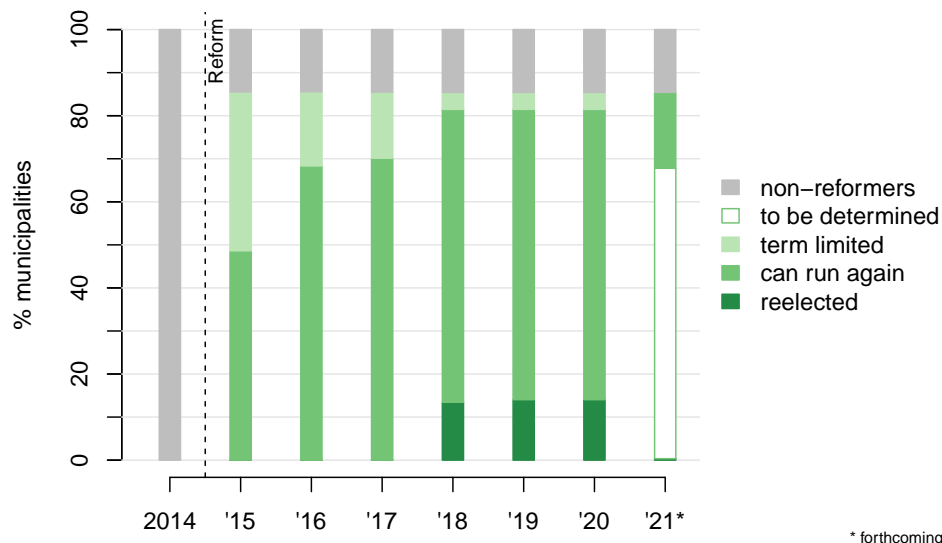
Figure 1: Extending the electoral horizons of municipal incumbents. Columns classify $N \approx 2,030$ municipalities according to the yearly reelection status of elected officeholders (430 municipalities with unelected indigenous governments are excluded).

segments. A total of 273 municipal presidents from 17 states secured reelection for a consecutive term that year, 12 more joining them in 2019. Together these account for 14 percent of observed municipalities, or almost 20 percent when population-weighted. The inaugural proportion is remarkable, the 2018 races concurred with a presidential race won by a landslide that, we will see, probably depressed reelection rates.

Freshmen elected in 2015, representing nearly 50 percent of municipal officers, had a very different perspective from their predecessors, as they were not barred from running again at the end of the term.

Other post-2014 incumbents, in light purple, remained term-limited due to reforms coming into force further down in time. This block shrank progressively from about one-third of municipalities in 2015 to less than 5 percent in 2018. By 2021, only returning incumbents will be term limited.

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Members of Congress can be reelected for up to 12 consecutive years. With 3-year terms,

Term limits sever the personalized electoral connection, collective reputation only without the personal element.

See Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina (1987) for argumentation.

3 A hypothesis perhaps

Hypothesis 1: Presidents are more likely to fast-track bills when the committee chair with jurisdiction over the bill belongs to the president's party than otherwise.

Table 1: Success and failure with and without incumbent running

In party	incumbent on the ballot				open seat			
	%won	%lost	sum	(N)	%won	%lost	sum	(N)
PAN	66	34	100	(121)	39	61	100	(1663)
PRI	49	51	100	(219)	50	50	100	(3546)
PRD	55	45	100	(88)	39	61	100	(1082)
Morena	100	0	100	(8)	88	12	100	(18)
Other	45	55	100	(99)	25	75	100	(631)
Total	54	46	100	(535)	44	56	100	(6940)

Figure 2: Population-weigthed altitude deviations in municipalities
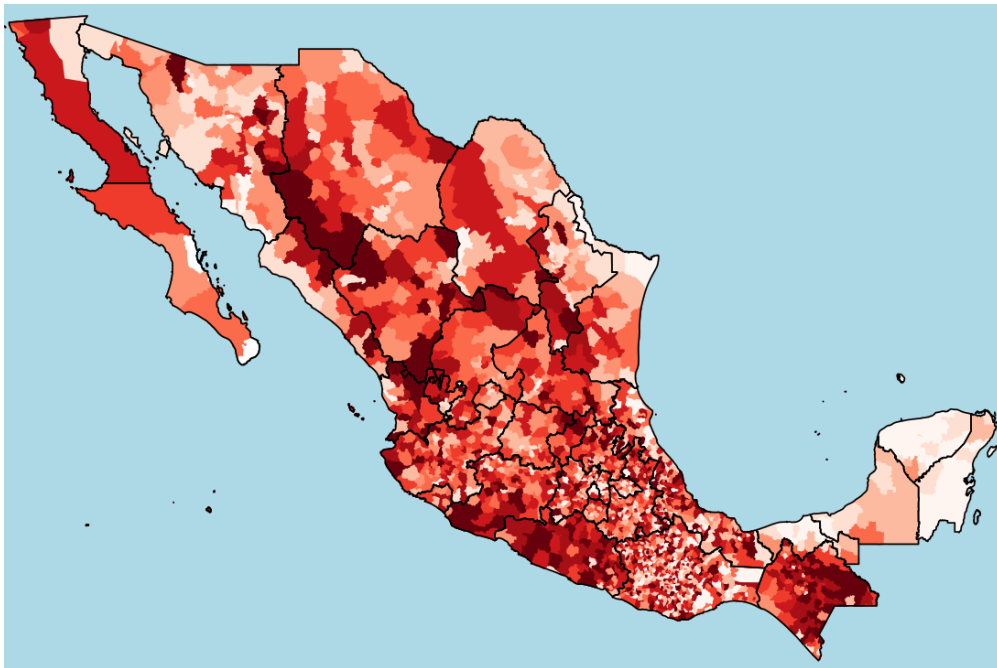
4 Incumbents running v. open seats

In party	incumbent on the ballot				open seat, party			
	won	lost	sum	(N)	won	lost	sum	(N)
left	58	42	100	(96)	39	61	100	(1100)

Table 2

	Dependent variable:		
	Residual		
	PAN	PRI	Left
	(1)	(2)	(3)
vote share (lagged)	−0.187***	−0.035***	−0.339***
	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.013)
party incumbent	0.224***	0.171***	0.165***
	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.018)
other-party incumbent	−0.021**	−0.011	0.005
	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)
party open seat	0.162***	0.124***	0.130***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)
governor	−0.009*	0.028***	0.008
	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.006)
population (10k)	0.002	0.002**	0.006***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
elevation (pop. weigthed)	−0.003	−0.00005	−0.031***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
sd.elev	−0.143***	−0.038	−0.080**
	(0.034)	(0.031)	(0.035)
post reform	0.085***	−0.156***	0.047***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.006)
elev x sd.elev	0.105***	−0.017	0.085***
	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.025)
Intercept	−0.041***	−0.036***	−0.062***
	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.004)
Observations	8,314	8,314	8,314
R^2	0.213	0.293	0.183
Residual Std. Error (df = 8303)	0.163	0.152	0.169
F Statistic (df = 10; 8303)	225.2***	344.3***	185.6***

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

5 Regression model

6 Discussion

Acknowledgements

References

Cain, Bruce E., John A. Ferejohn and Morris P. Fiorina. 1987. *The personal vote: constituency service and electoral independence*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.