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Why Rules Matter: Changes in Candidate Selection in Mexico's PRI, 1988–2000*

JOY LANGSTON

Abstract. The traditional literature on Mexico's formerly hegemonic party, the PRI, notes the importance of the 'informal rules of the game' in determining outcomes, such as who will be the PRI's presidential candidate. This article argues that the onset of electoral competition allowed weaker actors within the party to strengthen their position by reforming the statutes in order to give them decision-making power previously denied them. However, this was a difficult process. President Salinas was able to overturn statutory reforms, while President Zedillo was not. Now that the PRI has lost the presidential elections, internal mechanisms of distributing selective benefits become even more important because of the loss of the omnipotent president who once exacted cooperation from all actors within the party and the regime.

This article examines the evolutionary changes in one of the central institutions of Mexico's former hegemonic party system – the Party of the Institutional Revolution (PRI) – between 1988 and 2000. The focus is on how actors within the PRI negotiated new rules of the game (in this case, nominations) in periods in which the old structures were breaking down and new ones which were acceptable to those involved had not yet been established. Much is gained by focusing on party rules.[1] The PRI, an inclusionary corporatist party that dominated the electoral arena at all levels of government for over 60 years, continues to be a central actor in

Joy Langston is a member of the Political Studies Division at the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE), Mexico.

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[1] For works that do take into account the institutional effects of higher levels of electoral competition, see Joseph Klesner, 'Realignment or Dealignment? Consequences of Economic Crisis and Restructuring for the Mexican Party System', in Maria Cook, Kevin Middlebrook and Juan Molinar (eds.), *The Politics of Economic Restructuring. State-Society Relations and Regime Change in Mexico* (San Diego, 1994), Alonso Lujambio, *Federalismo y congreso en el cambio político de México* (Mexico, 1995), and Yemile Mizrahi, 'The Costs of Electoral Success: The Partido Acción Nacional in Mexico', Working Paper, CIDE, Mexico City, 1997.

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the political arena despite losing the presidential elections of July 2000. Yet even before that historic election defeat, its dominance had been weakened by electoral competition, which in turn had changed the internal dynamics of the party. Therefore, to understand the Mexican transition to democracy it is imperative to study how electoral competition, principally from the centre-left party – the Democratic Revolution (PRD) – and the centre-right party – National Action (PAN) – affected the internal relations of power within the PRI.

This article argues that competition at the ballot box allowed lower-level actors and groups within the Revolutionary Coalition to attempt to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the president of Mexico and the national leadership. They did this in large part by changing the party statutes between 1988 and 2000 to gain greater decision-making power over nominations. Electoral competition made both the quality and form of candidate selection far more important than under non-competitive conditions. While not all changes to nomination procedures were achieved by statutory battles, these disputes over the formal rules did lay the groundwork for future alterations in nomination practices. However, electoral pressures did not automatically translate into statutory victories for the rank-and-file, who were faced with differential levels of presidential control over their attempts to win more decision-making power, especially over nominations.

Not all statutory changes during the period 1988 to 2000 were respected by higher-ranking members of the party, or by the president of Mexico. New rules that were unfavourable to the president's interests remained in force only when the executive became weaker in relation to other groups within the governing coalition. This weakness depended in part on structural attributes, especially levels of electoral competition. The first attempt – in 1990 – to decentralise nominations was easily overturned by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994), while the new rules formulated in the 1996 PRI Assembly have not only remained on the books, but even obligated President Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000) to change the presidential nomination process for the PRI radically by devolving the nomination decision to all registered voters.

Because the president of Mexico had been the de facto leader of the PRI before 2000, he represented the Leviathan that enforced rules that promoted co-operation among the members of his party. Even after 1988, groups within the party were too weak to form a countervailing power to create internally stable enforcement mechanisms which would have forced the president to respect the party's new statutes. However, both the structural reality of greater electoral competition and the institutional situation of the presidency vis-à-vis other political institutions during

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Zedillo's administration help explain why the 1996 statutes remain in place and were able to change future expectations and the behaviour of relevant actors. It is not surprising to any student of Mexican politics that Salinas was able to overturn the rule changes of the 1990 Assembly; what is truly remarkable is that the changes from the 1996 Assembly did hold. Because of Zedillo's relative weakness in comparison to Salinas, and the former's reluctance to play the role of enforcer, along with rising levels of electoral competition, the new rules coming out of the 1996 Assembly changed the relevant actors' behaviour and, eventually, the method for choosing the PRI's presidential candidate.

Traditionally, the presidents of Mexico could directly appoint their successors in the presidency, together with the senators and the governors. At lower levels, such as federal congressmen, the president had veto power over lists made up by the Secretary of *Gobernación*, the president of the party (a nominee of the federal president) or the head of the National Executive Committee (CEN) and leaders of the sectors. The power of the president over nominations and the overall lack of opposition gave the chief executive the power to determine the future career paths of his party's ambitious politicians. This power, together with the constitutional prohibition on consecutive re-election, allowed the president enormous discretion over his party, its policy decisions and the actions of its members.[2]

Rising levels of electoral competition have changed this equation, and thus the internal organisation of the PRI. Competition altered both the incentive and opportunity structures of leaders and members of the party. Because the PRI had to win elections against serious opposition parties, its leaders had far greater incentives to place candidates who are more acceptable to the voting public. (The pressures of electoral competition differ according to region and type of election – be they executive or legislative races.) Popular PRI politicians also faced a different world: when the PRI won electoral races against almost non-existent opponents, the value of a 'good' candidate was low – however bad the candidate, the party would probably win. After 1988, candidates capable of winning elections were far more important to the party and, therefore, could increasingly make demands that earlier generations of politicians could not. Furthermore, with the party system in flux, disgruntled PRI politicians who have lost out in nomination battles can now leave the party and run under another party's banner (principally, the PRD).

However, the PRI leadership did not wish to devolve decision-making

[2] For more on the causes of presidentialism in Mexico, see Jeffrey Weldon, 'The Political Sources of Presidencialismo in Mexico', in Scott Mainwaring and Matthew Soberg Shugart (eds.), *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America* (Cambridge, 1997).

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capacity to lower levels of the party structure, such as the PRI governors or the rank-and-file militants. To allow the activists, low-level party leaders, or the general voters to make nomination decisions would have negated the ability of top leaders to determine the professional futures of their party's politicians. This loss of control would make it more difficult for party leaders to control the party's votes in Congress, especially for unpopular measures, such as raising the Value Added Tax. Thus, a dilemma existed within the PRI: the party's leaders had to reinvent the (nomination) process and find new procedures to choose better candidates without losing control over the actions of the party's politicians.

While it was clear that electoral competition was changing the internal dynamics of the PRI, it was an open question as to how. Two categories of change can be seen: the first is which groups within the party would take advantage of the new circumstances, and the second is how the actors would fight to achieve their goals within the party. The groups that were most involved were first, the militant rank-and-file; second, a small group of governors; and third, a group of leaders of the party apparatus. Each of these groups fought to change the formal rules of the party, most importantly the nomination rules, to strengthen their position with the PRI.

In the first phase of party change after 1988, then-president Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994) punished one set of actors in the party – the sectors – and attempted to re-work the territorial organisation of the PRI better to win elections. Salinas wanted to use the 14th National Assembly, held in September of 1990, to weaken the sectors' weight in leadership and nomination roles, while not turning over any real decision-making capacity to the low-level territorial activists. However, these activist-delegates rebelled in the Assembly and changed the statutes radically to allow full nomination power at the lowest level of the party. However, President Salinas was so strong that he simply ignored these new statutes in the nomination decisions of 1990 and 1991, and later overturned them in the following Assembly in 1992. Salinas went on to develop a new organisation, National Solidarity, which would take on many of the grass-roots organising that the PRI otherwise would have carried out thus allowed him to maintain the party structures in a weak position.

In the second stage of party reform which took place during Zedillo's administration, a small group of governors and some leaders of the party apparatus used the party assembly to reform the formal rules, this time concentrating on reducing the president's prerogative of imposing his own chosen successor on the party. Whereas Salinas had been able simply to ignore the new party statutes, Zedillo was not in a position to do so.

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Zedillo, in order to avoid a major rupture within the party going into the 2000 elections, was forced to respect the new statutes and organise the first presidential primary in the history of the PRI.[3]

The changes made in the reform assembly of 1996, and Zedillo's failure to overturn them, demonstrate two fundamental points. First, the growing importance of both the governors and the party bureaucrats within the PRI and the Revolutionary Coalition in general, and second, the use of formal party rules as instruments by weaker members of the Coalition to shore up their position vis-à-vis the party leadership and president. By weakening the president's hold over nominations, especially those for governors and the presidential successor, actors who had for several decades been extremely weak were able to position themselves for a run at the presidency. In large part, the reforms of the 1996 Assembly forced the president's hand, obliging him to configure a new nomination procedure: an open primary vote of all registered voters (carried out in November 1999). This radical change forced potential candidates within the party to make new types of alliances to win the nomination. Instead of only working to assure the president's approval, they had to convince as many PRI voters as possible, although of course the president still mattered greatly in the primary battle as he was able to mete out several advantages to his favourite.[4]

Political parties can be seen as organisations made up of party leaders and militants who attempt to place their candidates in elected positions by winning votes in fair elections.[5] The nomination system, which is a set of rules to choose candidates the party will put up for election, has crucial implications for party organisation.[6] In democratic systems elected

[3] With regard to gubernatorial nomination procedures the alterations of 1998 were the result of electoral competition and exits from the PRI by popular politicians, not because of efforts made in reform assemblies.

[4] Aside from nomination practices, the PRI has changed in several other ways because of competition at the ballot box. Campaign management has changed dramatically in the last 12 years. What was once a combination of private lunches and coopted mass rallies has been transformed into a media-driven activity, complete with media consultants, public opinion experts and negative campaigning. Another important change is the relation between the PRI president and his party in Congress. Once the PRI lost its majority in the Chamber of Deputies, the president was forced to negotiate with the PAN to pass initiatives, some of which were highly unpopular within his own party. However, the focus of this article is on changes in nomination procedures, as choosing candidates is arguably one of the most important tasks a party faces, and one that helps determine the focus of power within the same.

[5] For more on this minimum definition of political parties, and alternative definitions, see, Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York, 1957), and Joseph Schlesinger, 'On the Theory of Party Organisation', *Journal of Politics*, 46 (1984), pp. 369–400.

[6] For more on the importance of nominations in changing one-party systems, see Gary Wekkin, Donald Whistler, Michael Kelley and Michael Maggiotto (eds.), *Building*

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officials often control public resources, policy-making and opportunities for advancement. But the politician must win an elected post to enjoy these benefits. Thus, nominations are the means to achieve these ends, and the party organ controlling this gateway in large part determines the relations of power within the party.[7] For this reason, the presidents of the Republic had long understood the importance of directly controlling the nomination system in order to impose their preferences. The central issue in nominations is the identity of the actors who make the rules that determine access of party members to public office and the consequences of these distinct rules and procedures. The general literature on party organisation notes that candidate selection methods that allow more participation by activists or general voters help create parties that are less vertically controlled. Those parties in which candidates are chosen by national leadership tend to be hierarchical in their organisation. The PRI provides a clear example of the latter point.[8]

The PRI before 1990

The PRI has been rightly characterised by having a vertical structure of command and control. The President of the Republic (who was also the de facto leader of the party) *informally* imposed his choice as president of the PRI (officially, president of the National Executive Committee, or CEN), almost single-handedly decided whom to nominate as PRI candidates for governors and senators, and acted as an arbiter among various interests within the party when nominations were decided for federal deputies.[9] In doing this, the president solved important collective

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Democracy in One-Party Systems: Theoretical Problems and Cross-National Experiences (Westport, 1993), especially the article by Ralph Goldman, 'The Nominating Process: Factionalism as a Force for Democratisation'. Other articles on nomination and party structure include, 'Party Structures and Democracy: Michels, McKenzie and Duverger Revisited via the Examples of the West German Green Party and the British Social Democratic Party', *Comparative Political Studies*, 22 (July 1989).

[7] Scott Morgenstern, 'The Selectoral Connection: Electoral Systems and Legislative Cohesion', Working Paper, CIDE, Mexico City, 1997.

[8] Michael Gallagher, 'Introduction', in Michael Gallagher and Michael Marsh (eds.), *Candidate Selection in Comparative Perspective: The Secret Garden of Politics* (London, 1988), and Morgenstern, 'The Selectoral Connection'. Obviously, other factors such as electoral systems, ballot structure and campaign finance rules matter as well.

[9] John Bailey, *Governing Mexico: The Statecraft of Crisis Management* (New York, 1988), Roderic Camp, *Mexico's Leaders, Their Education and Recruitment* (Arizona, 1980), Benito Nacif, 'The Mexican Chamber of Deputies, The Political Significance of Non-consecutive Re-election', unpubl. PhD diss., Oxford University, 1995, George Philip, *The Presidency in Mexican Politics* (New York, 1992), and Peter Smith, *Labyrinths of Power: Political Recruitment in Twentieth Century Mexico* (Princeton, 1979).

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action problems for the ruling elite. All ambitious politicians wanted to be nominated, but internal battles over the candidacies would have made the party more vulnerable to opposition challenges. The informal right of the president to choose candidates solved this problem: members of party could not leave the party because of the lack of external opportunities, and loyalty was likely to be rewarded in the middle and long run.

Some of the most important interests within the party were the three corporatist associations; the Worker, the Peasant and the Popular sectors, which grouped together millions of work-based unions and other groups into peak-level bargaining organisations within the PRI. These sectors organised Mexicans to vote and support all governmental policies and, in return, they were awarded candidacies (among other benefits) for elected positions, especially in the Lower House of Congress. Within their states, governors had similar nominating power to that of the president. They were normally able to hand-pick the leaders of the state party committees (the CDEs in their Spanish initials), as well as candidates for municipal presidents (or mayors) and local deputies.[10] The party militants were and are at the bottom of this pyramid. The centre (defined as the President of the Republic and leader of the National Executive Committee, or CEN) directed the actions of both the national sectoral leadership and the governors, who in turn controlled the great majority of their local deputies and municipal presidents.

Before turning to the statutes, it is necessary to sketch a picture of how the PRI was officially organised and structured. The Party has long been organised upon both a *corporatist base* made up of the three *sectors* (Worker, Peasant and Popular) grouping together functional, work-based organisations, and a *territorial structure* composed of the *sections*, municipal committees and, during election time, district committees. In terms of number of militants, before 1990 the PRI was dominated by the three functional sectors, but after the 14th Assembly in 1990 the balance shifted to the territorial base, which now holds more members.[11] Each sector brings together hundreds of unions and groups, but the Worker and Peasant sectors are both dominated by one huge confederation. The CTM, or Mexican Workers' Confederation, is the bulwark of the

[10] For more the internal structure of the PRI, see Dale Story, *The Mexican Ruling Party. Stability and Authority* (New York, 1986).

[11] In 1991, the PRI claimed 7.4 million militants divided accordingly: 1,238,000 in the Agrarian Sector (92% in the CNC); 425,000 in the Workers' Sector (78% in the CTM); 1,334,000 in the Popular Sector (73.5% in the CNOP) and 4,100,000 unaffiliated with any sector. See the *Memoria de Actividades del CEN del PRI*, 1991 for more on membership structure. Also, Luis Javier Garrido, 'Un partido sin militantes', discusses the difficulties in counting membership reliably for the PRI. In Soledad Loaeza and Rafael Segovia (eds.), *La vida política mexicana en la crisis* (Mexico, 1987).

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Workers' sector, and the CNC (National Peasant Confederation) is the largest organisation by far in the Peasant sector. The Popular Sector has as its base the National Confederation of Popular Organisations (CNOP), which is divided into hundreds of much smaller groups and organisations, making the CNOP a far looser confederation than the CTM or CNC.

According to the 1978 statutes, Mexicans could affiliate themselves to the PRI in only one way; when an individual requested party membership, he or she was automatically placed in one of the three sectors, based on his work activity. When an individual joined a union affiliated with any one of the three sectors, that individual automatically became a member of the PRI and of the corresponding sector. The statutes implicitly indicated that an individual could not join the PRI and *not* be integrated into a sector.[12] However, in the 1978 statutes, all members had to register their affiliation both with the sector to which he belonged, as well as the section of the party under which his residence fell.

Before 1990, the *territorial*, as opposed to the corporatist, base of the party was weak, but it did have natural electoral responsibilities that would greatly increase in importance important in the future. The *sections*, the base of the territorial structure, were created in 1960 by the president of the CEN, General Corona del Rosal, to bring the party to the neighbourhood level. The sections were subdivisions of the federal electoral districts, and so provided the very base of the electoral activity of the party outside the sectors. Their central tasks were to keep the electoral rolls up to date, to participate in campaigns and to promote community projects.[13] So the PRI was organised around mass-based, inclusive groups formed in the workplace, but it also depended on what was essentially an electoral machine based on territorial residence. However, these territorial militants (as opposed to their sectoral counterparts) had almost no say in how the party was run, nor in decisions concerning candidate nominations.

Another crucial point *not* stated in the statutes was that all PRI candidates for federal deputies officially had to represent one of the three sectors of the party. Simply put, all members of Congress were given the label of one of the three sectors, and were said to represent the interests of that sector, although many did not have any contact with their stated organisation, either before or after the election. Since no member of the Party could be unaffiliated, it followed that the candidates would have to

[12] This is one of the great changes of the 1990 National Assembly, in which territorially-based membership was not only allowed for, but emphasised over that of sector-based affiliation. In the electoral reforms of 1996, a proposed constitutional amendment would ban sector based affiliation to any party.

[13] Artículo 139, III–IX, 1978 statutes.

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Table 1. *The Strength of Each Sector*. Official Distribution of Candidacies to Federal Deputy Seats for the PRI*

Sector	1979–85	1988	1991
Worker	72 (24%)	75 (21%)	57 (15%)
Agrarian	46 (15%)	58 (17%)	50 (14%)
Popular	182 (61%)	217 (62%)	243 (71%)
Total	300 (100%)	350 (100%)	350 (100%)

* For an excellent work on the sectors in Congress, see Juan Reyes del Campillo, 'Candidatos y campañas en la elección federal de 1991', in Alberto Aziz and Jaqueline Peschard (eds.), *Las elecciones federales de 1991* (Mexico, 1992).

represent sectors. Thus, the power of the sectors within the PRI was a measurable entity: how many seats in Congress, how many state houses, how many municipal presidents were held by each sector.

The formal rules before 1988[14]

The aim of this section is to make clear how the CEN and the President of Mexico were able to dominate the party structure via their use (and abuse) of the official statutes before serious electoral challenges began. It identifies the formal brakes on participation, which will help explain the fights to reform the statutes in 1990 and 1996.[15] The rules make clear that the party leaders were able to control all party resources and dole them out to the activists in a particularistic manner.

Before 1990 the statutes stipulated that candidates were chosen in delegate conventions. This could have allowed for some decision-making capacity for the lower level militants. However, delegate control was used by the party's leadership to determine nomination outcomes. The delegate selection was controlled by the National Executive Committee (CEN) or the state party committees (CDEs), depending on the election.[16] Because it was not clear from the statutes how and from which party organs the delegates to the different conventions were to be selected, the sectors, governors and leader of the CEN (meaning the president of Mexico)

[14] The following section is based on the 1978 Statutes of the PRI, which is taken from, *Documentos Básicos del PRI*, 1978, published by the CEN del PRI, Divulgación Ideológica. The 1978 Statutes are used because they are the first available after the important 1977 electoral reform, which gave opposition parties proportional representation in the Congress. Although there were changes to the statutes after 1978 and before 1990, they were minor.

[15] Many authors agree that the PRI is not internally representative, but do not show how the formal rules allow the CEN (National Executive Committee) to dominate 1. which specific procedure (out of the many possible in the statutes) is used in any nomination process, 2. the final candidate and leadership lists that come to be voted on, and 3. how the voting is carried out in the conventions and assemblies.

[16] See Artículo 150 of the 1978 Statutes.

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possessed enormous leeway to choose the delegates and, in this way, to predetermine nomination outcomes.[17]

The sectors, unlike the territorial organisation had *explicit*, *rule-based* participation in nominations, which simply reflected their prerogative of placing their members in elected positions, a right given to them by the PRI presidents. These rules benefiting the sectors, which gave them an advantage over the territorial sector, had to be changed when the regime's leaders decided the sectors were no longer to be rewarded with so many elected positions.

The *convocatorias* were the official rules of the nominating process. They dictated how delegates to the conventions were elected, the voting method to be used once in the convention and what kind of convention would be held (one, two, three sectors participating, or some number of them with the sections as well). For each election, a different *convocatoria* was written, which allowed the CEN to adjust to varying conditions within the states or districts when concocting the guidelines.

Under the 1978 statutes, the *convocatorias* for the conventions nominating *municipal presidents*, *local deputies* and *governors*[18] were written by the state party committees or CDEs, with prior authorisation of the CEN, which approved the rules made by the CDE directing the convention. This gave the governors explicit power to write the rules and to choose the delegates for the two positions which they were 'allowed' to impose: local deputies and municipal presidents. Yet no nomination could be held without the CEN approving its procedures. This gave the CEN control over the governors and the sectors in the states.[19] The *convocatorias* written directly by the CEN were those for *federal deputies*, *senators* and for the *president* of Mexico.

[17] This assumes that the militants *wanted* a different candidate than one imposed by the a sector, governor or higher authority. As we shall see on the section covering the 14th National Assembly, this seems to be the case.

[18] In an interesting change from the post-1990 statutes, written after the supposedly more democratic 14th National Assembly, the CEN now has the responsibility for writing the rules for the governors' nominations. In fact, the CDEs were only given the right to draw up governors' *convocatorias* after the 1978 National Assembly, which followed on the heels of the 1977 electoral reforms, giving the opposition 100 PR seats in the Congress, a move that the sectors opposed. To counter this opposition, the CDEs were given the right to draw up the *convocatorias* for the governors, only to have the right taken away in 1990.

[19] The final rule-based power the CEN has over the nomination of candidates at all levels is Article 161, which clearly states that in cases of problems, the CEN is able to either call a new convention, or simply designate new candidates. Thus, if any rebellion occurs, there is a clear rule allowing the CEN to remove the candidate, in that if a governor wished to assure that his personal candidate would succeed him, the CEN could make sure that, via the delegates elected, the sitting state executive had not stacked the deck in favour of his candidate.

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Even with the formal provisions for voting in the conventions, candidates for local deputies and municipal presidents were often chosen by the favoured method of forwarding a 'candidate of unity', meaning no other potential candidate could even compete in the nomination. If there were no choice for the delegates, the 'correct' candidate would always be nominated. This was (and is) done to by-pass the supposedly destructive, factional nature of the conventions by simply not allowing several pre-candidates to campaign for delegate votes.[20]

Added to its ability to nominate candidates and to write the rules underpinning the conventions, the CEN could also name the candidates to head the proportional representation (PR) lists for local and federal Congress (and now, the Senate), with only 'suggestions' from the three sectors. In 1984, there were 200 plurinominal seats in Congress set aside out of 500, allowing the CEN and the President of Mexico to send a good number of special allies to Congress through these lists. The president used these positions to send his best people to 'take care' of the important committees in Congress.[21]

The 14th National Assembly of the PRI (1990): an attempt to reorganise the party to win more competitive elections

In the federal elections of 1988 (presidential, senate and federal deputies), the PRI was almost voted out of office by an electorate furious over recurrent economic crises.[22] Incoming-president Salinas, elected by a slim and disputed margin in 1988 and angry over the failings of the sectors in the election, used the 14th National Assembly, held in September 1990, to weaken rule-based power of the sectors' to place members as candidates. Despite a successful rebellion in the convention against the party leadership, the militants won only a short-lived statutory victory in the 14th National Assembly. New rules allowing enormous activist influence in nominations and leadership selection were enacted, but then ignored in 1990 and 1991 and finally overturned in the following Assembly of 1992 by a president intent on maintaining his ability to impose candidates and

[20] Carlos Madrazo, president of the CEN from 1964 to 1965, attempted to implement primaries at the municipal level and was met with ferocious opposition from the governors and certain Cabinet ministers. Their resitance led to his downfall.

[21] Interview with Pedro Ojeda Paullada, March, 1996.

[22] The PRI's presidential candidate was battered in the elections of 1988, officially capturing only 50.4% of the votes cast, as opposed to 48% for the opposition – 31.1% for Cuahtemoc Cárdenas of the leftist front, and 17% for Manuel Clouthier of the PAN. The PRI won 51.1% of the national vote for federal deputies, a 17% drop from its 1985 showing. For more on the 1988 elections see, Arturo Sánchez Gutiérrez (ed.), *Elecciones a debate 1988: las actas perdidas* (Mexico, 1994).

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thereby control his party. The fact that these rules were so easily returned to (almost) the *status quo ante* speaks to the continued weakness of the rank-and-file militants vis-à-vis the institutional and personal power of the president. However, as Arnault and Hernandez point out,[23] the governors were inadvertently strengthened by the creation of state and national Political Councils. This would create an important institutional base for future battles.

Salinas and his political staff were firmly convinced that a large part of the near-disaster in the 1988 elections was due to the failure of the corporatist sectors, particularly the workers' central, to control the vote of their members or to attract the vote of those citizens unaffiliated with the party.[24] The electoral turnout for the PRI before 1988 had in large part been assured by allowing the sectors to choose candidates from within their occupational groupings, who then went on to win territorially-based, first-past-the-post elections in which there was little or no electoral competition. This created a good part of the dilemma: when opposition parties offered no serious threat, and when the sectoral leaders mobilised their members to vote, the PRI won handily. However, serious, united electoral challenges and ineffective mobilisation on the part of the sectors almost caused an electoral disaster. Those within the territorial structure of the party, that is, within the Sectional and Municipal Committees, had done a good deal of the work of organising elections, and were certainly capable of doing more considering their electoral base. However, they were not rewarded in a systematic fashion with elected posts, or even with access to higher party posts, as were those within the sectors.[25] Furthermore, questions were raised as to whether the sectors were mobilising voters outside of 'their' districts.

Another serious problem was that by the late 1980s far more Mexicans simply did not belong to the party, and their votes were not controllable (which does not mean all members' votes were). As Mexican society became more urbanised, modern, educated and better connected, the three

[23] Alberto Arnault, 'El Partido Revolucionario Institutional', in Mónica Serrano (ed.), *Mexico: Assessing Neo-Liberal Reform* (London, 1997), Rogelio Hernandez, 'The Partido Revolucionario Institucional', in Mónica Serrano (ed.), *Governing Mexico: Political Parties and Elections* (London, 1998) and by the same author, 1991, p. 241.

[24] See Rogelio Hernández Rodríguez, 'The Partido'. Stephen Morris agrees with this interpretation. See his work, *Political Reformism in Mexico: An Overview of Contemporary Mexican Politics* (Boulder, 1995).

[25] Once Mexico began to urbanise at a startling rate between 1950 and 1980, the peasant sector lost a dramatic percentage of its quota of power in the Congress. Guadalupe Pacheco reports that in 1964, the agrarian organisations won 50% of the seats, but by 1967, that figure had dropped to 25% and by 1969, it had bottomed out at 18%. Yet, unlike the workers' sector, the agrarians were able to keep their voters under tighter control because they voted in their communities. 'Estructura y resultados electorales', *Examen* 15 (15 August 1990), p. 19.

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sectors were less able to organise for example, new groups of neighbourhood activists, urban poor, professionals and other members of the growing economy. In the early 1960s the PRI claimed 8 million members out of a population of approximately 34,000,000 (which would mean that almost 25 per cent of all Mexicans were members of the party). Yet, by 1990, the PRI only reported 8.3 million members out of a population of 80,000,000 people – less than 10 per cent.[26] Obviously, not all PRI members vote for PRI candidates, and plenty of non-affiliated citizens do, but there is no doubt that the fall in the *percentage* of PRI members makes the job of winning the vote more difficult.[27]

Given electoral opposition, low-level activists could be expected to seek to win control over nominations from the centre and the sectors in return for their work in winning elections and their loyalty to the party. It would seem reasonable to suppose that the centre would replace the sectors (having largely failed in their duties as electoral agents). In doing so, the party leadership could take away candidacies that had previously been given to the sectors and distribute them to members of the party's bureaucracy, that is, give valuable selective benefits to those who were leading the electoral battles. Almost all actors within the party, including the rank and file, the governors and the party bureaucracy, would benefit from less sectoral interference in nominations.

But taking away the federal deputy quotas from the sectors was not enough; the territorial structure of the party had to be strengthened, as it was believed that elections were won or lost by the work of the militants at the section level, that is, the lowest level of territorial organisation. If elections were no longer automatically won because of the corporatist vote, then they would be won with the voluntary work of the activists, who would then have to be rewarded with some sort of decision-making power over leadership and candidate selection.

To meet the growing opposition threat, a National Reform Assembly was convened in September 1990. The president of the CEN, Luis Donaldo Colosio, wrote

> The will of our militants to begin to transform the PRI methods in the run up to the 14th Assembly is palpable. In this way (by respecting the will of the militants), the Assembly will ratify the decision to change in order to be a stronger and more competitive party.[28]

[26] *La Jornada*, 18 September 1990, p. 4. However, Wayne Cornelius in *Mexican Politics in Transition: The Breakdown of a One-Party-Dominant Regime* (San Diego, 1996) reports that the PRI's organisation in 1994 was able to field more than 1.2 million party militants on election day, which gives us an idea of the present size of the party.

[27] Pacheco, 'Estructura y resultados', p. 20.

[28] *Memoria de Actividades del CEN*, 1990, p. 128.

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On March 5 1990, President Salinas opened the public phase of the initial preparations of the Assembly, by explicitly promising a more democratic PRI: '… (C)andidates of the PRI for elected positions must be nominated under democratic mechanisms and the full participation of the militant base.'[29]

The *convocatoria* written for the 14th National Assembly was a clear indication of CEN's desire to restructure the PRI around a territorial base and to weaken the sectors. The delegates to the 14th were in large part chosen from the Sectional and Municipal Assemblies of Consultation and Debate, where the reform agenda (*documento base*) was discussed and amended.[30] The *convocatoria* was written to allow for the participation of the territorial structure. The CEN cleaned out the party organs that made up the territorial base of the party so that new militants – those not so closely tied to the governors or the sectors – could participate in the National Assembly.[31]

This strategy failed because a rebellion against CEN manipulation of the Assembly was launched by disgruntled PRI delegates who had expected to change the organisation democratically in the actual Assembly.[32] The delegates to this working group were able to institute

[29] President Salinas controlled the general organisation of the Assembly. His hand-picked CEN president, Donaldo Colosio, had little experience in the bureaucratic organisation of the party. Rather, his career had centred around Salinas in the Secretary of Planning and Budget (SPP). Roberto Madrazo, the Secretary of Organisation of the CEN, and responsible for much of the organisation of the 14th, did have experience with the party, especially as a regional co-ordinator, but was closely identified as a Colosio man. *La Jornada*, 5 March 1990, p. 1.

[30] Of over 9,000 delegates to the National Assembly in 1990, 5,578 were chosen from among the members of the Sectional Assemblies in the Municipal Assemblies Only 1,440 were chosen in the State Assemblies, which were easier for the governors to manipulate. Not only did the *convocatoria* call for half the delegates to be chosen from the territorial structure, the basic reform to the statutes was aired in a series of organised fora, from the sections to the Municipal to the State Assembly level. Numbers taken from *Memoria de actividades del CEN del PRI*, 1990.

[31] The Sectional and Municipal Committee members were replaced so that new 'cuadros' could then compete to become delegates to the National Assembly. Of the 46,000 Sectional Committees, 26,899 elected new members via the direct vote of the militants of each section. 9,465 held elections via the assembly of elected delegates, and only 1,051 were simply designated by their Municipal Committees. The Municipal Committees suffered a similar fate: of a total of 2,386, 1,259 were restructured either through a direct vote of the base, or the delegates. Thus, thousands of new leaders at the levels closest to the electoral districts were discovered and elected in the Sectional and Municipal Assemblies to win places in the party's National Assembly.

[32] Colosio and Madrazo also tried to keep the Assembly under control by writing the rules for debate in the Tribunals (the working groups of the National Assembly where the votes would be made on the final proposal). First, all the proposals made in the Municipal and State Assemblies were unified and digested by the CEN, which produced a new reform proposal that was then discussed in September (the report of the National Analysis Commission). Thus, the CEN controlled the reform agenda.

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crucial changes in candidate and leadership selection rules, in effect winning the battle of the Assembly.[33] The statutes that came out of this assembly stated that, instead of conventions made up of the sectors, all nominations for *federal level elections* would be decided in conventions of democratically elected delegates divided between the territorial and sectoral structures of the party. Even more radically, in nominations for state level elections (those for governor, municipal president and local deputies) *the direct vote of the militant base* in the territorial area of the popular election decided the candidate. This measure also took away the president's ability to dictate nominations, transferring it to the militant base.[34] This was potentially a monumental change from almost seventy years of presidential control of nominations and, if respected, could have dramatically changed the PRI's internal organisation. As we shall see, this would never happen, at least under the Salinas presidency.

On the organisational front, three changes stemming from the 1990 National Assembly were important. First, the party would allow individual affiliation, instead of forced membership in a sector on joining the party. Thus, the sectors no longer won new members automatically. The party would be modernised and membership would be based on individual affiliation (without eradicating the sectors).[35] Second, in every assembly or convention, the number of delegates from the sectors had to equal to those from the territorial base. In addition, Political Councils were created at the state, district and municipal levels and were charged with advising the CEN, the CDE and the Municipal Committee on

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Second, the actual debate in the Assembly took place in four Tribunals, Statement of Principals, Statement of Action, Statutes and Modernisation. The president and secretary of the Tribunal were selected by the CEN, and not only did these two figures control the debate within the Tribunal, they also formed the Committee (Comisión de Dictamen) that would take the new proposals, and write the final document to be voted on the floor of the Assembly. This allowed the CEN yet another lever with which they controlled the outcome of the debate. For more on the 14 National Assembly, see *La Jornada*, 2–3 September 1990.

[33] For more on the 'take-over' by the delegates of the Statutes Tribunal, see *La Jornada*, 2–5 September 1990.

[34] Artículo 138, inciso I and II, PRI estatutos, 1990. A second important change was how the pre-candidate list voted on in the convention would be formulated. Between 1990 and 1992 (when the rules were quietly changed again) the only official pre-requisite to becoming a pre-candidate for the PRI was to be able to demonstrate the support of 20% of the members of the party Committee at the lower corresponding level. Thus, it would be more difficult for the CEN, the sectors, or the governors to impose candidates of unity, as up to five names could appear and be voted on.

[35] See Denise Dresser on this same point, 'Embellishment, Empowerment, or Euthanasia of the PRI? Neoliberalism and Party Reform in Mexico', in María Lorena Cook, Kevin J. Middlebrook and Juan Molinar Horcasitas (eds.), *The Politics of Economic Restructuring: State-Society Relations and Regime Change in Mexico* (San Diego, 1994).

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electoral and ideological matters. Again, in these Councils the sectors and territorial base enjoyed the same numerical weight.[36] Finally, from 1991–1992, the National Political Council was responsible for electing the General Secretary of the CEN in a strategy to protect at least one leadership post from the President's *dedazo*.[37] This provision quietly dropped out of the rules in the 15th National Assembly in 1992.

Arnaut, Hernández and others have argued the inadvertent winners of the 1990 Assembly were the governors, in large part because the creation of the National Political Council allowed state and municipal leaders onto the national deliberative body. Because the PRI governors generally controlled the party in their states, the state executives were able to gain representation on the Council.[38] This point would become more important during the 1996 Assembly, in which a small group of governors (along with leaders from the territorial structure of the party) was able to institute crucial rules changes in their favour.

Despite the statutory win in 1990, the militants never were able to capitalise on their newly found statutory power in either the gubernatorial or federal congressional nominations. The clear rule mandating party primaries was ignored in the 1991 congressional nominations and reversed in the 1992 National Assembly. The ease with which the formal rules were overridden by presidential preferences indicates that despite the electoral challenge of 1988, the president would never let go of the candidacies, or allow much participation from the party's activists. The institutional power of the Salinas presidency, and the weakness of any other institutional break, was such that the decisions made in an official party forum were easily changed or ignored.

The 1991 congressional elections would constitute a plebiscite regarding Salinas's first three years in office. Given his audacious economic and political reforms, most Mexicans believed the president would continue to improve the economic course of the nation.[39] It became clear that while good candidates were needed in closely competed districts, what would determine the outcome of the elections was partisan loyalty and the performance of Salinas in office (the role of Solidarity

[36] For an excellent review of the important points of the 14th National Assembly less than a month after it was held, see John Bailey, Denise Dresser, and Leopoldo Gomáz, 'Balance preliminar: 14 Asamblea del PRI', *La Jornada*, 26 September 1990.

[37] Artículo 128, inciso II, PRI statutes, 1991.

[38] Rogelio Hernández, 'The Partido Revolucionario Institucional', p. 82, and Luis Javier Garrido, 'Reform of the PRI: Rhetoric and Reality', in Neil Harvey and Mónica Serrano (eds.), *Party Politics in an Uncommon Democracy: Political Parties and Elections in Mexico* (London, 1994), p. 27.

[39] Jorge Buendía, 'El elector mexicano en los noventa: Un nuevo tipo de votante', *Política y Gobierno*, Primer semestre, 2000.

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programme will be discussed more below).[40] Given this reality, congressional electoral victories seemed to depend little on local level participation in decision-making or on the militant's participation in the campaigns, because candidate identity mattered little. As such, there was little reason to open up the selection of candidates to the militant base.

Stephen Morris reports that over 90 per cent of these 1991 congressional candidates were, in effect, imposed from above and presented to the bases as candidates of unity.[41] Garrido writes that the congressional lists were made up of politicians close to Salinas, and various ploys were used so that while some lip-service was paid to the formal convention rules, the party leadership had already announced 225 of the 260 possible PRI candidates during the actual registration period.[42] Thus, the first real test of the willingness of the party to leave the selection of candidates up to the militants was a failure.

Other reforms that came out of the 1990 Assembly would suffer the same fate. The new National Political Council (CPN) was required by statute to elect its members democratically, a rule which was never respected. The popular sector, or CNOP, was reorganised to include committees at the district level which were to constitute the new organisational base of the party. These reforms fell by the wayside as well, in large part because the sector's leaders were able to block further reforms reducing their power. For example, the sectors were eliminated from formal representation on the CEN in the 1990 Assembly, but by 1993, they had returned in the form of 'consulting bodies'.[43] Again, new rules were not viable over the long-term because those within the party that benefited from them were unable to maintain enforcement, or to protect them against the depredations of higher-ranking members of the party.

After the debacle of the 1990 Assembly and the great success of the 1991 mid-term elections, President Salinas largely gave up on reforming the PRI. Instead, he turned to another project – the National Solidarity Programme (known as both Pronasol and Solidaridad). Solidarity was an 'umbrella organisation' of social spending programmes funded by the federal government and originally invented by Salinas. It was developed

[40] For more on the determinants of the 1991 PRI win, see Jorge Buendía, 'El elector mexicano'.

[41] 'Political Reformism in Mexico: Past and Present', *Latin American Research Review*, 28 (1993), p. 199.

[42] Garrido, 'Reform of the PRI', p. 37 and p. 28. For example, the candidates had to collect 60,000 signatures in less than 48 hours to be able to register as candidates. Those without the support of the CEN found this impossible.

[43] For more on these rule changes, see Rogelio Hernández, 'The Partido Revolucionario', p. 82.

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to achieve two central goals: to meet the basic material needs of some of Mexico's neediest citizens in terms of social services and infrastructural building, while at the same time restructuring the political and organisational bases of the dominant party regime.[44] This programme was undertaken and funded while the Salinas administration deepened the neoliberal economic reforms, and was aimed at ameliorating the worst of the consequences of that reform.[45] The politico-organisational aspect of the programme was a series of local, grass-root Solidarity Committees that were organised at the community level to help local leaders to co-participate in the planning and implementation of the different works.[46]

The accepted wisdom of the relation of Salinas's Solidarity programme and the PRI was that the President used the programme 'to reconstitute Mexico's strong, centralist, presidential system on a new institutional and coalition bases'.[47] In the words of Denise Dresser, the programme would function as a 'parallel party',[48] and would reduce the importance of the traditional sectors of the PRI. It would also include new groups and movements, principally those in the urban areas, that the PRI had largely failed to integrate into it sectorial ranks. According to Jonathan Fox, Salinas chose to maintain the Solidarity committees outside the formal party structure, using the PRI as an electoral mobilisation machine that would not conflict with the objectives of Pronasol.[49] Once Ernesto Zedillo became president, he abandoned Solidarity and devolved a great deal of financial responsibility for social programmes to the municipalities and state governments. Zedillo evidently saw the organisation of the programme as a hold-over from the by then hated Salinas administration, and so he dismantled it relatively quickly. It was by then clear that the PRI would survive Solidaridad.

[44] Wayne Cornelius, Ann Craig and Jonathan Fox, 'Mexico's National Solidarity Programme: An Overview', in W. Cornelius, A. Craig and J. Fox, (eds.), *Transforming State-Society Relations in Mexico: The National Solidarity Strategy* (San Diego, 1994), p. 3.

[45] Solidarity's funding covered extremely diverse areas, such as schools, drainage, road paving, as well as loans for micro-businesses.

[46] These committees numbered close to 100,000 (with roughly 120 members each), making the organisation at its height enormously important, both in terms of financial and numerical strength. Jonathan Fox, 'The Difficult Transition from Clientelism to Citizenship: Lessons from Mexico', *World Politics* 46 (January 1994), p. 168.

[47] John Bailey, 'Centralism and Political Change in Mexico: The Case of National Solidarity', in Cornelius, Craig, and Fox, *Transforming State-Society*, p. 98.

[48] Denise Dresser, 'Bringing the Poor Back In: National Solidarity as a Strategy of Regime Legitimisation', in Cornelius, Craig and Fox, *Transforming State-Society*, p. 156.

[49] President Salinas had two other options regarding the political-partisan role of Solidaridad: first, he could build a new party using the committees as the new organisational base; and second, he could simply turn the committees over to the party. Jonathan Fox, 'The Difficult Transition', p. 168, and Denise Dresser, 'Bringing the Poor Back In', p. 157.

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The story told above demonstrates the power of the President to dictate the fate of duly constituted rule changes in the party's statutes. Formal rules did not matter much in that leaders could change them with few or no consequences. The informal rules of the PRI hierarchy and, thus, presidential power over internal decisions, had not changed. However, after the severe economic crisis of 1994 and 1995, the PRI continued to lose elections, and the pressures of this ever more serious competition brought an end to the structure of both formal and informal rules that had produced collective benefits within the regime for sixty years.

The Changing Institutional Context

The Zedillo era (1994–2000) would see fundamental changes in relations between the presidency and the PRI. Ever-rising levels of electoral competition, a severe economic crisis and Zedillo's desire to negotiate reforms with both opposition parties weakened the traditional ties between president and party. These new circumstances not only facilitated rule changes which favoured lower level party actors, but they also changed the balance of forces within the regime, making it too costly for President Zedillo to revoke the changes which directly harmed his interests in the presidential succession. Thus, one can note variation over the dependent variable of *when* rules matter: given the electoral and economic situation of the presidency as an institution, we see a greater likelihood of lower level actors both changing rules in their favour and making them stick (that is, changing behaviour *and* outcomes in the future).

Although Ernesto Zedillo had been imposed by Salinas as the replacement after the assassination of the PRI's original candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio, he won a relatively easy and accepted victory in August 1994. However, in February 1995, President Zedillo stated that he would no longer take charge of the internal life of the PRI, but rather, would maintain a 'healthy distance' from the party, allowing its leaders to make their own decisions. Thus, at least formally Zedillo ended the special relationship of de facto leadership the president of Mexico had always enjoyed over the PRI. Authors believe this move was caused by several considerations; some argue that Zedillo needed to negotiate his favoured reforms with the opposition parties, and was therefore willing to distance himself from the party.[50] Another consideration was that Zedillo believed the PRI itself was 'an obstacle to democratisation and modernisation',[51] and was therefore willing to restrict its historical prerogatives. At the

[50] Arnault, 'The Partido Institucionalizado Revolucionario', p. 17.
[51] Hernández, 'The Partido Institucionalizado Revolucionario', p. 88.

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same time, the President called for new, more democratic nominating procedures for the party. Thus, it is no surprise that certain groups within the PRI took advantage of the new distance to transform the statutes to their advantage.

The PRI lost three states to the PAN in the first half of 1995: Jalisco, Guanajuato and (for the second time) Baja California. Added to these gubernatorial defeats, the PRI lost several important cities. Zedillo ordered both the interim leader of the CEN, Ignacio Pichardo, and his replacement, María de los Angeles Moreno, to write fair, democratic nomination rules for the five gubernatorial races in 1995. They wrote nomination guidelines that provided for a competitive candidate selection convention in three of the five states, precisely those in which the PRI was eventually defeated. When these efforts ended in electoral failure, Moreno was replaced. A new Assembly was called for 1995 and then delayed for several months, until September 1996. Thus, going into the 1996 Assembly, the once-dominant party stood by as the incumbent president drew away from his traditional leadership role, as the economy tumbled into the depths, and the leadership of the party went into a tailspin.

During this period, the rising competition at the ballot box at the municipal and state levels made the governors important in several new ways. First, they were responsible for winning the federal deputy elections within their states, second, these ambitious politicians whose careers were by and large made at the state level now had an exit option if they were passed over in the nomination battle and, finally, the governors were now in a position to argue that they were the best possible candidates in the presidential elections to defeat the popular opposition candidates.

Traditionally the centre had exercised veto power over the PRI governors' choices for their local deputies and municipal president candidacies, and the governors also had to negotiate with the centre over federal deputy nominations. Furthermore, an informal rule, in place since the 1950s, held that only members of the cabinet were among the possible presidential candidates for the PRI. Thus, sitting governors had no hope of winning the president's nod and becoming the next chief executive. This had the effect of allowing the president control over a smaller number of ambitious politicians and excluding popular, powerful state executives from contention.

In abstract terms, a PRI governor would prefer to end five decades of exclusion from the PRI presidential succession game and win the informal right to be considered a candidate. To achieve these goals, *he must first modify the rules of the presidential nomination process to eradicate the ability of the sitting executive to name his successor*. Given electoral competition, it is reasonable to expect that governors would attempt to weaken the

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president's ability to determine his successor, so they too would be considered possible presidential pre-candidates. As seen above, the presidential candidate for the PRI had always been chosen formally by the National Assembly.[52] Actors such as governors could attempt to take away this presidential prerogative in two ways: by reducing the universe of presidential possibilities to exclude the president's closest technocratic allies, or by changing the nomination method so the president can no longer simply impose his successor. Both of these strategies would involve changing the formal rules of the presidential nomination.

The governors were inadvertently strengthened by rule changes in the 1990 Assembly that gave them representation on the National Political Council. Because Salinas and Colosio had decided to replace the sectors with members of the state PRIs, the governors found it easier to place their closest allies on the PRIs deliberative body. The National Political Council (CPN) became important because it was given the responsibility of choosing methods for selecting candidates.[53]

In addition to the formal rules giving more decision making power to the state executives, Zedillo had decided not to become involved in local and state electoral disputes. Salinas had negotiated several state elections with the PAN and had effectively removed duly elected PRI governors from office (the so called '*contracesiones*'). According to Todd Eisenstadt, Zedillo preferred to allow the courts to decide electorate disputes, but in doing so he allowed the PRI's governors to run roughshod over electoral laws.[54] Not only this, but local political elites have used Zedillo's 'new federalism' to block attempts by the centre to control their actions, creating new and more autonomous political bases for the PRI governors.[55] Other leaders of the party were also strengthened by growing electoral threats, precisely those within the party apparatus who were responsible for overall electoral strategy and operations. The party bureaucracy reacted to opposition threats by organising new political forces, revamping the party's voting lists, hiring opinion polling experts and managing media campaigns. For all their new importance, these actors were still excluded from full participation in nomination decisions.

[52] The rules for this Assembly are written by the CEN, which chooses the delegates who will vote, and the one name which will appear on the ballot. The president chooses the CEN, making it easy for him to determine the outcome of the Assembly, and thus, the candidate he himself has chosen.

[53] Rogelio Hernández Rodríguez, 'The Partido Revolucionario', p. 82, and Alberto Arnault, 'The Partido Revolucionario Institutional', in Mónica Serrano (ed.), *Mexico: Assessing Neo-Liberal Reform* (London, 1997).

[54] Todd Eisenstadt, 'Electoral Federalism or Abdication of Presidential Authority? Gubernatorial Elections in Tabasco', in Wayne A. Cornelius, Todd A. Eisenstadt and Jane Hindley (eds.), *Subnational Politics and Democratisation*, (San Diego, 1999).

[55] *Ibid*., p. 269.

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The 17th National Assembly of the PRI, September 1996: The Party takes on the President and ignores the opposition

Against this backdrop, the 17th National Assembly of the PRI was called. In examining the *convocatoria* for choosing delegates to the 17th, one can see that the governors were able to bring in their carefully selected delegates to the National Assembly, where leaders of the state delegations could control their delegates' votes on important measures. Contrary to the *convocatoria* for the 14th, the rules to the 1996 National Assembly mandated that the territorial delegates would be chosen *not* from among the members of the Sectional or Municipal Assemblies, (in successive elections beginning at the lowest levels), but in the State Assemblies, in which the *only* possible delegates from the territorial base were the Presidents of the Municipal Committees, who are, in large part, selected by their respective governors.[56]

Because of the particular electoral calendar in Mexico, in which governors are elected on a staggered calendar, the incoming president has not initially nominated the governors serving under him. Few if any of the state executives in 1996 were Zedillo allies, and so they had no special reason to protect Zedillo's ability to control the selection of candidates for the 1997 Congress, or more importantly, his ability to place his own successor. Finally, two of the most independent PRI governors, Manuel Bartlett of Puebla and Robert Madrazo of Tabasco attended the statute working group, and helped instigate the rebellion that would remove the president's technocrats from the nomination race.

The campaign to limit the president's choice of successor and to strengthen the autonomy of the CEN and party bureaucracy focused on the requisites for being a PRI candidate for president, governor and senator. In the original reform proposals sent to the state assemblies in June, all hopefuls had to have been *either* a party leader *or* an elected official. This would have made it more difficult, but certainly not impossible, for the 'technocrats' serving in the president's cabinet (who tended not to have experience in elected posts) to meet the requirements. However, in the working document presented for discussion in the National Assembly in September, the wording had been changed so that

[56] As in the 14th, the working groups in the September Assembly were led by a president and secretary named by the CEN. Similarly, the first reform proposal sent to the State Assemblies in June of 1996 was drafted by the CEN, and the 'suggestions' of the lower level Assemblies reworked by a CEN group before a second, significantly changed proposal was presented to the National Assembly in September. Finally, the president of the working group had the authority to change any proposal that had been approved by the majority vote in the working groups before it reached the final vote of the full Assembly.

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candidates for these three positions had to have been *either* militants *or* leaders of the party *or* have held elected position, by definition making all members of the cabinet presidential possibilities, and so undermining the attempt to make party experience a prerequisite for becoming the PRI's presidential candidate.[57] When the section of the statutes dealing with presidential candidates came up for discussion, Governor Madrazo sent one of his state's federal deputies, Raúl Ojeda, to the podium to question the wording of the statute. The delegates on the statutes working group rebelled against those defending 'the president's line' and mutinied against the president and the secretary of the working group. A new president of the working group was chosen immediately and held a quick vote to change the clause to 'militant' (*cuadro*), *and* party leader *and* have held an elected position'.[58] This change left only a few of the president's cabinet eligible, and created many more eligible candidates *outside* it, including several governors, who obviously meet the election requirement and who have also held party leadership posts.[59] Thus, the ability of the president to hand-pick his successor was considerably diminished, as his most of his cabinet members were not in the running. This left President Zedillo with few alternatives. He could either prepare his allies' way by sending them to the Senate, or bring already eligible politicians into cabinet positions, or call for another National Assembly to remove the offending requirements.[60]

The second major change to stem from the 1996 National Assembly was the new mandate of the National Political Council to elect the

[57] Apparently, the final reform proposal was finished the day before the Assembly began. It was at this last minute when the President decided to insist that the word 'cuadro' be inserted in the document.

[58] In the final document voted on, but not read to the delegates to vote on the floor of the Assembly the final day, the word senator dropped out, thereby allowing the president to prepare his technocrats by sending them to the senate on the plurinominal list.

[59] The informal rule that only members of the cabinet (and regente of the DF) could be considered possible pre-candidates was instituted in roughly 1958, in large part to reduce the number of pre-candidates, and make their status as 'posibles' depend on the good will of the president to place them in cabinet positions. This would be an important change in the informal rules of the PRI's presidential succession.

[60] The first reform proposal written by the CEN demonstrated an attempt to bind the President of Mexico's hands when choosing his successor. In the reform proposal made up by the CEN, and sent to the state party committees in June, the pre-candidates for president would first be voted on by the National Political Council (CPN). All those who could show the support of 10% of the National Political Council would be placed on a list, which would be narrowed down to five by a vote of the CPN. This list would be sent to the National Assembly, called specifically for this purpose, and voted on by the delegates and the PRI presidential contender chosen. This 10% would mean that many party members not necessarily tied to the president could viably contend for the nomination, making it more difficult for the president to impose his successor. The clause was dropped in negotiations with the president before it reached the states.

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president and secretary general of the CEN, thus excluding the National Assembly from this decision. This was seen by some as an attempt to make it more difficult for the president to impose a leader of the party, although it was not clear that the National Political Council would be not as easily manipulated by the president as the National Assembly. This is especially doubtful after Zedillo, said to be furious at the exclusion of most of his cabinet, simply placed one of his closest political collaborators, ex-Secretary of Gobernación, Esteban Moctezuma, in the position of Technical Secretary of the CPN, seen as the second most important post within the PRI.[61]

However, for the first time ever the president was unable simply to overturn the offending rules, an astonishing change to the Mexican political routine. His institutional position, which obliged him to negotiate with the opposition in Congress, and the recurring economic difficulties during his *sexenio*, were fundamental causes of his distance from the PRI. The ever-rising levels of electoral competition forced him to concede statutory limits to his historical right single-handedly to choose his successor.

As for longer term consequences of the 17th assembly, three years after the Assembly, the restrictive requirements remain in place and have, in fact, become a rallying cry for hard-liners within the PRI, some of whom are tied to governors and ex-governors. The 17th Assembly represents a kind of gubernatorial-party apparatus putsch against the technocratic wing of the party and the president. Both governors and election managers have been strengthened by electoral competition, at least those who are able to continue winning elections for municipal presidents, local congressmen and federal deputies. Elections are won in the states, and those governors who are able to maintain their organisations intact and defeat the opposition at the ballot box are valuable resources for the national leadership.

The governors and leaders of the party apparatus used the statutes to stabilise the terms of negotiation with the CEN, making piece-meal deals more difficult, while weakening Zedillo's closest allies. This does not mean that all governors or party leaders were working in a concerted fashion to bring about these outcomes. If they had negotiated the presidential succession without a statutory base their position would have

[61] The technical secretary is responsible for integrating the political councils at the state, municipal and district level, an especially important task as it allows the technical secretary to 'plant' his loyal people all over the country, and in the organs which will write the rules for selecting candidates in the very near future. Moctezuma, who is widely seen as a failed secretario de Gobernación, was probably placed to help the president place his candidates for the 1997 Congress. He won a candidacy for the senate on the PR lists.

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been far weaker. Once they won on the rules, they defended their position while waiting to see what the president and his CEN would offer in exchange for removing these 'candados' (locks) on the career prospects of technocrats. In fact, not only did the president have to offer to stay out of the nomination process,[62] he had to offer primaries as a nomination process which would necessarily take the selection out of his hands and place into the hands of other powerful actors within the party, the rank-and-file and perhaps (in the case of open primaries in which all registered voters can participate) the general electorate.

So by 1996 it had become far harder to change rules put into place in a reform assembly than it was as recently as 1990. What explains the difference? Fundamentally, the president could no longer guarantee electoral victories for his party's members. The collective good of assured victory was no longer provided in exchange for loyalty and obedience. Thus, if an individual politician refused to remain loyal when he or she was passed over for the nomination, there was no guarantee that other members of the party would not exit and run for another party, and there was no guarantee that the dominant party would win the election. This fact raised the costs of staying loyal to the PRI president, while at the same time it lowered the gains from remaining disciplined to the president's mandates. Loyalty and obedience to presidential impositions made sense when there was no chance the PRI would lose in the present or future; but once there were no guarantees, these strategies lost their advantages.

The institutional strength of the presidency was thus weakened for several reasons. First, there was the ever-present threat of electoral defeat. Second, in terms of leadership, president Zedillo had openly stated his intention to lessen his influence over internal party decision making. Finally, in terms of party organisation, the president needed to avoid internal splits. If the president had forced through the reversal of those changes implemented in the 17th Assembly he would have risked a division within his own party, which in turn would have made it even more difficult for the PRI to win the presidential elections in the year 2000. Yet by not changing the rules, he was greatly limited in his ability to place his most preferred candidate. The difficulty in changing the rules reflects both the electoral pressures of competition and the new ability of factions within the party to challenge the president's decisions.

[62] For more on Zedillo's statements on the succession process, see *Reforma*, 10 June 1998, and *El Universal*, 13 October 1998.

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Conclusions

On November 7 1999, the PRI held a presidential primary to choose the candidate for the highest office in the land. In doing so, seventy years of top-down decision making within the party were overturned. And while it is true that the president's favoured candidate, Francisco Labastida won the contest, the losers in the nomination battle accepted the outcome and have stayed in the PRI. Electoral competition made the threat of a rupture on the part of one of the losing candidates a real and credible threat. This forced Zedillo and his advisors to find a procedure which would be acceptable to all those competing for the nomination. None of the presidential hopefuls would have accepted a party nominating convention or the vote of the members of the National Political Council because of the ease of pre-determining the outcome via the selection of delegates. In terms of institution building within the party, the open primaries of all registered voters are not recognised as a nomination method in the statutes. Closed primaries, consisting of only registered party members, could not be held because there is no reliable membership list acceptable to the pre-candidates. The transitory nature of the PRI statutes is evident. At this juncture in Mexican politics, the most 'open' decentralised nomination method was chosen and accepted by all pre-candidates, in large part because it afforded most of them the only hope of victory. Yet, it cannot be known which type of nomination procedure will be used in the next presidential nomination contest – that is, if the open primary method will be agreed upon as the only method of choosing a presidential candidate, or indeed the PRI candidates for elected office.

Once competition at the ballot box became more serious, the party leadership was faced with a dilemma – how to choose winning candidates while not turning over control to lower levels of the party hierarchy, including governors and activists. President Salinas first organised and gave voice to the demands of the party's rank-and-file, but once it became clear that these actors were not so easily controllable under the new rules giving them nomination power, Salinas changed the statutes once again to make centre-impositions a rule-based procedure. In the 1996 Assembly, newly empowered members of the party, including some governors and members of the party bureaucracy, forced through a rule change which benefited their interests and stripped the president of his ability to unilaterally impose his successor. Zedillo unsuccessfully attempted to overturn the '*candados*' but finally had to accept a more radically decentralised presidential nomination procedure, reducing his ability to impose his successor.

Now that the PRI has lost the presidential elections, questions of how

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best to organise the internal decision-making procedures take on far more importance. One possibility is that decision making within the party will be turned on its head. Instead of top-down impositions based on the presidential preference which no longer exists, we could see two changes, one in the growing weight of statutory rules in determining outcomes, and the other in the level of party hierarchy at which these decisions take place. At this point, however, it appears to be impossible to revert to centre impositions, as lower-level party leaders and potential candidates will refuse to allow impositions from high-level party officials who no longer control the executive bureaucracy and can no longer guarantee future electoral victories. Thus, the formal rules may take on a life of their own.

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