Building the Party on the Ground: The Role of Access to Public Office for Party Growth

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How is the growth and institutionalization of political parties shaped by access to public office? In this article, I analyze a natural experiment from Mexico, in which a political party used a lottery system to select candidates for national public office, and present new insights into how access to elected office shapes the development of new parties. I find that the party was able to build local party networks by gaining access to office (through elected legislators) that subsequently mobilized new voters for the party. I show that the party was able to institutionalize more successfully and increase its membership base in localities that randomly received access to public office through an elected legislator from the same locality. The findings highlight the importance of access to state resources for the success of new parties and have important implications for debates about democratic representation and accountability.

How do new political parties grow and take root in society? Going back to early canonical research on the origins of parties (Aldrich 1995; Duverger 1954; Schattschneider 1942), there is a long-standing (often implicit) assumption in the literature that access to public office plays an important role in the growth of new parties. Yet, existing research fails to test this crucial assumption and explore the underlying mechanisms.

This article sheds light on this fundamental question, by rigorously testing the relationship between office-holding and party growth and examining which mechanisms drive the expansion of parties within the electorate and the (often uneven) growth of new parties in different areas of a country. More specifically, I explore how new parties' ability to grow and take root locally is shaped by their level of access to elected office. I argue that access to office through elected legislators helps new parties build *local party networks* that subsequently mobilize new voters for the party.

This article tests this argument in the context of Mexico, a recent democracy with a relatively well-institutionalized party system (Greene and Sánchez-Talanquer 2018). I focus on the case of a recently founded party that has rapidly grown to become one of the country's most important: MORENA (Movimiento Regeneración Nacional; National Regeneration Movement). It was first registered as a party in 2014 and contested its first election the following year. MORENA has continued to increase its support among voters across the country: it won the country's presidency and both chambers of the Congress of the Union in 2018. During its first four years, the party managed to recruit about 440,000 members (0.49% of the adult population—a membership rate comparable to canonical mass parties in established democracies, such as the Social Democratic Parties of Germany (0.50%) and Sweden (0.86%) and almost twice as high as that of more long-standing parties in Mexico, such as the PAN (Partido Acción Nacional; National Action Party; 0.24%). Unlike other contemporary Mexican parties, such as the PRD (Partido de la Revolución Democrática; Party of the Democratic Revolution) or PAN, MORENA has been able to build a nationwide presence.

To explore how access to public office shapes the growth and institutionalization of new parties, I examine the case of a party that used a random lottery to select candidates for

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Support for this research was provided by a grant from the University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States (UC MEXUS). This research was reviewed and deemed exempt by the Office for Protection of Human Subjects at the University of California (protocol no. 2014-07-6538). Replication files are available in the *JOP* Dataverse (https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/jop). The empirical analysis has been successfully replicated by the *JOP* replication analyst. An appendix with supplementary material is available at https://doi.org/10.1086/724961.

Published online July 28, 2023.

The Journal of Politics, volume 85, number 4, October 2023. © 2023 Southern Political Science Association. All rights reserved. Published by The University of Chicago Press for the Southern Political Science Association. https://doi.org/10.1086/724961 ooo

national public office.[1] Drawing on data obtained through dozens of information requests and a lawsuit filed under Mexico's 2015 General Transparency Law, I analyze MORENA's use of publicly conducted lotteries to select candidates for elected office. These lotteries randomly selected local party members from across the country to be included on the party's candidate lists for (proportional representation) federal deputies. Due to the random assignment of candidates' list ranks, the party randomly gained access to public office in some localities through an elected legislator from the same locality, whereas in other areas the local candidates did not obtain office.[2]

Analyzing this natural experiment (Dunning 2012), I provide clear and novel empirical evidence that increased access to public office helped the party grow and institutionalize at the local level. In localities where the party obtained office through the election of legislators from these places, it grew more rapidly: it gained significantly more new party members than in areas where local candidates were not elected because of their randomly determined rank on the party list.

These areas with a stronger party presence on the ground then, in turn, were more successful at mobilizing new voters for the party in subsequent elections, which gave the party a strategic electoral advantage. What is more, while the clientelism literature might attribute parties' ability to mobilize a stronger following in areas where they have access to elected office to pork barrel politics, I show that parties are more successful at building local networks and mobilizing new voters even if they lack access to public funds to mobilize supporters in a clientelistic manner. Instead, additional qualitative data suggest that the election of locally embedded deputies allowed the party to take root locally. Their election allowed the party to mobilize the deputies' local networks and build a *local ground game*.

While new parties can also gradually expand their local presence across the country over time, access to public office provides a boost that allows parties to institutionalize and grow more quickly. When a party's local candidate gets elected, the party gains visibility in the local community, which allows the party to build a local ground game. Media coverage of the representation provided by the elected representative, visits to the hometown, routine constituent services, and access to parliamentary staff all provide crucial organizational resources that can help build a local party presence. Furthermore, if the representative is well connected within the local community, this embeddedness allows the party to tap into local networks, further boosting the party's visibility and securing regular endorsements of the party by local organizations.

These findings have at least three crucial implications for a series of debates about democratic representation and accountability. First, the results speak to ongoing debates about the origins of parties and shed light on the role that access to state resources plays in the growth and consolidation of parties. Moreover, the findings of this study draw attention to the crucial importance of party organization for the territorial entrenchment and institutionalization of new parties.

Second, the article sheds light on the importance of membership and activism in new parties. Party membership and activism are thought of as playing a critical role in interest representation in democratic regimes. However, involvement in new parties is little studied in the literature, which tends to focus on well-established parties (often in historic democracies; Hager et al. 2021; Mair and van Biezen 2001; Panebianco 1988; Scarrow 2017; Whiteley 2011). Yet, as shown in this article, party activists play a crucial role in mobilizing voters during electoral campaigns. Furthermore, they also constitute a key "pool of talent" for candidate recruitment and serve important functions in parties' ability to aggregate and represent societal interests.

Third, this article builds on the related literature on incumbency advantages, much of which focuses on the effect of holding office for individual politicians rather than parties, and mostly attributes an incumbency advantage to elected politicians' ability to curry a personal vote in their districts (Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2009, 2020; Fiorina 1989; Fowler 2014; Gronke 2001; Jacobson and Carson 2019; Mann and Wolfinger 1980).[3] By contrast, I examine the effect of elected office on a party's future electoral support where individual-level incumbency advantages are not present because incumbents cannot seek reelection (under Mexico's electoral laws at the time).

This article expands on previous studies that investigate partisan incumbency advantage in weakly institutionalized party systems like Mexico's in two ways. First, it moves the focus from the local to the national level. Whereas prior research has largely focused on the election of local officials, such as mayors,

1. I use the term *party institutionalization* to refer to a party's local rootedness in the electorate, and I operationalize this concept by focusing on the number of registered party members in a given locality. For a full discussion of the conceptualization and operationalization, see below.

2. For more information on the lottery, see also my closely related article on the effect of the representation provided by the elected representatives on citizens' attitudes and voting behavior (Poertner 2023).

3. Some studies operationalize the theoretical incumbency advantage of individual legislators in the US Congress by analyzing party vote shares (Gelman and King 1990). However, these measures, which are putatively focused on party incumbency, still center on the incumbency of individual politicians, given the very high renomination rates in the United States. For instance, Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart (2000) show that a large fraction of the well-documented incumbency advantage in US House elections is driven by a personal vote for individual incumbents.

and found no evidence that holding such offices improves parties' future electoral support (De Magalhaes 2015), this study explores access to office at the *national* level. Given the different incentive structures faced by national and local politicians and the more prominent role that party labels often play at the national level (compared to the local level where they might be less informative and relevant), it seems crucial to better understand the impact of access to national office in this context. Second, my research design allows me to go beyond the analytic constraints of often-used electoral regression discontinuity designs, which focus on a local average treatment effect among "bare winners" and losers. While this study's empirical focus on a particular party also raises important questions about the findings' external validity, which I discuss in more detail in the conclusion, the empirical strategy used in this article offers a unique opportunity to study the effect of access to office beyond close elections.

A THEORY OF ENDOGENOUS PARTY INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Even though scholars have long studied the origins and institutionalization of political parties (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), we still know surprisingly little about the growth and institutionalization of new parties at the local level. Recent work on party building has emphasized the importance of strong, consistent party brands (Lupu 2016, 77), experiences of intense conflict (Levitsky, Loxton, and Van Dyck 2016, 10), and the passage of time for new parties to institutionalize (Brader and Tucker 2001, 70). These factors are crucial for understanding why some new parties more successfully take root in society than others. However, they cannot fully account for the (often uneven) growth of new parties across different areas of a country.

Drawing on related work on party building, party institutionalization, and party system institutionalization (Levitsky et al. 2016; Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Panebianco 1988; Poertner 2018; Randall and Svåsand 2002; Rosenblatt 2018), I use the term *party institutionalization* to refer to a party's rootedness in the electorate or, put differently, its local "ground game."[4] Whereas some scholars use the term party institutionalization more broadly to also include related concepts, such as the stability of electoral support or organizational linkages, I focus here on local party organization, in particular local party membership, in order to explore how factors, such as legislative representation, shape party institutionalization and how this, in turn, affects electoral support.

This article expands on prior research by exploring how new parties' ability to take root and institutionalize locally is shaped by their degree of access to elected office. In doing so, it builds on earlier work on the origins of new parties that often implicitly assumed that holding positions of power within the state plays a role in the growth of political parties. Schattschneider, for example, in his analysis of the historical development of the major US parties, refers to "the expansion of the parties from Congress into the country" in order to mobilize voters and win elections (1942, 61) and contends that modern party organization usually occurs in two stages: "(1) the rise of party organization in Congress; and (2) the development of party organization in the electorate" (49). Despite the fact that many historical parties outside the United States (particularly movement-based parties) and most contemporary new parties did not *originate* as parliamentary factions, most of them initially secured some (often limited) parliamentary representation and then grew substantially in the electorate once in office.

Furthermore, this study builds on recent research on the impact of access to subnational office on grassroots party building. In this context, Sells, for example, explores the role of local executive office in Brazil and shows that local incumbency can help "parties expand their grassroots bases during the later stages of party building after the party has already made an initial investment in developing a cohesive national structure and building robust local organizations" (2020, 1577). This article expands on this prior research in at least two ways. First, it examines the role of national, legislative office, which presents an incentive structure for elected officials and party representatives potentially quite different from the incentives local mayors face. Thereby, this article allows us to test the long-standing, implicit assumption that access to national legislative office plays a crucial role in the growth of new parties. Second, whereas Sells finds that local incumbency only helps parties that already have a well-established presence in a municipality, this article tests whether access to national office can help new parties build such local presence in the first place.

While new parties' performance in office, the state of the economy, and other factors influence their future levels of support, I contend that their initial success in obtaining office itself crucially affects their ability to institutionalize. More specifically, I argue that access to office (e.g., through elected legislators) helps new parties build local party networks.

New parties are usually only weakly institutionalized and tend to have a limited local presence. While they can gradually expand their local presence across the country over time, access to state office provides a boost that allows parties to institutionalize and grow more quickly. When a party's local candidate gets elected, she and her party gain visibility in the local community, which allows the party to build a local ground game. Media coverage of the representation provided by her, frequent visits to her hometown, routine constituent services,

4. Relatedly, I use the term *party growth* to indicate an increase in party institutionalization.

and access to parliamentary staff all provide crucial organizational resources that can help build a local party presence. Furthermore, if she is well connected within her local community, her election might allow the party to tap into those local networks, further boosting the party's visibility and securing regular endorsements of the party by local organizations.

As a result, we might expect the party to build a local presence more quickly in towns and cities where a party member has been elected to office. A party's local presence on the ground could be expected to manifest itself, for example, in the number of party members in a locality. Therefore, we might expect to observe the following:

> **Endogenous growth hypothesis.** Party membership will grow more rapidly in localities where it has access to office than in those where it does not.

Beyond this main hypothesis, party growth might result in some downstream effects on secondary outcomes related to vote choice. For example, these local party networks could help the party mobilize voters and be more successful in subsequent elections in these localities. As a result, we might expect the following:

> **Voter mobilization hypothesis.** The party will receive more votes in subsequent elections in localities where it had access to office than in those where it did not.

Such electoral mobilization through local party networks might be expected to come at the expense of other parties with a similar platform:

> **Winning over voters hypothesis.** Other similar parties will obtain less electoral support in subsequent elections in localities where the party (MORENA) had access to office than in those where it did not.

Finally, if local party networks give the party a strategic advantage over other strong parties, we might expect to observe the following:

> **Resulting strongholds hypothesis.** The party will have a larger margin of victory (over its strongest competitor) in subsequent elections in localities where it had access to office than in those where it did not.

THE CANDIDATE LOTTERY

The idea of randomly selecting politicians by lot has a long history in democratic thought and practice, going back to fifth- and fourth-century BC Athens.[5] Yet sortition has hardly been used in contemporary democracies. Indeed, MORENA's system of candidate lotteries represents the most far-reaching use of sortition to select political leaders to date. The party's use of candidate lotteries allows me to explore how access to office through elected legislators (in some localities) shapes its local growth and institutionalization. Since the lottery randomly assigns candidates' list ranks, the party randomly receives access to public office in some areas (where a legislator is elected) but not in others (where the local candidates are not elected). The random nature of this assignment allows me to estimate the marginal effect of having a deputy in office from a locality on the party's subsequent growth and strength in that locality.

THE MEXICAN ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND THE CANDIDATE LOTTERY

Mexico uses a mixed-member majoritarian system that combines first-past-the-post voting with party-list proportional representation (PR) to elect the national legislators in the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the Congress of the Union. Out of the total 500 deputies, 300 are elected in single-member districts (SMDs) by plurality, and 200 are elected by closed, blocked PR lists in five multimember districts (MMDs) of 40 seats each, using the Hare quota. These MMDs are constituencies of multiple, neighboring states.

Parties choose how they select and nominate their candidates within this electoral system. MORENA relies on a combination of full-membership votes, delegate assemblies, surveys, and lotteries to select its candidates for the Chamber of Deputies.

Two-thirds of the party's candidates for federal deputies elected through PR party lists are selected at random through lotteries from among local-level party affiliates (MORENA 2014, art. 44). The remaining third of the party PR list candidates (occupying each third position on the list) are filled with "external personalities," which are chosen by the party's National Council (in a nonrandom way). For elections at the federal level, a separate lottery (blocking on gender) is conducted for each of the five MMDs. (For an overview of Mexico's electoral and territorial units, see table 1.)

According to my interviews with members of the early MORENA leadership and federal deputies, the party instituted this rather unusual system of candidate selection to build a local party presence across the country, to avoid intraelite self-cooptation and factionalism and to mobilize citizen support (beyond traditional PRD supporters) for the new party. While

5. The origin of this practice seems to be religious in nature, even though its use became secularized over time (Headlam 1891, 11–12; see also Manin 1997).

Table 1. Overview of Electoral and Territorial Units in Mexico

Units	Number of Units	Mean Size (Voters)
Multistate constituencies (MMDs) for PR lists	5	17,789,739
Federal entities (31 states + Mexico City)	32	2,779,647
Federal electoral districts (SMDs)	300	296,496
Municipalities	2,458	38,356
Electoral sections	68,436	1,315
Polling places	157,859	564

Note. Mean numbers of voters within the units are calculated using eligible voters for the 2018 general election.

the party could already count on the support of some PRD voters and activists, who—along with a sizable part of the PRD leadership—moved from the PRD to MORENA, when a faction of the PRD around Andrés Manuel López Obrador left to found MORENA, the lottery was viewed as a way to mobilize genuinely new supporters.

Furthermore, the party's adoption of lotteries also seems to have been provoked by the experience of extensive factionalism within the PRD (as well as the PRI [Partido Revolucionario Institucional; Institutional Revolutionary Party] before that), where powerful factions held significant influence over the selection of candidates. The lottery system adopted by MORENA can counteract such factionalism and the iron law of oligarchy (Michels 1915) by circumventing the higher-level party apparatus and offering local members a chance to secure nominations directly. Even though lottery winners could theoretically be renominated through the lottery at a later point, their chances of success would (by design) be extremely low.[6]

The lottery entries consist of the names of local members who were nominated by the party's base committees. In each electoral district, a meeting of the full membership of the party in that area chooses 10 candidates (five men and five women, selected via a direct and secret vote) to enter into the lotteries.[7] From the 300 electoral districts, 3,000 candidates (across the five multistate constituencies) are thus entered into the lotteries.

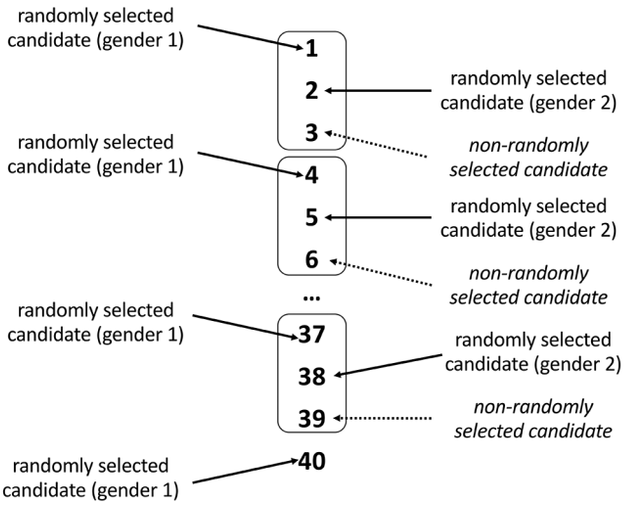

Figure 1. Structure of the party lists. Gender of the first candidate is randomly chosen (gender 1) between women and men; gender 2 refers to the other gender.

To select the actual candidates out of this set of entries for each multistate constituency's party list, the party uses a randomized block lottery: names are randomly drawn (in alternation) from two urns with the entries from the constituency—one for women and another for men. After flipping a coin to decide whether the first position is to be filled by a male or female candidate, a name is drawn from the corresponding urn and then another one from the other urn. The following position is then set aside for an "external" candidate. This procedure is repeated until all positions on the party list have been filled (up to 40 positions). As a result, each party list consists of several candidate trios; the first two slots of each trio are randomly filled (see fig. 1).

This procedure results in a double randomization. First, whether an individual party member entered into the pool of 3,000 entries is actually selected for inclusion on the party list is randomly determined. Second, each candidate's ranking on this list is randomly determined. Since party lists in Mexico are closed and blocked, this random list rank and the number of list candidates elected (established by the party's vote share in the multistate constituency) determine whether a given candidate ends up in office.[8]

Since each district puts forward the same number of initial entries, each one has the same chance of having an individual drawn to be on the party list or end up in office.

6. Furthermore, the 2015 deputies would not be eligible to run for immediate reelection because even under the 2014 Political Electoral Reform, which eased Mexico's long-standing ban on reelection, only deputies elected in 2018 or later are allowed to run for (consecutive) reelection.

7. These district-level meetings are supposed to be held simultaneously; for 2015, the election year I focus on here, this indeed seems to have been the case.

8. Unfortunately, we can only observe the names and outcomes for individuals who were placed on a party list because the full list of the 3,000 initial entries for the lottery is not publicly available. However, since the candidates who are placed on a list are drawn randomly from this larger population of lottery participants, this random sample should be representative of this population.

Figure 2. One of the urns during the 2015 candidate lottery. (Photo, Jesús Villaseca, February 23, 2015.)

Furthermore, given that the size of the electoral districts is based on population, localities with similar numbers of inhabitants should have a similar chance of being included.

Since the MMD constituencies for the party lists are large and span across multiple states, it is arguably not plausible that an individual party list candidate's characteristics or effort in the electoral campaign (e.g., a candidate with a middling list position who might end up being near the cutoff) could be sufficiently large to ensure that they win.[9] Furthermore, a particular feature of the country's electoral system further mitigates potential concerns about sorting around the cutoff. As Kerevel points out, "unlike in most other mixed electoral systems, Mexican voters do not cast a separate ballot for deputies elected in the PR tier, and therefore seat allocation is based purely on the number of votes cast in single-member districts. List deputies therefore do not have to campaign, and their primary loyalty is to the national party, which is in charge of selecting candidates for the lists" (2010, 696; see also Langston 2006; Weldon 2001, 472–73).

Moreover, there are at least two reasons to think that this selection procedure indeed produced a random assignment. First, the names were drawn—under the auspices of public notaries—in a public, nationally televised event (see fig. 2). Second, balance tests of the candidate characteristics included on the candidate registration forms also support the randomization claim: deputies elected through the lottery and unsuccessful candidates are very similar on these pretreatment covariates (see table 2). I provide additional results using equivalence tests that these null effects should be interpreted as absent of substantive meaning (see fig. A1).

Table 2. Balance Statistics for Candidates on Party Lists

Variable	Nonelected	Elected	Difference in Means	p
Female	.5128	.5000	−.0128	.9222
Years of residence	4.0983	4.7500	.6517	.4773
Age	45.6496	44.3889	−1.2607	.7084

Note. Estimates through t-tests comparing characteristics of candidates who ended up in office to those who did not. All variables are calculated relative to the election day (June 7, 2015). Years of residence refers to years residence in the municipality. The F-test for joint significance of all balance variables on treatment assignment is also nonsignificant ($p = .8275$). $N = 135$.

ESTIMATION STRATEGY AND DATA

MORENA's use of a lottery to select candidates permits me to investigate how access to office through elected legislators (in some localities) has shaped the party's local institutionalization and growth. In order to operationalize local party institutionalization, I focus on the number of registered members of the party in a given locality.

I take advantage of the fact that the lottery assigns candidates from a given locality to become either a deputy or a nonelected candidate (through the 2015 election), depending on their randomly determined list positions. As a result, some localities with (randomly drawn) candidates on the party list are "assigned" deputies (treatment group), while others are "assigned" nonelected candidates (control group; see fig. 3).[10]

Therefore, I can estimate the marginal effect of having a deputy from a given locality in office on the party's growth and strength in the same locality. The lowest geographic level at which I can connect candidates from the party list to a specific area is the municipality. Thus, I can estimate the marginal effect of "assigning" an (elected) deputy to a municipality on party strength in that municipality in the 2018 election.

However, one has to account for slightly different assignment probabilities across municipalities. First, a given candidate's chances of being elected are slightly different across the five multistate constituencies due to the different numbers of candidates elected across the various constituencies/lists. Second, due to municipality size and random chance, some municipalities ended up with more than one candidate on the

9. It should also be noted that the election in question here (in 2015) was the first one contested by the party, which had also been founded only recently. As a result, neither the party leadership nor individual candidates had reliable information about how many party list candidates would get elected in any given constituency. Indeed, electoral support in much of the country exceeded expectations and strongly outperformed the predictions based on preelection polls.

10. I use the term *deputy* to refer a candidate who is *elected*, as opposed to *a nonelected candidate*.

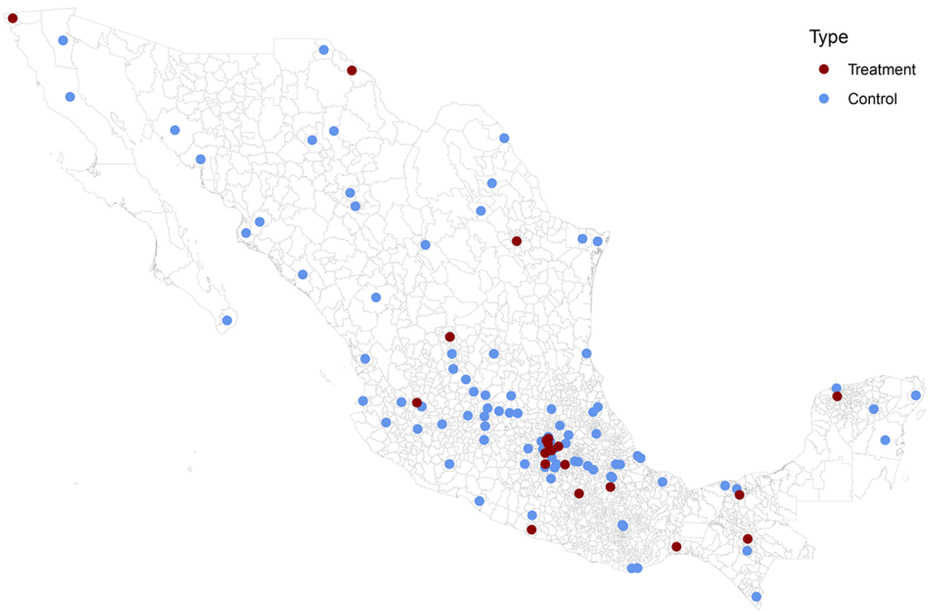

Figure 3. Map of municipalities with candidates selected through the 2015 lottery (treatment group: municipalities with elected lottery deputies; control group: municipalities with nonelected lottery candidates).

list.[11] Thus, the probability that a given municipality will be assigned to the treatment group (i.e., that it will have at least one elected lottery deputy) is given by the probability that a given lottery candidate on the party list (corresponding to the constituency to which the municipality belongs) will be elected and the number of lottery candidates from that municipality on the list.[12]

To adjust for those slightly different assignment probabilities, I rely on two different estimation approaches. First, I use inverse probability weighting (IPW) based on the exact assignment probabilities. Second, I replicate the main analyses with fixed effects (FE) for constituency and the number of candidates from a municipality on the list. Since the FE estimates are very similar to the IPW estimates, I focus on the IPW results here and report the FE estimates in the appendix.

Data

I obtained copies of the registration forms for all candidates on the 2015 MORENA party list through a series of information

Table 3. Balance Statistics for Municipalities

Outcome	Control	Treatment	ATE	SE	*p*
Population ages 0–29	.3823	.3869	.0046	.0197	.8157
Population ages 30–49	.2619	.2498	−.0121	.0099	.2265
Population ages 50+	.3558	.3633	.0075	.0262	.7753
Primary sector workers	.2132	.2096	−.0037	.0063	.5636
Industrial workers	.2177	.2139	−.0038	.0209	.8577
Commercial sector workers	.1607	.1896	.0289	.0173	.0969
Service sector workers	.3478	.3627	.0149	.0196	.4498
Income vulnerable population	.0767	.0896	.0129	.0115	.2659
MORENA members (baseline)	.0041	.0048	.0007	.0014	.6394

Note. Estimates of municipality characteristics using IPW, comparing census data from municipalities with a MORENA lottery candidate who was elected (in 2015; treatment) to those with a lottery candidate who was not elected (control). SEs are clustered by constituency and number of lottery candidates; *p*-values are two-tailed. The *F*-test for joint significance of all balance variables (omitted category for age variables: ages 0–29) on treatment assignment is also nonsignificant ($p = .1619$). ATE = average treatment effect; $N = 102$.

11. As discussed above, since each district puts forward the same number of entries, each one has the same chance of having an individual drawn to be on the party list or end up in office. Furthermore, given that the size of the electoral districts is based on population size, the chance that larger geographic areas, such as municipalities, are selected increases proportionally with their population size.

12. The probability that a given lottery candidate on the party list will be elected can be calculated for each multistate constituency by dividing the number of elected lottery deputies (on the corresponding list) by the number of lottery candidates (on the same list).

Table 4. Effect on Local Party Membership

	New Membership (1)	Total Membership (2)
Treatment effect	130.40**	198.11*
	(67.70)	(143.45)
Constant (control mean)	92.25**	503.37***
	(51.10)	(62.73)
Percentage change (relative to control)	+141%	+39%

Note. Estimates of the effect on local party membership (new members and total membership) per 100,000 registered voters using IPW, comparing party membership in municipalities with a MORENA lottery candidate who was elected in 2015 (treatment) to municipalities with a lottery candidate who was not elected (control). SEs (in parentheses) are clustered by constituency and number of lottery candidates. $N = 102$; p-values are one-tailed to account for directional hypotheses.
* $p < .1$.
** $p < .05$.
*** $p < .01$.

Table 5. Effect on Baseline Party Membership and New Membership

	Baseline Membership (1)	New Membership (2)
Treatment effect	67.72	116.64*
	(144.07)	(74.19)
Baseline membership		.20**
		(.11)
Constant (control mean)	411.12***	8.70
	(44.40)	(47.10)

Note. Estimates of the effect on local party membership at baseline and new members (controlling for baseline membership) per 100,000 registered voters using IPW, comparing party membership in municipalities with a MORENA lottery candidate who was elected in 2015 (treatment) to municipalities with a lottery candidate who was not elected (control). SEs (in parentheses) are clustered by constituency and number of lottery candidates. $N = 102$; p-values are one-tailed to account for directional hypotheses.
* $p < .1$.
** $p < .05$.
*** $p < .01$.

requests under the 2015 General Transparency Law and a lawsuit to the National Electoral Institute (INE, Instituto Nacional Electoral) and the National Transparency Institute (INAI, Instituto Nacional de Transparencia). While parts of the candidates' addresses were redacted to safeguard their privacy, their municipalities and states of residence were released to me. These candidate registration forms also report information on candidates' date of birth, gender, length of residence in the home municipality, and occupation. To ascertain which candidates were elected, I used publicly available election returns from the 2015 legislative elections made available by INE.

To explore the effect on local party institutionalization and growth, I analyze the number of local MORENA party members. I acquired a complete list of all MORENA party members who joined before the end of 2018 (with their date of joining the party and their municipality and state of residence) through another series of information requests to INE, MORENA, and INAI.[13] This list allows me to calculate the baseline number of MORENA party members in each municipality before the 2015 election and the number of party members in the same localities in 2018.

To estimate the effect of having a deputy in office from a given municipality on voter mobilization in the next election in that municipality, I merge the information on the candidates with precinct-level election returns for the 2018 general election to calculate municipal-level voter turnout (based on the deputy vote) and vote support for various parties.

Table 3 shows that the municipalities in the treatment and control groups are very similar on a variety of observable characteristics, analyzing census and social development data (CONEVAL 2015; INEGI 2016). Furthermore, there is no significant difference in MORENA party membership between the two groups of municipalities at baseline.

These quantitative data are complemented by qualitative data gathered during fieldwork in Mexico City and municipalities in the treatment and control groups. More specifically, the article draws on about 40 original, semistructured interviews with members of the early MORENA leadership, federal deputies, representatives of base committees, representatives of organizational allies, and some political analysts. I conducted these interviews between March 2016 and July 2018.

FINDINGS

Below, I present the findings from the analyses outlined above. I find that MORENA grew much more rapidly in localities where it had gained access to office at random through elected deputies from these places. In municipalities in the treatment group, party membership grew about 2.4 times as much as in the control group (0.22 vs. 0.09 percentage points; see model 1, table 4).

13. This list includes all individuals who are current party members by the end of 2018. Unfortunately, this list does not contain people who might have joined and again left the party earlier. Therefore, the analyses presented in this article rely on "net" membership numbers by the end of 2018.

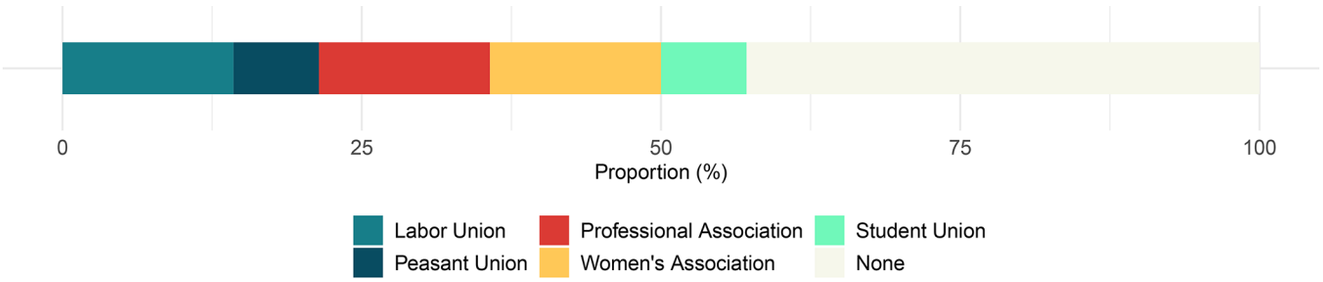

Figure 4. Organizational background of MORENA lottery deputies. Coded using the information reported in the congressional biographies (LXIII Legislature; 2015–18).

As a result, the party developed a much stronger local presence on the ground in areas where it had gained access to office. It had a 39% larger membership in municipalities in the treatment group by the end of 2018, compared to those in the control group (0.70% vs. 0.50% of registered voters; see model 2, table 4). When controlling for pretreatment membership, which is balanced between the treatment and control groups (see table 3), the difference becomes even more pronounced (see table 5), indicating that party membership grew about 14 times as much in the treatment group as in the control group (0.125 vs. 0.009 percentage points).

To test whether the observed effect might just be the result of being represented by any deputy from that municipality (potentially even for the first time), I explore heterogeneous effects by whether a municipality is also represented by another deputy (from any party). On the one hand, if the observed effects are just due to having a local elected deputy (from any party), we might expect that the effects are particularly pronounced in municipalities that would not have been represented absent the lottery deputy. On the other hand, if the observed effect is the result of having a MORENA lottery deputy in office, we might expect the effect to be similar irrespective of whether a given municipality is also represented by another deputy from there.

The results of this heterogeneous effect analysis are consistent with the latter prediction: there is no significant difference in the treatment effect between municipalities with another elected deputy from there and those without such deputies (see table G1). However, even though representation by another deputy is orthogonal to treatment assignment, we should be a bit cautious about these heterogeneous effects because of the relatively small number of municipalities that are also represented by another deputy (27 municipalities).

Next, I turn to additional qualitative data gathered during fieldwork in the municipalities in the treatment and control groups—including extensive interviews with lottery deputies, party officials, and leaders of civil society organizations—in order to explore how access to office through these deputies helped the party grow locally. These interviews reveal that the party was particularly successful in the places in the treatment group because the election of locally embedded deputies allowed the party to take root locally. Their election allowed the party to mobilize the deputies' local networks and expand support "on the ground."

As my interviews with lottery deputies consistently document, most of them had been activists in civil society organizations in their hometowns before they assumed office. A Mexican newspaper also picked up on this point, when it described one of the candidates in its coverage of the lottery for the 2015 legislative elections: "Seven months ago, the adventure began for doña Olivia and for the rest of the aspirants, who, for the most part, are leaders of [for example] neighborhood associations, taxi driver unions, in short, people who in some way hold influence over the neighbors in the environment" (Gutérrez 2015). Indeed, according to their congressional biographies, at least 57% of the lottery deputies occupied leadership positions with a social organization before running for office (see fig. 4).[14]

These organizational networks offer crucial connections to voters—especially popular class voters—in the representatives' hometowns. The interviewees consistently remarked that most of the lottery deputies regularly visited their communities "back home" and kept active connections to locally based civil society organizations, such as local labor unions or women's associations. The organizations played two key roles in building a local "ground game."

First, these organizations helped facilitate direct connections between constituents (esp. popular class constituents) and their representatives and provide information about how the elected deputies represent their constituents. As Ariel Juárez Rodríguez, a lottery deputy, emphasized: "Whenever the organizations make a request, the deputy will be with the people. He will talk with them directly. Not like the traditional politicians who move about with guards and feel like 'rock stars.' The people

14. This proportion might be viewed as a lower bound of the true extent of organizational involvement of lottery deputies, given that not all congressional biographies contain sufficiently detailed information.

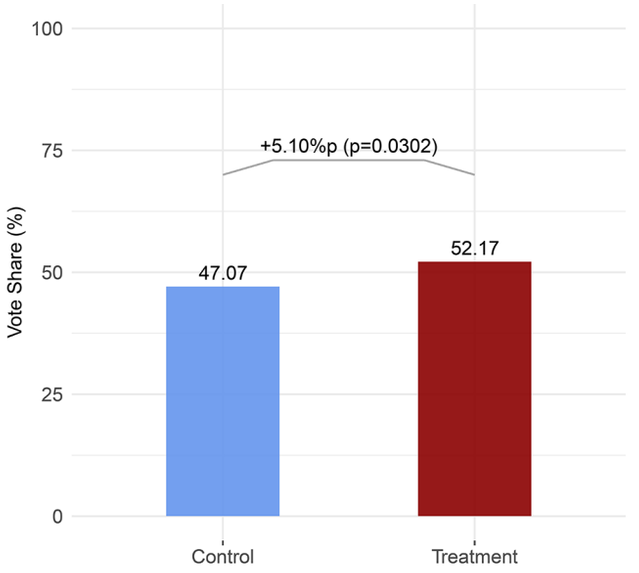

Figure 5. Estimates of the effect on electoral support for MORENA using IPW, comparing electoral returns (in the 2018 elections) from municipalities with a MORENA lottery candidate who was elected (in 2015; treatment) to municipalities with a lottery candidate who was not elected (in 2015; control). SEs are clustered by constituency and number of lottery candidates; *p*-values are one-tailed to account for directional hypothesis.

cannot approach them because of the security personnel" (interview by author, July 26, 2016).

Thereby, local organizations can play a crucial role in boosting the party's visibility in the local communities that gain representation through elected deputies. Even though organizations in places without an elected lottery deputy could still mobilize voters during electoral campaigns, this heightened exposure of citizens to their (elected) representative and her party facilitated by local organizations helps the party gain additional visibility and additional new supporters throughout the time in office.

Second, organizations to which lottery deputies belong seem to frequently mobilize supporters by endorsing the party. As other recent work on locally based civil society organizations shows (e.g., Poertner 2021), such organizations can hold significant sway not just over their own members but also over people in their wider social networks. Such endorsements of the party by organizations to which lottery deputies belong seem to be widespread. As the same lottery deputy, who is also a former labor union leader, explained: "If I am a secretary general of a labor union and I make my political preferences publicly known, that will have a strong impact on the workers. Many workers will be swayed [to MORENA]" (interview by author, July 26, 2016). Thus, regular endorsements of the party by organizations to which a lottery deputy belongs throughout her time in office can help mobilize new supporters for the party. Thereby, the party gains additional followers who can be mobilized easily and who, in turn, mobilize others in their social networks during subsequent elections.

These insights into the mobilizing roles played by deputies' local networks are supported by additional analyses of the natural experiment. I find that access to office not only helps the party grow more rapidly but also has downstream effects on vote choice in subsequent elections.

First, in line with the voter mobilization hypothesis, areas with a stronger party on the ground, in turn, became more successful at mobilizing new voters for the party in subsequent elections. As figure 5 shows, MORENA received about 5.10 percentage points more votes in localities where it had gained access to office at random, compared to localities in the control group. This finding is particularly noteworthy given that the incumbents could not run for reelection under Mexico's electoral laws at the time.

Second, I find evidence that in areas with a stronger party on the ground, MORENA is particularly effective at winning over voters from its closest programmatic competitor—the PRD. The PRD, which ran parliamentary candidates in an alliance with the PAN and Movimiento Ciudadano in most districts in 2018, lost about 4.72 percentage points in "represented" localities (see table 6). Other parties, for example, the PRI, were less affected.

Next, I explore whether these increases in voter mobilization give the party a strategic advantage over important competitors. In line with the strongholds hypothesis, which posits that the party will have a larger margin of victory (over

Table 6. Effect on Vote Shares and Margin of Victory

Outcome	Control	Treatment	ATE	SE	*p*
Vote share for PRD	.2891	.2419	−.0472	.0311	.0663
Vote share for PRI	.2277	.2163	−.0114	.0024	.0000
MOV: MORENA over runner-up	.1499	.2386	.0887	.0374	.0098
MOV: MORENA over PRD/PAN	.1817	.2798	.0982	.0587	.0489

Note. Estimates of the effect on vote choice using IPW, comparing electoral returns (in the 2018 elections) from municipalities with a MORENA lottery candidate who was elected (in 2015; treatment) to municipalities with a lottery candidate who was not elected (in 2015; control). The vote share for the PRI also includes support for the Partido Verde Ecologista de México and Nueva Alianza, and the vote share for the PRD also includes support for the PAN and Movimiento Ciudadano since they ran in electoral alliances in 2018. SEs are clustered by constituency and number of lottery candidates; *p*-values are one-tailed to account for directional hypotheses. ATE = average treatment effect; MOV = margin of victory; $N = 102$.

its strongest competitor) in localities where it had access to office through a lottery deputy than among those without one, I find evidence suggesting that the party is able to build a sizable lead over its competitors as a result. When comparing MORENA's margin of victory over the other strongest party in a given locality,[15] I find that MORENA, on average, received 8.87 percentage points more votes than the other strongest party in localities with a prior lottery deputy, compared to those in the control group. The effect is heightened further for MORENA's margin of victory over its closest programmatic and organizational rival, the PRD: on average, MORENA received 9.82 percentage points more votes than the PRD in localities in the treatment group.

Last, although the clientelism literature might expect that parties' ability to mobilize a stronger following in areas where they have access to elected office is merely the result of pork barrel politics, I find that MORENA was successful at building a party on the ground and subsequently mobilizing new voters, even though it lacked access to public funds to mobilize supporters in a clientelistic manner.

Even though clientelism and patronage politics are common in Mexico, the specific context in which the lottery deputies were elected limited the opportunities (and incentives) for deputies to target resources to their hometowns for three reasons. First, during the 2015–18 legislative term, MORENA had only a limited number of seats in the Chamber of Deputies, held none in the Senate, and formed a clear opposition to the PRI presidency of Enrique Peña Nieto. Without legislative and executive control, it would have been difficult to change the allocation of funds in favor of specific municipalities. Second, MORENA had not won any of the state governments yet. Due to Mexico's decentralized fiscal system, most discretionary federal funds are channeled through the states. Absent such state control, the targeting of non-formula-based funds to specific municipalities does not appear plausible. Third, in light of the fact that the lottery candidates were PR party-list candidates, the literature on electoral systems suggests that the candidates' loyalty should be primarily to the party rather than to their district, which is also much larger than just their hometown in this case. Thus, even if lottery deputies had the opportunity to target resources to their hometowns, they should have very limited incentives to do so.

To further test this claim that localities with lottery deputies were not allocated more resources from the federal level than they would have been absent such the lottery deputies, I estimate the effect of having an elected lottery deputy on the amount of discretionary federal transfers (transfers that are part of Ramo 28) that municipalities received. Table G2 illustrates that there are no significant differences in the changes in transfers after the lottery deputies take office (on September 1, 2015) between municipalities with a lottery deputies and those with a lottery candidate who was not elected, analyzing data from INEGI (2019).

In addition to the IPW-based estimates presented here, I also include the results of other specifications as robustness checks in the appendix (models with FE for constituency and number of candidates from a municipality are in app. E, and randomization inference estimates, controlling for the number of voters in a given municipality, are in app. F). These estimates are very similar to the results presented here.

CONCLUSION

This article shows that new parties' ability to grow and take root locally is shaped by their level of access to elected office. While new parties might also gradually expand their local presence across the country over time, access to public office provides a boost that allows parties to institutionalize and grow more quickly. Drawing on a natural experiment in Mexico, I find that the party grew more rapidly, gaining significantly more new party members, in localities where it randomly gained access to office through the election of legislators from these places. Areas with a stronger party network were more successful at mobilizing new voters in the next election, which gave the party a strategic electoral advantage. These findings are particularly noteworthy given that incumbents were not allowed to run for reelection and the party did not have access to public funds to target voters in their hometowns in a clientelistc manner.

Even though the particular way in which MORENA allocates its candidacies and thereby determines which localities gain access to elected office is rather unique, there is good reason to believe that the broader insight that new parties' ability to grow and take root locally is shaped by their level of access to elected office can also travel to other contexts. However, there are two important caveats to note. First, in the present case, the random element in the candidate selection procedure helps us overcome the challenge that usually the level of access to office that parties have in a given area is driven by their prior level of support in that area. Therefore, we might expect the growth of other parties (with more "traditional" candidate selection procedures) to be more concentrated in areas where the parties are already strong (and hence gain more access to office). Second, the candidate selection procedure used in this case yielded candidates who are deeply socially embedded in their home communities, and their election allowed the party to tap into the deputies' local networks. Therefore, we might also expect other parties whose

15. If the other party received a larger share of the votes than MORENA, the margin of victory would be negative.

officeholders have access to similar local networks to be particularly successful at building a local ground game.[16]

While the study documents significant effects on local party membership three years after the party first gains legislative representation, it would be interesting to explore whether these effects persist even more long term and whether they might accumulate in places where the party wins office again in subsequent elections. However, due to data constraints, these questions will have to be addressed by future research (should the necessary data become available).[17]

The results of this study have far-reaching implications for ongoing debates about democratic representation and accountability. The study elucidates how nascent parties grow and consolidate as a result of earlier electoral successes. Whereas prior studies have often portrayed the development of new parties as the result of either top-down, elite behavior or bottom-up, mass politicization (see, e.g., Kalyvas 1996; Lipset and Rokkan 1967), this study illustrates how both types of influence are crucial. The party grew most quickly in areas where it could rely on access to office to build local party networks that incorporated local groups of politicized citizens.

Furthermore, the findings draw attention to the crucial importance of party organization for the territorial entrenchment and institutionalization of new parties. In doing so, the study helps us understand the often uneven electoral success of new parties throughout a country's territory.

Last, the study provides critical insights into the crucial importance of local networks. The results contribute to a growing body of research on the importance of such networks for electoral behavior (Arias et al. 2019; Cruz, Labonne, and Querubín 2017; Nickerson 2008; Poertner 2021).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For helpful discussions and comments on earlier versions of this article (or the research design), I thank Kate Baldwin, David Broockman, José Cheibub, Donghyun Danny Choi, Ruth Berins Collier, Ana de la O, Dominik Duell, Thad Dunning, Jessica Gottlieb, Don Green, Guy Grossman, Macartan Humphreys, Herbert Kitschelt, Horacio Larreguy, John Marshall, Cecilia Mo, Gareth Nellis, Vincent Pons, Sven-Oliver Proksch, Anne Rasmussen, and Jan Vogler, as well as seminar participants at Duke University; University of California, Berkeley; University College London; Texas A&M University; and the WZB Berlin Social Science Center. I also thank the three anonymous reviewers and the editors at the *Journal of Politics* for their feedback. Earlier versions of this article were also presented at the 2021 and 2022 European Political Science Association annual conferences, 2021 IPSA World Congress, the 2021 PSA Elections, Public Opinion, and Parties Conference, and the 2021 and 2022 American Political Science Association annual meetings. I thank Elsa Torres de la Garza, Enrique Mejía Fontanot, and Jason Edmondson for providing excellent research assistance.

16. There are numerous ways beyond lotteries, however, in which parties could potentially ensure the selection of candidates with strong local networks, such as corporatist arrangements or local nomination assemblies.

17. Despite extensive efforts, I have been unable to obtain a complete list of all MORENA party members that is more up to date, i.e., that includes all members who joined after 2018.

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