

NÚMERO 205

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The Effect of Electoral Rules on
Indigenous Voting Behavior in Mexico's
State of Oaxaca

DICIEMBRE 2008



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Abstract

This study analyzes whether subnational ethnic group and institutional variation leads to variation in ethnic group political behavior. To this end, I focus on the political behavior of indigenous groups in Mexico. Though Mexico has a small indigenous population compared to many other countries in Latin America and does not host ethnic-based political parties, it benefits from certain institutional and demographic features that allow analysis of how different electoral laws interact with ethnicity to shape political behavior. To this end, I study Mexico's state of Oaxaca where municipal governments have been legally allowed to adopt different kinds of electoral rules and where ethnic group heterogeneity is highest. Statistical analysis of municipal institutions, indigenous group density, and federal election results in this state show that certain municipal electoral rules exacerbate ethnic group abstention, although they have had no impact on electoral margins or partisan support

Resumen

Este estudio analiza si las variaciones subnacionales de los grupos étnicos e instituciones conducen a una variación del comportamiento político de los grupos étnicos. Con tal propósito, este trabajo se concentra en el comportamiento político de grupos indígenas de México. Aunque esta nación posee una población indígena pequeña en comparación con muchos otros países de América Latina y no cuenta con partidos políticos étnicos, se beneficia de ciertos rasgos institucionales y demográficos que permiten analizar de qué manera interactúan diferentes leyes con la etnicidad para configurar el comportamiento político. Para tal fin, se estudia el estado mexicano de Oaxaca, donde a los gobiernos municipales se les permitió adoptar legalmente diferentes tipos de reglas electorales, y donde es más elevada la heterogeneidad de los grupos étnicos. El análisis estadístico de las instituciones municipales, la densidad de los grupos indígenas y los resultados de las elecciones federales en este estado demuestran que ciertas reglas electorales municipales exacerbaban la abstención en los grupos étnicos, aunque no han tenido impacto sobre los márgenes electorales o el apoyo partidista.

Introduction

Much research on ethnic group political representation and subsequent political behavior has tended to focus on how electoral laws facilitate or hinder the formation of ethnic-based political parties and how this affects voting behavior, party systems and political stability (Birbir 2004, Horowitz 1991, Reilly 2001, Van Cott 2003), on how the presence of ethnic groups, regardless of the existence of ethnic-based parties, directly affects voting behavior, party systems, and political stability (Birbir 2006, Birbir 2004, Lipset and Rokkan 1967), or on how non-institutional conditions encourage ethnic groups to mobilize politically, as long as political institutions do not prevent them from doing so in the first place (Horowitz 1985, Laitin 1998, Van Cott 2003, Yashar 1999). This last research trend is a specific variant on the first and second.

The key distinction between research on ethnic group political participation lies not in their conclusions about the importance of ethnic group political participation in a society, though scholars frequently come to different conclusions on the matter, but in what triggers ethnic group political participation in the first place and how this later affects party systems and politics in the country at hand. Returning to the research trends mentioned above, for some scholars electoral laws shape the behavioral patterns of ethnic groups. For others, the mere presence of ethnic groups alone is enough to affect politics, voting behavior, and party systems. And, others demonstrate that ethnic groups are encouraged to form parties under certain socio-economic conditions and political institutional systems.

Scholars also come to different conclusions about how and why ethnicity matters for party politics and political stability. Some argue that the existence of ethnic-based political parties ensures stable ethnic group representation and thus political stability, at least in new democracies (Lijphart 1977, Sartori 1994). Other researchers, in contrast, argue the reverse: that ethnic-based parties encourage social and political divisions, undermining political stability (Horowitz 1985). Some highlight how the presence of ethnic groups in a society, regardless of whether they are able to form parties, decreases political stability, while others argue that the presence of ethnic groups facilitates political stability through their stabilizing effect on voting behavior, party support, and electoral volatility, even where ethnic parties are absent (Birbir 2006, Birbir 2004).

Despite their often divergent points of focus and findings, research on ethnic politics has two things in common. First, most research demonstrates that, in ethnically diverse societies, systematic ethnic group political participation in some form or another affects the quality and stability of democracy. This makes both theoretical and empirical sense: understanding

how the political incorporation of ethnic groups affects political systems has been important to understanding the chances of democratic survival in heterogeneous societies. Second, most scholars tend to focus on national-level ethnic groups, patterns of ethnic group politicization, and thus national-level political trends. Again, this makes empirical sense. The existence of ethnic-based parties tends to be determined by national-level electoral laws, not local ones, and any within-country variation in ethnic group presence tends to be of national interests as it affects national-level party systems and political stability. To the extent that scholars care about within-country variation in voting behavior, the explanation tends to lie in within-country variation in ethnic group presence, not within-country variation in electoral laws.

This study attempts to add to the extensive literature on ethnic group politics by analyzing ethnic-based politics and political behavior in a country where subnational ethnic group presence and subnational electoral rules vary. The goal of this study is thus to determine whether such subnational ethnic group and subnational institutional variation leads to differences in subnational ethnic group political behavior and whether this affects local and national politics and party systems. In terms of the ethnic group research trends summarized above, the study seeks to complement research on electoral laws and how they affect the formation of ethnic-based political parties by investigating whether, even in a case where national electoral laws prevent the formation of ethnic-based parties, some kinds of subnational electoral laws affect the behavior of ethnic voters and thus political party systems in predictable ways. In so doing, this paper also indirectly addresses the second and third research trends discussed above by analyzing whether, even if intra-system variation in ethnic group presence leads to intra-system variation in political behavior and party politics, electoral laws exacerbate variation in this political behavior. In this way, the study seeks to build on studies, like that of Van Cott 2005 and Madrid 2005, that focus on how differences in ethnic group political behavior (party formation or voting volatility) within countries depend solely on variation in ethnic group concentration and composition. Instead, the study conducted here investigates whether variation in subnational electoral laws interacts with ethnicity, and any variation in ethnic concentration, to lead to predictable variation in political behavior and thus in party politics and political stability, even where national electoral laws restrict ethnic party formation.

To achieve this goal, this study focuses on the political behavior of indigenous groups in Mexico. Although Mexico has a relatively small indigenous population compared to many other countries, estimated at about 13% of the total population, especially those in Latin America, it benefits from certain institutional and demographic features that allow us to investigate how different electoral laws interact with ethnic groups to shape party politics.

Institutionally, Mexico's national-level electoral laws have systematically prevented the formation of indigenous-based parties at both the federal and local levels. However, Mexico's federal institutions have enabled states, where willing, to allow municipal governments to experiment with different kinds of electoral rules that can affect the nature of local indigenous group participation. This subnational political institutional variation is unusual for Latin America where national laws usually limit or wholly determine the precise shape of local election laws adopted by both municipal and state governments.

To this end, I study Mexico's state of Oaxaca. Oaxaca, one of Mexico's 31 states, is known for allowing changes in municipal electoral codes in the 1990s that gave municipal governments the freedom to choose new mechanisms for electing local leaders based on local indigenous traditions and that therefore differ considerably from conventional electoral systems. This form of government, called *Usos y Costumbres* (UyC) or Uses and Customs, is currently used in 418 out of 570 Oaxacan municipalities. Although several other Mexican states also have large indigenous populations, Oaxaca's 570 municipalities provide a singular testing ground for evaluating the effect of subnational political practices on national politics and democracy. The institutional arrangements used by UyC municipalities differ dramatically from non-UyC systems in important ways. More important, unlike in other states in Mexico, Oaxaca's UyC regimes have been formally recognized, thus making it possible to compare ethnic political behavior in UyC and non-UyC systems statistically. Other states in Mexico, like in Chiapas, Guerrero, and Veracruz, have also been known to allow UyC-type local political arrangements but until these systems are formally recognized by law and codified, statistical analysis of these systems is impossible.

Given their use of indigenous customs for selecting local governments, indigenous voters in UyC systems should differ systematically in their political behavior compared to municipalities using other electoral systems. Moreover, higher density indigenous UyC municipalities should differ from lower-density UyC systems and from non-UyC municipalities. In particular, I hypothesize that highly indigenous UyC systems should enjoy higher levels of political participation, higher levels of political competition, and lower levels of support for the formerly hegemonic Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). The use of indigenous customs to select local governments should raise indigenous group interest in local politics, leading to higher levels of participation. With participation comes political competition and losses in support for dominant parties. However, statistical analysis revealed that UyC systems have not led communities with high levels of ethnic voters to more political inclusion, participation, debate, or competition. This is contrary to both what advocates of UyC and state-level political leaders had hoped would occur. Instead, highly ethnic UyC areas suffered higher rates of abstention

than lower ethnic areas and non-UyC systems. And, indigenous voters in UyC systems did not favor political competition or disfavor the PRI, something likely the result of their lack of political participation in their systems.

This study proceeds as follows: First it summarizes Mexico's national electoral laws and demographic features in order to explain its lack of indigenous parties. Second, the study discusses the emergence of electoral systems used to elect local government in some Mexican states to show that many localities have been legally allowed to adopt other electoral systems and forms of government, leading to interesting subnational variation in electoral laws. Third, the study develops three testable hypotheses about the effect of local electoral laws and ethnic group presence on ethnic group political behavior in Mexico. Fourth, it discusses the data and statistical models used to test the hypotheses, and then it reports the results of the tests in section five. I then conclude.

Mexican Electoral Laws and the Lack of Indigenous Parties

Mexico's demographics and electoral laws work against the formation of ethnic-based political parties. For the purposes of this study, we will consider Mexico's primary ethnic groups as its myriad of indigenous peoples. The Mexican government estimates that 62 different indigenous languages are spoken within its borders.¹ Even so, Mexican citizens who consider themselves indigenous represent a small percentage of the overall population. Mexico's Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (formerly the Instituto Nacional Indigenista or INI), based on data from the Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO) and the Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI), currently estimates the number of indigenous people at about 13% of the total population.² If indigenous language capacity is used to distinguish between indigenous and non-indigenous groups, the estimate declines to 6%.³ Mexican states counting on the highest proportion of that nation's indigenous population include Yucatán (where 59% of the population is considered indigenous), Oaxaca (48%), Quintana Roo (39%), Chiapas (28%), Campeche (27%), Hidalgo (24%), Puebla (19%), Guerrero (17%), San Luis Potosí (15%) and Veracruz (15%).⁴ Racially speaking, however, indigenous groups most likely account for a much higher percentage of the population, though most of these racially indigenous peoples are Spanish-only speakers and have little contact with the cultural and social traditions of their groups of origin. Massive internal migration and emigration from Mexico to other countries,

¹ Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas < <http://www.cdi.gob.mx/> >.

² *Idem.*

³ *Idem.*

⁴ *Idem.*

primarily the US, has also led to a thinning of many of indigenous communities.

The small percent share indigenous group population in Mexico, however, in itself, is not necessarily enough to prevent the formation of indigenous parties. Federal electoral laws only require parties to win 2% total national votes to maintain party registration and access to public party financing. And, some parties receiving relatively small national vote shares win seats in the national Chamber of Deputies and sometimes the Senate. However, certain particularities of Mexico's party registration law have interacted with key demographic characteristics of Mexico's indigenous communities to prevent the creation of indigenous parties in Mexico. Indeed, rather than aiding small party formation, Mexico's party registration presents considerable barriers to them, with only those parties obtaining national registration able to compete in federal, state, and even municipal elections. To register, aspiring parties must present a copy of their party statutes and evidence of at least 0.13% of total registered voters in the last federal election. Party membership rolls must be distributed across more than 50% of the Mexican states, with each state having at least 3,000 members, or across at least 50% of the country's 300 federal districts, with each district showing at least 300 members. As mentioned, parties who obtain registration but then win less than 2.0% total national votes in a federal election lose their registration status. All parties must compete alone, that is, not in coalition with other parties, in their first federal election.

The spatial requirement for registering parties interacts with two demographic features of Mexico's indigenous population to undermine the registration prospects of indigenous parties. In the first place, as stated above, the nature of indigenous groups varies widely by region in Mexico, as do the languages they speak, making not just social but political coordination between them extremely difficult. In addition, Mexico's numerous indigenous groups have varied in their attempts to protect their cultures and languages, something that has affected the intensity of indigenous group affiliation. In the north, the Tarahumara of Chihuahua and the Yaqui and Seri of Sonora maintain traditional cultures and languages quite different from the Nahuatl, Tarascan, and Mixtec minorities surviving in the central regions of Mexico. In the southern states of Chiapas and Oaxaca, and in the Yucatán Peninsula, the majority of the population is indigenous but belongs to a variety of language and cultural groups. More important, and as noted above, despite representing 13% overall share of citizens, Mexico's indigenous population is heavily concentrated in just a few regions, particularly in Chiapas, Oaxaca, and the Yucatán Peninsula, with the numbers of indigenous people in other regions extremely small. Registering an indigenous party that could appeal to such a wide range of cultural groups and that could drum up support in the

number of states or districts required to receive party registration is unlikely.⁵ This point echoes that of Van Cott (2005) in her study of other Latin American nations.

Of course, there are likely many other factors that also contribute to the lack of an indigenous political party in Mexico but demographics and party registration requirements certainly play their role in working against such party formation. And, as long as these things remain the same or similar, there is little likelihood of an indigenous party forming in the future. Even so, despite the current and likely future lack of indigenous parties in Mexico, indigenous political activity has been an important topic of study for scholars, politicians, government officials, and bureaucrats in this country. However, most have studied the origins of ethnic group political mobilization in Mexico (Trejo 2001 and Trejo 2001) out of concern for political representation of indigenous groups or post-election violence (Osorio 2004). Though the interest of both scholars and government officials in the informal political activities of indigenous groups seems justified given the recent surge in political activity in the state of Oaxaca, the heavy concentration of indigenous voters in some regions in Mexico means that, though they may not have a striking effect on national electoral outcomes or overall national political stability, they can have an important impact on municipal, state, and even regional results of federal elections. Yet, few scholars have investigated the role of ethnicity in local politics in Mexico. The remainder of this paper uses the municipality as its primary level of analysis and investigates how variation in the presence of indigenous groups and municipal electoral laws affect voting behavior in these districts.

Mexico's State of Oaxaca and its Varied Municipal Institutional Systems

Despite the difficulty of indigenous party formation and registration in Mexico, the federal government has recognized the important existence of indigenous communities throughout its territory. In 1992 the federal government amended its discussions over indigenous representation (Anaya Muñoz 2005, Recondo 2002). There is considerable debate about the reasons

⁵ Of course, it could be argued that indigenous groups could borrow the party registration of another party, simply using another political group as a vehicle for politicizing its own concerns. I borrow Van Cott's (2005) definition of an ethnic party as "an organization authorized to compete in elections, the majority of whose leaders and members identify themselves as belonging to a non-dominant ethnic group, and whose electoral platform includes among its central demands programs of an ethnic or cultural nature (p. 3)" and conclude that no party in Mexico has been effectively borrowed by Mexico's indigenous community as no party devotes a significant share of its program to indigenous issues. Given that party platforms are largely constructed at the national level in Mexico, it remains unlikely that any party's current or potential ethnic voters could muster enough political sway inside their parties to influence the party platform or policy in a way that would make indigenous issue dominant enough for the party to be considered ethnic in nature.

underlying the federal government's decision but most scholars conclude that the government hoped to reduce ethnic tensions and resulting guerrilla movements that had blossomed in the southern, heavily indigenous states of Chiapas, Guerrero, and Oaxaca in the early 1990s (Anaya Muñoz 2005, Recondo 2002). The state of Oaxaca was the only state to follow the federal government's initiative and change its municipal electoral codes in 1995, with reforms in 1997, to allow a new election mechanisms that would legally recognize local community practices that had been used for decades (Anaya Muñoz 2005, Recondo 2001). The municipal institutional system eventually approved by the Oaxacan state government is called the "Usos y Costumbres" (UyC) or the "Uses and Customs" system. When the state government first approved the introduction of UyC systems in 1995, 412 out of Oaxaca's 570 municipalities chose to adopt it; by 1997 the total number of UyC municipalities had increased to 418 (Recondo 2001, Servicios para una Educación Alternativa 2006).

UyC systems differ from municipal governmental institutions used in the rest of Mexico in important ways. Before describing UyC systems, however, it is important to describe how most municipalities in Mexico are structured and how they elect local leaders. Normally, mayors are elected by plurality from a single, municipal district, and municipal councilors are elected from closed party lists on ballots fused with mayoral ones, with a complex allocation formula guaranteeing mayors a majority of seats on city councils (Acedo 2003). Candidates for elected municipal (and state and federal) offices are selected and presented by political parties that have been formally recognized by the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) and thus have met restrictive national registration guidelines. A secret ballot is used for casting votes, while all men and women eighteen years and older are eligible to vote in municipal (state and federal) elections. Scholars of Mexican politics refer to this combination of political party-based electoral processes, secret ballots, and universal suffrage as the "Political Parties" (PP) system.

In contrast, Oaxacan municipalities using UyC systems must follow federal constitutional guidelines and select a mayor, municipal council, and a local attorney general but the rules used to determine suffrage and candidate eligibility, candidate selection and presentation procedures, and ballot structure and voting mechanisms can differ from the PP system in important ways. UyC governments do not formally allow political parties to select or present candidates, although considerable anecdotal evidence suggests that parties still retain some influence in UyC municipalities (Eisenstadt 2007, Recondo 2001). Most UyC regimes revolve around a central decision-making body that is the municipality's highest level of political authority, with its decisions/rulings adopted by the municipal government. Sometimes this takes the form of an elder's council, sometimes a public Asamblea General Comunal (AGC) or General Communal Assembly (Eisenstadt 2007, Guerra Pulido 2000).

Two things characterize these decision-making bodies. First, they are charged with running all candidate selection and municipal voting. Second, formal participation in them is limited. Elders' councils are comprised of age-eligible citizens and can be closed-door events. The AGC is organized around a public meeting whose recognized participants, either in the form of its leaders or its voters, varies by community. The AGC is usually comprised of a mesa de debates or a debate group that runs the meeting, all elections held in the meeting, and records its decisions/rulings. The mesa usually includes a president, secretary, and note-takers.

UyC regimes vary in their requisites for who is eligible to be selected for elders' council or AGC positions, with the field most often restricted by sex, age, marital status, residency requirements, and satisfactory participation in the cargo and tequio system (Eisenstadt 2007, Guerra Pulido 2000, Recondo 1999). The cargo system requires citizens to hold a variety of formal positions in the community and the tequio system service on short-term community projects. Both mechanisms trace their roots to the Catholic Church in this region and are designed to help contribute to the community's political, economic, and social life. Service requirements range by municipality, with eligibility limited by age, marital status, and residency requirements. Candidates for municipal offices are recommended by the elders' council or AGC. Candidates must also meet certain sex, age, marital status, residency, and cargo/tequio requirements. Sometimes community groups, like peasant or neighborhood associations or police forces, also have the right to name candidates who have complied with minimum requirements. Municipal elections run through the elders' council or AGC, which can use a variety of voting mechanisms, ranging from secret individual ballots to mechanisms of publicly cast votes by individuals or groups. Ballots can also be cast using simultaneous or sequential procedures.

Oaxaca's UyC regimes have attracted considerable scholarly attention, with studies in political science focusing primarily on why Oaxaca approved electoral reforms to allow their formalization (Anaya Muñoz 2005, Anaya Muñoz 2002, Anaya Muñoz 2003, Elizarrarás Álvarez 2002, Recondo 2002, Recondo 2001), what explains municipalities' decisions to adopt them (Guerra Pulido 2000, Recondo 2002), how they have worked to affect the level of post-election conflict and violence (Eisenstadt 2007, Osorio Zago 2004, Recondo 2002), how they have helped the PRI maintain political support (Anaya Muñoz 2003, Elizarrarás Álvarez 2002, Owolabi 2004), and how they have affected electoral participation in federal elections (Benton forthcoming, Goodman and Hiskey 2006). Few scholars, however, have studied whether and how UyC systems affect indigenous voting behavior and this is what this study seeks to address.

Oaxaca's Municipal Institutions and Expected Indigenous Political Behavior

In this section, I develop several hypotheses about how UyC rules should be expected to affect indigenous group political behavior in UyC compared to PP systems. Advocates for the adoption of UyC systems supported municipal level electoral changes that would recognize the state's multicultural heritage and large indigenous population and that would increase the level of indigenous political interest and participation in local politics and government (Eisenstadt 2007). Several scholars have also noted that state-level political discussions in Oaxaca in the 1990s revealed politicians' concern over guerrilla movements and how changing local electoral rules to recognize the indigenous traditions might allay social unrest and related political instability (Anaya Muñoz 2005, Recondo 2001). Even so, several scholars also conclude that the decision to adopt UyC systems was taken out of interest in preserving the then-hegemonic Partido Revolucionario Institucional's (PRI) position in local and state government, even if local politicians were concerned about social and political stability (Anaya Muñoz 2005, Eisenstadt 2007, Recondo 2001). "Passing a law to keep municipal elections 'free' from party involvement—at least by other parties—minimized opposition incursions under the guise of promoting indigenous representational 'purity'" (Eisenstadt 2007).

UyC systems thus may have been adopted to help maintain the hegemonic position of the PRI in state politics. They might also have been adopted to help shore up indigenous political participation. Either way, UyC systems differ dramatically from PP systems because political parties are not allowed to run candidates and because the laws governing suffrage rights, voting mechanisms, and candidate pools have been changed, usually in restrictive ways. As a result, although UyC political practices might be familiar to local indigenous groups populating UyC municipalities and thereby inspire them to participate in local political processes at higher rates than in PP systems, they might also work to undermine indigenous political participation compared to PP systems. Indeed, Benton (forthcoming) notes that UyC systems have systematically undermined political participation among all citizens in these areas, so it may also be the case that UyC systems even undermine indigenous participation compared to non-indigenous participation as well.

For the sake of argument, if assume that Oaxaca's UyC systems were adopted to reflect indigenous group traditions and thus appeal to these groups, we should observe three systematic differences between indigenous political behavior in UyC compared to PP systems. In the first place, if UyC electoral systems reflect local indigenous customs, cultures, and values, then indigenous groups should be more interested in local political affairs in UyC compared to PP systems. Moreover, since UyC municipalities exclude the nation's political parties from participating in local politics, elections, and

government, municipal political discussions should be relatively more detached from national level political concerns and instead focus on local political matters. Local politics will thus reflect local concerns and local politicians who rise to municipal level prominence should do so thanks to their positions on local issues, of which indigenous matters should be paramount, particularly in highly indigenous areas. As a result, the level of interest of indigenous groups in local political matters should be greater in UyC compared to PP systems, thereby raising their interest in participation in local political processes. And, indigenous interest should be greater as the level of ethnicity climbs. In contrast, in PP systems where electoral mechanisms to select municipal government reflect practices used to select higher levels of government throughout the nation and where national parties are important for organizing elections and thus the focus of political debate, local indigenous groups should find themselves relatively more alienated from local political matters, thereby lowering their interest in political participation. And, this effect should remain, even where the level of indigenous groups are high.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that the nature of UyC political institutions means that we cannot directly observe or easily quantify political behavior in them. UyC systems do not use political parties and often do not keep record of local vote outcomes in a systematic way, so it is difficult to measure levels of political participation in their municipal level processes and to compare them to PP ones. However, it is possible to observe how voters in UyC systems behave in elections for other levels of government and thus to test the hypotheses using municipal electoral behavior in federal elections. Although this study is designed to test the effect of local UyC systems on ethnic group behavior, it need not focus on local political outcomes to make its point. In fact, if UyC systems affect indigenous political behavior at municipal levels, they should also affect indigenous political behavior in federal contests as well. Indeed, evidence that UyC systems affect indigenous political behavior at higher levels of government would act as stricter test of any arguments about how these institutional rules affect ethnic political behavior. When local political practices not only affect local politics but politics at higher levels of government, we can conclude that their effects are quite strong.

Returning to the effect of UyC systems on indigenous electoral participation rates, I hypothesize the following:

H1: Abstention rates among indigenous voters in federal elections should be lower in UyC municipalities compared to PP systems, all else being equal.

The second difference observed in indigenous group political behavior expected between UyC and PP systems addresses political competition. If it is

true that UyC systems increase the level of interest of local indigenous groups in local politics and their level of political participation, as outlined in Hypothesis 1, then UyC municipalities should favor more competitive political systems than their PP counterparts. Moreover, the greater the percent share of indigenous citizens in UyC municipalities, the greater the level of political participation and thus political debate and competition. Systems that encourage political participation raise the likelihood that participants will hold contrasting viewpoints. In terms of elections, as the level of political participation in a system rises, so too should the level of political debate and competition. In contrast, more exclusionary political systems can be expected to stifle political debate. The exclusion of would-be politicians and voters from local politics diminishes the range of issue positions and viewpoints under discussion, thereby reducing the level of political competition in the system. With the relationship between participation and political competition in mind, I hypothesize the following:

H2: First-place parties' electoral margins will be lower in highly indigenous UyC municipalities compared to PP ones, all else being equal.

The third expected difference between UyC and PP systems concerns electoral support for the formerly hegemonic *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI). Between 1946 and 1976, the PRI averaged 86% total national votes in presidential elections and 83% in Chamber of Deputies elections and PRI domination was reproduced in state and municipal governments. Mexico's centralized federalism, however, changed in the 1980s when the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD) and the *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN) began to challenge the PRI. Former PRI member Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano (PRD) competed for the presidency in 1988, winning 30.9% votes compared to the PRI's 51.22%. The PRI lost control over the lower chamber of congress in 1997 and in 2000 the presidency when Vicente Fox Quesada (PAN) obtained 43.4% support to the PRI's 36.9%. The PAN took the presidency again in 2006 when Felipe Calderón Hinojosa won 35.9% votes to Andrés Manuel López Obrador's (PRD) 35.3%. PRI candidate Roberto Madrazo Pintado came in third with 22.3%.

In contrast to its national decline, the PRI has remained an important political force at the local level. In mid-2000, it controlled 17 out of 32 states, compared to the PAN's nine and the PRD's six, and just over 50% of municipalities. The state of Oaxaca is known for being one of the last strongholds of the PRI. Even so, the PRI faced a decline in its state-level support in Oaxaca during the 1990s, going from over 90% support in the late 1980s to 40-50% support by the late 1990s. Although still able to win gubernatorial elections, the party faced the prospects of electoral defeat in the mid 2000s when it only narrowly won the 2004 gubernatorial race.

The PRI's general state-level electoral decline, however, masks considerable variation in PRI support among Oaxaca's 570 municipalities. With this variation in mind, if UyC systems work to the benefit of political competition, then we should also observe the PRI suffering greater electoral losses in UyC compared to PP systems. If it is true that UyC regimes increase the range of political debate and thus political competition, then UyC systems should see greater declines in PRI support compared to PP systems. This will be true despite the contention of several scholars that the PRI-controlled state government advocated for UyC systems in order to eliminate political competition and shore up support. The relationship between UyC systems and the decline of PRI hegemonic rule leads to the following hypothesis:

H3: PRI support in federal elections will be lower in highly indigenous UyC municipalities compared to PP ones, all else being equal.

The Variables and Data

I begin the analysis with the 1994 presidential elections, the elections immediately prior to reforms allowing UyC systems, and include elections posterior to this date, including the 1997 midterm Chamber of Deputies elections, the 2000 presidential elections, and the 2003 midterm deputy elections.⁶ The principal dependent variables of concern include voter participation, electoral margins of first-place parties, and support for the PRI in federal elections. I use abstention to measure voter participation. Abstention was calculated as $1 - (\text{voters casting votes} / \text{total registered voters})$. The Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) reports total votes as including party votes and blank and null ballots. Electoral margins won by first place parties are $(\text{number of votes won by that party} / \text{total votes cast}) - (\text{the number of votes won by the second-place party} / \text{total votes cast})$. PRI support is $(\text{number of votes cast for PRI}) / (\text{total votes cast})$.

The principal independent variables include the ethnic makeup of municipal populations, the presence of UyC institutions, and selected institutional rules of the game used in UyC systems. The ethnic composition of a municipality is measured as the percent indigenous language speakers out of the total municipal population over five years of age. To record whether a municipality uses a UyC system or not, I created a dummy variable coded 1 for UyC system and 0 for PP system.⁷ Only two dummy variables for UyC regimes,

⁶ All municipal-level federal electoral information was provided by the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) (gobierno de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos). Space limitations led me to exclude deputy elections for 1994 and 2000 but they produced similar results to presidential elections those years.

⁷ Municipal status in 1995, 1998, and 2001, following the local electoral cycle, is from the Government of the State of Oaxaca (Gobierno del Estado de Oaxaca) (2006 [cited December 2006]); available from <<http://www.e-oaxaca.gob.mx/>>., Instituto Electoral Estatal de Oaxaca (IEEO), [Website] (2006 [cited December 2006]); available from

1995 and 1998, were included in the analysis as those municipalities using the system in 2000 and 2003 were the same as in 1998. I also include control variables that have been linked to abstention, electoral margins, and PRI support, including municipal spending per capita, economic and educational levels, and municipal religious composition.⁸

Statistical Tests of the Hypotheses and Discussion of Results

I conduct a series of statistical tests to evaluate the testable hypotheses above. All models were estimated using ordinary least squares regression (OLS) with robust standard errors (RSEs). Panel analysis was inappropriate as data for the main control variables are only available for 1990 and 2000. OLS with RSEs addresses two problems observed during data diagnostics: the presence of outliers⁹ and heteroskedastic residuals in the models when OLS without RSEs was used.¹⁰

Table 1 shows results for the test of Hypothesis 1 that predicts that ethnic voters will abstain at lower rates in UyC municipalities compared to PP ones. If this hypothesis is true, statistical analysis should reveal a negative relationship between the percent share ethnic voters and abstention rates in UyC municipalities once UyC systems were formally adopted. This means that the relationship between ethnicity and abstention in UyC systems should only exist for elections after the 1994 presidential race. To examine how ethnicity interacts with UyC institutions to affect political participation rates, the models in Table 1 include a term capturing the interaction between the use of UyC systems and the percent share indigenous language speakers in a municipality. This interaction term is called *UyC 1995 * Indig. Lang. 1990* for the 1994 and 1997 presidential and deputy elections and *UyC 1998 * Indig. Lang. 2000* for the 2000 and 2003 presidential and deputy contests.

Model 1 in Table 1 shows results for the 1994 presidential race. Those municipalities that would later choose to adopt UyC systems in 1995 showed no relationship between ethnicity and abstention during the 1994 presidential elections, with the variable *UyC 1995 * Indig. Lang. 1990* returning an

<<http://www.iese-oax.org.mx/>>., and Servicios para una Educación Alternativa, *Usos y costumbres en Oaxaca* [website] (Servicios para una Educación Alternativa, A.C., EDUCA, 2006 [cited December 2006]); available from <<http://www.usosycostumbres.org/>>.

⁸ Data is from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática (INEGI), *Sistema municipal de base de datos (Simbad)* (2006 [cited December 2006]); available from <<http://www.inegi.gob.mx/>>. Municipal spending per capita is (total pesos spent per year) / (total population). Poverty and income are (dwellings with non-earth flooring) / (total dwellings) and (citizens over age 12 earning less than one minimum wage) / (all economically citizens over age 12). Illiteracy rates (citizens unable to read / citizens over age five) measure education levels. Religious makeup is (citizens affiliated with the Catholic Church) / (population over five years of age). Municipal population was not included as its high multicollinearity with spending per capita interfered with significance tests of this variable.

⁹ Robust regression produced results similar to those from OLS and from OLS with RSEs, demonstrating the minimal leverage of outliers on parameter estimates.

¹⁰ The source of heteroscedasticity is unknown, justifying OLS with RSEs.

insignificant coefficient. The dummy variable capturing whether municipalities would adopt UyC systems or not, called UyC 1995, was also not significant in Model 1. That year, there was no difference between UyC and PP municipalities in how ethnicity affected abstention, as we would expect since UyC systems were not formally at work. Interestingly, however, the variable measuring the percent share indigenous language speakers (*Indig. Lang. 1990*) was negative and significant at the $p < 1\%$ level. These findings show that, in all municipalities, larger indigenous populations were related to lower abstention rates.

With the formal adoption of UyC systems in 1995, however, the relationship between ethnicity and abstention in UyC municipalities changed. Models 2, 3, and 4 show results for the effect of ethnicity and UyC systems on abstention in the 1997, 2000, and 2003 federal elections. Municipalities that retained their PP systems for selecting local leaders showed a negative relationship between ethnicity and abstention, that is, higher levels of indigenous voters were associated with lower levels of abstention. In Models 2, 3, and 4, *Indig. Lang. 1990* and *Indig. Lang. 2000* remained negative and significant, with a percent increase in the number of indigenous language speakers in PP systems leading to a 5.7% to 8.9% drop in abstention, depending on the year. These coefficients were significant at the $p < 5\%$ level. However, contrary to Hypothesis 1, Models 2, 3, and 4 show that the relationship between ethnicity and abstention in UyC municipalities after 1997 was positive. The interaction terms between ethnicity and UyC systems were significant at the $p < 5\%$ level in these models. For every percent increase in indigenous language speakers in UyC municipalities, abstention increased by 0.2% in 1997 (-0.058 plus 0.060), by 0.1% in 2000 (-0.057 plus 0.058), and 1.3% in 2003 (-0.089 plus 0.102) in these areas. The dummy variable capturing whether a municipality adopted UyC systems was also significant and positive in Models 2 and 3, revealing that abstention was generally higher in UyC municipalities than in PP ones in 1997 and 2000, regardless of the level of ethnicity. Coefficients for this dummy variable were significant at the $p < 5\%$ level. This effect wore off by 2003, as shown by the insignificant coefficient for this variable in Model 4.

Taken together, the UyC dummy variables and interaction terms in Models 2 and 3 reveal that, contrary to theoretical expectation, PP systems enjoyed lower abstention rates compared to UyC municipalities, with higher ethnic concentration PP systems finding their abstention had declined even more. In contrast, UyC municipalities faced generally higher abstention levels compared to PP systems, with higher ethnic composition UyC municipalities showing higher abstention rates than lower ethnically concentrated ones. Although by 2003 there was no discernable difference between all citizens in UyC and PP municipalities in their relative levels of abstention, the positive relationship between ethnicity and abstention in UyC areas retained. We can

thus conclude that, contrary to theoretical expectation, UyC systems do not raise indigenous voters' level of political participation. Rather, the reverse appears to be true: indigenous voters in UyC systems abstain more than indigenous voters in PP systems. As the percent share indigenous voters grows, so too does the difference between PP and UyC systems, with highly indigenous UyC systems showing greater abstention rates than highly indigenous PP systems.

Table 2 presents results for tests of Hypothesis 2 about the effect of ethnicity on first-place party margins in UyC municipalities. According to the hypothesis, electoral margins won by first-place parties should be lower in highly indigenous UyC municipalities compared to lower indigenous UyC municipalities and all PP ones. Ethnic voters should be drawn into the political life of UyC municipalities at higher rates than other types of voters and at higher rates than in PP systems. If this hypothesis is true, then we should see a negative relationship between municipal ethnic composition and first-place party margins in UyC municipalities. This means that, as in Table 1 above, and interaction term between UyC systems and the percent share indigenous language speakers (*UyC 1995 * Indig. Lang. 1990* or *UyC 1998 * Indig. Lang. 2000*) should be negative and significant. Also, the dummy variable for whether a municipality counted on UyC rules or not should also be negative and significant, revealing that electoral margins in UyC regimes are always lower than in PP ones. The variables measuring the effect of indigenous language, *Indig. Lang. 1990* and *Indig. Lang. 2000*, on margins in PP municipalities may or may not be significant. Indigenous populations may or may not have an effect on margins in PP regimes but they should matter in UyC systems.

Results for the effect of ethnicity and UyC systems on margins won in the 1994, 1997, 2000, and 2003 federal elections are reported in Models 1 through 4 in Table 2. The interaction terms *UyC 1995 * Indig. Lang. 1990* and *UyC 1998 * Indig. Lang. 2000* were not significant in any of the models. The variables *Indig. Lang. 1990* and *Indig. Lang. 2000* capturing the effect of ethnicity on margins in PP systems were also not significant in Models 2, 3, and 4, those years after the formal adoption of UyC systems. There was thus no discernable or systematic effect of ethnicity on first-place party margins in UyC systems, contrary to theoretical expectations. Additionally, and contrary to theoretical expectations, first-place party margins were higher in UyC systems compared to PP ones more generally, regardless of their level of ethnicity. The dummy variables capturing whether municipalities used UyC rules or not were positive and significant in all models. First-place parties' electoral advantages in UyC compared to PP systems ranged from 7.3% in 2003 to 12.9% in 2000. Municipalities that would or currently had adopted UyC systems faced lower levels of political competition, regardless of their ethnic composition.

Ethnicity also appeared to have no measurable effect on the level of PRI support in UyC municipalities. Table 3 shows results for Hypothesis 3 about the expected effect of ethnicity in UyC systems on PRI political support. This hypothesis predicted that higher ethnic composition UyC municipalities would enjoy lower levels of PRI support. Statistically speaking, the interaction terms *UyC 1995 * Indig. Lang. 1990* and *UyC 1998 * Indig. Lang. 2000* measuring the effect of ethnicity on PRI support in UyC systems should be negative and significant across Models 2, 3, and 4. Despite these predictions, however, the interaction term between UyC systems and the percent share indigenous language speakers did not have a significant impact on PRI support in any of the elections under study here, as shown in Table 3's Models 1 through 4. The variable capturing the level of PRI support enjoyed by higher and lower level ethnic composition PP municipalities, *Indig. Lang. 1990* and *Indig. Lang 2000*, was also not significant in a systematic way across all elections, attesting to the lack of consistent relationship between indigenous voters and PRI support in PP systems as well. Even so, UyC systems did show a systematic difference from PP ones that had nothing to do with their ethnic composition: in Models 1, 2, and 3, the dummy variables *UyC 1995* and *UyC 2000* were positive and significant at the $p < 10\%$ level. The PRI seems to have fared better in UyC systems, at least until 2003 when it suffered considerable losses throughout the state, as demonstrated by this variable's loss of significance in Model 4. Indigenous groups therefore do not appear to be pulled to support opposition parties as they are pulled to participate in UyC systems.

The models show that Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 do not survive statistical tests. Contrary to theoretical expectation, indigenous voters tend to abstain at higher rates in UyC municipalities compared to PP ones. The hypothesized relationship between ethnic voters and first-place party margins was also not born out empirically, most likely because of UyC systems' negative effects on indigenous group political participation. Municipalities with high levels of ethnic citizens showed no difference in voting patterns from municipalities with lower ethnic group composition, regardless of whether the municipality adopted UyC institutions or not. UyC systems also appear not to have had any special effect on the partisan identification, that is, level of PRI support, of indigenous voters as well, also likely a result of their effect on indigenous abstention.

Although the hypotheses were not born out empirically, statistical tests showed interesting differences between UyC and PP systems that do not depend on their indigenous makeup. Abstention, first-place party margins, and PRI support were all higher in UyC municipalities compared to PP ones, regardless of their indigenous makeup. This is in line with findings by Benton (forthcoming) who shows that UyC systems, thanks to their exclusion of national level political parties from local politics, isolate local communities politically, leading to systematic differences in the political behavior of their

voters compared to PP system citizens in national elections. Because UyC municipalities are more isolated from national political discussions, UyC citizens are relatively less informed about national political processes, reducing their level of interest in national affairs. Political isolation also helps local leaders maintain control over local political affairs, helps them manage the dissemination of national political information, and helps them control how and the extent to which citizens participate in national politics, all to the detriment of national democratic projects (Benton forthcoming). The statistical findings shown in Tables 1, 2, and 3 that UyC municipalities suffered from higher abstention, lower levels of political competition, and higher PRI support compared to PP regimes, despite variance in their levels of indigenous population, supports these points.

TABLE 1: ETHNICITY AND ABSTENTION IN OAXACA'S USOS Y COSTUMBRES MUNICIPALITIES, 1994-2003

	(1) 1994 PRESIDENT	(2) 1997 DEPUTIES	(3) 2000 PRESIDENT	(4) 2003 DEPUTIES
UYC 1995	-0.002 (0.15)	0.035 (2.44)**		
UYC 1998			0.067 (5.64)***	0.011 (0.75)
UYC 1995 * INDIG. LANG. 1990	0.029 (1.36)	0.060 (1.99)**		
UYC 1998 * INDIG. LANG. 2000			0.058 (2.83)***	0.102 (3.78)***
INDIG. LANG. 1990	-0.082 (3.87)***	-0.058 (1.99)**		
INDIG. LANG. 2000			-0.057 (2.99)***	-0.089 (3.51)***
ILLITERACY 1990	0.520 (6.08)***	0.141 (1.37)		
ILLITERACY 2000			0.047 (0.99)	0.054 (1.05)
FLOORING 1990	-0.045 (1.77)*	-0.047 (1.60)		
FLOORING 2000			-0.046 (1.98)**	-0.004 (0.17)
WAGE 1990	-0.203 (2.91)***	0.001 (0.01)		
WAGE 2000			-0.071 (0.84)	-0.028 (0.31)
CATHOLICS 1990	-0.049 (1.07)	0.121 (1.95)		
CATHOLICS 2000			0.081 (2.00)**	0.104 (2.37)**
EXPENDITURES 1993	-0.004 (3.44)***			
EXPENDITURES 1996		-0.006 (6.95)***		
EXPENDITURES 1999			-0.002 (4.44)***	
EXPENDITURES 2002				-0.002 (3.63)***
CONSTANT	0.342 (7.14)***	0.444 (7.27)***	0.400 (9.26)***	0.565 (10.89)***
OBSERVATIONS	567	568	570	570
R-SQUARED	0.15	0.16	0.15	0.09

Note: Method of analysis is OLS with Robust Standard Errors, t statistics in parentheses. *Significant at 10%; **significant at 5%; ***significant at 1%.

TABLE 2: ETHNICITY AND ELECTORAL MARGINS IN OAXACA'S USOS Y COSTUMBRES MUNICIPALITIES, 1994-2003

	(1) 1994 PRESIDENT	(2) 1997 DEPUTIES	(3) 2000 PRESIDENT	(4) 2003 DEPUTIES
UYC 1995	0.104 (3.88)***	0.112 (4.68)***		
UYC 1998			0.129 (6.25)***	0.073 (3.24)***
UYC 1995 * INDIG. LANG. 1990	-0.004 (0.08)	-0.042 (0.97)		
UYC 1998 * INDIG. LANG. 2000			-0.024 (0.56)	-0.041 (1.09)
INDIG. LANG. 1990	-0.094 (1.94)	-0.062 (1.51)		
INDIG. LANG. 2000			0.004 (0.09)	0.005 (0.13)
ILLITERACY 1990	0.389 (2.15)**	0.470 (3.14)***		
ILLITERACY 2000			0.172 (1.92)*	-0.057 (0.70)
FLOORING 1990	-0.186 (3.15)***	-0.196 (3.74)***		
FLOORING 2000			-0.074 (1.51)	-0.079 (1.81)*
WAGE 1990	0.179 (1.10)	-0.004 (0.03)		
WAGE 2000			-0.197 (1.29)	-0.251 (1.95)*
CATHOLICS 1990	-0.148 (1.44)	-0.238 (2.71)***		
CATHOLICS 2000			-0.004 (0.06)	0.010 (0.14)
EXPENDITURES 1993	0.008 (3.16)***			
EXPENDITURES 1996		0.005 (4.08)***		
EXPENDITURES 1999			0.002 (2.35)**	
EXPENDITURES 2002				0.002 (2.48)**
CONSTANT	0.389 (3.56)***	0.402 (4.41)***	0.157 (2.05)**	0.220 (2.77)***
OBSERVATIONS	570	568	570	570
R-SQUARED	0.12	0.18	0.13	0.06

Note: Method of analysis is OLS with Robust Standard Errors, t statistics are in parentheses.
*Significant at 10%; **significant at 5%; ***significant at 1%.

TABLE 3: ETHNICITY AND PRI SUPPORT IN OAXACA'S USOS Y COSTUMBRES MUNICIPALITIES, 1994- 2003

	(1) 1994 PRESIDENT	(2) 1997 DEPUTIES	(3) 2000 PRESIDENT	(4) 2003 DEPUTIES
UYC 1995	0.038 (1.92)*	0.029 (1.68)*		
UYC 1998			0.042 (2.39)**	-0.003 (0.15)
UYC 1995 * INDIG. LANG. 1990	-0.065 (1.60)	-0.034 (1.06)		
UYC 1998 * INDIG. LANG. 2000			-0.049 (1.59)	-0.038 (1.25)
INDIG. LANG. 1990	-0.058 (1.51)	-0.051 (1.65)*		
INDIG. LANG. 2000			0.022 (0.79)	0.008 (0.28)
ILLITERACY 1990	0.061 (0.42)	0.252 (2.33)**		
ILLITERACY 2000			0.108 (1.58)	-0.036 (0.57)
FLOORING 1990	-0.064 (1.36)	-0.103 (2.60)***		
FLOORING 2000			-0.077 (1.99)**	-0.039 (1.08)
WAGE 1990	0.100 (0.71)	0.047 (0.45)		
WAGE 2000			-0.081 (0.70)	-0.058 (0.57)
CATHOLICS 1990	-0.294 (3.68)***	-0.235 (3.86)***		
CATHOLICS 2000			-0.036 (0.60)	-0.049 (1.00)
EXPENDITURES 1993	0.005 (2.41)**			
EXPENDITURES 1996		0.003 (3.49)***		
EXPENDITURES 1999			0.002 (2.98)***	
EXPENDITURES 2002				0.001 (2.41)**
CONSTANT	0.778 (9.20)***	0.701 (10.53)***	0.485 (7.90)***	0.511 (8.57)***
OBSERVATIONS	570	568	570	570
R-SQUARED	0.06	0.09	0.06	0.02

Note: Method of analysis is OLS with Robust Standard Errors, t statistics are in parentheses.
*Significant at 10%; **significant at 5%; ***significant at 1%.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to evaluate the effect of electoral laws on ethnic group political behavior. Rather than focusing on analyzing cases where ethnic groups channel their political behavior through ethnic political parties, however, the study contemplated a case where ethnic political parties have not formed but ethnic groups still remain. Specifically, the study analyzed Mexico's state of Oaxaca, where municipal level indigenous group strength and electoral laws vary, to examine how institutions affect ethnic group voting behavior. Oaxaca's UyC regimes were ostensibly designed to increase indigenous group political participation, leading me to hypothesize that highly indigenous UyC municipalities should enjoy higher levels of political participation and political competition, and lower levels of support for the formerly dominant PRI. However, statistical analysis revealed that UyC systems have not led communities with high levels of ethnic voters to more political inclusion, debate, or competition. This is contrary to both what advocates of UyC and state-level political leaders had hoped would occur.

Some advocates for UyC systems argued that allowing local political processes to reflect the customs, beliefs, and values of indigenous communities would increase the level and quality of indigenous participation in local politics, to the benefit of Mexico's multicultural society. Some scholars, including state level politicians, even argued that such changes would alleviate social unrest. Instead, the evidence here points to an electoral system that led indigenous voters to abstain at higher rates than non-indigenous ones in both UyC and PP systems. If the intention of state level politicians was to entice indigenous voters into local politics to deflect social and political unrest, the evidence shows that their inclusionary goals were not met. UyC systems were not accompanied by the increased political participation of indigenous groups and, as several scholars have observed, Oaxaca is still plagued by the presence of high levels of post-election political conflict and violence in UyC compared to PP systems (Eisenstadt 2007, Osorio Zago 2004, Recondo 2002).

The continued abstention of indigenous groups from local politics explains the lack of effect that UyC systems had on the behavior of indigenous voters in terms of partisan support. If the intention of state level politicians was to protect the PRI's electoral fortunes, then UyC systems also appear to have failed. Although UyC systems protected PRI support in the beginning, by 2003 this effect had declined to the point that PRI support was no different in UyC and PP systems. Moreover, that UyC systems appear to have protected electoral margins but not PRI support suggests that when the PRI lost hold over municipal politics, it was replaced by another dominant party. Indeed, this is the argument made by Benton (forthcoming) who notes that higher

margins in UyC regimes, regardless of whether winners were PRI or opposition groups, appear to have fostered the emergence and survival of local authoritarian control (Benton forthcoming). "UyC regimes enabled local leaders to isolate their municipalities from both federal and state...politics and political intrusion to protect their political positions...Local leaders were able to switch partisan allegiances and carry citizen support with them to the parties and politicians they favored, a true test of the extent and strength of local political control." Such political control appears to have no relationship to the level of ethnicity in the municipality.

Despite the fact that the hypotheses here were not born out empirically, the findings still point to the effect of subnational political institutions on ethnic political behavior. The fact that highly ethnic UyC systems faced higher abstention rates than their lower-ethnic and PP counterparts demonstrates this point. Some kinds of local institutional structures thus can affect ethnic group political behavior, even if in the case of this study institutions did not do so in the way expected. In this way, this study is intended to contribute to the growing and important literature on ethnic politics. Few studies have systematically analyzed the impact of subnational political institutions and regional variation in ethnic composition on ethnic group electoral behavior. Rather, most research on subnational institutional effects on national election outcomes have not included analyses of ethnicity, while studies of the political consequences of ethnicity have usually not included analysis of how subnational institutions channel ethnic political behavior. This study shows that local electoral rules do indeed interact with ethnicity, leading to regional variation in political behavior, even in higher level elections.

That municipal level political institutions affect national politics points to another important implication of the finding in this study. It points to the depth of the reverse coattail effect found in studies of other Latin American nations like Argentina and Brazil (Ames 1994, Jones 1997). Thus far, studies of reverse coattails effects have been largely limited to the effect of state level politics on national level outcomes. This study goes beyond that to show that, thanks to variation in Mexico's municipal electoral institutions, local institutions might affect national elections as well. This study also contributes to the growing research on Mexico's UyC regimes. Thus far, most studies of these systems have focused on ethnographic accounts of local governments and societies, on explanations of why some municipalities have chosen to adopt UyC systems, or on how UyC systems have affected post-electoral conflict. Few have discussed in any systematic way how differences in the UyC regimes affect national-level voting behavior, especially of indigenous groups. In its conclusions about the effect of UyC structures on abstention, margins, and PRI support, the analysis here thus contributes to our understanding of the long-lasting and larger effects of these systems on not just local political processes but national ones, too.

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