

NÚMERO 229

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An Argument for the 'Best Loser'  
Principle in Mexico

JULIO 2011



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*Acknowledgements*

*We would like to thank Carole J. Wilson, Michael A. Thrasher, Francisco Javier Aparicio Castillo, and all of the participants from the Spring 2011 Política y Gobierno Seminar for their valuable comments. All errors, however, are our own.*



## Abstract

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*In the following paper we take advantage of the inherent flexibility of mixed-member systems and propose a new set of electoral rules we argue can help resolve—or at least greatly mitigate— Mexico’s legislative gridlock and lack of substantive representation. To demonstrate this, we first require changing two aspects common to all mixed-member systems, including the one used to elect Mexico’s Chamber of Deputies: (a) selection of a party’s ‘list’ candidates and (b) calculation of a party’s share of seats. Second, we use simulations of the past four Chamber elections, as well as evidence from Japan and two Mexican state legislatures, to show that our proposed electoral reforms—the implementation of a ‘Best Loser’ rule and a more restrictive calculation of largest remainders— encourage the incidence of single-party majorities and strengthen voter-legislator ties; and all while maintaining a relatively high degree of proportionality. This is an especially appealing result when one considers the weight ‘proportionality’ still has in Mexican political discourse. In short, we find that there are ways to modify the electoral regime that more effectively and predictably yield socially-preferred outcomes; however, to benefit from this flexibility decision-makers in Mexico and elsewhere must recognize that their solutions-to date may not be the most appropriate.*

## Resumen

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*En este documento hacemos un análisis aprovechando la flexibilidad inherente a los sistemas electorales mixtos y proponemos un nuevo conjunto de reglas electorales que ayuden a la resolución—o por lo menos a la reducción— del estancamiento legislativo de México y la falta de representación sustantiva en el país. Para mostrar la validez de nuestra propuesta, primero cambiamos dos aspectos comunes a todos los sistemas mixtos: (a) la selección de candidatos plurinominales y (b) la distribución de curules por la vía proporcional. Después mostramos, con evidencia obtenida de cuatro elecciones mexicanas a nivel federal, así como evidencia del régimen japonés y de los casos de Coahuila y el Estado de México, que nuestras reformas—i.e., la implementación de una regla de ‘mejores perdedores’ y de un cálculo más restrictivo de restantes mayores— fomentan la incidencia de mayorías unipartidarias y fortalecen los enlaces entre votante y diputado; además logran esto mientras mantienen un alto grado de proporcionalidad. Este último resultado es especialmente atractivo dado el peso que ‘la proporcionalidad’ todavía tiene en el discurso político mexicano. En resumen, encontramos que hay maneras de reformar*

*el régimen electoral que son más efectivas y producen resultados socialmente preferidos; pero para beneficiar de esta flexibilidad a los políticos en México y en otras partes tienen que reconocer que sus soluciones a la fecha, tal vez, no han sido las más adecuadas.*

## Introduction

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Over the past three decades, reformers have increasingly turned to 'mixed-member' electoral systems —i.e., systems where multiple electoral formulas are used simultaneously to elect legislative assemblies— to resolve various problems of representation and governability. Proponents argue that, by combining aspects of both proportional and majoritarian visions, such systems can result in the "best of both worlds". Not only would they produce working majorities with strong local-level ties, but they would also maintain a relatively high level of proportionality between electoral outcomes and legislative seat shares (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001). In fact, optimism that these systems were a panacea for electoral problems was so widespread that by 2000 as many as 18 countries and sub-regions had already used mixed frameworks to elect their legislators.<sup>1</sup>

This initial optimism, however, has since been tempered by reality. Not only has the use of such systems been particularly problematic for members of the former Soviet Union (Moser 2001; Moser and Scheiner 2004), reforms have also had mixed success in well-established democracies such as Italy and Japan (Scheiner, 2008). Indeed time has shown that mixed systems do not represent a cure-all for electoral inefficiencies and they may actually create entirely new problems. Fortunately these failures (and successes) have spurred a much needed discussion on the variability of mixed-member arrangements and their effects on such outcomes as party fragmentation (e.g., Herron and Nishikawa, 2001; Cox and Schoppa, 2002; Moser and Scheiner, 2004; Ferrara *et al.*, 2005), distributive policies (e.g., Lancaster and Patterson, 1990; Stratmann and Baur, 2005), and legislative behavior (e.g., Herron, 2002; Thames, 2005; Pekkanen *et al.*, 2006). And while much remains to be studied, it is now clear that altering the components of these electoral systems will not only affect the translation of votes into seats, but it will also shape the relationships between both voter and candidate and candidate and party. To ignore this may only make the political system worse off than it was before any such reform.

In this paper we use lessons learned from previous mixed-member cases to develop new electoral rules that directly address current electoral inefficiencies in Mexico. Like many of the countries mentioned above, Mexico had by the 1990s fully embraced a mixed-member system as the solution to its severe partisan inequalities. And like some of those same countries, Mexico has since been afflicted by other, perhaps even graver, problems —namely, chronic legislative impasse, a profound mistrust in political parties, and a lack

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<sup>1</sup> Armenia, Bolivia, Croatia, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Macedonia, Mexico, New Zealand, Russia, Ukraine and Venezuela. Mixed systems were also used to elect sub-national legislators in Scotland and Wales.

of government accountability. To address these problems, the incumbent Calderón Administration proposed a series of reforms in late 2009 which would, for example, repeal reelection constraints and reduce the number of congressional seats. However, as we show below, these reforms are likely to have only marginal effects if they are approved at all.

Instead we look to the flexibility of mixed-member systems and propose a new set of electoral rules we argue can help resolve—or at least greatly mitigate—today’s gridlock, mistrust, and non-responsiveness. Yet we do not simply suggest a change to the number of seats or the magnitude of electoral thresholds to achieve these goals, nor do we turn to extensive (and highly improbable) constitutional reform. Rather we change two fundamental—and largely ignored— aspects of every mixed system, something we argue can be effective and, at the very least, no less feasible than what has already been proposed. Looking exclusively to Mexico’s Chamber of Deputies, we first recommend a change to the selection of ‘list tier’ candidates. Whereas the Chamber currently uses closed-list PR, giving the party singular control over nominations, we propose a ‘Best Losers’ approach whereby ‘list’ seats are awarded to losing candidates with the smallest margin of defeat. Ostensibly, this should give voters significant authority over candidate selection and, given how competitive elections already are, increase the voter-candidate ties that closed-PR lists currently stymie. If a candidate cannot win a single-member district outright, perhaps their locally oriented politicking/campaigning will help them earn enough votes to win a ‘list’ seat. Second, we alter the method by which a party’s share of ‘list’ seats is calculated. We propose that only parties which win at least (a) 2% of the national vote or (b) one single-member district be eligible to receive a share of ‘list’ seats. Through these two restrictions, we increase the bias favoring larger parties and require smaller ones to have at least some connection with a voting constituency; and because the vote totals used to calculate seat shares only include those parties which satisfy one of the two criteria, this process should not result in a significant loss to proportionality.

In short, our proposal would—in contrast to the current arrangement—create greater hurdles to legislative representation and thus increase the incidence of single-party majorities, reduce the ‘pivotalness’ of small particularistic parties, strengthen connections between voters and legislators, and maintain a high level of vote-seat proportionality.

Using simulations of the past four elections—for which we vary both the number of ‘Best Loser’ seats and the electoral threshold—we show that our proposal first and foremost increases the probability of a single-party majority. We also find that despite the majoritarian tendencies of our reforms, the level of vote-seat proportionality is not substantially higher when compared with the current system. This is an especially appealing result when one considers the weight ‘proportional representation’ still has in Mexican

political discourse. Moreover, given evidence from both the Japanese House of Representatives and the sub-national assemblies of Mexico's Coahuila and Estado de México states, we expect the 'Best Loser' rule to encourage federal deputies to seek out closer ties with district voters—all without repealing the near-inviolable prohibition on consecutive reelection.

It bears noting that while our proposal indeed encourages single-party majorities while still maintaining current levels of proportionality, it should not be considered either comprehensive or definitive. We are simply trying to demonstrate that reform efforts can move past the simple 'tinkering' of seats and thresholds while still avoiding significant changes to a country's constitution (which are difficult to achieve). In short, we argue there are ways to modify a mixed electoral regime so as to more effectively and predictably yield socially-preferred outcomes; however, to benefit from this flexibility, decision-makers must first recognize that their solutions-to date may not be the most appropriate.

### *1. Defining Mixed-Member Systems*

Mixed-member electoral systems belong to a category of multiple-tier representation where legislators are elected via at least two overlapping districts (see Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001). Often one of the tiers is elected by proportional representation (PR) while the other consists of single-member districts (SMD). Thus, voters cast a vote for both a party list and candidate to each represent their communities simultaneously. The connection between the two tiers, also referred to as the linkage, is what differentiates the two types of mixed systems: mixed-member proportional (MMP) and mixed-member majoritarian (MMM). When the tiers are 'linked'—i.e., outcomes in one tier affects those in the other—the PR tier plays a greater role in the allocation of seats, which, in turn, benefits smaller parties, as is the case in Germany and New Zealand. However, in the absence of linkage, the majoritarian element of the SMD tier dominates, giving the advantage to larger parties that have the ability to win SMD seats. This is the form of MM system used in Japan and many post-Communist countries.

#### *1.1. Mexico's Mixed-Member System—Chamber of Deputies*

The lower house of Mexico's Federal Congress, the Chamber of Deputies, currently uses a particular form of mixed-member majoritarian system where voters submit a single vote for both party and candidate, and the number of seats awarded to both the SMD and PR tiers remains fixed. More specifically, the Chamber consists of 500 legislative seats in which 300 are reserved for the SMD tier while the remaining 200, which are equally divided into 5 regional

districts, belong to the PR tier. Those *candidates* who receive a plurality of district votes win an SMD seat. Their votes are then summed by party/coalition such that *party/coalition lists* which win at least 2% of the national vote receive a proportional share of the regional PR seats.<sup>2</sup> The order of list positions is fixed, having previously been determined by the parties/coalitions themselves. Additionally, no individual party may (1) win more than 300 total seats, or (2) be awarded a seat share that exceeds its vote share by more than eight percentage points. Deputies may serve multiple terms of office, but Article 59 of the Constitution forbids their *consecutive* reelection.

## *2. The Efficiency of Electoral Outcomes in Mexico*

Mixed-member systems are considered “the best of both worlds” because they maximize the benefits of both proportional and majoritarian electoral systems while avoiding some of their major drawbacks. To determine how well mixed systems actually maximize these benefits, we turn to the concept of “electoral efficiency” for a general set of evaluative criteria (Shugart, 2001a, 2001b, 2005). In short, there are two dimensions of efficiency: the interparty dimension and the intraparty dimension. The interparty dimension emphasizes the balance between proportionality and governability, while the intraparty dimension examines the degree to which candidates cultivate a personal vote. In the following we discuss the inefficiency of Mexico’s current system on both dimensions.

### *2.1. Interparty Efficiency in Mexico*

Evaluating electoral rules on the interparty dimension highlights the trade-off between representativeness and effectiveness. Representativeness refers to the degree to which societal heterogeneity is translated into political representation, while effectiveness refers to the ability of an electoral system to create decisive and stable government policy (Powell, 2000; Lijphart, 1999). Thus, deviation from interparty efficiency can be viewed in terms of a continuum –electoral systems which maximize effectiveness at one end (i.e. majoritarian systems), and systems that maximize representativeness at the other (i.e. proportional systems). An electoral system that is, however, fully efficient on the interparty dimension is one that presents parties as clear government alternatives while simultaneously preserving the proportionality of each group’s vote-to-seat share; ultimately, the resulting policies ought to represent the preferences of a significant portion of the electorate (Shugart, 2001a, 2001b; Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001).

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<sup>2</sup> The formula used to distribute PR seats is the Largest Remainders Method with a Hare Quota.

In terms of interparty representativeness, the Mexican system fares well, especially when compared with other mixed-member systems. Table 1 presents the effective number of parties (ENP) –both electoral (Nv) and legislative (Ns)— for the most recent election in eleven mixed-member systems, as well as two measures of proportionality.<sup>3</sup> The first is the ratio Nv to Ns (Laasko and Taagepera, 1979); the second is LSq, the least squares measure (Gallagher, 1991). For both cases, lower values indicate greater proportionality.

In terms of ENP, Mexico has a relatively moderate value, both electorally and in the legislature: there are seven systems with more electoral parties (Nv), and eight with more legislative ones (Ns).<sup>4</sup> Additionally, both measures of proportionality indicate that the Mexican system produces more proportional outcomes than many of its counterparts: using the Nv/Ns measure, there are seven systems with more disproportional outcomes while there are five using the LSq measure. Clearly, Table 1 illustrates that the Mexican system not only yields a reasonable number of parties when compared with other mixed systems, but it also tends towards a fairly proportional share of legislative seats.

**TABLE 1. THE EFFECTIVE NUMBER OF PARTIES: PROPORTIONALITY IN ELEVEN MIXED-MEMBER SYSTEMS**

COUNTRY	YEAR	NV	NS	MEASURES OF PROPORTIONALITY	
				NV/NS	LSQ
GERMANY	2009	5.58	4.83	1.16	3.40
NEW ZEALAND	2008	3.07	2.78	1.10	3.48
SCOTLAND	2007	4.71	3.41	1.38	6.99
UKRAINE	2002	6.98	4.67	1.49	7.44
ITALY	2001	6.32	5.30	1.19	10.22
<b>MEXICO</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>3.77</b>	<b>2.75</b>	<b>1.37</b>	<b>10.46</b>
LITHUANIA	2008	8.90	5.78	1.54	11.14
WALES	2007	5.08	3.33	1.53	11.36
HUNGARY	2010	2.82	2.00	1.41	11.67
RUSSIA	2003	6.61	3.60	1.84	12.01
JAPAN	2009	3.15	2.10	1.50	15.11
AVERAGE		5.18	3.69	1.41	9.39

Source: Gallagher, Michael and Paul Mitchell. 2008. *The Politics of Electoral Systems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Full data available at: [http://www.tcd.ie/Political\\_Science/staff/michael\\_gallagher/EISystems/index.php](http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/EISystems/index.php). Accessed March 2011.

However, the Mexican system does deviate from interparty efficiency in terms of effectiveness. Recall that a system efficient on the interparty

<sup>3</sup> In the case of Italy, Russia and Ukraine, we use the last election that occurred under the mixed-member electoral system. In all three countries, a pure PR system was implemented in the following election.

<sup>4</sup> Only Hungary, Japan, and New Zealand have fewer electoral parties, while only Hungary and Japan have fewer parties in the legislature.

dimension results in governments which not only implement policy, but implement policy representative of the preferences of a significant portion of the electorate (Shugart, 2001a, 2001b; Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001). Now, while evaluating the 'representativeness' of Mexican government policy is beyond the scope of this paper, it is clear that Mexican governments have proven woefully deficient in their ability to pass consequential legislation. That is, a great irony of modern Mexican politics is that the electoral rules once lauded for advancing opposition interests have since been panned for promoting chronic legislative deadlock.

Beginning in 1964, the hegemonic Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) spent the following three decades enacting reforms that gradually improved the proportionality of the country's electoral system.<sup>5</sup> And though this permitted a great proliferation of opposition parties, their presence in the Chamber has only served to complicate a once-straightforward process of hegemonic decision-making.<sup>6</sup> That is, with the 1994 repeal of the infamous 'governability' clause and subsequent passage of the '300-seat' and '8% margin' rules, no one party has since controlled at least 50%+1 of Chamber seats—a stark change for a country accustomed to 70 years of decisive single-party government.<sup>7</sup> Complicated further by the election of its first opposition president in 2000, the country has spent more than a decade struggling with chronic policy gridlock.<sup>8</sup>

During this time Mexico has certainly seen the passage of several important policies, the majority of which have been approved by grand coalitions consisting of the three largest parties. However, these coalitions are largely *ad hoc* and occur infrequently (Casar, 2008). Furthermore, proposals tend to get mired in long spells of debate and negotiation and, if approved, are usually stripped down to their lowest common denominator. For instance, during the 2008-2010 period one would find that despite the Chamber's achievements partisan conflict had indeed delayed and changed a

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<sup>5</sup> Examples include lowered vote thresholds for party registration, the introduction of mixed representation, the public funding of parties, and the creation of an independent regulatory body which monitors/administers federal elections. For a more detailed account of Mexico's electoral reforms and their immediate consequences please see Molinar Horcasitas and Weldon (2001) and Weldon (2001), respectively.

<sup>6</sup> The effective number of legislative parties has grown from 1.2 during the 1970s to a high of 3.77 for the 2009-2012 term (Gallagher and Mitchell, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> The 'governability' clause, implemented during the 1988 round of electoral reforms, maintained that if the largest electoral party (i.e., the PRI) won at least 35% of the vote then it was entitled to a simple majority of seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Within ten years, this was replaced by the two majority-inhibiting rules mentioned above. It is also worth noting here that we focus exclusively on the Chamber of Deputies because while the Senate is certainly considered more prestigious, it is in the Chamber where the government's annual budget—the primary source of political conflict—is introduced, debated, and ultimately approved.

<sup>8</sup> Mexican presidents were as powerful as they were during one-party rule because of (1) their standing as head of the PRI, which afforded them the privilege of choosing their own successor, and (2) the PRI's dominance in legislative, judicial, bureaucratic, and security spheres. Constitutionally speaking, however, the presidency is relatively weak—especially when compared with its homologues throughout Latin America (Aleman and Tsebelis, 2005). It lacks both a line-item veto, reducing the presidency's ability to negotiate with the legislature, and decree-making authority—an important tool when legislative deadlock cannot be resolved.

litany of major proposals, effectively halting the resolution of serious legislative business. One prominent example is the 2008 modification of the country's petroleum laws: to counter the rapid decline in reserves and production, the Calderón Administration sought a landmark restructuring that would have greatly encouraged private investment and jumpstarted new exploration.<sup>9</sup> And yet because of serious ideological differences with the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), as well as looming electoral competition with the PRI, Calderón's proposal took nine months to approve, saw its scope/efficacy greatly reduced, and, had its enactment delayed by a PRD-led judicial review. Other examples of gridlock include Calderón's "Decalogue", a series of proposals which would have revamped the country's political system but has instead been tabled since December 2009 (more below); the 2011 anti-monopoly law that, despite the media attention, took over a year to approve; badly-needed security, fiscal, and labor reforms which have still not been addressed; the Chamber's inability to approve important nominations;<sup>10</sup> and so on.

Perhaps worse is that few if any expect the current state of affairs to improve in the short- to medium-term. This is largely due to the upcoming election in 2012 when the three major parties will again fiercely compete for the presidency. The PRI, for example, will not want to grant any electoral advantage to Calderón's National Action Party (PAN) by approving his policies. Likewise the PRD and PAN will hesitate to support the PRI's suggestions, especially when the PRI's leading presidential candidate, Enrique Peña Nieto, enjoys a comfortable advantage in all national polls. And because no party holds a clear majority, all they can presently do (other than negotiate) is block the others' efforts. Moreover, if the previous decade is any indication, the PRI is unlikely to hold a Chamber majority even if it does win the presidency and will face the same obstacles that have frustrated the PAN since 2000.

## *2.2. Intraparty Efficiency in Mexico*

Intraparty efficiency concerns the degree to which candidates cultivate a personal vote (Carey and Shugart, 1995). In other words, efficiency represents a high level of accountability in which there is a balance between personalistic politics and party service. Under a more personalistic system, the relationship between candidates and their parties is weak because

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<sup>9</sup> Reforming the Mexican Constitution requires a 2/3 majority in both chambers of Congress and the approval of at least half of the state legislatures —thresholds which may be impossible to obtain for particularly divisive issues (Constitution Art. 135).

<sup>10</sup> With respect to the nomination of a Supreme Court Minister, the Chamber took nearly 15 months (November 2009 until February 2011) and two rounds of executive proposal to fill the vacancy. This may be surpassed by the time it takes for the Chamber to approve new executive board members of the Federal Electoral Institute, a task that should have legally been completed no later than October 31, 2010.

candidates rely more on a network of personal and local support to win election. If this occurs to an extreme degree, then candidates/legislators become overly tied to their constituents and risk prioritizing local concerns over national ones (Grofman, 1999). Pre-reform Japan, using the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system, provides an excellent example of a hyper-personalistic case whereby its open-list PR encouraged candidates to rely heavily on local networks to defeat opponents both inside the party and out (Grofman, 1999). Such personalistic tendencies cause candidates to not only waste resources on a small portion of the population, but it also makes policy implementation difficult as each legislator tends to favor narrow constituency issues over more programmatic needs (Shugart, 2001: 176).

On the other hand, in an excessively party-oriented system there is a tendency to emphasize programmatic concerns over particularistic ones. This is the case for pure-PR systems that use closed-list ballots because they encourage parties to maximize their label's overall vote total but not necessarily the vote total of specific candidates. And in the absence of preference or nominal voting, citizens have virtually no control over which candidates actually enter office. Pre-1999 Venezuela is an example of such hyper-centralization whereby highly disciplined parties pursued programmatic and national-level goals while depriving voters the ability to choose/sanction legislative candidates (Shugart, 2001). The result has been a reversion to authoritarianism in which the new regime capitalized on this crisis of accountability to rapidly reform the Constitution in its favor.

Mexico's mixed system currently suffers from this latter form of inefficiency: beginning with local precincts on up to the national Congress, citizens complain that their elected officials cater more to partisan interests than to voters. Unfortunately for voters, the institutions which encourage party-centric behavior are very well entrenched. According to Article 41 of the Constitution, political parties are "entities of public interest". This endows them with sole control over authorizing official nominations, exclusive access to public funding, and the discretion to explicitly decide how campaign messages are disseminated—all of which they use in conjunction with Article 59 to dictate the behavior of politically ambitious, although term-limited, deputies (González, ND; Aparicio and Langston, 2009). Party control is further compounded by the particulars of Mexico's mixed system. That is, while national party leaders do not always decide SMD candidacies, only they can set the group's closed-PR slate—a legal right they use to stack lists full with loyal proxy agents (Langston, 2006; Weldon, 2001). The result is that at least 40% of deputies—i.e., 200 out of 500 total seats—rely on the party, rather than the voters, for political advancement.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This number is likely higher due to the prohibition on consecutive reelection which limits the ability of deputies to develop a personal constituency. Because almost no SMD candidate is an incumbent, they may not enjoy much support beyond the party and might therefore rely on the strength of the party's label or the mobilizing efforts of

This party-centrism represents another of Mexico's great political ironies in that previous efforts to improve representation have resulted in a profound centralization of political power favoring the 'partyarchy' over citizen interests (Serra, 2009). But to explain this, many analysts focus on term limits and overlook the centralizing effect nomination control can have (Siavelis and Morgenstern, 2008). In fact we argue that if voters were able to select *all* of their candidates—which our 'Best Loser' approach encourages—then consecutive reelection may not be necessary to increase candidate responsiveness to voter demands. At the same time, however, the approach we propose below also encourages, single-party majorities, maintains a high degree of proportionality, and (largely) preserves small party representation.

### ***3. Reforming the Mexican System: Alternative Reform Proposals***

Before we fully detail our proposal, it is best to first consider the reforms the Calderón Administration has already proposed and discuss why they would be either infeasible or ineffective.

#### *3.1. The Decalogue and Its Limitations*

In December 2009, the Calderón Administration officially proposed ten major political reforms, many of which specifically address the country's lack of governability and representation. Among the more prominent are:

- A reduced number of deputies, from 500 to 400 (240 SMD, 160 PR);
- A higher electoral threshold, from 2 to 4%;
- Consecutive reelection for all legislators and municipal executives;
- Independent candidacies (which do not require party nomination); and
- A majority run-off system for presidential elections.

The subject of significant debate, it is worth noting that these reforms are vulnerable to one of two weaknesses and may be unable to effect their intended consequences (Negretto, 2010). The first is that given today's conditions (and our expectations for the future), approval of these reforms is politically infeasible. Such is the case for the term-limit repeal, the majority-assuring runoff, and the independent candidacies. The second is that reforms like those reducing chamber size and increasing the electoral threshold will not be effective on their own.

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local machines to win office. At the same time, however, there are many examples where legislators do indeed enjoy the autonomy of a non-partisan base.

To begin, there are two constitutional protections which Mexicans consider inviolate. One is protection against foreign ownership of sub-soil resources —the reform of which, as mentioned above, has been especially contentious. The other is the ban on reelection. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century motto “Effective Suffrage, No Reelection” was the rallying cry against the 30-year rule of General Porfirio Díaz, and helped drive the bloody conflict that followed his deposition. After the Revolution, the prohibition —intended originally only for presidents— was extended to governors, legislators and municipal presidents so as to increase the victors’ political control (Weldon, 2004: 574). Since then the prohibition has persisted and any call for repeal has only served to conjure fears of authoritarian rule. In fact, according to esteemed pollster Consulta Mitofsky, nearly 80% of all citizens oppose any change to the prohibition —even if the repeal were only extended to non-presidential offices for a period of 12 years (Mitofsky, 2010). Moreover, this “No Reelection” sentiment has been further strengthened by the categorical opposition of the PRD, the same party which, along with elements of the PRI, successfully weakened Calderon’s oil reform. Popular support for majority run-offs is also low: both 75% of voters and the PRD/PRI oppose the measure (Mitofsky, 2009).<sup>12</sup> And with respect to independent candidacies, many within the PRI —especially those loyal to Enrique Peña Nieto— staunchly oppose the measure because it would further reduce party power by eliminating the monopoly parties have over candidate nomination (Zuckermann, 2011).

With respect to the two other reforms —fewer legislative seats and higher thresholds— their biggest problem is ineffectiveness. Aparicio and Marquéz (2010), for example, argue that either reform will only have marginal, non-linear effects. With respect to chamber size, the authors find that the probability a Chamber party wins a simple majority is relatively low once the number of PR seats exceeds 100 —the Decalogue proposes 160— because these extra seats will effectively eliminate much of the majoritarian bias that an overall seat reduction creates. And with respect to higher thresholds, there certainly exists a great majoritarian bias, but according to the author’s simulations, even with a 10% threshold a single-party majority is impossible to achieve, especially with the 8%-margin rule still in effect.

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<sup>12</sup> The motivation for PRD opposition to the reelection repeal is based on ideological calls by its most vocal standard-bearer, 2006 presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who considered the repeal an effort by the “party mafia” to consolidate its power à la Porfirio Díaz. Its opposition to the run-off system, however, is a product of political calculation. That is, of the three main political parties, the PRD finds itself in a particularly vulnerable position: in addition to being the least preferred of the three, it is also the smallest in terms of regional support. So absent a charismatic leader —like the Left’s two previous presidential candidates, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and Andres Manuel López Obrador— the PRD would suffer the most from any strategic voting resulting from a run-off as PRD voters would be expected to defect to the two strongest options, the PRI and PAN (Cox, 1997). Given that, it is unlikely that the PRD will back down on its stance against a run-off system; and so long as there is no majority party in the Chamber of Deputies, the PRD is well-positioned to obstruct any future reform.

### *3.2. An Alternative Proposal for Reform*<sup>13</sup>

The goals we seek to address with our electoral proposal are as follows. First, we look to avoid reforming the inviolate restriction on consecutive reelection. Second, we hope to increase efficiency on the interparty dimension by improving general governability —i.e., improve the probability that a single-party majority forms— while, at the same time, maintaining proportionality and the legislative presence of small parties. Finally, we hope to increase intraparty efficiency by improving legislator-voter linkages by way of the 'Best Loser' principle.

Our proposal involves two key components. First, we recommend a change to the 'list' tier. As we have already mentioned, Mexico's use of closed-list PR empowers political parties at the expense of citizens, fueling the idea that deputies respond primarily to party demands (Carey and Shugart, 1995; Weldon, 2004). To this we propose a 'Best Losers' approach whereby 'list' seats are awarded to the most competitive losing candidates. Used in Japan since 1998, the 'Best Loser' approach has been criticized for overly strengthening ties between PR candidates and local interests: because a candidate's list position is improved by increasing her vote share in the SMD race, candidates have an incentive to target local interests rather than adhere to national party platforms (McKean and Scheiner, 2000; Pekkanen, Nyblade and Krauss, 2006).<sup>14</sup>

It is this very 'flaw', however, that makes the 'Best Loser' approach ideal for Mexico where parties enjoy significant constitutional protections. In fact, we find in the Mexican states of Coahuila and Estado de México —the only two we know to have recently used this 'Best Loser' rule—<sup>15</sup> that local 'Best Loser' deputies actively curry public support as they do in Japan. And because of how progressive ambition works in Mexico, these sub-national deputies not only campaign more "locally", they remain responsive to constituent demands

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<sup>13</sup> Throughout this entire discussion, one must ask: why not change to a non-MM system? Simply put, given Mexico's extensive partisan divisions, there has to be some guaranteed level of proportionality that pure SMD cannot provide. Moreover, with Mexico's past/current experience with corruption and authoritarian rule, there is little support for a pure SMD arrangement. At the same time, however, a purely parliamentary system based on proportional representation is not particularly appealing because of both voter and elite inexperience with such a system.

<sup>14</sup> The Japanese version of the 'Best Loser' rule is somewhat different than the one we propose for Mexico: whereas we do not consider the use of dual candidacies, this is expressly how Best Losers are nominated in Japan. That is, many SMD candidates in Japan are also ranked on party lists so that if these candidates were to lose their SMD elections they would still win office via the PR route —assuming they were high enough on the list and had a low enough margin of victory to distinguish themselves from other equally ranked dual candidates (McKean and Scheiner, 2000: 451).

<sup>15</sup> To the best of our knowledge, Coahuila is the only state that has expressly used a 'Best Loser' approach to elect its PR deputies. However, this is not to say that there is not mixing of SMD and PR candidacies via dual candidacies (as was the case in Chihuahua during its 2010 state elections); the difference between the former and the latter is that the latter has already fixed the candidates for each list position whereas the former decides this based on SMD performance.

throughout their terms of office. Within the state legislature, for example, we find that these ‘Best Loser’ deputies are more likely to pursue distributive posts that allow them to expand their electoral base for future office.<sup>16</sup> All the while, parties still exercise considerable leverage so as to limit the extreme personalization of deputy-voter linkages. This result –while preliminary– is particularly impressive given that it does not require a change to the current prohibition on reelection.

Second, we alter the method by which a party’s share of ‘list’ seats is calculated. Due to the country’s experience with authoritarian rule, a legislative party cannot control more than 60% of the Chamber seats nor can its overall seat share exceed its vote share by more than eight percentage points. With the addition of a relatively moderate electoral threshold, this combination of rules reduces the probability a single-party majority forms by increasing the number of legislative parties. However, we argue that these rules may be outdated (and thus easier to repeal) because, unlike the 1990s, the proliferation of political parties today is no longer as desirable of a goal as is decisive government. This is especially the case when one considers public clamor against the legislature’s record of *non*-achievement. Moreover, while these two rules have the same constitutional status as the ban on consecutive reelection (see Article 32 of the Mexican Constitution), neither has the societal support or the legacy that the ban enjoys. So to counter this anti-majority tendency, we propose that parties/coalitions must win either 2% of the national vote or at least one single-member district to have their vote totals included in the calculation of ‘list’ seat allocations—all without the burden of the “8%-margin” or “300-seat” rules.<sup>17</sup> The expected result will favor larger parties while requiring smaller and particularistic ones to establish a fixed voting constituency. And because only those parties/coalitions that satisfy the two criteria are included in the vote totals used to determine a list’s share of seats, proportionality is effectively maintained.

Thus, our proposed system to elect the Chamber of Deputies is as follows:<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Additionally, with the decentralization of Mexican party nominations, local actors have even greater influence over which candidates even make it to the ballot since parties cannot impose their preferred candidates without some broader support (Langston, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Multiparty coalitions are a frequent occurrence in Mexico. So given that we do not want to limit a party’s capacity to align itself with other likeminded interests, our proposal allows for the possibility coalitions. As such, it is possible for smaller parties to win seats without having to fulfill either criteria so long as it is aligned with a strong larger party.

<sup>18</sup> To be clear, our proposal assumes that neither the “8%-margin” rule nor the “300-seat” limit is in effect.

- The Chamber consists of 400 total seats.<sup>19</sup>
- Each voter is given a single vote with which to select her preferred SMD candidate.
- Each SMD candidate can only win with a plurality of district votes. There are a total of 300 SMD seats.
- The 100 'Best Loser' seats are divided equally among the five existing PR districts.
- Only parties which win at least (a) one SMD in a PR district or (b) 2% of the national vote are eligible for a share of PR seats.
- Once the votes for ineligible parties are discarded, those for the remaining eligible parties are summed, forming the basis for a LR-Hare distribution of seats.<sup>20</sup>
- After tallying a party's share of 'Best Loser' seats for each PR district, the seats are awarded to SMD candidates within that PR district who have the smallest margin of defeat in percentage points.<sup>21</sup> Note: this rule does not require "Best Losers" to be second-place candidates. Because the allocation occurs *within* party lists, a fourth-place candidate who loses by less than five percentage points, for example, will be positioned higher on the PR list than a second-place candidate who lost by more than five percentage points.
- In the event that a party does not have enough losing SMD candidates from which to select Best Losers, each party must also submit a closed list of 100 PR candidates.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Again, in keeping with Aparicio and Márquez (2010), we agree that changing seat totals and thresholds, on their own, will only have marginal effects on the probability of single-party majorities. However, by changing these values as well as the way we calculate the vote totals in general, we believe (and later demonstrate) that this will be sufficient to significantly increase the incidence of a single-party majority. Additionally, there is a normative argument for reducing the number of legislative seats (one which we agree with): fewer seats imply a reduction in the overall cost of government.

<sup>20</sup> Although not insidiously intended, this two-round summation effectively introduces two thresholds. First there is the 2% parties must reach to even be considered for a PR seat, and then there is the 5% they must have (once the non-discarded vote totals are summed) to win at least one of the 20 PR seats. As the reader will see in the Discussion section, it is this doubling-up —along with option of winning at least one SMD seat— which allows the majoritarian bias to persist without resulting in dramatic losses of proportionality.

<sup>21</sup> In the event of a tie between two Best Losers, the candidate whose SMD garnered the highest percentage turnout will be 'ranked' higher on the list.

<sup>22</sup> So that there is no confusion, our proposal differs from SNTV and other forms of preference voting in that voters under our proposal decide which candidates make it onto the list; under other forms of preference voting, however, it is the parties who decide which candidates make it to the lists (although not necessarily their position on that list).

#### ***4. Discussion: Predicting Outcomes Using the Alternative Proposal<sup>23</sup>***

In Figure 1 we present two sets of the ENP statistic for the four most recent legislative terms—one obtained using the current mixed-member system and the other obtained using the system we propose here. What is clear from these values is that the current system does indeed encourage a greater proliferation of minor parties, although that edge is, in an absolute sense, slight (and perhaps inconsequential). In fact, according to Table 2—where we report each party’s legislative seat share under both the current system and variations of our proposal—there are only two instances (the PAS and PSN in 2000) in which a party would have lost seats. However, the advantage of our proposal is that despite this loss in party representation the remaining smaller parties would have either enjoyed non-trivial support (e.g., PCD in 2000) or represented specific districts (e.g., PVEM in all four elections). This is particularly encouraging given that the Calderón proposal is expected to significantly decrease the amount of minor-party representation without ‘compensating’ those that remain—a situation that would not sit well with Mexico’s fragmented Left.

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<sup>23</sup> The simulated values reported in the Appendix were obtained using the results from the four legislative elections since 2000. This information is freely available from Mexico’s Federal Electoral Institute (<http://www.ife.org.mx>).

FIGURE 1. EFFECTIVE NUMBER OF LEGISLATIVE PARTIES: A COMPARISON BETWEEN CURRENT AND SIMULATED ELECTORAL RULES<sup>24</sup>

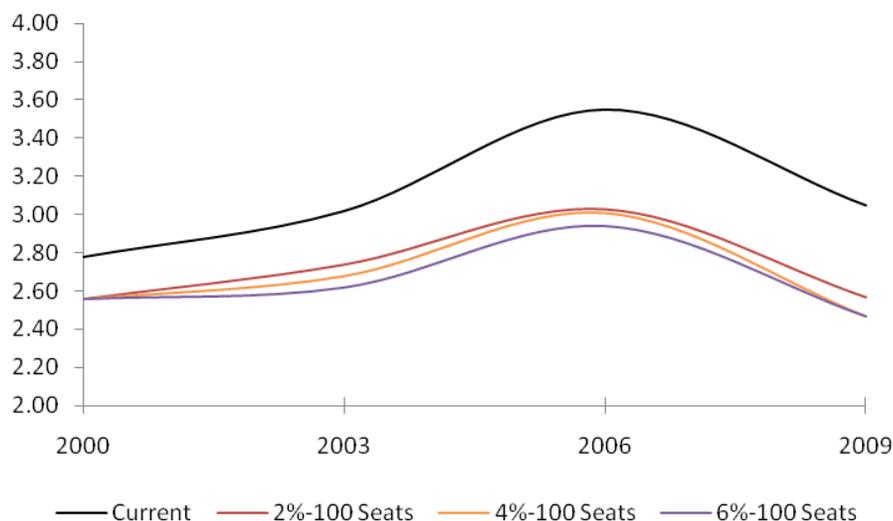


TABLE 2. LEGISLATIVE SEAT SHARES, BY PARTY AND BY LEGISLATURE: CURRENT RULES VERSUS PROPOSED RULES

PARTY	CURRENT	2%-100 SEATS	4%-100	6%-100	2%-200	2%-300
<b>2000</b>						
PRI	0.424	0.430	0.430	0.430	0.424	0.420
PAN	0.410	0.440	0.440	0.440	0.432	0.428
PRD	0.100	0.108	0.108	0.108	0.126	0.137
PVEM	0.034	0.015	0.015	0.015	0.012	0.010
PT	0.016	0.005	0.005	0.005	0.004	0.003
PCD	0.006	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002
PAS	0.004	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
PSN	0.006	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
<b>2003</b>						
PRI	0.448	0.500	0.505	0.510	0.476	0.462
PAN	0.302	0.282	0.285	0.290	0.292	0.297
PRD	0.194	0.188	0.190	0.192	0.188	0.188

<sup>24</sup> Each non-black line in Figures 1 represents the results produced by our proposal under different electoral thresholds and number of BL seats. The observed values reported here differ from those reported by Gallagher and Mitchell (2008) because the authors do not disaggregate vote totals for multiparty coalitions whereas the present analysis necessarily require us to do just that. For example, during the 2003 election when the PRI and PVEM ran under the “Alianza por Todos” banner, we identify all SMD candidates expressly affiliated with the PVEM and subtract them from the coalition totals. While this is certainly more labor intensive, the validity of the simulations hinges on specifying the parameters as exactly as possible.

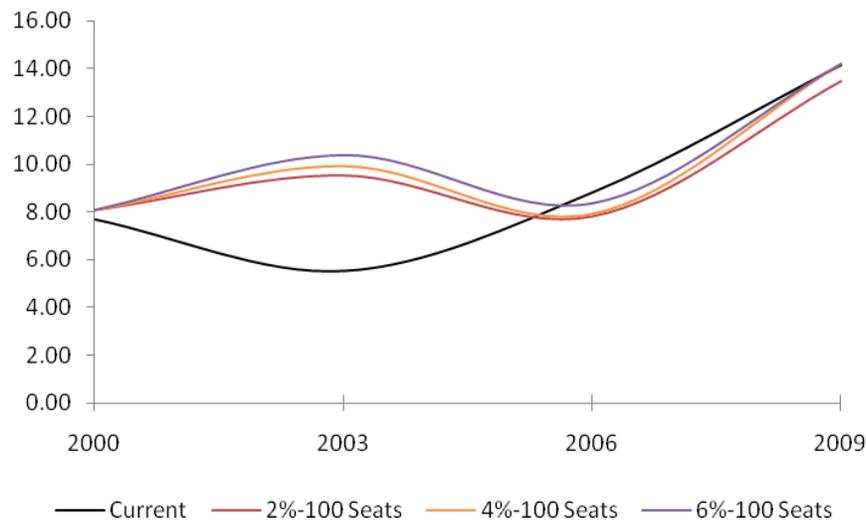
PARTY	CURRENT	2%-100 SEATS	4%-100	6%-100	2%-200	2%-300
PVEM	0.034	0.020	0.020	0.008	0.024	0.028
PT	0.012	0.005	0.000	0.000	0.010	0.013
PCD	0.010	0.005	0.000	0.000	0.010	0.012
<b>2006</b>						
PRI	0.210	0.232	0.235	0.237	0.244	0.253
PAN	0.412	0.430	0.432	0.435	0.412	0.402
PRD	0.254	0.300	0.300	0.307	0.300	0.298
PVEM	0.036	0.003	0.003	0.003	0.002	0.002
PT	0.026	0.005	0.005	0.005	0.004	0.007
PCD	0.034	0.012	0.012	0.013	0.010	0.047
PNA	0.018	0.013	0.013	0.000	0.020	0.021
ASD	0.010	0.005	0.00	0.000	0.008	0.010
<b>2009</b>						
PRI	0.472	0.555	0.565	0.565	0.522	0.500
PAN	0.286	0.250	0.257	0.257	0.260	0.265
PRD	0.144	0.132	0.138	0.138	0.132	0.132
PVEM	0.042	0.030	0.033	0.033	0.040	0.048
PT	0.026	0.018	0.007	0.007	0.022	0.023
PCD	0.012	0.005	0.000	0.000	0.010	0.014
PNA	0.018	0.010	0.000	0.000	0.014	0.018

With respect to presence of single-party governments, Table 2 shows that there is not a substantial difference in seat shares when one compares the current system with our proposal. However, there is a *substantive* difference in the sense that both the 2003 and 2009 elections would have produced a single-party majority under a 2% threshold and 100 'Best Loser' seats. This result persists for the 2009 election when we vary the threshold and number of 'Best Loser' seats.<sup>25</sup> And while this may not be an overly impressive result, the simulated values nevertheless demonstrate that single-party majority government is indeed possible whereas the current rules have so far failed to produce a single instance. Moreover, it is worth noting that it was only *after* the 2009 election that the legislature began debating (and delaying) some of the most pressing issues of the post-hegemonic era, e.g., energy, fiscal matters, security, political institutions, etc. Had a single-party majority been elected—here it would have been the PRI—perhaps the legislature would have approved or (rejected) significant proposals in a more timely fashion rather than continuing to leave the country lurching along in a state of gridlock. Whether a PRI majority would have actually behaved responsibly is, however, a debate for another time.

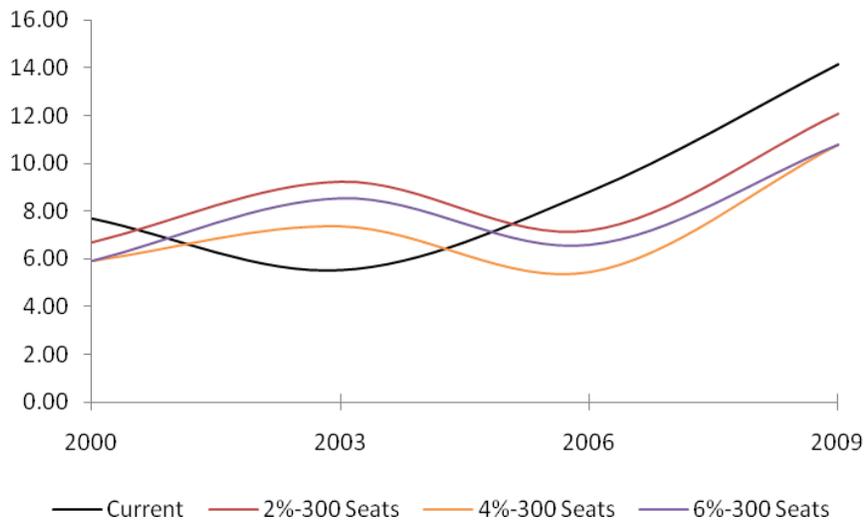
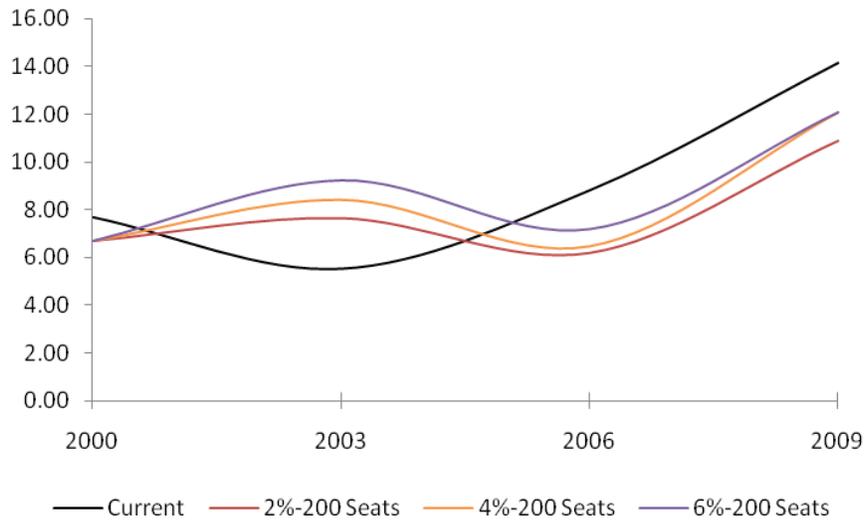
<sup>25</sup> When the threshold and the number of 'Best Loser' seats are both increased the PRI loses its simple majority in 2003, but just barely. This is important because, given the PRI's success over the past ten years in gaining center-left and minor party support, one could consider this near-majority situation to be the functional equivalent of a simple majority.

Having established that our proposed schema would increase the probability of single-party majorities (while not severely disadvantaging minor parties), we now consider the overall proportionality of the system to determine how much representation we are sacrificing for governability. Turning to Figure 2 (with 3 graphs), we compare the proportionality of the current system (as measured by the LsQ method) with a 'Best Loser' approach that employs 100, 200, and 300 BL seats, as well as three different electoral thresholds (2, 4 and 6%). The three graphs clearly show that while the current system does at times outperform variations of the proposed system – remember, the lower the LsQ value, the greater the proportionality— it does not do so all of the time. In fact, aside from every version of the 2003 election and the 200 and 300-seat versions of the 2000 election, each take on our proposal outperforms the proportionality of the current system. This robustness is particularly encouraging given that we would still obtain a single-party majority government in 2009 and be no worse off in terms of proportionality. Note: this level of proportionality should come as no surprise given that Aparicio and Márquez (2010) guarantee high proportionality – regardless of the threshold employed— once the number of 'list' seats exceeds 100.

FIGURE 2. GALLAGHER VALUES: A COMPARISON BETWEEN CURRENT AND SIMULATED ELECTORAL RULES<sup>26</sup>



<sup>26</sup> See footnote 27.



Taken together –the comparison of ENPs, the incidence of single-party majorities, and the relatively high levels of proportionality– our results demonstrate that our proposed mixed-member system would have greatly increased the interparty efficiency of Mexico’s mixed system. That is, not only would have our proposal allowed for greater governability, but it would have done so by maintaining (or even increasing) system-level proportionality without excluding many of the minor parties. And while we do not directly compare the intraparty efficiency of our proposal with that of the current system, we do assert in the next section that the ‘Best Losers’ approach (as evidenced by the Japanese, Coahuila, and Estado de México examples)

creates strong incentives for candidates to appeal directly to the voters for support rather than solely to the party. And what is most impressive is that all this is possible under the current ban on consecutive reelection, a restriction normally associated with strong party power.

## **5. Concerns**

Although the results are far from conclusive, they are certainly encouraging. This is especially the case when one considers the possibility that strategic behavior under the proposed system might not dramatically change the simulated values given that every party would have an incentive to win as many SMD votes as possible thus preserving the relative interparty differences in vote totals. However, there still remain several other concerns about external validity that need to be addressed before we can be any more confident about our results.

### *5.1. Local-Level Responsiveness*

Our first concern is about how the 'Best Loser' concept will apply to an environment where consecutive reelection remains prohibited. In Japan the 'Best Loser' principle fostered greater attention to local interests because candidates and parties alike valued an additional term in office. While the 'Best Loser' principle will certainly motivate Mexican candidates to *campaign* more aggressively (and locally) to reduce their margin of defeat, what guarantee is there that term-limited deputies will follow through with their promises once they are in office? That is, it is the parties who still authorize nomination and funding, so on the surface one would expect deputies seeking future office to be more attentive to party, rather than voter, demands once they reach the legislature. However, we argue that there are two reasons why we should expect Mexican deputies to engage in greater *constituent* service rather than just more localized campaigning. First, deputies are likely to return to sub-national office once their Chamber terms are over (Langston and Aparicio, 2008: 21); second, deputies tend to run for sub-national offices that, to one degree or another, include the federal district they had previously represented (González ND). Taken together, these observations suggest that it would not be in the interest of a progressively ambitious deputy to renege on campaign promises to voters and other local interests because that will only hurt their chances of winning local office later in their political careers. We expect this to be especially the case for Best Losers who —having enjoyed significant district support despite their loss— ought to use their time in office to increase their base for future campaigns. And when we consider Mexico's Coahuila and Estado de México states, which recently used a variant of the

'Best Loser' rule to allocate PR seats, the preliminary evidence suggests that our expectation may have some merit.

During Coahuila's 2008 state elections, for example, the opposition parties used the 'Best Loser' rule to allocate several of their PR seats—a first for the state and, as far as we know, an arrangement used nowhere else but there and Estado de México.<sup>27</sup> According to Coahuila deputy Loth Mota Natharena, a 2008 SMD candidate for the PAN and now 'Best Loser' deputy, the opposition adopted this rule both to encourage stronger voter linkages and to avoid internal fractions by allowing voters to decide list positions.<sup>28</sup> With respect to the former, Mota claims that the 'Best Loser' rule compels candidates to pay greater attention to local interests rather than focus solely on party demands. However, as Mota notes, this behavior is not just limited to the campaign when local deputies supposedly need voters the most. No, this behavior also occurs in the lead-up to the campaign when candidates use their time in other public offices to shore up their résumé and electoral base. Furthermore, Mota indicates that state deputies continue to work for local interests even after they are elected so that they can further expand their base should they decide to pursue other (perhaps higher) offices in the future. Best Losers have a particularly strong incentive to do this because they have already demonstrated a capacity to win votes; their legislative achievements can help them expand their once "insufficient" electoral support.

Although our research on the state-level cases is at its early stages, we have found some evidence that is consistent with Mota's comments about deputies' constituent service. In Table 3 we report the share of distributive committee posts that Best Losers have occupied in both Coahuila and Estado de México and compare that with their overall share of legislative seats, a test developed by Pekkanen et al. during their analysis of legislative organization and Japanese Best Losers (2006: 189).<sup>29</sup> In short, we find preliminary support for the idea that Best Losers seek (and acquire) those posts that will help them build their electoral base for future runs at office at a higher rate than their non-'Best Loser' colleagues. This tendency is especially pronounced when one considers committee leadership positions,

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<sup>27</sup> According to Article 24 of Coahuila's state electoral law and Article 46 of the federal electoral law, parties in Coahuila have the discretion to select their PR candidates any way they wish. For 2008, the PRI used a closed-list slate, whereas the 'Best Loser' rule was used to select four of the PAN's six PR slots, the PRD's entire slate, and several spots on the small party lists (*Periodico Oficial de Coahuila*, 19 September 2008). For the 2011 election, however, every party has returned to using the closed-list rule. In contrast, Estado de México has used the 'Best Loser' rule since at least 2000 to fill no more than four PR slots on each party's list (*EdoMex* state electoral law: Articles 22 and 267). Interview data from Estado de México is pending.

<sup>28</sup> Interview conducted via telephone on 2 June 2011.

<sup>29</sup> For Coahuila, we classify the following to be distributive committees: economic promotion, social development, agricultural promotion, public works and transport, health, water, environment and natural resources, municipal matters, social service, migration and frontier matters, energy and mines, and tourism. For Estado de México, we classify the following: social service, urban development and public works, agricultural and forest development, economic development, communications and transport, ecology, health, water resources, state/municipal properties, development and planning, tourism, and metropolitan matters.

i.e., the presidency and the secretariats: in Coahuila, Best Losers constitute 20% of all legislative seats; however they occupy over 33% of distributive committee presidencies and 34% of secretariats. This is particularly relevant given that committee presidents and secretaries in Mexico are known to determine much of an assembly's legislative production (Rivera Sánchez, 2004; González, ND; Aparicio and Langston, 2009). Moreover, we find similar patterns for Estado de México during its 2000-2003 and 2003-2006 periods, as well as relatively consistent results for the state's last two periods when both leadership and non-leadership posts are considered. And while these results do not control for other possible explanations of committee assignment —e.g., ideological proximity, previous experience, party affiliation— they do suggest that Best Losers in Coahuila and Estado de México seek out (and acquire) posts that can help them further expand voter support.

**TABLE 3. NUMBER OF DISTRIBUTIVE POSTS IN TWO MEXICAN STATE LEGISLATURES: SHARE OF 'BEST LOSER' COMMITTEE POSTS VERSUS SHARE OF 'BEST LOSER' SEATS**

COMMITTEE POSTS	% BL
<b>COAHUILA (2008—2011)</b>	
COORDINATOR	33.33
VICE-COORDINATOR	0.000
SECRETARY	34.21
TOTAL	27.42
LEGISLATIVE SEATS	20.00
<b>ESTADO DE MÉXICO (2000—2003)</b>	
PRESIDENT	38.46
SECRETARY	23.08
PROSECRETARY	23.08
MEMBERS	15.38
TOTAL	20.88
LEGISLATIVE SEATS	12.00
<b>ESTADO DE MÉXICO (2003—2006)</b>	
PRESIDENT	25.00
SECRETARY	41.67
PROSECRETARY	8.33
MEMBERS	13.89
TOTAL	17.59
LEGISLATIVE SEATS	16.00
<b>ESTADO DE MÉXICO (2006—2009)</b>	
PRESIDENT	7.14
SECRETARY	7.14
PROSECRETARY	14.29
MEMBERS	23.81
TOTAL	19.05
LEGISLATIVE SEATS	17.33

COMMITTEE POSTS	% BL
<b>ESTADO DE MÉXICO (2009–2011)</b>	
PRESIDENT	25.00
SECRETARY	16.67
PROSECRETARY	33.33
MEMBERS	14.10
TOTAL	17.54
LEGISLATIVE SEATS	16.00

Source: The State Congresses of Coahuila and Estado de México. Data available at: <http://www.congresocoahuila.gob.mx> and <http://www.cddiputados.gob.mx/>, respectively. Accessed June 2011.

Furthermore, it is not in the interest of the parties for candidates to renege on their campaign promises because unlike some candidates, parties—especially the three main ones—will certainly compete in every district in the future. And any reduction in vote shares at the district level will also reduce the number of ‘list’ seats allocated to the party (McKean and Scheiner, 2000: 460). With that in mind, parties will use their privileged status to ensure that a legislator’s behavior at time  $t$  does not negatively affect a party’s electoral performance at  $t + 1$ .<sup>30</sup>

## 5.2. Effectiveness of Single-Party Majorities

Another concern we must consider is whether the ‘Best Loser’ arrangement will prevent the single-party majorities that emerge from acting in unison. That is, the ‘Best Loser’ rules (and Mexican-style progressive ambition) will create an incentive for candidates/deputies to pursue more locally-oriented policies. But will this prove problematic for a majority party that must remain somewhat unified in order to impose its collective will?

While it is impossible to predict how deputies will respond to party whipping under our proposed system, the case of the United States House of Representatives can help provide us with a rough idea of what to expect. First and foremost, while parties in the US House are not as disciplined as their Mexican counterparts, the difference is nominal: US representatives vote with their parties an average 89% of all bills whereas Mexican deputies vote with

<sup>30</sup> Another voter-related concern is that the Mexican electorate is not sophisticated enough to process and act upon the strategic incentives generated by the ‘Best Loser’ rule, i.e., voters refrain from voting for a particular candidate because they fear ‘wasting their votes’, not realizing that their votes can still help a losing candidate reach office via the ‘list’ tier. In his work on Duvergerian tendencies in Mexico, Ulises Beltrán finds that Mexican voters are indeed sophisticated, defecting from candidates with low probabilities of victory in a manner consistent with Duvergerian theory. And while this effect is strongest for the most educated and affluent, Beltrán admits that this tendency might not be a lack of sophistication on the part of the less affluent but rather a product of mobilization by political parties (2011: 30).

their parties 97% of the time (Carey, 2000); and yet, despite relatively similar levels of party discipline, the legislative incentives for personalistic behavior are far greater in the United States than in Mexico. Second, González (2007) finds that the Mexican Chamber of Deputies operates in the same way as the US House —both are dominated by procedural cartels which allow the largest party substantial discretion in securing party unity on important votes. So even if the 'Best Loser' rule does encourage US-level personalism, the party caucuses within the Chamber have enough tools at their disposal to ensure that legislators do not stray too far from the party line.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, as we have stated above, Deputy Mota claims that the 'Best Loser' rule was adopted in part to reduce a party's internal conflicts. The rule is supposed to accomplish this because it avoids the possibility of elite disagreement over list positions —which is seen as particularly contentious, not only in Coahuila but in elections throughout the country. Instead it is the voters who decide where a candidate is ranked on a list; and it is the politicians and deputies who are left without the bitter taste of intraparty conflicts that would have affected the party's legislative production.<sup>32</sup>

### *5.3. Supply of Best Losers*

Our third major concern revolves around the question: what happens if a party wins so many SMD seats that it does not have any more Best Losers to place in the 'list' tier? Take the extreme example of a party winning all 300 SMDs with 60% of the national vote: according to our proposal, the party must be awarded  $\pm 60$  additional seats from the 'list' tier but it does not have any more lost SMDs from which to select Best Losers. To remedy this remember we stipulated in section 3.2 that parties must submit a closed-list slate of 100 PR candidates (as is currently done). In the unlikely event that a party's

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<sup>31</sup> Many of the important decisions made in the Chamber are made via two-third majorities. However, we do not expect this to reduce the value of our simulated single-party majorities because under the current rules no party can win more than 60% of seats. So if a single-party two-thirds majority is not feasible even today, then at least the proposed rules can produce a single-party simple majority.

<sup>32</sup> There is, however, another source of intraparty conflict: the post-election contestation of results. Since the beginning of Mexico's democratization process, parties have frequently contested the validity of official tallies —the most famous of which was the PRD's opposition to the 2006 election when its presidential candidate, López Obrador, lost to the PAN's Calderón by 0.56%. So, given this 'culture of contestation' and the intense oversight afforded by federal and state electoral institutes, there is the possibility that the 'Best Loser' rule will encourage candidates to challenge their co-partisans for spots on the PR list, especially when the margins of defeat separating Best Losers are small. However, in looking to Coahuila and Estado de México, there has not been a single instance where such challenges have occurred; this is even true when as little as 0.09% has separated one Best Loser from another (see the PRI list during the 2000 Estado de México election). Whether this is a function of party discipline or inter-candidate negotiation is unknown, but these results are encouraging in that they do not suggest that such intraparty competition is likely to result in significant post-electoral conflict. Many thanks to Andreas Schedler for bringing this to our attention.

allocation of seats exceeds its supply of Best Losers, parties can select deputies from this closed-list until they fill all remaining 'list' seats.<sup>33</sup>

Additionally, this 'safety net' of the closed-list should not greatly reduce the localizing effects of the Best Loser rule because by the time this 'net' is applied, deputies who had competed in district elections will already dominate a party's legislative caucus (unlike what currently occurs).

#### *5.4. Feasibility*

Our final concern is the feasibility of our 'Best Loser' system. That is, given the current state of policy gridlock in Mexico, what is the probability that a proposal as unconventional as ours garners enough political support to win approval? If the probability is low—or at least lower than the probability that Calderon's Decalogue (and its variations) is approved—then our effort here is especially futile. However, we have two reasons to be optimistic about our proposal's chances.

First, as we have stated before, our proposal does not involve repealing the ban on reelection, something which has already proven particularly fractious. Moreover, we do not require any change to the parties' constitutional status as "entities of public interest". In short, we are neither challenging the inviolate principles of "Effective Suffrage, No Reelection" nor are we attacking the basis of party power in Mexico. In this sense our proposal should have a higher of probability of passage relative to Calderón's Decalogue since the latter does indeed challenge both "Effective Suffrage, No Reelection" and party dominance while the former does not (or at least not directly). That is, although the 'Best Loser' rule empowers the electorate by allowing them to select which SMD candidates receive 'list' seats, parties still authorize their nomination and funding.

Second, as we mentioned in our discussion on Coahuila and Estado de México, there is already a precedent for the 'Best Loser' rule in the country. Although Coahuila only used this rule during the 2008 election (and not in the 2011 contest), Estado de México—the largest and most politically important state in the country—has required parties since at least 2000 to fill their PR lists with Best Losers. And while we do not want to make an unnecessarily large leap of faith and suggest that the Estado de México experience can compel national-level reform, we do believe that the mere presence of this rule should make Mexican voters and political elites more amenable to an otherwise unconventional proposal. Furthermore, should Enrique Peña Nieto win the 2012 presidential election, his rather positive experience with the 'Best Loser' rule—positive because he has generally dominated the state

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<sup>33</sup> We consider this scenario unlikely because, according to our simulations, parties never run out of Best Losers until we increase the number of 'list' seats to an extreme (i.e., 300). This data is available upon request.

under this rule since his rise to the governorship— should not hurt the chances that our proposal is approved.

## Conclusions

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We argue that our proposal helps mitigate Mexico's problems of intraparty and interparty efficiency by first linking the 'list' tier with voter preferences and creating incentives for parties and candidates alike to respond to citizen interests. This is because the 'Best Loser' rule used to distribute 'list' seats would greatly encourage SMD competition –not only would candidates compete at the SMD level with cross-party adversaries, but they would also compete with their fellow co-partisans throughout their respective regions. So even if SMD candidates lose, the more fiercely they compete, the more likely they will be awarded a 'Best Loser' seat –which ought to help their future political careers. Thus, we increase intraparty efficiency by tying candidates' political fortunes to their constituents' preferences. Not only do we find our expectations born out in the prototypical case of Japan, where Best Losers have won office since 1998, but we also have preliminary evidence that Best Losers elected to state assemblies in Mexico's Coahuila and Estado de México generally seek to respond to constituent demands by securing assignment to distributive committees.

Second, our proposal improves interparty efficiency by instituting a double-threshold that greatly increases the probability of a single-party majority while preserving the electoral system's proportionality. Moreover, our proposal reduces the electoral weight of smaller parties. In short, while the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was spent improving representation to give opposition parties a national foothold in the Chamber of Deputies, the long-term result has been the creation of a minor party system built largely on political favors and payoffs. That is, these groups are essentially being 'hired' by the three major parties to help construct *ad hoc* coalitions (Kellam, 2008). Although there are certainly some normative benefits to allowing small parties this 'kingmaker' status, the well-known willingness of small Mexican parties to casually shift from coalition to coalition greatly undermines the ability of major parties to construct reliable legislative blocs that can govern without significant obstruction.

Finally, our proposal is a relatively viable one in that it may be able to overcome the present state of partisan gridlock that so afflicts Mexican legislative politics. While space (and the uncertainty of an ever-changing Mexico) do not allow us to fully comment here on our proposal's prospects for approval, we can say with confidence that it would encounter no more opposition than those Calderón has already proposed –especially when this system is already at work in two of the country's states and would not require changing inviolate aspects of the Constitution. And as we mentioned earlier, if the last decade was any indication, the PRI may still face considerable

opposition should it win the presidency in 2012, further limiting the prospect for large-scale constitutional reform.

Suffice it to say, the simulated results obtained from our proposed electoral rules are neither earth-shattering nor especially impressive. Then again, our intent here is not to shock or awe our audience into agreement but rather to illustrate the inherent flexibility of the mixed-member approach in addressing a society's political problems—like the lack of governability and representation in Mexico. In short, our proposal is a clear example that there are other ways to effect a desired change other than through fundamental constitutional reform or through the 'tinkering' of thresholds and chamber sizes. This is especially important given that Mexico faces a series of substantial crises—e.g., *narco*-violence, resource insecurity, economic uncertainty—and needs both decisive decision-making and representative policy to solve them.

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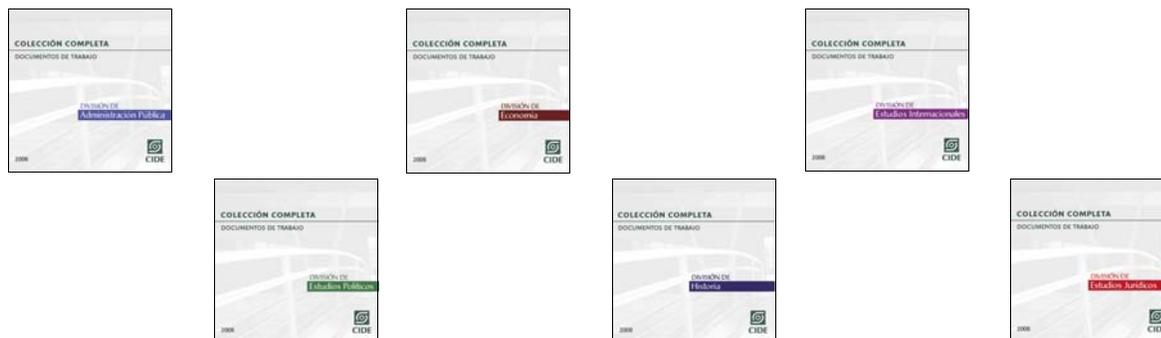
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