Partisanized Participation in Nonpartisan Elections: Evidence from Mexico's Extraordinary Judicial Elections

Abstract

This study analyzes Mexico's unprecedented direct election of judicial authorities across federal and subnational levels on June 1, 2025. Although framed as a democratization effort, the reform resulted in significant consolidation of judicial power by the ruling party. Using a combination of official section-level vote returns and original survey data, we show that turnout was higher in areas supportive of the president, while spoiled ballots were more common in opposition strongholds, suggesting that low participation reflected political dissent more than confusion or lack of information. Despite rules prohibiting campaigns and partisan affiliation of candidates, the best predictor of candidate success was appearing on a government-aligned "voter guide" (acordeón), particularly in pro-government areas. Ballot design also conveyed executive preferences and incumbency status, reinforcing partisan patterns in what was technically an election where partisanship was prohibited. Although the long-term effects of these unprecedented judicial reforms are yet to be seen, this evidence suggests that this electoral process stands to undermine judicial independence and the separation of powers.

Abstract

Este estudio analiza el Proceso Electoral Extraordinario para la elección de diversos cargos del Poder Judicial de la Federación, celebradas en México el 1 de junio de 2025. Aunque se presentó como un proceso de democratización, la reforma dio lugar a una importante consolidación del poder judicial por parte del partido gobernante. Combinamos analyses de resultados oficiales de los recuentos en las casillas electorales y datos de encuestas originales, mostramos que la participación fue mayor en las zonas favorables al presidente, mientras que los votos nulos fueron más frecuentes en los bastiones de la oposición, lo que sugiere que la baja participación reflejó más la disidencia política que la confusión o la falta de información. A pesar de las normas que prohíben las campañas y la afiliación partidista de los candidatos, el mejor indicador del éxito de un candidato era aparecer en una ≪guía del votante≫ alineada con el Gobierno (acordeón), especialmente en las zonas progubernamentales. El diseño de las papeletas también transmitía las preferencias del ejecutivo y la condición de titularidad, lo que reforzó los patrones partidistas en lo que técnicamente era una elección en la que estaba prohibido el partidismo. Aunque aún están por verse los efectos a largo plazo de estas reformas judiciales sin precedentes, estas pruebas sugieren que este proceso electoral puede amenazar la independencia judicial y la separación de poderes.

Keywords: Poder Judicial Federal, Elección del Poder Judicial de la Federación 2025, elecciones judiciales, México//Direct elections of the federal judiciary of Mexico, judicial elections

On June 1, 2025, Mexico implemented the largest direct election of judicial authorities in the world, starting a process that will replace all ministers, magistrates and judges in the federal and subnational judicial hierarchies via popular suffrage.[1] We document here the political origins of this major judicial reform, and introduce empirical evidence regarding the Mexican public's participation in this historic electoral process. We evaluate hypotheses that the low public participation was rooted in lack of information or served as a signal of political opposition, and scrutinize the possibility that, despite prohibitions on campaigns and candidate party affiliation, partisanship exerted a profound influence on the eventual outcome of these elections.

The direct election of judges is not unique to Mexico, nor is it unprecedented in comparative perspective.[2] Judicial elections exemplify a core tension between democratic accountability and judicial independence: while advocates often argue that popular selection can enhance legitimacy and public confidence, the circumstances surrounding electoral implementation often generates dynamics that undermine judicial independence. Judicial elections are often low-information events, which amplifies the influence of partisan actors and elite coordination, and increases voters' reliance on candidate heuristics, even in formally nonpartisan contests (Shugerman, 2012; Driscoll and Nelson, 2019). Elsewhere, centralized candidate preselection and widespread abstention have transformed judicial elections into mechanisms of partisan consolidation rather than democratic accountability, despite the prohibition of partisan labels on the electoral ballot (Driscoll and Nelson, 2014; 2015; 2019). Public support for these reforms reflects both the belief that they will remedy long-standing failures in the justice system—despite being poorly suited to do so—and a desire for sweeping institutional change as a break from prior partisan control. Yet judicial elections polarize public confidence by recasting courts as political institutions and judges as partisan actors, undermining the diffuse support on which judicial compliance and legitimacy depend (Driscoll and Nelson, 2015;

[1]This is the first Mexican electoral process of its kind, elections scheduled for 2027 will replace all lower and federal judges who were not directly elected in the 2025 contests.

[2]Popular elections are used to select many state-level judges in the United States, and the judges and magistrates to national judicial institutions in Bolivia (c.f. Driscoll and Nelson, 2015; Bonneau and Hall, 2009).

Driscoll et al., 2025). Viewed through this lens, Mexico represents an extreme but theoretically informative case of judicial elections conducted under conditions of restricted candidate vetting, strong executive signaling, and uneven political participation.

We test these hypotheses using data from the national electoral authority (Instituto Nacional Electoral, or INE) and a public opinion survey fielded in the days following the elections. We first suggest that turnout was higher and ballot spoiling less frequent in areas where presidential supporters were concentrated. Moreover, open-ended responses about voters' participation reveal that a plurality of subjects expressed skepticism and distrust for the entire election process, characterizing it as a fraudulent effort by the government to stack the courts with their favored judicial appointees. Next, we turn to an analysis of candidate vote share and describe that although the Mexican electoral authorities aimed to create an environment devoid of partisan influence, the strongest predictor of candidate vote share appeared on a pro-government voter information guide (acordeón), especially so in sections where presidential supporters are highly concentrated. Along with evidence of this external partisan influence, features of the ballot design—specifically the indication of candidates who had been nominated by the executive power or were already in office—are amongst the strongest predictors of candidate vote shares.

This research empirically substantiates existing expert claims that this election serves to populate judicial hierarchy with judges, magistrates and ministers who were hand-picked by the ruling party (Montfort, 2025; Aparicio Castillo, 2024; Cossío Díaz and Medellín Pino, 2025). This capture was made possible by a suite of reforms the government claimed would 'democratize' the judiciary by involving the popular vote in the selection of judicial authorities and ensuring that more diverse jurists were elected to the bench. Yet the candidate selection process was so circumscribed that no careful vetting of candidates was possible, and candidates were approved to stand for election without the involvement or endorsement of the political opposition. As to the direct election of judges, the government designed a ballot and coordinated its voters sufficiently to ensure their favorite judges were elected, while opposition voters abstained and invalidated their

ballots. Although the long-term effects of these historic reforms are too soon to be fully realized or appreciated, these analyses make clear that the judicial elections are a dramatic reshape of the judiciary that benefits the ruling party while undermining the institutional separation of powers and judicial independence. Far from a neutral institutional redesign, the reforms have significantly enhanced the ruling party's influence over the judiciary, raising serious concerns about the erosion of judicial independence and the weakening of the constitutional separation of powers.

Partisan Origins of the Judicial Reform

The constitutional reform that led to the current judicial reform has its roots in the rise of the Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (MORENA) and the pivotal role of its founder, former president Andrés Manuel López Obrador (more commonly referred to by his initials, 'AMLO'). MORENA's establishment and swift rise to electoral hegemony has fundamentally shifted the contemporary Mexican political landscape, setting the stage for a new wave of institutional reforms and political transformation (Castro Cornejo, 2023; Aguilar et al., 2025). Since Mexico's transition to democracy at the turn of the century, the country's political environment has been dominated by three major parties: the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the National Action Party (PAN), and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). The dominant of the three was the centrist, catch-all party of the PRI, which had maintained the presidency, as well as a supermajority share of seats of the bicameral National Congress and control of most subnational governments for the better part of the 20th century (from 1929-2000). Although the 2000 elections marked a critical juncture with PANista candidate Vicente Fox clinching the presidency, scholars emphasize that this was the culmination of a gradual erosion of a PRIista hegemony, rather than a sudden collapse (Dillon, 2000; Magaloni, 2006).

The PRI's monolithic grip began to fracture as early as 1988, when the party lost its constitutional supermajority in the Chamber of Deputies, ending its ability to pass unilateral constitutional reforms and forcing it into strategic negotiations with the opposition (Magaloni, 2006). This transition also manifested at the subnational level; the 1989 election in Baja California marked the first

time the PRI conceded a governorship to the opposition, beginning a "bottom-up" cycle of democratization that saw the PRI steadily lose control of local congresses and state houses throughout the 1990s (Magaloni, 2006).[3]

Against this backdrop of political decline, key institutions began acquiring independence well before 2000, in part because of the PRI's strategic calculations. A prime example is the 1994 constitutional reform, which constitutionally bolstered the independence of the Supreme Court. Rather than an act of democratic benevolence, this reform has been characterized as a political "insurance policy," implemented by the PRI to entrench its interests through a powerful judiciary in anticipation of future electoral losses (Finkel, 2005). This historical context is essential to understanding the current judicial reforms, as the PRI's historical efforts to "stack the deck" via judicial empowerment provided the institutional framework that the current administration now seeks to overhaul.

In 2014, following the PRI's recapture of the presidency with the election of President Enrique Peña Nieto, AMLO set about to put an end to the PRI's dominance of the traditional party system decisively. Capitalizing on populist sentiments and a widespread public desire for a viable political alternative, this long-time presidential aspirant and prominent member of the leftist party PRD registered a civil society organization as a new political party, with himself as its central figurehead. Since then, MORENA has rapidly become a dominant political force, culminating in AMLO's run for the presidency in 2018 as the party's candidate (Aguilar et al., 2025; Sánchez-Talanquer and Greene, 2021; Parra Prieto et al., 2024; Castro Cornejo, 2023).

AMLO championed a populist campaign, built on rhetoric that emphasized a government for the "virtuous people" against a "corrupt elite," and promising what he called the Fourth Transformation, defined as the mission to purify public life and end the so-called "mafia of power" (Aguilar et al., 2025; Ríos Figueroa, 2022; Monsiváis-Carrillo, 2024). The 2018 elections brought

[3]Prior to this erosion, the political hegemony of the catch-all party was maintained for decades through a combination of sincere public support, corporatist arrangements and intraparty compromise (Langston, 2017) and clientelist networks (Magaloni, 2006), with periodic reversions to outright graft, corruption and repression (Cantú, 2019a;b).

AMLO to power with an absolute majority of the votes (53.19%), a level of support not seen since 1988, simultaneously securing for his Morena copartisans and other supportive parties a majority coalition in both houses of Congress; a level of consolidated support that had not been seen since 1994, and which had never been accomplished by a party other than that of the hegemonic PRI (Aparicio Castillo and Cornejo, 2020; Ríos Figueroa, 2022). This was the highest vote share for any president since democratization, and was a historic election that was widely characterized as a significant marker of democratic vitality and vibrancy (Esteinou Madrid, 2019).

AMLO's decisive victory also represented a decisive turning point for the Mexican electorate, who no longer viewed a meaningful difference between the hegemonic PRI and long-standing party of the opposition—the PAN, a refrain that was emphasized repeatedly by AMLO himself over the course of his campaign (Castro Cornejo, 2023; Aparicio Castillo and Cornejo, 2020).[4] This widespread disdain for the traditional parties, and the groundswell of support for the emergent Morena, laid the groundwork for AMLO's subsequent efforts to profoundly reshape Mexican political institutions.

Once in office, AMLO's anti-establishment rhetoric and commitment to a fundamental reordering of the governmental system escalated, as he set his sights on capturing or completely dismantling formerly autonomous political institutions. Beyond appointing party loyalists to key positions, sweeping reforms targeted the various bodies responsible for administration of national elections (the Instituto Nacional Electoral, or INE), and disbanded completely the institute responsible for government oversight, accountability and transparent documentation of government functions (The Instituto Nacional de Transparencia, Acceso a la Información y Protección de Datos Personales, or INAI, was the Federal Institute for Access to Public Information and Data Protection (Nieto-Morales, 2024). This disbandment was enacted through a constitutional reform as part of a package proposed by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador on February 5, 2024, which saw

[4]Experts have since argued that this shift in public perceptions did not correspond to a true ideological convergence or party realignment, but rather a broad public rejection of the mainstream parties, whose legitimacy had steadily eroded over the previous decades (Castro Cornejo, 2023; Monsiváis-Carrillo, 2024).

legislative approval in September 2024 and was officially published in the Federal Official Gazette under the president's administration.

Throughout his administration, his daily press conferences ("mañaneras"), made a public show of criticizing and delegitimizing any institution or organization perceived as an obstruction to his agenda or his plans for the "Fourth Transformation" (Aguilar et al., 2025; Monsiváis-Carrillo, 2024; Ríos Figueroa, 2022), research has demonstrated that these consistent attacks reduced the public confidence in institutions, and increased public tolerance to backsliding reforms (Cella et al., 2025). AMLO's attacks on the INE were especially intense, including accusations of corruption, waste, and electoral manipulation, along with repeated budget cuts and attempts to undermine the institution through legislative reforms (Parra Prieto et al., 2024; Monsiváis-Carrillo, 2024). In the federal judiciary, the courts—and the Supreme Court in particular—became a recurring target of AMLO's ire, who frequently accused judicial institutions and individual judges, magistrates and ministers of corruption, elitism, and acting against the interests of "the people" (Aguilar et al., 2025; Ríos Figueroa, 2022).[5] However, the origins and evolution of these reforms were fundamentally shaped by external developments, the first of which was the new legislative balance established by the 2021 midterm elections.

Although MORENA and its coalition partners had maintained a simple majority in the Chamber of Deputies since 2018, they remained short of the two-thirds qualified majority required by Article 135 of the Constitution for unilateral amendments (Monsiváis-Carrillo, 2024; Parra Prieto et al., 2024). Indeed, no single party or coalition has held the 333 seats in the Chamber or 85

[5]This shift in public perceptions did not correspond to a true ideological convergence or realignment between the PRI and the PAN, but rather a broad public rejection of the mainstream parties, whose legitimacy had steadily eroded over previous decades (Aguilar et al., 2025; Monsiváis-Carrillo, 2024). This erosion is often accompanied by "trash-talking democracy": a strategy where leaders denigrate institutions as corrupt or elitist to build public tolerance for democratic backsliding (Cella et al., 2025). In the case of Mexico, Aguilar et al. (2025) found that between 2019 and 2023, AMLO made at least 163 negative mentions of the INE and 428 negative mentions of the federal judiciary in his morning conferences, representing an unprecedented pattern of rhetorical attack in Mexico's democratic era. These strategies, which combine direct communication with the delegitimization of independent agencies, lay the groundwork for more radical reforms like Plans A, B, and C (Monsiváis-Carrillo, 2024; Parra Prieto et al., 2024). Experimental evidence suggests that such rhetoric targeting the courts can elicit anti-democratic attitudes among both supporters and opponents of the administration (Cella et al., 2025).

seats in the Senate required by Article 135 for such reforms since the PRI lost its supermajority in 1988. The 2021 results further complicated this legislative math, as the ruling coalition's share of seats decreased, leading to the failure of the initial "Plan A" electoral reform and the subsequent introduction of the controversial "Plan B." The comprehensive constitutional reform known as "Plan A," a plan which sought to fundamentally transform Mexico's electoral governance system (Monsiváis-Carrillo, 2024; Parra Prieto et al., 2024).[6]

Although framed as a measure to democratize the system, eliminate electoral fraud, and reduce election costs, the reform raised serious concerns about undermining the autonomy, professionalism, and impartiality of Mexico's electoral institutions (Aguilar et al., 2025; Martín Reyes, 2024). Groups from civil society and opposition parties strongly opposed the initiative, arguing that it would weaken checks and balances and increase the risk of the executive branch taking control of elections. Ultimately, Plan A failed to achieve the necessary support in Congress, a legislative defeat led directly to the government's pursuit of "Plan B," a suite of changes to secondary legislation with similar objectives (Monsiváis-Carrillo, 2024; Parra Prieto et al., 2024; Martín Reyes, 2024). By focusing instead on extensive modifications in secondary legislation, the government could evade the necessity for broad legislative consensus that constitutional revisions require.[7]

As with Plan A, these extensive legislative changes sparked immediate resistance and multiple legal challenges from opposition parties, civil society groups, and independent electoral authorities (Martín Reyes, 2024; Aguilar et al., 2025). The legislative process itself became a major point of contention; opponents emphasized that Plan B was pushed rapidly through Congress without ad-

[6]Among its most notable provisions, Plan A proposed the wholesale elimination of the National Electoral Institute (INE) and its replacement with a centralized National Institute of Elections and Consultations (INEC), with councilors elected through popular vote. The proposal additionally aimed to abolish local electoral bodies, eliminate proportional representation seats in Congress, significantly reduce public funding for political parties, and establish direct popular elections for all members of the Federal Electoral Tribunal (Martín Reyes, 2024).

[7]The implementation of Plan B brought with it a significant cut to the National Electoral Institute's (INE) operational budget and staff, thereby reducing the institute's ability to oversee and administer elections. The reform also limited the INE's independence while rewriting rules about party representation, running for office, and public funding, which critics argued could unfairly help the ruling party and its allies while hurting smaller opposition groups (Martín Reyes, 2024; Parra Prieto et al., 2024; Monsiváis-Carrillo, 2024).

equate legislative debate, transparency, or public consultation, violating standard procedural rules and democratic norms required by the Mexican Constitution (Martín Reyes, 2024; Parra Prieto et al., 2024).

These challenges to Plan B made their way to the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation (SCJN), which heard several legal cases contesting its constitutionality. In May 2023, the Court issued a unanimous ruling invalidating the entire reform package. The decision was based primarily on procedural grounds; the Court found that Congress failed to justify the "urgent" character of the legislative process and did not provide adequate time for consultation, debate, and public deliberation. Scholars highlight that, although this decision effectively protected electoral integrity in the short term, especially ahead of the critical 2024 elections, it did not establish a strong constitutional precedent against the substantive ambitions of Plan B, leaving open the possibility that similar reforms could be pursued in the future if proper procedures are followed (Martín Reyes, 2024; Parra Prieto et al., 2024; Monsiváis-Carrillo, 2024). It also put the Supreme Court in the cross-hairs of AMLO and his Morena-party backers, who viewed the pinnacle judicial authority as a critical obstacle to their reform agenda.

On February 5, 2024, the President formally submitted a comprehensive package of constitutional reforms to Congress, referred to as Plan C.[8] The initiative proposed that all Supreme Court justices, circuit judges, and district judges be selected through direct popular elections. Plan C also called for the complete abolition of the Federal Judicial Council (CJF), transferring its administrative and disciplinary powers to newly created bodies: a Judicial Discipline Tribunal and an Administrative Judicial Body, vested with broad and largely autonomous authority to oversee judicial behavior throughout the judicial hierarchy, sanctioning or even removing judges who failed to meet expectations. Additional provisions included reducing the number of Supreme Court

[8]Plan C was a comprehensive package of 18 constitutional reforms proposed by the outgoing administration. In addition to judicial reform, the package included reforms affecting public security institutions, electoral governance, and the organization of the armed forces, among other areas. Judicial reform thus constituted one component of a broader constitutional agenda advanced during the final months of the López Obrador administration (Harrison, 2024; Noriega and Reyes, 2025).

justices from eleven to nine, reducing the salaries of the ministers of the Supreme Court, eliminating the specialized chambers within the Court, and concentrating judicial functions into a single plenary session. The proposal additionally introduced restrictions on the judiciary's authority to suspend the application of laws or government acts during constitutional review, thereby limiting the general effects of injunctions and judicial decisions (Presidencia de la República, 2024; Berg, 2024; Wilson Center Mexico Institute, 2024; Noriega and Reyes, 2025).

The judicial reform also significantly reshaped the internal leadership structure of the Supreme Court in ways that were detrimental to its institutional power. Previously, the presidency of the Court was a four-year term elected by the ministers themselves, a position that carried substantial political weight and institutional leadership since the 1994 reforms; the Chief Justice often acted as a critical mediator between the judiciary and the other branches of government (Ríos-Figueroa, 2016). Under the new framework, the presidency is reduced to a two-year rotating term, assigned automatically to the candidate who receives the highest number of votes in the general election (Congreso de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 2024; Zissis, 2025). This shift undermines the office of the Chief Justice, transforming it from a role of internal consensus-building and institutional representation into one dictated by electoral performance. By shortening the tenure and linking it to popular plurality, the reform risks diluting the Court's ability to maintain a consistent institutional voice against executive or legislative overreach.

AMLO and his Morena backers claimed these reforms would make the judicial branch more democratic, foster electoral accountability, and rebuild the public's trust in the justice system by virtue of the electoral connection. As with previous reform efforts aimed at implementing judicial elections in Bolivia and the United States, proponents claimed that electing judges by popular vote would bring the courts closer to the people and make the judiciary more responsive to the needs and expectations of everyday Mexicans (Driscoll and Nelson, 2012; Shugerman, 2012). Meanwhile, reorganizing administrative structures was presented as a way to fight corruption, boost efficiency, and guarantee impartial justice (Presidencia de la República, 2024; Wilson Center

Mexico Institute, 2024; Berg, 2024). Functionally, however, the new disciplinary tribunal would ensure ex-post control of the judicial branch in an effort to rein in the judicial branch, rather than assure its independence.

During the period between the submission of Plan C and its legislative approval, Mexico held federal elections in June 2024. Claudia Sheinbaum, who ran as MORENA's candidate and was widely regarded as AMLO's chosen successor, won the presidency with nearly 60 percent of the popular vote. Her victory was accompanied by a sweeping electoral mandate for MORENA and its coalition partners, who secured a supermajority in the Chamber of Deputies and nearly reached the same threshold in the Senate (Ríos, 2024; Wilson Center Mexico Institute, 2024). In a public statement after her election, Sheinbaum expressed support for Plan C, characterizing it as a necessary step toward democratizing and modernizing the judiciary, and affirming her commitment to the Fourth Transformation agenda initiated by her predecessor. In June 2024, she stated publicly that "judges should be elected," directly endorsing the reform's core provision for the popular election of Supreme Court justices, while also emphasizing the need for a judicial system that is both accountable and transparent (Reuters, 2024; Wilson Center Mexico Institute, 2024; Berg, 2024). Sheinbaum vowed that implementing the reform would adhere to democratic principles and legal protections, mirroring official reasons for supporting Plan C and cementing its position at the heart of Mexico's new political landscape.

The post-election composition of Congress also generated debate regarding whether the Morena-led coalition legitimately won a qualified supermajority. Although the coalition obtained approximately 55 percent of the national vote, its final seat share in the Chamber of Deputies exceeded the two-thirds threshold required for constitutional reform. Critics argued that rulings by electoral authorities and courts facilitated an undue supermajority through the allocation of proportional representation seats, raising concerns about overrepresentation and the interpretation of electoral rules. Others emphasized that the outcome complied with existing constitutional and electoral law, underscoring the legal permissibility—if political contentiousness—of the seat distribution

(Reuters, 2024b;a).

On September 1, as the new Congress took office, Morena leadership made clear their intention to prioritize debate on the judicial reform. The Chamber of Deputies approved the proposal on September 4, following three days of contentious debate, with 359 votes in favor and 135 against. The Senate's final approval on September 11 was marked by intense political maneuvering and public tension. Opposition and labor protests continued outside the legislative chambers, with demonstrators at one point forcing entry into the Senate, disrupting the session, and prompting lawmakers to relocate the vote to a different building (Al Jazeera, 2024; Harrison, 2024; BBC News, 2024; Mexico News Daily, 2024).

Domestic protests culminated in boycotts by opposition senators during the official declaration of the reform's passage. Following its legislative approval, the constitutional reform was promulgated and formally published in the Diario Oficial de la Federación on September 15, 2024, while President Andrés Manuel López Obrador was still in office; President-elect Claudia Sheinbaum assumed the presidency on October 1, 2024. Another constitutional reform included in Plan C—transferring the National Guard to the Secretariat of National Defense—was approved on September 30, 2024, also prior to Sheinbaum's inauguration. The National Electoral Institute then began preparations for the 2025 judicial elections, a process fraught with logistical and financial obstacles exacerbated by the diminished institutional capacity of the INE (Mexico News Daily, 2024; CNN, 2024; Harrison, 2024).

The passage of Plan C drew sustained and vocal opposition from judicial associations, legal academics, and international bodies (Espinosa Silis, 2025; Meza, 2024; Cossío, 2024). These critiques were echoed by prominent domestic legal scholars. In a widely circulated analysis, former Supreme Court Justice José Ramón Cossío and constitutional lawyer Jorge Alberto Medellín argued that the reform undermines judicial independence by concentrating candidate selection and disciplinary oversight in the political branches, particularly when combined with limits on constitutional review (Cossío and Medellín Pino, 2024). The Inter-American Commission on Human

Rights (IACHR) subsequently expressed grave concern that the reform threatened judicial independence (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2024). In parallel, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers warned that reforms combining judicial elections, restricted candidate vetting, and limits on constitutional review pose serious risks to judicial independence and democratic governance, particularly in low-information electoral contexts (Council, 2024).

Approving Plan C was not merely a legislative milestone but required a second constitutional amendment that fundamentally altered the hierarchy of legal norms in Mexico. A critical development in this process was the introduction of an *ad hoc* reform in late 2024, known as the "Supremacía Constitucional" (Constitutional Supremacy) amendment. This reform was promulgated on November 1st as a direct response to the SCJN's decision to admit legal challenges against the judicial overhaul. The timing was notably preemptive, passing the Chamber of Deputies just five days before the Supreme Court was scheduled to deliberate on a proposal to strike down parts of the judicial reform (MND Staff, 2024). By amending Articles 105 and 107 of the Constitution, the ruling coalition explicitly prohibited the judiciary from reviewing or suspending constitutional amendments approved by Congress (Oré, 2024; Romero and Mega, 2024). Days later, on November 5, the Supreme Court considered a final legal challenge to the judicial reform but failed to reach the required supermajority threshold to invalidate it. Consequently, the case was dismissed, and the reform stood shielded from judicial scrutiny, undermining the Court's traditional role as the ultimate arbiter of constitutional integrity (Cossío, 2024; Meza, 2024).

Partisan Influence in the Candidate Selection Process

With little to no time to waste, the INE set about preparing for the 2025 electoral process. The newly reformed Article 96 of the Constitution requires each branch of government (executive, legislative, and judicial) to form a committee composed of five jurists who would be responsible for assessing and selecting prospective judicial candidates (Congreso de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 2024), with each arm of the government selecting a third of the candidates to be included on the

ballots. In cases where the number of suitable applicants exceeded the available ballot slots, a lottery was used to determine which candidates would appear on the ballot. Professional requirements for aspiring judicial candidates were significantly reduced compared to those previously in place for the federal judicial career. Candidates are now required only to possess a law degree with a minimum general grade point average of 8.0 out of 10, and a 9.0 out of 10 in subjects specifically relevant to the post (Pozas Loyo and Ríos Figueroa, 2024). While higher court candidates must demonstrate five years of "legal activity," this requirement is broadly defined and lacks the technical vetting of previous years (Pozas Loyo and Ríos Figueroa, 2024). Additionally, the evaluation process now relies on a three-page "statement of motives" and five letters of recommendation from neighbors or acquaintances to attest to the candidate's suitability, rather than the rigorous technical examinations of the past (Pozas Loyo and Ríos Figueroa, 2024).[9] As before, aspirant judges were prohibited from having served in a partisan electoral capacity (legislative or executive posts) within the previous year.

The process of narrowing down the initial pool of applicants was complex and unfolded within a compressed timeline of only a few weeks. Contemporary reporting suggests that the reform initially attracted an extraordinarily large number of aspirants, estimated at approximately 34,000 individuals who expressed interest or submitted preliminary materials across the various selection channels (Forbes México, 2024). As the process advanced, candidate evaluation was consolidated through constitutionally mandated committees associated with the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches. According to official candidate lists submitted to and published by the Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE), the Senate transmitted a consolidated roster comprising 1,410 nominees originating from the Executive branch, 1,416 from the Legislative branch, and 955 from the Judicial branch, yielding a total of 3,781 prospective candidates prior to final validation and ballot publication (Washington Office on Latin America, 2025; Espinosa Silis, 2025; Instituto Nacional

[9]Constitutional reforms enacted in 1994 established the Consejo de la Judicatura Federal (Federal Judicial Council, or CJF), empowered to supervise the administration of judges throughout the hierarchy. A merit-based system of appointment and promotion governed judges' and magistrates professional trajectories.

Electoral, 2025b), including 64 candidates competing for the nine seats on the Supreme Court (Zissis, 2025).

Following the suspension of the work of the Judicial Branch's evaluation committee, the names of eligible candidates under its review were sent to the Senate's evaluation committee to finish the evaluation of their suitability (Washington Office on Latin America, 2025). This meant that the Morena party who, with the help of coalition partners, controlled a supermajority of Senate votes, nominated two-thirds of the future judicial candidates without the involvement of any members of the political opposition. The remaining candidates were vetted and cleared as candidates by the evaluation committee of the political executive (Espinosa Silis, 2025).[10] The resulting pool of judicial aspirants raised significant alarm for both critics and government officials (Camacho et al., 2025). Although the judicial elections were constitutionally mandated to be nonpartisan, many candidates were approved by the selection committees with longstanding ties to political parties, often the Morena party (Ortega, 2025). Further, research by civil society organizations revealed that there were approved judicial candidates at both the federal and subnational levels with credible connections to convicted drug traffickers and violent criminal organizations; More than a handful would be elected in the 2025 contests (Villegas and Mega, 2025; Jiménez, 2025).

The Erosion of the Judicial Career

A critical point of contention regarding the 2025 reforms is the dismantling of the professional *carrera judicial* (judicial career) established during the 1994 transition. Prior to these amendments, the Mexican judiciary operated under a merit-based system overseen by the Federal Judicial Council (CJF), which prioritized technical expertise and longevity. Consequently, the career path of the federal judiciary was historically one of the most rigorous in the Mexican state, requiring meritocratic evaluations and decades of experience to reach the highest levels (Pozas Loyo and

[10]This single-party control is strikingly similar to the candidate selection process in the early years of the Bolivian judicial elections (Driscoll and Nelson, 2012; 2015), which resulted in an election of national magistrates all of whom were aligned with the governing party.

Ríos Figueroa, 2024). On average, reaching the bench required a career ladder of 16 years for district judges and 19 years and 8 months for circuit magistrates. This experience-heavy model of professional advancement was designed to ensure that judges were adequately prepared for the task of legal adjudication set before them, and the judiciary largely functioned as a technocratic check on the other branches of government (Pozas Loyo and Ríos Figueroa, 2024).

The 2025 reform replaces this ladder with a set of significantly reduced requirements and dismantles the Federal Judicial Council entirely. The CJF is now replaced by the Judicial Administration Body (Órgano de Administración Judicial) and the Judicial Discipline Tribunal (El Tribunal de Disciplina Judicial), the latter of which is empowered to review judicial rulings and sanction or remove judges and officials when their decisions do not conform to the priorities of the disciplinary tribunal (Driscoll et al., 2025). While the 1994 system demanded decades of specialized training and internal examinations, the new criteria only require a law degree and five years of loosely defined "legal activity." As shown in Table 1, the shift from merit-based selection to elections fundamentally alters entry requirements and reorients jurists' incentives toward the Disciplinary Tribunal and the electorate, rather than professional advancement or legal norms.

Table 1: Comparison of Judicial Appointment Requirements

Feature	**1994 System (Merit)**	**2025 Reform (Election)**
Avg. Required Experience (Judge)	16 years	5 years
Avg. Required Experience (Magistrate)	19 years, 8 months	5 years
Selection Basis	Technical Exams/Merit	Popular Vote
Overseeing Body	Federal Judicial Council	Evaluation Committees (ex-ante) Judicial Administration Body Disciplinary Tribunal (ex-post)

The Elections Begin

The official campaign period began on March 30, 2025, and concluded on May 28, followed by the constitutionally prescribed period of electoral silence. Formal rules stipulated that candidates were prohibited from accepting public or private funding and had to self-finance their campaigns,

they were also expressly forbidden from purchasing ads or paying for publicity. In practice, the implementation saw irregularities, government-backed contenders reportedly had access to public resources for self-promotion (Dresser, 2025).[11] There were documented instances of political parties, particularly the ruling Morena party, distributing "cheat sheets"—voter information guides that promoted specific candidates (Instituto Nacional Electoral Comisión de Quejas y Denuncias, 2025; Misión de Observación Electoral de la OEA, 2025).[12] The most visible candidates were often those who already held public office or had existing media platforms. The INE provided a centralized online portal (Conóceles, Practica y Ubica) with the aim of educating voters about the candidates and the electoral process, which included the curriculum vitae of the candidates, their contacts, social media handles and candidate number, as well as an opportunity to preview the ballots and practice casting one's ballot (Instituto Nacional Electoral, 2025a). Nevertheless, the sheer number of candidates made the amount of information to sort through very difficult for the average voter.

The 2025 elections involved the popular vote for roughly half of Mexico's federal judiciary, with the remainder to be elected in 2027. Specifically, voters elected:

- Nine Supreme Court justices
- Two magistrates of the Superior Chamber and 15 magistrates of the Regional Chambers of the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary
- Five members of the newly established Judicial Disciplinary Tribunal
- 464 circuit court magistrates
- 386 district court judges (Congreso de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 2024);

All judicial positions were elected by plurality voting (Congreso de la Unión de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 2024). The election was conducted across six separate ballots, one for each office. Each ballot displayed two lists, separated by gender, listing each candidate's number, nominating

[11] Compounding the issue of an already complicated electoral process, the INE faced significant budget cuts which limited the INE's capacity to effectively administer such a large and complex election (Misión de Observación Electoral de la OEA, 2025).

[12] Examples of voter guides which were officially subject to INE injunctions are shown in section D of the Appendix.

branch, and, where relevant, legal specialization (Pantin et al., 2025; Laboratorio Electoral, 2025). Voters were instructed to mark their choices by writing the candidate numbers in designated boxes, which were color-coded for specializations (Laboratorio Electoral, 2025).[13] For the election of circuit court magistrates and district court judges, 60 judicial electoral districts were established across Mexico's 32 judicial circuits.

The complexity of the judicial elections led to a dizzying array of candidates and electoral contests. With over 7,700 candidates vying for more than 2,600 positions, and up to six separate ballots, voters faced an overwhelming task (Wagner and Beltran, 2025). Some ballots reportedly listed over 150 names on a single page, and the delegation of local administration to state level electoral authorities introduced considerable heterogeneity in the ballot design (Pantin et al., 2025). A May 2025 Enkoll/El País poll found that only 23% of respondents were familiar with the candidates, although the same poll indicated that 72% of Mexicans viewed the judicial elections as "necessary" (Zissis, 2025).

Election day proceeded peacefully, but yielded strikingly low turnout (Misión de Observación Electoral de la OEA, 2025). Preliminary estimations from the INE indicated a turnout rate between 12.6% and 13.3%, a drastic drop compared to the 61% turnout in the 2024 presidential election (Instituto Nacional Electoral, 2024). A large number of votes were either blank or invalid, accounting for approximately 23% of all votes cast, and more than double the total number of valid votes cast for the Supreme Court candidate with the highest number of votes (Dresser, 2025). In a departure from regular electoral protocol, ballots were not tallied in the sections by citizen supervisors, but rather transported to centralized locations to be manually tabulated by INE officials

[13]The prioritization of gender "parity in everything" is a core element of AMLO's socially progressive platform and was constitutionalized in 2019, in part as a symbolic heuristic to mobilize Morena voters. Yet the implementation of these parity rules revealed tensions with other institutional priorities. In practice, parity requirements generated inconsistencies in voter instructions and vote tabulation procedures, creating confusion for both voters and electoral administrators (c.f. Pantin et al., 2025). Although the resulting Supreme Court is the most diverse in Mexico's history, it remains unclear how representational diversity aligns with expectations of constitutional fidelity and judicial independence (Pantin, 2025). Moreover, because the presidency of the SCJN is now awarded to the candidate receiving the most votes, the requirement that voters select five women and four men systematically disadvantaged female candidates in the competition for this leadership position.

in the two weeks following the elections (Washington Office on Latin America, 2025).[14] International coverage largely condemned the elections, including a scathing report by the Organization of American States (Misión de Observación Electoral de la OEA, 2025), with international observers expressing concerns about the erosion of judicial independence and the potential for increased political influence and corruption (Dresser, 2025). Former Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo called the election an "assassination of our young democracy," and a UN Special Rapporteur warned that the reform could eliminate judicial independence and lead to partisan-driven rulings that conflict with international human rights standards. Public reaction has been mixed, with some defending the reform as a necessary step to combat corruption, while others expressing deep apathy and disillusionment due to decades of corruption and a perceived lack of basic information about the vote (Dresser, 2025).

Analysis of Turnout and Voter Participation

Our first empirical analysis centers on voter turnout and participation. The low turnout of barely 13% of the electorate was widely publicized, drawing criticism from opponents who decried that the unprecedented lack of public participation as evidence of an undermined legitimacy of the entire electoral process (Dresser, 2025; Janetsky and Verza, 2025). The government, by contrast, publicized the election as a sweeping success, having involved more citizens' in the designation of judicial authorities than ever before (Janetsky and Verza, 2025; Dresser, 2025).

Explanations for the low voter participation have hinged on two possibilities we explore here. On the one hand, it is possible that the complicated nature of the electoral processes—there were many candidates, on many ballots, to fill positions in many institutions that are not well known to the public—may well have deterred voter turnout, or lead people who voted to cast blank or invalid ballots. As political expert Ernesto Guerra noted, "Evidently, people were not interested in this

[14]The longstanding electoral norm sees ballots counted in the precincts by citizen-volunteer precinct captains, who then publicly post the precinct vote tally for all voters to observe. This fosters citizen oversight and involvement, and is widely thought to minimize irregularities and foster public trust.

process," citing the complex nature of the ballot, limited organizational capacity of the INE, and low public understanding of the broader justice system institutions (Mega and Romero, 2025). On the other, it is possible that the low voter participation, and relatively high level of blank and null voting is instead an indicator of dissatisfaction with the process, or a sign of political opposition, similar to that found in the inaugural Bolivian judicial elections (Driscoll and Nelson, 2014). We bring two separate pieces of evidence to bear on these possibilities, finding limited evidence in favor of the former hypothesis (lack of information), and several points of evidence in support of the latter (lack of political support).

Analysis of Voter Turnout

From the INE records of voter turnout and participation, we calculated *Turnout* as the proportion of voters registered in the section divided by the number of voters per section that cast a ballot.[15] The median turnout was 12.8%, the average was slightly higher at 14.9%. The lowest turnout sections were located in Puebla, the highest turnout sections with near universal participation were in Guerrero, Chiapas and Sinaloa. The remaining two outcome variables we consider here are *Null* and *Blank* votes, which is calculated as the number of possible votes cast as invalidated or blank, divided by the number of possible votes.[16] We include as covariates sections (or district-average) level predictors that characterize voting locations. These include political covariates such as *Sheinbaum* and *Gálvez vote share*, which correspond to the vote share from the presidential elections in 2024 of both President Sheinbaum and her main competition, PANista candidate Bertha Xóchitl Gálvez Ruiz.[17] We also include demographic information that measures the proportion of

[15]For our analyses of electoral returns, we rely on the electoral data publicized by the INE in the days following the election which corresponded to the tallying of votes for the Supreme Court. We accessed these data on June 4th, data were incomplete or unavailable for .004 percent of the data at the time of our access. Although we attempted to conduct analysis at the precinct (casilla) level, the disparities in casilla location between the 2024 and 2025 elections made this disaggregated analyses prohibitive. Instead, we aggregate to the next highest electoral level, which was available with a common indicator for 97.1% of both the presidential and judicial contests.

[16]This calculation accounts for the possibility that voters cast partial ballots—filling in some candidate numbers while invalidating or leaving blank others.

[17]The presidential race of 2024 was split in a three way race between Claudia Sheinbaum, Xóchitl Gálvez, and centrist leader of the Movimiento Ciudadano (Citizens' Movement), Jorge Álvarez Máynez.

Table 2: Mixed Effects Linear Regression estimates of Turnout, Null and Blank Voting, with district clustered standard errors

	Voter Turnout	Null Votes (Proportion)	Blank Votes (Proportion)
Sheinbaum Vote Share (2024)	0.29*	-0.04*	0.05*
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Gálvez Vote Share (2024)	0.22*	0.01*	0.05*
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Proportion Indigenous	0.02*	0.00	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Proportion Internet	-0.07*	-0.01*	-0.05*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Median Education	0.00*	0.00*	-0.00*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	-0.15*	0.09*	0.11*
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Controls			
Presidential Turnout (2024)	0.11*		
	(0.00)		
Proportion Null Vote (2024)		0.02	0.27*
		(0.01)	(0.02)
Judicial Turnout (2025)		-0.00	0.00
		(0.00)	(0.00)
AIC	-125942.76	-219548.21	-181893.06
N	66560	66361	66361

* $p < 0.01$

indigenous voters, the proportion of homes with internet, and the median level of education.[18] We estimate a mixed effects linear regression, with clustered standard errors for electoral section.

Our estimates of the relationship between previous voter turnout and participation are shown in Table 2. These results suggest a political pattern to voters' participation in the inaugural judicial elections. Looking at the first column of the table, which uses voter turnout as the outcome variable,

[18]These figures are taken from the Mexican census of 2020. Proportion indigenous ranges from 0 to 1 with an average of .17. Proportion of internet homes ranges from 0 to 1 with an average of .47, meaning that in the average district, half of the populated homes have internet access. Median education is measured in years, the sample average of 9.42 suggests that in the median district, residents have completed 6 years of primary education plus another 3 years of lower secondary.

the strong and positive coefficients for *Sheinbaum vote share* and *Gálvez vote share* suggest that districts with higher concentrations of progovernment voters, as well as those voters who favor traditional parties (PAN, PRI, PRD, etc.) were more likely to turn out to vote in the judicial election. Districts which supported the third party candidate in 2024 (Movimiento Ciudadano), saw lower than average participation in the 2025 judicial elections. What is more, we find an inverse correlation between internet penetration and voter turnout, which implies that those districts with comparably *higher* access to information were among those with *lower* than average levels of voter participation. As such, these associations lend support to the hypothesis that political considerations, moreso than informational deficits, predicted voter turnout and participation.

The second column of Table 2 provides the results for the proportion of null votes in a section. Here, we see the inverse relation of that of turnout: in areas where Sheinbaum dominated in the 2024 presidential election, null voting was less common in the 2025 judicial election. But, the proportion of null votes increases with support for the opposition candidates in the 2024 elections. There is a small but positive association between Gálvez vote share in 2024, and a much stronger positive association between voteshare for centrist Máynez, and invalid voting in the judicial elections. Turning to the third column of the table, blank voting was relatively more common in sections with high concentrations of Sheinbaum and Gálvez supporters. Insofar that blank voting is an indication of voting without expressing a preference (or contributing to the overall balance of invalid voting), this may have been a more common option in locations where partisan voter mobilization efforts worked to mobilize voters. This may be why blank voting this is more common in areas with previous concentrations of all three presidential candidates, including that of the PAN and the Movimiento Ciudadano. Overall, these estimates lend credence to the assertion that political motivations underpin voters' participation in this inaugural contest.

Analysis of Original Public Opinion Survey

A second source of evidence regarding the reasons for public nonparticipation is original survey data collected in the days following the election.[19] Of this sample, roughly 33% indicated they had participated in the elections, far more than the official turnout rate of 13%. Nevertheless, 927 indicated they had not participated in the election, 917 of whom answered an open-ended response as to why. Of this sample of 917 respondents who did not participate and offered a reason in an open-ended response, we coded 148 randomly selected observations (16%) for their reasons for not participating.[20]

Of the 148 respondents who offered their reasons for not participating in the election, 36% indicated this was due to a lack of information, which they attributed to a variety of sources. In Appendix B, we present a list of 10 randomly sampled examples of reasons offered by respondents. Those which cited a lack of information expressed confusion about the candidates and their platforms, as well as lack of understanding about the electoral procedures and how to participate. For others, the lack of information manifested as a general disinterest in the election or the judicial branch of government. As such, we have some evidence that the new electoral environment, as well as the very high number of candidates, created an informational environment which many voters found taxing and difficult to overcome.

At the same time, a large plurality of 47% (69 respondents) indicated their reason for staying home on election day stemmed from dissatisfaction with the process or opposition to elections themselves. Again, a random sample of these reasons are presented in Appendix B. Multiple respondents reference the elections as a "farce," a "fraud," or a "circus," which they viewed as an intentional effort by the government to capture the judiciary. Another respondent registered

[19]Our survey was fielded between June 1 and June 10, 2025. Our convenience sample of public opinion was fielded online with the support of Netquest, who maintains survey panels of respondents throughout Latin America. Our data contained 1,669 complete responses, the demographic composition of which is shown in Appendix A.

[20]We coded according to a four-category variable, indicating informational deficits (1), administrative reasons (e.g. lacking credentials, or a work conflict that prohibited participation) (2), opposition (3) and other (4).

their dissent with the notion of electoral selection of judicial authorities altogether, suggesting that they preferred the meritocratic process that existed before the reform. Overall, this distribution of opinions lends support to the hypothesis, and corroborates the evidence shown above, that public opposition to the judicial elections was at the heart of the public's lack of participation.[21]

Analysis of Candidate Vote Share

Having assessed the determinants of participation in this election, we now turn to vote choice. Here we examine hypotheses related to ballot design and partisanship, focusing on the Supreme Court contest.

There were a number of characteristics of the ballot (which we show in Figure 1) that we anticipate will manifest increased vote share. First, each of the candidates were assigned a *candidate number*, designated by the alphabetical order of the candidates listed on the ballot. These candidate numbers were advertised in advance as part of the candidates campaign materials, as well as indicated in advance in the "Conóceles!" information portal on the INE website. Given the constrained informational environment, and following the findings of Driscoll and Nelson (2015) in the inaugural Bolivian judicial elections, we expect that voters may have been more prone to vote the top of the ballot. Thus, we expect that the candidate number will be inversely related to vote share.

Second, we include an indicator for each of the *nominating institution(s)* that approved of each candidate. To the left of each candidate name and number on the ballot, voters were shown which of the various nominating bodies approved of the candidate on the ballot: they had been vetted by either the executive ("PE", for Poder Ejecutivo), the national legislature ("PL" for poder legislativo), the judiciary ("PJ" for the poder judicial), or some combination of all three. A fourth

[21] This is consistent with the patterns of blank and null voting in the Bolivian judicial elections, where the proportion of invalidated ballots greatly exceeded those of a standard national election, accounting for an absolute majority of ballots cast in 2017. As with Mexico, Driscoll and Nelson (2014; 2019) argue this is due to opposition to the electoral processes themselves, rather than a lack of information.

Figure 1: Official Ballot for Supreme Court Candidates, Extraordinary Elections of the Federal Judicial Power in Mexico, 2025

designation set apart three candidates who were already in office ("EF", for "en funciones").[22] Although originally cast as a ballot design detail that would replace the partisan logos that are standard fare on electoral ballots, instructions circulating on social media told voters that by selecting candidates who were approved by the executive office (those designated "PE" on the ballot), they would be voting for candidates that President Sheinbaum personally approved (Ortiz and Ledesma, 2025).[23] As such, we explore the possibility that these indicators are associated with increased (or possibly decreased) proportions of vote shares for candidates.

Third, the design of the ballots required voters to select a different number of candidates on the basis of their *gender*. In the case of the Supreme Court race, voters were instructed to select five candidates from a list of 33 female candidates on the left-hand side of the ballot, and four candidates from a list of 30 candidates on the right hand side of the ballot. We expect, therefore,

[22]Yasmin Esquivel Mossa and Loretta Ortiz Ahlf were appointed to the Court by President López Obrador in 2019 and 2021, prior to her appointment Ministra Ortiz had served as a national deputy for the Green Party before switching party affiliation to join Morena. Ministra Lenia Batres Guadarrama was appointed to the Supreme Court by President López Obrador in December 2023, she is a known Morena party affiliate and sister to a high ranking Morena party leader.

[23]Likewise, it describes candidates who were listed as "PJ" as nominated by the "corrupt" judicial branch. An example of these instructions is provided in Figure A6 of the Appendix.

a mechanical effect from this ballot design that will reduce the overall proportion of vote share for female candidates. The results presented below are substantively identical if we exclude this variable from the analysis.

As to the question of partisan explanations, we consider characteristics of both candidates and voters. We first evaluate the possibility that informational campaigns were effective in increasing the vote share of particular candidates. Both domestic and international news media underscored the prevalence of *acordeones*, interest group and party distributed "voter guides" that were circulated to the public, concisely instructing voters which numbers to write on each of the judicial election ballots.[24] Although these voter guides were distributed by many different interest and party affiliated groups, we focus here on the possibility that the candidates who were singled out benefited from this publicity as a pro-government candidate slate. If these *acordeones* had the effect that many critics have since claimed, then we should observe an increase in the proportion of vote share amongst candidates that were singled out in those campaign materials.

Concerns about the effects of voter guides were not confined to journalistic reporting. In a widely circulated analysis, Montfort (2025) examined the design and administration of the judicial elections and argued that the combination of complex ballots, low-information conditions, and coordinated voter guides created strong incentives for guided voting rather than autonomous choice (Montfort, 2025). Under these conditions, Montfort contends, informational shortcuts such as *acordeones* can operate as de facto partisan cues, shaping vote choice even in formally nonpartisan contests and raising broader concerns about electoral integrity and democratic accountability.

Parallel concerns were raised in a technical and legal capacity by Aparicio (2025), who submitted an *amicus curiae* brief as part of the post-election review led by Electoral Magistrate Reyes Rodríguez. Aparicio emphasized that the institutional design of the election—marked by restrictive campaign rules, complex ballot structures, and asymmetric informational environments—created

[24]These *acordeones* were circulated in both hard copy and digital format, in both traditional outlets and social media. They included pictures of each of the ballots with the designated candidate numbers filled in, often branded to indicate an explicit endorsement by a party, social movement or prominent politician. We include two examples in Appendix D.

conditions in which coordinated voting cues could exert a disproportionate influence on electoral outcomes (Aparicio Castillo, 2024). In particular, the brief argued that the widespread circulation of voter guides blurred the boundary between prohibited campaigning and permissible voter information, undermining the election's formal nonpartisan character in practice.

As to the characteristics of voters, we anticipate that the voter guides would have been most influential to those voters who have previously supported the government party in the past. Although we do not have information on individual voters' choice, we include as a predictor the proportion of the electoral section vote share of President Sheinbaum in the 2024 elections. Simply put, if party signals from either voter guides or ballot features were really at play in these elections, we should observe a stronger association of these predictors in areas where there are high concentration of supporters of President Sheinbaum and her party.[25] In sum, we anticipate that both ballot characteristics and governmental association will be associated with higher candidate vote share (H1). Second, we anticipate these correlations will be especially strong in areas where pro-government voters are known to be concentrated (H2).

These expectations are consistent with contemporaneous legal assessments of the design and legality of the judicial election. In an opinion project circulated during the post-election review process, Electoral Magistrate Reyes Rodríguez Mondragón examined the widespread dissemination of voting guides ("acordeones") and argued that their systematic distribution constituted illicit electoral propaganda rather than permissible individual voting aids. Drawing on documentary evidence and statistical analyses linking guide inclusion to electoral outcomes, the opinion emphasized that candidates featured in widely circulated acordeones obtained substantially higher vote shares. Crucially, the analysis underscored that these effects were amplified by the institutional design of the judicial election itself, which combined complex ballots, severe informational constraints, and prohibitions on formal campaigning, thereby increasing voters' reliance on coordinated external cues (Reyes Rodríguez Mondragón, 2024).

[25] We evaluate in Appendix section E the possibility that these voter guides resulted in a higher candidate vote share in section with high concentration of opposition supporters; we find limited evidence of this possible effect.

We base our analyses on the vote total reports distributed on the INE website as the official vote tally in the days following the election.[26] The unit of analysis is a candidate's proportion of the vote share in a given section. To these data, we added section-level vote share returns from the 2024 presidential elections which provided us information about *Presidential Vote Share (2024)*.[27] We coded ballot and candidate characteristics based on the information provided in the candidate files distributed by the INE, which lists the nominating institution, their assigned candidate number, and provided a link to their candidate website. An example of the ballot is shown in Figure 1. Finally, we created the variable *Acordeón* to indicate candidates whose numbers were circulated in advance in a publicly disseminated voter information guide. Although many such acordeones were in physical and digital circulation in advance of the election, we coded acordeones that were subject to official injunctions by the Committee for Electoral Complaints and Denunciations of the INE for their violation of the electoral code that prohibited campaigns.[28]

Finally, there are several characteristics for which we control. Information regarding the candidates' *Education (Ph.D.)* was taken from the candidates' curriculum vitae, linked from the candidate information page on the INE website. Voters were encouraged to consider candidates' formal education and experience, this is a discrete piece of information listed on each of the candidates' profile that would have clearly indicated advanced training. For our demographic control

[26]The judicial elections presented a number of technical and logistical challenges that were new to the INE, requiring the establishment of new and untested electoral administration procedures. One such modification was the calculation of the vote totals, which are typically calculated at the precinct by the citizen volunteers charged with electoral administration in their district. Whereas the judicial election involved voters' selection of multiple candidates per ballot, and multiple ballots per voter, the INE deemed this process too complicated to leave in the hands of citizen volunteers. Instead, all ballots were sorted at the precinct and then transferred to a central counting location, where trained electoral administrators worked in teams of two to hand count each ballot—one reading off the numbers on each ballot, and the second inputting the numbers into an electronic tally on a mobile phone or tablet.

[27]We merged section-level data from the 2024 presidential and judicial elections by matching on entidad, distrito federal, and seccion. Of the 72 019 unique sections in our master grid, 69 942 (97.1%) appeared in both datasets; 757 (1.05%) appeared only in the presidential data, and 1 310 (1.82%) appeared only in the judicial data, leaving 2 067 sections (2.87%) unmatched.

[28]We identified nine such cease and desist orders on June 13th from the INE, which we used to identify candidates that were suggested on these prohibited voter information guides. A handful of candidates of each gender were present in most of these voter guides, our analyses here include those candidates who appear on a supermajority of the acordeones in question. In Appendix E we show the results of analyses that includes a broader sample of candidates. The inferences reported here are robust to this alternative coding.

variables, we integrated information on demographic composition of the sections and districts, taken from the 2020 Census.[29]

We provide linear estimates for our regressions in Table 3, with clustered standard errors for the candidates. Column (1) reports the results of the candidate vote share regression with only covariates relating to ballot design included (with controls), column (2) then includes interactions between the percentage of *Presidential Vote Share (2024)* in a particular section, such that we can evaluate the extent to which these ballot features were particularly strong predictors for candidate vote share among certain groups of voters. Column (3) then introduces our measure of *Acordeón*, to consider how a candidates' inclusion in a voter information guide might have benefited their electoral performance. Finally, Column (4) includes cross-level interactions between *Presidential Vote Share (2024)* and both *Nominating institutions* as well as *Acordeón*. A very clear picture emerges from these results.

First, as we can see in column (1), several aspects of the ballot design alone were consequential predictors of candidate vote share. In particular, indicators on the ballot that the candidate had been nominated by the political executive ("PE"), or had already been appointed to the court ("EF") is associated with between a 2 and 8% increase in candidate vote share, respectively. This holds constant the candidates' educational attainment and section demographic composition. This lends credence to critics who claim that even absent the circulation of campaign voter guides, and in the face of an extremely complex ballot and highly restricted campaign environment, the ballot design itself contained sufficient information for voters to distinguish a candidate as being aligned with the preferences of the president. What is more, as shown in Column (2) these correlations are even stronger predictors of candidate vote share in sections with a high concentration of President Sheinbaum supporters. Both the baseline coefficient and the interaction between "In Functions"

[29]The INE and the INEGI (National Institute of Statistics and Geographical Information) provide a mapping of select demographic information at the level of the electoral section and precinct, as they were geographically specified as of January 20, 2021. We were able to match exactly approximately 60% of the electoral sections level data to that of the census. For all remaining sections where an exact match was not possible, we imputed demographic based on the average demographic statistics at the level of the district, the next highest level in the geographic hierarchy.

Table 3: Mixed Effects Linear Regression estimates of Ballot Design and Partisan Influence Correlates on Candidate-Section Vote Share, with candidate clustered standard errors

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Ballot Design				
Executive Nominee	0.02*	0.01	0.01	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Legislative Nominee	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Judicial Nominee	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
In Functions	0.08*	0.05*	0.03	0.04*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Gender	-0.05*	-0.05*	-0.04*	-0.04*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Candidate Number	-0.00*	-0.00*	-0.00*	-0.00*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Partisan Influence				
Presidential Vote Share		-0.01*	-0.00	-0.01*
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Executive Nominee ×		0.02		0.00
Presidential Vote Share		(0.01)		(0.00)
In Functions ×		0.05*		-0.03
Presidential Vote Share		(0.01)		(0.01)
Acordeón			0.05*	0.00
			(0.01)	(0.01)
Acordeón ×				0.08*
Presidential Vote Share				(0.01)
Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES
Constant	0.07*	0.08*	0.07*	0.08*
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)
N	4245636	4245636	4245636	4245636

* $p < 0.01$

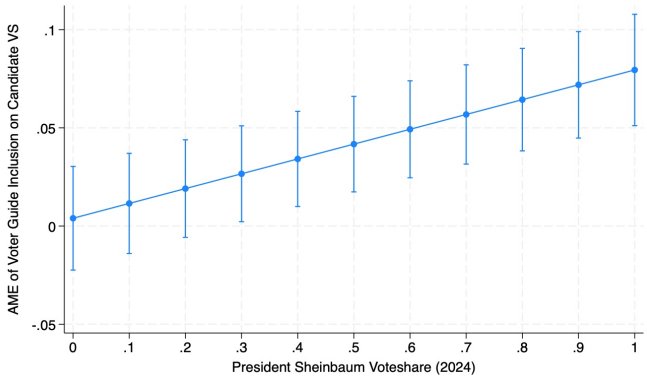

Figure 2: Average Marginal Effects of Inclusion of Candidate Number in Pro-government *Acordeón* on Section-level Vote Share

and Presidential Vote Share are statistically significant at an $p < .01$ level, suggesting that this designation alone would have yielded a roughly 5% increase in candidate vote share on average, the strength of this association was twice as strong in sections with high concentration of pro-Sheinbaum supporters—an associated increase in 10% of vote share in these sections. Whereas the candidates were competing for a plurality of votes with more than 30 other candidates, and the highest vote getter of the election emerged with 5.31% of the total vote, a 5% increase in vote share—a result of ballot design alone—would have been determinative to the outcome of the election.

Turning now to the question of the impact of voter information guides, we see a similar pattern emerge, and one which corresponds to political explanations. In Column (3), we include an indicator for whether a candidate was included on a voter information guide, or *Acordeón*. As with the ballot design features previously discussed, inclusion in an acordeón was associated with a substantial increase in candidate vote share, a roughly 5% point increase on average across all districts. And when we consider this association in areas where pro-government voters are known to be concentrated, this correlation is even stronger. Figure 2 plots the average marginal effect of the indicator for *Acordeón* on section-level candidate vote share, plotted by the proportion of the vote that was directed to President Sheinbaum in the 2024 Presidential elections. At the low end of this

spectrum—electoral enclaves of the opposition—candidates' inclusion on these voter information guide is effectively nil—the point estimate and confidence intervals span zero, so we fail to reject a hypothesis of no effect. Yet in sections where President Sheinbaum's supporters are concentrated, judicial candidates' inclusion in these voter information guides is associated with a nearly 8% increase in candidate vote share as compared to those candidates whose names did not appear in voter information guides. Far from the official record that political campaigning was restricted, or that these voter information guides were simply an effort to overcome a complex informational environment, this evidence suggests that the voter information guides were distributed to benefit particular candidates, and that those signals were acted upon by a particular group of voters in ways that benefited disproportionately the government party.

External Validation and Cross-Sectional Analysis

External statistical evaluations of the 2025 judicial election provide further evidence of the coordinated mobilization patterns identified in this study. First, Aparicio Castillo (2024) notes that the national turnout of 13.02% was among the lowest in Mexico's democratic history, making the process particularly susceptible to "mechanisms of electoral mobilization." His analysis highlights an "extraordinary uniformity" in the results at the booth and district levels, a pattern he describes as statistically improbable for an open-list election involving 102 candidates for various positions. Aparicio's electoral forensics findings specifically corroborate our "acordeón" hypothesis: he reports an "overwhelming" advantage for candidates listed on government-aligned voter guides, noting that every single candidate included in certain widely distributed guides won their respective contest, while those omitted failed to secure seats. Furthermore, his analysis rejects the hypothesis of a random or purely individualistic vote, pointing instead to "induced or coordinated" voting patterns that ensure a systematic advantage for the ruling party's favored slate. These external findings support our assertion that the election functioned less as a nonpartisan democratic exercise and more as a partisan consolidation of the judiciary.

Second, our findings regarding the influence of voter guides are further corroborated by an

independent forensic analysis conducted by Cossío Díaz and Medellín Pino (2025). Their report documents a "mechanical pattern" of voting across the 2025 judicial elections that they argue is statistically incompatible with spontaneous voter behavior. By contrasting the official results against a model of expected natural dispersion, Cossío Díaz and Medellín Pino (2025) demonstrate that instead of the variability characteristic of a pluralistic election, the results exhibited a homogeneous block of winners who appeared in the exact same order across thousands of voting sections.

Specifically, Cossío Díaz and Medellín Pino (2025) highlight three critical anomalies that corroborate the *acordeón* hypothesis:

- **Absence of Dispersion:** In a free election with 64 candidates competing for 9 positions, statistical probability suggests a chaotic distribution of results where candidate vote shares fluctuate regionally. Instead, the winning candidates' vote curves remained virtually parallel across districts, a phenomenon the authors describe as a "carbon copy" design indicative of centralized control rather than individual preference.

- **Statistical Improbability:** The analysis notes that the probability of millions of voters independently reproducing the exact same list of winners—out of billions of possible combinations—is statistically negligible. This uniformity was replicated across three distinct national contests (Supreme Court, Disciplinary Tribunal, and Electoral Tribunal), reinforcing the conclusion that the results were "packaged" via induced voting lists.

- **Partisan Correlation:** Consistent with our results, Cossío Díaz and Medellín Pino (2025) find that the "coincident" voting patterns (where the same slate of candidates won) were strongly correlated with the electoral geography of the ruling coalition. They observe that the judicial results closely tracked the voting behavior of the Morena-PVEM-PT alliance from the 2024 presidential election, while diverging significantly from opposition voting patterns.

These findings provide external validity to our claim that the "acordeones" did not merely

serve as informational aids, but operated as effective mechanisms for partisan capture, overriding the nonpartisan design of the ballot.

Discussion

The newly elected judges and magistrates assumed office on September 1.[30] With the judicial reform, the number of Supreme Court justices has been reduced from eleven to nine (Congreso de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 2024), and the candidate receiving the largest number of votes for the Supreme Court now presides over the court as President. Of the nine Supreme Court justices, the five candidates with the highest number of votes will serve for 11 years, while the four who receive fewer votes will have an eight-year tenure (Zissis, 2025). The remaining judicial positions not elected in 2025 will be put to a vote in 2027, concurrent with the national election for the Chamber of Deputies (Harrison, 2024; Flores, 2025). The election results ensure that a significant portion of the judiciary is now aligned with the ruling party, raising concerns about the future of checks and balances within the Mexican government.

The low voter turnout, and subsequent protests about the process have called into question the legitimacy of this electoral process, as well as the legitimacy of the resulting judicial authorities and institutions. Only time will tell if this extraordinary electoral process had detrimental effects on public support for the judicial power and its jurists, or whether the direct election of judicial authorities will bring the salutary effects that advocates of the judicial reforms promised that it might. We can say decisively from the original survey data shown here that many who declined to participate did so not for confusion or lack of interest, but out of political opposition to the process itself.

We also know from this exercise and other related analyses that despite the formal prohibitions on candidates' party affiliation or partisan campaigning, partisanship informed several key facets of

[30]Since the elections, legal challenges have been raised by both civil society organizations as well as the candidates themselves, saying that irregularities in the vote administration, counting and the widespread dissemination of the voter information guides warrant a full invalidation of the electoral process (Animal Político, 2025).

this electoral process, and appeared determinative in the election of judicial authorities. Members of the political opposition and civil society were largely absent from the candidate pre-selection process, implying that the candidates cleared to stand on the ballot were approved by a majority of government party adherents. As to the actual elections, we show here that there was sufficient information contained in the ballot design, as well as that circulated on voter information guides, to ensure that pro-government candidates' vote share increased in districts where government supporters are known to reside. This was part and parcel of a larger effort from the Morena government, one which dates back to the reform efforts of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, to dismantle institutional apparatus of the state that might check or counterbalance government power.

Although the long-term consequences of these unprecedented reforms remain uncertain, our analysis makes clear that the elections represent a profound restructuring of the judiciary that advantages the ruling party and weakens both judicial independence and the separation of powers. We believe the concerns about the independence of the Mexican judiciary to be well founded. Rather than a neutral institutional redesign, these reforms have substantially expanded executive influence over the courts, raising serious concerns about the durability of constitutional constraints.

References

Azul A Aguiar Aguilar, Rodrigo Castro Cornejo, and Alejandro Monsiváis-Carrillo. Is mexico at the gates of authoritarianism? *Journal of Democracy*, 36(1):50–64, 2025.

Al Jazeera. Mexico senate passes judicial reform after protesters break into chamber, September 2024. URL https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/11/mexico-senate-passes-judicial-reform-after-protesters-break-into-chamber.

Animal Político. Candidatos a jueces y magistrados impugnan elección judicial. *AnimalPolítico*, June 2025. URL https://animalpolitico.com/elecciones-judiciales-2025/federales/jueces-magistrados-impugnan-eleccion-judicial. Accessed: 2025-06-26.

Francisco Javier Aparicio Castillo. Amicus curiae on the design and legality of the mexican judicial elections, 2024. URL https://javieraparicio.net/wp-content/uploads. Submitted as amicus curiae in the opinion of Magistrate Reyes Rodríguez.

Francisco Javier Aparicio Castillo and Rodrigo Castro Cornejo. Elecciones 2018. una coyuntura histórica en méxico. *Política y gobierno*, 27(2), 2020.

BBC News. Mexico's president hails judicial reform as protests sweep country, June 2024. URL https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy4y9q74j2ko.

Ryan C. Berg. Amlo's plan c and the north american bloc—if we can keep it, February 2024. URL https://www.csis.org/analysis/amlos-plan-c-and-north-american-bloc-if-we-can-keep-it.

Chris W. Bonneau and Melinda Gann Hall. *In Defense of Judicial Elections*. Routledge, 2009.

Susana Camacho, Arturo Espinosa, Luis F. Fernández, and Ricardo Sanginés. El dilema del ine: reconocer su error o comprometer la legitimidad de la elección. *El Juego de la Suprema Corte*, May 2025. URL https://eljuegodelacorte.nexos.com.mx/el-dilema-del-ine-reconocer-su-error-o-comprometer-la-legitimidad-de-la-eleccion/. Accessed: 2025-06-02.

Francisco Cantú. The fingerprints of fraud: Evidence from mexico's 1988 presidential election. *American Political Science Review*, 113(3):710–726, 2019a. doi: 10.1017/S0003055419000285.

Francisco Cantú. Groceries for votes: The electoral returns of vote buying. *Journal of Politics*, 81 (3):790–804, 2019b. doi: 10.1086/702945. URL https://doi.org/10.1086/702945.

Rodrigo Castro Cornejo. The amlo voter: affective polarization and the rise of the left in mexico. *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, 15(1):96–112, 2023.

Lautaro Cella, Ipek Çinar, Susan Stokes, and Andres Uribe. Building tolerance for backsliding by trash-talking democracy: Theory and evidence from mexico. *Comparative Political Studies*, 2025. doi: 10.1177/00104140251328024.

CNN. Controversial judicial reform in mexico triggers protests and warnings from legal experts, September 2024. URL https://www.cnn.com/2024/09/04/americas/mexico-judicial-reform-amlo-intl-latam.

Congreso de la Unión de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos. *Ley General de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales*. Diario Oficial de la Federación, Ciudad de México, última reforma publicada en el diario oficial de la federación el 29 de noviembre de 2024 edition, 2024. URL https://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/LGIPE.pdf. Consultado el 25 de junio de 2025.

Congreso de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos. Decreto por el que se reforman, adicionan y derogan diversas disposiciones de la constitución política de los estados unidos mexicanos, en materia de poder judicial. Diario Oficial de la Federación, September 2024. URL https://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5703321&fecha=15/09/2024. Reforma publicada el 15 de septiembre de 2024, modifica el artículo 96 para establecer la elección directa de ministros, magistrados y jueces.

José Ramón Cossío. "con la reforma, los jueces quedan amarrados a las clientelas que les den el voto". *El País México*, October 2024. URL https://elpais.com/mexico/2024-10-07/jose-ramon-cossio-con-la-reforma-los-jueces-quedan-amarrados-a-las-clientelas-que-les-den-el-voto.html. Accedido el 25 de junio de 2025.

José Ramón Cossío and Jorge Alberto Medellín Pino. La reforma judicial y la independencia de

los jueces. https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=86727, 2024. Nexos.

José Ramón Cossío Díaz and Jorge Alberto Medellín Pino. Elección judicial 2025: Reporte de integridad electoral. Technical report, Crabë, Mexico City, Mexico, June 2025. URL https://crabe.com.mx/. Consulted report regarding statistical anomalies and the use of 'acordeones' in the 2025 extraordinary judicial elections.

United Nations Human Rights Council. Safeguarding the independence of judicial systems in the face of contemporary challenges to democracy. Technical Report A/HRC/56/62, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Geneva, 2024.

Sam Dillon. Mexico, voting in new leader, begins political sea change. *The New York Times*, July 4(https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/world/americas/070400mexico-election.html), 2000.

Denise Dresser. Mexico's judicial election is a blow for democracy. *Americas Quarterly*, Jun 2025. URL https://americasquarterly.org/article/mexicos-judicial-election-is-a-blow-for-democracy/.

Amanda Driscoll and Michael J. Nelson. The 2011 judicial elections in bolivia. *Electoral Studies*, 31(3):628–632, 2012.

Amanda Driscoll and Michael J. Nelson. Ignorance or opposition? blank and null voting in low-information, highly politicized environments. *Political Research Quarterly*, 67(3):547–561, 2014.

Amanda Driscoll and Michael J. Nelson. Judicial Selection and the Democratization of Justice: Lessons from the Bolivian Judicial Elections. *Journal of Law and Courts*, 3(1):115–148, 2015.

Amanda Driscoll and Michael J. Nelson. Chronicle of an Election Foretold: The 2017 Bolivian Judicial Elections. *Política y Gobierno*, 26:41–64, 2019.

Amanda Driscoll, Michael J. Nelson, and Julio Ríos-Figueroa. Mexico's judicial elections and the politics of reform. *Judicature International*, 2025. URL https://judicature.duke.edu/articles/mexicos-judicial-elections-and-the-politics-of-reform/. Online publication.

Arturo Espinosa Silis. Radiografía de las elecciones judiciales. *Este País*, 2025. URL https://estepais.com/tendencias_y_opiniones/radiografia-de-las-elecciones-judiciales/. Accedido el 25 de junio de 2025.

Francisco Javier Esteinou Madrid. Las elecciones de 2018 y el triunfo de amlo/morena. 2019.

Jodi Finkel. Judicial reform as insurance policy: Mexico in the 1990s. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 47(1):87–113, 2005. URL https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-2456.2005.tb00302.x. Accedido el 21 de diciembre de 2025.

Chantal Flores. Confusion and concern loom over Mexico's historic judicial election. *Al Jazeera*, may 2025. Accessed on January 23, 2026.

Forbes México. Más de 34,000 mexicanos se inscribieron para competir en la primera elección judicial, 2024. URL https://forbes.com.mx/mas-de-34000-mexicanos-se-inscribieron-para-competir-en-la-primera-eleccion-judicial/. Accedido: 2025-06-24.

Chase Harrison. A timeline of mexico's judicial reform and elections, June 2024. URL https://www.as-coa.org/articles/timeline-mexicos-judicial-reform-and-elections.

Instituto Nacional Electoral. Informa ine que se computaron 60115184 votos en la elección presidencial, equivalente al 61.04 *Comunicado de prensa, INE*, June9 2024. URL https://centralelectoral.ine.mx/2024/06/09/informa-ine-que-se-computaron-60-millones-115-mil-184-votos-en-la-eleccion-presidencial/. Accedido el 25 de junio de 2025.

Instituto Nacional Electoral. Conóceles, practica y ubica. Sitio web, sección Voto y Elecciones – Elecciones 2025, April10 2025a. URL https://ine.mx/conoceles-practica-y-ubica/. Consultado el 25 de junio de 2025.

Instituto Nacional Electoral. Listado enviado por el senado de personas candidatas para los cargos a elección del proceso electoral extraordinario del poder judicial de la federación 2024–2025. https://www.ine.mx/listado-candidaturas/, 2025b. Página oficial que contiene los acuerdos y los listados preliminares y definitivos de candidaturas para la elección judicial.

Instituto Nacional Electoral Comisión de Quejas y Denuncias. Acuerdo de la comisión de quejas y denuncias del instituto nacional electoral, respecto de la necesidad de adoptar medidas cautelares en contra de la página de internet https://justiciaylibertadmx.org/; dentro del procedimiento especial sancionador iniciado de oficio identificado con la clave alfanumérica ut/scg/pe/pef/cg/182/2025. *Acuerdos - Comisión de Quejas y Denuncias*, May 30, 2025: https://repositoriodocumental.ine.mx/xmlui/handle/123456789/183464, 2025.

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Iachr expresses concern over constitutional reform initiative affecting the federal judiciary in mexico, June 2024. URL https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/media_center/preleases/2024/213.asp.

Megan Janetsky and María Verza. Mexico's president defends first judicial election despite low turnout and democratic criticism. *AP News*, June 2025. URL https://apnews.com/article/mexico-judicial-elections-a1aee50781468a0cac437f221e73ffea.

Elia Castillo Jiménez. Abogados de narcos, acusados de abuso sexual o trata están a un paso de convertirse en jueces y magistrados en méxico. *El País*, 2025. URL https://elpais.com/mexico/2025-06-23/abogados-de-narcos-abusadores-sexuales-violentadores-acosadores-y-traficantes-de-personas-estan-a-un-salto-de-convertirse-en-jueces-y-magistrados-en-mexico.html. Accedido el 25 de junio de 2025.

Laboratorio Electoral. Manual para sobrevivir a la elección judicial. *Laboratorio Electoral*, February 2025. URL https://laboratorioelectoral.mx/leerdocumento/MANUAL_PARA_SOBREVIVIR_A_LA_ELECCION_JUDICIAL. Accessed: 2025-06-02.

Joy K. Langston. *Democratization and Authoritarian Party Survival: Mexico's PRI*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2017. ISBN 9780190674997. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190674997.001.0001.

Beatriz Magaloni. *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Javier Martín Reyes. La muerte judicial del "plan b": certeza inmediata y riesgos futuros. *Estudios sociológicos*, 42, 2024.

Emiliano Rodríguez Mega and Simon Romero. In mexico, thousands ran for office, few voted and one party dominated it all. *The New York Times*, 2025. URL https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/15/world/americas/mexico-courts-election-results.html. Accessed: 2025-06-17.

Mexico News Daily. Senate approves amlo's judicial reform to overhaul mexico's judiciary, September 2024. URL https://mexiconewsdaily.com/politics/senate-approves-amlos-judicial-reform-to-overhaul-mexicos-judiciary/.

Miguel Alfonso Meza. El camino para detener la reforma judicial. *Nexos*, 2024. URL https://redaccion.nexos.com.mx/el-camino-para-detener-la-reforma-judicial/. Accedido el 25 de junio de 2025.

Misión de Observación Electoral de la OEA. Informe preliminar de la misión de observación electoral de la oea para las elecciones del poder judicial en méxico. Informe preliminar, Organización de los Estados Americanos, Washington, D.C., June 2025. URL https://www.oas.org/fpdb/press/2025_MEXICO_MOE_Elecciones_Judiciales_-Informe_Preliminart_ESP.pdf. Consultado el 25 de junio de 2025.

MND Staff. Congress passes reform blocking court review of constitutional changes. *Mexico News Daily*, October 2024. URL https://mexiconewsdaily.com/politics/mexico-constitutional-reform/.

Alejandro Monsiváis-Carrillo. Deceitful autocratization: Subverting democracy through electoral reform in mexico. *Latin American Policy*, 15(3):486–508, 2024.

Aleister Montfort. El elefante en la urna. *Nexos*, 2025. URL https://redaccion.nexos.com.mx/el-elefante-en-la-urna-2.

Fernando Nieto-Morales. The elimination of inai: A blow to transparency and accountability in mexico. *Wilson Center Mexico Institute*, November 21 2024. URL https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/elimination-inai-blow-transparency-and-accountability-mexico.

Saúl López Noriega and Javier Martín Reyes. La tormenta judicial. implicaciones de la reforma de 2024 en méxico. *El Juego de la Suprema Corte*, May 2025. URL https://eljuegodelacorte.nexos.com.mx/la-tormenta-judicial/. Accessed: 2025-06-02.

Diego Oré. Mexico supreme court justice challenges controversial judicial reform. *Reuters*, October 2024. URL https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexico-supreme-court-justice-challenges-controversial-judicial-reform-2024-10-29/. Accessed: 2026-01-22.

María Ortega. Radiografía de la reforma y la elección judicial en méxico. *Transparencia Electoral*, 2025. URL https://transparenciaelectoral.org/blog/radiografia-de-la-reforma-y-la-eleccion-judicial-en-mexico/. Accedido el 25 de junio de 2025.

Alexis Ortiz and Edgar Ledesma. Repartieron acordeones de la candidatura de la 4T en la elección judicial. *Animal Político*, June 2025. URL https://animalpolitico.com/elecciones-judiciales-2025/federales/repartieron-acordeones-candidatura-4t-eleccion-judicial.

Laurence Pantin. El nuevo rostro de la corte, aug 2025. URL https://juiciojusto.org/nueva-corte-y-el-viaje-a-la-dimension-desconocida/. Juicio Justo, análisis y opinión.

Laurence Pantin, Alejandra Quezada, and Luis Tapia. Diseño de boletas para la elección judicial: ¿se hizo algo bien? *El Juego de la Suprema Corte*, May 2025. URL https://eljuegodelacorte.nexos.com.mx/diseno-de-boletas-para-la-eleccion-judicial-se-hizo-algo-bien/. Accessed: 2025-06-02.

Irene Parra Prieto, Rosalind Dixon, and David Landau. Reforma judicial abusiva en méxico abusive judicial reform in mexico. *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 22(5):1184–1193, 2024.

Andrea Pozas Loyo and Julio Ríos Figueroa. La carrera judicial después de la reforma judicial obrador-sheinbaum. In S. López Noriega and J. Martín Reyes, editors, *La tormenta judicial*, pages 63–73. Nexos, Sociedad, Ciencia y Literatura, 2024.

Presidencia de la República. Iniciativa con proyecto de decreto por el que se reforman, adicionan y derogan diversas disposiciones de la constitución política de los estados unidos mexicanos, de la

ley orgánica del poder judicial de la federación, y de diversos ordenamientos legales, en materia de justicia, 2024. URL https://gaceta.diputados.gob.mx/PDF/65/2024/feb/20240205-15.pdf. Presentada por el Ejecutivo Federal el 5 de febrero de 2024.

Reuters. Mexico's sheinbaum says judges should be elected, backing lópez obrador's reform, June 2024. URL https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexicos-sheinbaum-says-judges-should-be-elected-backing-lopez-obradors-reform-2024-06-13/.

Reuters. Mexico ruling party wins lower house super-majority but misses senate super-majority, 2024a. URL https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexico-ruling-party-misses-senate-super-majority-wins-lower-house-morena-says-2024-06-09/.

Reuters. Mexico electoral authority ratifies ruling coalition's lower house supermajority, 2024b. URL https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexico-electoral-authority-ratifies-ruling-coalitions-lower-house-supermajority-2024-08-23/.

José Luis Reyes Rodríguez Mondragón. Opinión sobre el diseño y legalidad de la elección judicial extraordinaria, 2024. Opinion project circulated by Electoral Magistrate.

Viri Ríos. How claudia sheinbaum will be different from amlo. *Americas Quarterly*, june 2024. URL https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/how-claudia-sheinbaum-will-be-different-from-amlo/.

Julio Ríos-Figueroa. *Constitutional Courts as Mediators: Armed Conflict, Civil-Military Relations, and the Rule of Law in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Julio Ríos Figueroa. El poder judicial ante el populismo y la erosión democrática. el caso de méxico, 2018-2021. *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, (198), 2022.

Simon Romero and Emiliano Rodríguez Mega. Mexico's supreme court rejects bid to limit judicial overhaul. *The New York Times*, November 2024. URL https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/05/world/americas/mexico-supreme-court-judicial-overhaul.html. Accessed June 6, 2025.

Mariano Sánchez-Talanquer and Kenneth F Greene. Is mexico falling into the authoritarian trap? *Journal of Democracy*, 32(4):56–71, 2021.

Jed Handelsman Shugerman. *The People's Courts: Pursuing Judicial Independence in America*. Harvard University Press, 2012.

Paulina Villegas and Emiliano Rodríguez Mega. "candidatos judiciales en méxico son promovidos por un cártel, según el gobierno.". *The New York Times en Español*, 2025. URL https://www.nytimes.com/es/2025/05/29/espanol/america-latina/candidatos-judiciales-mexico-cartel.html. Accedido el 25 de junio de 2025.

James Wagner and Gray Beltran. Dozens of candidates and rainbow colors: Mexico's sprawling judicial ballots. *The New York Times*, June 1, 2025(June 1, 2025): https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/06/01/world/americas/mexico–judicial–election–ballots.html, 2025.

Washington Office on Latin America. The road to the judicial elections in mexico. *WOLA*, May 2025. URL https://www.wola.org/analysis/the-road-to-the-judicial-elections-in-mexico/.

Wilson Center Mexico Institute. Mexico's constitutional reforms series: Judicial reform, June 2024. URL https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/mexicos-constitutional-reforms-series-judicial-reform.

Carin Zissis. Six facts to understand mexico's 2025 judicial elections. *AS/COA*, Jun 2025. URL https://www.as-coa.org/articles/six-facts-understand-mexicos-2025-judicial-elections.

Partisanized Participation in Nonpartisan Elections: Evidence from Mexico's Extraordinary Judicial Elections

Supplementary Information Appendix

A Convenience Sample Characteristics

Our convenience sample of public opinion was fielded online with the support of Netquest, who maintains survey panels of respondents throughout Latin America. Our data contained 1,669 complete responses, the demographic composition of which is shown in Table A1. Although not nationally representative, there is good approximation of national averages as it relates to gender composition and regional distribution of respondents, with less impressive correspondence as it relates to SES and age. Notably, and as is common with online panels, our sample skews high in terms of socioeconomic resources (and likely therefore, education), and is older on average than the average Mexican adult.

Table A1: Comparison of NetQuest Sample, National Population, and Online Sample Distribution

Category Category	**NetQuest (%) Sample (%)**	**National Population (%)**	**Convenience Sample (%)**
SES AB	25	8	30.56
SES C+	23	12	27.9
SES C	18	12	17.03
SES C-	17	15	15.22
SES D+	10	22	7
SES D	6	20	2
SES E	1	11	0.18
Pacific	6	15	5.63
North	15	15	19.17
Center West	15	12	20.43
Center	15	21	21.15
DF	34	25	21.27
South East	14	12	12.34
Male	41	48.49	49.97
Female	59	51.51	50.03
16-24	19	17	6.29
25-34	31	16	26.84
35-44	26	14	30.14
45-54	16	12	18.39
55 and up	8	18	18.33

B Reasons Given for Nonparticipation

As described in the main body of the paper, 45% of respondents who did not participate and offered a reason for not doing so cited unwillingness to participate due to opposition to the process. Ten such examples outright opposition are shown here (randomly sampled answers to the question, "Why did you not to participate in the elections?"):

- *"Porqué es una farsa, un fraude orquestado de antemano por el gobierno y su partido."*/"This is a farse, a fraud orchstrated in advance by the government and the ruling party."
- *"Son un fraude"*/"They are a fraud"
- *"Me parecen un fraude"*/"I think they are a fraud"
- *"porque es una locura elegir este tipo de cargos con una eleccion popular, Deben ser personas estudiadas y profesionales en su area"*/"Because it's crazy to elect this sort of position with a popular election, They should be educated people and professionals in their area"
- *"Por que es una estupidez"*/"Because this is stupid"
- *"Porque se ha convertido en un circo en el que nadie conoce a los candidatos ni si trayectoria"*/"Because this has turned into a circus that no one knows the candidates or their path"
- *"porque todo eso es un fraude"*/"Because this whole thing is a fraud"
- *"Todo eso es un teatro y realmente no ayuda en nada... están gastando DEMASIADO dinero del pueblo y por eso estoy en desacuerdo"*/"All of this is theater and will really solve nothing... they are spending TOO MUCH money and for that reason I don't support it"
- *"por que desgraciadamente para mi todo era una farsa... señor lopez obrador siempre fue un farsante al iual que la actual narcopresidenta..."*/"Because unfortunately to me it's all a farse... Mr. Lopez Obrador, he was always a fraud, just like the current narco-president...."
- *"creo que estan amañadas"*/"I think they are rigged"

The second most common reason given for non-participation was related to a lack of information about the candidates or process, or a lack of interest. This accounted for about one third of total responses proffered. Here, we report ten randomly selected examples of reasons given that cite disinterest or lack of information as the primary reason for not participating in the judicial elections.

- *"Porque desconocía a los candidatos, realmente no iba a votar por algo que no hice una investigación"*/ "Because I didn't know the candidates, I wasn't going to vote for something I hadn't fully understood"
- *"No me interesa"*/"I'm not interested"

- *"Nunca estuvo claro cómo hacerlo, además tampoco hubo tiempo de conocer bien a los candidatos así como sus carreras y logros (no solo sus propuestas de campaña")*/"It was never clear to me how to do it, I also didn't have time to get to know the candidates, their experiences and accomplishments (and not just what they promised in campaigns)"

- *"no entendí bien por quienes se iba a votar, además de que había demasiados nombre en las planillas y no escuche nada sobre ellos en este tiempo"*/"I didn't understand well who to vote for, there were too many names on the ballot and I hadn't heard about any of them"

- *"No tiene relevancies para mi"*/"The elections aren't relevant to me"

- *"Porque el. Modo en el que sé viene votando fue cambiado, había demasiadas boletas de personas que nunca las he visto, siempre se conoce los candidatos"*/"The way in which I normally vote was changed, there were too many ballots full of people I had never heard of, I always know the candidates"

- *"Por la complejidad del proceso, además por desconocimiento de todas las propuestas de los candidatos, eran demasiados para poder informarse adecuadamente sobre cada uno."*/"Because of the complexity of the process, also for not knowing all the proposals of the candidates, there were too many to inform oneself adequately about all of them."

- *"Porque no hubo información clara y consisa"*/ "There wasn't clear and concise information"

- *"No era importante para mí. Era algo innecesario"*/ "It wasn't important to me. It was unnecessary."

- *"No estoy informada de los candidatos ni se quien son"*/"I'm not informed about the candidates I don't know who they are"

Figure A3: Official Ballot for Supreme Court Candidates, Extraordinary Elections of the Federal Judicial Power in Mexico, 2025

C Mexican Judicial Elections Supreme Court Ballot

The INE circulated examples of each of the 9 judicial election ballots in advance of the judicial elections on the website of the INE. Voters seeking information about the candidates and process were encouraged to "get to know the candidates, practice your vote, and locate your polling location" (*Conóceles, práctica, y ubica*), and could access the ballots they would encounter by entering the information shown on their voter registration card.[31] Figure A3 shows the practice ballot for the ministers of the Supreme Court.

The purple ballot for the ministers of the Supreme Court was the same for all voters in the Mexican elections. Voters are directed to select 9 candidates to fill the court, indicating their preference for 5 women from the list on the left and and 4 men from the list on the right. There are 63 candidates in total. Candidates are listed in alphabetical order by last name; next to their name is their candidate number as well as the institution or institutions responsible for their nomination. These designations are explained in a key in the center of the ballot, "PE" indicates the candidate was vetted and approved by the executive, "PJ" and "PL" candidates were considered by the judiciary and legislature respectively. Finally, candidates who are already seated in the Supreme Court were marked as "En funciones," or "EF" on the ballot.[32]

[31] Whereas some of the federal judicial posts and all of the subnational judges were elected in geographically demarcated districts, the address listed on each voter's registration determined which ballot and configuration of candidates that each voter would consider. All told, there were 120 different separate ballots (Pantin et al., 2025; Wagner and Beltran, 2025), each color ballot representing a different judicial institution.

[32] This ballot is arguably one of the most simple that Mexican voters encountered, as it asked voters to select multiple candidates without reference to jurisdictional expertise. In some states, there were hundreds of candidates listed for a small number of positions, yet in others there were the same number of candidates as there were judicial vacancies. See (Pantin et al., 2025; Wagner and Beltran, 2025), for additional details.

D Voter Information Guide (*Acordeón)*

Figure A4: Digital *Acordeón*, instructing voters to vote for particular candidate numbers

Figure A5: Gubernatorial *Acordeón*, instructing voters to vote for particular candidate numbers

Figure A6: Digital Voter Information Guide, describing "PE" nominated candidates as those aligned with President Sheinbaum, and "PJ" nominated candidates as proposed by a "corrupt" judiciary

E Robustness of Acordeón Coding and Demobilization of Opposition Voters

In Figure 2, we show a positive correlation between candidates' inclusion in voter information guides designated by the INE as an illegal *Acordeón* and their vote share, particularly in sections with high concentration of President Sheinbaum voters. Here, we report the results with an alternative coding of *Acordeón* which is inclusive of a larger list of candidates (Columns 1 & 2), and evaluate the possibility that these voter information guides may have been used to mobilize members of the opposition.

As described in the main text of the paper, we coded candidates' inclusion in an *Acordeón* based candidates' numbers listed in voter information guides that were cited in injunctions by the INE as prohibited candidate materials. In the paper, we used a measure that coded candidates whose number appeared in a supermajority of those injunctions (6 of 9, 7 of 9, or 8 of 9 injunctions). Here, in columns (1) and (2) we use an alternative coding of *Acordeón* that includes any candidate number that was cited at least once in those injunctions. Although the correlations observed here are more muted, we still observe a statistically significant, positive correlation between a candidates' inclusion in an *Acordeón* and candidate voteshare, and especially so in sections with high levels of President Sheinbaum supporters in the 2024 presidential elections. All coefficients are statistically significant at an $\alpha < .05$ level, providing further support for our claims in the main paper.

In Columns (3) and (4), we evaluate the possibility that these voter information guides might have been useful to mobilize voters of a different party, instead focusing on vote share of candidates in sections that had previously been dominated by PANista presidential candidate, Bertha Xóchitl Gálvez Ruiz. One such argument was made in an injunction brought to the INE, which explicitly claimed that the *Acordeón* in question brought as problematic to the INE was sponsored by and circulated by the PAN, to try to mobilize PAN voters in favor of the candidates listed in the injunction. We therefore include in these regressions an indicator for those candidates listed in this injunction[33], which we interact with the *Gálvez Voteshare* indicator, taken from the 2024 presidential election returns.

Here, we see no evidence that the candidates listed as part of the PANista *Acordeón* benefited from this distinction in sections with high concentrations of PAN supporters. The coefficient on the interaction term between *Acordeón* and *Gálvez supporters* is negatively signed, suggesting that the candidates indicated in the *Acordeón* actually had a slightly *lower* voteshare in districts with high concentrations of Gálvez voters; this coefficient is statistically significant at $\alpha < .1$ level ($p = .057$). Similarly, it bears noting that the interaction terms between Gálvez voters and being either an *Executive Nominee* or *In Functions* are also negatively signed, but not statistically significant from zero. As such, these three indicators that appear to have mobilized the pro-Sheinbaum voter base in favor of particular candidates, did not appear to have the same effect in sections where opposition voters are known to reside.

[33]Notably, they are the same candidates as those identified in our baseline indicator of *Acordeón* variable.

Table A2: Mixed Effects Linear Regression estimates of Ballot Design and Partisan Influence Correlates on Candidate-Section Voteshare, with candidate clustered standard errors.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Ballot Design				
Executive Nominee	0.02*	0.01	0.02*	0.02*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Legislative Nominee	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Judicial Nominee	-0.00	-0.00	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
In Function	0.06*	0.04*	0.05*	0.06*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Gender	-0.05*	-0.05*	-0.05*	-0.05*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Candidate Number	-0.00*	-0.00*	-0.00*	-0.00*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Partisan Influence				
Acordión Alternative	0.02*	0.01	0.04*	0.05*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Presidential Voteshare	-0.00	-0.02*		
	(0.00)	(0.00)		
Executive Nominee ×		0.02*		
Presidential Voteshare		(0.01)		
In Functions ×		0.03*		
Presidential Voteshare		(0.01)		
Acordión ×		0.02*		
Presidential Voteshare		(0.01)		
Gálvez Voteshare			0.00	0.01*
			(0.00)	(0.00)
Executive Nominee ×				-0.01
Gálvez Voteshare				(0.01)
In Functions ×				-0.02
Gálvez Voteshare				(0.02)
Acordeón ×			-0.04	-0.03
Gálvez Voteshare			(0.01)	(0.02)
Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES
Constant	0.08*	0.08*	0.08*	0.08*
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
N	4245636	4245636	4245636	4245636

* $p < 0.05$

Información de autores

Amanda Driscoll, Associate Professor of Political Science, Department of Political Science, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL, ORCID: 0000-0002-3193-2770

Michael Nelson, Professor of Political Science, Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA, ORCID: 0000-0002-7665-7557

Rachel Canino, Graduate Student, Department of Political Science, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL, ORCID: 0009-0008-7043-728X

Matheus Zanetti, Graduate Student, Department of Political Science, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL, ORCID: 0000-0002-9229-3781