Strange Bedfellows in the Name of Democracy:
PAN-PRD Alliances in Mexican States, 1999-2012

Karl Schuettler

Faculty Mentor: Prof. Desha Girod

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments 4  
Timeline of Mexican Transition to Democracy 5

1. Introduction  
   Troubled States, Diverging Paths: How Did Chiapas Become More Democratic than Tabasco? 7  
   What Can Alliances Contribute to Democracy? 9  
   Theory 10  
   Organization of the Thesis 10

2. Setting the Stage  
   Mexican Alliances Between Ideological Opposites 13  
   Political Parties in Democratic Systems 15  
   Mexican Governors: Modern-Day Viceroy 17  
   Dominance Through Pragmatism: Single-Party Rule Under the PRI 19  
   Opposing the Institutionalized Revolution: The Emergence of the PAN and PRD 21  
   Continued Rigidity 23  
   Moving Beyond Ideological Fault Lines: Mexico’s Democratic Evolution 24  
   The Next Step: Continued Democratization at the State Level 25  
   Social Divides and Mexican Multipartism 27  
   Theories of Coalition Government 28  
   Incentives for Party Cooperation 30  
   The Ideological Barrier 31  
   PAN-PRD Alliances: A Brief History 32  
   Observable Implications of the Theory 34

3. Methodology  
   Measuring Democratic Gains in State and Municipal Elections 36  
   Caveats 37  
   Non-PAN-PRD Alliances 38

4. Results  
   Correlating PAN-PRD Alliances with PRI Erosion 41  
   Testing Significance 43

5. Alliance in Practice  
   Comparing the 2010 PAN-PRD Coalition in Durango with a Non-Alliance Race in Chihuahua 47  
   Chihuahua: Business as Usual 48  
   Durango Forges a Coalition 52  
   Fractious Alliances: Conclusions from the Case Study 58

6. Can the Alliances Endure? 60
7. Coalition Formation, Identity Politics, and Alliances
   Oaxaca and Chiapas 64
   The PRD and the Politics of a United Front 65
   Indigeneity, Fragmentation, and Democracy 66
   Following in the Footsteps 68

8. Conclusions
   In Summary 70
   What Next for Mexican Democracy? 71

Maps
Map 1: States of Mexico 6
Map 2: Current Mexican State Governors by Party 15
Map 3: PAN-PRD Alliances, 1999-2012 33
Map 4: State of Chihuahua 49
Map 5: State of Durango 53
Map 6: State of Oaxaca 64
Map 7: State of Chiapas 64

Tables
Table 1: Election Year Opposition Gains in Mexican States Forming PAN-PRD Alliances 42
Table 2: Correlation Between PAN-PRD Alliances and Opposition Gains in State Legislatures and Municipal Governments 44
Table 3: Results of the 2010 Chihuahua State Elections 49
Table 4: Results of the 2011 Durango State Elections 53
Table 5: Staying Power of Democratic Gains Made by Allied, or Once-Allied, Opposition Parties in Subsequent Elections 60
Table 6: State-by-State Percentage of Citizens 5 and Older Speaking Indigenous Languages 67
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Timeline of Mexican Transition to Democracy

1929: President Plutarco Elías Calles forms the PRI. The party dominates national politics until the 1980s, with only occasional competition from the right-leaning PAN in a handful of elections.

1982: Election of PRI President Miguel de la Madrid; beginning of neoliberal economic program in response to an ongoing economic crisis.

1985: Major earthquake strikes Mexico City. Slow government response prompts doubts about the PRI’s competence.

1988: Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas splits from the PRI and runs as the presidential candidate of a united left (later renamed the PRD). Despite allegations of serious fraud, PRI candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari prevails. Another economic crisis besets the country.

1989: Opposition parties win their first governorship following a PAN victory in Baja California.

1994: A year of tumult, as Mexico accedes to the North American Free Trade Agreement on January 1, and Zapatista rebels in Chiapas immediately revolt in protest. PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio is assassinated; his replacement, Ernesto Zedillo, triumphs. With U.S. help, Zedillo stabilizes the economy after yet another crisis.

1997: The PRI loses its majority in Congress; the PRD wins control of the government of Mexico City.

1999: First modern PAN-PRD alliances form in states of Nayarit and Coahuila.

2000: The PAN’s Vicente Fox wins the presidency, ending national PRI hegemony. Opposition candidates across the country, including an alliance candidate in Chiapas, gain ground.

2001-2004: The PAN and PRD attempt alliances in five separate state-level elections.

2006: In a controversial presidential election, Felipe Calderón of the PAN defeats the PRD’s Andrés Manuel López Obrador by a narrow margin. The PRI is relegated to third place.

2010-2011: Facing a PRI resurgence, the PAN and PRD ally in seven state races. Despite PRI gains across the country, the alliance dislodges the PRI from a hegemonic position in three states.

2012: Mexicans prepare for a July presidential election.

Map 1. *States of Mexico*

Source: Adapted from "State Names." Mapas de México.
1. INTRODUCTION

Troubled States, Diverging Paths: How Did Chiapas Become More Democratic than Tabasco?

The year 2000 was a momentous turning point in Mexican politics, as opposition candidate Vicente Fox drove the once-hegemonic, authoritarian *Partido Revolucionario Institutional* (PRI; Institutional Revolutionary Party) from the presidency for the first time since the 1920s. But six weeks later, in the southeastern state of Chiapas, an even more surprising result shook up national politics. Pablo Salazar, running under the banner of a broad alliance including both of Mexico’s major parties, Fox’s right-leaning *Partido Acción National* (PAN; National Action Party) and the left-wing *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD; Party of the Democratic Revolution), ousted the PRI from the governorship of the state for the first time in its modern history (Rice). Chiapas, a poverty-stricken, violence-plagued state that served as the site of the 1994 Zapatista revolt by indigenous peasants against the Mexican government, went from a troubled backwater to the vanguard of a democratic transition. Salazar inspired voters of diverse backgrounds to abandon their ideologies and unite behind an attack on the status quo. The counterintuitive PAN-PRD alliance, attempted twelve times in Mexican gubernatorial races between 1999 and 2011, emerged as a potential tool to dislodge the PRI.

Across Chiapas’s northern border, the state of Tabasco conducted its own gubernatorial election a few months later. While Tabasco was not the home of a simmering rebellion, its situation was hardly ideal. Its 1994 elections prompted cries of fraud by the PRD and led to violent street protests against the PRI (Iliff). Though economic indicators suggest Tabasco is somewhat wealthier than its southern neighbor, tightly-concentrated oil revenue generated by the national petroleum company, PEMEX, drives much of the difference between the two states.
(Diebel). Accusations of PRI corruption were rampant, and the state also faced a growing environmental crisis due to mismanagement of the oil fields (Diebel). In many respects, Tabasco appeared just as ripe to play a transformative role as Chiapas.

In Tabasco, however, the PAN and PRD remained separate, as 83% of PAN functionaries voted against a proposed alliance in a party congress (Pérez). Though the vote share of the two opposition parties cleared fifty percent, the PRI candidate narrowly won the gubernatorial poll over a PRD competitor (Instituto de Mercadotecnia y Opinión¹). Both opposition parties cried fraud; the electoral institute agreed, but a special election a year later produced the same results (Weiner). The governor’s mansion in Tabasco remains firmly in the hands of the PRI, and though there has been some alternation at lower levels of government—the PRD controlled the state legislature from 2003-2009, and also won a majority of municipal presidencies in 2003—these institutions quickly reverted to form, and the PRI’s level of control as of 2010 is roughly equal to what it was in 2000 (IMO). While certainly more competitive than it was twenty years ago, Tabasco has yet to attain a high level of lasting democratic competitiveness.

Chiapas, on the other hand, has undergone some notable changes. It would be wrong to romanticize the PAN-PRD alliance in Chiapas as the state’s salvation; Salazar could not resolve the ongoing conflict with the Zapatista rebels, nor could he single-handedly reverse centuries of economic mismanagement. He himself did not stay above the fray, abandoning the alliance in the 2006 election of his successor for political favors from the PRD (Althaus).

Still, the foundations built by his initial campaign persist. The PAN and PRD have twice allied in local Chiapas elections since 2000, each time with considerable success. The state kept along a steady progression towards competitiveness, and both parties appear to have made gains; the PRD took the state’s largest prize by winning the governorship in 2006, and the PAN, once a

¹ Hereafter abbreviated “IMO.”
non-factor in state politics, did noticeably better than in previous years the last time it ran separately from the PRD. Opposition parties have held a majority in the state legislature since they first allied at that level in 2004, and as of 2010, the PRI no longer controls a plurality of municipal presidencies in the state. While not all Mexican states have moved towards more competitive elections since the formal “arrival of democracy” to the nation in 2000, Chiapas clearly has.

**What Can Alliances Contribute to Democracy?**

Given these drastically diverging stories, this thesis proposes to answer a series of questions about the PAN-PRD alliances in Mexico. Are they indeed linked to the birth of competitive democracy in Mexican states, and if so, is the shift a significant one? How do the alliances work in practice, and what about them convinces voters to put aside ideology and support pro-democracy unity candidates? Are changes that occur concurrently with PAN-PRD alliances lasting or fleeting, and what might account for any difference between the two? Together, these questions aim at a comprehensive examination of the PAN-PRD alliances and their impact on Mexican democratization at the state and local levels.

Mexico is not the first country to form grand coalitions in an effort to oust authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, and scholarship on democratic transitions recognizes that reducing the number of alternatives to the regime enhances the odds of opposition victory (Estévez et al. 50). But the Mexican alliances between ideological polar opposites against a more-or-less centrist party are distinct. If these unique coalitions prove capable of eating into hegemonic regime’s grip on power, they could serve as a model for opposition political parties anywhere as they seek a democratic breakthrough. With a substantial number of Mexican states still firmly within the grasp of the PRI, this study offers one of the first analyses of this tactic, and aims to
explore whether the PAN-PRD alliances are worth repeating in upcoming elections.

**Theory**

This thesis hypothesizes that PAN-PRD alliances will lead to greater opposition gains. Alliances unite the ideological rivals behind a common cause—the promotion of democracy—and change the tenor of the political debate in Mexican states. This new form of political discourse should then provide a base for democratic evolution beyond the initial alliance, whether or not the PAN and PRD continue to join forces. Alliances should prove positively correlated with erosion of PRI hegemony in state and local elections.

**Organization of the Thesis**

Chapter Two of this thesis explores existing literature on several topics related to Mexico’s PAN-PRD alliances. It reviews the history of the major Mexican political parties and explores some of the theories surrounding coalition formation. It also traces Mexico’s democratic transition since 1990, emphasizing the opposition parties’ efforts to overcome narrow ideologies and their various attempts to form alliances to increase their odds of success at the ballot box.

Chapter Three explains the methodology behind a statistical analysis of alliance success, while Chapter Four assesses the results. This thesis measures the correlation between state-level PAN-PRD alliances and corresponding opposition gains in elections for seats in state legislatures and municipal presidencies. It finds a significant correlation between most forms of alliance and opposition gains within Mexican states, suggesting these coalitions between the left and the right can indeed be an effective means of democratization. Elections involving alliances tend to produce far larger opposition gains in state legislatures and municipal presidencies than in non-alliance Mexican elections across the nation’s thirty-one states, indicating the alliances are a
potential factor in the erosion of PRI hegemony.

Chapter Five proceeds into a pair of case studies, which seek to compare how a 2010 PAN-PRD alliance in the state of Durango produced apparent democratic gains, while a simultaneous non-alliance election in Chihuahua did not. Though the Durango elections produced more democratic gains than those in Chihuahua, the study reveals a fractious, skin-deep PAN-PRD union that largely collapsed in the two years following the election. The ideological rift often prevented the parties from finding internal candidates agreeable to both, and in many cases ran former members of the PRI who had little loyalty to the opposition or some broader democratic ideal.

Given these sobering results, Chapter Six analyzes democratization trends across all alliance states in the years following the initial alliance. Many of these states saw the PRI later regain some, or even all, of its former power in subsequent non-alliance elections. Despite the effectiveness of alliances, this thesis argues that their constituent parties largely proved unable to develop means to sustain these ties.

There are, however, two clear exceptions to this conclusion, which are explored in Chapter Seven. In Oaxaca and Chiapas, the PAN and PRD have allied repeatedly, and with considerable success at the polls. This thesis therefore explores several factors that make these states unique, and ultimately points toward internal party dynamics and demographics as a driving force behind alliance formation and continuation. These two poverty-stricken southeastern states both have very diverse electorates, thereby lending themselves toward political fragmentation. The many competing interests must form some type of broader coalition to bring their voices into a relevant political movement at the state level.

The thesis concludes with a broader reflection on the role of the alliances, in terms of
both their immediate impact on democratization and their contributions to a broader dialogue. It
distinguishes several steps Mexican political actors could take to deepen democratic reforms, and
also offers several avenues for further research in the field.
2. SETTING THE STAGE

Mexican Alliances Between Ideological Opposites

Mexico’s move to democracy over the past two decades has been one of the world’s more remarkable transitions. The *Partido Revolucionario Institutional* (PRI) controlled the country from 1929 to 2000 with such efficiency and dominance that Peruvian Nobel Laureate Mario Vargas Llosa labeled the regime the *dictadura perfecta*, or “perfect dictatorship” (Magaloni 11). The authoritarian, corporatist PRI co-opted major sectors of society such as labor unions that might have been a source of opposition, allowing the party to govern with relatively little repression and win most elections by giant margins with minimal fraud. Mexico’s booming economic growth led some observers to laud the PRI as a model for developing nations aiming for first-world prosperity (Huntington 85).

By the 1980s, the dream had soured. The economy tanked as bloated patronage networks drove Mexico into a series of crises, and the PRI’s power began to erode. The 1988 presidential election of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, which was almost certainly stolen, set off a decade of instability and increased demands for democracy that culminated in a series of opposition electoral victories. The right-wing *Partido Acción National* (PAN) won the largest opposition victories, though the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD), a leftist party that broke off from the PRI, also made major inroads in some regions of the country. Traditional narratives trace the process through national elections, noting the PRI’s loss of its majority in the legislature in 1997 and marking its defeat for the presidency in 2000 as the country’s official arrival at democracy.

Though these national-level narratives provide many key insights into the Mexican transition, they often pay little attention to state and local elections. The thirty-one Mexican
states provide a different narrative of democratization and show just how uneven the process has been. In some states, the opposition knocked the PRI out of the power long before the national transition, beginning with the PAN’s gubernatorial victory in Baja California in 1989 (IMO). On the other end of the spectrum, the PRI has yet to lose the governor’s mansion in eleven states, meaning that these states are, according to some definitions of democracy, still run in an authoritarian fashion (Przeworski 27).

The continued dominance of the PRI in some regions of the country led the PAN and PRD to consider surprising steps to gain electoral victory. Despite their apparent ideological opposition, the parties have allied behind a common candidate in thirteen gubernatorial elections since 1992, six times successfully ousting the PRI. Alliance formation is fraught with difficulty due to ideological and personal barriers, along with the PRI’s efforts to re-write election laws to prevent such unions (Castillo2 “Presenta”). Yet in several cases, alliances have clearly made major inroads into PRI power. The PRI derides these alliances as blindly power-seeking, while their proponents argue they are necessary to remove authoritarian state-level regimes from power and promote a more democratic future. This thesis aims to measure the truth behind the claims of the opposition and gauge whether PAN-PRD alliances truly do assist in the democratic transition.

An effort to understand these unique alliances requires information drawn from a number of strains of scholarly literature. First, this thesis outlines a basic understanding of political parties and emphasizes party interaction within an interconnected political system. It then establishes the prominent role Mexican governors play in the distribution of resources before

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2 This paper adheres to normal Spanish naming conventions, in which a person’s “last name” (as understood in the United States) is typically the second-to-last name in the full name. The second (maternal/maiden) last name is usually excluded unless the figure in question is referred to by this name in the media, or when distinguishing between individuals sharing the same first last name.
outlining the Mexican transition in its historical context. It draws from literature that explains the PRI’s longtime dominance and the internal and external factors that ate away at its hegemony. It moves on to discuss the emergence of opposition parties, their interaction with the hegemonic PRI and with one another, and their internal divisions. The thesis continues with a discussion of studies of the apparent incentives for PAN-PRD coalition formation, exploring factors that encourage and discourage alliances between parties.

**Map 2. Current Mexican State Governors by Party**

![Map of Mexican State Governors by Party](image)

Source: Adapted from “Mexico Governor’s Map.” Wikimedia Commons. Updated data from Instituto de Mercadotecnia y Opinión.

**Political Parties in Democratic Systems**

Political parties, despite their many real and perceived shortcomings, are the foundation of any democratic system. Some politicians demonize parties’ perceived failures and attempt to run independently of them, claiming to be anti-political (Woldenberg 105). José Woldenberg, the
ex-director of the Mexican Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), notes the fallacy in separating politicians from citizens; he claims anti-political candidacies are “curiously nothing more than a rhetorical strategy used by some politicians to develop an identity against other politicians” (Woldenberg 105). Any campaign for political purposes forms a “party” of some sort through the networking, interest gathering, and the establishment of a platform (Woldenberg 106). It is therefore essential to understand the roles of political parties in the political evolution of any country.

Political party scholarship offers numerous lenses that allow for different means of study. Leonardo Valdés Zurita (2005) explores these various perspectives and assesses their past application to Mexican politics. He finds the classical theory of party politics, propounded by Maurice Duverger in his 1954 work *Political Parties*, highly relevant. Duverger analyzed the internal structure of political parties, tracing them back to their foundation and the divergent paths they then follow (Valdés 115). A related approach articulated by Angelo Panebianco centers its study around party institutionalization, placing parties somewhere on a scale between two ideal types and deriving certain conclusions about the parties based on where they fall (Valdés 118). Observers of Mexican politics have often offered perspectives from within this vein, noting the weakness of opposition parties prior to the 1990s and their increasing strength since (Greene 60).

While these models certainly help explain the internal dynamics of parties, they ignore other actors that play crucial roles. Later studies, such as Giovanni Sartori’s *Parties and Party Systems* and Valdés’s *Los partidos políticos en México*, explore political parties as systems, both interior and exterior, that mediate interaction between individuals and groups inside and outside the formal structure of the party (Valdés 120). This approach is especially relevant in Mexico, as
the rise of the opposition is inextricably linked to the concurrent decline in PRI hegemony.

Following from the work of Maurice Duverger, Estévez et al., claim electoral systems are most stable when they attain “Duvergerian equilibrium” (Estévez et al. 50). This equilibrium is defined by the rule “M + 1,” which claims the number of viable candidates within a system cannot exceed the number of available seats plus one. As Mexican gubernatorial elections are first-past-the-post contests that choose a single winner by plurality vote, the Duvergerian equilibrium should be two candidates (Cox 139). Such a system encourages bipartisanship; thus, any contest with more than two viable parties contesting the seat violates the equilibrium (Cox 72). Yet PRI, PAN, and PRD victories in numerous states in the union reveals that Mexican politics quite clearly involves three major parties, meaning a large number of voters essentially “waste” their votes on comparatively weak third party candidates (Cox 75). Cox (1997) claims coordination can prove complicated when second- and third-place candidates are separated by a narrow margin, as voters cannot tell which candidate would most benefit from a strategic vote (Cox 75). Though such situations arise in some Mexican elections, this explanation alone cannot possibly account for the consistent violation of Duvergerian equilibrium. Riker (1976), in his study of the Indian Congress Party and its opponents, finds a more important cleavage that inhibits opposition coordination: ideology (Cox 77).

**Mexican Governors: Modern-Day Viceroyys**

With the importance of ideology in mind, this thesis now turns to the Mexican case and seeks to explain the decision to focus on state-level politics. While scholars such as Beatriz Magaloni, Kenneth Greene, and Joseph Klesner have provided thorough explanations of the national transition to democracy, state-level government in Mexico remains understudied. When the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) controlled the presidency from 1929-2000, it
carefully managed the distribution of benefits to its most loyal regional supporters. Though Mexico under the authoritarian PRI often gave the appearance of a heavily centralized system, state governors held considerable power. The federal government gave general outlines on how to spend funds, but allocation was largely the prerogative of the state governments, and governors enjoyed considerable discretionary power. “Special projects” allowed presidents and governors to dodge funding quotas and set up patronage networks so extreme that in some states the state capital retained 80 percent of allocated funds (Rodríguez 24). Rodríguez summarizes the general Mexican sentiment about governors in the phrase, *un gobernador es un virrey de su estado* (“a governor is a viceroy of his state”), hearkening back to the powerful viceroys once appointed by the Spanish crown to reign over its Latin American colonies (Rodriguez 25).

The extent of gubernatorial power became even more evident following the Mexican financial crises of the 1980s and 1990s. Numerous scholars (Rodríguez 1997, Estévez et al. 2007) note the surprise at the continued effectiveness of state governors in instituting policy despite the blows to the national patronage network. Political reforms pushed by the right-wing *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN) and reluctantly accepted by the PRI in the early 1990s further devolved power to the state level and vested greater power in state governors (Estévez et al. 44). While the PRI controlled the presidency, decentralization weakened its hand, but in its decade out of power, the new policy likely helped save the party, as it allowed effective PRI governors to rise to national prominence.

Local and regional elections are also far more likely to still be under the yoke of paternalistic, quasi-authoritarian forms of control. The Mexican state cannot control all of the country directly, so patron-client relationships still persist in a series of regional islands of undemocratic rule (Zárate 276). Under the pressure of economic reforms that threaten some
communities, local bosses known as *caciques* harness power and negotiate with higher-level authorities and then distribute resources at their own discretion (Zárate 295). Though *caciques* can protect their communities from collapse, they also operate in a very strict, vertical manner largely incompatible with liberal democracy (Zárate 276). Democratic state governor elections with alternation complicate established hierarchy and should directly lead to greater accountability at the state level and indirectly loosen the grip of paternalism at the municipal level. Likewise, democratization is possible from the bottom up; if new tactics such as PAN-PRD alliances can dislodge the PRI at the local level, they may lead to greater opposition success in larger-scale elections.

**Dominance Through Pragmatism: Single-Party Rule Under the PRI**

Any story of the evolution of Mexican politics must begin with the one-party PRI regime that dominated the country for decades and only began to erode in the 1980s. Unlike some other one-party states that try to bifurcate society along a sharp division that allows for a small but persistent majority (Huntington 427), the PRI drew most significant civil society groups into the regime through a “coalition of the whole,” excluding only a few fringe groups either too radical for or too strictly opposed to the post-revolutionary PRI coalition. According to Ruth Collier (1992), a coalition of the whole aims to capture the general center of the political system, rendering remaining opposition polarized and confronted with serious obstacles for cooperation (Greene 45). Within this scheme, party ideology tends to take a secondary role to the promotion of a “national project” the party uses to bind disparate sectors of society together, balancing conflicting interests within a broader scheme of national improvement.

Still, ideology can be important, and parties can drift “surprisingly far” from the pragmatic center thanks to the advantages awarded by patronage networks (Greene 46). Such
oscillations are clear in the Mexican example, both in the turn to the left during the post-revolutionary Lázaro Cárdenas era (1934-40) and in the imposition of the rightward swing of the neoliberal economic project beginning under Miguel de la Madrid in 1982. However, the size of government patronage power is at least somewhat dependent on the size of the state; cuts to the public sector can destabilize the authoritarian equilibrium as previously guaranteed benefits disappear (Greene 47).

The authoritarian-era PRI is therefore a classic example of a “party of power” that eschews ideological rigidity in favor of extensive patronage networks that maintain its grip on power (Paz 66, Klesner 133). Even today the party’s ideological ambiguity persists, as party rhetoric prioritizes “results” over any clear platform (Peña Nieto). Though the party’s positions generally fall somewhere between the PRD and PAN on a left-right scale, these positions can vary noticeably between different regions or constituencies of the PRI (Magaloni 182-6; 189).

Magaloni (2006) provides perhaps the most complete picture of the PRI’s mechanisms of control and their gradual erosion over the last few decades of the twentieth century. Her model discards traditional notions of ideological loyalty and instead focuses on voter calculations based around expected economic performance, anticipated cash transfers, and the possibility of post-election violence or state repression (Magaloni 55). This model effectively reflects the power of PRI patronage networks and also explains the struggles of the opposition to consolidate and compete nationally with the PRI, as no party can yet match the authoritarian-era PRI’s clientelistic power relationships. The “pocketbook evaluations” of poor Mexican voters, centered on cash transfers, are the root of the PRI’s “image of invincibility” through most of the twentieth century (Magaloni 65; 11). While Magaloni rightly admits the endogeneity present in her economic argument (voters’ expectations for economic performance are often tied to their
ideological stance on economic issues), this portion of the argument is strongly tied to the state’s ability to distribute cash transfers to its clients. If the economy does not generate enough revenue to sustain the patronage networks, the hegemonic party begins to lose influence. Thus, Magaloni argues the PRI’s collapse can be primarily explained by “voters’ decreasing approval of the PRI, not by increasing approval of the opposition’s capability” (Magaloni 203).

**Opposing the Institutionalized Revolution: The Emergence of the PAN and PRD**

Though Magaloni’s thesis on the erosion of PRI power is compelling, a complete study of the gradual Mexican transition requires a study of the agency of the opposition parties. The PAN and the PRD stand on somewhat more solid ideological ground than the PRI, and both emerged from legitimate ideological differences with the ruling party brought about by some of its most noticeable deviations from the center. The PAN arose as a conservative, Catholic party in the 1930s in opposition to the anti-clerical stance of early PRI governments (Magaloni 51). Though various commentators and members of the Left have accused the PAN of “loyal opposition” to the PRI at certain times, the party has never abandoned its right-wing roots. Similarly, the PRD was born in 1988, when Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the son of a popular ex-president, broke from the PRI and brought most of the party’s left-leaning wing with him (Magaloni 53). The contested results of the 2006 presidential election accentuated the sharp ideological divide between the two parties. Pro-alliance commentators regularly blast the ideological rigidity of PRD and PAN hard-liners, labeling them “great allies” of the PRI for their refusal to work in concert to knock off the hegemonic party (Aguilar “López Obrador”).

While Kenneth Greene (2007) largely concurs with Magaloni’s analysis of the PRI’s enduring power, he contributes additional ideas on the weaknesses of opposition parties. He
claims these parties rely heavily on “moral authority” to attract supporters, and that such authority only arises through intense commitment to the cause and through the cultivation of close ties with the party’s inner circle (Greene 60). This ideological rigidity leads to “niche parties” of “relative extremists” that maintain a strict organization at the expense of a broader platform that might appeal to a wide swath of the electorate (Greene 61). Such a narrow focus keeps parties from exploiting the PRI’s perceived performance failures, even when these failures are quite pronounced. The “path dependence” of the opposition seriously inhibits parties’ electoral chances and forces them to either move toward the ideological center or form an alliance to achieve victory (Greene 175).

As opposition parties established themselves, they formed around an essential core of support. As this base was essential for survival during the era of PRI dominance, the parties chose candidates who appealed to that base rather than branching out (Greene 182). This is especially true of the PAN, which existed for forty years before winning a state-level office, though it also applies to the fragmented leftist parties that preceded the PRD. The PRD also relied on an ideologically rigid core of former PRI activists who broke away from the hegemonic party when its policies turned toward the right in the 1980s.

The pattern of reliance on a small core was likely exacerbated by PRI practices of opposition co-option. The corporatist structure of the PRI brought in groups that are normally very politically active, such as labor unions, and effectively made them submissive bodies that had to work within the party (Greene 183). Without the ability to attract such major political actors, the opposition could only rely on small fringe groups the PRI considered either too weak or too opposed to their broad platform to be worth co-opting. For the PAN, this group included staunch anti-state capitalists and religious groups slighted by the PRI’s secular crusades; for the
PRD and its antecedents, it meant the revolutionary far left and, eventually, sectors of society left behind by the PRI’s neoliberal economic reforms of the 1980s and 1990s.

Continued Rigidity

Thus, the ideological orientation of the PAN made it a niche party that focused primarily on the church-state divide, while the disorganized left that preceded the PRD was a “mirror image” of the PAN in its fixation on a statist platform (Greene 37). The very rigidity that guaranteed the parties’ survival prevented them from winning elections with any regularity. Greene claims the PAN’s narrow focus became a “source of pride” for the party in the early era (Greene 188). The party placed high barriers to entry on new party members to ensure ideological purity, and its rejection of the PRI corporatist model led the party to reject alliances with civil society and instead focus on individual-level recruitment alone. This pattern persisted well into the 1990s, when a poll indicated intense support for the ideology at the expense of electoral losses, all in the name of maintaining a perceived moral high ground over the PRI (Greene 189).

Though the PRD boasted an ostensibly welcoming stance following the widespread popularity of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in the 1988 presidential election, the party was plagued by infighting and the barriers set up by regional or interest-based sects known as corrientes. Greene counts twenty-two such corrientes squabbling for control within the party between 1989 and 2000, while Sánchez (1999) notes over thirty (Greene 190). Each corriente attempts to impose its own ideological quirks on the party, and the narrowness of the groups erects barriers and complications to party entry. While the decline in perceptions of PRI effectiveness certainly opened an opportunity for the major opposition parties, both needed to move beyond their niches and appeal to more voters.
Moving Beyond Ideological Fault Lines: Mexico’s Democratic Evolution

The internal disputes within the PAN and PRD persist today, as the factions within each party struggle to balance ideology and victory at the ballot box. The PAN is split between a more traditional group of conservative Catholics, such as current president Felipe Calderón, and a more moderate wing embodied by Calderón’s predecessor, Vicente Fox, and his “barbarians from the north,” so labeled for their surprise seizure of control away from the old guard ahead of the 2000 election (Klesner 130). The PRD remains torn amongst its differing strains; individual activism free from a corriente within the party proves nearly impossible (Greene 190). The PRD must also contend with its own PRI legacy; as the party is an offshoot of the PRI, some of its major figures maintain an authoritarian mindset that sometimes clashes with democratic reality (Klesner 132).

Mexicans are also still coming to terms with the diminished authority of political institutions now that democratic checks on state power carry some weight. Francisco Reveles Vázquez (2005) and José Eduardo Zárate Hernandez (2005) note that parties in power no longer have the patronage networks to reward supporters, nor the ability to cultivate long-lasting ties with civil society when defeat is a very real possibility (Reveles 55, Zárate 294). Party weakness leads to widespread dissatisfaction with the system and an attitude of que se vayan todos (a rough equivalent of the U.S. phrase “throw all the bums out”), in turn causing widespread cynicism and opening the door for populist incursions (Reveles 61). Discontent with modern Mexican politics runs deep.

Still, a return to the authoritarian past appears unlikely, if not impossible. Despite their frustration, Mexicans now largely reject the paternalism of the old PRI and demand a level of accountability from their politicians that would be impossible in an authoritarian system. Díaz-
Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni (2009) note that campaign handouts, a longtime PRI tactic, were “infrequent” in the 2006 presidential race, and “seemed to backfire” when they were used (Díaz-Cayeros et. al 242-244). Electoral competition and the use of objective poverty measures in place of government discretion in many programs (such as the conditional cash transfers of the Oportunidades program) prevent parties from using such initiatives as explicit vote-buying schemes (Díaz-Cayeros et. al 230). These new programs, instituted by the PAN administrations since 2000, are wildly popular and are a key to the party’s national success in the past two presidential elections.

The Next Step: Continued Democratization at the State Level

Given the democratic consolidation of the past decade, Mexico’s only real option for the future involves strengthening its fledgling democracy. Guaranteeing democracy at the state level is one of many changes Mexico can make along the road to stronger democratic institutions. Though many states have made a move toward alternation in government, eleven remain within the hands of the PRI with no alternation in post-Revolutionary Mexico; the strength of the PRI and relative weakness and divisions between the major opposition parties prevent further movement. In these cases, opposition parties’ only hope for victory requires some sort of move to the center, either through a moderate candidate in a large opposition party or a PAN-PRD alliance. The work of Greene (2007) shows how more centrist strategic policy announcements raise the opposition’s odds of victory. By positioning itself to best capture the median voter and acting as a catch-all party, the opposition dramatically increases its odds of dislodging a dominant party (Greene 57).

Given the well-established moderation of most Mexican voters (Bruhn and Greene 2009, Klesner 2005), candidates who best match the opinion of the electorate would likely be fairly
moderate themselves. Such logic follows the traditional belief that the PRI’s general centrism and catch-all status forced its opponents to the extremes and gave them no effective strategy for capturing the center. Though PRI power eroded for many reasons unrelated to opposition ideology--economic mismanagement, political crises, authoritarian excesses in a democratizing world--the opposition needed to dramatically re-make its strategy in order to unseat the PRI political machine. In some cases, existing parties moved towards catch-all status, as the PAN did under Vicente Fox in the 2000 presidential election, and as elements of the PRD supporting the more moderate Marcelo Ebrard\(^3\) hoped to do in 2012. But due to the complexities of internal party politics, there is no guarantee parties will consistently nominate moderate candidates who give them the best chance to win. Instead, the only way to guarantee a widely appealing candidate may be to have both the PAN and PRD coalesce behind a single figure who can, at least for a time, unite them. It thus appears logical that PAN-PRD alliances, however counterintuitive they might initially seem, can help deepen Mexican democracy.

Estévez, et al., describe the PRI as “entrenched” in certain states, still firmly in control of all important political institutions despite the national transition toward a more competitive democracy. Estévez, et al., calculate the advantages of PRI incumbency in gubernatorial elections at 25 percent; that is, they are likely to win 75 percent of elections in states where they hold office, while only 50 percent of the elections in states where they do not (Estévez et al. 49). When there are more candidates in the field, the PRI is noticeably more likely to win, but when it faces a unified opposition, odds of victory decline to 50 percent. (Estévez et al. 50). Perhaps most surprisingly, PRI alliances with smaller parties such as the PVEM (Partido Verde Ecologista de México, or Green Party) immediately raise the probability of victory back to 75

\(^3\) Though Ebrard lost the internal party struggle for presidential candidacy, PRD nominee Andrés Manuel López Obrador, known for his harsh rhetoric in the 2006 race, has moved to co-opt parts of Ebrard’s less strident platform into his 2012 campaign (Aguilar “López Obrador”).
percent (Estévez et al. 50). Even though the Greens are a relatively minor political actor, their ability to play kingmaker in gubernatorial elections is dramatic. The upswing in support for the PVEM over the past decade is likely attributable to its outsized role in alliance formation, which gives it a platform for political influence it would otherwise not have. By decreasing the number of competitors in a given election, Mexican states can move closer to a Duvergerian equilibrium.

**Social Divides and Mexican Multipartism**

Literature on political parties points to societal cleavages that can affect the number of parties in a given polity. These analyses help explain why Mexican states often violate Duvergerian equilibrium and feature three parties locked in a complicated struggle for power instead of the expected stable two-party system. Cox (1997) assesses the number of parties by focusing at the district level, noting that an inability to coordinate at the smallest level of government will lead to a more fractionalized national system (Cox 203). This theory appears to perform well in the Mexican case, as there are clear divisions within the political system that encourage multipartism. Baker (2009) details a surprising degree of ideological conformity among Mexican citizens who know one another. Compared to citizens of other democracies, Mexicans are far more likely to only interact with members of their own party (Baker 88). The deep divisions and subsequent isolated groups may explain the ability of three parties to persist, though the analysis does not discuss the reasons behind such social divides, which most likely relate to the legacy of PRI-era inclusive patronage networks that sought to capture groups within society and make them organs of the party.

Ethnic cleavages also play a role, and though Mexico is not wrought with the ethnic violence or divisions seen in some other developing countries, a cursory glance at Mexican states with large indigenous populations suggests a higher number of competitive parties in more
diverse states. In a study of Mexico alone, Klesner (2005) identifies a distinct regional divide; he shows that the PRI is the only political party with a truly national presence. It competes with the PAN in the north and the PRD in the south, and only in a small number of central states do all three parties seriously contest for seats (Klesner 105). While gubernatorial election data certainly supports this general theory, a claim that Mexico is essentially two two-party systems (Klesner 105) requires some qualification. The PAN and PRD do have a presence in every state, however small it may be, and often these small parties gain outsize influence over the electoral process through alliances. As Estévez, et al., note, even an alliance with a relatively small party can significantly increase the odds of victory and contribute to major shifts in Mexican democracy (Estévez et al. 50).

**Theories of Coalition Government**

While the comparison has its shortcomings, the extensive literature on coalition government offers some applications to Mexican alliance formation. Kaare Strom (1990) defines a political party coalition as a party union that 1) agrees to a common goal or set of goals; 2) pools its resources to attain the goal; 3) “communicate[s] and form[s] binding agreements” about their goal; and 4) agrees on post-election payoffs (Strom 24-25). The PAN-PRD alliances meet all these conditions when they put forward common gubernatorial candidates in Mexican states, though some of the lasting agreements are admittedly rather weak. This weakness, however, is not unique to Mexico, but rather plagues coalitions of all types.

While many of the original theorists of political parties argued that single-party majorities formed the most effective governments (Duverger 1954), more recent scholarship has noted significant exceptions. Political parties are rarely monolithic, particularly when they have constructed an electoral majority; the diversity of opinion within them can and does vary,
sometimes dramatically (Keman 163). Though minority governments in parliamentary systems
tend to break down faster than majority governments, they do tend to stay in power long enough
to enact serious policy (Keman 163). According to Keman (2006), most of the literature on
government formation claims “mutual collaboration between parties in government depends on
necessity (to form a majority) and familiarity (to be able to cooperate)” (Keman 164).

As most of the traditional coalition formation literature focuses on established liberal
democracies, the ouster of authoritarian regimes rarely appears as a point of discussion. One
school of thought within the literature explains coalition formation in terms of “minimal range
coalitions” or “party distances” between one another on an ideological scale, assuming parties
with the most similar platforms will ally, while another focuses on the parties’ plans for
“government composition” once in power (Lijphart 50; Keman 164). While these approaches
(particularly the latter) have some relevance to the Mexican case, the school of thought that best
fits the Mexican experience is what Keman calls the “office-seeking approach” (Keman 164).
This parsimonious approach puts aside ideological reasons for alliance formation and maintains
that parties seek the “minimal winning coalition” that allows them to gain power using the
fewest number of parties (Woldendorp et al. 2). Strom (1990) affirms this approach, arguing
rational behavior by party elites more accurately explains alliance formation than cabinet
composition or other such issues of coalition design (Strom 23).

Due to intricate organization, parties have goals beyond simply seeking power (Strom
38). A focus only on a left-right ideological scale ignores other spheres of political contestation
that might take precedence under certain conditions. Recognition of this gap in the literature has
led to the creation of new theories on “multidimensional coalition formation” that, while quite
narrow in their focus, shed light on certain unusual situations, such as the Mexican alliances
along non-ideological grounds (De Winter and Dumont 178).

Framing coalition or alliance formation as a project involving a set of common goals rather than an ideological alliance appears more applicable to countries going through democratic transitions such as Mexico. The PAN and PRD unite not out of ideological agreement, but because they manage to put aside their differences and adopt a position that transcends ideology in the pursuit of democracy. The work of Budge and Herman (1978) also sheds light on the PAN-PRD alliances in its focus on “crisis conditions” (Lijphart 58). Budge and Herman claim that elections that serve as referenda on the current political system (in their analysis, democracies; in this instance, authoritarian Mexico) lead pro- and anti-system parties to unite in grand coalitions (Lijphart 58). Just as pro-democracy parties of different ideologies unite to block communist or fascist parties from government, they can also join forces to drive out a party that is perceived as authoritarian.

**Incentives for Party Cooperation**

Kaare Strom introduces a series of key incentives at play in decisions to form coalitions, a number of which are relevant to Mexican gubernatorial elections (Strom 38):

1. In the process of government formation, political parties are not motivated solely by office (power) considerations, but also to a significant extent by opportunities for policy influence.

2. Party leaders are not concerned exclusively with immediate objectives. Their behavior must be understood in a temporal perspective. Parties have longer-term as well as short-term goals, and sometimes these will conflict. In such situations, the resulting behavior may not be myopically rational.

3. There is frequently a trade-off between a party’s short-term office (and
policy) objectives and its longer-term electoral incentives.

In most Mexican cases, all three points can help explain the rationale behind PAN-PRD alliances. This is particularly true in states in which the gap between PAN and PRD vote shares is large, as the smaller party is undoubtedly aware of the electoral obstacles it faces. Thus, an alliance offers the smaller party an avenue to power not otherwise available. Even though the party will likely have to accept a position as a minority partner, it still will wield noticeably more influence than it would if it were shut out of power completely. The minority party’s presence in the coalition gives it the ability to influence the majority party’s selection of a gubernatorial candidate, and may even allow it to push a candidate without significant ties to either party, as occurred in several cases such as the 2000 race in Chiapas (Sullivan).

PAN-PRD alliances may also arise out of longer-term political considerations. By getting its foot in the door or playing kingmaker in a gubernatorial election, the minority partner in the alliance builds its political capital for the subsequent electoral cycle. The majority partner, by admitting the need to ally with the minority partner, grants the minority partner legitimacy as a state-level political actor. While it may seem risky to empower such an opposition party, the chances of victory and demonstrated benefits of incumbency in future elections regardless of party affiliation give majority parties a strong incentive to pursue an alliance when victory might not be otherwise possible (Estévez et al. 50).

The Ideological Barrier

Though ideology is not the motivating factor behind PAN-PRD alliances, it can certainly prevent them. The idea of an alliance has been floated in countless elections, including the 2000 presidential race, but has not usually come to fruition (Greene 219). Scholarly study and opinion polls affirm significant public support for pro-democracy PAN-PRD alliances. Polling data
conducted by the *Reforma* newspaper in 1998 identify 17.3% of the 41.9% of Mexicans who supported either the PAN or the PRD as “regime opposition” voters, whose primary reason for supporting their party was a rejection of the authoritarian PRI (Greene 218). In the same poll, nearly half of the members of each party voiced open support for an alliance in the 2000 presidential elections (Greene 220). Yet, despite the public’s apparent receptiveness to alliances, ideology tends to prevent them from taking off.

Bruhn and Greene (2009) point to a crucial factor that limits alliance formation in Mexico in their essay “The Absence of Common Ground between Candidates and Voters.” The authors mine the 2006 Candidate and Party Leader Survey and compare congressional candidate views to voter opinion polls and find a surprising gulf between the beliefs of each group. On every issue, the candidates took a noticeably harder line than the voters who supported them, suggesting differences between the PAN and PRD leadership are far greater than those between their respective supporters (Bruhn and Greene 67). Such ideological certainty among party elites explains why the parties struggle to coordinate in many elections despite a common opponent and voter bases that generally appear willing to work towards a common goal.

**PAN-PRD Alliances: A Brief History**

As increased electoral competition raised the likelihood of the PRI’s defeat through the late 1980s and the 1990s, commentators increasingly discussed the possibility of a pro-democracy front designed to bring down the regime. Democracy advanced at different rates around the country, as some states elected opposition politicians to statewide office in the 1980s, while others remain bastions of PRI support to this day. Democracy advocates and opposition parties looked for ways to hurry the demise of the PRI in its most entrenched districts, and looked toward alliances as a possible option (Greene 221).
While much of this discussion centered on the abortive effort to field a common candidate in the 2000 presidential election, the idea also gained currency in some states where the PRI still reigned supreme. The states of Nayarit and Coahuila both fielded a PAN-PRD alliance in 1999, with the opposition successfully dislodging the PRI in Nayarit. Shortly after the 2000 presidential election ended PRI hegemony over the national government, voters in Chiapas also elected an alliance candidate, prompting excited claims of a new era in one of Mexico’s most troubled states. A third successful alliance in Yucatan in 2001 seemed to suggest a common

4 The PAN and PRD did attempt one gubernatorial alliance long before the rest, when the two joined forces in the 1992 Tamaulipas race. The alliance formed in a state firmly in the hands of the PRI, mustering a mere 25.8 percent of the vote (IMO). The election took place in a country in which only one opposition governor had ever won a seat, and in a state in which no opposition candidate has ever come within 25% of the PRI’s gubernatorial candidate. Given the extreme circumstances surrounding this alliance, it does not seem appropriate to compare it to the later PAN-PRD unions, to say nothing of the spotty data on 1989 and 1992 municipal elections in Tamaulipas.
candidate was a viable means to remove a state governorship from the hands of the PRI. But all three alliances attempted in 2003 and 2004 failed to dislodge the dominant party, and as a result the PAN and PRD did not reuse the tactic until 2010. But three successful alliances out of the five attempted in 2010 and 2011 brought the unions back into the national spotlight, and now that over ten years have passed since the first wave of alliances, analysts can begin to study their impact on the political system.

While alliances in gubernatorial races receive by far the most coverage of any attempted alliances, the PAN and PRD have periodically allied in state legislature and municipal presidency races. Some of these alliances are undoubtedly unions of convenience based on the particularities of certain districts, but there are numerous cases of systematic alliance formation in several Mexican states since the late 1990s. The data set includes twelve cases of alliances in both state legislative elections and municipal presidential races. Most, though not all, of these cases are concurrent with alliances in gubernatorial races, or in states that have elected alliance governors. Only once (Nayarit, 1999) did the alliance field a gubernatorial candidate without fielding any common legislative or municipal candidates, and only once (Quintaña Roo, 2010) did an alliance form only at the municipal and legislative level without a concurrent or prior gubernatorial alliance.

**Observable Implications of the Theory**

The existing literature on Mexican politics and coalition formation suggests the PAN-PRD alliances should be positively correlated with advances in Mexican democracy. Alliances move Mexican politics toward a Duvergerian equilibrium and lower the number of actors competing for seats. In recent decades, the PAN and PRD have learned that they must move toward the pragmatic center to win elections, particularly against the largely ideology-free PRI.
With PRI hegemony still intact in numerous states across the nation, alliances offer one clear tool to unite the opposition behind a single cause that transcends partisan fault lines.

A series of indicators should be able to demonstrate whether PAN-PRD alliances truly are successful means for democratic advancement at the state level. First and foremost, the alliances should enjoy a positive, significant correlation to opposition gains vis-à-vis the PRI in elections for seats in the state legislature and municipal presidencies. Alliances should likewise help give opposition parties gubernatorial seats, and move the states beneath the 60 percent threshold of PRI control here used to illustrate hegemony. Closer analysis of case studies should show that bringing ideologically opposed parties together should force them to tone down their rhetoric and focus on broader themes of accountability and democracy. If the alliance candidates deliver on these promises, they should be able to elevate the positions of their parties and be more competitive in future elections.
3. METHODOLOGY

Measuring Democratic Gains in State and Municipal Elections

This analysis collects data from every Mexican gubernatorial, state-level legislature, and municipal presidential election since the mid-1990s. (The starting year is not uniform across states due to differing election years and spotty data in some states, though each has at least one election prior to 2000.) In order to best judge the impact of the alliances, this thesis measures the erosion of PRI support as a percentage of the total first-past-the-post seats--those in which the candidate receiving the most votes wins the seat, regardless of the percentage or margin of victory--in each state legislature, and as a percentage of the total number of municipal presidency elections won in each state.

Elections for representative in the state legislature--*diputado local*--and municipal president--*presidente municipal*--are held every three years in Mexico. They are conducted in the same cycle as state-level gubernatorial elections, meaning the entire legislature is contested at the same time as the gubernatorial election and half way through the governor’s term.\(^5\) Legislative districts are drawn by each state and vary in number from state to state with no direct correlation to the populations of states, though they tend to be roughly equal in size. Each state elects representatives to its legislature by both a first-past-the-post simple plurality in districts throughout the state and via proportional representation, according to the percentage of the vote received by each party.

In order to avoid the vagaries of the proportional representation formulas, this analysis only tracks the results of the first-past-the-post districts. While proportional representation can

\(^5\) There is one exception to this rule; gubernatorial elections are held separately from other state-level elections in Chiapas. Several other states have not always had concurrent elections, but all others have shifted in this direction since the mid-1990s (IMO).
aid minority parties in their efforts to dislodge a dominant party—and certainly did so in Mexico, where reform in the national legislature led to opposition inroads decades before the PRI lost the presidency—a legislator put in office by proportional representation does not illustrate the same level of democratic consolidation demonstrated by the direct election of a representative to a small, set district.

Municipalities are the most basic unit of government in Mexico and can vary wildly in size and population. All but a handful of the least populous states have more municipalities than legislative districts, and some states have over 200 municipalities. State legislatures and municipal presidencies are the smallest nationally-recognized political units in Mexico, and studying the erosion of PRI hegemony in them gives perhaps the best possible indicator of the depth of democratic reforms in Mexico.

It would be wrong to measure hegemony solely on alternation; certain regions of liberal democracies consistently vote for the same party, and such a homogenous voting bloc does not necessarily indicate a lack of democracy. This is especially true when dealing with smaller electoral districts such as Mexican municipalities. This study therefore looks at broader trends of dominance across a wide sample set and seeks general trends toward competitive democracy. Should the results indicate a legitimate correlation between PAN-PRD alliances in opposition gains, it would demonstrate the power of such alliances in combating single-party domination in both Mexico and other countries.

**Caveats**

In some cases, the decision to unite the PAN and PRD was not state-wide. Some races for municipal presidency saw the parties’ candidates running on separate tickets, while they united in others. In order to ensure that alliances were systematic instead of ad hoc unions made in
certain territories, I have established a threshold of ten percent support for PAN-PRD alliances across the entire state. This percentage suggests at least some level of statewide coordination within the alliances, whereas smaller figures would not reflect a systematic operation.

This analysis omits the Distrito Federal (D.F.), as it did not elect its *jefe de gobierno*--the position equivalent to a state governorship--until 1997, and has elected a PRD *jefe de gobierno* in each election since. It is therefore not possible to trace the erosion of PRI power in the D.F. strictly through electoral results. Prior to 1997, the president of the country--always a member of the PRI--appointed a *regente* to control Mexico City, who in turn named his own cabinet. Though popular pressure forced the PRI to set up an elected advisory board in the late 1980s, there was no pretense of democratic competition for the executive wing of the D.F. government until the PRD’s triumph in 1997 (Wirth 155).

This analysis also excludes states in which the opposition was already competitive with the PRI at the start of the data set. While this study would ideally trace the erosion of PRI hegemony since the very start of the democratic transition in the 1980s, missing and/or unreliable data renders such an undertaking nearly impossible (IMO). The study therefore omits seven state legislatures that had already passed a competitiveness threshold of 60 percent PRI control by their first election in the data set, and also the races for municipal presidencies in Baja California and Colima. As a result, this thesis does not employ data from Baja California. Colima and Yucatan are the only alliance states affected by these changes, though data from a non-competitive set of elections remains useable in each state. All other states were firmly in the hands of the PRI when the opposition decided to form its alliance.

**Non-PAN-PRD Alliances**

Also omitted from the analysis are alliances with other, smaller political parties. Parties
such as the Convergencia (Convergence, a center-left party), Partido Verde Ecológico de México (PVEM, the Green Party), Nueva Alianza (PANAL, New Alliance; a party formed by the national teachers’ union not to be confused with any of the inter-party alliances) and the Partido de Trabajadores (PT, Workers’ Party) compete in most Mexican elections and sometimes win seats. They also often join with one another or one of the major parties to best maintain the level of support necessary to guarantee government funding. Some of these alliances make ideological sense, such as the union between the PRD and the PT, and others have longstanding arrangements, such as the PRI and PVEM. Still, many of these alliances appear quite opportunistic; the PVEM has, at separate times in separate states, allied with each of the three major parties. The tangled webs of alliances can vary wildly across single states; the 2000 municipal elections in Veracruz saw no less than sixty different combinations of parties attempted in the 210 races for which data is available (IMO).

Many of these alliances can likely be dismissed as unions of convenience. Still, Estévez, et al., note that the probability of victory increases with nearly any alliance, whether it involves two large parties or one large party and one or more smaller parties (Estévez et al. 49). This includes the PRI’s alliances, largely with the PVEM, which appear to raise its probability of victory by as much as twenty-five percent (Estévez et al. 50). While this figure may include some selection bias--the PVEM may simply align with the party it believes will win in order to best enjoy the benefits of governing--there can be no doubt these alliances do make a difference. The difficulty lies in determining the impact of these alliances on the specific cases measured in this analysis; it is near impossible to make a definitive statement on the effects of a PRI-PVEM common candidacy in any particular state, particularly when the study includes sub-state electoral districts that may have different alliance patterns in different districts. This thesis
therefore leaves aside the alliances between the three major parties (PRI, PAN, and PRD) and the various minor parties for later study.

This omission invites the question of why this thesis does study state-level PAN-PRD alliances in which one of the two parties is a weak political actor. As noted earlier in this thesis and in numerous other studies (Klesner), all three parties are not competitive in every state; this is especially true in some of the northern states where the PRI and PAN compete for power while the PRD polls alongside a number of the minor parties, and also in a handful southern states where the PAN is relatively weak. But despite their marginal status as serious actors, the national clout and electoral machinery available gives these parties a certain legitimacy that smaller parties normally cannot attain. And while alliances between the three major parties and the likes of the PVEM or PT are now dismissed as common practice, the PAN and PRD coalitions are rare enough--and ideologically unique enough--to deserve special consideration.

One last phenomenon worthy of some explanation is the rare but occasional alliance between the PRI and PAN. There has only been one PAN-PRI gubernatorial alliance, and it was unsuccessful; the coalition occurred in Chiapas in 2006 after six years of rule by a PRD-PAN alliance. This case will be further investigated in a deeper exploration of Chiapas later in this thesis. The PAN-PRI alliance also appeared in several sub-state elections in Michoacán over the past decade; while several PAN-PRI candidates were elected to municipal presidencies, the trend does not yet appear to be broad enough to merit any sort of special discussion within the context of this thesis. The state has traditionally been a PRD stronghold, but the PRI’s victory in the 2011 gubernatorial race probably renders PAN and PRI unions unlikely in the future. Should these alliances become a broader trend, they will certainly deserve further study.
4. RESULTS

Correlating PAN-PRD Alliances with PRI Erosion

With the parameters of the study now established, this thesis now offers a formal study of the implications of PAN-PRD alliances for democratization in Mexican states. Table 1 summarizes the results of the elections involving PAN-PRD alliances. It first notes whether the election produced a victory for the alliance gubernatorial candidate (if applicable) and presents opposition gains as a percentage of the number of legislative seats or municipal districts up for election. (A negative value, therefore, denotes PRI gains.) The final column judges whether or not the alliance took place in the year in which states first attained the 60% threshold for competitiveness in either the state legislature or the municipal presidencies. That is, it aims to suggest whether the alliance may have played a role in the democratization of one or both bodies. Unless otherwise noted, all of these elections took place in states that were still under PRI hegemony.

The results suggest alliances make a powerful impact on the erosion of PRI hegemony. This is especially true in state legislatures, where the median gain from an alliance\(^6\) is over thirteen times greater than the national median in all elections involving alliances. While somewhat less drastic, the median for opposition gains in municipal presidency elections is also several times larger than the national median.

Ten of the twenty-two sets of previously undemocratic state legislatures and municipal presidencies democratized in an election featuring a PAN-PRD alliance. The successful democratization is especially striking in more recent elections; seven of nine states forming

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\(^6\) Due to the significantly larger (positive and negative) data points in certain states, this paper uses the median opposition gain rather than the mean.
Table 1. Election Year Opposition Gains in Mexican States Forming PAN-PRD Alliances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State (Year)</th>
<th>Gov. victory?</th>
<th>Opposition Gains</th>
<th>Competitive?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Legislature</td>
<td>Mun. Pres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coahuila (1999)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nayarit (1999)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chiapas (2000)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9.32%</td>
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<td>Yucatan (2001)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N/A**</td>
<td>13.21%</td>
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<td>Colima (2003)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td>N/A**</td>
</tr>
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<td>Chihuahua (2004)</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>4.48%</td>
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<td>Chiapas (2004)*</td>
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<td>7.63%</td>
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<td>Durango (2010)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>26.67%</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hidalgo (2010)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>-1.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oaxaca (2010)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>64.00%</td>
<td>14.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiapas (2010)*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>4.16%</td>
<td>8.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quintana Roo (2010)*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puebla (2011)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>17.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinaloa (2011)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>38.89%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Alliance Median    | 23.11       | 12.44            |
| National Median for All Elections | 1.67 | 4.48 |

-In the final column, L=legislature; MP=municipal presidency; “both” means both bodies reached the 60% threshold necessary to be defined as competitive.
-No data is available for 1996 state legislature elections in Coahuila, rendering it impossible to calculate the rate of change. However, the PRI won every seat in the legislature in 1999.
-Asterisks (*) denote elections in which there is no gubernatorial alliance; that is, the alliance was only formed for the state legislature and municipal presidency elections.
-Double-asterisks (**) denote cases in which the electoral body in question had already seen PRI dominance decline beneath a 60% threshold. As these alliances formed in an already competitive environment, it makes little sense to measure their impact on democracy in the state.
-Chiapas is the only Mexican state in which gubernatorial and local elections do not occur concurrently. The legislative and municipal figures used in the 2000 entry for Chiapas come from its 2001 elections.

All election data comes from the Instituto de Meracodtécnia y Opinión (IMO).
alliances since 2004 saw at least one body move under the 60 percent threshold of PRI dominance. These large gains may be attributable to a more competitive national political environment in more recent years, but this fact does not refute the obvious correlation between alliances and the erosion of PRI hegemony. While alliances certainly cannot be labeled the sole cause of these transitions, their success rate appears to be relatively high.

Alliances in gubernatorial elections also appear relatively successful. Six of twelve PAN-PRD candidates have won their elections; this 50 percent success rate is higher than opposition parties’ 39.66 percent rate in non-alliance elections since 1999, when the first alliance formed. The fact that a number of these non-alliance elections took place in states that had already democratized—meaning, presumably, that opposition parties faced much lower barriers to entry than they did in the still PRI-dominated alliance states—further supports the case for alliance success.

**Testing Significance**

With these parameters in place, the study proceeds to test the correlation between alliances and the erosion of PRI hegemony in 165 cases across thirty Mexican states. The analysis employs a simple binary variable to distinguish between gubernatorial elections that included a PAN-PRD alliance and those that did not. It then repeats the same tactic for state legislatures and municipal presidencies. These data represent the independent variables used in this study.

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7 It should be noted that the Chiapas legislative alliances did take place in a state that had already elected an alliance governor, rendering it difficult to label the state as fully within the grasp of the PRI. Still, the state legislature and municipal presidencies remained dominated by the PRI until 2004, and the PRI did not lose its majority among municipal presidencies until 2010. The other state to feature a repeat alliance, Oaxaca, saw the opposition make significant gains in its first alliance in 2004, but the PRI still reigned supreme: the dominant party maintained the governor’s mansion and control of 72 percent of the legislature and 49 percent of municipal presidencies, or 26 more presidencies than its next-closest competitor, the PRD. Thus, this study includes these later alliances, which are also a sign of the enduring power of the Chiapas and Oaxaca PAN-PRD unions, a topic discussed later in this paper.
The dependent variable is the erosion of PRI hegemony, measured by the percent change in seats held by the PRI since the previous election. The data set includes percent change in both state legislative and municipal presidency elections, along with an aggregate of the results from both elections. While not an ideal measurement due to the varying number of seats contested, particularly at the municipal level, it offers the broadest possible view of the correlation between gubernatorial alliances and the results of lower-level elections.

Analysis of the numbers begins with a simple correlation of the presence of an alliance with a percent decrease in seats held by the PRI. (For the sake of consistency, the study represents PRI losses as positive numbers.) The study then employs a difference of means test to

Table 2. Correlation Between PAN-PRD Alliances and Opposition Gains in State Legislatures and Municipal Presidencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Significance (p)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gubernatorial Alliance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Change</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>.047**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Legislature Change</td>
<td>.282</td>
<td>.003***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal Presidency Change</td>
<td>.081</td>
<td>.184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Legislature Alliance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Change</td>
<td>.174</td>
<td>.026**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal Presidency Alliance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Change</td>
<td>.126</td>
<td>.076*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal Presidency Change</td>
<td>.114</td>
<td>.100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<.01.
**p<.05.
*p<.1.

"Total Change" here refers to the combined change between state legislatures and municipal presidencies, expressed as a percentage of the total seats between the two.

All election data comes from the Instituto de Meracodtécnia y Opinión (IMO).
ascertain the statistical significance of the correlation between alliances and loss of seats by the PRI, effectively demonstrating the relationship between PAN-PRD unions and opposition inroads into PRI-controlled elected offices.

Initial results show a noticeable relationship between PAN-PRD alliances and PRI losses. The cases tested all resulted in a positive correlation between alliance formation and erosion of PRI hegemony, though not all results were statistically significant. Gubernatorial alliances do indeed prove statistically significant predictors of opposition gain.

However, the data show a large divide between the significance of legislative and municipal elections. While gubernatorial alliances appear highly correlated with opposition gains in state legislatures, the relationship between the alliances and municipal elections was not statistically significant. The significance of the shift is driven almost entirely by legislative alliances, while elections for municipal presidencies lag noticeably behind. This surprising gap provokes a series of questions over the differences between state- and municipal-level politics in Mexico, and will receive significant attention in the case studies later in this analysis. The correlation of alliances with change in the state legislature registered a P value of .003, while alliances measured against municipal presidencies produced an insignificant P value of .184.

Tests of the significance of alliances between the PAN and PRD at the state legislative and municipal presidency levels produced robust results. Legislative alliances produced a significant correlation with erosion overall of PRI power, while their impact on the legislature in particular proved among the most significant figures in the entire analysis, with a P value of .004. While somewhat less robust than the legislative alliances, PAN-PRD unions at the municipal level also registered as significant when correlated to aggregate PRI decline, and barely missed the cut-off for significance. The results suggest the extension of PAN-PRD
alliances beyond a single governor’s race prove successful for the opposition, especially within the legislature.
5. ALLIANCE IN PRACTICE

Comparing the 2010 PAN-PRD Coalition in Durango with a Non-Alliance Race in Chihuahua

Having established a positive, significant correlation between Mexico’s state level PAN-PRD alliances, this thesis now moves to focus in on the particularities of alliance formation and their implications for democratization. In doing so, it will focus on the 2010 Durango election, which produced an alliance that yielded results roughly in line with the national averages for opposition gains through alliance formation. (The opposition gained 26.67 percent of legislature seats and 15.38 percent of municipal presidencies, compared with national averages of 23.11 and 12.44 percent, respectively [IMO].) As a control, it will compare Durango with a concurrent election in neighboring Chihuahua, where no alliance formed. The study looks at the strategies for candidate selection and platform construction adopted by the relevant parties in the elections, paying special attention to the comparison between the Durango PAN-PRD alliances and the Chihuahua opposition parties (chiefly the PAN, which is the largest opposition party in the state).

Ideally, this thesis would study two earlier contrasting cases, such as the Chiapas and Tabasco comparison outlined in the Introduction; the passage of time has created an even more stark distinction between these two states. However, serious study of local-level elections in the early 2000s proved very difficult, as there is no systematic information about their conduct. Many Mexican news sources did not develop a major online presence until the mid-00s, and even today many lower-level politicians do not bother to develop campaign websites. The Durango-Chihuahua comparison thus presents a much clearer picture than earlier races might offer, and even though only two years have passed between the election and this writing, the

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8 As illustrated later in this paper, Chiapas is also a rather exceptional case in many ways, and its alliance is largely unrepresentative of the normal PAN-PRD alliance experience.
events that unfolded during this time period allow this thesis to offer a relatively clear judgment on the democratizing effects of the 2010 Durango coalition.

Durango and Chihuahua offer up a narrative of two states that took different paths in the 2010 state-level elections. Both are northern Mexican states that the PRI has continued to control throughout the democratic transition that has taken place in other parts of the country, and both states have suffered heavily from violence related to drug trafficking, a regional crisis that demands a political solution (Rueda). Though the opposition has at times made modest inroads in some local elections, the PRI remains the dominant political force in both states. The opposition in both states is more or less equal in its size and reach, and the PAN is noticeably more powerful than the PRD in this region of the country.9

The PAN has also been reasonably competitive in statewide gubernatorial elections dating back to the 1990s. The right-wing party came within seven percentage points of the PRI as early as 1992 in Chihuahua—an impressive showing by the opposition at such an early stage in the democratic transition—while the 39.9 percent vote share recorded by the PRI gubernatorial candidate in Durango in 1998 was its lowest winning plurality to date (IMO). However, the opposition appeared to hit a ceiling at a percentage somewhere in the low 40s, and neither state’s legislature or municipal presidencies saw significant erosion in PRI support.

**Chihuahua: Business as Usual**

A PAN-PRD alliance formed in Chihuahua in 2004, though it was one of the least successful attempts to unite the two parties. The PAN-nominated candidate, Javier Corral Jurado, made concessions to his PRD allies that angered his own party’s base, and lost the election by a fifteen-point margin (Grayson 19). Effects on lower-level offices were minimal, as the PRI

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Table 3. Results of the 2010 Chihuahua State Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Gov. (%)</th>
<th>Leg. Seats</th>
<th>Leg. Change</th>
<th>% Leg. Change</th>
<th>MP Seats</th>
<th>MP Change</th>
<th>% MP Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>22.73</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>-8.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>-22.73</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>7.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All data from Instituto de Mercadotécnia y Opinión (IMO).

-The first column expressed the percentage of votes received by the party’s gubernatorial candidate.
-“Leg. Seats” is the number of seats won by a party in the state legislature, while “MP Seats” is the number of municipal presidencies won by the party.
-“Change” here refers to change in number of seats from the previous election, while the columns following the “change” columns express these gains or losses as a percent of the total number of seats.

gained a seat in the state legislature and only lost three of its 47 municipal presidencies, out of a total of 67 (IMO). With little to show for the alliance, the parties went their separate ways in the
2007 midterm elections and again in the 2010 races.

If the 2004 alliance was a disappointment for the opposition, the 2010 campaign with a separate PAN and PRD only further reinforced the status quo. The PRI gubernatorial candidate, César Horacio Duarte Jáquez, coasted to a fifteen-point win over the PAN’s Carlos Borruel Baquera, while the PRD candidate, Victor Orozco Orozco, only received a paltry two percent of the vote (IMO). The Center for Strategic and International Studies described Borruel’s campaign as “lackluster,” and lauded Duarte’s ability to pull together the PRI organization (Center). While most narratives attribute the meager 33 percent turnout rate to statewide drug violence, competitive elections in other violence-plagued states was noticeably higher (Miller). The predictability of the Chihuahua race was likely a major factor in the apparent voter apathy.

One of the largest swings took place in the city of Chihuahua; the PAN had controlled four of five legislature seats in the state capital, but the PRI re-captured all of them in the 2010 race. In District Seventeen, PRI candidate Liz Aguilera García captured a seat long held by the PAN, citing her support among younger voters as a key reason for the energy behind her campaign (Liz Aguilera). Though both she and her PAN rival ran on typical party platforms, her victory showed the PRI’s appeal as a fresh alternative to voters frustrated by a lack of progress under the PAN. In a neighboring district, César Alejandro Domínguez Domínguez likewise hammered out a victory for the PRI by maintaining the party line of “unity” and “results” (Meza). When politics comes to focus on delivery in a state in which one party has clear organizational advantages, the other political parties will inevitably face long odds.

In a district consisting of the city of Cuauhtémoc and its environs, popular PAN ex-Municipal President Elías Humberto Pérez Mendoza ran for the legislature on a unity platform of his own. Like the PRI’s Jorge Abraham Ramírez Alvidrez, Pérez prioritized “results” and used
his personal clout to avoid a potentially divisive candidate selection process (“Se destapa”, Salazar). Despite his apparent strength as a candidate and a very similar platform, Pérez lost to Ramírez by about 4,000 votes, or nine percent of the vote (Instituto Estatal Electoral de Chihuahua). Even under favorable circumstances for the opposition, PRI candidates achieved relatively easy victories.

The PRI strategy in municipal presidency races began with a concerted effort to control the largest cities in the state (Cabrera). The party poured its resources into cities such as Chihuahua, Ciudad Juárez, and Cuauhtémoc, and comfortably staved off PAN challengers in each race. By focusing on such major cities, the PRI reinforced its sense of inevitability and effectively put itself in position to maintain control over a significant majority of the citizens of the state.

Despite these efforts, the opposition did manage to wrest six municipal seats away from the PRI in the 2010 elections. An alliance formed in a single municipality—the small town of Carichí—and sailed to victory, while the PRD raised its total of seats from one to two and the PAN won five more seats (Instituto Estatal Electoral de Chihuahua). The PRI regained one “opposition”-held seat by forming an alliance with the PVEM and re-taking the single seat the Green Party had won in the 2007 elections (IMO). The opposition’s biggest prize came via a PAN victory in Delicias, the state’s fourth-largest city. PAN candidate Mario Mata, like so many victorious opposition candidates, moved to the center to build his support, relying on campaign slogans that emphasized hard work (Gobierno). He also emphasized his ability to work with other parties, later describing his relationship with PRI Governor César Duarte Jáquez as “harmonious,” a sentiment echoed by the governor (No afectarán). As predicted by Greene (2007), opposition candidates who most effectively move to the center and promote their ability
to work with other parties are most likely to attain victory at the ballot box.

The 2010 Chihuahua election unfolded much like most non-alliance Mexican state-level contests. The opposition made some scattered gains, most notably at the municipal level, but lost ground in other places. This halting democratic progress--a 1.12 percent increase in opposition-held seats--proves largely consistent with the national average since 1999 (IMO). The Chihuahua PAN made some headway in districts where it offered pragmatic candidates capable of working with higher-level PRI officials, but the PRD remained largely irrelevant. The PRI’s platform--a simple insistence that the party was best positioned to produce “results”--kept ideology from creating serious rifts within the party, and its resource advantages seemed to support its campaign claim. In a state plagued by violence, a pitch that emphasized stability and an ability to deliver overruled a democratic experiment in the eyes of voters. The platforms proposed by opposition candidates, which also attempted to focus on results rather than some higher democratic ideal, seem to confirm this hypothesis.

Durango Forges a Coalition

With this narrative of a fairly typical Mexican election in a state still controlled by the PRI in place, the study now moves to compare this Chihuahua election with a prototypical PAN-PRD alliance in Durango. Unlike Chihuahua, Durango did not attempt an alliance in 2004. The results of that election were convoluted; while the opposition made some inroads into PRI hegemony by winning four of the thirty-nine municipal presidencies away from the PRI, the PAN also lost both of its seats in the state legislature. These losses placed all fifteen first-past-the-post seats in the legislature back in the hands of the PRI, a position of complete dominance the party maintained until 2010. In the 2007 midterm elections, the PRI won back five municipal presidencies, rendering the gains of 2004 moot. These electoral defeats for the opposition left
Map 5. State of Durango.


Table 4. Results of the 2010 Durango State Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Gov. (%)</th>
<th>Leg. Seats</th>
<th>Leg. Change</th>
<th>% Leg. Change</th>
<th>MP Seats</th>
<th>MP Change</th>
<th>% MP Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>46.50</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-26.67</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>-15.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN-PRD</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>26.67</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>+7</td>
<td>17.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-2.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All data from Instituto de Mercadotécnia y Opinión (IMO).

-The first column expressed the percentage of votes received by the party’s gubernatorial candidate.
-“Leg. Seats” is the number of seats won by a party in the state legislature, while “MP Seats” is the number of municipal presidencies won by the party.
-“Change” here refers to change in number of seats from the previous election, while the columns following the “change” columns express these gains or losses as a percent of the total number of seats.

Durango a “PRI fiefdom;” the PRD and PAN, searching for answers, chose to ally in 2010 (Grayson 23).

Durango is an interesting case because José Rosas Aispuro Torres, the alliance gubernatorial candidate, lost the election. Rosas Aispuro’s loss suggests the alliance was not
simply propped up by a single candidate, but involved some level of coordination on all levels. The promise of alliance candidates drew in voters from across the state, despite the fact that voters did not gather around the figurehead of PAN-PRD unity in Durango.¹⁰

The alliance made democratization and accountability the central themes of their campaign. PAN leader César Nava claimed the opposition parties shared a common cause in their effort to oust the PRI, and used the formation of the alliance as an opportunity to lecture the PRI on its perceived obstructionism (Saldierna). Jesús Ortega Martínez, then national director of the PRD, announced the chief goal of the alliance was the elimination of the cacicazgo, or system in which regional bosses controlled portions of the country in a hierarchal manner (Jiménez).

Like several other PAN-PRD alliance candidates, Rosas Aispuro was a former member of the PRI who left the party only weeks before the alliance announced him as its candidate. The abrupt change in loyalties raised some concerns over the candidate’s motives and the possibility of lasting change, but alliance leadership largely dodged these questions (Saldierna). Still, Rosas Aispuro’s vehement rejection of the PRI gave the alliance a candidate who could unite the left and the right against a common enemy. He claimed the PRI had “hijacked” the state, and publicly accused its leadership of violating the nation’s constitution in its disregard for democracy (Ayala “Rosas”). The alliance took on the dominant party by running on the one issue it could use to unite disparate forces, and left broader questions until after the election.

The coalition joined up with a third, minor party, the Convergencia, took the name Durango Nos Une (“Durango Unites Us”), and began to campaign in earnest. Seven days after

¹⁰ A possible alternative explanation of alliance success or failure to democratize state legislatures and municipal presidencies might argue that alliance victory in the race for the governorship is more likely to lead to greater democratic consolidation, and vice versa. However, the results of a comparison of democracy in Mexican states (presented later in this paper, in Table 5) suggest this correlation is tenuous at best. An alliance governor by no means guarantees success for alliance candidates in other areas, and vice versa.
the official selection of Rosas Aispuro, the heads of the three parties within the alliance released a list of common candidates for every municipal presidency and seat in the state legislature (Cárdenas). The candidates were a diverse group, including members of the alliance’s three parties in the regions they were strongest and also a number of PRI defectors, such as Rosas Aispuro. While the PAN’s predominance among the opposition parties within the state certainly gave it an advantage, it also set aside a series of seats for lesser partners in the coalition, most prominently the PRD (Ayala “Durango”).

A late start hampered a number of the alliance candidates’ campaigns, as the PRI used its stronger organization to launch campaigns months before the alliance settled on the best choices. Skepticism about PRI converts to the alliance abounded among rank-and-file members of the PAN and PRD (Hernández). The inevitable infighting produced by the attempt to incorporate a large number of ideologically diverse political parties within a single coalition led to some conflicts that damaged its chances.

One such case emerged in the search for a candidate for the crucial municipal presidency of the city of Durango, the state’s capital and largest city. The presidency had never deviated from PRI control, but with several accomplished national politicians expressing an interest in the seat, the alliance sensed an opening for victory. However, after an internal competition for the alliance candidacy produced a split decision between two sitting Senators--Rodolfo Dorador Pérez Gavilán of the PAN and Alejandro González Yáñez of the leftist PT--the alliance fractured (PAN-PRD). The PT refused to abide by an earlier agreement to nominate a presumably more electable PAN candidate if the race proved close, and the popular Yáñez ran separately and finished a close third. PRI candidate Adán Soria Ramírez won the three-way race with less that 40 percent of the vote, and though Dorador claimed fraud, the failure of the alliance to coalesce
around a single figure seems to be the primary reason the seat will remain in the hands of the dominant party until at least 2013 (Adán Soria).

No common path unites the four alliance candidates who broke the PRI’s complete domination of the state legislature’s first-past-the-post seats in 2010. Gina Gerardina Campuzano González followed the normal PAN nomination process, celebrating the openness of the party primary in comparison to the paternalistic PRI. While firmly a PANista candidate, Campuzano appeared to place high value on openness and political meritocracy (Diputado). Similarly, PAN Representative Aleonso Palacio Jáquez has built his legislative credentials on a nonpartisan attack on entrenched corruption, particularly in the worst-afflicted, predominantly rural areas of the state (Esperanza). Jorge Alejandro Salum del Palacio, on the other hand, served as a PAN representative in the national legislature prior to his election, riding to victory in a lower-level race based on his clout in a national institution that had already democratized (Honorable). All three were firmly within the PAN, though they were also apparently moderate enough--or powerful enough--to earn a necessary level of respect from the PRD.

The most complicated of the four opposition representatives was Manuel Ibarra Mirano, a former PRI municipal president who ran under the alliance banner in 2010. Ibarra went through a political odyssey in his first two years in the legislature, first swearing his allegiance to the minor Convergencia party, abandoning the Convergencia to become an independent, then finally requesting re-admittance to the PRI caucus in February 2012 (Estrada). Such movement over time suggests Ibarra’s decision to run as an alliance candidate had little to do with a democratic transformation and had far more to do with his own political career, whatever his ideological motives may have been.

Representatives such as Ibarra raise considerable doubt over the value of alliances and
suggest they may simply serve as platforms for members of the PRI who feel jilted by the establishment to gain political office. This in itself is something of a democratic development; it does create alternatives to the candidates nominated by the PRI political machinery, empowering the public to have some measure of choice over its representative. But a choice between an establishment PRI candidate and an internal rebel (whose motives for abandoning the PRI may be a matter of power instead of substance on the issues at hand) hardly constitutes an advance towards a robust multiparty democracy. The decision of another Durango PAN-PRD representative--this one elected via proportional representation--to return to the PRI fold promoted one commentator to decry the PAN’s decision to enter the alliance, claiming the small victories were an illusion, and that the party would suffer lasting damage for associating itself with a group of politicians with shifting allegiances (Hernández).

Initial evidence suggests these concerns were by no means irrational. PRI politician Eligio Moreno Martínez was blocked from running by the state party, and revolted against them for “abandoning its ideology” and “violating agreements” allegedly made with the candidate long before (Robles). Like a number of PAN-PRD candidates, Moreno is a former member of the PRI whose split from the party appears to be the result of internal struggles for position. When out-of-favor PRI candidates appear stronger candidates for a united opposition than anyone from within the opposition itself, a serious dilemma confronts the PAN and PRD: in order to win they need to bring in PRI candidates, yet bringing in these candidates may provide little to no long-term benefit for the parties involved.

A study of the municipal presidencies won by the PAN-PRD alliance reveals further rapid shifts in allegiance that seem to represent career-focused moves. Two alliance municipal presidents who had once been members of the PRI rejoined the party in March 2012, declaring
their lifelong loyalty to its political program. Noé Guangorena Cruz, president of the Santa Clara municipality, declared he had always been “free and independent” to choose the party that best suited his political goals, and given the PRI’s national ascendance ahead of the 2012 elections, his move cannot be considered overly surprising (Blanco).

**Fractious Alliances: Conclusions from the Case Study**

The PAN-PRD alliance clearly changed the dynamic of the election in Durango. Instead of a relentless focus on results--a scenario the smaller opposition parties are likely to struggle with, as happened in Chihuahua--the alliance raised issues of democracy and accountability, forcing the PRI to go on the defensive. For the most part, the alliance was able to agree on moderate or unaligned candidates, a number of whom went on to win seats and move the state towards democracy.

However, the litany of ills plaguing the Durango alliances casts a rather negative light on the whole process. Despite some substantial gains in representation, the alliance largely proved unable to hold together. The alliance forced the PAN and PRD to find electable candidates they could agree upon, but many of these politicians felt no loyalty towards a broader coalition. This is not necessarily a loss for Mexican democracy; the mere disruption of PRI hegemony can erode the sense of inevitability and change the dynamic of future races, and there is something to be said for politicians remaining loyal to their particular ideologies. But it is fairly clear that several alliance politicians had no intention to promote democracy, as is clearly shown by the return of many former PRI members to their original party after running under the alliance.

In many ways, the Durango experience shows just how powerful the PRI still is in many of the nation’s states. In districts where the best candidates available to the alliance were renegade members of the PRI, alliances did little to shake up the status quo. Though these
candidates may have been less objectionable to the more staunchly ideological wings of the PAN and PRD than a member of the other party, the end result offers little hope for democratic development. Unsurprisingly, moderate candidates from the stronger opposition party within a given electoral district appear to be the most successful. But such candidates are not always easy to find, particularly in the greatest PRI strongholds, and alliances do not offer a quick fix in such cases. The road to democracy can be agonizingly slow, and it may require multiple election cycles for change to come to fruition.

This observation begs an obvious question: do the democratic gains created by PAN-PRD alliances continue beyond the initial union? Or do the weaknesses of the alliances outlined in this case study drive voters back towards the PRI, either because they believe it cannot be supplanted, or out of frustration with the weakness of the opposition?
6. CAN THE ALLIANCES ENDURE?

Having established a positive relationship between PAN-PRD alliances and opposition gains but also finding reasons to doubt the depth of democratic progress in a case study of an alliance, this thesis now ventures to comment on the staying power of these coalitions. As there have not yet been any statewide elections in Durango, Hidalgo, Puebla, Quintana Roo, or Sinaloa since the alliance first formed, these states are left aside. The remaining seven cases are summarized here in Table 5:

Table 5. Staying Power of Democratic Gains Made by Allied, or Once-Allied, Opposition Parties in Subsequent Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coahuila (1999)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nayarit (1999)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>0.84%</td>
<td>7.50%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chiapas (2000)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>13.54%</td>
<td>8.43%</td>
<td>Y, Twice</td>
<td>Y(both)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yucatán (2001)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>13.21%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colima (2003)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>-3.13%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chihuahua (2004)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>-6.61%</td>
<td>2.24%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oaxaca (2004)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>2.10%</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y(both)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Alliance Median</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Alliance Median (incl. first year)</td>
<td>7.29</td>
<td>8.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Median for All Elections</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

-“Median” here refers to the median of all elections after the initial alliance, not the median of the aggregate percentages listed in the table.
-In the final column, L=legislature; MP=municipal presidency; “both” means both bodies reached the 60% threshold necessary to be defined as competitive.
-The asterisk (*) in Colima denotes that Colima is only competitive in the municipal presidencies, which had already democratized by the time of the first alliance in 2003. The legislature is not competitive.

All election data comes from the Instituto de Mercadotecnia y Opinión (IMO).
The results offer a mixed view of the alliances over the long term. Despite the largely positive relationships between states at the time of the alliances, these initial results are rarely built upon, and in two cases even reversed themselves completely. The sample size in this table is small enough that particularities within each state can certainly skew the data, and if the elections following the alliances of 2010 and 2011 yield different results, this analysis could appear entirely off-base. But as the case study of Durango illustrates, there is little reason at this point to believe the results will be any different in the future.

This is not an entirely unexpected outcome; it would be unrealistic to expect continued dramatic opposition gains in every election. Once a state attains democratic competitiveness, it would also presumably cease to vary as dramatically as in initial democratizing elections. However, it seems wrong to assume that an initial spurt of democratic euphoria represents a complete transition. The substantial gains in the first election did not always lead to competitiveness.

Table 5 reveals one trend that counters the relationship established in the original data set. Elections for state legislatures, which produced the most robust opposition gains when under the influence of an alliance, mostly swung back towards the PRI or saw the PRI erode at a slower than expected rate. Only Oaxaca and Chiapas, by far the most successful alliance states by nearly any measure, are exceptions. Elections for municipal presidencies, on the other hand, line up very evenly with the national average over the period, suggesting the alliances had little to no enduring effect on the advance of democracy in Mexican municipalities.

Perhaps most tellingly, two state legislatures that were characterized as “democratized” after the initial alliance have since reverted to PRI dominance. In Nayarit, the PRD won thirteen of the state legislature’s eighteen states in the year of the gubernatorial alliance (1999); in the
subsequent election the PRI took back every single seat, and has not dipped below fifteen seats since. Yucatán, which had been competitive before the alliance but saw the opposition win a majority for the first time in the year of the alliance, now has a similarly lopsided legislature. Colima, which attained competitiveness in the election cycle after its alliance, has likewise returned to PRI dominance. While this does not necessarily constitute a “democratic regression”---there were no widespread claims of overt fraud in these elections, and the PRI is perfectly capable of performing very well in democratic contests--the trend bears watching. If the PRI continues to maintain a high level of control over large portions of the country with little alternation, the democratic advances of the past decade could prove illusory, or at the very least proof that the PRI maintains significant advantages over its competitors that not even a brief coalition between opposition parties can unseat.

The relative success in sustaining democratic gains in municipal presidencies when compared to the state legislatures also runs counter to some of this study’s initial findings. Indeed, some of the reasons that make it easier for alliances to create drastic movement in legislatures also make it possible for the PRI to win back its lost seats in equally emphatic fashion. With significantly fewer legislative seats than municipal presidencies at stake in most state elections, change in a handful of seats can make an election look far more momentous than it actually was.

For example, the Durango case outlined in the previous section records a 26.67 percent “democratic gain”---apparently a dramatic shift. But in a legislature that only includes fifteen first-past-the-post seats, wins by four PAN-PRD candidates (one of whom re-joined the PRI within two years of his election) constitute this entire shift. While these victories deserve some recognition for ending a complete PRI monopoly on first-past-the-post seats in the legislature,
they are also so few in number that they may not necessarily represent as profound a shift as they seem to suggest. Indeed, the standard deviation in legislative elections is somewhat larger than in municipal presidency elections, suggesting they are more likely to produce large swings in either direction.

If municipal presidency election results are indeed less prone to drastic shifts, they are likely a more stable and reliable indicator of Mexican democratic development than state legislature elections. Given the somewhat less robust results in municipal elections, these results further temper any initial enthusiasm about the democratizing power of PAN-PRD alliances.
7. COALITION FORMATION, IDENTITY POLITICS, AND ALLIANCES

Oaxaca and Chiapas

Despite this bleak outlook, two exceptional cases stand out as examples of successful democratization through alliance formation. The repeated alliances in Oaxaca and Chiapas—in all races in 2004 and 2010 in Oaxaca, and in the 2000 gubernatorial race and 2004 and 2010 lower-level elections—are perfectly normal in many ways; they have been fraught with infighting and difficulties just like the other PAN-PRD unions, and as in many other states, the disappearance of the alliances allowed the PRI to regain much of what it had lost (IMO). But the alliances have persevered, and according to a United Nations report conceived as part of a new project studying governance in Mexican states, Oaxaca’s new alliance government deserves much praise for its early steps to strengthen democratic institutions (México Estatal). Under the correct circumstances, it appears alliances can play a role in democratic advancement. The key, then, comes in the ability of the PAN and PRD in these two states to ally with one another more than once. Lasting gains require a lasting commitment from both members of the alliance, as has happened in Oaxaca and Chiapas.

Maps 6 and 7. States of Oaxaca (L) and Chiapas (R).

Sources: “Map of Oaxaca” and “Map of Chiapas,” Explorando México.
The PRD and the Politics of a United Front

A search for commonalities between these two states that other alliance states lack reveals an obvious first point: Oaxaca and Chiapas are the only alliance-forming states in which the PRD, not the PAN, is the leading opposition party. This fact can be spun in any number of ways; PRD members will likely claim it proves they are more effective than their PAN counterparts at holding alliances together, while the PAN leadership might claim it proves they are a more willing minority partner. Some commentators have called the PRD more open to political cooperation, though this flexibility certainly does not extend to all corners of the party (Aguilar organizaciones 159).

The history of the PRD may in fact lend itself to more effective coalition formation. While the PAN long sustained itself on a core group of supporters and never really branched out to incorporate other movements, the PRD itself was born out of an alliance between left-leaning elements of the PRI, scattered small leftist parties, and social democrats in search of a political movement. Its relatively late foundation to some degree freed the party from the corporatist mindset that predominated in Mexican politics after the 1910 Revolution; by the time the party came together in 1988, civil society enjoyed noticeably more freedom than it had beforehand (Aguilar organizaciones 228). While many of these groups share certain basic political assumptions, they are hardly a monolithic bloc, as the many corrientes within the party demonstrate. As a party accustomed to considerable infighting, the PRD is probably more ready to absorb yet another competing voice—that of the PAN—than the more unified PAN could ever manage. The very factor that renders the PRD relatively weak on the national level may help keep it afloat in the states in which it forms alliances.
**Indigeneity, Fragmentation, and Democracy**

The PRD’s success in Oaxaca and Chiapas may also merely be evidence of more significant underlying factors that lead to alliance formation in these states. Though calculations are not entirely clear due to widespread underreporting, Oaxaca and Chiapas are two of the three Mexican states with the highest indigenous populations (Fox). Many of their citizens of mixed race also identify more strongly with their indigenous roots than their counterparts in other regions of the country, owing to the enduring influence of Maya, Mixtec, and Zapotec cultures on these states (Anaya Muñoz 587). During the era of PRI hegemony, indigenous identity was largely ignored, as the government lumped most of the rural poor into the category of *campesino* (peasant) (Anaya Muñoz 586). But Mexico’s democratization came at a time of increasing identity politics throughout Latin America, and as these communities looked to play a role in both local and national politics, cultural identification proved a strong base for political action (Yashar 23). Indigenous communities were among the first areas to turn against the PRI in both states, as impoverished groups frustrated by decades of neglect looked for new alternatives (Anaya Muñoz 598).

Given the demographics of these fractious, often poverty-stricken communities, they have been unable to coalesce into a single party with a common political vision. Though they often share a general diagnosis of the ills plaguing their communities, they disagree as to the points of emphasis that a single sympathetic political party (such as the PRD) might adopt (Hernández Castillo and Furio 124). Furthermore, the initial success of some PRD candidates led some *caciques* to simply switch from the PRI to the PRD. Such false democratic transitions likely fueled turns to other, smaller parties, such as the PT and PVEM, both of which poll quite well in Oaxaca and Chiapas compared to their national averages (Hernández Castillo and Furio
Despite the fragmented state of politics in Oaxaca and Chiapas, the scattered parties supported by indigenous and other marginalized groups still tend to have more in common with one another than they do with the PRI. As a result, coalitions have become more than an option for defeating the PRI; they are a necessity for the disparate voices to gain any stake in the national debate. It comes as no surprise that minor parties perform better in Chiapas than in any other state, and that another state with a very large indigenous population, Veracruz, once held a round of elections for municipal presidencies in which sixty parties, or combinations of parties,
competed for seats (IMO). Such scattered voices require some form of coalition government if they aim to have any influence beyond the local level, and though a role in a fractious alliance may take the edge off a political movement’s platform, it may be preferable to a position managed from within a hegemonic party.

The dulling effects of such coalitions on ideology may also help explain the PAN’s willingness to join the alliance. Even though the PAN has little interest in the indigenous platform, it likely finds it easier to work with a more fragmented coalition than it might if a powerful, unified PRD were speaking for these groups (Hernández Castillo and Furio 118). The alliances in these states seem to represent a more pure form of grassroots politics, instead of the brokered unions seen in some states. Their organic formation makes them more sustainable than an alliance created from on high, but if such fragmented communities are necessary for successful long-term alliances, they will have little utility beyond a select few Mexican states.

**Following in the Footsteps?**

The success of the Oaxaca and Chiapas alliances invites a search for other states sharing similar circumstances. Another state with a large indigenous population, Yucatán, also formed a successful gubernatorial alliance in 2001, and the election produced modest opposition gains in municipal presidencies and PAN gains in the already competitive state legislature (IMO). However, an inability to sustain the alliance allowed the PRI to regain many of the municipalities it had lost. Unlike Oaxaca and Chiapas, the PRD has always been a minor actor in Yucatán, supporting the theory that alliances are more sustainable when the PRD is the majority partner. But with only one remaining state (Tabasco) featuring both continuous PRI rule and the PRD as the second major actor, opportunities to further test the importance of majority partner status will be limited.
Puebla and Hidalgo, two of the most recent states to create alliances, also deserve careful scrutiny. While indigenous peoples do not make up quite as large of a portion of the population in these states as in Chiapas or Oaxaca, they still constitute a sizeable chunk of the electorate (see Table 6) (Fox). If the PAN-PRD alliances in these states can show some signs of resilience, they will support the theory that more diverse states are more likely to uphold alliances. And though Veracruz has yet to attempt a PAN-PRD coalition on a state-wide level, the PRI’s narrow margin of victory over the PAN in 2010 makes it a prime candidate for unity when it next elects a governor in 2016 (IMO). An alliance in Veracruz would certainly support the diversity theory, and the state deserves special attention in the coming years.
8. CONCLUSIONS

In Summary

The alliances formed between the right-leaning Partido Acción National (PAN) and left-wing Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) against the hegemonic Partido Revolucionario Institutional (PRI) in numerous Mexican states since 1999 represent a unique coalition of strange bedfellows in the name of democracy. Though Mexico achieved democracy at the national level when the PRI lost the 2000 presidential election, PRI “fiefdoms” endured in several states around the country. Powerful state and local bosses continued to control numerous regions in a paternalistic manner, forcing opposition parties to try new strategies to break up the PRI monopoly on power. This thesis analyzed alliances employed by opposition parties in their efforts to break down PRI hegemony and create a more democratic society at some of the lowest levels of government.

The PAN and PRD overcame their ideological differences and ran joint candidates in thirteen different states between 1999 and 2011. Alliances successfully dislodged the PRI from the governorship of six Mexican states, and alliances were positively correlated with above-average opposition gains in most cases. Most of these correlations proved statistically significant, suggesting they can indeed play a significant role in a democratic transition.

However, a case study of a typical PAN-PRD coalition in Durango raised questions about these results. The alliance struggled to field candidates it could agree upon, and numerous officials elected under the alliance banner have since defected to the PRI. Though the alliance candidates were able to make democracy a real campaign issue--something not easily achieved in non-alliance elections--the enthusiasm they generated appeared not to last long beyond
election day. A subsequent study of all elections following an initial PAN-PRD alliance revealed further democratic consolidation in only a handful of states.

The alliance states that have made the most significant democratic gains, Oaxaca and Chiapas, share one obvious characteristic: they are the only two states in which the PAN and PRD have allied more than once. These repeated alliances have continued to strengthen their constituent parties and helped bring democracy to the southeastern part of the country. The ongoing success of the coalition in Oaxaca and Chiapas is likely rooted in two features unique to these two states. First, the history of the PRD, the majority partner in the coalition, suggests it may be more adept at coalition formation than the PAN, which has been the majority partner in every other alliance attempt. Second, Oaxaca and Chiapas are ethnically fragmented states with large indigenous populations, raising the importance of alliances in tying together disparate groups.

The results of this study suggest PAN-PRD alliances can make some contributions to the Mexican democratic transition, but this conclusion comes with several caveats. The alliances are no substitute for the organic rise of strong opposition parties, particularly in a fairly moderate country where results, not ideology, seem to be the winning pitch in elections. Opposition parties must continue to build up their resources so they can compete with the PRI and be more certain of their ability to deliver on promises once elected. Alliances appear most successful in states in which the PRD is the largest opposition party, and in which there is a large indigenous population. Though there are only a few such states that remain undemocratic by the definition set out in this thesis, the alliance could prove a valuable tool in these cases.

**What Next for Mexican Democracy?**

On a broader note, it is important to remember that democracies do not consolidate
overnight. Even if the 2010 alliance victories look less impressive in retrospect, they are still proof that Mexican voters demand some level of accountability from their leaders (Krauze). At a time when parts of the nation are under serious stress due to an ongoing war between drug cartels squabbling for territory and Mexican security forces, it is perhaps only natural that voters turn to the party of order and stability. If and when the battles grow less heated, voter concerns about order may fade away and ideology may again return to the forefront, empowering both opposition parties, as occurred in the 2006 presidential race.

Though this thesis has been critical of the PRI and its authoritarian excesses, it is also important to remember that it, too, can play a key role in a democratic transition. Critics have every right to be skeptical of the PRI’s claims that it has changed, but given the evidence that many old methods of control no longer work (Díaz-Cayeros et al. 230), the PRI will be forced to prove its mettle when in office. Even a PRI return to the presidency in July 2012—a prospect polls suggest is quite likely (Encuestas)—would by no means invalidate the gradual democratic advances of the past decade. The true measure of democracy would come in the following years, when the public passes judgment on the PRI at the ballot box.

The PAN and the PRD face continued obstacles in their efforts to gain traction. After twelve years in the presidency, the PAN has enjoyed several triumphs but also learned of the many burdens that come with power. The party held Mexico’s first ever primary election for a presidential candidate in 2012, a democratic advance that produced the country’s first ever female presidential candidate, Josefina Vázquez Mota (Figueroa). Such an open process is a positive development for Mexican democracy, and the other parties would do well to replicate it instead of relying on party bosses making selections from within. The PRD, routed from power in all but a handful of southern states and Mexico City, must confront even larger challenges in
its struggle for national prominence. Polls suggest PRD presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador will fare worse in the 2012 presidential election than he did in 2006, suggesting it may be time for the party to explore new strategies and candidates to better promote its platform (Encuestas).

As the PAN and PRD move forward, alliances should remain an option, especially in states still dominated by the PRI. Alliances clearly produce gains for opposition parties, and if the parties find agreeable moderates within their own ranks instead of relying on PRI defectors, future alliances may hold together better than some of the previous attempts. Internal primaries within the alliances could also produce more agreeable candidates.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the PAN-PRD alliances has been the launch of a national dialogue on coalition government. Recognizing the reality of the Mexican politics--a three-party competition in a first-past-the-post system--a group of intellectuals including writer Carlos Fuentes and PRD founder Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas came out in favor of coalition governments in 2011, suggesting such alliances--whatever their constituent parties--are necessary to break up the gridlock in the system (Castillo “Intelectuales”). Other commentators have since sought to temper the enthusiasm for such unions, noting their potential pitfalls (Morales). Still, this seems to be a dialogue worth having, and PAN presidential candidate Josefina Vázquez Mota’s endorsement of the plan suggests it is gaining traction at the highest levels of the major parties (Llegó). Whatever the final verdict on PAN-PRD alliances may be, they have altered the way Mexicans think about politics at all levels, and could lead to even greater changes in the future.

PAN-PRD alliances offer many avenues for future scholarship on Mexican democracy. Deeper case studies of the attempted alliances could better shed light on what allows them to
succeed or fail, and comparing them to anti-authoritarian coalitions in other nations might paint them in a different light. Future studies should reassess the staying power of alliances by including results from the 2010-2011 round of PAN-PRD coalition formation. If Mexico does indeed move toward coalition government on a broader level, there is a wide body of existing scholarship on multiparty systems in many European nations, and much of it could possibly be applied to the Mexican case. There is no shortage of areas for study as Mexico’s democratic project lurches forward, and all of them offer potential insights into the realities of Mexican politics and the possibilities for change in the future.
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