

THE NATIONALIZATION OF MEXICAN PARTIES*

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Abstract

This article evaluates the nationalization of Mexican parties since democratization. To do so, we use data from the last nine federal elections in the country and apply two alternative measurements of party nationalization. In particular, we first estimate the levels of static and dynamic nationalization among Mexico's major parties, and we then analyze the importance of national, state, and district factors in order to explain the variance of the parties' electoral support. The overall results show that PRI has been the most nationalized party during the 1994-2018 period, while PAN and PRD show regionalized patterns of support but with uniform fluctuations over time. The findings also portray MORENA as a highly nationalized party, and that both PRI and PAN continue to rely on their national strength during elections.

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During the last thirty years, electoral competition in Mexico has centered on three main parties: the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the National Action Party (PAN), and the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD). The consistency of their voting patterns over time have led to the Mexican party system becoming one of the most institutionalized party systems in Latin America (Mainwaring, 2018). Party competition has typically focused on the PRI competing with either the PAN or PRD in different parts of the country (Klesner, 2005). This portrays the PRI as a strongly nationalized party, and the PRD and PAN as regionally focused parties with consolidated support bases in different parts of the country.

However, in 2018, the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) upset this dynamic after winning the presidency and claiming majorities in both legislative houses. Moreover, as Garrido and Freidenberg show in this volume, MORENA led the vote in all but one state in the country. A first impression would be that the 2018 election diluted the regional vote patterns observed for the two previous presidential elections (Klesner, 2007; Camp, 2013). But is it such a surprising result or just the consequence of a noticeable pattern over time?

This paper analyzes the patterns of electoral support over time for the four most important parties in the country. We evaluate whether party politics is more nationally or regionally focused in Mexico, and how MORENA fits into this system. Rather than predict how the party nationalization of Mexican parties will change in the future, we take the 2018 election as an inflection point to look back and get a perspective of the patterns of electoral support during the last 25 years. Our analysis explores the national, state, and district components that explain the variance of vote returns for the parties. We aim to fill a gap in the literature of Mexican politics by focusing on the patterns of nationalization across political parties. This approach follows a group of selected studies that go beyond an analysis of the party system level to understand the electoral support of the parties over time (Bartels, 1998; Lupu, 2015; Morgenstern, 2017; Mustillo, 2018).

We argue that the nationalization of the electoral support for Mexican parties was sustained by their centralized party organization and financial structure. In fact, this is what helped MORENA to emerge as a national party. Moreover, the first couple of elections for MORENA portray it as highly nationalized, similar to what other parties have achieved in the past. We also seek to explain the variance in levels of the party's vote shares over time, arguing that Mexican politics can be explained at a state- and national-level.

Our analysis first builds on [Mustillo and Mustillo \(2012\)](#) and [Morgenstern \(2017\)](#) to capture two different dimensions of parties' electoral support: the uniformity of the party's vote shares across districts (static nationalization) and consistency of the district-level variations of the party's vote shares over time (dynamic nationalization). Both dimensions give us a better picture of the consistency of parties' territorial support. This approach demonstrates that the main Mexican parties show nationalized patterns of electoral support for most of the democratic period. The second part of the analysis unpacks the national, state, and district components of electoral support over time. We follow [Stokes \(1967\)](#) and [Bartels's \(1998\)](#) operationalization of party nationalization to compare MORENA's patterns of support in the last election to those of the former largest parties in the country. The findings of this paper update and complement previous works on the nationalization of the party system in Mexico ([Klesner, 2005](#); [Lujambio, 2001](#); [Baker, 2009](#); [Harbers, 2017](#)).

The article begins by reviewing the most important conceptualizations of party nationalization. It then provides a few expectations for the nationalization of the Mexican parties. The empirical section shows first the results for the 1997-2018 section and then focuses on the last two federal elections to include MORENA in the analysis. The conclusion summarizes the findings and proposes potential ways to expand the research.

Measuring Party Nationalization

The geographical distribution of a party's support determines the way regional and national interests play out in politics. A highly nationalized party system incentivizes parties to focus on country-focused policies (Caramani, 2004), particularly in the presence of similar cross-district constituencies (Crisp, Olivella and Potter, 2013). Moreover, it keeps parties more accountable for economic outcomes, allowing voters to follow a retrospective economic voting logic at the polls (Morgenstern, Smith and Trelles, 2017). Higher party nationalization also dilutes the incentives for targeted budget allocations and subnational transfers, increasing the provision of public benefits at a national level (Lago-Peñas and Lago-Peñas, 2009; Hicken, Kollman and Simmons, 2016; Castañeda-Angarita, 2013; Crisp, Olivella and Potter, 2013). Finally, in new democracies, where ethnic or religious tensions are also divided by territory, the nationalization of major parties is an important factor for democratic stability (Stepan, 2001; Reynolds, 1999).

Given the importance of party nationalization, scholars have sought to conceptualize the uniformity of voting behavior across subnational units (Schattschneider, 1960). Stokes (1967) operationalized this idea with a components-of-variance model which segmented electoral returns into district, state, and national components. By doing so, Stokes was able to account for the many moving parts of national electoral support for any major party. Bartels (1998) adopted Stokes's idea and modeled the electoral support for a party in a given year as the sum of three distinct components: the standing loyalty for the party in a district, the electoral forces at work in a specific state, and the shifting tides of national electoral forces. His approach, therefore, conceptualizes nationalization as the degree to which the national vote patterns explain the overall variance of the results for a party.

An alternative approach of accounting for the homogeneity of electoral support across districts uses the Gini coefficient (Caramani, 2000, 2004; Jones and Mainwaring, 2003), a measure of distribution often used to analyze levels of inequality. While dispersion measures are the standard approach to estimate the nationalization of parties and party sys-

tems, they only capture the vote distribution of a party at a given point in time. As a result, the Gini index fails to account for any temporal variation. Moreover, the measurement conflates other sources of variance in the data, such as those occurring within each district.

A third approach has been mined by [Morgenstern \(2017\)](#) and [Mustillo and Mustillo \(2012\)](#). [Morgenstern and Potthoff \(2005\)](#) propose a model similar to the one originally proposed by Stokes and deconstruct the district-level electoral results into three components: the distribution of the party's vote across districts, the volatility of the party's national vote, and the unexplained variance both in the districts and across time. Morgenstern and Potthoff also conceptualize two main dimensions of party nationalization. On the one hand, static nationalization considers the homogeneity of national trends that underpin elections that a party competes in. On the other hand, dynamic nationalization is the "local effect" resulting from characteristics that shape the differences between districts over time.

Building on the last approach, [Mustillo and Mustillo \(2012\)](#) propose a way to account for different sources of dynamic nationalization. To do so, they develop a multilevel model that defines the mean trajectory of the party's vote share and use their parameters to estimate the initial level of support for a party, its rate of change, and the dynamic variations of this support. This allows researchers to consider not just a single form of nationalization, but to conceptualize nationalization in terms of both the static and dynamic sources of variance, as well as identifying electoral volatility.

Each of these approaches offers a different way to measure nationalization. The best approach depends on the question being asked and the conceptualization of nationalization being used. The dispersion measure approach is appropriate when comparing the variance in party support across districts at one point in time, but it only offers a snapshot of static nationalization and fails to account for wider dynamics. The components of variance approach, on the other hand, identifies the effect of national or local dynamics on

vote share trends, but doesn't account for electoral volatility or static nationalization. Finally, the [Mustillo and Mustillo \(2012\)](#) approach accounts for both the static and dynamic dimensions of nationalization, as well as accounting for electoral volatility. This approach identifies a number of different kinds of variance at the same time, but will only describe the broad patterns over time.

This article will analyze the components of each party's national vote share, and the patterns of support that shape vote share trends in Mexico. In order to do so, it is appropriate to use two alternative approaches, first building on the [Mustillo and Mustillo \(2012\)](#) and [Morgenstern \(2017\)](#) empirical strategy, before following [Stokes \(1967\)](#) and [Bartels's \(1998\)](#) approach.

Expectations for the Mexican Context

The literature on electoral behavior in Mexico considers the regionalization of the partisan support as one of the most important determinants of vote choice ([Domínguez and McCann, 1995](#); [Moreno, 2003](#)). A common description of the Mexican party system portrays the PRI competing with either the PAN in the west and northern states or the PRD in the Federal District, Michoacán, and the south of the country ([Klesner, 2005, 2007](#)). This creates a situation where PRI is far more spread out across the nation, and PRD and PAN are more focused in their respective regions.

We discuss below the institutional and party level factors that may explain the variance of vote trends across districts, and to what extent the disruption of MORENA may affect the nationalization of the party system in Mexico. We organize our discussion describing first our expectations for the overall party system and then what we expect for each of the parties in the analysis.

At the party system-level, party nationalization faces at least three important institutional obstacles. The first has to do with the number of districts in the country. A large

number of districts increases parties' strategies to allocate their campaign resources in those districts that they believe they have better opportunities to compete for a seat ([Morgenstern, 2017](#)). For the specific case of Mexico, the existence of 300 districts increases the opportunities for parties to concentrate their efforts at a regional level, producing scattered party strongholds in the country and reducing their expected static nationalization. Moreover, numerous and smaller districts will increase the heterogeneity across them, making it very difficult for parties to manage a uniform campaign in the country.

A second institutional roadblock for party nationalization in Mexico involves its presidential system. [Morgenstern \(2017\)](#) argues that nationalization should be lower in presidential cases because voters have different ballots to elect the executive and legislative. Such an opportunity allows congressional candidates to exploit their personal attributes rather than following a national campaign strategy. In contrast, parliamentary systems fuse executive and legislative elections, which leads voters to make choices based on nationally-focused platforms. We then expect that the presidential system decreases the dynamic nationalization of parties, as it leads to more voters making decisions based on local issues.

The final institution hindering party nationalization has to do with its federalist structure. Mexico's sub-national political units have independent executives and legislatures. Such institutional design, along with the cross-state diversity of economic development, social values, and political competition, creates incentives for national parties to split along state lines. Previous work has shown the role that governors play in influencing legislative behavior after the end of the hegemonic-party period ([Cantú and Desposato, 2012](#); [Rosas and Langston, 2011](#)). As a result of this influence, state-level issues and events will be more powerful than those that occur at a district-level. Moreover, the visibility of gubernatorial candidates over their legislative counterparts produces substantive coattail effects, where congressional candidates would mimic the slogans and messages of candidates for governors ([Magar, 2012](#)). In fact, spatial analysis of the 2012 election in Mexico

suggests that parties allocate resources and campaign efforts based on a state- rather than a district-logic, which is reflected in the correlation of the vote returns between nearby districts ([Harbers, 2017](#)).

On the other hand, the expected regionalization of Mexican party systems is moderated by the centralized structure of the parties. Parties in Mexico financially depend on federal public transfers. Once assigned funds to the parties, each party's National Executive Committee has great discretion on transferring part of these resources to their state party chapters, which heavily rely on those transfers to complement their resources for local campaigns ([Harbers, 2014](#)). This provides national leaders an important leverage to provide party cohesion and discipline local sub-parties. Moreover, party elites keep the control over ballot access ([Kerevel, 2015](#)).

At the party-level, we expect that the nationalization of each party is a function of its previous experience in government and their particular origins. We expect democratic governing experience to have a positive effect on both dimensions of nationalization. Experience in a national government expands the visibility of a party and provides incentives to broaden the scope of their campaign proposals to be nationally-focused ([Morgenstern, 2017](#)). We then expect that PRI and PAN's previous experience in the national government increased their opportunities for reaching a national electorate.

At the party-level, we expect nationalization to be a function of how each party was founded as well as their vote-earning strategies. We expect the PRI to be the most nationalized of all Mexican parties, given its previous structure as an hegemonic party. One of the main changes to the party occurred during the early 1930s, when it went from being a confederation of regional parties to a hierarchical structure led by the national party leadership ([Langston, 2017](#)). This structure allowed the party to control and mobilize party members from the top down. Moreover, PRI's monopoly of power during most of the twentieth century gave it full control of the political resources at the federal, state, and local levels ([Klesner, 2005](#)). These characteristics have led to a party that operates as a

national party.

In contrast, the origins of the PRD and PAN leave both parties with fewer incentives to be as nationalized as the PRI. The PRD was originally created as an umbrella party of former leftist parties and civic organizations. While all them united around the electoral campaign of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the electoral defeats left party members to deal with competing interests and struggle to maintain internal cohesion (Camp, 2014). This led to the party struggling to institutionalize, and relying on support that has been concentrated in a small base that is linked to the historical leaders of the party (Bruhn, 2012).

PAN, meanwhile, took a different path. Instead of trying to topple the PRI by beating the party to the presidency, the PAN started by building electoral support from the bottom up. Their strategy focused on targeting subnational offices, and using these offices as a springboard to other victories. This path resulted in the gradual increase in support for the party, spreading geographically and horizontally (Lujambio, 2001; Lucardi, 2016). This strategy, however, has inevitably resulted in a party that is keenly interested in local politics. In addition, PAN's support base is primarily the urban, educated middle class. This base is concentrated in urban centers, especially the northern region of the country (Klesner, 2005).

Lastly, the early electoral success of MORENA allowed it to strengthen the national aspect of its electoral support. Similar to the case of the PRD, MORENA was built as an organization to support the presidential candidacy of a charismatic leader. Nevertheless, López Obrador's overwhelming national popularity received a similar electoral support across regions, vanishing the regional patterns of the presidential vote observed in previous elections (Baker, 2009). As a result, we expect MORENA to score highly on its national patterns of support.

In sum, the institutional context in the country should produce a moderately to strongly nationalized party system. We expect the PRI to be the most nationalized party, with moderate state-effects. However, the PRI's nationalization may have been suppressed by

corruption scandals which have led voters to punish the party in recent elections (Ang, 2019). The PAN and PRD should have a lower level of nationalization, as a result of their regionally-focused support bases, which will produce vote shares that are clustered at state-level. On the other hand, the centralized organization of parties should produce consistent fluctuations of electoral support over time. In MORENA's case, the dependence on the fate of its presidential candidate helped it to appeal to a national constituency, which will produce a nationalized party with smaller state-effects similar to the PRI.

Analysis

Our goal for this section is to estimate the levels of party nationalization in Mexico over the 1994-2018 period. We do so by looking at the variation of the vote trends across elections and districts for the four most important parties in the country: PRI, PAN, PRD and MORENA. Our units of analysis are the 300 congressional districts in the country. We address any changes of district boundaries over time by grouping the precinct-level results according to the 2013 redistricting process. All the data comes from the official election results available at the National Electoral Institute's (INE) website.¹

Figure 1 plots the district-level vote shares during the 1994-2018 period for each party. Each gray line represents the party's vote share in a given district; and the thick, red line denotes the national vote share for the same party. Our discussion focuses on the two types of uniformity in the vote-share trends proposed by Morgenstern (2017): static and dynamic nationalization. Static nationalization is understood as the uniformity of the party's vote shares across districts at a given point in time. A high level of static nationalization means that the vote shares for a party have little variation across districts, so most of the lines in the plot should be very close to the red line. Meanwhile, dynamic nationalization captures the consistency of the district-level variations of the party's vote

¹<http://www.ine.org.mx>

shares over time. In this case, a high level of dynamic nationalization would mean that changes in district-level vote shares will be uniform across elections, and we don't expect many gray lines to cross each other in the plot.

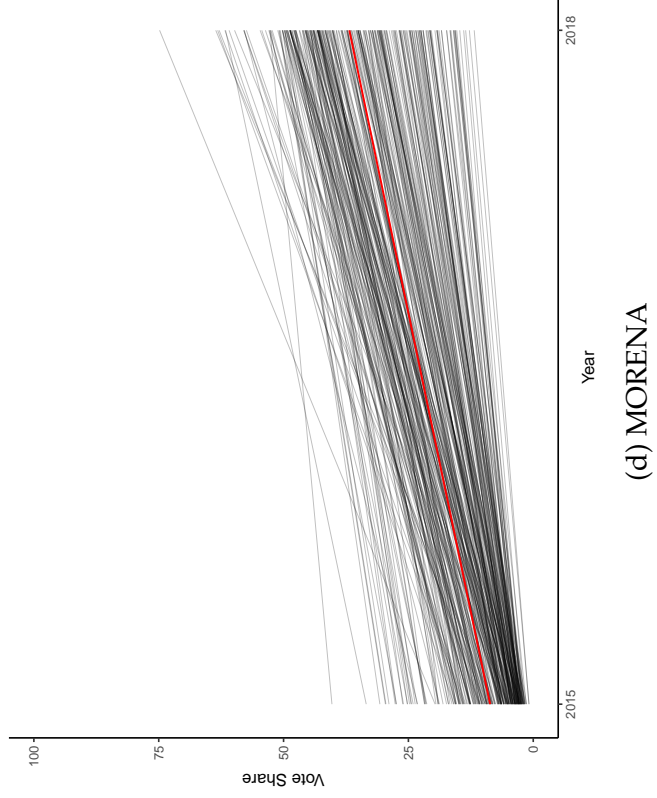
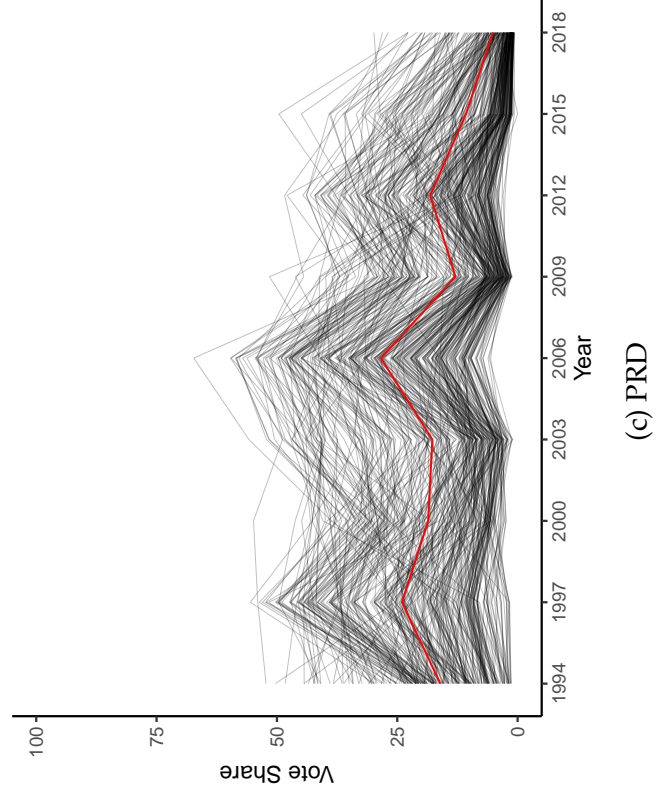
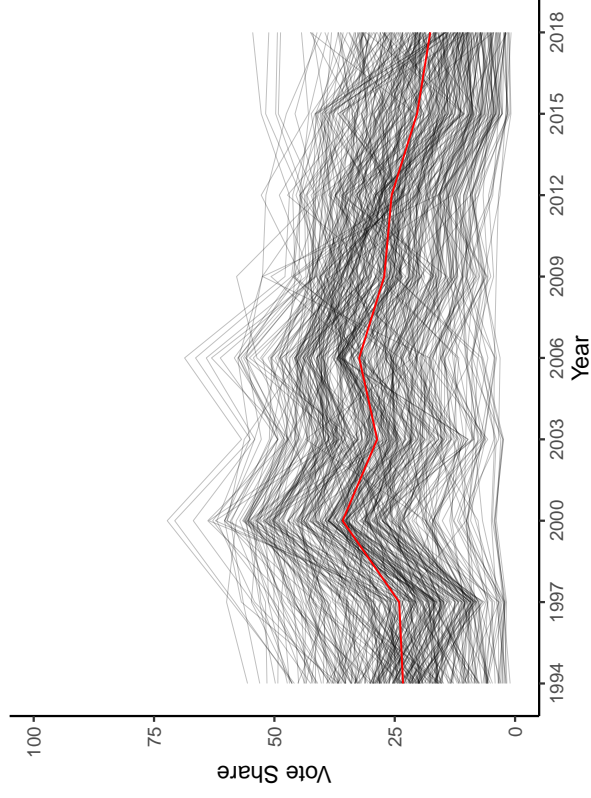
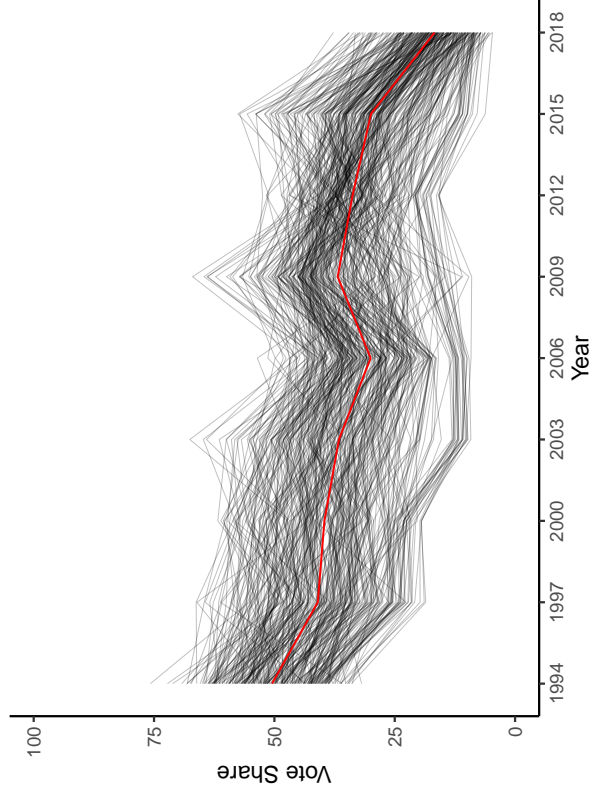


Figure 1: Vote shares per district

The district-level vote shares in Plot 1a show that the PRI has the highest static nationalization in the country, as there are more lines falling closer to the party's national mean than is observed for the PAN and PRD. Similarly, PRI's electoral support over time presents uniform fluctuations for most of the districts in the country. A notable exception is the set of lines at the bottom of the plot, which represent the district-level results in Mexico City. This set of outlier trends suggests that while the PRI obtains very similar results in all the districts in Mexico City, these vote returns are systematically lower than what the party gets elsewhere in the country.

The vote returns for the PAN, meanwhile, suggest the uneven electoral strength of the party across districts. While the party earns more than half of the votes in a few districts, it also obtains no more than 5% in others. Such wide variance denotes the PAN's low static nationalization. On the other hand, the graph also shows uniform fluctuations across districts for the elections before 2006. Beginning that year, the lines present more convoluted patterns, suggesting a decline of PAN's dynamic nationalization in recent elections.

Similar to the PAN's case, the vote shares for the PRD in any given year show large variations across districts, initially spreading evenly between 0% and 50%. However, the figure suggests that static nationalization increased in the recent three elections due to the decline of party support in the country, getting vote shares close to 0% in most districts. On the other hand, dynamic nationalization seems to be very high, as changes in vote shares over time seem to move uniformly across districts.

We now narrow our focus to the vote nationalization trends for MORENA by only considering the two federal elections after the creation of the party in 2013. While the lack of enough elections should warn the reader about the prematurity of the findings, Figure 1d highlights a few patterns that can be confirmed in forthcoming elections. While MORENA's support was relatively low in 2015, all its district-level vote shares increase by 2018. This increase, however, was not uniform, as the vote shares "fanned out." The

vote shares for MORENA in the districts of Guanajuato, Aguascalientes, and Yucatán increased by a lower rate than the national average. In contrast, districts in Chiapas, Hidalgo, and Tabasco reported vote shares from less than 10% in 2015 to over 50% in 2018. These results may suggest similar levels of static nationalization for MORENA to those observed for PRI. On the other hand, we are still unable to elucidate the national dynamics of the party with only two elections for the analysis.

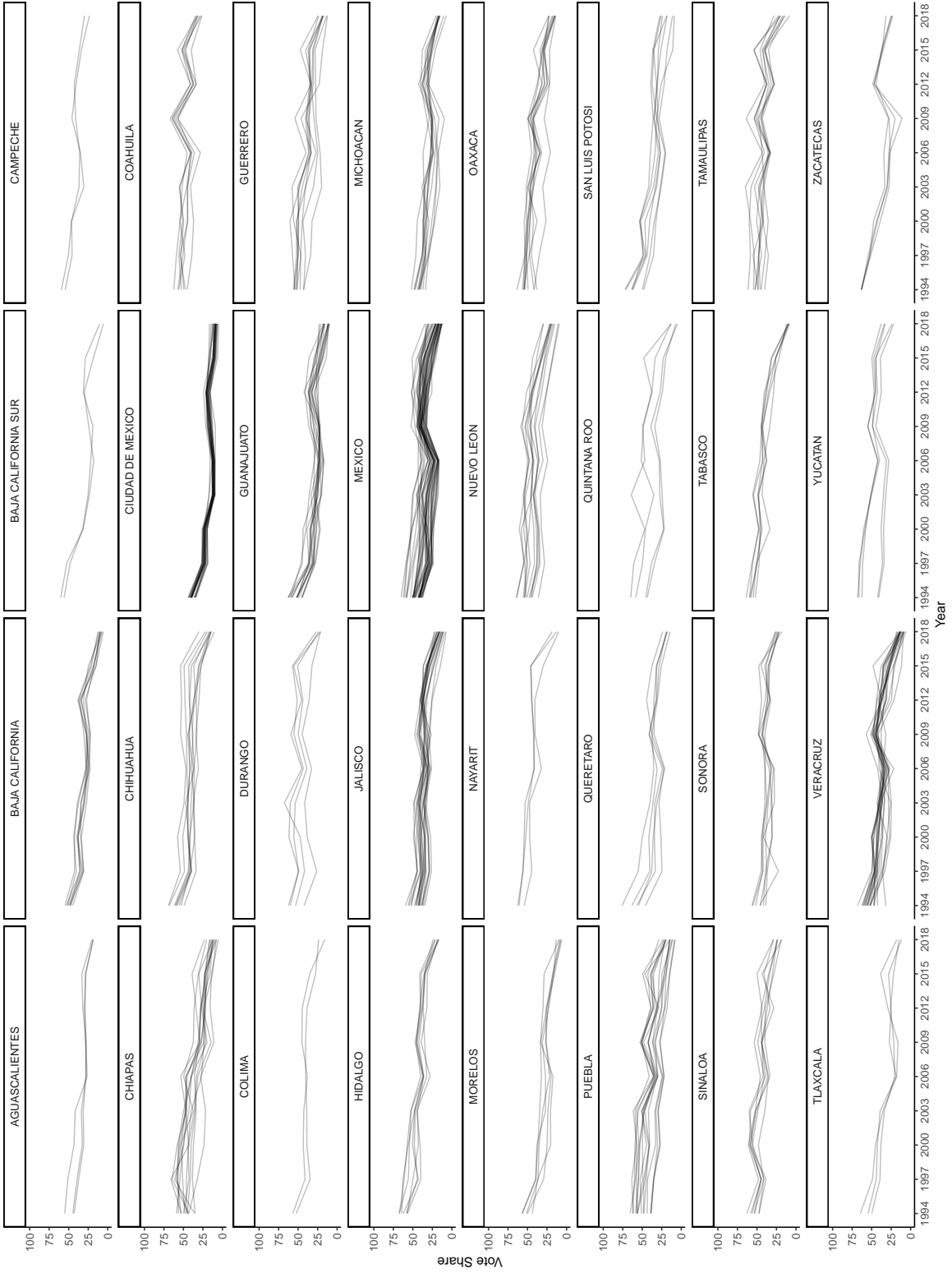


Figure 2: PRI vote share by district, split by state

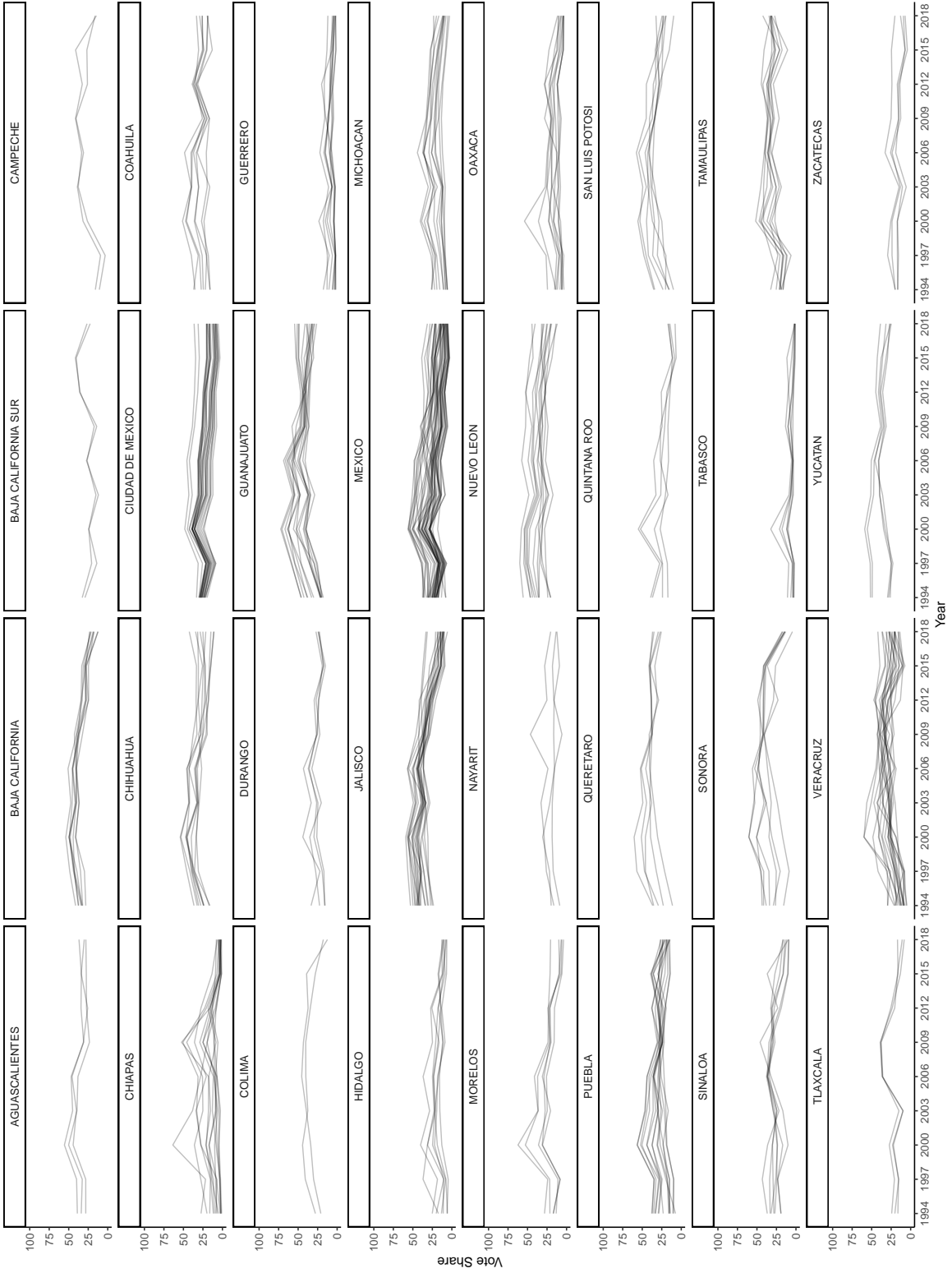


Figure 3: PAN vote share by district, split by state

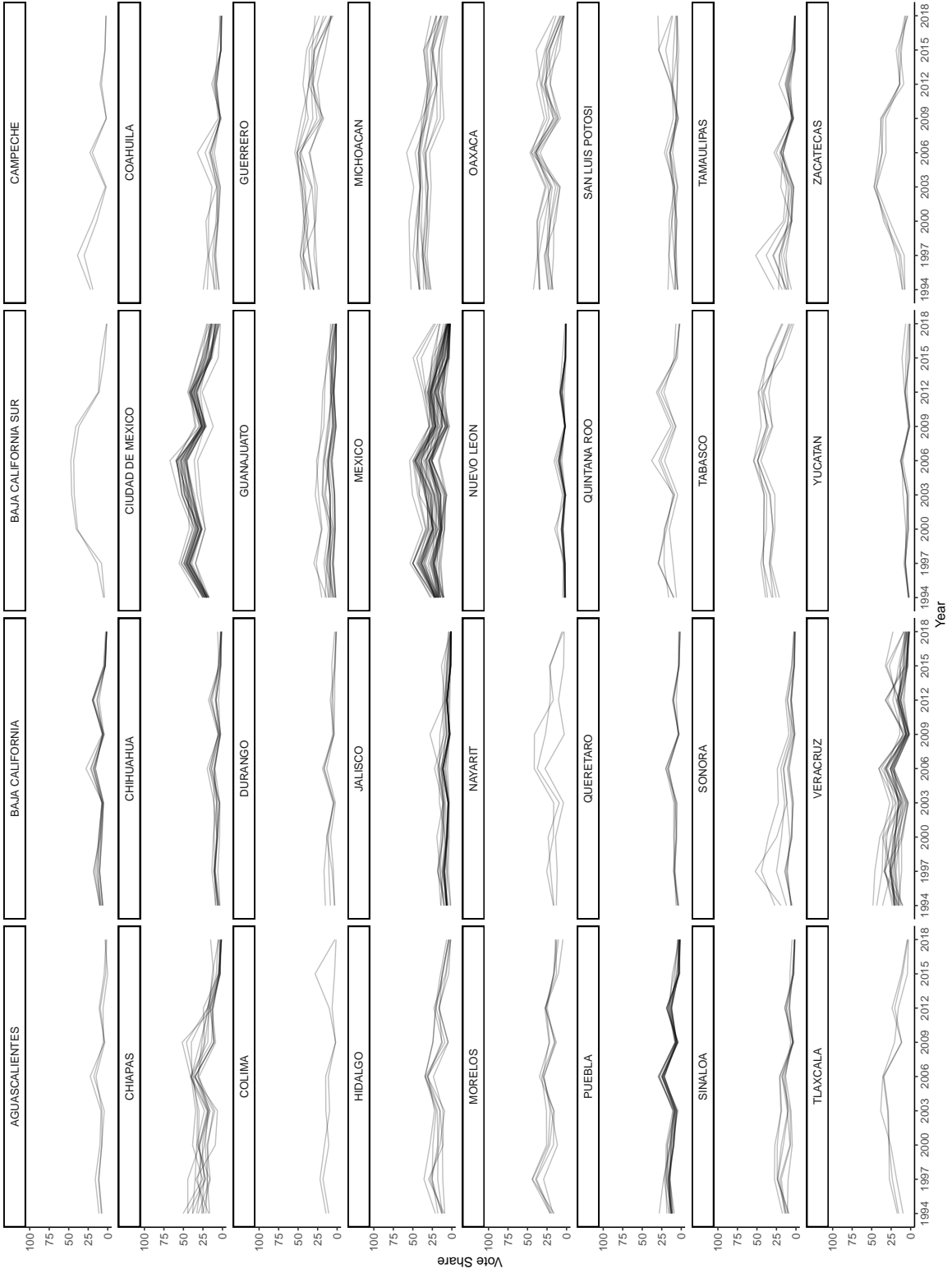


Figure 4: PRD vote share by district, split by state

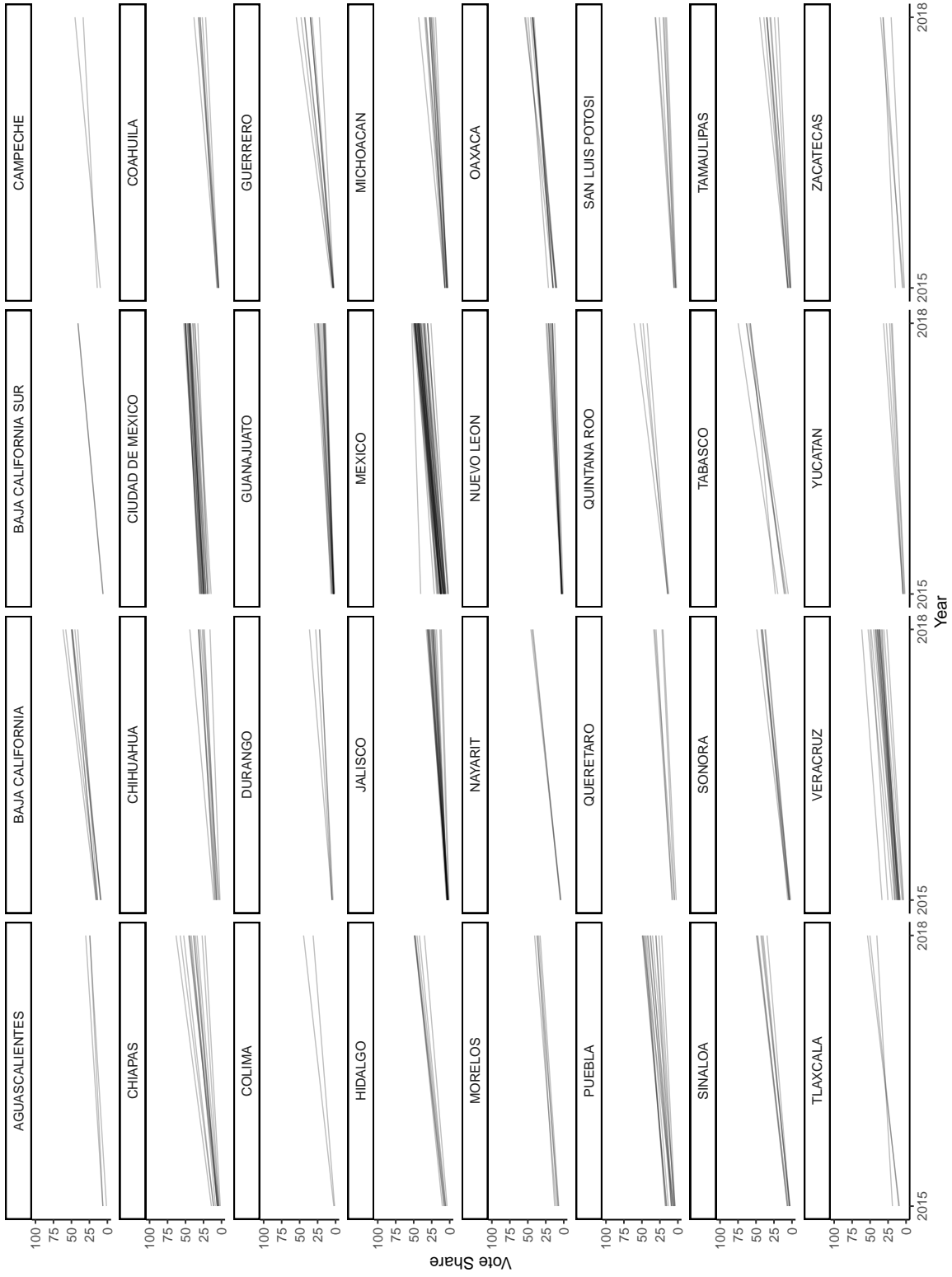


Figure 5: MORENA's vote share by district - split by state

This first glance at the vote trends suggests a high variance on the district vote returns for the party. We now do a deeper exploration to explore how much of this variance can be explained at the state level. Figures 2-5 distinguish the vote shares in every state for each party. The analysis confirms the high dynamic nationalization of the PRI, as all states present similar downwards trends. Moreover, the figure also illustrates different levels of inter-district variation of vote shares across states, going from almost no variance in Mexico City, Baja California, and Tabasco to high variance for those districts in San Luis Potosí, State of Mexico, or Puebla.

Meanwhile, the PAN's vote-share trends appear more uniform over time than those observed for the PRI. With the exception of Veracruz, Sonora, and Jalisco, the fluctuations for the district vote-shares are very consistent within each state. This trend is clearer since 2006. In other words, most of the drop for the PAN's dynamic nationalization after 2006 can be explained by the variance of the vote trends at the state level.

In the case of the PRD, the graph helps us to understand that most of the low static nationalization is explained by different levels of support across states. With the exception of Mexico City, the State of Mexico, Michoacán, Oaxaca, and Guerrero, the vote shares for the PRD are very uniform within states, suggesting that the variance for the PRD's vote returns across district can be partially explained by the political dynamics at the state level.

To formally estimate the different types of electoral variability, we update Morgenstern's (2017) analysis for Mexico by extending the panel series and suggesting a more precise specification for the party's national vote volatility. In this case, we follow Mustillo and Mustillo's (2012) multilevel approach, which nests time within district as:

$$Vote_{pdt} = (\alpha_0 + \zeta_{0d}) + \sum_{t=1}^{N=3} \beta_t(t_{dt})^t + \zeta_{1d}(t_{dt}) + \varepsilon_{dt} \quad (1)$$

$$Vote_{pdt} = (\alpha_0 + \zeta_{0d}) + \gamma_{dt}State_d + \sum_{t=0}^{N=3} \beta_{t+1}(t_{dt})^t + \zeta_{1d}(t_{dt}) + \varepsilon_{dt} \quad (2)$$

Where $Vote_{pdt}$ is the vote share for a party p in district d and election t . Election t is an indexed ordinal variable for the sequence of elections in our database. The set of β models the trajectory of the national mean vote for the party—i.e., the red line in any of the plots of Figure 1—using a polynomial of order 3. ζ_{0d} and ζ_{1d} account for the variance of electoral support among districts. In particular, ζ_{0d} accounts for the durable district differences that explain dispersion of a party’s vote returns during the initial election. Therefore, lower values of ζ_{0d} can be interpreted as a high level of static nationalization. ζ_{1d} accounts for the variance in the initial rate of change. We assume that ζ_{0d} and ζ_{1d} are drawn from two independent distributions with mean zero and variance σ_0 and σ_1 , respectively, and an unknown covariance σ_{01} . Finally, the residual variance, ε_{dt} represents the district and time-specific unexplained variability in vote share trends. This estimate accounts for election-cycle features that may account for vote dispersion. We take this coefficient as our measurement for dynamic nationalization. Values of ε_{dt} closer to 0 suggest a high level of dynamic nationalization as there are fewer sources of cyclical dynamics.

Equation (2) proposes an alternative specification that includes $State_d$, which is a battery of state dummy variables to identify the state that each district belongs to. This specification tries to capture any heterogeneity of the vote shares produced at the state level. We present the analysis with and without this covariate to compare how our measures of nationalization depend on the state effects.

Table 1 shows the results for the last nine federal elections in the country. To make a fair comparison of the parameters across parties, we leave out MORENA from this analysis. The Appendix, however, shows the results for all parties using a less complex model that only includes the last two federal elections.

We first discuss the models that do not include state controls, which confirm the visual inspection of Figure 1. The value of ζ_d in model (1), which represents the variance

Table 1: Models for district-level vote support, 1994-2018

	PRI	PRI	PAN	PAN	PAN	PRD	PRD
Time	-12.301*** (0.383)	-12.301*** (0.383)	7.629*** (0.403)	7.629*** (0.403)	7.629*** (0.403)	2.859*** (0.473)	2.859*** (0.473)
Election ²	3.223*** (0.115)	3.223*** (0.115)	-1.761*** (0.120)	-1.761*** (0.120)	-1.761*** (0.120)	-0.461*** (0.143)	-0.461*** (0.143)
Election ³	-0.274*** (0.009)	-0.274*** (0.009)	0.090*** (0.010)	0.090*** (0.010)	0.090*** (0.010)	-0.011 (0.012)	-0.011 (0.012)
Constant	49.827*** (0.596)	48.405*** (2.509)	22.938*** (0.790)	32.656*** (3.311)	17.606*** (0.688)	8.761*** (2.535)	8.761*** (2.535)
State effects		✓		✓			✓
Random Effects							
ζ_{od} (Static nationalization)	73.96	53.23	151.77	85.98	143.64	35.13	
ζ_{1d}	0.57	0.57	1.48	1.48	0.36	0.36	
ε_{dt} (Dynamic nationalization)	37.98	37.98	41.21	41.21	56.06	56.06	
Observations	2700	2700	2700	2700	2700	2700	2700
Districts	300	300	300	300	300	300	300
Elections	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Log Likelihood	-9227.219	-9056.879	-9497.081	-9315.877	-9736.869	-9489.108	
AIC	18470.440	18191.760	19010.160	18709.750	19485.740	19052.220	
BIC	18517.650	18421.900	19057.370	18939.890	19521.140	19270.550	

***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1

in the PRI's district-level electoral support around its national mean, is 73.9. This means that, in the absence of any other systematic variance, 68% (or one standard deviation) of the district-level shares for the PRI fall within an interval of 8.6% above and below the national mean. In contrast, the values of ζ_d in models (3) and (5) suggest that 68% of the district-level shares for the PAN and PRD range around 11.9% and 12.3%, respectively, above and below their national means. These results suggest a larger static nationalization for the PRI than for the other two parties.

Regarding dynamic nationalization, we consider the non-uniform swings in the district-level votes observed in Figure 1. The values of ϵ_{dt} for the PRI and PAN are 37.98 and 41.21, respectively, suggesting that the swings for both parties are relatively uniform across districts. In contrast, the size of this parameter for the PRD's models is 56.06, representing a lower dynamic nationalization than the other two parties.

The models that include the state dummies explore the vote share trends in a similar way to Figures 2-5, allowing us to contextualize the heterogeneity of the vote trends. For the case of the PRI, its static variance estimate drops from 73.4 in Model 1 to 53.2 in Model 2. This tells us that the state effects account for 27% of the variance in the party's district-level support. While such reduction for the cross-district variance helps us understand more about the party's static nationalization, the observed effect is lower than what we observe for the PAN and PRD. The inclusion of the state effects accounts for 43% and 75% of the variance in the district-level support for PRD and PAN, respectively. This means that much of the low static nationalization levels for these two parties can be explained by the dynamics within the states.

These results differ from Morgenstern's expectations in a few ways. For example, [Morgenstern, Swindle and Castagnola \(2009\)](#) have previously found that Mexico's party system is low on the static nationalization dimension, and low to moderate on the dynamic dimension. They conclude that Mexican parties are closer to locally-focused (similar to the US). However, we find that the Mexican party system scores relatively high

on dynamic nationalization, but low on the static dimension. This suggests that Mexican parties tend to be unbalanced instead. In addition, our results also suggest that party differences matter. It is clear that PRI's differences distinguish them from PAN and PRD, and that the PRD and PAN are both experiencing changes that are specific to the party. Perhaps this is not surprising, as Morgenstern's focus has been cross-national, and so some detail will inevitably be lost, while our national focus allows us to put Mexican party nationalization under the microscope.

Observe that the results in Table 1 describe the overall patterns for the parties for the entire period. This approach, however, does not allow us to perceive significant changes in the vote trends across elections. To address this limitation, we use an approach proposed by Bartels (1998), who measures the relative nationalization of the party vote for each election. Building on Stokes (1967), Bartels provides a way to decompose the election results within a district into (1) the standing party loyalties in the district, (2) the shifting tides of electoral support at the national level, and (3) the fleeting district forces at work. The model is specified as:

$$Vote_{pdst} = \alpha_t + \beta_1 Vote_{pdst-1} + \beta_2 Vote_{pdst-2} + \gamma_{st} + \varepsilon_{dst} \quad (3)$$

Where $Vote_{pdst}$ is the vote share for party p in district d and state s at election year t . $Vote_{pdst-1}$ and $Vote_{pdst-2}$ represent the vote shares for the same party and district in the two previous federal elections. The intercept parameter α_t accounts for the mean national support of a party at a given election. γ_{st} is a parameter that accounts for the state forces of the election results in the district at a given time. Finally, ε_{dst} is the stochastic term accounting for the idiosyncratic forces of the district during a specific election. We assume that ε_{dst} is drawn from a probability distribution with mean zero and election-specific variance σ_{dpt}^2 .

The model in Equation (3) differs from the one proposed by Bartels (1998) in three aspects. First, similar to Lupu (2015), we use as the dependent variable the vote shares

for every party rather than the difference of the two main parties' vote shares. This allows us to study the different components of the vote support in multiparty systems. Second, since MORENA has competed in only two federal elections, we use the PRD vote shares for the lagged terms of both MORENA and PRD. Finally, our estimates are reported using Seemingly Unrelated Regressions ([Zellner, 1962](#)), which allow correlated errors across the models for each party vote share in a given year. Running a system of equations for each election year introduces additional information to considering the individual equations separately.

Table 3 presents the estimates of the parameters of interest for each party and election from 2000 to 2018. Each row corresponds to a regression for the vote shares of a party in a given year. Column (1) in the table shows the estimated stochastic variance of the district forces in a given year. Column (2) shows the average of the estimated state vote-swings during the election. Column (3) presents the estimated national party support. Columns (4) and (5) show the estimated persistence of the two preceding election results in the district. Finally, Column (6) estimates the stability of the partisan support in the district by adding up the size of the coefficients for the two lagged terms. All the values are presented in percentage points, and values in parentheses denote the standard errors for the parameters.

The estimated parameters can help us understand the fluctuations of the vote components for the parties over time. Before the 2018 election, the district forces are similar across parties and the most steady component of the vote over time. Both the state and national components present more volatile, inconsistent patterns for the parties. Consider, for example, the case of the PAN's national force, where it shows their highest values for the presidential elections. All the components for the PRD seem to decline for the 2018 election, while the vote for MORENA seems to be driven by the national and state forces.

To assess the strength of the national component of the vote for each party and election, we follow [Lupu's \(2015\)](#) estimation for the relative nationalization of the vote as the

Table 2: Components of Party vote, 2000-2018

	(1) District Forces σ	(2) State Forces (absolute mean)	(3) National Force α	(4) First lag β_1	(5) Second lag β_2	(6) Partisan Loyalties $\beta_1 + \beta_2$
PRI						
2000	3.79	5.26	-6.26 (0.05)	0.59 (0.05)	0.34 (0.05)	0.94
2003	4.63	4.61	6.85 (0.07)	0.53 (0.07)	0.24 (0.07)	0.77
2006	3.40	3.53	4.61 (0.04)	0.25 (0.04)	0.38 (0.04)	0.64
2009	4.54	9.28	11.29 (0.07)	0.26 (0.07)	0.28 (0.06)	0.53
2012	3.97	4.09	11.54 (0.05)	0.32 (0.05)	0.34 (0.05)	0.66
2015	4.92	5.45	0.97 (0.07)	0.74 (0.07)	0.25 (0.06)	0.98
2018	3.24	3.91	1.86 (0.04)	0.34 (0.04)	0.23 (0.05)	0.57
PAN						
2000	4.71	5.44	8.83 (0.06)	0.44 (0.06)	0.78 (0.06)	1.22
2003	5.21	5.73	8.14 (0.05)	0.64 (0.05)	0.04 (0.07)	0.68
2006	4.02	5.23	12.19 (0.05)	0.45 (0.05)	0.26 (0.04)	0.71
2009	5.70	6.59	1.33 (0.08)	0.59 (0.08)	0.03 (0.07)	0.62
2012	3.95	3.46	2.44 (0.04)	0.19 (0.04)	0.50 (0.04)	0.69
2015	5.06	8.39	4.57 (0.06)	0.69 (0.06)	0.25 (0.05)	0.93
2018	3.82	9.01	6.46 (0.04)	0.39 (0.04)	0.43 (0.05)	0.83
PRD						
2000	3.65	5.04	-0.62 (0.04)	0.32 (0.04)	0.55 (0.05)	0.87
2003	4.52	5.18	-0.28 (0.06)	0.69 (0.06)	0.10 (0.05)	0.79
2006	3.66	5.08	12.12 (0.05)	0.39 (0.05)	0.41 (0.05)	0.80
2009	4.88	3.44	-4.07 (0.07)	0.34 (0.07)	0.36 (0.07)	0.69
2012	3.36	4.59	-0.13 (0.04)	0.10 (0.04)	0.48 (0.04)	0.58
2015	5.28	3.55	-4.04 (0.08)	0.57 (0.08)	0.27 (0.06)	0.84
2018	2.57	1.85	1.18 (0.03)	0.47 (0.03)	0.00 (0.04)	0.47
MORENA						
2015	3.48	2.56	1.01 (0.05)	0.46 (0.05)	-0.11 (0.04)	0.35
2018	5.32	7.48	19.83 (0.09)	0.70 (0.09)	0.37 (0.08)	1.07

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

ratio of the national variance to the sum of the national, state, and district variances.² This ratio is estimated as:

$$RelativeNationalization_{pt} = \frac{\alpha_t^2}{\alpha_t^2 + \gamma_{st}^2 + \varepsilon_{dst}^2} \quad (4)$$

Figure 6 summarizes the estimation of *RelativeNationalization* for each party and election year. These estimations show a relatively nationalized party system during the 2000-2006 period and its downtrend afterwards. The national component of the PRI's election results was relatively high until 2012. For the last two federal elections, in contrast, the variance of its vote shares are mostly explained by the state or district components. For the case of the PAN, its relative nationalization collapsed after the 2006 election. The measurement's value for the PAN has risen during the last three elections, and it explains about a third of the total variance for 2018. The relative nationalization for the PRD has been consistently low with the exception of the 2006 election. Finally, the success of MORENA in the most recent election was strongly determined by the national forces at play as illustrated by its high relative nationalization in 2018. This level of relative nationalization is similar to the PAN and PRD's in 2006 or PRI's in 2012.

Figure 6 also shows that parties enjoy high levels of relative nationalization when they have a successful presidential campaign. This pattern should not be surprising, as presidential elections involve candidates campaigning across the country. It could be the case, however, that pooling together vote shares of presidential and non-presidential election years as lagged terms introduces noise to the estimations, and it may obscure the national strength of parties. We check for this issue by only including election years with concurrent presidential elections in our estimations, as shown in Figure 7. This exercise actually allows us to estimate the nationalization of the party endorsing López Obrador as its presidential candidate over the last three presidential elections. The figure shows

²Lupu (2015) modifies the estimation proposed by Bartels (1998) to incorporate the effect of the province variance in Argentina.

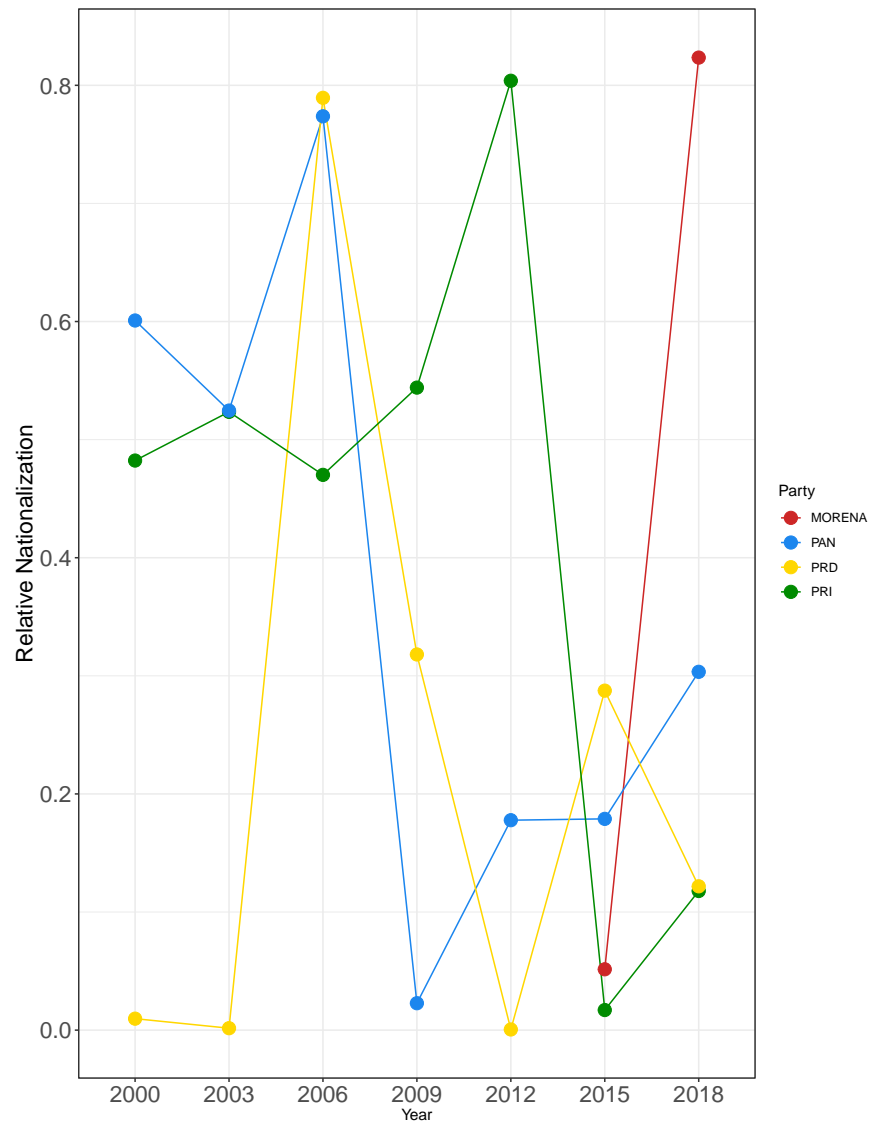


Figure 6: Relative Nationalization of Mexican Parties, 2000-2018

the collapse of PAN and PRI's relative nationalization after 2006 and 2012, respectively. The relative size of the national component explaining the party vote variance goes from more than 80% to below 20% at its best. It also shows that the strong national electoral component of López Obrador's party during 2006 and 2018 was replaced by the PRI in 2012.

In sum, the analysis suggests that a successful election outcome has largely relied on the national forces of the parties rather than the district or state contribution of the vote. Moreover, while the PRD continues to appear to be more of a regional party, the poor electoral performance of the PAN and PRI in 2018 seems not be followed by the vanishing of the national forces of their vote. Time will tell whether these parties can sustain their national forces for the next elections. Similarly, the 2021 federal elections will let us know whether MORENA could establish itself as a national party when López Obrador is not on the ballot.

Conclusion

This article evaluates the development of the party system in Mexico since democratization. In particular, we explore patterns of party nationalization and compare trends from the last 21 years through to the latest election, which saw the rise of a new party, MORENA. Our findings suggest that the PRI and PAN continue to produce similar nationalization scores to those produced in the past, while the PRD has become increasingly nationalized as a result of the decline of its electoral support. The PRD's falling vote share has occurred at the same time as the rise of MORENA, who appear to have slotted in to the party system without causing a great deal of instability. We find that their patterns of electoral support are similar to other parties in previous years.

Our findings also seem to suggest that vote shares for Mexican parties are clustered by state, highlighting the importance of sub-national politics in this decentralized, pres-

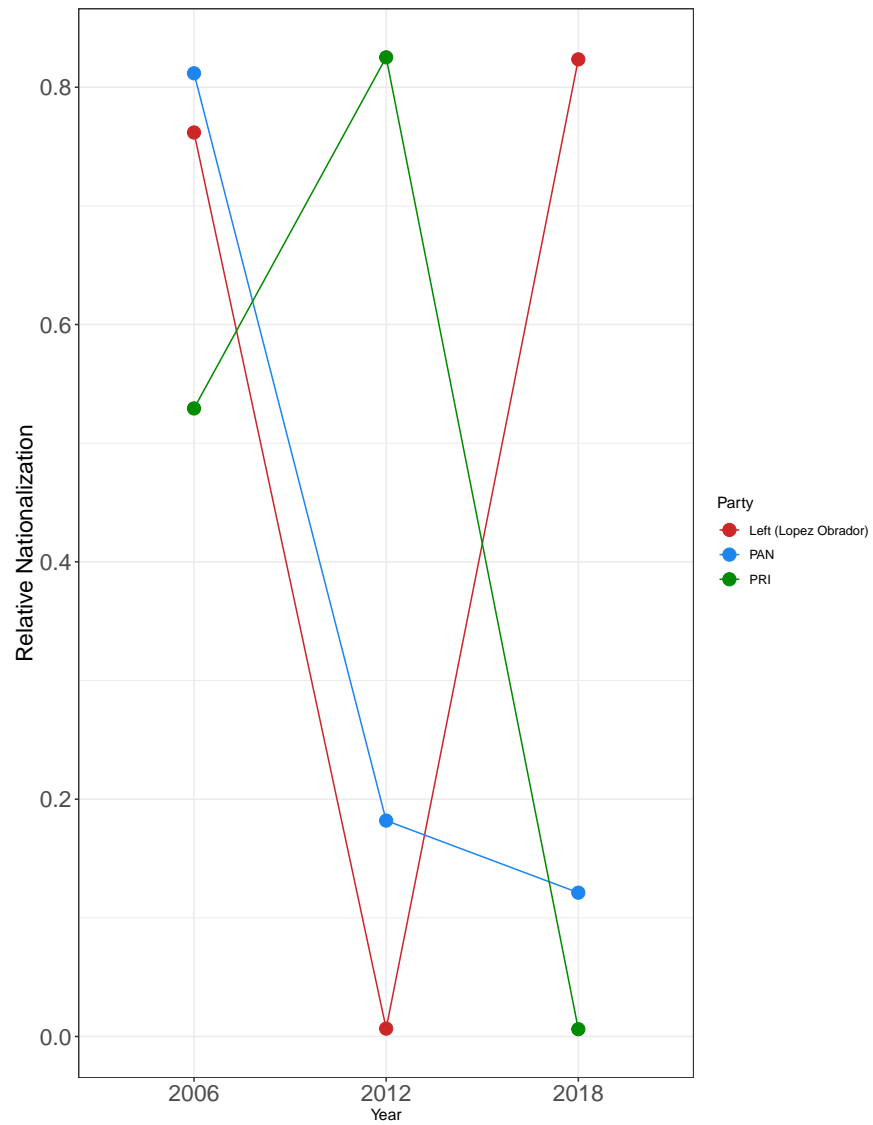


Figure 7: Relative Nationalization of Mexican Parties during Presidential Elections, 2006-2018

idential system. While all four Mexican parties are strongly nationalized on at least one dimension (dynamic), and to some extent on the other (static), a great deal of the variance in the static dimension is explained by state effects. The importance of state-effects suggests that state-level issues and gubernatorial issues have a greater effect than events occurring at the district level.

We find that MORENA's successful 2018 looks similar to the PAN in 2006 and PRI in 2012, where high levels of relative party nationalization are present concurrently with successful presidential campaigns. MORENA's vote share in the most recent election is driven by national and state forces. This is likely as a result of their nationally-focused campaigning, using AMLO's popularity and visibility to elevate the party's support, and relying on a similarly centralized, top-down approach to campaign resources as the other parties. Taken together, our findings demonstrate that elections in Mexico are driven by national, state, and district forces, which paints a more complex picture of the levels of nationalization.

While we conclude that MORENA appears to follow similar levels of nationalization to those of the other main parties in Mexico, there is a limit to how much can be concluded from our findings. We only observe one electoral cycle that includes AMLO's party, so it is important to review our findings once more data can be collected. As further electoral cycles are observed, we will see whether any lagged instability occurs, or whether MORENA proves to be a one-hit wonder. Perhaps the most likely outcome is that the PRD support continues to decline, and MORENA effectively replaces them as the leftist alternative in the party system.

From these findings, there are two main avenues for potential future research. First, future work should investigate the different levels driving electoral dynamics in Mexico. While this paper identifies the levels of nationalization in the Mexican party system, it only touches on the other forces driving electoral outcomes. Given that we know the importance of state governors in Mexico, there is reason to explore how parties in decen-

tralized systems may be sub-nationally organized. It is possible that this may go some of the way to explaining much of the variance in party nationalization. There is also potentially fruitful research in further exploring the interaction between national, state, and district forces in explaining successful legislative and presidential outcomes in Mexico, and in other decentralized systems.

Second, explaining MORENA's rise remains an important task, and may help shed light on the broader issue of new party success. MORENA are just one of numerous new parties claiming major electoral victories in well-established party systems. MORENA is as an interesting case for study, as our findings seem to suggest that they have slotted in to the party system without much instability or volatility. Understanding MORENA's rise should serve as one part in the explanation of new party success in recent years around the world.

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2015-2018

This section only considers the two federal elections after the creation of the party in 2013. While the lack of enough elections should warn the reader about the prematurity of the findings, the analysis highlights a few patterns that can be confirmed in forthcoming elections. To analyze the static and dynamic nationalization of the party over this period, we repeat the exercise described above to find the variance components of the vote shares both across districts and over time. Since we only have two points in time for this election, we simplify our estimation model described in Equation 1 to:

$$Vote_{dt} = (\beta_0 + \zeta_{0d}) + \beta_1(t_{dt}) + \varepsilon_{dt} \quad (5)$$

Observe that while we cannot account for the random effect over time for the elections, we keep our two quantities of interest (ζ_{0d} and ε_{dt}) to estimate the nationalization dimensions. We run the model for all four parties during that period and the results are reported in Table 3. The estimates for static nationalization are lower but are similar to those reported in Table 1. The only notable differences are for the levels of static and dynamic nationalization of the PRD. This is the result of considering two of the worst election results for this party. In fact, most of the PRD district-level returns are very low, producing a uniform decay of the party's electoral support. For the case of MORENA, the fixed effect for time shows that the party increased its vote shares on average about 28%. The estimate for static nationalization also suggests that MORENA's distribution of votes across districts is similar to that suggested for the PRI. Meanwhile, the largest value for ε_{dt} suggests that the increases of vote shares that the party experienced were uneven across country.

Table 3: Models for district-level vote support, 2015-2018

	PRI	PAN	PRD	MORENA
Time	-12.753*** (0.393)	-2.699*** (0.425)	-5.700*** (0.350)	28.341*** (0.530)
Constant	29.283*** (0.493)	20.427*** (0.663)	10.773*** (0.461)	8.734*** (0.556)
N	600	600	600	600
Random Effects				
Number of Districts	300	300	300	300
ζ_d	49.67	104.76	45.49	50.68
Number of Elections	2	2	2	2
ε_{dt}	23.17	27.03	18.36	42.09
Log Likelihood	-2042.895	-2164.318	-1991.157	-2155.748
AIC	4093.790	4336.636	3990.315	4319.496
BIC	4111.378	4354.224	4007.903	4337.084

***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1