Of Love and Hate: Understanding the Determinants of Presidential Legacies

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Abstract

All things being equal, presidents should prefer to be positively remembered in history for improving their country's conditions, rather than be hated for generations for heading a bad administration. Few, however, succeed. Why? The inquiry goes beyond historic accounts or mere intellectual curiosity, it is a key part of understanding presidential decision-making, since obtaining a positive legacy is at the core of presidents' motives. We answer this question using Mexico as case study. We use original data from an experts survey among academics in the field, the first of its kind for Mexico and one of the few conducted outside the United States. We find that problem solving capacities and presidents' ability to change the existing institutions are the main determinant of success. Corruption is barely punished by experts; it is the weakest determinant of a positive presidential legacy. Negative remembrance in history is associated to authoritarianism and economic crises.

Keywords: Presidential legacies, presidential decision-making, Mexican Presidency, experts surveys.

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Executives in presidential systems are typically perceived by both citizens and analysts as having an enormous amount of influence upon their country's fate. Great expectations are commonly placed on presidents' performance in office in all types of regimes, to which executives add by promising citizens all sorts of goods, from new legislation to hospitals and space trips. Significant sums of public resources are invested on presidents' public image, and public works, many which have the clear purpose of leaving presidents' mark in their nations. Despite all of these exertions, executives rarely fulfill the expectations that are placed on them, and few are recorded in history as ¨good" presidents.[2] Why? What determines whether a president is able to build a positive legacy? Is the corrupt behavior of presidents actually punished by history?

These are questions that the existing literature has not fully addressed. We still do not have a precise explanation on what determines whether a president is well regarded, hated, or ignored by history. With few exceptions for the United States Presidency,[3] the analytical literature on the topic is practically non-existent. The topic has been dominated by biographical, journalistic, and historical accounts that provide good detail on presidents' administrations but from which we cannot validly infer about the determinants of presidential legacies.

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[2] For more in-depth analyses on expectations on presidents' performance see for the United States case Ragsdale (2000) on "presidential imagery" and Pious (2008) on explanations about why presidents fail. See Elizondo (1987) for the Mexican Presidency.

[3] Such as Nelson (2000) and Rose (1993) on evaluating presidents, and Beverlin and Ostrander (2008) and Nichols (2012) more specifically on presidential legacies.

Assessing and understanding presidential legacies goes beyond mere historical accounts or intellectual curiosity. It is a key part of inquiring into presidential decision-making. Much of presidents' behavior is explained by executives' desire to conquer a positive place in history books.

To provide a better understanding of presidential legacies, we use the Mexican presidency as case study and support much of our theoretical discussion with the literature on the American Presidency, given the significant bulk of work that exists for this institution. We use data from a survey conducted by the author between 2009 and 2010 among academics whose research interests are somehow related to the Mexican Presidency: the Survey of Academics on the Mexican Presidency (SAMP henceforth).[4] In the SAMP academics were asked to grade presidents on different dimensions and then to describe the specific items for which presidents would be positively or negatively remembered in history. This is the first survey of its type for the Mexican case and one of the few conducted outside the United States. The SAMP follows a lineage of similar surveys done for the United States Presidency and a few other countries dating back to the pioneer work of Arthur Schlesinger in 1948.

For Mexico, we find that presidents' capacity for problem solving is the item most correlated with a positive remembrance of presidents by experts in the SAMP. When inquiring about the specific actions that lead presidents to a positive place in history, we find that their ability to reform existing institutions, and a good economic performance, are those most frequently mentioned.

Individual virtues, such as honesty or leadership, do not seem to increase the likelihood of a positive legacy. Honesty is not rewarded as such and corruption is the item least correlated with

[4] The complete database is available upon request to the author.

presidents' overall grade. Specific autocratic behavior is punished, but with a caveat; it is peculiar that Mexican presidents ruling during the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) hegemonic regime (from the 1930s to the early 1990s) are not punished by academics for heading a non-democratic regime, as if the type of political regime was exogenous to chief executives.

Our work´s contribution is threefold. First, by providing an explicit account on the mechanics of presidential legacies, we add towards a better specification on the microfoundations of presidential decision-making, a topic in which we lag behind as compared to our understanding of other political actors. Second, we contribute towards a better methodological design for inquiring into the determinants of presidential legacies, which can be exported to investigate into other nations' presidencies, including the United States. Our design maximizes the number of observations in the analysis using multivariate methods. Our third contribution regards our understanding of the Mexican presidency. To our knowledge, the data in this paper is the first systematic analytical effort to assess and explain Mexican presidents' performance in office.

In the remainder of this document, we first provide the core elements for defining presidential legacies and discuss the state of the art on the subject. Then, we describe and analyze Mexican presidents' legacies using the SAMP. The last section outlines a research agenda on presidential legacies.

Presidential Legacies

The logic of legacy as a core ingredient of presidents' motives goes back to Alexander Hamilton (1788) who argued in *Federalist* 76 that the one-man structure of the presidency

motivates executives to be concerned for their own reputations, which acted as an effective constraint to presidential abuse of power.

Executives' behavior in office, at least partially, seems to comply with Hamilton´s assessment. Presidents in democracies and non-democracies systematically invest in grandiose infrastructure projects, and they envision (usually unfeasible) public policies to end their countries' problems. They make high profile public appearances, and try hard to influence the media and academics to speak well of their administrations. The desire to achieve a positive place in history, thus, explains much of presidential behavior. If we are able to accurately measure and understand the logic of presidential legacies, we would be in a better position to explain why presidents do the things they do. Given the relevance of this political actor, this is no minor contribution.

It has been almost two decades since Aldrich (1993, 59) noted that there is no plausible specification of presidents' motives in the literature. Unfortunately, his claim remains mostly true. Despite the abundant literature on presidential administrations across countries, little attention has been given to understanding the motivations of presidents as opposed to other political actors—such as Congressmen or Court justices. As a result, presidential authority and power are commonly approached by the actions presidents undertake—e.g. number of bills sent to and approved by congress or number of executive decrees—and not by whether such actions actually benefit presidents' own interests.[5]

While there is not a widely accepted definition of presidential legacy in the literature, there is a relative agreement on its core elements. Beverlin and Ostrander (2008, 2) define a presidential

[5] See Bambaci (2007) for a good explanation on approaches to presidential decision-making based on "who does what" as opposed to "who gets what."

legacy as "the impact of a president's actions beyond their own administration." These authors focus not on executives' performance during their administrations as such, but on whether such performance has a lasting impact after their terms are over. Beverlin and Ostrander propose focusing on institutional and policy legacies, as opposed to popular and historical legacies, since the former are more plausibly linked to constraining the behavior of future presidents, and having a future impact on their nations.

Other authors—such as Cameron (2000, 29), Moe (1993, 363-365), Moe and Wilson (1994, 11-12), Skowronek (1993, 18), and Nelson (2000, 2)—describe legacy on wider terms, such as "presidents' place in history", which refers to overall performance during office, and particular acts that determine their place in history books. A related and widely used concept is that of "presidential greatness" (e.g. Bailey, 1966; Murray and Blessing, 1994), also stated in quite general terms.

Based on these works, we define a presidential legacy as *the set of items for which presidents are evaluated after their term is over*. Therefore, a legacy is an item, or set of items, that individuals consider to have improved or worsened their nations' conditions. Such "items" can be expressed in general terms—for instance, a president's outstanding handling of the economy (positive) or a corrupt administration (negative)—or they may be specific actions they performed during their administrations—such as, winning a war (positive), or a failed welfare program they implemented (negative).

Empirically assessing that a president's action has had an impact upon their nation is no minor task. To begin, it implies the construction of valid counterfactuals from which we could determine what would have happened with a country's situation if president i did not have implemented policy x, and either did nothing or implemented policy y. This approach implies

enumerating all of president's *i* actions in office that we suppose have had an impact and then constructing plausible counterfactuals for every case.[6]

An additional problem is that the assessment of presidential legacies can change. As one may expect, presidential legacies are not fixed in time, we are dealing with a dynamic process, in which multiple biases are present. From the complete set of actions that presidents perform while in office, only a small subset of actions is selected at every step; and from the selected ones, some have greater weights than others. As a result, at every point in time after the presidential term, the actions for which a president is remembered are necessarily a selective and likely biased excerpt of the complete set of performed actions. The point, then, is to inquire into which sort of actions are the ones that made it across time.

Historical events are re-assessed as new information is revealed and/or taken into account and other information is discarded or re-interpreted. It is not a neutral process; there are multiple biases on how information is selected.[7] We remember presidents for only a handful of actions, and many times we have no memory of any specific action, especially for those farther away in time. Famous incidents—positive or negative—tend to overshadow other actions that occurred during a presidential administration (Nelson, 2000; Pious, 2008; Rose, 1993).

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[6] Beverlin and Ostrander (2008) offer a way to identify the relevant policy and institutional areas we should look at when assessing presidential legacies for the United States case, although they do not offer any clear advice on the construction of plausible counterfactuals.

[7] See McCullagh (2002) for an historiographic account on the different biases in historical research; Kosso (2009) on a more epistemological discussion about the nature of historiographic facts, evidence, and explanations; and Lustick (1996) for a useful discussion about historiography and the problem of selection bias in Political Science.

The great tragedy for presidents is that, once their term is over, they have little control over how history will judge them. They cannot use the vast communication machinery of government to further promote their actions, and presidents and their supporters will eventually die. A statement by Mexican president Felipe Calderon (2006-2012) clearly exemplifies this point when, in a 2011 meeting with civil society to discuss crime and violence, he stated, "I would like the violence to come to an end (…). I would, of course, like to be remembered for the things I have done for education, for the hospitals (…), for the environment. No. I will likely be remembered for this issue (the fight against organized crime) and, probably, with great unfairness."[8]

Measuring Presidential Legacies

As a consequence of the loose definition of the concept, systematically measuring presidential legacies is not a straightforward task. For certain, since there have been rulers in human societies, there have been evaluations of their performances. And, there have been debates about how we should evaluate rulers (Nichols, 2012).

The standard approach to approximate presidents' performance ex-post in the existing literature is to recur to specialists' rankings and grades to determine a president's place in history with respect to his peers. A president's grade or rank approximates the degree of positive impact that an executive has had on his country.

Since legacy has to do with achieving a place in history, historians have done most of the research into presidential legacies. Of this, most is concentrated on the American Presidency. The 1948 survey on United States presidents conducted by Arthur M. Schlesinger is the pioneer

[8] Available at http://www.presidencia.gob.mx/?p=67886

work on retrospective evaluation of presidents by experts on the field. Many more experts surveys have followed since then for the United States, such as the 1962 follow-up of Schlesinger, the 1992 continuation by Schlesinger Jr. and the Maranell (1970) survey.

Other surveys conducted by newspapers are the Chicago Tribune poll of 1982, the Wall Street Journal surveys of 2000 and 2005, the CSPAN polls of 1999 and 2009, and the Times survey of 2008. There are other works with a more academic profile such as the Murray and Blessing survey of 1994, the Ridings and McIver poll that went from 1989 to 1997, and the series of surveys by the Siena research Institute of 1982, 1990, 1994, 2002, and 2006.

In all of these studies experts tend to agree on the top rated presidents. The best ranked executives are systematically: Lincoln, Washington, and F.D. Roosevelt. There is, however, relatively less agreement about the villains, the most recurrent are: Nixon, Harding, Buchanan and Pierce. Regarding the determinants of presidential legacies, the existing literature is far less clear. Authors may sometimes confuse means with ends by connecting particular ways of organizing the presidential office and particular traits of the individuals holding the presidency to whether they succeeded as presidents (Beverlin and Ostrander, 2008; Moe, 1993).

Other research has specifically taken up the task of explaining what determines American presidents' place in history. Simonton (1981) finds that three quarters on the variance in what he labels "presidential greatness"[9] is explained by a bundle of biographical and contextual variables: administration duration, number of war years, presidents' publication record before their tenure, failed assassination attempts, and scandals. He finds practically no effect from presidents' personal characteristics, political experiences, and family background. Nichols (2012) also finds

[9] It is a composite index of the significant variables on presidential performance in a factor analysis of the Maranell (1970) survey.

that context matters for explaining experts' rating scores; he focuses on political context, adding a substantive dimension to the time variable. Murray and Blessing (1994) report no effect of biographical characteristics on presidential greatness; they show that great presidents are associated with significant developments in American history, or with serious crises, which are, again, contextual variables.

Other countries have followed the rankings approach to determine executives' place in history. In 1999, BBC Radio 4 asked historians to rank 19 British prime ministers from Lord Salisbury to John Major.[10] In 2006, the BBC History Magazine presented Francis Beckett's rankings for all prime ministers in the 20th century.[11] The British Politics Group conducted another survey in 2000, [12] and Mori/Leeds interviewed 139 historians to inquire into Prime Ministers place in history.[13] In Australia, the newspaper The Age interviewed 15 historians to rank their modern era Prime Ministers.[14]

To our knowledge, there is no study for the Mexican case in which experts on the subfield evaluate the job of presidents. The SAMP is the first study of its type for the Mexican case. The closest thing we found for Mexico were a few retrospective evaluations of presidents at the

[10] Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/575219.stm

[11] Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/5294024.stm

[12] Available at http://www.ipsos-mori.com/polls/2004/leeds.shtml

[13] Available at http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=661

[14] Available at http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/12/17/1102787276691.html

public opinion level (e.g. Alduncin, 1986; Sefchovich, 2000).[15] However, there are no systematic time-series showing changes on the public mood towards former presidents.[16]

The Legacy of Mexican Presidents: Experts Evaluations

Once we have stated the basics of presidential legacies and the state of the literature on the topic, we empirically analyze Mexican presidents' legacy based on the results from the SAMP.

The design of the SAMP follows a rather standard design for this type of study for the United States—where most of the work on the topic has been conducted. As in all of these types of surveys, the sample is not randomly selected. In a first stage, the researcher either selects an exhaustive sampling frame of all potential interviewees (as in the case of the SAMP) or selects a set of experts based on some criteria—such as the most known experts in the field.

At the second stage, the interviewees decide whether to answer, or not, the questionnaire. In a strict sense, most surveys of experts are not probabilistic, since respondents are self-selected, thus we cannot fully infer to the whole population of experts on a particular presidency, but only approximate it, as long as we have some plausible priors about the potential biases. As in this case, the core validity of a non-probabilistic sample lies in its internal validity. If the relationships among the items in the questionnaire are consistent for the sample under study, we can learn, for instance, what determines a president's high grades from the experts in a particular

[15] See Moreno (2009, 253-259) for a good review of the work on presidential approval in Mexico.

[16] Likely the largest series of polls on retrospective presidential approval for a single country are the ones conducted by Gallup. See King (1999) for an analysis of public opinion retrospective evaluations of United States presidents.

sample. In terms of the results external validity, the issue is estimating the differences between the subsets of respondents and non-respondents.[17]

It should be pointed out, however, that we couldn't disregard all external validity of this type of surveys. Since the size of the population of experts on a particular country's presidency is comparably small,[18] we can set relatively plausible priors on the sort of information that we will obtain from a survey about presidents' place in history. The sort of information that we receive from experts in a particular field should tend to converge since these individuals share a common pool of information. Of course, there could be some potential biases by ideology or private interests, which can be minimized with appropriate treatment. For instance, some works on presidential rankings weight their samples for the political ideology of the respondent, usually in the liberal-conservative dimension.

The SAMP was conducted between April, 2009 and February, 2010. The survey population was composed of academics and practitioners (we label them "experts") in the areas of economics, government, history, law, political science, and public administration whose research interests were somehow related to the Mexican Presidency. The specific individuals within the

[17] See Farber and Farber (1997), Pfiffner (2003), Beverlin and Ostrander (2008), and especially Nichols (2012) for critiques on the potential limitations of this approach for assessing presidents' place in history and also on its advantages.

[18] For instance, as of August 2012, the American Political Science Association section on Presidency and Executive Politics had 339 registered members (Available at http://community.apsanet.org/pep/AboutPEP/GeneralMembership/). Since the United States Presidency is likely the most researched executive institution in the world, we would expect relatively smaller populations of experts in other nations.

population of study were included on two routes. First, based upon web-searches and our own expertise we constructed an exhaustive list of academic institutions and think tanks in which we suspected somebody could have some sort of expertise on the Mexican presidency. The list consisted of organizations mainly in Mexico and the United States, but we also included institutions from other countries in which we found experts on the topic. From the institutions on the list, we then browsed the websites of the related departments—Economics, Government, History, Law, Political Science, and Public Administration—searching for individuals whose websites reported some sort of research experience on the Mexican Presidency; these we included in the study population. In the final sample, only historians (55.6%) and political scientists (44.4%) decided to answer the questionnaire.

Our second source of experts on the Mexican Presidency was bibliographic references on the topic. We listed all individuals who, to our knowledge, had written something about the Mexican Presidency and tried to get their e-mail addresses for sending them the invitation to participate in the survey.

In the end, our sampling frame contained 268 experts on the Mexican Presidency from institutions in Mexico (215), the United States (35), The United Kingdom (10), Germany (3), Colombia (2), France (1), Canada (1), and the Netherlands (1).

The SAMP was in most cases self-answered through the Internet. An e-mail describing the project was sent to all the academics in sample with a link to a web survey. We sent two reminders in a five month period. In the final round, we contacted the experts in the Mexico City Metropolitan Area—due to budget and logistic constraints—offering to conduct the interview over the phone or to get an appointment for a face-to-face interview.

After the two rounds of e-mails, telephone, and face-to-face interviews, 42 questionnaires were completely or partially responded. Note that, even though the sample size may seem small at first glance, the number of observations is not so different from many of the surveys of its type, and in general of experts surveys. The pioneer work by Schlesinger in 1948 had a sample of 55 historians, and 75 in the 1962 survey. The follow-up by Schlesinger Jr. in 1992 interviewed 32 historians. The 1982 Chicago Tribune survey considered 49 historians. The 2000 Wall Street Journal had a sample of 132 experts, and its 2005 poll—conducted in collaboration with Lindgren—interviewed 130 academics. The Times in 2008 had a mini-sample of 8 media experts. Few works have had much bigger sample sizes, the exceptions are the Murray and Blessing (1994) survey that has a sample of 846 academics (the biggest sample so far for a study of this type), the work by Ridings and McIver (1996) interviewed 719 specialists, and the Siena Research Institute surveys from 2006 and 2010, with 744 and 238 academics interviewed respectively.

The sample sizes for surveys outside the United States are also not so far from the number of cases in the SAMP. The 1999 BBC Radio 4 poll considered 20 historians; the British Politics Group survey considered 22 interviewees in 2000; the BBC History Magazine had only one expert, Francis Beckett, who ranked all prime ministers in the 20th century.[19] The Mori-Leeds survey had an ampler sample of 139 historians. In Australia, The Age interviewed 15 historians.

Thus, in comparative perspective, the SAMP's sample size is within the range of previous exercises for other countries. Moreover, if we approach the sample size relative to the potential respondents—i.e. the number of experts in the field—then, the SAMP's sample size should be

[19] Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/5294024.stm

bigger than many of the surveys for the United States, where there are many more experts on this country's Presidency than experts on the Mexican Presidency.

For our multivariate examination, we maximize the number of valid observations by using as units of analysis the presidents in sample multiplied by the panel of experts and then controlling for the potential non-independence of the observations. Thus, instead of having 26 observations (the number of presidents) for analysis, we have 26 presidents multiplied by the number of experts that responded for every executive in each of the items, a maximum of 42 experts for every president. Previous works have used the average of experts' grades and other aggregated variables for every presidential administration as unit of analysis, getting very small sample sizes that increase the uncertainty of their results (e.g. Nichols, 2012; Simonton, 1981).

The SAMP asked respondents to grade 26 Mexican presidents. By the time the survey was administered, Mexico has had 67 chief executives since it became an independent republic in 1824. Many, however, were interim executives who lasted a few weeks, days, or even minutes in office.[20] This circumstance of short tenures in office is especially recurrent during the 19th Century, when Mexico underwent a phase of acute instability. These short-tenures do not leave much space for the judgment of history, thus they were excluded from the sample. The subset of presidents that were included in the SAMP are those considered the main executives from the 19th century by standard historical work, most of the 20th century presidents, and the only president that had finished his tenure in the 21st Century by the time the survey was administered.

[20] The extreme case is President Pedro Lascuráin, who ruled from less than an hour on February 19th of 1913. The exact time varies from source to source, from around 15 minutes to 45 minutes.

The experts were asked to grade each of the 26 presidents on six different items: overall performance, their work on economic issues, the degree of corruption in their governments, their capacity to reform the existing State institutions, their capacity to face the problems they encountered, and their cabinet performance. The questionnaire was pre-tested with academics to adjust phrasing and length. The existing literature agrees in that one way to reducing—although not eliminating—the problem of the lack of a common meaningful criteria for evaluating presidents among respondents of a survey is to ask about different and (hopefully) relatively independent dimensions of presidential performance (Faber and Faber, 1997; Nichols, 2012).

Then, the questionnaire requested that respondents stated up to two positive and two negative items for which each president would be remembered in history. Lastly, we asked experts to describe the two main general characteristics with which they associated a "good" president and the two with which they associated a "bad" president. In addition, the questionnaire included a battery of items asking respondents about their positions on the State role in the economy and abortion in order to know about the experts' ideology and whether it had some sort of effect in their evaluations; there were also questions about the respondents' age, academic degree, and their research's proximity to the Mexican Presidency.[21]

Evaluating the Presidents

The grades on the different items inquired in the SAMP provide a fair approximation of presidents' place in history in absolute terms by the metric of the grading scale and in relative terms to the other presidents in sample. This section describes presidents' place in history, while

[21] The questionnaire and the complete frequencies of the survey can be consulted upon request to the author.

the following analyzes its determinants. Table 1 presents the means and rankings (based on the means) for the six items that were graded in the SAMP; Table 1 also shows the standard deviation for the overall grade.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

There are various pieces of useful information on Table 1. The two best evaluated presidents are the usual suspects: Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40) and Benito Juárez (1958-72 multiple terms, some non-consecutive). These two presidents even have a quite similar standard deviation in their overall grades, the smallest of all presidents, which points to a wide agreement about their exceptional place in history. Cárdenas´s good grades in the SAMP are associated to specific actions: the oil expropriation and the agrarian reform he headed. He is credited for exercising a strong leadership and for getting things done. Juárez is well remembered by the experts for more general items, such as his defense of the existing institutions and his fight for the nation's sovereignty. Not much surprise here; the choice of these two presidents seems to echo the official history of the PRI era, which was quite effective.

The third best-ranked president, Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911 multiple terms, some non-consecutive), would likely be a surprise for some. Díaz is commonly regarded as a dictator, focusing on his refusal to give up power leading to the 1910 Revolution. However, Díaz is also one of the greatest reformers of Mexico; many of the economic changes introduced by Díaz marked Mexico's modernization in many respects. Experts seem to put more weight on the latter and they seem to relatively agree on this since the standard deviation on Díaz's overall performance is relatively small. It can be seen that Diaz ranks well in most grades but corruption.

At the lower end of the table are most of Mexico's favorite villains: Victoriano Huerta (1913-1914), who deposed and assassinated the triumphant president of the Revolution Francisco I. Madero (1911-1913), Antonio López de Santa Anna (1833-1855 multiple terms, some non-consecutive), who is credited for giving up a significant part of Mexico's territory to the United States, and José López Portillo (1976-1982) and Luis Echeverría (1970-1976), who are blamed for the severe economic crises and corruption that Mexico suffered in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Two relatively badly graded presidents who did memorable actions before their terms, but their administrations fell much below expectations, are Vicente Fox (2000-06) and Francisco I. Madero (1911-13). Madero headed the armed movement that deposed Porfirio Díaz in 1911 (Díaz had ruled Mexico for about 29 years). Fox defeated the PRI at the polls after 71 years of a hegemonic regime. Despite their significant acts to democratize the country—which occurred before their terms began—they are not well evaluated by academics. Experts in the SAMP gave relatively low grades to Fox due to corruption during his tenure, and his incapacity to change the existing institutions. Madero's low grades also have to do with his incapacity to govern and his lack of understanding of the historic moment in which he was ruling.

The variance on grades tends to increase as grades get lower. There seems to be relatively agreement about who are the best presidents, but more diverse opinions about those in the middle and in the lower part of the ranking—something similar to what we observe for the United States.

Another relatively clear pattern on the grades' dispersion is that more recent presidents have higher variances. This is likely explained because there is still a stronger bias on the respondent based on personal experiences and perhaps ideology. These two variables tend to fade as we deal with presidents of whom we had no direct experience with their administration across time.

Lastly, it is quite peculiar that presidents during the PRI hegemonic regime, roughly from 1930s to the early 1990s, do not seem to be punished for leading a non-democratic regime, as if it was an exogenous circumstance to them. It is of note that, of the items in which presidents were graded, the less correlated topic is corruption (0.58), which was one of the core characteristics of the PRI regime (Magaloni, 2006). The rest of the items are highly correlated among them, as one would expect in this type of data (Nichols, 2012): problem solving (0.86), Cabinet performance (0.82), economic performance (0.82), and institutional reforms (0.79).

There does not seen to be any ideological divide among academics influencing their assessment of presidents' performance. If we take the experts' positions on the role of the State in the economy as a proxy for ideological positions—which is an issue that one would think would matter for evaluating presidents—there are practically no statistical differences among the experts on how they grade presidents by their positions on the economic role of the State.[22]

There are, however, significant differences on overall grades by discipline of study. The survey was only answered by historians and political scientists. Historians tend to confer higher grades than political scientists on average; in a 0 to 10 scale, historians' grade is 0.7 higher than political scientists on average. There is no temporal component to these differences, except that this circumstance seems to be reversed for most recent presidents, who seem to be better evaluated by political scientists, although most differences are non-significant for this period.

However, historians and political scientists tend to agree on the relative ranking of presidents; a Spearman order correlation between the grades of historians and political scientists show a quite significant coefficient of 0.82. This may imply that the differences in grades have to

[22] For space reasons we do not include the tables here, which can be consulted upon request to the author.

do with either the use of different scales across disciplines or a more critical approach to presidents by political scientists.

Positives and Negatives

In addition to grading presidents on the six topics presented in the previous section, participants in the SAMP were asked to assess up to two positive and negative items for which they believed that each presidents would be remembered in history. Table 2 presents the frequencies for ten categories of positive and negative responses; the questions in the questionnaire were open-ended, we recoded them to these more meaningful categories, trying to keep sufficient variance on the responses.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Presidents' ability to reform the existing institutions and a good economic performance are the two most rewarded characteristics. Both items are related to presidents' capacity to govern and account for half of the recorded responses.

On the negative items for which presidents are to be remembered, corruption is one of the two most cited. Note, however, that the inverse does not hold true; honesty is not a valued feature for achieving a positive legacy. It is unlikely that presidents will be remembered in history books for being "honest", but it can prevent a dirty stain in their biographies.

The other most voiced characteristic is authoritarianism, which also has a less relevant positive version. That is, abiding by the rules does not matter much for a positive legacy, but authoritarian acts do lead to negative mentions in experts' assessments. Perhaps correspondingly,

performance related features do matter for a negative mark in history, yet in a smaller proportion than they do for a positive legacy.

On the Determinants of Presidential Legacies

The descriptive data in the previous section provides us some relevant clues about what determines whether a president would be positively or negatively remembered in history, but we are not controlling for the other relevant items. Of especial interest would be to understand how much weight each one of the graded items has on experts' overall assessments of presidents.

To approximate the determinants of presidents' place in history we specify an OLS regression model with robust standard errors, clustering by expert, and fixed effects by president using the overall grade as dependent variable. To maximize the number of observations, the model takes presidential administrations as unit of analysis multiplied for the set of experts who answered the survey for a total of 647 observations. The model is specified as follows,

$$Overall\ grade_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * Economic\ performance_i + \beta_2 * Corruption_i + \beta_3 * Institutional\ reforms_i + \beta_4 * Capacity\ to\ face\ problems_i + \beta_5 * Cabinet\ performance_i + \theta_{ni} * (President_1, \ldots, President_n) + \mu_i$$

Where i refers to the specific presidential administration and μ is the random error of the model. The model controls for two potential sources of non-independence and heterogeneity of the observations. First, the model includes fixed-effects by president. One may suspect that there are idiosyncratic differences among presidents which are beyond the independent variables considered in the model. An objective or subjective systematic bias by president could be, for instance, the case of a president that failed on a specific action that then overshadows all others

(such as Carlos Salinas in Mexico or Richard Nixon in the United States). Another case is that of executives who are highly praised by the officialdom (such as Benito Juárez in Mexico or Abraham Lincoln in the United States). These fixed effects by presidents also capture all variables that are constant for every administration, for instance, presidents' economic performance or the particular context they faced.

The second source of potential non-independence of the observations is systematic differences among the respondents of the SAMP, which I control by specifying clusters for expert responding the survey. The experts answering the survey may have systematic differences on the grading scales, deriving in non-independent observations within the subset of answers of every respondent of the survey.[23]

On the basis of the regression model, Figure 1 shows the marginal effect of a one unit change (in a 0 to 10 scale) of each of the five independent variables that approximate experts' evaluation of presidents on different areas. The complete output of the regression can be consulted in the Appendix.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Ceteris paribus, the area of performance most important to experts for defining presidents' overall grade is their capacity to face the problems they encounter in office. This implies not only that highly valued presidents must act accordingly when circumstances require them to do

[23] There is no evidence of multicolinearity in the model, the Variance Inflation Factor test has values far below the 10 value that is usually used as threshold. Robust standard errors are utilized to correct for the potential effects of heteroskedasticity.

so, but also that significant problems exist—which in most occasions are exogenous to the individual holding office—which require the executive's attention. There is, thus, an ingredient of luck in whether a president has the opportunity to demonstrate his talents. This result relates to findings for the United States Presidency that emphasize the relevance of the context for explaining presidential greatness (e.g. Murray and Blessing, 1994; Nichols, 2012; Simonton, 1981).

Curiously enough—since it is hardly mentioned when experts are asked about the particular items leading to positive and negative legacies—the second item that has the most impact is cabinet performance. Economic performance and institutional reforms matter, yet in a smaller proportion than executives' capacity to confront problems. It may be that experts do not have sufficient information on cabinets and thus approximate their work to the performance of the president.

One of the most surprising results is that the topic that has the smallest average marginal impact on the overall grade is corruption; academics place relatively less weight on corrupt behavior to determine a president's overall performance in office. This may explain why corruption is so widespread among executives, and perhaps also why so very few executives are formally prosecuted. Multiple former presidents from Latin America who were allegedly corrupt have run for reelection, and have sometimes won office again, such as Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua and Alan García in Peru.

Related literature on elite corruption finds no strong correlation between corruption and voters punishing their representatives. Golden (2005) finds that in postwar Italy (1948-1994) of the 54 percent of the elected representatives that were charged of malfeasance by the judiciary, 51 percent were reelected, as compared to 54 percent of the non-charged representatives. For the

case of Japan, Reed (1999) shows that 62 percent of the legislators convicted for corruption were reelected.

To have a better understanding on the size of the effects of corruption and the rest of the items evaluated, and differences of the effects of the determinants of presidents' overall grades, Table 3 shows the simulated overall grades for four hypothetic scenarios of extreme grades in corruption and capacity to face problems on the basis of the regression model.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

In the upper-left cell is the case of the worse possible president in these two topics: *ceteris paribus*, a highly corrupt and incompetent president. The model predicts a 3.5 grade for this hypothetical president in a 0 to 10 scale, which would imply a rank in the 25th place out of 26th presidents. In the diagonal lower-left cell is the opposite: *ceteris paribus,* an honest president, who is quite capable at problem solving. This president would get a 7.7 grade, which would rank him in the 3rd place of all evaluated presidents.

The most interesting combinations are in the two other cells. The upper-right cell portrays, *ceteris paribus*, the best president to face problems, but one who is quite corrupt. Despite his abuses of public funds, this president would get a 6.7 overall grade, which is above the weighted grade mean by president of 5.7, and that would grant him a quite decent 9th place of the 26 graded presidents. History does not punish corruption as one may expect.

Finally, the lower-left cell portrays, *ceteris paribus*, a president useless for problem solving, but who is impeccably honest. This hypothetical president would be severely punished by the experts with a 4.5 grade, which implies that there are only four presidents with worse grades than him. Honesty does not seem to pay.

The three remaining categories that were explored in the regression—economic performance, institutional reforms, and cabinet performance—also have a positive and significant effect on the overall grade. Cabinet performance is the second most important determinant; it is actually the only item whit a confidence interval that overlaps with presidents' ability to face problems.

Conclusions and Further Research

The work presented here contributes to our understanding of executives' decision-making by adding to a more explicit and analytical account of presidential legacies as one of the main motivations of presidents. This is a topic that has been insufficiently addressed in the literature, especially for presidencies outside the United States. Methodologically, we contribute to a more robust specification and analysis of multivariate models for survey data on presidential rankings by experts.

Regarding the Mexican case, this is the first study of its type for Mexico and analyzed through multivariate methods. We find that presidents' abilities at problem solving are the issue that has the greatest impact on how experts grade presidents' overall performance. Corruption is the weakest predictor of the overall evaluation of presidents. An honest president does not get high rewards or a corrupt high punishment. This result concurs with much of the comparative literature on corruption that finds that dishonest politicians are not always punished by citizens as they are expected to. Corruption is only remembered as a negative legacy if the president committed some other highly negative act. Autocracy is similarly not punished, unless coupled with highhanded repression.

The study of presidential legacies should develop on two directions: first, on building a more theoretically grounded notion of presidential legacies that would help for more rigorous and

comparable measures of presidential performance. In turn, this would add to our understanding of why presidents do the things they do.

The second venue for increasing our knowledge on presidential legacies implies expanding empirical studies about presidents' performance across countries in a comparative manner, and within countries systematically over time. The study of presidential performance has usually been constrained to one executive or to one country. Most of the comparative work on presidential regimes has been focused on their institutional structures (e.g. Haggard and McCubbins, 2001; Mainwaring and Shugart, 1997; Shugart and Carey, 1992), but not on performance. A theory on presidential legacies should be sufficiently general to explain president's behavior across cases. That is not to say that the peculiarities of countries and historic moments do not matter to determine how a president is remembered in history books, but we should be able to generalize, in order to generate systematic knowledge on the issue. This is not an easy task given the marked idiosyncratic bias of the literature on presidencies, which has been dominated by journalists and historians. In this work we state some general elements we believe can be used as guide for measuring presidential legacies in other nations and then compare across countries to have a better understanding of presidential decision-making.

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Appendix

Table A1. OLS regression with robust standard errors, fixed effects by president, and clustered by expert.

	Coefficient	**Robust Std. error**
Performance categories		
Economy	0.168***	(0.049)
Corruption	0.100***	(0.027)
Institutions	0.137**	(0.051)
Problems	0.325***	(0.03)
Cabinet	0.237***	(0.053)
Presidents dummies		
Alemán	0.480***	(0.173)
Ávila Camacho	0.432*	(0.215)
Cárdenas	0.612***	(0.172)
Carranza	0.361*	(0.195)
De la Madrid	0.051	(0.239)
Díaz	0.037	(0.155)
Díaz Ordaz	-0.091	(0.219)
Echeverría	-0.037	(0.235)
Elías Calles	0.206	(0.219)
Fox	0.295	(0.192)
Gómez Farías	0.404	(0.286)
Guerrero	0.946**	(0.421)
Huerta	-0.942**	(0.372)
Juárez	0.403*	(0.198)
López Portillo	0.001	(0.263)
Madero	0.105	(0.292)
Rodríguez	-0.318	(0.221)
Obregón	0.426**	(0.19)
Ortiz Rubio	-0.104	(0.238)
Portes Gil	0.169	(0.209)
Ruiz Cortinez	0.369**	(0.137)
Salinas	0.126	(0.173)
Santa Anna	-0.709*	(0.402)
Victoria	0.890***	(0.284)
Zedillo	0.424***	(0.151)
Constant	0.130	(0.28)
Observations = 647	R-squared = 0.871	
F(30, 34) = 1031.55	Prob > F = 0.0000	
35 clusters (Experts)		

Table 1. Average grade, ranking (in parenthesis), and standard deviation [in brackets] by president
Sorted by overall performance. Grades in a 0 (worse) to 10 (better) scale

Years in office	President	Overall performance**	Economics	Corruption***	Capacity to reform the institutions	Capacity to face problems	Cabinet performance
1934-1940	**Lázaro Cárdenas**	**8.4** (1) [1.0]	7.8 (1)	6.9 (3)	8.6 (1)	8.6 (1)	7.8 (2)
1857-1872*	**Benito Juárez**	**8.4** (1) [1.2]	7.2 (4)	7.2 (1)	8.5 (2)	8.6 (1)	7.9 (1)
1876-1911*	**Porfirio Díaz**	**7.6** (3) [1.5]	7.5 (2)	5.0 (12)	7.7 (4)	8.1 (3)	7.6 (3)
1940-1946	**Manuel Ávila Camacho**	**7.1** (4) [1.4]	6.9 (7)	5.7 (8)	6.0 (10)	6.8 (8)	6.9 (6)
1924-1928	**Plutarco Elías Calles**	**7.1** (4) [1.6]	7.0 (6)	4.4 (17)	7.8 (3)	7.3 (4)	7.1 (4)
1920-1924	**Álvaro Obregón**	**7.1** (4) [1.4]	6.6 (10)	4.4 (17)	6.7 (7)	7.3 (4)	7.1 (4)
1952-1958	**Adolfo Ruiz Cortines**	**7.1** (4) [1.4]	7.1 (5)	6.5 (4)	6.0 (10)	7.0 (6)	6.6 (8)
1994-2000	**Ernesto Zedillo**	**6.8** (8) [2.4]	6.4 (11)	5.2 (10)	6.2 (8)	6.9 (7)	6.1 (10)
1917-1920	**Venustiano Carranza**	**6.7** (9) [1.6]	6.3 (12)	5.1 (11)	7.4 (5)	6.6 (9)	6.3 (9)
1958-1964	**Adolfo López Mateos**	**6.7** (9) [1.4]	7.4 (3)	5.7 (7)	6.1 (9)	6.6 (9)	6.9 (6)
1946-1952	**Miguel Alemán Valdés**	**6.4** (11) [1.5]	6.7 (8)	3.2 (23)	5.9 (12)	6.5 (11)	5.9 (13)
1824-1829*	**Guadalupe Victoria**	**6.3** (12) [2.2]	6.7 (8)	6.4 (5)	5.1 (15)	5.6 (14)	5.9 (13)
1833, 1846-1847*	**Valentín Gómez Farías**	**6.1** (13) [1.8]	6.2 (13)	6.2 (6)	5.5 (14)	5.8 (13)	5.4 (18)
1988-1994	**Carlos Salinas de Gortari**	**6.0** (14) [2.6]	5.4 (18)	3.4 (22)	6.9 (6)	6.2 (12)	6.1 (10)
1911-1913	**Francisco I. Madero**	**5.8** (15) [2.0]	5.9 (14)	7.1 (2)	5.6 (13)	4.5 (18)	5.5 (17)
1928-1930	**Emilio Portes Gil**	**5.5** (16) [1.9]	5.7 (17)	4.7 (13)	4.5 (18)	5.0 (15)	6.0 (12)
1829	**Vicente Guerrero**	**5.3** (17) [2.2]	5.2 (20)	5.3 (9)	3.9 (21)	4.4 (19)	4.7 (21)
1982-1988	**Miguel de la Madrid**	**4.9** (18) [2.5]	4.9 (21)	4.4 (17)	5.0 (16)	4.7 (16)	5.1 (19)
1932-1934	**Abelardo L. Rodríguez**	**4.9** (18) [1.9]	5.8 (15)	4.1 (20)	3.8 (23)	4.6 (17)	5.6 (15)
1964-1970	**Gustavo Díaz Ordaz**	**4.6** (20) [2.0]	5.7 (16)	4.5 (16)	4.4 (20)	4.0 (23)	5.1 (20)
2000-2006	**Vicente Fox Quesada**	**4.6** (20) [2.7]	4.5 (22)	4.6 (15)	3.8 (22)	4.2 (21)	4.2 (24)
1970-1976	**Luis Echeverría Álvarez**	**4.5** (22) [2.0]	4.5 (22)	3.8 (21)	4.8 (17)	4.3 (20)	4.6 (22)
1930-1932	**Pascual Ortiz Rubio**	**4.4** (23) [1.9]	5.3 (19)	4.7 (13)	3.6 (24)	3.6 (24)	5.6 (15)
1976-1982	**José López Portillo**	**3.6** (24) [2.0]	3.5 (25)	2.8 (24)	4.5 (19)	3.2 (25)	4.5 (23)
1833-1855*	**Antonio L. de Santa Anna**	**3.3** (25) [2.3]	4.1 (24)	2.8 (24)	3.3 (25)	4.2 (22)	4.1 (25)
1913-1914	**Victoriano Huerta**	**2.0** (26) [2.1]	2.6 (26)	2.6 (26)	1.7 (26)	2.7 (26)	2.9 (26)

Source: SAMP 2009-2010. The sample size ranges from a minimum of 11 to a maximum of 42; the mean is 32.8 observations by cell. **Note**: * Multiple terms, some non-consecutive, **Mean (Ranking) Standard deviation, *** Corruption scale goes from 0 highly corrupt to 10 non-corrupt. The number of observations ranges from 25 to 36.

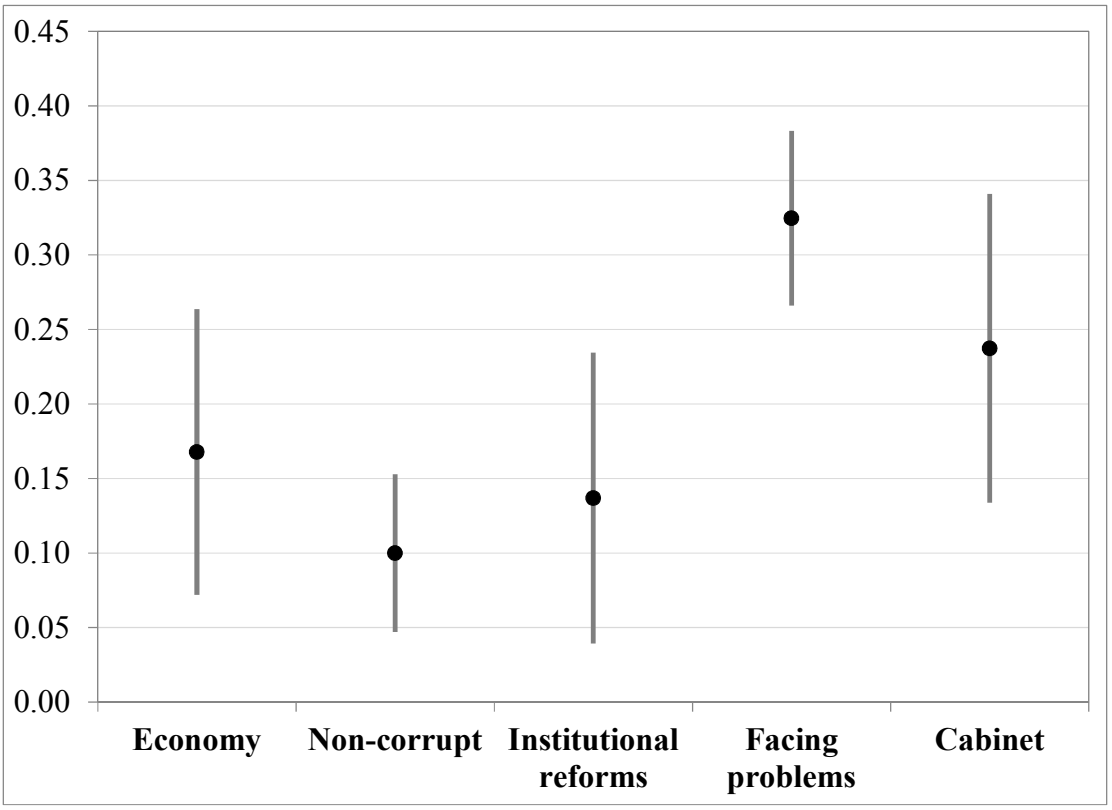
Table 2. Positive and negative features for which presidents are remembered in history

POSITIVE	
Ability to reform the existing institutions	33%
Good economic performance	17%
Leadership	9%
Defense of national sovereignty	8%
Follows the rules / Limited by constrains	7%
Stabilized the country	6%
Honesty	6%
Capacity to conciliate among different groups	5%
Good diplomatic relations	4%
State vision	4%
Efficacy / Get things done	2%
Knowledge of society´s problems	0.7%
Bargaining abilities	0.6%
Sincere concern for people's problems	0.4%
Good working team/cabinet	0.1%

NEGATIVE	
Corruption	24%
Authoritarianism	24%
Economic mismanagement	12%
Incapacity to govern	12%
Lack of leadership / Lack of State vision	9%
Not bounded by institutions / Breaks the law	8%
Submissive to foreign interests	4%
Not working for the citizenry	2%
Inability to bargain	2%
Populism	1.3%
Nepotism	1.1%
Inability to reform	1.0%
Bad working team/cabinet	0.1%

Source: SAMP 2009-2010. **Note:** n=853 for positive mentions, and n=790 for negative mentions.

Figure 1. Marginal effect of a one unit change of the independent variable on the overall grade



Source: Marginal effects computed using Clarify (King, et al., 2000) in Stata on the basis of the regression in the Appendix with SAMP data. **Note**: The circle for every category evaluated is the punctual prediction of the marginal effect, the arms represent the 95% confidence interval of the effect.

Table 3. Overall grade (and rank) simulations

		Capacity to face problems	
		Min (0)	**Max (10)**
Corruption*	**Min (0)**	3.5 (25^{th})	6.7 (9^{th})
	Max (10)	4.5 (22^{nd})	7.7 (3^{rd})

Source: Simulations computed using Spost (Long, 1997) in Stata on the basis of the regression in the Appendix with SAMP data. **Note**: The number in every cell represents the predicted grade for every combination of grades on corruption and the capacity to face problems. In parenthesis is the ranking corresponding to every grade. *A minimum grade in corruption means a corrupt president, a maximum means a non-corrupt president.