

Captured by the Ballot

Judicial Elections and Democratic Erosion in Mexico

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Democratizing the Judiciary?

Proponents: judicial elections would democratize the judiciary

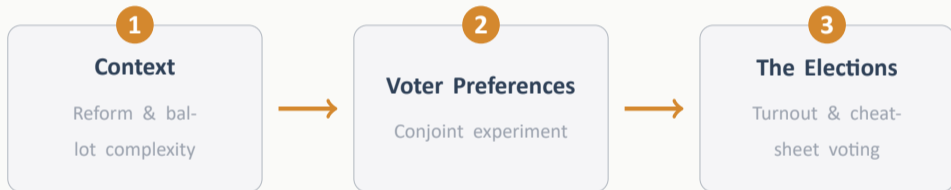
Reality: implementation distorted citizen preferences

Mechanism: informational capture

Informational Capture

1. Ballot is engineered to maximize information costs;
2. Ruling party then provides the heuristic that resolves those costs;
3. Provision is officially deniable;
4. Voters abstain or support capture

Road Map



The Reform

Signed into law: **September 15, 2024**

Replaced judicial appointment with popular election

Candidates nominated by committees in each branch

Elections held: **June 1, 2025**

The Ballot



6 separate federal-level ballots

Some states: up to 13 ballots

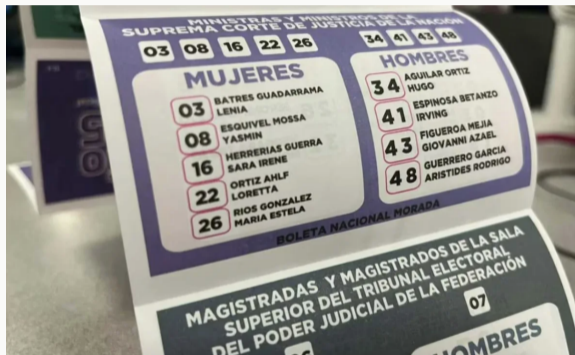
No party labels on the ballot

SCJN: 64 candidates for 9 seats

No sé ni elegir bien los
aguacates, que voy a andar
eligiendo jueces y magistrados.



Cheat Sheets (*Acordeones*)



Morena backed candidates

Digital and print

All 9 SCNJ candidates on acordeon win

What do citizens want in Supreme Court justice?

How do they decide given informational demands?

Research Design: Conjoint Experiment

Attribute	Levels
Nominating Power	Executive, Judicial, Legislative
Political Affiliation	Unknown, Independent, Morena, Opposition
Most Recent Position	Sitting Justice, Federal Judge, Academic, Private Attorney
Education	Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate
Gender	Man, Woman
Ethnic Group	Mestizo/a, Indigenous, White
Age	30, 40, 50, 70 years

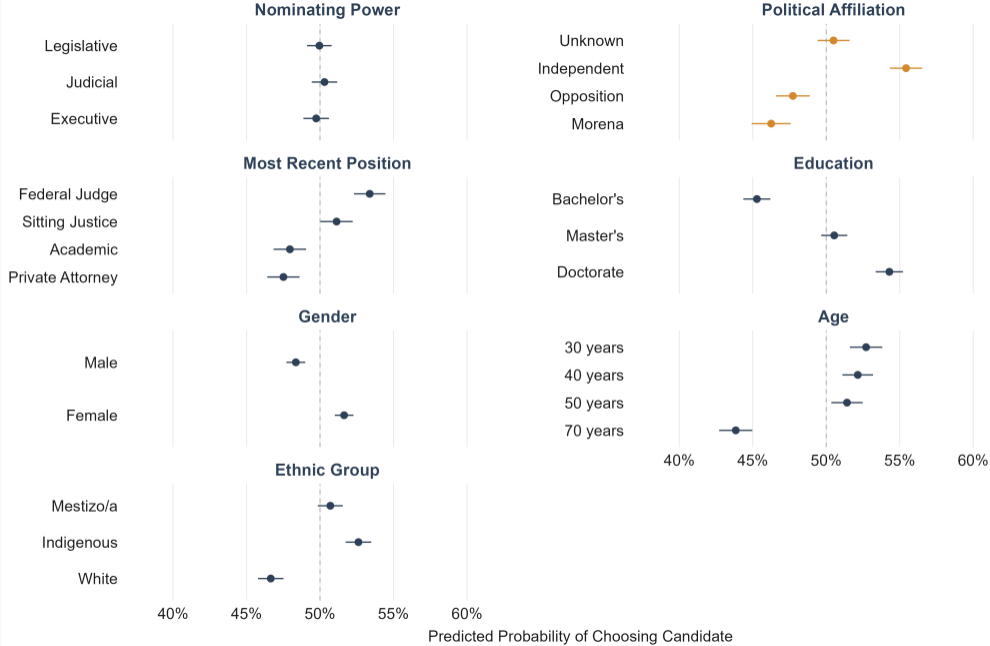
9 paired-choice tasks per respondent · $n \approx 1,500$

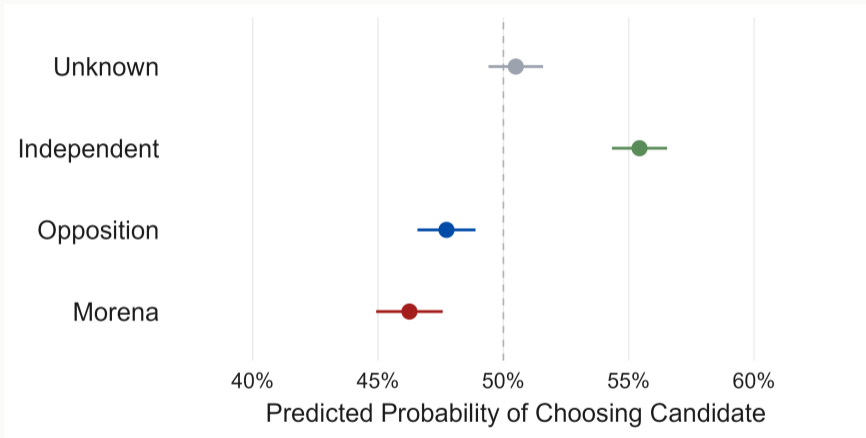
Attribute	Candidate A	Candidate B
Nominating Power	Legislative	Executive
Political Affiliation	Independent	Morena
Most Recent Position	Federal Judge	Academic
Education	Doctorate	Master's
Gender	Woman	Man
Ethnic Group	Mestiza	Mestizo
Age	50 years	40 years

Which of these candidates would you vote for?

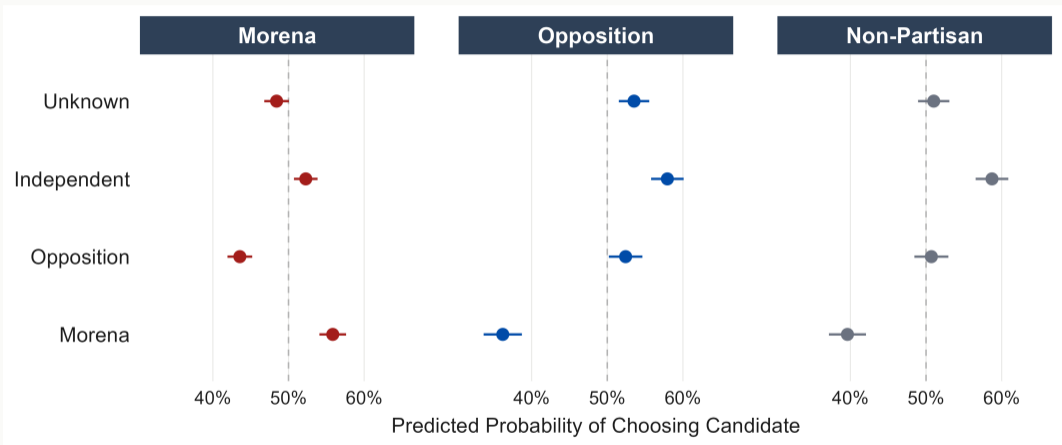
Candidate A

Candidate B



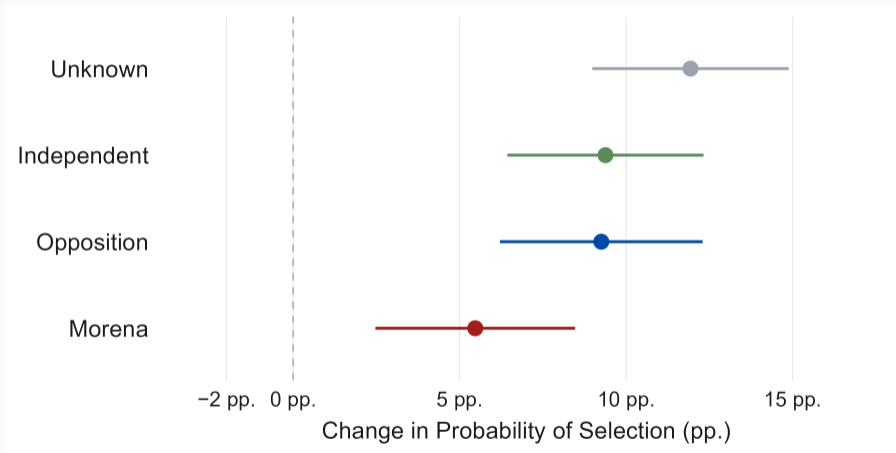


Political affiliation only — 95% CI, SEs clustered by respondent



Political affiliation only — 95% CI, SEs clustered by respondent

Partisan Affiliation Reduces Effect of Education



Effect of doctorate vs. bachelor's on selection probability, by candidate affiliation

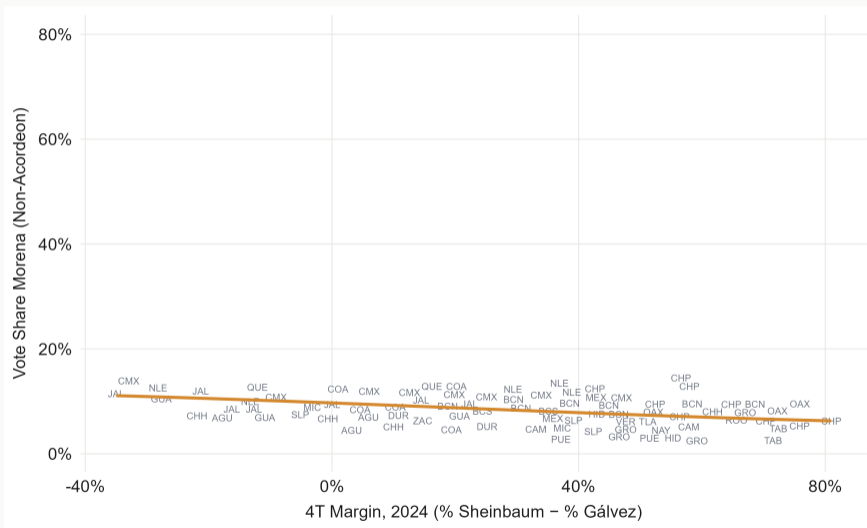
The Elections

13%

national turnout



Partisan Voting Without the Cheat Sheet



Non-endorsed Morena candidates — same y-axis scale as previous slide; $n = 7$ candidates

Contributions

Shows novel mechanism: Electoral capture by information provision

Pivotal election for Mexico

Eroded *vertical* and *horizontal* accountability

Appendix: Morena Candidates Not on the Official Cheat Sheet

Used to separate mobilization from cheat-sheet guidance. Top three are the cleanest controls; bottom four have partial acordeón exposure.

#	Candidate	Basis for Morena coding	Note
24	Pérez Romo	Career federal magistrate; Morena-associated	Clean: no acordeón exposure
25	Reyes Terán	Appointed by Morena Gov. Barbosa (Puebla); ex-SAT	Clean: no acordeón exposure
60	Santillán Pérez	UNAM professor; Morena-coded	Former PRD delegado (2009); likely convert
31	Téllez Torres	AMLO-backed magistrate; assoc. Sec. Buenrostro	On <i>early draft</i> acordeón before final 9
36	Anaya Gallardo	Honorary Morena trainer; adviser to Martí Batres	Borderline coding (flagged); early draft acordeón
12	García Villegas	Daughter of Olga Sánchez Cordero (Morena senator)	On MC Nuevo León parallel acordeón
55	Molina Martínez	“Proclive a 4T”; cercano a min. Esquivel	Recoded from opp.; MC Nuevo León acordeón