

Abstract: The paper argues that institutional arrangements shape representation patterns indirectly. In Venezuela, party structures and electoral rules the two-party system broke down and parties with less centralized internal structures won half of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies in 1993. In the same year, Venezuelans installed a new mixed-member proportional electoral system and elected half of the Chamber of Deputies from single-member districts. Electoral rules and party structures shape representation patterns in the Venezuelan Chamber of Deputies. Political institutions—party structures and electoral rules—identify two groups of deputies: those from system. meant that half of the Chamber of Deputies was elected from traditional party-lists and half from new single-member districts. They can make some legislators more electorally vulnerable than others. Thereby, institutions can create They identify groups of legislators that have distinct Institutions can define sub-groups of legislators that face distinct electoral incentives. which are electorally vulnerable are need to be Representation, however, cannot be explained by institutions alone. Legislators make calculations of the potential electoral benefits from ties with different interest organizations. Therefore, institutional incentives and deputy evaluations

Political and institutional change can create opportunities for new interests in society to develop access to formal political processes. In Venezuela, the breakdown of a two-party system and the implementation of a mixed-member proportional electoral system were widely intrepeted as opportunities for new, local-level interests to cultivate ties with legislators. Electoral incentives associated with party structures and electoral rules would encourage deputies from single-member districts and new decentralized parties to be attentive to new interests. New interests found representation in the 1994–1999 Congress, but these deputies were more responsive to established interests such as business and labor than the newer interest organizations. New institutional arrangements shaped representation patterns, but they cannot explain which political interests deputies will represent. Deputies’ calculations of the political benefits of alliance with different interests determined who they would attentive to.

**Who’s In and Who’s Out: An Analysis of Representation Patterns
in the Venezuelan Chamber of Deputies**

**Political Calculations and Interest Representation:
An Institutional Analysis of the Venezuelan Congress**

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INTRODUCTION

New institutional arrangements have produced unexpected consequences for representation in Venezuela. After a wave of civil society mobilization in the 1980s, political observers predicted that the breakdown of the Venezuelan two-party system and the implementation of a mixed-member proportional electoral system in 1993 would create electoral incentives for some legislators to represent new interests at the state and local-levels as well as older, established interests. While new interests are represented in the 1994–1999 Congress, the legislators who were predicted to be particularly responsive to them are disproportionately attentive to established interests.

Reformers' expectations that institutional changes would produce opportunities for new interests to become integrated in the formal polity (see Ellner 1993; Gómez Calcaño and López Maya 1990), were derived implicitly from an institutionalist conceptualization of politics. The party system and electoral rule changes created two institutionally-defined groupings of legislators: deputies from single-member districts (SMDs) and decentralized parties, and deputies from party-lists and centralized parties. Political parties exercise less control over the electoral fortunes of the former deputies than the latter ones. Because deputies from SMDs and decentralized parties cannot rely on party labels or machineries to carry them to office, they face greater electoral insecurity than deputies from party-lists and centralized parties. Electoral insecurity, according to reformers, encourages them to seek ties with unaligned groups in society, such as the new interests that mobilized in the 1980s, to compensate for diminished party support.

This purely institutional analysis does not account for legislators' calculations of the potential benefits they might earn from alliances with different interests. A great deal of uncertainty surrounds, for example, new state and local-level interests. Their ability to promote candidacies and swing electoral outcomes are unknowns given their limited experience in institutionalized politics. Deputies from SMDs and decentralized parties who already feel insecure about their reelections might be expected to seek ties with the older, more established political interests that have demonstrated their electoral value repeatedly in past campaigns rather than with the mostly untested new political actors.

This paper uses a "soft" rational choice institutional approach to examine whether deputies from single-member districts and decentralized parties have developed ties with new interests or established interests in Venezuela. It assumes that legislators calculate the political utility of alliances with different interests, and that they favor alliances that produce the most electoral security. As a result, it considers representation to be largely a response to (1) institutional incentives associated with electoral rules and party structures, and (2) legislator expectations about the political value of alliance with specific interest organizations. To test hypotheses about the effects of single-member district electoral rules and the breakdown of the two-party system on representation patterns, this paper uses survey data from the Chamber of Deputies and elite interviews with leaders of interest organizations.

In spite of strong presidentialism, the Venezuelan Congress is an appropriate venue for examining representation patterns. The legislative branch has become an active and autonomous actor in the Venezuelan policy process in the 1990s. The 1994–1999 Congress is the first to have exercised considerable influence over a broad range of policy including the budget. Moreover, it has begun to modernize and professionalize its staff and research resources so that its committees and members can more efficiently draft legislation, hold legislative and oversight hearings, and respond to lobbying by outside interests. Because the Congress is exercising independent power in the policy process, it is also a more attractive lobbying target for interest organizations.

The findings in this paper indicate that electoral rules and party structures in the Chamber of Deputies affect representation patterns, but the direction of the effect is influenced by deputies'

calculations of the potential political leverage of different interest organizations. Deputy uncertainty about the ability of new, local-level interests to influence electoral outcomes modifies the impact of electoral rules and party structures on representation. Instead of cultivating representation among new interests as reformers anticipated, single-member district deputies and members of decentralized parties build ties with established interests.

The following analysis is divided into four sections. The first section examines party system changes and electoral reform in the early 1990s and introduces a classification of Venezuelan interest organizations. The second section reviews party representation of established political interests from 1958 into the 1980s, and the subsequent mobilization of new interests in the 1980s. The third section uses survey data from the Chamber of Deputies to test hypotheses about the impact of party structures and electoral rules on deputy attentiveness to new and established political interests. The final section discusses the findings in comparative context and with regard to democratization in Venezuela.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AND INTEREST ORGANIZATION IN VENEZUELA

Political and institutional changes in the 1990s create conditions that are hypothesized to favor a broadening of representation patterns among deputies. The breakdown of the two-party system and the introduction of mixed-member proportional rules for congressional elections create incentives for deputies to be attentive to new state and local-level interests. Single-member district deputies, for example, compete in personalized contests where people vote for candidates rather than parties. Party labels continue to be important cues for voters, but candidates' personal characteristics are additional criteria that citizens can now use when deciding how to vote. Similarly, the new, more decentralized parties in Congress neither have the vertical organization nor the national networks that are necessary to promote congressional candidacies efficiently.

The following analysis reviews these institutional changes and introduces the differences between new and established interests in Venezuela. It also proposes hypotheses about how party system changes and electoral reforms interact with legislators' evaluations of the political influence of different interests to affect representation patterns in the Chamber of Deputies.

Party System Change and Electoral Reform

The 1993 elections mark a drastic change in the partisan make-up of the Chamber of Deputies. More than two parties won significant representation in Congress for the first time since 1968. Broader party representation in the Chamber of Deputies has created unique opportunities for new interests to integrate themselves in the legislature without having to work through either Acción Democrática or COPEI.

Acción Democrática and COPEI controlled an average of 84 percent of the seats in Congress from 1973 through the 1988 elections (Rey 1994: Appendix 2). In contrast, when the new Congress opened in 1994, Acción Democrática controlled the largest delegation with only slightly more than 25 percent of the seats. Together, AD and COPEI held just 54 percent of the Chamber seats. La Causa-R, MAS, and Convergencia entered the 1994–1999 period with large congressional delegations for the first times.¹ The precise partisan make-up of the Chamber of Deputies has varied

¹La Causa-R split into two parties in March 1997 (Patria Para Todos [PPT] and LCR-Velásquez). For this paper, the two La Causa-R parties are combined into a single analysis. This decision is justified by the fact that for all but 4 months of the period during which data for this paper

as the Supreme Electoral Council (*Consejo Supremo Electoral*—CSE) has settled electoral disputes and deputies have switched parties (Subero 1997). The division of La Causa-R and the creation of the party *Independientes Por Venezuela* (comprised of legislators who broke with their parties after the 1993 election) meant that seven major parties were represented in the Chamber in mid-1997 (Table 1).

The parties that have large congressional delegations for the first time differ from *Acción Democrática* and COPEI in ways that are relevant to representation of new interests. High centralization and strict discipline characterize AD and COPEI more than La Causa-R, MAS, *Convergencia*, and *Independientes Por Venezuela*. This paper codes the former parties as centralized and the latter parties as decentralized.² Compared with their colleagues from centralized parties, deputies from the decentralized parties have more liberty to cultivate independent support among political interests. Because most of the emerging interests are unaligned with either of the major parties, they are obvious targets for entrepreneurial members of decentralized parties. Anti-AD/COPEI sentiment among many new interests gives members of decentralized parties an organizational advantage over centralized parties with regard to winning new interest support. La Causa-R, for example, already has a long history of working with local movements and promoting emerging interests. Its initial electoral successes were based on the party's ability to forge alliances with groups and interests that opposed the AD/COPEI hegemony in Venezuelan politics and society.

The 1994–1999 Congress was the first elected using the new mixed-member proportional system. From 1958 through 1988, Venezuelans voted for party-lists rather than candidates. Under this electoral system, deputies faced incentives to cultivate ties with the party elites who created the electoral lists. In 1993, using the mixed-member proportional system, half of the Chamber of Deputies was elected from traditional party-lists and half from new single-member districts. Under the new rules, state and local-level reputation and alliances are potentially valuable electoral commodities. As a result, legislators have strong incentives to support the state and local-level issues that many new interests promote. Compared to their colleagues from party-lists, SMD deputies are more attentive to new, state and local interests than to party elites (Kulisheck 1998a). It remains unclear whether they are similarly more attentive to new state and local interests relative to nationally-oriented established interests.

The debate around the adoption of single-member district electoral rules suggests that reformers understood the potential implications of the new rules for representation. Single-member districts were strongly supported by civil society groups and opposed by the major parties (see Shugart 1992). The parties feared, and the civil society organizations hoped, that single-member district electoral rules would dilute party control over legislative processes and representation. The rationale for these hopes and fears was based on political experiences in the United States and Britain.

were collected (February 1994 through June 1997), PPT and LCR-Velásquez were a single party. Moreover, the parties' new organizational structures were not firmly established during the 4 months when PPT and LCR-Velásquez existed separately and data were being gathered. The Supreme Electoral Council ruled that LCR-Velásquez would control the name La Causa-R. PPT was briefly identified as LCR-Medina.

²Party codings are determined by (1) the degree to which lawmakers are permitted to speak and vote their consciences on the Chamber floor; (2) party tolerance of internal factions; and (3) rules about leadership ascendancy within the party and the legislature. See Appendix 1 for information about coding decisions.

Studies from these countries argue that the electoral payoff from local-oriented activities is low in party-list, proportional representation systems because citizens vote for parties rather than casting personalized votes. In plurality, single-member district electoral systems, legislators face incentives to develop personal ties with local interests because citizens can use personal cues as well as party cues when deciding how to cast their votes (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987; Weaver and Rockman 1993: 13).

Party system change and electoral reform created incentives for some deputies to pursue independent reelection strategies. Which interest organizations are better represented as a result of the institutional changes is a largely a function of deputies' evaluations of the political experience and influence of different interests. In Venezuela, interest organizations can be divided into two groups: *new* interests and *established* interests.

Established and New Interests in Venezuela

A diverse group of interests mobilized in Venezuela in the 1970s and 1980s. Their origins and political strategies differ from older interests that tend to have strong ties to political parties. As a result, political interests in Venezuela can be characterized as *new* or *established*. Descriptions of interest organizations in Venezuela support this distinction.

Established interests are usually economically defined organizations with ties to the major parties (Navarro 1995; Crisp 1998). They tend to be highly partisan and/or “semicorporatist institutions of class representation” such as CTV (Confederation of Venezuelan Workers), FCV (Peasant Federation of Venezuela), or FEDECAMARAS (Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Production) (Navarro 1995: 130). Many of these groups and organizations have been integrated in parties from the moment of their foundation (Kornblith and Levine 1994: 41). Established interests have used their partisan ties to exercise greater influence in political and policy processes than the more recently mobilized, non-partisan interests.

Navarro (1995: 115) identifies new actors in Venezuelan politics as those that developed outside of the political parties and whose identities are based largely on criticism of Acción Democrática and COPEI. These new political actors have generally tried to avoid even the appearance of complicity with political parties (Ellner 1993: 26). They oppose clientelism, the lack of internal democracy in parties, and party strategies to invade spheres of social activity by coopting organizations (Navarro 1995: 131). In addition to being non-partisan, new interests also tend to be non-economically defined interests such as neighborhood associations, religious organizations, and environmental and human rights groups (Crisp 1998: 33). Public opinion in favor of these new organizations has risen as opinions about political parties have fallen (Salamanca 1995: 211).

The analysis in this paper builds on the organizational distinctions made implicitly by Navarro (1995), Crisp (1998), and others. It codes interests based on their origins, issue foci, and relationships with Acción Democrática and COPEI. Established interests are economic-based groups with strong functional ties to the major parties. Many established interests were founded and/or promoted by political parties (e.g., business and labor organizations). New interests are recently mobilized groups that tend not to be allied with Acción Democrática and COPEI or organized purely around economic issues (e.g., neighborhood organizations, environmental and human rights groups, and state and local-level movements). Some groups that are coded as new interests have had ties to AD and COPEI, but have begun to act more autonomously and to adopt non-traditional strategies for promoting their needs and demands (e.g., the women's movement; see Friedman 1998). Appendix 2 shows how specific groups, organizations, and movements in Venezuela were coded.

Hypotheses

Parties exercise weaker control over legislative and campaign processes involving deputies from decentralized parties and single-member districts. As a result, these deputies face greater electoral insecurity than their colleagues from centralized parties and party-lists. This paper tests two related hypotheses. First, it hypothesizes that electoral insecurity encourages deputies to cultivate independent ties with political interests in society. Deputies from party-lists and members of centralized parties can still rely on party cues to help them in elections. The incentives for them to broaden their representation strategies are weak because they still enjoy significant electoral security.

When deputies from single-member districts and decentralized parties decide with which interest to build ties, they evaluate the ability of different interests to influence political procedures and electoral outcomes. Comparison of the political experiences of new and established interests illustrates why legislators may not be equally confident about their abilities to influence political and electoral outcomes. The second hypothesis, therefore, states that uncertainty about the political clout of new interests encourages electorally insecure deputies from single-member districts and decentralized parties to be attentive to established interests.

THE POLITICAL ROLES AND EXPERIENCES OF ESTABLISHED AND NEW INTERESTS

This section of the paper examines the political experience of established and new interests in Venezuela. When legislators calculate the potential political and electoral benefits they may gain from alliance with different interest organizations, they conduct similar analyses. This examination emphasizes the historical ties between parties and established interests and reviews the different political roles new interests have played since mobilizing in the 1980s.

Established Interests and Party-Based Representation (1958–1980s)

Interest representation occurred primarily through party channels for the first generation of democracy in Venezuela. Representation was efficient because parties encapsulated most relevant organizations and interests. Party activists, particularly from Acción Democrática, were instrumental during the mobilization of, among others, trade unions, peasant groups, teachers' organizations, and student and professional organizations. Existing groups that expressed political demands were often integrated into party structures and became almost corporative parts of the major parties (Salamanca 1995: 200).

Ties to AD and COPEI ensured that interests would be represented effectively in the political arena and in negotiations among parties in the legislature, the bureaucracy, and across branches of government. The labor movement's relationship with Acción Democrática exemplifies the value of partisan affiliations for societal organizations. Because of union ties to the party, labor conflicts were referred automatically to official commissions on which labor and government representatives loyal to Acción Democrática could always outvote management (Coppedge 1994: 32).

Parties also benefitted from their representation of established interests. Acción Democrática benefitted enormously from its ties to labor during the transition to democracy. Labor leaders affiliated with AD minimized strike activity at the request of party elites. For conservative sectors of society, the ability Acción Democrática to control organized labor led credibility to the Betancourt presidency (1959–1964). Moreover, during COPEI administrations, Acción Democrática benefitted politically from disruptive labor strategies that pro-AD unions promoted (Coppedge 1994: 34; Ellner 1989: 98).

The vertical organization of the major political parties in Venezuela facilitated representation by linking masses to elites and the interior of the country with the capital. Party offices in the smallest towns were contact points between citizens, party machineries, and finally the government. People, often representing interests that were integrated in the party, would bring their complaints or demands to local party organizers. The local party leaders would pass requests to the state-level party organization and, assuming the requests had merit, they would eventually reach Caracas and be acted upon by loyalists in the government or bureaucracy (Karl 1997: 107).

Party machineries were also the primary mediators of representation in Congress (Rey 1972: 205). Congressional leaders in Acción Democrática and COPEI demanded strict obedience to party lines (Coppedge 1994: 23; Martz 1992: 113). Legislators could present opinions about issues freely as long as their parties had not announced official positions on them. Once a party line had been set, legislators who openly disagreed with it faced swift actions from their parties' disciplinary tribunals (Rey 1972: 202). Stiff disciplinary procedures created strong incentives for individual legislators from the major parties to avoid undertaking independent actions to represent interests outside of their parties. Citizens and organizations without functional ties with one of the major parties (AD and COPEI), as a result, struggled to find representation in the legislative arena. The fact that Acción Democrática and COPEI occupied over 75 percent of legislative seats from 1973 to 1993 meant that independent interests had few alternatives but to deal with AD and COPEI if they wanted to shape policy. Direct lobbying of legislators yielded few substantive benefits for independent organizations.

Candidate nomination processes created additional incentives for Venezuelan legislators to toe party lines. They also help to explain the hierarchical relationship between party elites and legislators. Venezuelans voted for closed, state-wide party-lists of candidates for Congress from 1958 through 1988. The general nomination pattern for congressional candidates in Acción Democrática and COPEI was for state and local party chapters to forward recommendations to their national parties in Caracas, where special committees of party leaders made final decisions about nominations. Candidates' relationships with party leaders could determine whether they were placed on electoral lists that assured election or were assigned positions that guaranteed defeat (Martz 1992: 102). In 1993, Venezuelans began to cast two votes for Congress under new mixed-member proportional electoral rules. Citizens cast one vote for candidates in single-member districts and one for closed party-lists in state-wide proportional representation elections. Under the new system, nonetheless, nomination procedures continue to create incentives for deputies to follow party lines. Party elites still exercise influence over candidate placement on party-lists as well as the selection of the districts in which candidates will compete.

The effectiveness of party-based representation began to falter long before the adoption of the mixed-member proportional electoral system. Centralized party structures began to threaten representation as early as the 1973 election of Carlos Andrés Pérez to the presidency of the Republic (Martz 1998: 67). Pragmatism had begun to shape party strategies and goals. Rather than using political influence to represent the concerns of their members, party elites consolidated their personal power and leadership positions (Martz 1992: 102). Leadership turnover became increasingly rare and ties between elites in Caracas and rank-and-file party members became more strained. For Acción Democrática and COPEI, representation had become important only to the degree that it carried large blocs of votes.

While the old structures remained in place, the effectiveness of centralized, party-based representation declined precipitously in the 1980s (Coppedge 1994; Crisp, Levine, and Rey 1995). New civil society groups organized independently from the major parties and found that they were effectively blocked from the formal political arena. Society was changing, but interests with ties to

national parties, business, and labor continued to monopolize participation on executive branch consultative commissions. Non-economically defined groups accounted for only 6 percent of the seats on executive branch commissions and less than 2 percent of positions in Venezuela's decentralized public administration. Labor, capital, and professionals combined for 31 percent of seats on commissions and 29 percent of positions in the decentralized public administration (Crisp 1998: 33). Similarly, Acción Democrática and COPEI continued to dominate the electoral process. In congressional elections, the two parties shared an average 77 percent of the vote from 1973 through 1988. In presidential elections, AD and COPEI combined for an average of 88 percent of the vote over the same period of time (Rey 1994: 12). The fact that existing institutions and processes were not accommodating emerging actors and interests contributed to the mobilization of state and local-level civil society organizations and to the growth of the reform movement in the 1980s (Gómez Calcaño and López Maya 1990; Crisp and Levine 1998).

Evaluation of the political experiences of established interests indicate that they can exercise significant influence over political processes and electoral outcomes. Established interests continue to be well integrated in formal political processes. For electorally insecure deputies, political alliances with established interests may be considered "safe."

The Rise of New Interests (1980s–1990s)

New social and political movements mobilize in response to opportunities such as expanding access to political processes and division among political elites (Tarrow 1994: 86). In Venezuela, many groups organized after institutional reforms created new political spaces and in response to an implicit division among political elites about the legitimacy of two-party politics.

First, access to political processes expanded in the 1980s. The *Ley Orgánica de Régimen Municipal* (LORM) mandated the direct election of municipal councils in 1979. By broadening access to the political arena, this institutional reform encouraged new interests to mobilize around issues and elections at the local-level. The LORM also charged city governments with the "responsibility for encouraging the formation of neighborhood associations and defining their authority. This gave the neighborhood movement the impetus . . . to mushroom across the nation" (Ellner 1993: 22). The 1988 reform of the *Ley Orgánica de Régimen Municipal* and the approval of the *Ley de Elección Directa de los Gobernadores de Estado* mandated the direct election of mayors and governors in 1989. These institutional reforms created more new spaces in which new groups, organizations, and movements could participate in political processes (Guerón and Manchisi 1996; Kornblith and Levine 1994; Kulisheck and Canache 1998).

Second, a division among Venezuelan elites began to appear in the 1980s. Politicians and small parties started to stake-out positions that challenged the legitimacy of the two-party system in Venezuela. The subtle division of elites into pro- and contra-AD/COPEI groups created an opportunity for new groups to organize and to press for change in the political system. The association between divisive elite conceptualizations of politics and new interest organization is bi-directional: groups mobilized in response to changes among elites, and the mobilization of society encouraged more elites to oppose the AD/COPEI political hegemony.

The elite division originated among political leaders outside of Acción Democrática and COPEI. Inside the neighborhood movement, for example, activists argued that the vertical organization of AD and COPEI did not represent Venezuelan society effectively. They built new organizations that were designed to engage society while not at all resembling political parties (Crisp and Levine 1998). In the military, criticism of the two-party system as unrepresentative and corrupt led to the formation of the Movimiento Bolivariano 200 (MBR-200) in the mid 1980s. The MBR-

200, under the leadership Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chávez Frías, led a nearly successful coup d'état in February 1992. Chávez Frías accepted responsibility for the failed coup attempt in a nationally broadcast television message and quickly became a popular alternative to party leaders who were widely perceived as politically compromised. His criticisms of Acción Democrática, COPEI, and the business class reverberated among lower and middle-class sectors of society (Levine 1994).

In the 1990s, the division among elites began to be evident in national party politics. The party La Causa-R emerged as a part of the *nuevo sindicalismo* (new unionism) movement and challenged AD dominance in the labor movement (Hellinger 1996). The party grew steadily in the 1980s and early 1990s by questioning the representativeness of two-party politics. In 1989, the La Causa-R candidate won the inaugural elections for governor in the state of Bolívar. Three years later the party won reelection to the governorship in Bolívar and was victorious in the Caracas mayoral elections. After the 1993 congressional elections, La Causa-R entered the Congress with the third largest delegation (López Maya 1995).

Rafael Caldera, former president of the Republic and founder of COPEI, broke with his party in preparation for the 1993 presidential elections. Harshly criticizing the two-party system he helped to create, Caldera ran for the presidency as the Convergencia candidate and won. At the same time, the party MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo) took advantage of the wave of criticism of Acción Democrática and COPEI to attempt to break from its minor-party status. The social-democratic MAS joined the social-Christian Convergencia in the 1993 elections as an equal coalition partner and supported the Caldera candidacy. Political calculations and opposition to AD and COPEI rather than ideology or a common platform was the basis for this electoral coalition.

By the mid 1990s, attitudes about the two-party system clearly divided Venezuelan political elites. This division was an opportunity for new groups and interests to mobilize as well as a result of many interests participating in expanded political spaces at the state and local-levels.

The Political Roles of New Interests

New interests have adopted different political roles than established interests in Venezuela. They have not used political strategies that focus on integration in parties. Their political roles can be characterized as engagement in cultural politics, participation in the informal polity, attempts to transform the state, and most recently, development of representation inside formal institutions (Hochstetler 1997: 196).

The first three roles exemplify non-traditional participation and characterize most of the activities of new interests in the 1980s and the 1990s. To influence policy debates about macro-level issues in Venezuela, however, these interests face incentives to become more integrated in formal political institutions such as the Congress. Representational politics, the fourth political role, offers the means for new interests to continue their growth and expand their political power.

The common characteristic among the non-traditional political roles is that they permit interests to act autonomously in the political arena. Participation in cultural politics and the informal polity do not require interaction with major parties. Groups can deepen popular understanding of issues and produce new cultural identities and symbols directly through the media (Hochstetler 1997: 202). AMIGRANSA (*Asociación de Amigos de Defensa de la Gran Sabana*) and other members of the Venezuelan environmental movement have played cultural politics to alert society about issues such as the destruction of parts of the Canaima National Park. The significance of these groups is that their themes and values generate new political facts, while their use of the media broadens popular and elite understanding and conceptualization of specific issues (García-Guadilla 1992: 159–161). The neighborhood movement has also used the media to promote its agenda. The civil

society organization *Escuela de Vecinos de Venezuela* uses radio programming and a daily television show to spread news about community projects and groups (Levine 1998: 201).

The informal polity offers a second political space in which new interests can shape sociopolitical outcomes without ties to the major parties or formal institutions. Many new interests have worked in the informal polity to confront societal needs that have gone unaddressed by the parties and the national government. Unlike playing cultural politics, actions in the informal polity can provide tangible goods and services to citizens (Hochstetler 1997: 202).

The types of goods and services that new civil society organizations have provided citizens are diverse. The neighborhood movement formed in the suburbs of Caracas in the late 1970s to fight unplanned city growth (Levine 1998: 200). During the second Pérez administration, some of these neighborhood groups distributed state-subsidized milk in poor neighborhoods (Gómez Calcaño 1998: 181). Cooperatives organized to protect small groups of citizens from high prices and to make transportation, capital, and credit more available for lower and middle class Venezuelans (Crisp and Levine 1998: 41). CESAP (*Centro al Servicio de la Acción Popular*) offers training programs and short courses for state and local-level groups as well as literacy and child-care programs for citizens (Levine and Crisp 1995: 241). Organizations such as the *Ferías de Consumo Popular* promote communitarian living in primarily poor areas by responding to problems such as food supply, unemployment, and health (Salamanca 1995: 207).

The third role for new actors is state transformation. State transformation in Venezuela has been more reformist than revolutionary. Reformist transformation includes increasing government accountability and responsiveness and devolving power away from national-level institutions and actors (Hochstetler 1997: 199). New interests in Venezuela have worked successfully to transform the state by placing reform issues on the national agenda.

Campaigns to change electoral laws and to decentralize political and economic responsibilities from the national government to states and localities are examples of recent political undertakings (Crisp and Levine 1998: 43). In 1987, segments of the neighborhood movement gathered 140,000 signatures on petitions demanding that the basic law governing municipalities be reformed (*Ley Orgánica del Regimen Municipal*—LORM). The LORM was changed in 1988 to provide for the direct election of mayors and governors, the creation of parish councils, and the possibility of recalling elected state and local officials (Levine 1998: 201). The civil society organization *Queremos Elegir* formed in 1991 to promote further electoral reforms. Its primary goal was to expand the use of single-member districts to elect legislative bodies at all levels of government. The group argued that electoral incentives associated with single-member district rules would encourage legislators to be accountable to new state and local-level interests and to be attentive to their demands (Gómez Calcaño 1998: 174).

In spite of efforts by new interests to shift many political powers and responsibilities to state and local governments, most policy and budgetary decisions continue to be made by the national government in Venezuela. Activity in the informal polity is, as a result, insufficient to maintain a strong, consistent voice in national policy debates. To influence decisions about serious issues such as macro-economic policy, social security reform, health and education policy, and privatization of nationalized industries, new interests need to cultivate relationships with actors in national government institutions such as the Congress. New interests have begun to broaden their political roles beyond the informal polity and state transformation to include the fourth political role, representation in formal institutions.

Efforts by new interests to engage members of the legislative branch are mostly nascent. The human rights group PROVEA (*Programa Venezolano de Educación-acción en Derechos*

Humanos), for example, worked with other human rights groups to promote their common agenda among presidential candidates but not legislative candidates as recent as the 1993 elections. In Congress, PROVEA views individual deputies as having limited resources and opportunities to affect legislation. When human rights issues arise, it is more likely to work with the Human Rights Committee in the Chamber of Deputies than with individual deputies (author interview with Raul Cubas, PROVEA, 26 March 1997).

The environmental movement began to use the legislative arena in the mid 1980s as route to influence governmental policy. In an extended campaign, it pressured the Congress to pass the Criminal Code of the Environment in 1991. The involvement of the environmental movement was not typical of interest activity in the formal polity in Venezuela. The movement mostly avoided interaction with Acción Democrática and COPEI in favor of relations with non-AD/COPEI deputies such as micro-party member Alexander Luzardo and the MAS-controlled Committee on the Environment. It also relied heavily on popular mobilization and a highly public petition campaign in favor of the issue. Although they were successful, parts of the environmental movement found the legislative process frustrating and returned, at least temporarily, to less visible political roles (Hochstetler 1995: 219–224).

Queremos Elegir, like PROVEA and the environmental movement, has begun to use congressional committees as political access points. The group was active in congressional committee hearings about reforming the electoral law (*Ley Orgánica del Sufragio y Participación Política*) during spring and summer 1996 (Gómez Calcaño 1998: 177). *Queremos Elegir* has also begun to pressure individual members of Congress. Through its program *Consulta Ciudadana*, it surveyed citizen opinion about different reform proposals such as the adoption of recall mechanisms for members of Congress, the referendum, and the elimination of legislative substitutes. *Queremos Elegir* presented the survey results to citizens in different parts of Venezuela over several months. By presenting this information, it aimed to educate citizens and to encourage them to contact and pressure their deputies about these issues. *Queremos Elegir* also presented the findings from the *Consulta Ciudadana* directly to members of Congress (author interview with Elías Santana, *Escuela de Vecinos de Venezuela*, 15 April 1997).

Even though new interests are beginning to participate in congressional committee hearings and to contact individual deputies, they are mostly novices in the legislative arena. As a result, electorally insecure legislators will likely be uncertain about the ability of new interests to influence political processes and swing electoral outcomes.

The following section analyzes representation patterns in the Chamber of Deputies using electoral rules and party structures as explanatory variables. The preceding analysis of the political roles of new and established interests indicates that the political experiences of the two types of interests are not the same. As a result, the following analysis is sensitive to legislators' confidence in different interests' political clout.

DATA ANALYSIS

This section tests whether electoral rules and party structures shape representation patterns using survey data from the Venezuelan Chamber of Deputies (Kulisheck 1997). The author administered the survey to a sample of deputies in April–June 1997 through their parties'

congressional delegations (N=65; 31.4 percent of the Chamber³). It consists of forty-two primarily closed-ended questions about deputies' representation patterns and legislative activities. The survey is sufficiently representative of membership in the Chamber of Deputies to be used to analyze representation patterns. In the 1994–1999 Chamber, for example, 50.2 percent of deputies are from centralized parties, 50.7 percent were elected from party-lists, 46.9 percent have held leadership positions in their parties or the Congress, and 71.6 percent are serving in their first term. Similarly, in the survey, 44.6 percent are from centralized parties, 35.9 percent were elected from party-lists, 44.6 percent have held leadership positions in their parties or the Congress, and 69.2 percent are in their first term.

Analysis 1: Representation Patterns in the Chamber of Deputies

To test whether electoral rules and party structures shape legislator attentiveness to new interests, this analysis must first confirm that new interests are represented in the Chamber of Deputies. The most direct way to determine which political interests command the attention of deputies is to ask them. When given the opportunity to indicate which interests they represent in an open-ended question, deputies claimed overwhelmingly that they represented new interests (Table 2, column 1). The fact that less than 4 percent of deputies claimed to represent established interests suggests that they responded to this question with a “political” answer. Given the recent rise of new interests, it is understandable that politicians would want to identify themselves with this emerging constituency. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that established interests maintain so few ties with members of Congress after having participated in national politics since the transition to democracy in 1958.

Deputies' skewed responses to the representation question are not meaningless. In the long-term, the fact that deputies perceive that it is politically advantageous to associate themselves with new interests may shift political and electoral alliances among deputies. In the short-term, however, it reveals what legislators believe is the “politically correct” response to questions about representation. It is not a strong indicator of which interests have truly cultivated ties with members of Congress.

A better strategy for understanding representation patterns focuses on lobbying. Deputies were asked, in an open-ended question, which interests lobby them most for assistance. The question about lobbying goes beyond deputies' attitudes about who they think they should represent, or would like to represent, and taps actual contacts between organized interests and legislators. Over half of deputies claimed that they were contacted most by established interests, while more than one-third reported that new interests lobbied them most (Table 2, column 2). Although they lobby legislators less than established interests, these data also indicate that new interests are engaged in the legislative process and appear to be building relationships with representatives in the Chamber.

Deputy attentiveness to specific issues is also an indicator of which interests have ties with legislators. To be responsive to the demands of, for example, new interests, deputies need to be

³As a percentage of the legislature under study, the N reported here is comparable to other research on legislative behavior: Bianco (1994) examines constituent-legislator trust in the United States using a sample of 37.3 percent of the House of Representatives. Lancaster and Patterson (1990) analyze representation in the West German Bundestag using responses from 37.1 percent of the MPs. As parts of the Parliamentary Elites of Latin America (PELA) project, Ramos (1997) relies on a sample of 31.9 percent of the Venezuelan Chamber of Deputies and while Kenney (1996) uses a sample of 72.5 percent of the Peruvian Congress, he interviewed a total of eighty-seven legislators.

knowledgeable about the issues that concern them. Therefore, the degree to which deputies are experts on the issues that concern new interests is an indicator whether these interests are integrated into the legislative arena.

Deputies answered an open-ended questions about what issues they are most knowledgeable. Their answers were coded so that the issues that concern new interests are *new* issues and the issues that concern established interests as *traditional* issues.⁴ Deputies who are experts on specific issues will likely attract lobbying from the interest organizations that promote those issues.⁵ Over a majority of deputies responded that they were experts on traditional issues, while slightly more than a third claimed to be more knowledgeable about new issues (Table 2, column 3). Though more deputies focus on traditional issues than new issues, both are clearly represented in the Congress.

Finally, levels of activity among members of the Chamber of Deputies shape whether expertise on different issues and lobbying contacts translates into substantive policy outcomes. The survey asked legislators how often they attempted to shape policy in the Chamber over the previous year. The data indicate that the most active deputies are lobbied overwhelmingly by established interests. New interests primarily lobby deputies who participate in the Chamber at low to medium levels (Table 3). This finding suggests a potential shortcoming of the strategies used by new interests' to cultivate ties with legislators. They seem to have cultivated ties with deputies who are not highly active and, as a result, may be less likely to be influential in congressional decision-making processes.

In summary, established interests maintain contacts with a majority of the members of the Chamber of Deputies and an equally large majority of legislators claim to be experts on the traditional issues. Moreover, the deputies who are attentive to established interests are more active in the Chamber than their colleagues who focus on new issues. In terms of ties with deputies, these data indicate that established interests are more broadly integrated into the Chamber of Deputies than new interests. Nevertheless, the fact that a third of deputies reported lobbying contacts with new interests and focused on new issues indicates that new interests are also integrated into the Congress.

Because new interests have developed ties to the legislative arena, it is appropriate to examine whether party structures and electoral rules influence which deputies represent them. The following analysis tests hypotheses about whether legislators from decentralized parties and single-member districts are particularly attentive to new interests in the Chamber of Deputies. It is sensitive to the

⁴*New* issues refer to issues that have emerged recently and are promoted by new organizations (e.g., decentralization, the environment, human rights, institutional reform, privatization), as well as existing issues that have been coopted by new groups at the state and local levels (e.g., drugs, justice, personal security, public services, women's issues). Crime, for example, is considered a new issue in Venezuela because it is often defined in terms of local issues (personal security). Likewise, reform proposals are categorized as new issues because they have been championed primarily by state and local organizations and civil society groups. *Traditional* issues refer to matters related to labor (e.g., salaries, education), business (e.g., debt, finances), the budget, and national policy issues (e.g., agriculture, transportation). See Appendix 3 for coding of political issues in Venezuela.

⁵Dexter (1969: 63-64) reports that lobbyists in the U.S. House of Representatives focus their time and resources on contacting and assisting members who already support their interests. Similarly, Hall and Wayman (1990) find that groups lobby legislators primarily to "mobilize bias" in favor of their interests. This involve pressuring supporters to be active on particular issues and, at times, urging non-supporters to minimize their opposition (p. 814).

possibility that deputy confidence about the ability of new interests to shape political processes and electoral outcomes may affect representation patterns.

Analysis 2: Explanations for Representation Patterns

This paper, and Venezuelan reformers, hypothesized that electoral insecurity would encourage deputies from single-member districts and decentralized parties to seek ties with new interests that are not aligned with national parties or institutions. The data, however, indicate that electoral insecurity prompted these deputies to cultivate ties with established interests.

For party system and electoral law changes to create perceptions of electoral insecurity and affect representation, deputies must believe that they are more responsible for their reelections than their parties. In fact, deputies from single-member districts and decentralized parties tend to claim that parties do not determine whether they win their elections. When asked about who was responsible for the organization of their campaigns, over a majority of deputies from single-member districts claimed that they were in charge of their own campaigns; only slightly more than one-quarter of the party-list deputies answered the same (Table 4). Similarly, one-fifth of deputies from decentralized parties reported that the actions of candidates rather than parties determined whether they were elected to office; less than 4 percent of deputies from centralized parties responded in kind (Table 4). These claims of responsibility for campaigns and reelections indicate that deputies from single-member districts and decentralized parties perceive that party labels cannot carry them to office.

Given the deep antipathy toward parties in Venezuela, independence from one's party during campaigns may be interpreted as an electoral opportunity. The deep penetration of parties in Venezuelan society and the national networks that the centralized parties maintain, however, provide candidates with important support even when citizens claim to oppose partisan politics. In Venezuela, electoral independence from party machineries remains a greater risk than opportunity.

Single-member district deputies must compete in unpredictable personalized elections. As a result, they face incentives to build independent ties with interest organizations that can shape political processes and electoral outcomes. Incentives related to electoral rules were hypothesized to encourage SMD deputies to be attentive to new state and local-level interests. A large majority of deputies from single-member districts, however, claimed to be experts on traditional issues and to be lobbied by established interests organizations (Table 5-A/B). They appear to be responding to the experience and demonstrated influence of established interests in Venezuelan politics. By developing expertises that focus on traditional issue areas, deputies from single-member districts calculate that they will be able to form alliances with influential established interests.

Faced with less electoral insecurity than their colleagues from single-member districts, deputies from party-lists are at liberty to build alliances with new interests even if they are unable to produce reliable political and electoral help in the future. The data support this expectation, approximately half of the party-list deputies claimed to be experts on new issues. Similarly, roughly half of these deputies were lobbied by new interests (Table 5-A/B).

Deputies from decentralized parties are twice as likely to be experts on traditional issues than new issues. Among deputies from centralized parties, approximately half are traditional issue experts and half focus on new issues (Table 5-A). The issue area expertise of deputies from decentralized parties does not attract heavy lobbying from established interests. New and established interests lobby deputies from centralized and decentralized parties in similar proportions. Approximately 60 percent of both types of deputies are lobbied by established interests and about one-third are lobbied by new interests (Table 5-B). In terms of deputies' attempts to cultivate ties with different interest

organizations, the fact that members of decentralized parties are overwhelmingly experts on traditional issues indicates that they perceive greater benefits from alliance with established interests than with new interests.

Overall, deputies' evaluations of the experiences and political influence of new and established interests clearly affected how electoral rules and party structures shaped representation patterns. Deputies from single-member districts and decentralized parties faced electoral insecurity related to the personalization of single-member district races and the weaker organization of decentralized parties. They had incentives, as a result, to build ties with interest organizations that could be useful in future campaigns. Established interests have had a long and successful tenure of activism in the formal political arena in Venezuela. New interests, on the other hand, only recently began to participate in the formal polity. Although many new interests mobilized in the 1980s, they were most active and successful playing non-traditional political roles. Faced with greater electoral insecurity than in the past, single-member district deputies and member of decentralized parties reviewed the political experiences of new and established interests and chose to cultivate ties with the "safer," more experienced option, the established political interest organizations.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings reported in this paper reveal the importance of placing institutional analyses in their proper case study contexts. Institutional arrangements relating to party structures and electoral rules define two groups of deputies that face distinct electoral incentives in Venezuela. Unlike deputies elected from party-lists and centralized parties who still enjoy a high degree of party-based electoral security, deputies from single-member districts and decentralized parties cannot rely on party labels or machineries to carry them to office. To understand the political implications of these institutional effects, this paper analyzed the potential benefits different interest organizations could provide electorally insecure deputies in single-member districts and decentralized parties.

In their bids for reelection, deputies from single-member districts and decentralized parties face incentives to build independent ties with interest organizations in society. Reformers expected that they would cultivate ties with new interests at the state and local-levels. New interests tend to be unaligned with parties and national-level politicians and are easily courted by individual legislators. Evaluation of the political histories of new and established interests, however, shows that established interests have more experience influencing political and electoral processes than new interests. Data about issue expertises and lobbying contacts revealed that deputies valued certainty about the potential political and electoral clout of organized interests more than contact ease. Insecure deputies from single-member districts and decentralized parties responded to electoral incentives by cultivating ties with established interests and by becoming knowledgeable about traditional issues.

These findings have potentially important implications for democratization and the political growth of new interest organizations in Venezuela. The data indicate that new interests have built ties with members of Congress. New interests no longer play only cultural and reformist roles in the informal polity. This finding is conclusive evidence that they are mainstream actors in Venezuelan politics. By playing the representation role, new interests cease to be political novelties. Given that new interests are now participating in the formal polity, their political clout and influence may be expected to increase. Alliances with new interest organizations can be expected to be viewed as "safe" in the future, even for electorally insecure members of Congress.

The inclusion of new interests in formal political processes could have a variable effect on democratization and political stability in Venezuela over time. In the long-term, broader representation of interests in the political process may jeopardize efficient decision-making.

Majorities become more difficult to form when more interests are represented at the political bargaining table. As a result, government may become less able to respond to the concerns of both new and established political interests. If representation becomes less efficient, politics may become increasingly unstable.

In the short-term, broader representation patterns will likely have a stabilizing effect on politics. New groups and interests will be able to find representation in formal political processes and will face fewer incentives to adopt anti-system strategies for influencing policy outcomes. The presidential candidacy of former coup-leader Hugo Chávez Frías exemplifies how interests that were once outside of the formal political process can be integrated into it. Chávez Frías is calling for major institutional changes, but he is using the electoral process rather than armed rebellion as means toward that end. Ultimately, the ways in which institutions and actors channel and represent the demands of different interests will be key for understanding political stability in Venezuela.

TABLE 1
Distribution of Seats in the Chamber of Deputies, 1989 and 1997

Parties	1989		1997	
	Seats	%	Seats	%
Acción Democrática	98	48.3%	53	25.6%
COPEI	67	33.0%	51	24.6%
MAS	19 ^a	9.4%	22	10.6%
La Causa-R ^b	1	0.0%	40	19.3%
Convergencia	—	—	18	8.7%
Independientes Por Venezuela	—	—	15	7.2%
Other ^c	19	9.4%	8	3.9%
Total ^d	203	100.1%	207	99.9%

Source: Consejo Supremo Electoral.

^a MAS and MIR formed an electoral alliance in the 1988 election.

^b La Causa-R split into LCR-Velásquez and Patria Para Todos (PPT) in March 1997.

^c Includes MIN, URD, ORA, MEP, NGD, independents and other small parties.

^d Does not total to 100.0% due to rounding.

TABLE 2
Deputy Reports about Which Political Interests^a They Represent,
Which Political Interests Lobby Them Most, and Their Issue Area^b Expertises

	—1— Deputies Represent	—2— Deputies Lobbied by	—3— Deputies' Issue Area Expertise
Established Interests	3.7%	54.7%	
New Interests	67.1%	37.3%	
Political Party	24.4%	—	
Other	4.9%	8.0%	
Traditional Issues			56.3%
New Issues			37.5%
Other			6.3%
Total ^c	100.1%	100.0%	100.1%
N	61	48	48

Source: Kulisheck 1997.

^a See Appendix 2 for coding of political interests in Venezuela.

^b See Appendix 3 for coding of political issues in Venezuela.

^c Does not total to 100.0% due to rounding.

TABLE 3
Deputy Reports about Which Political Interests^a Lobby Them Most by
Deputy Reports of Their Own Level of Activity in the Chamber of Deputies

	<u>Chamber Activity^b</u>			Total
	High	Medium	Low	
<u>Lobbied by</u>				
Established Interests	88.9%	47.4%	33.3%	60.9%
New Interests	11.1%	36.8%	66.6%	32.6%
Other	0.0%	15.8%	0.0%	6.5%
Total ^c	99.9%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N	18	19	9	46
χ^2_4	14.13*			

Source: Kulisheck 1997.

^a See Appendix 2 for coding of political interests in Venezuela.

^b Low coded 0–20 attempts to influence floor decisions; medium coded 21–40 attempts; and high coded 41+ attempts.

^c Does not total to 100.0% due to rounding.

*p < .01; **p < .05; ***p < .10

TABLE 4
Campaign Organization by Electoral Rules and
Reelection Responsibility by Party Structures

	Electoral Rules			Party Structures		
	Party-List	SMD	Total	Cen.	Decen.	Total
Candidate	22.7%	56.1%	44.4%	3.4%	20.0%	12.5%
Candidate and Party	50.0%	26.8%	34.9%	89.7%	65.7%	76.6%
Party	27.3%	17.1%	20.6%	6.8%	14.3%	10.9%
Total ^a	100.0%	100.0%	99.9%	99.9%	100.0%	100.0%
N	22	41	63	29	35	64
χ^2_2	6.51**			5.45***		

Source: Kulisheck 1997.

^a Does not total to 100.0% due to rounding.

*p < .01; **p < .05; ***p < .10

TABLE 5
Deputy Reports about Which Political Interests^a Lobby Them Most and Deputy
Issue Area^b Expertises by Electoral Rules and Party Structures

	Electoral Rules			Party Structures		
	Party-List	SMD	Total	Cen.	Decen.	Total
A.						
<u>Issue Expertise</u>						
Traditional Issues	46.7%	62.5%	57.4%	52.4%	59.3%	56.3%
New Issues	53.3%	31.3%	38.3%	47.6%	29.6%	37.5%
Other	0.0%	6.3%	4.3%	0.0%	11.1%	6.3%
Total ^c	100.0%	100.1%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.1%
N	15	32	47	21	27	48
? ₂	2.68			3.45		
B.						
<u>Lobbied by</u>						
Established Interests	44.4%	70.0%	60.4%	57.1%	63.0%	60.4%
New Interests	50.0%	23.3%	33.3%	38.1%	29.6%	33.3%
Other	5.6%	6.7%	6.3%	4.8%	7.4%	6.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N	18	30	48	21	27	48
? ₂	3.64			0.45		

Source: Kulisheck 1997.

^a See Appendix 2 for coding of political interests in Venezuela.

^b See Appendix 3 for coding of political issues in Venezuela.

^c Does not total to 100.0% due to rounding.

APPENDIX 1

Summary of the Codings of Party Structure Centralization

	<u>Party Structures Permit</u>			Coding
	Internal Factions ^a	Independent Behavior ^b	Leadership Decisions ^c	
<u>Parties</u>				
Acción Democrática	No	Little	No	Centralized
COPEI	No	Little	No	Centralized
MAS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Decentralized
Convergencia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Decentralized
La Causa-R	Unclear	Yes	Yes	Decentralized
Indep. Por Venezuela	Yes	Yes	Yes	Decentralized

Source: Kulisheck 1998b

^a Though factions may exist within parties, parties were coded as to whether the existence of factions was recognized as legitimate in party *Reglamentos* and/or *Estatutos*.

^b Operationalized in terms of a recognized right for deputies to vote their consciences in commissions or on the floor of Congress.

^c Coding based on whether or not leadership votes within the parties' congressional delegations were final (i.e., could delegation decisions be overridden by a party hierarchy outside of the Congress).

APPENDIX 2

Coding of Political Interests in Venezuela

New Interests

Voters
Neighborhood associations
Local interests
The people (el pueblo)
A state
Mayors
Regional interests
Consumers
Civil society associations
Non-governmental Organizations
Retired people
A community
The new generation
A district
A collective
The middle class

Established Interests

Unions
Workers
Businessmen
Professionals
Teachers' Union
Shopkeepers
Agriculture organizations
Peasants
The financial sector
Political Party
A party
An ideology
Other
The Catholic church
Cultural groups
The country

Source: Kulisheck 1997.

Note: Political interests were mentioned in deputies' responses to open-ended questions about who they believed they represented and who they believed lobbied them most.

APPENDIX 3

Political Issues in Venezuela

New Issues

- New Issues
 - Environment
 - Human rights
 - Women's issues
 - Indigenous groups
- State/Local Issues
 - State-level issues
 - Regional issues
 - Municipal-level issues
 - Housing
 - Public services
 - Social programs
 - Personal security
- Crime/Investigations
 - Contraloría
 - Investigations
 - Corruption
 - Law
 - Justice
 - Drugs
- Reform
 - Decentralization
 - Reform
 - Privatization
 - Electoral issues

Traditional Issues

- National Issues
 - National Issues
 - Health
 - Agriculture
 - Transportation
 - Politics
 - Legislating
- Labor
 - Salaries
 - Labor
 - Education
- Finance/Economics
 - Budget
 - Special budget outlays
 - Finance
 - Economics
 - Debt
 - Oil/mines
- Foreign Affairs
 - Foreign affairs
 - Defense
 - Borders/kidnaping
 - Customs

Other

- Party Issues
- Collective interest
- General
- Sports
- Tourism
- Sciences

Source: Kulisheck 1997.

Note: Political issue areas were mentioned in deputies' responses to open-ended questions about over which issues they believed they were most influential and knowledgeable in their parties and committees.

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