Agenda Control in Fragmented Congresses

How the PRI sets the legislative agenda in Mexico

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Abstract

This paper argues that a single party can effectively set the legislative agenda under strictly proportional chamber rules without obtaining majority or even plurality status. Furthermore, the plurality or minority agenda setting party need not be positioned as the median party in the assembly. The Mexican Chamber of Deputies provides a case study of how proportional chamber rules and the political context establish the conditions necessary for one-party-led agenda control in a fragmented congress. This argument is supported by roll-call data analysis, using W-NOMINATE, Rice scores, and roll rates. The failure of opposing party coalitions since 2006 to roll the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) evinces that party's ability to set the agenda through strategic coalition formation. Exceptionally high levels of party unity enable the PRI to do so because party leadership can make creditable commitments to potential coalition partners. The flexible and strategic nature of the PRI's ad hoc coalition-making is demonstrated using the W-NOMINATE statistic.

Introduction

Agenda control in legislative assemblies is important for two reasons. First, the legislative process tends toward instability without institutional mechanisms to limit and sequence the agenda. Second, how the agenda is managed and by whom shapes legislative outcomes.[1] A persistent concern with "gridlock" is evident in the literature on Latin American legislatures in democratic countries. Juan Linz (1990) argued that the multiparty presidential democracies of Latin American were more likely to fail due in part to a lack of incentives to form coalitions compared to parliamentary systems. Coalition formation and agenda control are related processes. Successful coalition building efforts are supported by managing the legislative agenda to foster success on the chamber floor. Coalitional success mitigates the concerns raised by Linz and other scholars.

This investigation seeks to contribute to the literature on agenda control and coalition formation in fragmented legislative assemblies; i.e., in multiparty assemblies with no majority party. The Mexican Chamber of Deputies offers a case study in which one party has come to dominate agenda setting. Consequently, that party now shapes the content of legislative outputs. Interestingly, this agenda setter is the same party that ruled Mexico from 1929 to 1997, when it lost its majority in the Chamber; namely, the *Partido Institucional Revolucionario* (PRI). This is the case despite the absence of favorable assembly rules, with or without a co-partisan executive-branch president, and whether or not its legislative faction held even a plurality of the seats in the Chamber. Furthermore, the party's control of the agenda is not dependent its programmatic location relative to other parties in the assembly.

To understand how the PRI has controlled the agenda during at least the last two *sexenios* (six–year presidential terms), we will proceed as follows. First, we will review the literature on agenda control and coalition formation in multiparty presidential regimes. The review will show that none of the extant theories fit the Mexican case. Second, a new theory of agenda control and coalition formation will be presented that explains the Mexican case. Central to this theory is intra-party programmatic constraints, along with strategic flexibility. Third, the methods to be employed in analyzing agenda control and coalition formation in the Mexican Chamber of Deputies will be discussed. Fourth, the empirical results will be presented, showing that indeed the PRI has come to control the agenda and successfully build coalitions. Fifth, these findings will be discussed in light of the theory referenced above. It will be argued that a combination of strategic positioning by the PRI along with programmatic constraints among its most significant rivals has allowed the PRI to exercise strong agenda control, despite institutional and contextual factors that do not advantage the party. Finally, the implications for legislative agenda setting in Mexico and beyond with be considered.

Literature Review

A seminal work that has influenced the study of agenda control in multiparty presidential systems is *Setting the Agenda* by Gary Cox and Matthew McCubbins. Cox and McCubbins (2005) present a model of agenda control for the two-party U.S. Congress. For these authors, a weaker form of agenda-setting powers is sufficient for the majority to set the agenda. The majority party leadership will not always be able to pass bills if party unity is

insufficient, but it can exercise negative agenda control powers by preventing bills from reaching the chamber floor that would divide the party. This weaker version of agenda control is evinced by the absence of rolls for the majority party, which occur when a majority of the majority opposes bills that pass away. Along with its positive agenda, negative agenda control should be reflected in the movement of policies toward the programmatic preferences of the agenda-setting party. When the majority party in the U.S. House of Representatives succeeds in preventing rolls and moving outcomes closer to its median legislator's "ideal point," a "procedural cartel" supported by majority empowering rules is said to exist.

Amorin Neto, Cox, and McCubbins (2003) present a theory of "parliamentary agenda cartels," based on their study of coalitions in Brazil from 1989-98. This adaptation of the Cox and McCubbins model to multiparty presidential democracies incorporates the president as a key player in coalition formation. This approach stems from the argument of José Antonio Cheibub, Adam Przeworski, and Sebastian Saiegh (2004) that parliamentary style coalition formation in presidential systems is theoretically possible and empirically evident, despite Linz's assumption to the contrary. Presidents can and do build legislative coalitions through portfolio assignments to coalition partners as do prime ministers. Thus, for Amorin Neto, Cox, and McCubbins, on-going coalitions were identified by portfolio assignments to members of coalition partners in the legislature. For the period studied, they found that during the last two years of President Cardoso's administration a parliamentary cartel did exist, as measured by a five percent or less roll rates for all coalition partners.

These authors also tested for the absence of an agenda-setting parliamentary cartel by measuring the roll rates of legislative parties distributed along a left to right single-dimension

spectrum. They argue that without an agenda setter, roll rates should resemble a U-shaped

curve with the median legislative party having the least rolls, and the most ideologically

extreme parties on both the left and right of the spectrum having the most rolls. Their data

confirm this hypothesis. The median voter prediction in a legislative assembly without agenda

control is theoretically sound and important to the theory developed and tested in this paper.

While parliamentary agenda cartels are one possible strategy for controlling the agenda,

presidents will not always chose this path or be successful if they do. Carlos Pereira and Marcus

André Melo (2012) argue that attempts to equate presidential coalition building with the role of

prime ministers in parliamentary systems are misplaced. Rather, these authors contend that

delegation of agenda setting powers to presidents is the primary means of avoiding the "perils

of presidentialism." Many Latin American presidents do indeed possess considerable agenda

setting powers, such as decree, veto, and exclusive proposal powers. As John Carey and

Matthew Shugart (1998) argue, legislative assemblies will delegate powers to the president to

solve their own collective dilemmas under certain conditions, thus allowing presidents to set

the agenda.

While presidents clearly play a role in coalition formation and agenda setting, models of

agenda control in multiparty presidential democracies can be developed without placing the

executive at the center of the process. Ernesto Calvo (2014) does just that in his work on

legislator success in the Argentine Congress. While the president's role is added to his model,

Calvo's theory of legislative agenda control is grounded in the assembly's legislative rules.

Those rules favor the majority or the plurality party in the Chamber of Deputies. Under

majority rule in the Chamber, policy outcomes move closer to the median voter of the majority

party. When no majority exists, outcomes reside in a space between the minority and plurality parties. Still, the plurality party is empowered by the rules to set the agenda. While policy moves away from the largest party's preferences when a majority becomes a plurality, legislative productivity remains similar. Mark Jones and Wonjae Hwang (2005) conducted an earlier study of agenda control in the Argentine Congress, arguing that the plurality party (PJ) allied with minor parties to control the agenda. They found that the PJ was seldom rolled, unlike the frequent rolls for the UCR.

In his study of gatekeeping in Argentina, Chile, and Mexico, Eduardo Alemán (2006) argues that presidential agenda powers, the political party system, and assembly rules are all important in shaping the agenda when a legislative majority does not exist. High levels of party unity, with concomitant centralization of decision-making power in the chamber's legislative leaders facilitates agenda control by the coalitional majority. Assembly rules aid this process in Argentina and Chile, but not in Mexico. With only the LVII and LVIII Congresses (1997-2003) in Mexico to analyze, Alemán suggests that the PRI's ability to control the agenda in Mexico is due to its centrist ideology. He observes, "Ironically, losing the presidency gave the PRI a positional advantage as the median party in Congress" (p. 146).

Strategic Agenda Control

Spatial voting theory predicts that legislative outcomes will reflect the chamber's median voter absent assembly rules empowering a plurality or majority, or absent external players with agenda setting powers. However, another possibility exists for setting the agenda in fragmented congresses absent these two constraints on pure majoritarianism. The

leadership of one party may consistently excel at coalition building relative to other legislative

factions. Such a legislative party would need to be sufficiently programmatically flexible to

consistently form majority coalitions on an ad hoc basis, either to block consideration of bills it

dislikes but that might pass anyway, and potentially divide the party, or to pass bills it favors.

This form of strategic agenda control depends on a number of contextual factors, which are

presented below as limiting assumptions.

Assumption 1: only one party is relatively free of ideological constraints.

Assumption 2: that party will seek to set the agenda

Assumption 3: that party will not consistently reside in the center of the left-right spectrum.

Assumption 4: high levels of party unity exist to facilitate credible commitments among coalition partners.

Assumption 5: a coalition partner will not "jump over" a more programmatically proximate partner to form a coalition.

Assumption 6: coalitions are based solely on programmatic and strategic considerations as opposed to side payments.

Assumption 7: agenda setting rules are based strictly on proportional representation of parties by seats held.

Assumption 8: no party holds a majority of legislative seats.

Assumption 9: there exists at least three parties in the assembly with sufficient votes to form a majority coalition, thus offering the strategic agenda setter a choice of potential ad hoc coalition partners.

Assumption 10: the executive has little agenda setting powers or chooses not to exercise them.

Given these assumptions, a strategic agenda setting party in the assembly should be

able to prevent consideration of bills it opposes that will pass on the floor, Cox and McCubbins'

negative agenda control. Leaders of that party will not allow their party to be rolled.

Furthermore, we should see policy move in the direction of the agenda setter's preferences.

Note that the strategic agenda setter is assumed to be more programmatically flexible than its

rivals in the assembly, not lacking any ideological preferences. However, this very flexibility

(willingness to compromise and play one potential coalition partner against another) will mean

that the agenda setter will not fully achieve its policy goals. Finally, the distribution of rolls

among the legislative parties should be distributed irregularly across the left to right spectrum.

They will not form a U-shaped curve that rises monotonically to the left and to the right. Based

on these assumptions and arguments, the following hypotheses follow.

> H1: The strategic agenda setting party will not be rolled.
>
> H2: The distribution of rolls will not be distributed in a U-shaped fashion
>
> H3: Bills passed in the assembly will move closer to the ideal points of members of the
> strategic agenda setting party on most votes.

How well the Mexican case fits these assumptions and hypotheses will be discussed

following analysis of the data. Before doing so, a discussion of the methods employed follows.

Methods

To estimate the relative left-right locations of the legislative parties, we will use W-

NOMINATE. This statistic is a non-parametric scaling technique developed by Poole and

Rosenthal (2005). The statistic is calculated using the WNOMINATE Package for the R statistics

program (Poole et al. 2011). While used to capture "ideal points" on a left-right ideological

spectrum across two dimensions, the technique does not necessarily imply that these points represent the "true" programmatic preferences of deputies. This would only be the case if legislators are unconstrained in their roll-call choices, and all possible policy agenda alternatives were on the agenda. Rather, the ideal points reflect actual voting decisions, which result from some combination of constraints (e.g., party discipline) and programmatic preferences, as well as the choices available. As noted by Royce Carroll and Keith Poole (2014), "[w]here party leaders have tight control over the legislative agenda, what roll-call votes tell us about the underlying concept of party unity is not clear."

It should also be noted that we cannot use this statistic to estimate the distances between deputies due to the very high levels of party unity in the Mexican Chamber of Deputies. Nor can we use a non-parametric statistic to compare ideological location across congresses. What the statistic does allow us to do is to compare how legislative parties compare to each other in their vote choices along two dimensions that represent programmatic preferences to some degree within a particular congress. We will also be able to assess the dimensionality of the legislative choice. A second dimension is observed when a different coalition of lawmakers regularly votes together on the floor for some types of legislative proposals as opposed to others. With high levels of party unity, a significant second dimension suggests a different coalition of parties.

The ideal points will be used to estimate whether the passage of new bills moves policies closer to the agenda-setting party (H3). This is done using the technique developed by Cox and McCubbins (2005: 65-68). Vote choice will be regressed (using Probit) on dimension 1 or dimension 2 ideal points depending on whether the roll-call votes scale as a first or second

dimension vote. The sign of each coefficient will be noted for all significant coefficients in each dimension, if the second dimension is significant in the congress. If the agenda setter is located to the right of the medium voter, then a majority of those coefficients should be positive, and vice versa. The total number of positive signs will be tabulated, then divided by the total votes to ascertain a percentage of roll-call votes that moved policy outcomes closer to the agenda setting party.

To determine if a roll-call vote scales along the first or second dimension, both dimension 1 and 2 ideal points are sequentially regressed on vote choice again. This time, the Pseudo R2 value is recorded for each binominal regression for each roll-call vote. If the first dimension R2 value is greater than the second dimension R2 value, then the roll-call vote is considered to be a dimension 1 vote, and vice versa. Identifying the roll-call votes that scale along one dimension or the other will be important to analyzing the types of coalitions and estimating if policy is moving in the direction of the agenda setting party.

Because one of the assumptions is high levels of party unity, the WRice statistic will be used to estimate party unity scores on roll-call votes. The Rice statistic calculates party unity on a scale of zero to one. The formula for Rice is ($\sum |\% yeas - \% nays|$) when we sum the absolute differential of a series of votes for a particular party or coalition. John Carey's (2007) WRice statistic weights the Rice one for the closeness of the roll-call vote using the following formula.

$$WRICE_i = \sum RICE_{ij} * CLOSE_j / \sum CLOSE_j$$

(where $i=$ the ith party, $j=$ the jth vote, and

where CLOSE$j=$ 1- (1/THRESHOLD * |THRESOLD - % YEA|)

Descriptive statistics will also be presented to determine the number and variety of coalitions formed during each congress among all possible majority seat coalition partners. Given the argument that the agenda setting party acts strategically to form ad hoc coalitions with different parties as needed to exert agenda control, data of coalition formation is important. This will include coalitions among the agenda-setting party and coalition partners with sufficient seats as needed to win on the floor. Frequencies of such coalitions will be calculated for roll-call votes in which the agenda setter voted yea, along with success rates. The variety of agenda-setter coalitions is an indicator of strategic coalition making, while the successful rates test for positive agenda control.

Finally, the number of rolls will be tabulated for the major parties to compare the roll rates for the agenda-setting party with other parties in the Chamber (H1). A roll will be recorded if a party votes against a bill, but it passes away. The roll rates for each party will then be compared to test the second hypothesis (H2), concerning the absence of a U-shaped curve for rolls. Unlike Cox and McCubbins, a simple party majority voting in one direction on a roll-call vote will not determine the party's direction. Instead, this investigation uses a threshold of sixty percentage to establish a party-vote direction for or against a bill on the floor. If less than sixty percent of a party legislators support or oppose a bill or amendment in a floor vote, the party is record as divided on that vote. Divided party votes can then be analyze separately in respect to agenda control. The logic of this method is the assumption that in a party system that places such a high value on floor-voting unity, a roll-call that results in considerable disunity within a party is worth analyzing.

A final methodological consideration concerns what types of roll-call votes are being measured. Cox and McCubbins in their study of agenda setting in the U.S. House of Representatives only considered final passage votes for calculating rolls. This will not work for the Mexican Chamber of Deputies. A bill reported to the floor is first voted on as reported. Following that vote, amendments are debated and voted on as determined by one of the Chamber's proportionally representative leadership bodies. The final bill is as amendment without any further votes. The amendments are often more divisive and consequential than the reported bill. There are no plenary votes on the rules for considering the bill. Consequently, all roll-call votes are included in the database for each three-year congress.

Results

Data on roll rates shows that no party controlled the agenda during the first three years after the PRI lost its majority in the Chamber in 1997. The LVII Congress (1997-2000) had all three of the major parties being rolled numerous times (see Table 1). However, with the election of Vicente Fox in 2000, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) emerged as the agenda setter during the LVIII Congress (2000-2003). But during the LIX Congress (2003-2006), serious internal divisions within the PRI resulted in five rolls for the party. Rolls substantially increased for the other two major parties in the Chamber, the *Partido Accion Nacional* (PAN) and the *Partido Revolucionario Democratica* (PRD). During the three following congresses (2006-2015) the PRI was never rolled. The party's two largest rivals, the PAN and the PRD, exhibited numerous rolls during this period, though the PAN had only five rolls during the LX Congress (2006-2009). This lower number of rolls for the PAN is most likely explained by its

role as the PRI's usual coalition partner during this period. Mostly importantly for our purposes, the evidence supports the conclusion that the PRI has acted as the agenda setting party in the Chamber since September, 2000 when the LVIII Congress began, allowing for a small loss of agenda control during the LIX Congress.

Table 1

Roll Rates for Major Parties by Congress

Congress/ Party	LVII N=	LVIII N= 317	LIX N= ~635	LX N= 465	LXI N= 667	LXII N= 715
PRI	32 (239)	0 (208)	5 (211)	0 (105)	0 (228)	0 (211)
PAN	74 (121)	4 (202)	45 (150)	5 (205)	21 (142)	39 (113)
PRD	15 (125)	27 (56)	64 (97)	52 (127)	52 (70)	85 (100)

Note: the number of seats held by each party are in parentheses. Seat numbers are an average of the party seats during the first vote and the last vote of the congress.

At no time during this period did the PRI hold a majority of the seats in the Chamber (251 of the 500 seats). In fact, the PRI was not even the plurality party during the LX Congress as show in Table 1. Not only has the PRI evinced negative agenda control since 2000, it has with rare exception effected positive agenda control (see Table 2). It has been a partner in nearly all affirmative coalitions (voting yea for the bill or amendment), and succeeded in passing the measures almost without exception since the beginning of the LX Congress in 2006.

These statistics support the argument that the PRI has set the agenda from 2000 through 2015, but one could still reason that the party's ability to do so was a result of its location in the middle of the left-right policy spectrum. If the PRI was the centrist party in the Chamber, it would be the pivotal actor between parties to its left and to its right in the coalitional bargaining process. However, the evidence does not support this conclusion. Figure

1 (see Appendix) displays the W-NOMINATE coordinates plots for the three congresses

beginning in 2006.

Table 2

Affirmative Coalition Frequencies and Success Rates (2006-2015)

Congress/Coalition	Number of Coalitions			Percentage of Total			Percentage Success		
	LX	LXI	LXII	LX	LXI	LXII	LX	LXI	LXII
PRI_PAN	92	91	78	91.1	69.5	69.6	100	100	100
PRI_PRD	n/a*	19	26		14.5	23.2		100	100
PRI_PVEM	n/a*	18	n/a*		13.7			88.9	100
PRI_PT	n/a*	2	n/a*		1.5			100	
PRI_PVEM_PNA	n/a*	n/a**	7			6.3			85.7
PRI_PRD_PVEM_CONV	9	n/a**	n/a**	8.9			100		
PAN_PRD	0	n/a*	n/a*	0					
PAN_PRD_PVEM	n/a**	n/a*	1			.9			0
PAN_PRD_PVEM_PT_MC	n/a**	1	n/a**		.8			100	
Totals	101	131	112	100	100	100			

* not a potential coalition due to insufficient seats
** not a minimum-winning coalition due to excess seats (does not indicate whether minor parties joined the coalition)
*** CONV changed its name to MC in the LXI Congress; MC is only used to designate the party in the LXII Congress

The PRI is located between the PRD on the left and the PAN of the right along the first

dimension during the LX Congress. The second dimension is not significant during this

Congress. Its closer proximity to the PAN on dimension one reflects the fact that the PRI

choose to form coalitions more often with the party to its right (the PAN) than the one to its left

(the PRD). As shown in Table 1, the PRI would have had comfortable seat margins with either

the PAN or the PRD during this Congress. The PRI's preference for the PAN as a coalition

partner could be due to a greater programmatic affinity with the PAN over the PRD, but it could

also have been a strategic decision to partner with a more reliable party. As shown in Table 3, the PAN's WRice score during this Congress was .976 compared to the PRD's score of .875. The fact that the PAN also held the presidency was likely an important factor.

Table 3

WRice Party Unity Scores

Congress/ Party	LVIII N= 317	LIX Congress N= ~635	LX Congress N= 465	LXI Congress N= 667	LXII Congress N= 715
PRI	.759	.820	.937	.953	.996
PAN	.865	.767	.976	.930	.965
PRD	.899	.879	.875	.856	.738

Statistics above are adjusted, weighted Rice scores. Abstentions were recoded as nay votes if party direction was yea.

Whatever the PRI's motives, the party's location on dimension 1 can be interpreted as the pivotal party between the largest party on its right, the PAN, and the next largest one on its left the PRD. Notice that the *Partido Verde Ecologista de* México (PVEM) is located in the same space as the PRI. In combination with the PRD and the Movimiento Ciudadano (MC, formally *Convergencia*), the PRI and PVEM could form a majority coalition, which it did on nine occasions. Since we do not know the "true" programmatic location of the PRI on the left-right spectrum, and given our assumption that a party will not jump over potential coalition partners who are more programmatically proximate, the PRI would appear to be the centrist party during the LX Congress. The party could form a left-leaning or a right-leaning coalitions. It may have controlled the agenda due its ideological location rather than its coalitional strategies during this Congress. The PAN's coalitional options were either the PRI or the PRD. Since it

would have had to jump over the PRI to partner with the PRD, it did not do so. The same is true

of the PRD in reverse.

Looking at the LXI Congress in Figure 1, one can see that the PRI is to the right of the

PAN on the first dimension. The PAN is to the left of the PRI and other parties on the second

dimension. The PRI is roughly in line with the PRD and other parties on this dimension. PRI

legislators are noticeably more dispersed, while the PAN appears more coherent in its floor

voting behavior. The significance of the second dimension in the coordinates plot reflects the

fact that the PRI choose to partner with the PRD and minor parties to a much greater extent

during the LXI Congress (see Table 2). This is the case even though the PRD's WRice score did

not improve, and the size of its legislative contingent substantially decreased. However, the PRI

held on average 228 seats during this Congress, thus making either the PRI or the PAN potential

coalition partners with comfortable coalition seat margins. Once again the PVEM resides in the

same space as the PRI in the W-NOMINATE coordinates plot.

Given that the PRI would needed to jump over the PAN to the less proximate PRD, we

would not expect any coalitions if the first dimension was the only one in play during the LXI

Congress (2009-2012). However, the PRI did form 14.5 percent of its coalitions with the PRD,

which are reflected in the second dimension. Given our assumption that parties will not jump

over more proximate potential coalition partners, we must also assume that the second

dimension represents actual programmatic differences. When regressing vote choice on

WNOMINATE dimension 1 and then on dimension 2 scores for roll-call votes for which there

existed a PRI_PRD Yea coalition, the Pseudo R2 value was always larger for the second

dimension than the first dimension. PRI_PRD coalitions all scaled along the second dimension.

It is the first dimension during the LXI Congress that is more interesting for our purposes. The PAN was located between the PRD and the PRI on this dimension. However, a PAN_PRD coalition held only 232 seats in the Chamber. Even if the PAN would have been willing to included minor leftist parties in the coalition, such as the PT, they would have fallen short of a seat majority. Alternatively, the PAN could have formed a coalition with the PRD as well as two minor parties on the left, the *Partido Tabajador* (PT) and the MC, which also included the PVEM on its right. On one roll-call vote it did, resulting in a divided PRI. In this roll-call taken at the end of the LXI Congress, and shortly before the 2012 presidential elections, 66 PRI deputies voted yea and 59 voted nay. Five PRI deputies abstained. Thus by Cox and McCubbins simply majority rule, the PRI was not rolled by the PAN_PRD_PVEM_PT_MC coalition. The potential for more such non-PRI coalitions existed. Still, the margin for defections was quite slim. Consequently, it is not surprising that all but one first dimension roll-call votes included the PRI in partnership with the PAN or the PVEM.

Most importantly for the strategic coalition theory advance here, the PRI partnered with the PVEM 13.7 percentage of the time on contentious votes (ones in which at least one of the three major parties voted in the opposite direction or failed to establish a direction). Of those eighteen floor voting coalitions, only four were used to pass measures, while fourteenth were used to block bills or amendments. The PAN as the party located in the center of the left-right spectrum might have been the agenda setter. However, the PRI strategically used its programmatic and/or strategic twin (the PVEM) on occasion to thwart the will of the PAN, resulting in four rolls and fourteenth defeats for the PAN when confronted with a PRI_PVEM coalition.

The LXII Congress (2012-15) began shortly before Enrique Peña Nieto assumed the

presidency. The PRI is grouped on the right side of the left-right spectrum with the PVEM and

the *Partido Nueva Allianza* (PNA). The PRD and several minor parties are located on the left.

The PAN is located between these two groups of parties on the left-right spectrum. The PAN

could form a majority seat coalition with the PVEM to its right along with the PRD to its left. In

fact, one PAN_PRD_PVEM coalition did attempt to pass a measure during this Congress, but it

was defeated. Most coalitions were PRI_PAN ones (69.6%). However, the PRI also formed

coalitions with the PRD (23.2%) and others with the PVEM and PNA (6.3%). All of the PRI_PRD

coalitions scaled as second dimension ones, as expected given their joint location on the left of

the spectrum for this dimension. All of the PRI_PVEM_PNA coalitions were first dimension

ones, as would be expected with the alignment of these parties for that dimension on the W-

NOMINATE coordinates plot. As with the LXI Congress, the PRI used its programmatic and/or

strategic minor party allies on the right to roll the first-dimension center party, the PAN. While

the PAN did not have a majority seat coalition potential on the left, it theoretically could have

formed coalitions with parties on its left and right, excluding the PRI. As noted above, the only

attempt to do so was not successful. The PRI was again the agenda setter despite its location

on the right of the spectrum.

To test for positive agenda control by the PRI, we should see most bills and

amendments passed in the Chamber moving in a rightward direction on the first dimension

given the PRI's location on the right side of the spectrum. The expected direction toward which

policy moves on second dimension roll-call votes depends on the congress. For the LX Congress

(2006-2009), seventy four (74.3) percent of roll call votes moved policy to the right on first

dimension roll-call votes. There were no second dimension roll-call votes during this Congress.

Policy also moved rightward during the LXI Congress (2009-2012) for first dimension roll-call

votes. Seventy one percent (.71) of those votes moved policy to the right. Policy moved

rightward for second dimension votes as well, as would be expected since the PRI was located

on the right side of the spectrum for both dimensions. Eighty two percent (.815) of the second

dimension roll-call votes had a positive and significant coefficient. During the LXII Congress

(2012-2015), policy moved to the right eighty percent (.798) of the time on first dimension roll-

call votes. It moved to the left seventy six percent (.763) of the time on second dimension roll-

call votes, toward the PRI's location on this dimension. The large proportion of first dimension

votes moving to the right supports the expectation that policy would move closer to the PRI,

the agenda setter. In the two congresses with a significant second dimension, policy moved

either left or right depending on the PRI's location on the left-right spectrum for this dimension.

In sum, policy on both dimensions moved toward the agenda setting party, the PRI.

Discussion

The PRI has controlled the Chamber's legislative agenda since 2000 despite the fact that

it was not the centrist, pivotal party in most congresses over both dimensions of vote choice.

Rolls clearly did not form a U-shaped pattern as would be the case in a pure majoritarian

assembly in which deputies voted their "true" programmatic preferences. But policy

preferences do appear to have constrained coalition formation. Neither the PRI nor any other

party jumped over more proximate parties to form coalitions. Still, the PRI did not always

choose to ally with the party most proximate to it, even when that party held sufficient seats to

form a majority. The PRI strategically selected its partners so that it avoided rolls and

maximized affirmative successes on the floor, resulting in rolls and defeats for parties that

could have been coalition partners. The fact that the potential existed for the PAN to control

the agenda despite its failure to do so, suggests that the PRI was simply better at playing the

coalitional game, or more willing to do so. This pattern persisted whether or not the presidency

was held by a member of their party.

Before we consider why this was the case, it is important to establish that the plurality

party is not advantaged by the Chamber's rules. But note that even if the rules did advantage

the plurality party, the PRI did not consistently hold that position. The Organic Law of the

Chamber requires strict proportionality in the distribution of seats on the three leadership

bodies that set the agenda. Formally, the agenda is controlled by the *Conferencia*. However,

members of the *Junta* sit in the *Conferencia* where voting is again proportional to party seat

share. Thus, the party *coordinadores* (legislative party leaders) are able to exercise agenda

control through the *Conferenencia* and its permanent body, the *Mesa Directiva*. The *comisiones

ordinarias* (standing committees) are also agenda setters. They decide which bills and

amendments will be submitted to the floor, subject to the discharge powers exercised by the

Junta and the Mesa. The *Conferencia* sets the deadlines for reporting *dictámenes* to the floor

(González 2007). Bills and proposed amendments (dictámenes) are reported to the floor by

majority vote in committees that consist of the same coalitional majority that is represented in

the *Conferencia* and the *Junta*. The procedural majority on the *Junta* appoints its own party

members to the most important committees. These committees are the ones most likely to report

contentious *dictámenes*. Third, the *coordinadores* that sit on the *Junta* have the power to remove

and replace committee members, including chairs, without constraints as long as the *coordinadores* hold their leadership positions (Lehoucq et al. 2008).

Despite these formal procedures that facilitate agenda control by the majority coalition, informality is still an essential part of the Chamber's processes. Accordingly to Alarcón Olguín (2009), the *comisiones* lack autonomy in part because the formal rules are bypassed and have been made "inoperable many of the articles of the *Reglamento* and its *Ley Orgánica*." He argues that the current process is "preoccupied with obtaining consensus prior to achieving agreements in the committees and the internal governing bodies of the chambers before arriving at an uncertain vote on the floor" (p. 202).[2]

Coalition leaders clearly have rules, norms and incentives that help them control the agenda. But to do so, they must maintain their leadership positions. Formally, the party *coordinador* is selected by the party's legislative faction and subject to replacement by the same. However, the parties central committees (CEN) have considerable influence over the selection of legislative party leaders, despite the practice of holding elections for factional leaders since 1997 (Camp 2007). Fabrice Lehoucq et al. (2008) argue that the party's CEN selects the party's *coordinador* prior to caucus elections. Benito Nacif (2002) concurs and notes that the PRI legislative contingent sometimes dispenses with the ritual of elections. Luisa Béjar Algazi (2006) argues that democratic rules and values do not exist within the legislative factions in the Chamber of Deputies. Thus, while leadership positions are distributed proportionally according to seat shares, party leaders are either delegated or have assumed considerable decision-making powers.[3] As long as they maintain floor-voting party unity, they are in a position to negotiate credible commitments to coalition partners. Most important for the theory of strategic agenda control, no party's leadership is advantaged over another by the rules.

Mexican political parties are organizationally centralized, and at the same time internally factious (Nacif 2002). Most parties present coherent, ideological brands despite deep ideological differences. The PRD and other leftist parties have clear programmatic positions. So does the PAN on the right. Considerable pressure is placed on party members, especially politicians, to conform to the party's legislative program.[4] The PAN started as a "confessional" party with close ties to the Catholic Church, but has for some time presented itself as a pro-free-market party with close ties to business (Shirk 2005; Wuhs 2001). The PRD started as a leftist break-away party from the PRI, exposing economic nationalism as the "true" party of the Revolution (Bruhn 1998). Along with minor leftist parties, a leftist identity is central to its brand. Adherence to core principles is expected of both PRD and PAN members despite significant internal divisions.

The PRI has traditionally been more ideologically diverse. The party of the old regime (1929 to 1997) was primarily a mechanism to bring elites under one umbrella so as to peacefully resolve the revolutionary elites' prisoners' dilemma; namely, how to ensure that competing politicians would not use violence (defect) but rather resolve their differences peacefully (cooperate). The party succeeded quite well in bringing together a heterogeneous group of politicians, as well as various key interest groups. The corporatist system brought peace and prosperity for a number of decades. While the party's creed was summed up as "revolutionary nationalism," it was in fact quite ideologically diverse. This was evident from the swings in policy from one administration to another from the 1930's through the 1990's. Thus, the PRI not only has a broader based of supporters, it also has a more ambiguous party brand.

The demise of the PRI corporatist system by 1997 resulted in a crisis of identity for the party. By the early 2000's the neoliberal or modernizing wing of the party had lost credibility, given the liberalizing policies of the three previous PRI presidents. The *dinosaurios* or traditionalist wing found new energy. The 2003 IVA (value added tax) floor vote most prominently illustrates the divisions within the PRI during the early congresses following the initial chaos in the PRI after losing its majority in the Chamber. This vote is the one discussed earlier that divided the PRI, even though it was not technically rolled. It occurred in the LIX Congress in which the PRI suffered five rolls. Elba Esther Gordillo, the party's leader in the Chamber supported this bill to increase the value added tax and extend it to food and medicine, while the party's Central Committee Chair, Roberto Madrazo, did not support it (Crespo 2004). A number of the *Elbistas* later split from the party to form the *Partido Nueva Allianza* (PNA), and Madrazo was nominated as his party's candidate for the 2006 presidential elections. Madrazo lost the election, coming in third place.

Following the 2006 election, the PRI began to move back toward the modernist, neoliberal direction. It is not surprising that by the LXI and LXII Congresses (2009-2015), the party was located further to the right than any party on the first dimension as illustrated in Figure 1. A sampling of dimension 1 roll-call votes supports the conclusion that the first dimension represents socio-economic issues. Dimension 2 issues tend to have no particular commonality, though many have to do with issues that play well to particular constituencies of the parties. Regionalism is one such issue. Both the PRI and the PRD have substantial support in the southern states, while the PAN's support is much stronger in the north of the country. But in terms of the dimension that drives most legislation, the first dimension, the PRI is now

clearly a party that supports liberalization of the economy. This is particularly evident under

Mexico's current PRI president, Ernesto Peña Nieto, who was inaugurated in December of 2012.

PRI deputies in the Chamber have faithfully supported their president's legislative agenda to

liberalize the labor and energy sectors, among other pro-market reforms.

Diversity still exists within the PRI, however. The incredibly high levels of floor-voting

party unity do not necessarily reflect ideological cohesion. Negotiations both within the party

and with other parties are surely important to fostering such high WRice scores, as is party

discipline. The PRI's history of behind-the-scenes politicking, while maintaining public

conformity is most likely another factor in its almost perfect floor-voting unity. So is the

tradition of careerism within the party, combined with electoral rules that empower leadership

to discipline their legislators. In sum, a political party that has succeeded most of the time over

many decades in keeping a diverse coalition together has the flexibility and floor-voting unity to

strategically negotiate coalitions by which its controls the agenda. The PRI's rivals in the

Chamber, on the other hand, are less programmatically flexible due to the combination of more

coherent ideologies and equally salient internal divisions. Programmatic heterodoxy is more

likely to fracture the PRI's rivals than the PRI.

Conclusion

Despite the PRI's remarkable success in strategically setting the agenda given the

absence of rules empowering it to do so, it may not be able to continue its role as Mexico's

legislative agenda setter. This could be the case for two reasons. First, the success of the PRI's

turn to the right on economic issues is still to be determined. Liberal economic policy reforms

accelerated rapidly with the election of Peña Nieto. Interesting, the PRI President's reform

agenda went even further in the direction of market liberalization than his PAN predecessors'

proposals in this policy area. PRI opposition to President Fox's liberalization agenda resulted in

much of it never being formally considered by Congress. Felipe Calderón did introduce a

structural reform package that received PAN support after being considerably weakened to

accommodate resistance among traditionalist within the PRI. The PRI's bold embrace of a

sweeping structural reform agenda under Peña Nieto has marginalized the economic

nationalists within the party. Popular disenchantment with the President's reform agenda is

evident throughout Mexico. Given the fall in oil prices, the economic benefits of these reforms

may not appear before the next presidential and congressional election in 2018. Along with

other problems concerning Mexican citizens, the result may be electoral disaster for the PRI

both in Congress and in *Los Pinos*. If this does happen, the PRI may go through another

contentious period similar to the LIX Congress (2003-2006), or even similar to the LVII Congress

(1997-2000). With considerable internal strife, the public face of unity may break down inside

and outside of Congress.

The second reason that the PRI may not be able to maintain its dominance in setting the

agenda is that the PRD and the PAN may evolve into more programmatically flexible parties

with greater strategic coalitional skills. If the PRI does suffer losses at the next election for

reasons discussed above, it is unlikely that the pro-market PAN will benefit. It is more likely

that the left will benefit. Now that the more ideologically "pure" elements of the PRD have

broken away from the party to form *Morena* led by Andres Lopez Obrador, the more social

democratic PRD could possibly gain seats and become an important coalition partner, and

perhaps even an agenda setter. However, the fragmentation on the left may well prevent such

a scenario from developing.

The PRI has set the agenda since 2000 because of its strategic capabilities supported by

an ambiguous party brand, careerism, and programmatic flexibility. Unlike a plurality agenda

setter supported by chamber rules, the ability of a strategic party to control the agenda is more

tenuous under strictly proportion chamber rules. Of course, the absence of such chamber rules

has allowed the PRI to control the agenda even when it was a minority party. It may be that the

PRI's control of the agenda will not last much longer. It will certainly not last for an extended

period of time. Nevertheless, this case study of legislative agenda setting supports the

argument that legislative institutions need not be designed to empower an agenda setting

party. An agenda setter may emerge absence such rules due to one party's strategic skills

under favorable political conditions.

Appendix: WNOMINATE Coordinates Plots by Congress (2006-2015)

LX Congress (2006-2009)

LXI Congress (2009-2012)

LXII Congress (2012-2015)
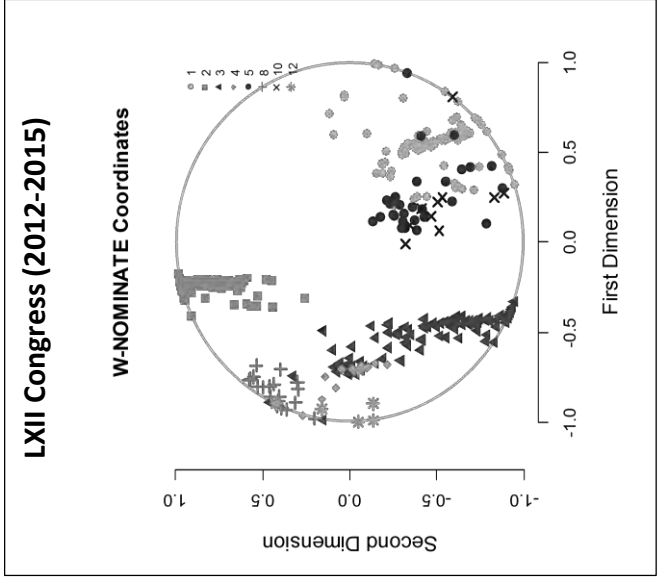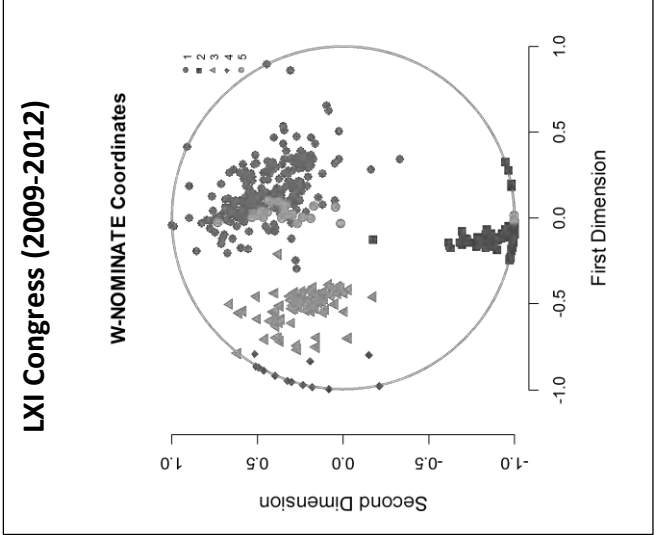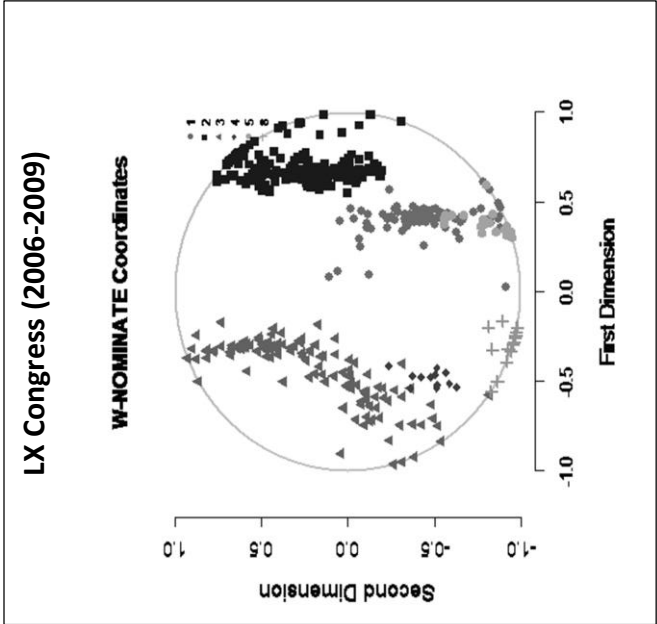
PRI = 1, PAN = 2, PRD = 3, PT = 4, PVEM = 5, Convergenica/MC = 8, PNA = 10, MRN = 12

Note that the Second Dimension is only significant for the LXI and LXII Congresses (Scree Plots not shown)

LX Congress: Predicted Yeas 98.9%, Predicated Nays 95.8%   Correction classification 97.65%, 97.92%   APRE 0.889, 0.902

LXI Congress: Predicted Yeas 98.3%; Predicated Nays 92.7%   Correction classification 94.84%, 96.06%   APRE 0.638, 0.794

LXII Congress: Predicted Yeas 98.6%; Predicated Nays 92.8%   Correction classification 95.04%, 97.32%   APRE 0.757, 0.868

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Endnotes

[1] For an overview of the theoretical literature on legislative agenda-setting, see Bjorn Rasch (Rasch 2014).

[2] My translation.

[3] Much of the preceding discussion of the Chamber's rules is replicated from one of my papers (Knight 2011).

[4] Statement based on interviews with PRI, PAN, and PRD deputies in 2006. The PAN especially stressed the importance of party loyalty on key roll-call votes.