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Voting Rights Abroad in Mexico

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Abstract

This research note provides a tentative analysis of the causes and consequences of Mexico's political-electoral reform in 2014 with a special focus on the extension of voting rights to Mexicans living abroad. The reform significantly modified the rules and procedures for electing and forming a government in Mexico. Specifically, I am presenting the following arguments. Democratization via increasing electoral competition promoted the reform of extending voting rights abroad as a way of enhancing the democratic representation of Mexican migrants in foreign countries. On the other hand, the usage of postal and internet voting in a context of weak monitoring mechanisms entails the risk of "exporting" clientelism beyond borders, because politicians may have a greater incentive to cultivate support from migrants to survive competitive elections. Since clientelism erodes electoral integrity, the reform of voting rights in Mexico, which was driven by increasing electoral competition, is a double-edged sword. Based on primary and secondary sources, I provide partial evidence to support these claims and propose a viable empirical strategy to rigorously verify the validity of them.

Key words: clientelism, substantive voting rights, Mexico, democratization, voting rights abroad, the 2014 political-electoral reform

1. Introduction

Mexico implemented a political-electoral reform in 2014, which significantly changed the way of selecting and forming a government, in tandem with the constitutional reform that amended the clause defining the political rights of Mexican citizens. This reform extended the voting rights of Mexicans living abroad, which was expected to have a significant impact not only on internal politics in Mexico but also on external politics, involving Mexican communities and public policy-making in the United States (hereafter US). Despite such a broad political influence across borders, few scholarly attempts have been made to explain the causes of this reform and studies on the consequences of the reform are even scarcer. This paper aims to fill this gap and provide a preliminary analysis of Mexico's 2014 political-electoral reform by addressing the following specific questions: Who demanded and initiated the reform? Why did competing political parties agree to change the status quo? What are the political consequences of this drastic change in Mexico's political and electoral systems?

This paper argues that all the major political parties voted in favor of the reform because the extension of voting rights to Mexicans abroad allows them to mobilize support from migrant communities in order to survive increasingly competitive elections. Furthermore, I suggest that as a consequence of the reform, extending voting rights through the introduction of postal and internet voting is likely to induce clientelist exchanges between party brokers and Mexican migrants, because Mexico's authorities are unable to monitor such individualized transactions beyond the border. The latter claim should be further verified by a rigorous empirical test. Yet this plausible political consequence may erode the quality of Mexico's emerging democracy, instead of improving it, which was the original objective of the 2014 reform.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. The second section presents an overview of Mexico's political-electoral reform in 2014 by focusing on the modification of the electoral law regulating overseas voting. The third section examines the *causes* of the reform, and demonstrates how the voting rights of Mexican migrants abroad have expanded since the 1980s; it shows that the dual incentives of politicians—both democracy-enhancing efforts and electoral calculation—on the one

hand, and an increasing demand from migrants on the other, became a driving force for the reform. The fourth section provides a tentative analysis of the possible *consequences* of the reform, implying that encouraging postal and internet voting in order to increase migrants' turnout may induce clientelism to spread beyond the US-Mexican border in a context of weak monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms. The final section concludes by suggesting an empirical strategy to analyze the cross-border expansion of clientelism as a consequence of the 2014 reform.

2. The 2014 Political-Electoral Reform and Extension of Voting Rights Abroad

2.1. Backgrounds

The process of democratization in Mexico has been characterized by a gradual transition from electoral authoritarianism to a multiparty system. Before the change of power in 2000, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, PRI) had ruled the country for seventy-one years. This authoritarian regime led by a single dominant party gradually expanded political participation and electoral competition through a series of political and electoral reforms beginning in the 1970s. Then, Mexico achieved the transition to democracy by allowing the change of power from the PRI to the National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*, PAN) following the 2000 presidential election. Since then, continuous attempts have been made to improve the quality of elections, and thereby democracy, by taking step-by-step measures to assure a free and fair electoral process.

Despite these constant changes, citizens' trust in government has declined, due to widespread corruption among policy makers, electoral fraud and vote buying, and the inability of government to sanction these illegal practices. In response to a growing popular discontent with the current political system, further efforts were undertaken as soon as President Enrique Peña Nieto (hereafter EPN) from the PRI assumed office in December 2012. The PRI, PAN, and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, PRD) signed the "Pacto por Mexico." It was an agreement on cooperation among the major political parties for the purpose of avoiding legislative immobility and effectively implementing economic and political-electoral reform.

Under this “Pacto,” the incumbent PRI had to make a compromise with opposition parties to pass reforms they were pursuing: the PRI initially opposed the opposition-led agenda for political-electoral reform, but then supported the reform in order to gain the PAN’s support which was necessary to pass fiscal and energy sector reforms (Wood 2013).

2.2. Key Issues of the Political-Electoral Reform in 2014

Initially, the PAN and the PRD took the initiative in putting the political-electoral reform on the legislative agenda, whereas the PRI opposed it by claiming that it would engender political corruption. After an intense legislative debate and several modifications to the contents, all the political parties approved the reform in May, 2014. The main points of the reform were as follows (Gobierno de la República undated)¹:

- Coalition governments: the president is able to form coalition governments with multiple political parties represented in the legislature;
- Consecutive reelection: for the purpose of strengthening electoral accountability, federal deputies can be elected in up to three consecutive elections, whereas senators can only be reelected once. Mayors and local representatives can also be reelected;
- Independent candidates: they are now able to run for elected offices by collecting a specified number of signatures from supporters;
- Transformation of the Federal Electoral Institute (*Instituto Federal Electoral, IFE*) to the National Electoral Institute (*Instituto Nacional Electoral, INE*): the INE is in charge of organizing both federal and local elections as well as the elections of political party leaders;
- Gender parity: political parties should ensure that 50% of the candidates for federal and local legislators should be female.
- Voting Rights of Mexicans Living Abroad: the reform promotes electoral participation by and enhanced representation of Mexicans living abroad by allowing

¹ The research center of the Federal Electoral Tribunal (Centro de Capacitación Judicial Electoral, el Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación) has created a database about the 2014 electoral reform which provides official information about legislative proceedings and other related documents (<http://portales.te.gob.mx/consultareforma2014/>).

them to (1) apply for and obtain a voter registration card outside of Mexico, (2) choose between postal (absentee) voting, electronic or internet voting, or voting at embassies and consulates, and (3) vote in presidential and senatorial elections. They are also eligible to vote in state governors' elections, depending on the conditions stipulated by the state constitutions.

The PAN and PRD had already attempted to introduce some of these changes as early as the 1990s, but they had to wait until 2014. The change of political climate accelerated the reform process: democratization. When Mexico was experiencing the transition to multiparty democracy, there emerged a growing demand to extend voting rights to migrant communities in the US. Since the 1990s, Mexican politicians have been pressed by those migrant communities and organizations to facilitate their participation in Mexico's national elections (Guitierrez, Batalova, and Terrazas 2012). The next section examines how migrant communities outside of Mexico articulated this demand for electoral reform and how politicians responded to those increasing voices from abroad.

3. The Causes of Reform: Extending Voting Rights to Mexicans Living Abroad

In order to explore the causes of the reform extending voting rights to Mexicans living abroad, this section firstly gives a profile of Mexicans living outside of Mexico, especially in the US, and their efforts to build migrant communities in the US while retaining ties with their home communities in Mexico, and how the Mexican government responded to a growing flow of migration toward the US². Secondly, the section discusses the obstacles which prevented them from participating in elections. Thirdly, it demonstrates that democratization as measured by increasing electoral competition in Mexico gave politicians an incentive to support the reform extending voting rights to Mexicans living abroad for the purpose of mobilizing migrants' support for their electoral campaigns.

² The ups and downs of migration from Mexico to the US are extensively discussed in FitzGerald and Alarcón (2013) and O'Neill (2013).

3.1. Connecting Mexican Migrants and Government

Who are Mexican Migrants in the US?

Given that a large portion of the population lives abroad, it is not surprising that the Mexican government highlighted the expansion of voting rights to Mexicans residing overseas as a priority issue for the 2014 political-electoral reform. According to the INE, in 2004, 11,913,989 Mexicans lived outside of the country, accounting for more than 10% of the total population, and about 98% of those were in the US (INE 2016b). Overall, it would be safe to say that over 10% of Mexicans were living in the US, more than 50% of them illegally (ibid.).

Furthermore, using the 2010 statistics, Mexicans of voting age in the US exhibited certain characteristics (Gutierrez, Batalova, and Terrazas 2012)³. First, 10.6 million out of the total 11.7 million were 18 years old or older. Second, almost half of those adult Mexicans lived in the states of California and Texas. Third, six out of ten Mexicans had not graduated from a high school. Fourth, about three out of four had limited English-language proficiency. Fifth, more than one-third of Mexican-born males worked in sectors such as construction, extraction, and transportation. Finally, more than 62% of them were living in low-income households. All these data suggest that Mexican migrants in the US live under economically unstable and vulnerable conditions.

A fundamental question which arises is why they stay in the US despite these unfavorable living conditions. The reason is simply economic: the average per-capita income gap between the US and Mexico. In tandem with a growing flow of migrants to the US, remittances to Mexico increased from 6.6 billion US dollars in 2000 to 26.1 billion in 2008 (Alba 2010). Although the economic recession in the US reduced the level of remittances after 2008, this remains the primary reason for Mexican migration to the US.

Migrant Communities and Network Building from “Below”

The next question which follows is whose interests underlie the extension of voting

³ The data used here relates to 2010.

rights abroad. The analysis below suggests that despite geographical distance, Mexican migrants in the US are tied to a community of origin through sending remittances to their families there, thus maintaining an interest and a desire to participate in the politics of Mexico. However, it took a while for them to organize themselves and take collective action in building networks with other migrants in the US and the government in Mexico.

Jane Bayes and Anna Gonzales explain why in the early years Mexican migrants in the US did not hold a shared identity (Bayes and Gonzales 2011: 21–22). First, the immigrants from Mexico had “no clear collective ideology to unite them” (ibid.: 21). Second, their perception of Mexico’s government was not positive; they saw it as corrupt and undemocratic (ibid.: 22). Third, immigrants from Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries were all simply categorized as “Hispanic” by the US, which may have prevented a shared identity from growing among Mexicans (ibid.).

On the other hand, since the 1980s, there has been an increasing number of hometown associations (HTAs), which are built on “the social networks that migrants from the same town or village in Mexico establish in their new U.S. communities,” primarily in urban areas such as Los Angeles and Chicago. The members which are called *clubes de horiundos* attempted to improve the living standards of the communities “of both origin (in Mexico) and residence (in the U.S.)” (Rivera-Salgado 2006a: 5, italics in original). Afterwards, hometown associations (*Clubes*) and home state federations (*Federaciones*) increased their influence as dominant organizations among those migrants from Mexico (ibid.: 6). Through these organizations, Mexican migrants could also build networks and collectively strengthen ties with their hometown communities in Mexico.

As Table 1 shows, the total number of hometown associations increased from 441 in 1998 to 623 in 2003 (ibid.: 7). The state of Zacatecas is particularly noteworthy. More specifically, Ochoa O’Leary states that the Zacatecan Federation is “one of the largest and most active of the HTA organizations and includes approximately sixty local clubs that stretch across the United States”; these “individual clubs mobilize the voluntary time and financial resources of hundreds of fellow migrants from the locality

to raise money for social infrastructure projects, to fund sports, scholarships and other philanthropic needs” (Ochoa O’Leary 2013: 330). In addition, through sending remittances to their original communities, they provide support not only to their own family at home but also to regional development projects in those communities (ibid.).

Table 1. Geographic Distribution of Origins of Mexican HTAs (1998-2003)

States of Origin in Mexico	1998	2003
Aguascalientes	3	1
Baja California	1	1
Chihuahua	6	10
Coahuila	2	2
Colima	1	4
Distrito Federal	3	6
Durango	19	20
Mexico	6	11
Guerrero	23	5
Guanajuato	40	48
Hidalgo	4	11
Jalisco	74	100
Michoacan	19	51
Morelos	0	5
Nayarit	22	27
Nuevo Leon	2	4
Oaxaca	22	36
Puebla	12	34
Queretaro	1	0
San Luis Potosi	39	23
Sinaloa	12	17
Sonora	2	5
Tamaulipas	2	3
Tlaxcala	7	13
Veracruz	2	12
Yucatan	4	2
Zacatecas	113	126
Total	441	623

Source: Rivera-Salgado (2006 :7).

Mexican Government as a Catalyst for Network Building from “Above”

While the migrant organizations such as the HTAs and clubs played a crucial role in uniting Mexican migrants spreading across the US, the Mexican government intended to serve as a catalyst for building networks between migrants in the US and their hometowns in Mexico, motivated primarily by strategic concerns (González Guitiérrez 1999: 5, cited in Bayes and Gonzales 2011: 21; Ochoa O’Leary 2014: 331). First, migrant communities in the US had a high value as a market to which Mexican products were exported. Second, the remittances from the migrant communities to Mexico were “an important source of foreign currency for Mexico (second only to oil)” (ibid.). Third, the Mexican government felt it should take responsibility to protect the human rights of Mexican migrants. And fourth, it was important to establish a good relationship with “Mexican Americans to lobby the United States government to make decisions favorable to Mexico” (ibid.).

Although the governmental effort to strengthen US-Mexico ties started in the early 1990s, President Vicente Fox from the PAN significantly advanced public policies targeting Mexican migrants in the US as soon as he assumed office in 2000. For instance, in 1999, the Mexican government launched the 3×1 program: “for every dollar of immigrant remittances for community infrastructure projects, an additional three dollars is matched by combining the contributions for the projects provided from the three levels of the government: the state, federal, and municipal” (Ochoa O’Leary 2014: 330-331). During the Fox administration, in 2003, the Ministry of International Relations created the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (*Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior*, IME) with the explicit purpose of building networks of migrants’ organizations and activists in the US (Rivera-Salgado 2006b: 31).

In addition, the IME has an Advisory Council which is known as CC-IME (*Consejo Consultivo del Instituto de los Mexicanos en Exterior*, CC-IME). The CC-IME is composed of leaders of Mexican migrant communities in the US (Bayes and Gonzalez 2008: 37; Rivera-Salgado 2006b: 31), and is “a remarkable and unique transnational organization of community leaders of Mexican origin or descent, organized by the IME,” and “charged with providing the Mexican government with

advice and suggestions concerning Mexico's policies toward" Mexican migrant communities (Bayes and Gonzales 2011: 23).

Boosted by these government-led efforts to build Mexican migrant communities, Mexican migrants in the US became organized over time, articulated their demand for extending voting rights abroad, and exerted pressure on the Mexican government (Ochoa O'Leary 2014: 331).

3.2. External Voting Schemes and Low Voter Turnout

Given a growing demand for voting rights by Mexican migrants in the US, it is quite puzzling that their voter turnout has been strikingly low in the 2006 and 2012 federal elections, for which external voting was introduced (Courtney Smith 2008). However, the following features of voting regulations have been identified which made overseas voting costly and troublesome (Gutierrez, Batalova, and Terrazas 2012: INE 2016b).

First, the voter ID card must have been issued in a national territory of Mexico. This means that Mexicans who left Mexico without the ID card have little chance of participating in elections, because traveling back to Mexico to obtain the ID card would be very costly. Second, Mexicans living abroad should register for the Registry of Electoral Residents Abroad (*Lista Nominal de Elecciones Residentes en el Extranjero*, LNERE) prior to elections. Third, the application for the registration and their ballot papers should be sent to the IFE by registered mail. Meeting these two conditions is also costly and time-consuming. Fourth, political parties and candidates should not campaign outside of Mexico, suggesting that Mexicans living abroad have the disadvantage of being uninformed about election issues and candidates, which are necessary to make a reasonable choice in voting.

Due to these high costs and the complexities associated with external voting rules, in the 2006 federal elections, the unit cost of casting an external vote rose to 8,285.29 Mexican pesos, whereas that of internal voting was merely 39 (Espinosa Valle 2013). As for voter turnout, 59% of voters in Mexico went to vote, but only 1% of Mexicans abroad did (Gutierrez, Batalova, and Terrazas 2012). For the 2012 federal elections, the IFE succeeded in reducing the voting costs and improving participation:

voter participation increased by 23.8% and the voting cost was decreased by 54.49%, a significant reduction compared to the previous federal election. Nevertheless, these changes are not sufficient, requiring further efforts to enhance the voting rights of Mexicans living abroad.

3.3. A Road to Politicization? Democratization and Extension of Voting Rights Abroad

As discussed in the previous subsection, the level of electoral participation of Mexican migrants in the US has been low. This means that migrant communities are separated from electoral pressure from the sending country, and not directly subject to electoral considerations or calculations from competing candidates or political parties. However, as a transition to democracy advanced in Mexico and electoral competition intensified, politicians and parties became more interested in cultivating support from seemingly “depoliticized” migrant voters.

Referring to the periodization strategy employed by Robert Courtney Smith, the following analysis is divided into four periods: (1) the period before 2000, when the PAN’s Vicente Fox assumed the presidency, (2) the period between 2000 and 2006 during the Fox administration, during which the migrant law was passed in 2005, (3) the period between 2006 and 2012 during the Calderón administration, and (4) the period after 2012, when the PRI’s EPN took office and enacted the 2014 political-electoral reform (Courtney Smith 2008). Throughout these periods, the PRI’s hegemony gradually eroded, as suggested by the decline in both their vote and seat shares in the federal elections, and three major parties—the PAN, PRI, PRD—competed with each other as viable alternatives in political arena (Table 2). This increasing electoral competition is expected to give each party a greater incentive to mobilize support from Mexicans living abroad for political survival, as a consequence of which the reform of extending voting rights to those abroad advanced.

Prior to 2000: Unrealized Demands for Voting Rights

As the previous section argued, both Mexican migrants and the government showed

interest in migrant participation in national and local elections and thus influencing policy making in the country (Ochoa O’Leary 2014: 330). However, although both sides made

Table 2. Changes in Seat Shares in the Elections for Deputies (1988–2012)

Legislature	Period	Vote Share (%)					Seat Share (%)			
		PAN	PRI	PRD	ENP	Margin	PAN	PRI	PRD	ENP
LIV	1988-1991	18.0	51.3	4.4	3.16	0.32	20.2	52.6	3.8	3.00
LV	1991-1994	17.7	64.2	8.3	2.39	0.40	17.8	64.2	8.2	2.21
LVI	1994-1997	25.8	52.6	16.7	2.88	0.21	23.8	60.0	14.2	2.29
LVII	1997-2000	26.6	39.0	25.7	3.42	0.16	23.6	47.8	25.0	2.86
LVIII	2000-2003	39.2	37.8	19.1	3.00	0.15	41.4	42.0	10.4	2.78
LIX	2003-2006	32.8	39.2	18.8	4.65	0.15	30.0	44.8	19.4	3.03
LX	2006-2009	34.4	29.0	29.8	3.40	0.14	41.2	21.2	24.8	3.57
LXI	2009-2012	28.0	36.8	12.2	3.83	0.13	28.6	47.4	14.2	3.04

Source: IFE, Center of Research for Development (*Centro de Investigación para el Desarrollo*, CIDAC), Casar 2002, p. 127.

Note: ENP stands for the effective number of parties, which means parties with substantive influence over party competition (Laakso and Taagepera 1979).

explicit efforts to organize Mexican migrant communities in the US, until recently, these attempts had not been part of a political agenda for expanding their voting rights. This is primarily because most of the migrants in the early years came from the states of Michocán, Zacatecas, Guanajuato, and Jalisco, where the opposition parties, especially the leftist PRD, were strong relative to the PRI (Muños Pedraza 2016: 182). For this reason, the PRI initially opposed the reform of voting rights for Mexican migrants.

However, after the opposition gained strength in the late 1990s and the PRI rejected the opposition’s proposal for a constitutional change that promoted voting abroad in the late 1990s, “pro-vote movements” emerged in three ways. First, opposition parties and civil society proposed a “wide-ranging reform to Mexican

electoral law enabling migrants to vote from abroad.” Second, the demand for voting rights from the US-based migrant organizations led to the introduction of “the right to vote from abroad and to stand for office” at local levels. Third, migrant leaders successfully incorporated the expansion of the rights of Mexican migrants living abroad into a broader agenda of democratization (Courtney Smith 2008: 716). However, these movements had to wait until the advent of the PAN’s Fox administration in 2000 to see their efforts bear fruit.

The Fox Administration (2000–2006): A Big Step Forward

As soon as President Fox from the PAN assumed his presidency, he actively promoted measures to expand the voting rights, more broadly representation of Mexican migrants living abroad. In the 2000 federal election, the PRI lost the presidency for the first time in seventy-one years, which meant that increasing electoral competition created a credible threat to the PRI’s political survival. Thus, all the major political parties—PAN, PRI, PRD—might have a greater incentive to cultivate support from Mexican migrants abroad for electoral victory.

As for the achievements of President Fox, the establishment of the IME and CC-IME is noteworthy in that it significantly advanced the building of networks between Mexico and migrant communities in the US. Furthermore, he created the Presidential Office for Mexicans Living Abroad (*Oficina Presidencial para Mexicanos en el Extranjero*, OPME), which gave migrants “privileged access to the President” and gave support for remittances, business promotion, investment, and distribution of Mexican goods in the US market (Bayes and Gonzales 2011: 22). In addition, the Political Commission of the CC-IME played an active role in promoting the reform to extend voting rights abroad as well as US migration reform (ibid.: 29–30). Most importantly, supported by favorable public opinion, the law allowing migrants to vote from abroad was finally passed in 2005, one year before the first PAN administration ended (Courtney Smith 2008: 725–726; Délano 2011: 220–221).

The Calderón Administration (2006–2012): High Demand, Low Turnout

The 2006 presidential election was the first one in which Mexican migrants abroad could participate. Despite the high demand for the extension of voting rights from abroad, the turnout was surprisingly low: less than 1% of eligible voters participated. This low participation rate was due to the high costs and complexities associated with voting rules and procedures, as discussed in the previous section: obtaining the voter ID card in Mexico, sending an application for LNERE and ballots to Mexico by registered mail, and difficulty in obtaining information about parties and candidates because of the prohibition of electoral campaigning abroad. However, the election results of the 2006 presidential election would provide an incentive to politicians to further extend voting rights abroad and mobilize support from migrant Mexicans for two reasons.

First, the 2006 election was a very tight race between two candidates, Felipe Calderón Hinojosa from the rightist PAN and André Manuel López Obrador (hereafter AMLO) from the leftist PRD. Calderón won the race by a small margin, and the difference between their vote totals was only 243,934 (less than 1% of total votes cast) (Gutierrez, Batalova, and Terrazas 2012). This suggests that if more migrants had voted, their votes would have changed the election results and resulted in a victory for AMLO, because migrants traditionally supported the PRD. Thus, even if the turnout was low, Mexican migrants abroad were expected to have a substantial impact on Mexican elections (*ibid.*).

Second, as Table 3 shows, the voting patterns significantly differed between Mexican voters inside and outside Mexico. For the 2012 presidential election, the votes in Mexico split evenly between the two strongest candidates, and the PRI candidate, Roberto Madrazo, had a slim chance to win. On the other hand, the vote share of PAN's Calderón was much greater among the migrant voters living abroad. This means that he won the race with a wider margin in the US than in Mexico⁴. Furthermore, while AMLO won much the same percentage of the votes among external and internal voters, migrants' support for the PRI was much lower abroad than in Mexico.

⁴ Calderón's victory was brought about by the incumbent advantage of the PAN (Espinoza Valle 2013). President Fox, his predecessor, actively promoted greater representation and extension of the voting rights of Mexican migrants in the US.

Given this decisive impact of migrant voters on the election results, all the major parties may have a greater incentive to mobilize external votes to win increasingly competitive elections by further extending voting rights abroad. In order to increase migrants' participation in the 2012 election, the IFE also loosened conditions required for external voting by allowing the use of certain expired voter ID cards, disseminating information on how to renew voter ID cards, and covering the cost of mailing the LNERE application and ballots to Mexico.

Table 3. Comparison of the 2006 and 2012 Presidential Election Results (%)

The 2006 Election		
Party (Candidate)	External Vote	Internal Vote
PAN (Felipe Calderón)	57.40	35.89
PRI (Roberto Madrazo)	4.10	22.36
PRD (André López Obrador)	33.47	35.31
The 2012 Election		
Party (Candidate)	External Vote	Internal Vote
PAN (Josefina Vázquez Mota)	41.80	25.39
PRI (Enrique Peña Nieto)	13.69	28.94
PRD (André López Obrador)	29.50	19.38

Source: INE.

Note: For the 2012 election, vote share obtained by forming a coalition with other parties is not included in calculating each party's vote share.

After 2012: A New PRI President and the Political-Electoral Reform in 2014

Despite politicians' growing concern about low turnout and the IFE's efforts to boost it, the turnout did increase, but remained low in the 2012 election. More specifically, the IFE received a greater number of absentee-ballot requests from abroad (4,938 more than in 2006 election) but this increase "was not a significant improvement given the changes implemented by the IFE to facilitate the registration process and increase

participation” (Gutierrez, Batalova, and Terrazas 2012).

Furthermore, the voting patterns significantly differed between Mexican voters inside and outside Mexico in the 2012 presidential election as well. Although the PRI Candidate, EPN, won the presidency in 2012 in Mexico, his migrant vote share was the smallest of the three PAN, PRI, and PRD candidates. This result may have incentivized EPN and the PRI to support the reform of extending voting rights abroad. As previously mentioned, the “Pacto por México” gave an immediate impetus to implementing the reform and eliminating obstacles to voting from abroad.

The movements for reform developed in both government and civil society. The legislative proposal was initially presented by the opposition parties, primarily by the PRD (Comisión de Gobernación, Cámara de Diputados 2014). Migrant leaders, organizations, and activists in the US kept articulating demands for the extension of voting rights abroad. Furthermore, in 2012, the IFE created the Expert Committee to elaborate a concrete proposal for reform, the results of which were submitted to the legislature (IFE 2013)⁵. In the course of lively legislative debates and negotiations, the PRI, which initially opposed the reform, supported the proposals submitted primarily by the PRD and PAN. In the end, on 23 May 2014, the General Law of Electoral Institutions and Procedures (*Ley General de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales*, LEGIPE) was issued.

The new law eliminated the obstacles to voting from abroad, modifying the requirements for voter ID cards, application for registration, voting choice, and so on⁶. The major changes are summarized in Table 4, comparing the old and new overseas voting systems. How these new measures will actually facilitate migrants voting from abroad will be verified in the next federal elections which are

⁵ The precise name of the Committee is *Comité Técnico de Especialistas para Elaborar un Análisis Jurídico, Técnico, Organizativo y Presupuestal del las Alternativas Sobre el Voto de los Mexicanos Residentes en el Extranjero* in Spanish. The Committee was composed of specialists from a wide variety of areas: experts in international law and electoral law, political scientists, legislative scholars, sociologists, migration scholars, and experts on information technology (IFE 2013).

⁶ One of the INE council members considers that it “modernizes” democracy (Andrade González 2016). However, a Labor Party legislator (*Partido del Trabajo*, PT) claims that this introduction of new technology should be more broadly announced to migrants living abroad in order to have an effect on migrant voting (*Despertar* 2016).

scheduled for 2018. Furthermore, how political parties elaborate vote-mobilizing strategies under this new scheme should be also scrutinized.

Table 4. Comparing Overseas Voting Systems Before and After the 2014 Reform

	Before 2014	After 2014
Who can be voted for?	President	President, senators, state governors
Voter Registration	Send the application to Mexico by registered mail	Three options: (a) mailing the application to Mexico, (b) applying on internet, (c) applying at embassies and consulates in the country of residence
Voter ID Card	Must be obtained in Mexico	Can be obtained at embassies and consulates in the country of residence
Voting	Send a ballot to Mexico by registered mail	Three options: (a) mailing it to Mexico, (b) submitting it to embassies and consulates in the country of residence, (c) internet

Source: Author's own elaboration based on IFE (2016a, 2016b).

4. The Consequence of Reform: Clientelism beyond Borders? A Tentative Analysis

It is still premature to evaluate the consequences of the 2014 reform extending voting rights abroad. Nevertheless, some evidence suggests that the new scheme of

encouraging voting from abroad may induce clientelism to spread beyond the US-Mexican border. Clientelism, which is a term often used interchangeably with machine politics or vote buying, is a political practice which has traditionally prevailed in Mexico (Diaz-Cayeros, Magaloni, and Estévez 2016; Fox 1994). There are compelling reasons to support this possibility.

First, postal voting and internet voting may induce clientelism in a context of weak monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms (Hill 2016; Stokes 2005; Stokes, Dunning, Nazarreno, Brusco 2013). It is difficult to monitor whether someone else intervenes these individualized systems of voting. Furthermore, given that the enforcement mechanisms for monitoring and sanctioning illicit behavior during electoral processes have no effect outside of Mexico's jurisdiction, exporting clientelism beyond borders might be a viable electoral strategy for office-seeking politicians in Mexico.

Second, as previously argued, the voting rights of Mexican migrants first expanded for the local elections. Mediated by the IME, Mexico's local government and migrant organizations in the US made a joint effort to build a network connecting migrants and their communities of origin. This very "network" could facilitate the export of clientelism, for which regionally-based community organizations have the potential of serving as brokers. It should be mentioned that while the INE and other oversight institutions constrained clientelism and other electoral fraud at the central level, malpractices such as vote and/or turnout buying have increased since 2006 at the local level in Mexico⁷. This means that the local electoral arena provides a fertile soil for clientelism. Furthermore, some regions elect migrant deputies (*diputado migrante*), who are elected in migrant communities and represent them at the local and federal legislatures⁸. Therefore, strengthening the regionally-based ties across borders might forge "political-electoral connections" between migrants and their communities of origin, and help clientelist practices transcend the border.

⁷ I thank Jesús Cantú and Irma Méndez de Hoyos for pointing this out to me.

⁸ A migrant deputy in the Zacatecas state legislature has been president and founder of the Zacatecan association of California, which supports the PRI (Silva Torres 2016).

Third, the majority of Mexican migrants in the US are characterized as having lower levels of education and income and an illegal status. They are economically and legally vulnerable, and might be easily targeted by clientelist transactions (Stokes 2005). Furthermore, their illegal status may prevent them from seeking US legal protection. It is also suggested that those migrants can politically influence their family members in the communities of origin through their remittances (Ahn Paarlberg 2017; Germano 2013). These socioeconomic conditions associated with migrants would also facilitate the building of clientelist network across borders.

To verify the validity of the aforementioned claims, a rigorous empirical analysis should be conducted. For instance, conducting focused interviews, systematic surveys, or web surveys might be viable methods. The PAN, PRI, and PRD have already approached migrant communities in the US to cultivate electoral support for the 2018 federal elections (Cárdenas 2014)⁹. Thus, testing this argument focusing on the 2018 federal elections should be the next step to take.

5. Conclusion

This paper argues that democratization promoted the reform extending voting rights abroad as a way of enhancing the democratic representation of Mexican migrants living overseas, but it entails the risk of expanding clientelism beyond borders, because politicians may have a greater incentive to cultivate support from migrants for surviving in competitive elections. In other words, since clientelism could erode the quality of democracy, increasing electoral competition is a double-edged sword. Further exploring how Mexico's democracy will tilt the balance between the contrasting effects of increasing electoral competition should be a meaningful research agenda.

⁹ How each party differentiates vote-mobilizing strategies between voters living inside and outside Mexico is also an important research agenda. I would like to thank Kiyotaka Yasui for suggesting this point.

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