

Public Mood and Presidential Election Outcomes in Mexico

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Who wins elections and why?¹ This question seems straightforward, and political scientists should certainly know enough to provide plausible answers. In scholarship on the United States, there is a cottage industry in explaining and forecasting aggregate election outcomes, and plausible answers abound (Campbell 2012). Most such models and theories have settled on one overriding cause: the health of the macroeconomy (Lewis-Beck and Rice 1992). The incumbent party does well on election day when the economy is booming, while the opposition party is likely to perform well when the economy is sluggish. This standard retrospective economic voting model has taken firm root in scholarly understandings of Latin American election outcomes as well. There is now an impressive body of evidence demonstrating the importance of valence issues and reward-and-punishment orientations in Latin American voting behavior (Remmer 1991; Singer and Carlin 2013). Latin American voters, it seems, vote out incumbent parties that oversee poor economies, and they re-elect ones that govern during times of economic growth.

This chapter does not take issue with the core of the retrospective voting claim: it is simple yet explanatorily powerful. Instead, I argue that it is incomplete for the Latin American, and especially Mexican, case. Quite simply, it is quiet on the question of where anti-incumbent voters go in a multiparty system. The theory is whole in the two-player world of the United States party system, since voters in an anti-incumbent mood during tough times have but one option. But Latin America's proportional representation systems feature at least three-party competition in the vast majority of presidential elections.

To fill this gap in scholars' understanding of the causes of aggregated electoral returns in Latin America, I introduce a new dimension alongside the standard valence or performance

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evaluations: positional issue voting. In particular, I argue that there is positional issue content to not just the opposition vote but all voting in Mexican elections. Voters' "mood" or aggregate central tendency on important policy and positional issue debates of the day can help to explain which parties perform well in Mexico's presidential elections. Mexican voters, I find, were in a liberal, market-friendly mood in 1994 and 2000 when the PAN was the leading opposition party (1994) or outright winner (2000) and the left-leaning PRD was marginalized to also-ran status in third place. In contrast, voters were in a more statist mood in 2006 and 2012 when the left nearly won and the centrist PRI (2006) or rightist PAN (2012) were more marginalized. All told, I conclude that public mood is a fruitful line of research in thinking about Mexican and Latin American elections.

The Importance of Policy Mood

Retrospective voting theory has been applied with some success to Mexican elections, giving scholars a solid understanding of trends in aggregate returns and party success. The PRI's steady decline through the 1980s and 1990s was almost certainly due to economic turmoil. The debt crisis of 1982, the subsequent lost decade, and the peso crisis of 1995 all played a role in chipping away at the PRI's credibility as an able economic manager, leading to a gradually decreasing vote share for the PRI and eventually its first presidential loss in 2000 (Magaloni 2006, chapter 2). The drying up of patronage resources for the PRI to divvy out also contributed to its gradual demise (Greene 2007). The 2012 outcome also has a nice retrospective-voting ring to it: rising cartel violence soured voters on the 12-year incumbent PAN, so voters abandoned it in droves, consigning it to third place.

But these narratives leave crucial questions unanswered. Why was it the PAN's Vicente Fox, and not the PRD's Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, that most profited from the anti-incumbency mood in 2000? Arguments that Cárdenas was an unattractive candidate or was not seen as viable are post-hoc or even tautological, especially considering his surprising second place performance in 1988. Similarly, why was it the PRD's Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), and not the PRI's Roberto Madrazo, that received the bulk of the anti-incumbent vote in 2006? Arguments that voters were tired of the PRI or that it had lost its credibility due to poor economic performance in the 1990s are belied by its return to power in 2012. To answer these questions about aggregate election outcomes, I turn to the concept of Mexican voters' public mood.

James Stimson defines *public mood* as a society's "general disposition" toward a set of conceptually related positional (i.e., controversial or divisive) political issues of the day (Stimson 1991: 18). Conceptually, mood can be thought of as the central tendency of opinions held by all individuals over a set of related policy issues. In practice, this central tendency is defined and calculated over two levels of aggregation: survey respondents and positional issues. It is *not*, however, aggregated over time (at least no more than annually), meaning mood is allowed to shift temporally. Indeed, many of the interesting findings from mood emerge from seeing how it shifts through time. For example, analysts looking at mood in the U.S. case speak of the public being in a conservative mood in one presidential election and then a liberal mood in the next. The simple notion of a "conservative mood" evokes an average opinion within an entire electorate over a large swathe of political issues that can be characterized as having a conservative position and a liberal position.

Do Mexican voters have policy moods? Scholarship to date has not provided an answer to that question. Some vague references to the notion exist. For example, a *New York Times*

article on the 2006 election referred to a “populist groundswell” (Rieff 2006). For Latin American electorates as a whole, there has been vague talk of “reform fatigue” and a “post-neoliberal age” (Hershberg and Rosen 2006; Lora, Panizza, and Quispe-Agnoli 2004; Roberts 2008; Samuelson 2002). In general, however, there is no scholarly research on the topic, save an analysis of region-wide trends by Baker and Greene (2011).

For the Mexican case, this oversight stems in part from a certain skepticism about the relevance of positional issues to voting behavior. In their classic work on the 1988 presidential and 1991 legislative elections, Jorge Domínguez and James McCann conclude that “these Mexican elections were not about the issues” (Domínguez and McCann 1995, 41). In another analysis of the 2000 election, McCann and Chappell Lawson argue that “the notion that citizens might base their voting decisions on candidates’ issue positions seems implausible at best” (McCann and Lawson 2003, 75). Finally, of the 2006 election, Greene (2009) concludes that candidate images, not positional issues, drove vote choice.² Moreover, to the extent that there has been any research on the impact of aggregate opinions, it is on performance assessments—of the economy, of crime, of the political system—and their movement through time (Buendía 1996; Buendía Laredo 2001; Magaloni 2006). This is not mood in the Stimsonian sense, as these are valence issues, not positional ones.

Furthermore, most analyses of Mexican voting behavior focus on single elections and use individual-level data (see Domínguez and Lawson 2004; Greene 2011; Lawson 2002). The

² Some dissenting voices that successfully employ models of Mexican voting behavior using a positional issue space do exist (Greene 2007, chapter 7; Magaloni 2006, chapter 6; Zechmeister 2008).

predominant scholarly approach has been one of estimating individual-level covariance between vote choice and causal factors such as performance evaluations, issue positions, campaign attention, and so on (e.g., Domínguez and McCann 1996; Moreno 2009). These studies are highly valuable for their expressed purpose: explaining what kinds of people vote for each party. But individual-level analyses on a single election (even with panel data) cannot provide convincing answers to questions about which party did better or about changing party fortunes from one election to the next. Fundamentally, these are questions about an aggregate process that, while rooted in individual-level decisions, cannot be satisfactorily answered by merely discerning the kinds of individual-level factors that are correlated with vote choice. Many questions that are central to comparative and Latin American politics (e.g., Why did the left rise? Why did some Latin American party systems collapse?) can only be answered with at least some focus on national- or multinational-level factors. In short, this chapter makes the case for not ignoring aggregate data and trends (Kramer 1983).

Measuring Mexican Mood

To estimate Mexican policy mood, I use the Stimson (1991) algorithm to recover estimates of mood from a set of repeated survey items that query respondents' opinions about different but conceptually related positional issues. Policy mood is a latent variable that takes on different values at each interval t . For my purposes, the interval is annual. To recover these annual values, the analyst first compiles as many time series of repeated positional issue survey items as possible and calculates the percentage of individuals in support of the rightist (or leftist—the choice is arbitrary) position on each one. For inclusion, any given time series needs not be complete—that is, there can be years in which the question was not asked. The issues

queried by the survey items should all be interrelated, in the sense that respondents' positions on each one are partly informed and constrained by a singular, underlying political philosophy, core value, ideology, predisposition, meta-orientation, or ascertainable source of constraint.

Respondents' self-placement on these positional issue items need only be *partly* informed by this underlying source of ideological constraint. Mood can exist when a substantial portion of mass thinking about different policy elements is "morselized" or unconstrained (Lane 1962; Converse 1964; Baker 2009).

The first choice in calculating mood, therefore, is to pick a meta-dimension, meaning an issue dimension that could underlie a set of technically distinct but conceptually related policy debates or elements. In the Mexican case, at least four such meta-dimensions are plausible. The first is the statist↔liberal divide, a dimension that exists in seemingly every North American, European, and Latin American society to at least some extent (Gunther and Hsin-chi 2007). (Note that throughout this chapter I use "liberal" in the classical liberal sense of free-market and capitalist advocacy, not in the sense of leftism or progressivism as is often used in the United States.) In Mexico, debates over privatization, free trade, fiscal policy, and government anti-poverty programs have been highly salient in elections and party competition for at least 30 years, ever since the government began a dramatic policy shift from state-led development to a more market-oriented model in the mid-1980s. Numerous specific policies and policy debates (such as those over NAFTA, the opening of PEMEX to private investment, the privatization of the electricity sector, the establishment of fiscal programs such as *PRONASOL* and *Oportunidades*, and the nature of fees for public university students), all can be characterized as having a statist position and a liberal promarket position.

A second potential meta-dimension for Mexico is the regime cleavage first pinpointed by Dominguez and McCann (1996). Political debates around the pace and nature of democratization, which were deeply intertwined with opinions of the longstanding partisan sponsor and beneficiary of hegemonic-party authoritarianism, the PRI, were central in Mexican voters' minds up through the PRI's first presidential loss in the 2000 election. Perceptions of the depth of voter fraud committed by the PRI, the transparency of government agencies, security and stability in a potential post-PRI political system, and opposition parties' capacity to manage the economy were among the more specific policy debates and concerns that were shaped in part by this underlying regime dimension. (See also McCann's chapter in this volume.)

The third potential dimension is religious and moral. Mexican parties and voters are divided on a broadly defined religious↔secular meta-dimension that is associated with a number of more specific policy issues—abortion rights, access to contraception, same-sex marriage—that have been part of political contestation for decades (Kitschelt et al 2010; Magaloni and Moreno 2003). The final meta-dimension is anti-crime policy, with opinions falling on a continuum ranging from the *mano dura* approach of repression and overwhelming state force to the more conciliatory approach of treating the underlying socioeconomic causes of criminality and negotiating with organized criminal gangs. (See the Franco et al chapter in this volume).

In the end, I focus exclusively on the statist↔liberal dimension for both theoretical and practical reasons. On the theoretical side, evidence is abundant that this is the primary meta-dimension and political cleavage in the Mexican party system, with the three major parties falling roughly on the statist center-left (PRD), the mixed economy center (PRI), and the pro-market center-right (PAN). Support for the importance of this dimension comes from a variety of sources. Wiesehomeier and Benoit (2009) asked experts in 2006 and 2007 to rank the importance

of eleven different issue dimensions to parties in Mexico. Three of the four most important dimensions were privatization (first), regional economic integration (third) and globalization (fourth).³ By contrast, a crime policy dimension ranked fifth in importance, and a dimension loosely related to the regime cleavage (on the desired extent of government regulation of party financial and campaigning activities) ranked second to last. Another bit of evidence comes from Kitschelt et al (2010, chapter 2), which finds an economic redistribution dimension to be one of two primary cleavages among parties in the Mexican national legislature. In contrast, a political regime dimension barely registered as significant. Finally, Baker and Greene (2011) analyze mass opinion data from across Latin America and find the main cause of partisan waves—and particularly the rise of the left in the 2000s—to be mass shifts in beliefs about the Washington Consensus. Changes in mass attitudes on other dimensions, including criminality and democratization, mattered little. In short, these various pieces of evidence point to the statist↔liberal divide as being more important than both the crime and regime dimensions.

Admittedly, however, some of these same sources of evidence point to the religiosity dimension as being just as important as the statist↔liberal one. Wiesehomeier and Benoit's (2009) expert coders ranked the religious dimension—the role of religious versus secular

³ The eleven dimensions were (in descending order of average importance to the three major parties) privatization, religiosity, regional economic integration, globalization, crime, fiscal policy, social/moral issues, decentralization, indigenous peoples' rights, regulation of party financial and campaigning activities, and environmental regulation.

principles in politics—as the second most important in Mexico’s party system.⁴ For their part, Kitschelt et al (2010) found a religiosity dimension to be slightly *more* important and divisive than the economic redistribution dimension in the Mexican legislature. The three major parties fall on the secular center-left (PRD), the moderately religious center (PRI), and the conservatively Catholic center-right (PAN).

Ultimately, the choice to maintain a strict focus on the economic dimension and ignore the religious dimension, despite the latter’s importance, comes down to a practicality. The data demands for constructing policy mood are high, and available survey data on religious and moral policy issues come nowhere close to meeting these demands. Time series constructed from equivalently worded, repeated survey questions on homosexuality, abortion, contraceptive use, religiosity, and so on are choppy and few. For example, the annual Latinobarometer surveys have only asked questions about abortion in three years and about homosexuality in four years.

By contrast, the set of survey questions asked of Mexicans that relate to the statist↔liberal debate is far richer and more voluminous. Figure 1 illustrates this. The raw materials that go into constructing annual measures of policy mood are the proportion of liberal responses to relevant survey questions (asked in nationally representative surveys) that are repeated at least once in a later year (and ideally much more than once) (Stimson 1991).⁵ Figure 1 plots the raw materials of my policy mood estimates, showing the simple proportion of

⁴ That said, a social/moral dimension about abortion, homosexuality, divorce, and euthanasia ranked only seventh.

⁵ Don’t knows, non-responses, and ambivalent responses were dropped. In the end, the

percentages were calculated as follows:
$$\frac{\# \text{ supporting liberal position}}{\# \text{ supporting liberal position} + \# \text{ supporting statist position}}$$

Mexican respondents that supported the economically liberal side of 26 different survey questions between 1988 and 2012. Each series has its own distinct symbol or marker, although (given the clutter) the point of the figure is less to convey individual series trends and more so to display the raw data and thus the intuition behind mood calculation. Some of these questions were only asked twice, while the most complete was asked in ten different years. The total number of item-years, or observed points, is 96. The questions come from a variety of sources, including Latinobarometer, World Values Survey, the Latin American Public Opinion Project, the 2006 Mexican Panel Study, the Pew Global Attitudes Survey, Office of the Technical Advisor to the President of Mexico, Gallup Mexico, and a few others. Questions fall into one of four types: (1) attitudes toward privatization, (2) attitudes toward foreign investment, (3) attitudes toward NAFTA and international trade, and (4) diffuse values about the market and capitalism. (All question wordings are reported in the web appendix.)

[Figure 1 here]

A naïve approach of estimating policy mood would take a simple average of the observed percentages in each year, and a slightly less naïve approach would take a moving average or calculate a central tendency based on some other kind of smoother. The problem with these is that they are highly sensitive to data availability in any given year. For example, in years when only trade-related attitudes were measured--trade being a highly popular measure (Baker 2003)--mood would seem to be liberal. In years when only questions about privatization, a far less popular measure, were asked, mood would appear to be statist. Obviously, these observed changes in mood would be due largely to instrumentation and the luck of data availability, not to changes in the true latent variable itself. To improve on this, the Stimson algorithm uses the information on changes through time within series of repeated questions to estimate changes in

the latent national mood. The main drawback of the Stimson approach, relative to the naïve approaches mentioned above, is that mood has no metric. One cannot say that $x\%$ of the population was in a liberal mood in 2000. Instead, the analysis simply focuses on the relative movement of mood through time, although one can point to the marginal percentages in some of mood's constitutive elements to provide something of an anchor.

The algorithm is similar to a factor analysis. It first calculates pairwise correlations among all the series, then it extracts a latent dimension based on this correlation matrix. From there, it calculates each series' loading on the underlying dimension. Annual estimates of policy mood are then generated based on these loadings and their associated factor scores. Although the algorithm is less sensitive to data availability than the alternatives, its estimates of mood can still be fickle and highly uncertain in years with few or no data points.⁶ (For example, relatively little data is available from 1988 to 1994 for Mexico. See Figure 1.) My analysis proceeds with this caveat in mind.

Results: Mexican Mood

Figure 2 shows the estimates of Mexican policy mood from 1994 to 2012. Although the few data points available from 1988 to 1993 were used, mood estimates for this *sexenio* are not reported because they are based on such sparse information. The estimates are scaled so that higher values equate to eras of more liberal, pro-market moods and lower values to more statist moods. Based on these estimates, the figure divides Mexican mood into four eras: an era of

⁶ Because of this problem, I ran the Stimson mood estimates through a time series (double exponential) smoother before finalizing them.

liberal ascendancy from 1994 to 2000, an era in which liberalism was in decline from 2001 to 2005, a short-lived era of liberal rebound from 2006 to 2009, and an era from 2010 to 2012 in which liberalism lost the ground it had gained in the previous era. The figure also reports with the grey vertical bars (scaled to the right y-axis) the number of observations in each year.

[Figure 2 here]

Mexicans were in their most liberal mood during President Ernesto Zedillo's *sexenio* (1994 to 2000). This is somewhat surprising, given the political upheavals of NAFTA's first year (i.e., Colosio assassination and Zapatista uprising), the peso crisis of 1995, and the discrediting of the market-friendly ex-president Carlos Salinas de Gortari after he left office. Nevertheless, Mexicans remained enthusiastic about NAFTA throughout these years (58% in 2000 saying NAFTA benefited their country a lot or quite a bit), and even the typically less popular policy arena of privatization was at its peak popularity during this time (e.g., 56% agreed that privatization had helped the country in 1998).

This liberal ascendancy started to unravel after 2000 during President Vicente Fox's *sexenio* (2000-2006). Mexicans' mood shifted in a more statist direction. By 2002, just 30% of Mexicans were expressing favorable attitudes toward privatization, and support for NAFTA had fallen by 27 percentage points by 2003. Subsequently, President Felipe Calderón's *sexenio* (2006-2012) featured Mexicans at their most fickle. For the first three years, Mexicans trended back toward the liberal pole, as exemplified by a 15 percentage point surge in their support for privatization. Yet the rebound was short-lived. By the end of Calderón's term, Mexicans' mood was nearly back where it was at its least liberal point in 2005. All told, the 1990s saw Mexicans at their most liberal, while the 2000s have seen them much less so, save an ephemeral move liberal-ward as the millennium's first decade closed.

What caused these shifts? In other words, what moves Mexican mood? A full analysis is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is worth pointing out that Mexicans' mood on economic policy is *not* simply a product of macroeconomic health, meaning it is not just a proxy for retrospective economic evaluations. The correlation between the mood estimate and annual GDP growth is virtually zero, and it is clear from the figure that Mexico's years of economic contraction (1995, 2001, 2009) were no more likely to trigger a more statist mood than were years of rapid economic growth (1997, 2000, 2010). Rather, previous research on the sources of public opinion toward market reforms suggests that mass attitudes are caused by rather focused and well-reasoned evaluations by citizens of Washington Consensus policies themselves (Baker 2009). Concrete experiences with and (to a lesser extent) knowledge gleaned from elites and the mass media about privatization, free trade, and foreign investment have been the primary drivers of citizen support and opposition to the market-friendly shift. Consumer-oriented considerations have been of particular importance, such as the impact of trade liberalization and utility privatization on prices and the quality of goods and services.

For example, in Mexico, the years following the implementation of trade liberalization measures, including NAFTA in 1994, were associated with massive gains in consumer welfare. Citizens, who before 1985 had been captive audiences in many product markets during Mexico's decades-long experiment with import substitution and foreign capital restrictions, suddenly had access to higher quality and less expensive foreign products. This consumer euphoria even outlived the 1995 peso crisis, as Mexican mood remained near its liberal peak through 2000. After that year, the prevailing sentiment shifted precipitously in a statist direction. The novelty of the consumer gains from trade and foreign investment faded as these gains became normalized. Moreover, by the 2000s, consumer-oriented concerns with the Washington Consensus arose

based on what could be labeled the “Carlos Slim effect.” The privatization of Mexico’s primary telecommunications firm Telmex in the 1990s had turned a state-owned near-monopoly into a private one, owned mostly by business magnate Carlos Slim. Because the firm faced minimal competition, Mexicans paid some of the world’s highest fees for fixed-line, mobile phone, and broadband services. Proposed reforms to de-monopolize the sector became increasingly politicized (and resisted by Slim) during the 2000s.

Results: Individual-Level Tests of Positional Issues Voting

Can these moods and shifts in moods explain anything? Do they correspond to aggregate changes in voters’ ideological preferences at the ballot box, and thus to shifts in the relative election day success of competing parties? Before answering these questions, I take a brief foray into individual-level survey data to determine if Mexicans are positional issue voters. If the answers to these questions are to be “yes,” then a necessary condition that must obtain is that Mexicans are positional issue voters in national elections: statist citizens are more likely to vote for the more statist PRD, liberal citizens are more likely to vote for the more liberal PAN, and citizens with relatively moderate views on economic policy are more likely to vote for the centrist PRI. Similarly, a move by a citizen in the issue space toward the liberal pole will increase her or his likelihood of voting for the most liberal candidate. Given the presence of some scholarly skepticism of positional issue voting in Mexico, the burden is surely on me to give some evidence that these economic policy issues that constitute the statist↔liberal mood meta-dimension matter in Mexican voting behavior.

I run tests using the 2006 panel data to determine if individual-level attitudes on economic policy debates help to predict vote choice. Panel data are valuable since they can

address some of the endogeneity problems posed by cross-sectional analyses. A partial correlation between issue positions and vote choice in a cross section could be due to positional issue voting, but it could also be due to citizens simply learning their issue preferences from their long-preferred party (Zaller 1992). A panel can control for past issue positions and political predispositions, and thus narrow in on whether short-term change in issue positions are causing short-term changes in vote intention. Panel data also mimic the temporal patterns underlying the expected impacts of changes in policy mood: changes in policy attitudes yield subsequent changes in vote choice.

The three-wave panel contains repeated questions on four economic policy issues, each of which can be characterized as part of a statist↔liberal divide: privatization of the electricity sector, the scope of commercial relations with the U.S., government versus individual responsibility for well-being, and redistribution through higher taxation on the rich. (Wordings are in the appendix.) Any single item is rife with measurement error, especially since each is measured solely as a dichotomy or trichotomy. Use of these items in their unaltered form would increase the chances of Type II error (Achen 1972; Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2008). To partially address this problem, I create an index constructed from the shared variation across the four variables. All four variables scaled onto a single dimension in a principal components analysis. The index is called *Economic liberalism*, and it is coded so that higher values mean more liberal sentiments on the part of the respondent.

All four items were repeated in the three survey waves, as was vote intention, presidential approval, and partisan identification. As a result, I construct a multinomial logit panel model of vote choice that controls for past vote intentions (i.e., the lagged dependent variable), past and present issue preferences, past and present presidential approval, and past and present partisan

identification. Given this full set of lags and contemporaneous values, the model allows me to isolate the effect of changing issue preferences on changes in vote choice. This structure automatically controls for the potential effects of omitted variables that do not vary between panel waves, such as union membership or crucial demographic variables (De Boef and Keele 2008). One drawback is that, given the inclusion of lagged values, the model estimates vote choice/intention only for waves two and three, since there are no lagged values for wave one. (The N is 2,824.) The full list of coefficients and standard errors is reported in the appendix. Here I will simply describe patterns of statistical significance and the weight of substantive effects.

The model results reveal that voters' shifting preferences on economic policy issues during the 2006 campaign had a notable impact on their vote choices. (Recall that the three major candidates were Calderón of the PAN, AMLO of the PRD, and Madrazo of the PRI.) The model was set up with an AMLO vote as the base category in a series of pairwise comparisons. The coefficient on the contemporaneous value of economic liberalism is statistically significant for the PRI versus PRD pairwise comparison, and that for the PAN versus PRD comparison is also statistically significant. (Interestingly, the impact of economic liberalism in the Calderón versus Madrazo pairwise comparison falls just below conventional statistical significant levels, a point upon which I elaborate below.) Among voters who were leaning toward a López Obrador vote in wave two, a shift toward the liberal end of the economic liberalism variable from the 25th to the 75th percentile lowered their probability of voting for him (as reported in wave 3) by 8 percentage points and raised their probability of voting for Calderón by nearly an equivalent amount, a net change in the probability gap between the two of 16 percentage points.⁷ Madrazo

⁷ These probabilities are derived from model predictions.

also benefited with this shift, relative to AMLO, by closing the probability gap with him by 9 percentage points. Among Calderón leaners, this shift in issue attitudes from 25th to 75th percentile raised their chances of voting for Calderón also by .08 while lowering the probability of an AMLO vote by .05, for a net shift of 13 percentage points. Among these voters, Madrazo gained ground with this shift on AMLO (closing the gap by 5 percentage points) while losing ground to Calderón (8 percentage points). All told, the microfoundations of the argument that changes in policy mood yield shifts in aggregate election outcomes are confirmed.

Results: Explaining Election Outcomes with Mood

What, then, about the central macro-question? Can mood explain election outcomes? Figure 3 reports the outcome to be explained, a numerical means of conveying the ideological propensity of the Mexican electorate *as expressed through its voting behavior* in each presidential election since 1994. This measure is called *Vote revealed rightism* (VRR_s) and, for any given election, it can be thought of as the sum of all parties' ideological scores after weighting each party by its vote share. More precisely, I first assign each candidate i in election s an ideology score that has a theoretical range from 1 (furthest left) to 20 (furthest right). The ideology scores come from those assigned to (nearly) all Latin American parties in Baker and Greene (2011), which relied heavily on the expert surveys conducted by Wiesehomeier and Benoit (2009).⁸ I then multiplied each candidate's ideology score by her or his proportion of the

⁸ The Wiesehomeier and Benoit data were supplemented by Pop-Eleches (2009), Lodola and Queirolo (N.D.), and Coppedge (1998) to create the dataset used by Baker and Greene (2011).

vote received in election s and then summed these products for all candidates to produce the VRR of election s . More formally, for candidates $i=[1..n]$, VRR for election s is given by

$$VRR_s = \sum_{i=1}^n Ideology_{is} * VoteShare_{is}$$

[Figure 3 about here]

Figure 3 plots each presidential election's VRR as a black diamond. This axis is shown across its entire theoretical range, from 1 to 20. To give readers a substantive sense of what these ideology numbers mean, the figure places Mexico's three major parties—the PRD (4.6), the PRI (11.5), and the PAN (17.4)—at their positions on the scale. VRR was at its peak in 2000 (12.83) for Fox's historic victory, also a year in which the PRD fared poorly. It was at its lowest point (furthest left) in 2012 (10.89) when the PAN fared poorly and the PRD came in a close second, although it was virtually the same (10.96) in 2006 for the PRD's best-ever showing.

Figure 4 zooms in to the middle portion of Figure 3 to more clearly depict the nature of the ideological movements taking place in these four elections. In most party systems, highly meaningful ideological swings occur between elections on a scale of one- or two-point shifts, not 10- to 20-point shifts, so the wide range of figure 3 downplays the importance of meaningful change. The figure also superimposes the mood estimates themselves, although readers should keep in mind that the mood line is not scaled to the ideology scores of the y-axis.

[Figure 4 here]

Can mood explain these ideological differences across elections? All told, it does so fairly well, with only some minor deviations from expectations. (Although just an N of 4, it is worth reporting that the correlation between mood and VRR is +.70.) During the era of liberal ascendancy from 1994 to 2000, VRR was at its highest for the two presidential elections that bookended it. The leftist PRD finished third in both elections due to, according to the mood

model, voters' relatively high level of enthusiasm for the Washington Consensus. Most importantly, the liberal era culminated in the victory of the PAN, one of Latin America's more unabashedly pro-business and pro-market political parties.

By contrast, the era broke soon after Fox's victory, giving way to a more statist mood. Correspondingly, Mexican elections saw the rise of the PRD as the strongest challenger, as it finished a close second not once but twice. To be sure, the 2006 election was won by the conservative PAN, but it was a virtual tie with the newly surging PRD.⁹ This election actually occurred on the cusp of two eras, near the trough of liberal mood in 2005 and around the beginning of a short-lived liberal surge. Regardless of its precise timing, it is clear that Mexican voters were in a much more statist mood in 2006 than they were in 2000. (It is tempting to take the mood model to its logical conclusion and assert that, had the election occurred in 2005 and not 2006, López Obrador would have won. Indeed, López Obrador was ahead in the polls throughout late 2005 and early 2006, only to be squeaked out by Calderón's late surge.)

Mexican mood went on a roller coaster ride during the Calderón *sexenio*, but it ended in 2012 virtually in the same place it began in 2006: a liberal low point. Of course, on standard measures the presidential election outcome in 2006 was dramatically different from that in 2012, as the PRI and the PAN swapped places. But in terms of the ideological balance of the electorate

⁹ Domínguez (2009) argues that the PRD performed well in 2006 (and thus perhaps again in 2012) because of the charisma of its candidate, López Obrador. However, the mood series suggests that the party's performance was in line with the country's statist mood shift, a shift that had occurred throughout much of Latin America and ushered in various leftist governments in the region (Baker and Greene 2011).

as expressed through its collective choice at the polling booths, the outcomes in the two were virtually equivalent. The dramatic fall of the rightist PAN and slight fall of the leftist PRD was counterbalanced by the rise of the centrist PRI. The mood model thus explains the 2012 election's center of ideological gravity quite well. In sum, the mood model is largely successful. It explains the leftward shift in the Mexican electorate's voting behavior after 2000 extremely well. It also explains the stability in the electorate's ideological propensity between 2006 and 2012.

Two failings of the model, however, must be mentioned. First, it cannot explain the swap in order-of-finish that occurred between the PRI and the PAN between 2006 and 2012. To be sure, this goes a bit beyond the intended purpose of the mood model. The goal is to explain the ideological center of gravity of an election result, and in a three (or more) party system there are an infinite number of election results that are compatible with each VRR value. Still, this weakness in explaining the allocation of votes among competing parties is evident in the 2006 versus 2012 contrast and needs to be stated. Second, the mood model cannot explain the noticeable shift in the ideological center of gravity between 1994 and 2000 that led to the historic victory of the PAN. In 2000, Mexicans were no more liberal in mood than they were in 1994, yet their VRR shifted an entire point rightward, enough to secure Fox's easy victory.

One piece of speculation that can be drawn from both the successes and failures of the model is that voters see the PRI and the PAN as close substitutes on the economic policy dimension, such that mood swings affect the balance of support for the PRD versus the PAN/PRI tandem, but they do not affect the balance of support between the PRI and the PAN. Stated differently, liberal issue voters are more likely to be indifferent in making the pairwise comparison between the PAN and PRI than they are in deciding between the PRD and these two

competitors. After all, it was PRI presidents Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988) and Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) that initiated and accomplished the most in moving Mexico toward the dictates of the Washington Consensus, effectively adopting in the 1980s a major piece of the PAN's platform.¹⁰

Two sets of findings support this claim. First, the PRD's electoral success has a far greater elasticity with mood than does the electoral success of the PRI and the PAN. The correlation between mood and the PRD's vote share in the four presidential elections (-.92) is greater in magnitude than that between mood and the PRI's vote share (+.65) and that between mood and the PAN's vote share (+.11). In other words, mood swings in the statist direction help the PRD more than they hurt the PRI, but they also hurt the (supposedly centrist) PRI more than they do the PAN. (For example, the PRI lost more ground than the PAN during the precipitous fall in liberal sentiment between 2000 and 2006.) Second, it is the case that, in the multinomial logit model estimated and described in the previous section, the coefficient on the economic liberalism variable is statistically significant for the PRI versus PRD pairwise comparison and for the PAN versus PRD comparison. However, it is *not* statistically significant for the PRI versus PAN pairwise comparison. In other words, changes in individual-level policy attitudes did not have a statistically discernible effect on the probability of shifting one's vote choice between the PAN and the PRI. All told, the leftist PRD is the most sensitive to shifts in mood, while the impact of mood swings on the PAN and PRI are slightly more ambiguous given their closer

¹⁰ Evidence from party manifestoes (in some contrast to the Wiesehomeier-Benoit scorings) show the PRI and PAN to be virtually indistinguishable in ideology after 1988 (Bruhn and Greene 2009, 113).

proximity to one another in the statist↔liberal issue space. This fact helps to explain some of the mood model's shortcomings.

Conclusion

This chapter is an attempt to revive the aggregate analysis of Mexican, and for that matter Latin American, elections. Scholars have focused most of their efforts on individual-level analyses, perhaps because of well-founded warnings against committing errors of ecological inference. But in doing so, they risk missing the forest for the trees. Being able to explain and predict the ideological center of gravity, and thus perhaps the winner, of an election is fundamentally an aggregate question, even if grounded in micro-level decisions.

The chapter is also a vote for the explanatory power of positional issue voting models. Retrospective economic evaluations are not, and indeed *cannot be*, the sole determinant of aggregate election outcomes in multiparty systems. When times are bad, voters have choice over which candidate they reward with their anti-incumbent sentiment. For example, the near-victory of AMLO in 2006 and the actual victories of leftists throughout Latin America during the 2000s were not mere accidents of retrospective voting (Arnold and Samuels 2011). Rather, voters' decisions had policy content and positional issue intentions. In Mexico, the shift leftward in election outcomes after 2000 was due to a souring of enthusiasm for the Washington Consensus. A similar correlational pattern obtained elsewhere in the region during the same decade, ushering in a number of leftist governments throughout the hemisphere (Baker and Greene 2011). Overall, mood and positional issues hold great potential for supplementing the predominant retrospective voting model of Mexican and Latin American voting behavior.

Figure 1: Observed Percentages in Favor of Liberal Stance on 26 Different Statist↔Liberal Survey Questions, 1988 to 2012

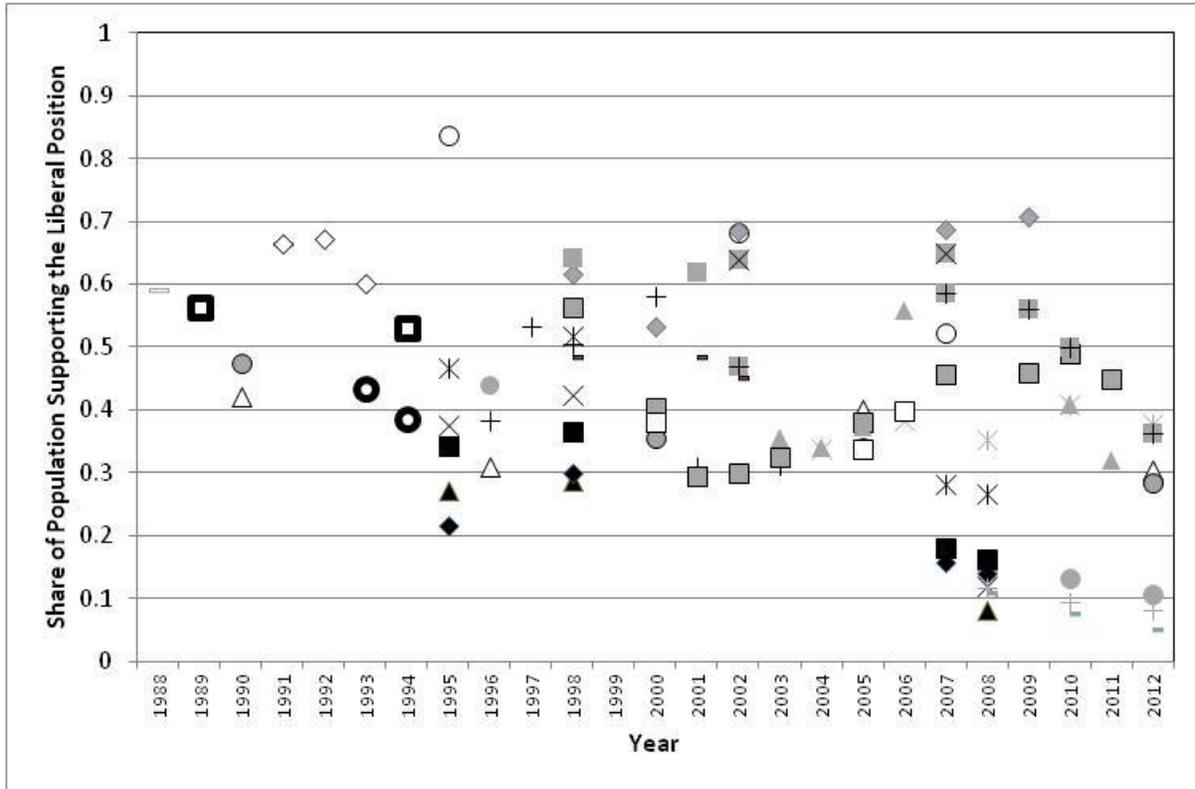


Figure 2: Liberal Policy Mood in Mexico, 1994 to 2012

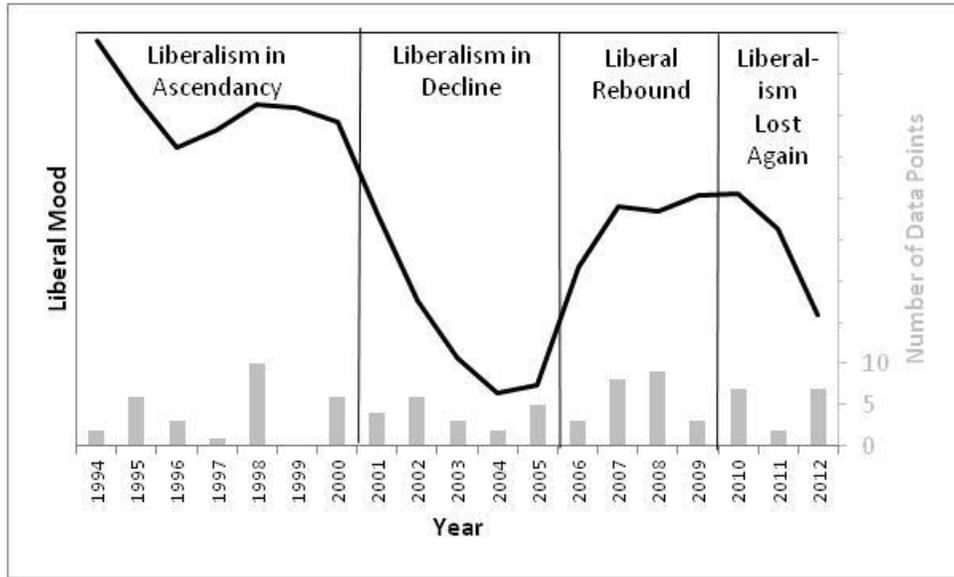


Figure 3: Vote-Revealed Rightism in Four Presidential Elections

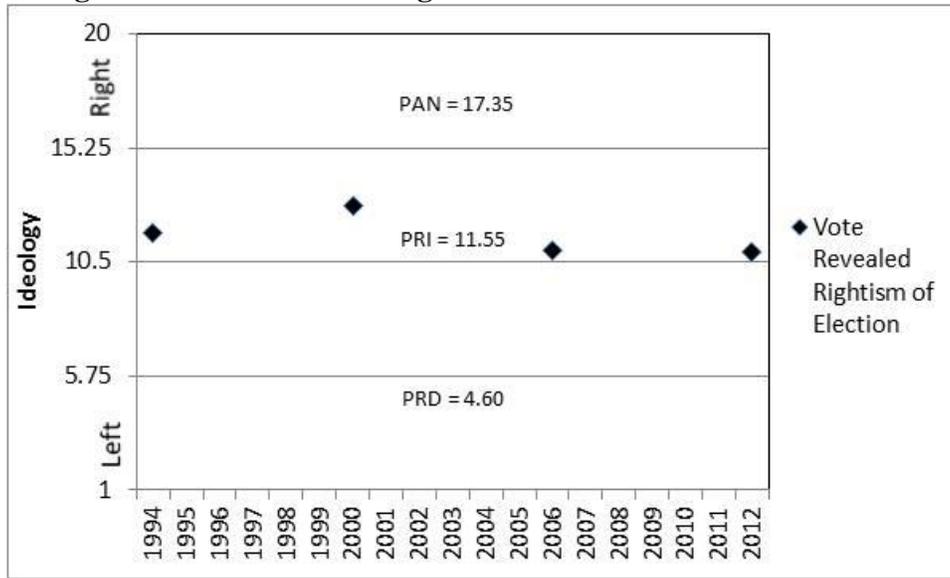
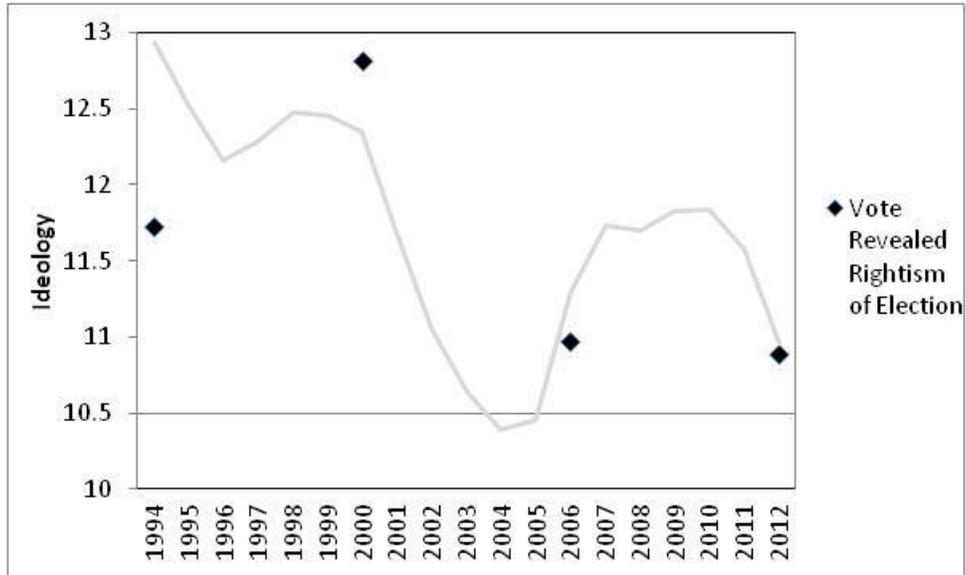


Figure 4: Mexican Policy Mood and Vote-Revealed Rightism in Four Presidential Elections: A Closer Look



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