Political Legacies*

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Abstract

Politicians are widely perceived to lose significance upon leaving office. Yet media accounts often highlight politicians' legacies as a source of influence that endures even after they retire. This article assesses these contrasting views by investigating the substance, endurance, and significance of political legacies. We develop a theoretical account of legacies and their relevance to contemporary politics, emphasizing that in addition to "hard legacies"—concrete and enduring policy achievements— politicians often establish "soft" legacies—memories enshrined in the public's consciousness. Soft legacies can be, but are not necessarily, tied to the substance of one's hard legacy. We ground our theoretical account empirically by testing a series of observable implications using data from online discussion forums, original surveys of both citizens and political elites, thousands of former politicians' Wikipedia pages, and a randomized experiment. We find that establishing a lasting legacy is a key motivation of public officials. More generally, our findings provide substantial evidence that legacies influence contemporary policy debates long after a leader steps down.

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The term "lame duck" captures the expectation that political power is tied to holding office. Indeed, the notion that leaders' relevance in public life diminishes after they step down is commonly evoked by the Latin adage: *Sic transit Gloria mundi* ("Thus passes the glory of the world"). Yet this view seems to fly against prominent counter-examples of politicians who have established a political presence long after bodily death. Franklin D. Roosevelt, for example, served as president nearly a century ago, but the entitlement programs he introduced as part of the New Deal continue to play a leading role in the contemporary political agenda. Over a decade after Ronald Reagan's death, Republican presidential candidates compete to present themselves as the most devout followers of his ideas.[1] John Sherman, Reed Smoot, and Carter Glass may not be household names, but they remain in the public discourse and the ideas they stood for are subject to continuing debate through their association with the Sherman Antitrust Act, the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, and the Glass-Steagall Act. Beyond these examples there are countless, less notable politicians whose names live on through elementary schools, post offices, bridges, retirement programs, and scholarships.

Indeed, media pundits routinely describe legacy concerns as a motivation for the actions and statements of elected officials.[2] Candid memoirs often reveal the extent to which politicians themselves fret about their own legacies, or what former President George H.W. Bush famously referred to as "the L-word" (Meacham 2015).[3] Which of these two perspectives has it right, then? Is it the case that "out of sight" means "out of mind," or do politicians

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[1] "GOP Candidates Aim To Claim Reagan's Legacy," *NBC News* (09/16/2015).

[2] For example, two headlines of *New York Times* front page stories appearing in the same week: "Obama to Unveil Tougher Environmental Plan with His Legacy in Mind" (08/02/2015); "Friends of Joe Biden Worry a Run for President Could Bruise His Legacy" (08/04/2015).

[3] Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, recalling his arguments with Gordon Brown about advancing certain policy proposals: "[He] would say to me: you're doing this for your legacy, but not my interests; and I would say: but if the policies are right—say on academies or NHS reform or ID cards—it is in your interests that we do them"(Blair 2011) (p. 600).

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establish lasting legacies that are enshrined in the public's consciousness long after they leave office?

We explore this puzzle by developing the first systematic study of the concept of a political legacy. Our study begins by positing a number of theoretical distinctions necessary for conceptualizing the relevance and impact of political legacies. We argue that in order to assess the merits of the two contrasting views noted above, one needs to expand the investigation beyond what we label "hard" legacies, and take account also of the notion of "soft" legacies. Whereas the former type of legacy centers on tangible changes and achievements (e.g., signing a peace agreement), the latter pertains to more abstract outcomes and principles (e.g., inspiring citizens to racial tolerance), the accumulation of which shapes how a politician is remembered by future political elites and the mass public.[4] This conceptualization is pertinent because the question of whether political legacies are lasting can be seen as self-evident if one takes a literal view of hard legacies. Surely, sanctioning a war, appointing an appellate court judge, or authorizing the capture of an arch-terrorist, produces concrete actions or feats. In that narrow sense, political legacies are "real." Yet this conceptualization of legacies misses much of the point. The more meaningful questions, we contend, are whether, for whom, and in what way soft legacies endure in the public consciousness.

To address these issues and adjudicate between the contrasting views of legacies described above, we examine a broad range of dimensions in which past politicians should have a notable presence if the view of legacies as politically meaningful holds water. We do so by utilizing a range of sources and methods: data from online discussion forums; thousands of former politicians' Wikipedia pages; original surveys of ordinary people and political elites; and a randomized experiment. These diverse sources of data provide substantial empirical

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[4]To be clear, we do not contend that everyone remembers the politician in question, nor that those who do remember have the same recollection about her. The key point is that a significant number of people do have memories or mental associations with the politician, and that this phenomenon is not limited to a small group of elites.

grounding for our theoretical account.

Taken together, we find some evidence in line with the "legacies matter" view: citizens do remember some politicians long after they are gone, invoke them frequently in discussions of contemporary politics, and fiercely debate those legacies over time. Additionally, many public officials recognize legacy concerns as a motivation for their own actions. Yet other results are in line with the more skeptical approach as they reveal that the public memory of politicians' legacies tends to be chiefly confined to presidents. Other politicians, even senior office holders in some of the most important Constitutional roles in public life, have much shorter shelf lives in the public consciousness and their achievements are far less remembered or discussed. Moreover, we find that invoking legacies can influence how people think about contemporary political issues but predominantly in domains in which the former president had acted. Thus, while our results do provide support for the view that legacies are a present and consequential political factor, the analysis points to the fact these results are narrow in scope and apply predominantly to leaders at the very top.

By examining how members of the mass public conceive of, debate, and react to political legacies, our study contributes to the literature on the determinants of political decision making. Perhaps the most common view is that politicians are single-minded seekers of reelection (Mayhew 1974), namely individuals whose actions are first and foremost driven by a calculus centered on the expected impact on their electoral chances. Even if politicians are also motivated by policy, Mayhew's contention is that reelection is the proximate goal necessary to achieve more distal goals related to policymaking. Other scholars model elected officials as "rent-seeking" (Barro 1973; Ferejohn 1986; Callander 2008). Finally, some conceive of politicians as "policy seeking" (Wittman 1983; Calvert 1985; Canes-Wrone, Herron, and Shotts 2001), or the idea that individuals gain utility from implementing their preferred policies or from enhancing social welfare. These policy motivations differ from our conception of legacies. A politician interested in shaping her soft legacy is also more likely to be interested in selecting policies that have a chance of being remembered over time. Our

study provides the first systematic account of this alternative source of motivation, namely politicians' concern with how they will be remembered by future generations. Some work on the presidency (Murphy and Stuckey 2002; Howell and Moe 2016) as well as formal theories of policymaking (Callander and Hummel 2014; Buisseret and Bernhardt 2017) have assumed that politicians are interested in how they and their decisions are remembered after they leave office and theorized about the sorts of behaviors that follow from this interest. Our account, by offering insight on the scope and characteristics of legacies, offers empirical support for the credibility of this assumption. Further, we specify a mechanism through which legacies can influence public policy debates, supporting further integration of legacy concerns into theories of political decision making. In sum, understanding how the mass public interpret and use political legacies sheds light on political motivations.

This paper also adds to the literature on political "collective memory" (Schuman and Rieger 1992; Schwartz 1982). The focus of this work is the notion that shared histories influence and shape individuals' social identities and group attachments. Schuman and Scott (1989), for example, argue that generations are defined by significant events during their coming-of-age years and their subsequent collective memories of those events. We extend this literature to memories of politicians, arguing that citizens have memories and, in some cases, shared understandings of past politicians. These memories can also shape how they think of and argue about politics today, suggesting that the stakes in forming an enduring political legacy can be considerable. This is also consistent with recent literature arguing that key political figures are central to political socialization (Jacobson 2009).

Finally, this study also makes a methodological contribution to research on public opinion and political behavior. By testing whether patterns we observe in traditional survey methods are also reflected in millions of political communications in people's daily lives, this paper demonstrates how new sources of digitized data can be used to assess the external validity of heretofore small-sample, survey-based findings. In doing so, we fruitfully use big data to augment traditional research designs based on survey data (Monroe, Pan, Roberts, Sen, and

Sinclair 2015).

Theoretical Considerations

What does it mean for political legacies to endure, let alone be meaningful, in the public sphere? To answer this question, it is useful to begin by explicating what a political legacy actually means. We conceive of a political legacy as either a concrete policy achievement or a memory, feeling, or idea that is associated with a politician and endures after she leaves office. Our definition emphasizes that there are two different facets of a political legacy: hard and soft.[5] First, an elected official may enact enduring policies and eliminate others, add to or subtract from the national debt, start or end international conflicts, issue signing statements that accompany legislation, appoint judges to the Supreme Court, and so on. We refer to such concrete changes that affect society after the politician leaves office as her *hard legacy.* However, a politician may also bequeath a vision or a governing philosophy that influences future policy debates, as well as a set of shared experiences and memories that linger in the public mind. Examples include John F. Kennedy's ethos of public service (Lilla 1981) or the widespread distrust of government engendered by the tenure of Richard Nixon (Schudson 1993). The accumulation of these outcomes, which ultimately are how a politician is remembered by future political elites and the mass public, are what we consider to be the *soft legacy* of a politician.[6]

To be sure, the two concepts are often closely intertwined, as actions taken while in

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[5]Our focus in this paper is on national legacies. There may be more localized geographic political legacies associated with governors and members of Congress. These are areas for future research, as we discuss in the conclusion.

[6]Our conception of "soft legacies" is related to what Jeffrey Olick and Joyce Robbins label as "collective memories," which they define as "the aggregated individual memories of members of a group"(Olick and Robbins 1998, p. 338). Since the landmark work of Halbwachs (1925), much has been written about the concept of "collective memory" and its sources. See, for example, Schwartz (1982), Schuman and Scott (1989), and Schuman and Rieger (1992).

office can have both hard legacy and soft legacy consequences. Consider, for example, Ted Stevens and the appropriation for the Gravina Island Bridge. The physical bridge became a component of his hard legacy, but the lasting public outrage over the profligacy of pork barrel spending (the "Bridge to Nowhere") was his soft legacy, and likely contributed to efforts to curtail particularistic spending in Congress.

Notably, soft legacies can outlive the policies that created them. The continuing American military presence in Iraq was a part of George W. Bush's hard legacy, and it was curtailed by Barack Obama's efforts to withdraw troops from the region. Nonetheless, the widespread public skepticism of the prospects for nation building that the Iraq War engendered remains a central part of Bush's soft legacy. Conversely, hard legacies can survive in effect even as some of the memories and emotions attached to them fade away. The assassination of James Garfield played a critical role in the passage of the Pendleton Act, and a significant portion of this bill is still in effect. Even so, if queried about their attitudes toward merit-based civil service—the key objective of the bill—few citizens would volunteer the possibility that the president could be assassinated by a disappointed office seeker as an important consideration. In other words, civil service reform endured in spite of the evaporation of Garfield's soft legacy.

From a formal theoretic perspective, a politician's hard legacy produces a stream of payoffs that starts when the policy is enacted and ends when the policy is replaced or repealed. Hard legacies can therefore be cast as an elaboration on the "good policy" motivation. It clarifies that policy choices are always subject to revision, and that politicians have incentives not only to create good public policies but also to ensure that their carefully crafted initiatives are not quickly supplanted by future actions undertaken by successors. Yet a politician's soft legacy also produces *indirect* payoffs by influencing future choices. This could occur, for example, by expanding or constraining the strategy space, altering the probability of success associated with different courses of action, or by influencing the expectations of

future actors.[7] Soft legacies can also influence how future generations approach related but distinct public policy challenges.

Concern with both hard and soft legacies can motivate politicians' actions while in office. Yet one's concern with her soft legacy may not necessarily be due to vanity or fame seeking. In fact, there are strong instrumental reasons for a politician to invest in cultivating their soft legacy. For one, it may be that the durability of the politician's hard legacy is predicated on her soft legacy. For example, one might argue that President Reagan's tax cuts may not have proven so enduring if Reagan's presidency was not remembered so fondly. Conversely, some of the welfare programs from the Johnson administration may have survived longer if the public held Lyndon Johnson in greater esteem and did not associate him with the Vietnam War and the social strife of the era. Thus, unpacking the mechanics of soft legacies may help us understand a key strategy by which politicians protect their hard legacies.

One justification we have provided for paying attention to political legacies is that they are often invoked in political debates, particularly when seeking to justify a certain stance or policy. This raises two initial questions. First, how widely applicable is any given political legacy? One conception of political legacies is akin to a *general brand*. Associating a policy alternative with a successful politician's legacy is expected to benefit the standing of the policy in the minds of citizens as a result of the halo effect of the brand. Yet we contend that political legacies actually function in a narrower fashion, generating a halo effect primarily in the specific domains associated with the politician's expertise or enduring achievements.[8] For instance, a politician mainly known for a foreign policy achievement or philosophy (e.g., Henry Kissinger) cannot extend his soft legacy towards unrelated arenas such as tax or education policy. In other words, our claim is that legacies should be viewed as more of a

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[7]Indeed, Skowronek's notion of "political time" rests upon the assumption that voters and interest groups remember the political commitments of past politicians (Skowronek 2008).

[8]This argument is consistent with the literature on brand "credibility" (Baek, Kim, and Yu 2010; Swait and Erdem 2007).

specialized brand.

Second, what is the distinction between the invocation of a political legacy and the standard notion of an endorsement effect? Although some similarities exist, one unique feature of legacies is that they are mostly used by a third party; that is, not by the source of the legacy herself to make the case for the outcome or action one supports. Sometimes the legacy comes up only by associating its owner with a given policy or stance; in other cases the legacy is invoked specifically with the claim that the legacy owner would have chosen a certain course of action. Either way, the use and invocation of legacies in political discussion occurs predominantly through third-party attribution rather than by first-person endorsement. This distinction helps explain why legacies can, at least in theory, be such a powerful political asset: they are a basis for argumentation and justification by a much broader constituency, including people who come long after the legacy owner herself has retired from political life.

We began the paper by highlighting two contrasting views regarding the significance of legacies in contemporary politics. As the previous discussion made clear, adjudicating between these views is challenging because the significance of legacies is not a function of one single aspect, but rather an amalgam of several. In what follows, we present a series of five studies that address each of these theoretical issues in turn. Taken together, they provide a rich and clear picture regarding the endurance, relevance, and significance of legacies in contemporary politics.

Theoretical and Empirical Roadmap

To establish the importance of political legacies, we make three arguments: that at least some politicians are remembered by ordinary citizens long after they leave office; that these legacies influence political debates long after a politician leaves office; and that political elites care about building enduring legacies. Based on data from a large, national survey of Americans, we find that presidents are remembered by the overwhelming majority of

ordinary citizens long after they leave office (Study 1). Moreover, these memories are rich in affective and potentially policy-relevant content. Other national officeholders, such as Speakers of the House and Secretaries of State, have far shorter shelf lives. Having shown that at least presidents leave lasting legacies, we then show that these legacies are politically consequential because they play an important role in contemporary policy debates. In an analysis of over five million posts from an online discussion forum, we find that legacies are frequently invoked in discussions of contemporary political issues (Study 2). Results from an experiment embedded in a national survey rationalize this behavior by demonstrating that invoking legacies affects how people evaluate different policy arguments (Study 3). Soft legacies help make weak arguments seem more compelling, especially in domains closely related to the former politician's core achievements. The widespread use and demonstrated effectiveness of invoking legacies as a rhetorical strategy implies that information about them will be both widely demanded and abundantly supplied. Consistent with this implication, we find that the Wikipedia pages of politicians (especially those of presidents) are widely read and heavily revised (Study 4). However, the fact that these legacies are politically consequential does not imply that politicians actually care about them. Using an original study of 437 public officials, we find that about a third of elites report that being remembered matters a lot to them (Study 5). An even larger share attribute this consideration to other politicians. Notably, we find that elites view legacy considerations as important even though they are unduly (in light of Study 1) pessimistic about the public's capacity to remember politicians.

Study 1: What Do People Remember About Politicians?

Our first study shows that the mass public remembers politicians who are no longer in office, but that it remembers presidents for far longer than it remembers other officeholders. This goes against the strong hypothesis that legacies do not exist, although it is consistent with the more modest contention that only a small subset of politicians are capable of build-

ing enduring legacies. Having established the existence of political legacies, we then address the objection that the public's memories consist of unimportant trivia about politicians' personal lives. We find that memories of past politicians are actually quite rich. They include affective evaluations as well as policy relevant considerations about what the politician did while in office.

To probe how widely and well the mass public remembers past politicians, we designed an original survey administered to a national sample of 2,202 American adults collected by Survey Sampling International in January 2016.[9] We present each respondent with a list of five politicians in random order: a President, a Speaker of the House, a Senate Majority Leader, a Secretary of the Treasury, and a Secretary of State.[10] Each respondent reports whether they "definitely remember," "somewhat remember," or "do not remember" each politician. If a respondent definitely or somewhat remembers the politician, we ask her to name the three things she remembers most about that politician.

Figure 1 presents the rate at which respondents definitely remember or somewhat remember each office holder as a function of when that politician left the given office. As the figure indicates, presidents are remembered at a very high rate, typically above 90%. The rate at which respondents remember presidents decays very slowly as a function of how long it has been since he has left office. This is clearly inconsistent with the position that the public quickly forgets past politicians.

Yet notably, the other offices do not fare as well as the presidents. We estimate a linear probability model where the outcome is whether the respondent remembers the politician.[11]

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[9]See Online Appendix 1 for the question wordings.

[10]We randomly drew politicians from the set of all presidents since Eisenhower, all Speakers and Senate Majority Leaders since 1961, and all Secretaries of State and the Treasury since the Reagan administration. We exclude the following individuals because they served in more than one office: Lyndon Johnson (Senate Majority Leader and President), George P. Schultz (Secretary of the Treasury and Secretary of State), and James Baker (Secretary of the Treasury and Secretary of State).

[11]We opt for a linear probability model because the decay coefficients are straightforward to interpret

Figure 1: Recall Proportion by Office
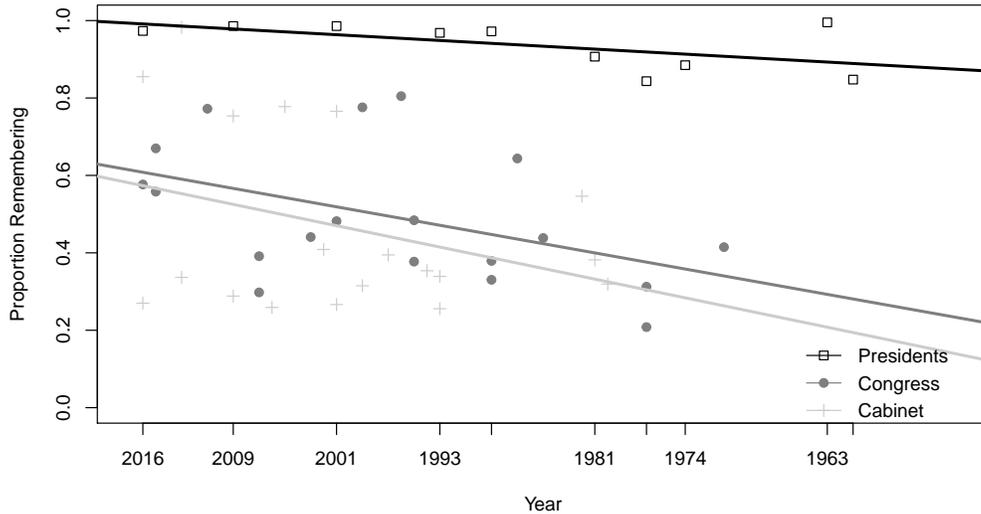
Note: The y-axis is the proportion of people who "definitely remember" or "somewhat remember" a politician, and the x-axis is the year that the politician left office. Politicians in office as of 2016 are recorded as leaving in 2016. The figure excludes Secretary of the Treasury Donald Regan, who many respondents believed was a misspelling of Ronald Reagan.

For each office, we estimate a separate intercept and decay slope, and include respondent-level fixed effects in the model.[12] The decay slopes illustrated in Figure 1 can be roughly interpreted as the proportion of respondents who forget about a politician with each passing year. Each line pertains to a different office holder. Taken together, these show vividly that memories of presidents fade more slowly than memories of other officeholders.[13] Indeed, the proportion of people who remember a president drops 4 percentage points in the 20 years

and it allows for the incorporation of respondent fixed effects. Fixed effects in a logistic regression would be driven to infinity for individuals who remembered all five politicians in a maximum likelihood estimation of a logistic or probit regression, and there is no agreed upon method for clustering standard errors in the logit or probit model.

[12]Due to the small number of politicians within each office, we cannot statistically compare the decay rates associated with different office holders with the politician as the unit of analysis.

[13]We attribute the decay rate for Secretaries of the Treasury to a floor effect. The 33% of respondents who report remembering the Secretary of the Treasury may be a mix of the highly politically informed who recall most office holders and those who misreport their recollections.

after he leaves office, whereas the proportion remembering a Speaker of the House drops 16 percentage points and the proportion remembering a Secretary of State drops 32 percentage points over a similar time interval.[14]

Having established that at least some politicians have strong legacies, we next turn to the question of whether or not the memories associated with these politicians are politically consequential. If people merely remembered that a particular individual held public office and nothing more, then legacies would be an uninteresting phenomenon. If people remembered biographical trivia and scandals, then memories of past politicians would largely be irrelevant to current political events. In order to ascertain the content of what people remember about these politicians, we analyze the open-ended responses regarding their recollections of each of the politicians.[15]

Table 2 presents hand-coded features of a sample of 1,500 open-ended recollections.[16] The majority of memories are simple descriptions and personal characteristics—the office the politician held, the party of which the politician was a member, and biographic details (for example, that Jimmy Carter was a peanut farmer from Georgia).

Affective evaluations are also quite common (e.g., Jim Wright was "good," George H.W. Bush was "horrible"). More importantly, respondents are fairly likely to have memories of presidents that relate directly to public policy. Dwight Eisenhower's role in the creation of

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[14]Based on the literature on generational differences in collective memories (Corning and Schuman 2015; Schuman and Scott 1989), we also examine this pattern separately by age group. We find that the pattern of decay is very similar across cohorts. Online Appendix 2 reports results of the same analysis conducted separately for different terciles of age cohorts. Members of the oldest cohort have higher intercepts for members of Congress and Cabinet officials. Yet the general patterns of the relationships are similar across age groups. Presidents are remembered by nearly all people and the decay rate is minimal; substantially fewer people remember other officeholders and the decay rate is steep.

[15]Details on the coding rules can be found in Online Appendix 3.

[16]We had two research assistants code the open-ended responses. The agreement rate for the categories ranged between 94% and 100%, except for "Biographical Detail," which was 84.4%. Krippendorff's alpha exceeded 0.66 in all cases. In cases of discrepancies, the main study authors reviewed and coded the response.

Table 1: Recall Decay by Office

	Intercept	Decay Rate
President	0.634*	−0.002*
	(0.015)	(0.001)
Speaker of the House	0.357*	−0.008*
	(0.019)	(0.001)
Senate Majority Leader	0.188*	−0.004*
	(0.021)	(0.001)
Secretary of State	0.530*	−0.015*
	(0.015)	(0.001)
Secretary of the Treasury	−0.060*	0.002
	(0.022)	(0.001)
N	10792	
R^2	0.813	

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)

Note: Estimates from a linear probability model in which the dependent variable is 1 if the individual definitely or somewhat remembers the given officeholder and 0 otherwise. Unit of analysis is respondent-politician. Standard errors are clustered at the respondent level. The independent variables are respondent-level fixed effects (which is why the intercepts do not match Figure 1), dummy variables for each office ("Intercept" in the table), and the interaction of these dummy variables and the number of years since the politician left office ("Decay Rate"). The analysis excludes Secretary of the Treasury Donald Regan, who many respondents believed was a misspelling of Ronald Reagan.

the Interstate Highway System, Jimmy Carter's Iran hostage crisis debacle, Ronald Reagan's call to tear down the Berlin Wall, and Bill Clinton's budget surplus are remembered. With the notable exception of Newt Gingrich's Contract with America, these policy relevant details are far less prevalent in recollections of other office holders. As we show in Online Appendix 4, copartisans are no more likely to recall a given politician's policy achievements than are those outside of the politicians party.

The combination of affective evaluations and policy-relevant memories suggests an important role for political legacies. If a citizen remembers that a past politician whom he

Table 2: Open-Ended Recollections of Politicians

Feature	Office	Proportion of Responses
Biographical Detail	President	0.558
	Congress	0.611
	Cabinet	0.612
Affective Evaluation	President	0.155
	Congress	0.176
	Cabinet	0.165
Partisanship or Ideology	President	0.025
	Congress	0.122
	Cabinet	0.061
Gaffe or Scandal	President	0.110
	Congress	0.038
	Cabinet	0.036
Policy Relevant	President	0.155
	Congress	0.044
	Cabinet	0.091
Monument	President	0.003
	Congress	0.000
	Cabinet	0.000

Note: These proportions are taken from the set of open-ended responses, with non-responses such as "Don't know" or "Can't remember" filtered out. Accordingly, the proportions should be interpreted as the probability that a memory exhibits a particular feature conditional on the respondent remembering anything at all. Some comments were assigned to multiple categories which is why some proportions do not sum to 1.0. Details on the coding rules are described in Online Appendix 3.

values supported a certain policy when it was put up for debate at the time, then that citizen is probably more likely to support that policy today. In that way, the politician's legacy influences contemporary debates. We explore this hypothesis regarding the influential role of legacies in contemporary debates in the studies below.

Study 2: How Often Do People Employ Legacies in Political Discussions?

The mass public carries memories of past politicians that seem ripe for exploitation. However, the findings of the previous study do not show that citizens are able to make the connection between their evaluations of past presidents, their knowledge about what that president did while in office, and contemporary policy debates. Study 2 shows that these memories are in fact exploited by ordinary citizens in discussions among themselves about current political issues. We do not mean to suggest that political legacies are only invoked in these settings. To the contrary, political elites and the media exploit political legacies as well. We focus here on peer-to-peer conversations because they constitute a hard test for the relevance of political legacies to contemporary debates.

To explore the invocation of former politicians' legacies among the mass public, we turn to data from Reddit.com. Reddit is a news aggregator which is, according to the Alexa Rankings, the most popular news website in the world. Its 174 million unique active users and 6 billion monthly page views make it the ninth-most heavily trafficked website in the United States, only one rank behind Twitter and far ahead of traditional news sources such as CNN and the *New York Times*. Users post links to content from around the Internet, and all users on the site have the opportunity to comment on these links. The site features posts on virtually every imaginable topic. To help users find the posts which will be most interesting to them, the website is divided into "subreddits" that focus on particular topics. Users subscribe to the subreddits on topics that interest them.

The "politics" subreddit, which focuses on American politics, is one of the largest and

most active subreddits, with over 3 million subscribers.[17] Most posts are links to news stories from either major news outlets or independent media, but some are prompts for discussions about salient political issues. Users then have the opportunity to comment on these posts. These comments are sometimes reactions to the linked stories, but many comments respond to other comments rather than the original story. These often evolve into discussions that can involve dozens or hundreds of users. Accordingly, the comments from the politics subreddit offer an opportunity to observe citizens discussing the issues of the day in a natural setting, as opposed to a research setting where subjects clearly know they are being monitored by academics. More specifically, they allow us to assess the relevance of politicians who are no longer in office to everyday political discussions, and explore which of these politicians are the most relevant.

We downloaded all comments on the politics subreddit over a two-year period (from January 2013 to December 2014) via the Reddit API. This yields a data set of 5,280,337 comments from 307,523 users. To contextualize the use of legacies in contemporary political discussion, we compare the rate at which politicians who are no longer in office are mentioned to the rates of several other entities which we expect to be relevant in political discussions. The rate at which politicians who are *currently* in office is an important and natural baseline quantity. We further expect that users mention various news sources, both because many posts are links to content from these news sources and because users can confer legitimacy on their arguments by citing these sources. Referencing think tanks offers an even greater opportunity for users to enhance the legitimacy of their arguments. Finally, we expect that users will deploy numbers and figures frequently in the course of political discussion—for example, when discussing the costs associated with particular projects, the proportion of

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[17]Reddit does not request any information when users create an account on the site. Demographic information on Reddit users is therefore unavailable, and we cannot comment on the representativeness of the Reddit sample. We contend that the external validity afforded by studying political discussion in a natural, observational setting offsets the costs of a potentially non-representative sample. Moreover, we test hypotheses generated from these data on a more diverse sample in Study 3.

Table 3: Invocation of Legacies on Reddit

| Feature	Comments with Feature	Comments with Feature per 100 Comments Mentioning Current Politicians
Current Politician	216,607	100
Legacy	138,515	64
Think Tank	15,954	7
Source	97,857	45
Numbers	509,175	235

Note: The presence of the features were identified using the rules described in Online Appendix 5. Note that unlike the other analyses, "Current Politician" and "Legacy" include vice presidents. The total number of comments is 5,280,337. Only about 5% of posts mention a current politician. This is because many posts are quite short (e.g., "Lol love it," "What a surprise").

the population that is unemployed, the number of firearms in the United States, and so on. (Definitions of all of these comment features are provided in Online Appendix 5, and precise coding rules are available in the replication materials.)

In Table 3, we show that political legacies, operationalized as mentioning a politician who is no longer in office by name, play a prominent role in political discussion. Recall that these comments respond to or debate topics raised by links to *current* news articles. Current politicians are the dominant political actors in the news and natural objects of discussion when reacting to current events. For every 100 times a current politician is mentioned, a former politician is mentioned 64 times. The fact that a legacy is invoked about twice for every three times a current politician is mentioned is quite striking, and suggests that citizens find these legacies relevant in making arguments about current events. Comparisons to the other comment features lend further credence to the notion that legacies are important in contemporary political discussion. Moreover, about 25% of comments which reference a legacy also mention a politician who is currently in office. This suggests that historic politicians are explicitly being used as reference points for understanding current events.

As our findings on the proportion of survey respondents who remember politicians lead us to expect, presidential legacies remain relevant for substantially longer than the legacies

Figure 2: Decay of Mentions in Political Discussion Forums
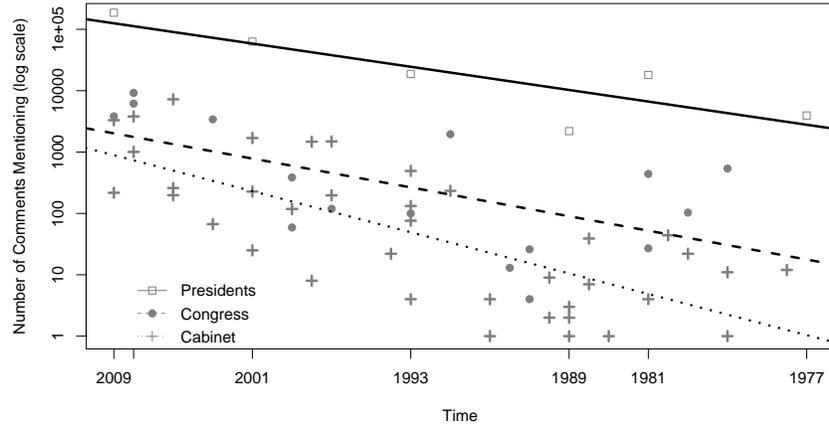
Note: The x-axis gives the date the officeholder left office. Cabinet members include the Secretary of State, Secretary of the Treasury, Secretary of Defense, and Attorney General. Congress includes Speakers of the House and the Senate Majority Leaders.

of Cabinet secretaries and Congressional leaders. Figure 2 shows how frequently politicians are mentioned as a function of their office and when they left office. For each office, the slope of the line of best fit indicates the rate at which conversation about those officeholders decays.[18] Presidential dominance is again striking. George W. Bush is mentioned more than three times as often as all of the Speakers of the House, Senate Majority Leaders, Secretaries of State, and Secretaries of the Treasury in the data set combined—including Hillary Clinton and office holders in 2013-2014. The least-mentioned president in the plot, George H.W. Bush, is mentioned more often than most politicians who were in office at time of the discussion —including prominent ones such as Nancy Pelosi, Mitch McConnell, and John Kerry. Discussion of Cabinet secretaries decays so rapidly that those who served in the Reagan administration are mentioned at most a few dozen times over the two-year period. Temporally distant Congressional leaders fare better, but not by much.

Turning to a qualitative analysis of the actual text of the comments, legacies are often invoked as brands that characterize particular policies or behaviors ("Eisenhower warned

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[18]The lines of best fit are obtained via linear regression. The small sample size for presidents precludes the inclusion of meaningful error bars. Instead, we present individual data points.

of the military-industrial complex and even detailed the number of schools and hospitals that one ship or bomber cost. Cut the military budget now!"). They are also frequently used to provide reference points for assessing the performance of contemporary politicians ("Obama didn't triple the debt. He only added 44% more. Not nearly as much as Reagan or Bush jr (sic) at 186% and 104%.") and to establish precedents for particular proposals ("What exactly is wrong with impeaching Obama? Nixon was impeached for spying on what, 4000 Americans? What Obama has done with the NSA makes Watergate look tiny."). The legacies of relatively recent presidents are used to apportion credit or blame for current events ("Bill Clinton laid the foundations for what we now have - economic depression, through his policies of massively increasing the money supply, encouraging consumerism and discouraging productive long term investment, during his tenure."). All of these strategies explicitly use the experiences of past presidents to interpret current events, and very often go even further and use them as justifications for policy proposals. Ironically, the important role played by legacies in these discussions leads Redditors to contest the past. One perennial point of contention is whether modern-day Republicans have a legitimate claim to the legacies of Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt; these debates frequently devolve into strictly historical debates as to what these figures did and believed. The fact that such debates regularly flare up on a forum dedicated to the discussion of current events tellingly demonstrates the relevance of political legacies to contemporary policy debates.

Study 3: How Do Legacies Affect Political Argumentation?

We have shown that people remember past politicians and that these memories are deployed in conversations about current political issues. Our third study demonstrates that political legacies play an important role in these discussions: they act as specialized brands that make arguments more persuasive.[19]

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[19]We do not mean to suggest that this is the only function of political legacies. However, we believe that this mechanism establishes that political legacies are important and worthy of more attention.

To test this hypothesis, we embedded an experiment in the survey described in Study 1.[20] Each respondent is presented with a policy proposal. They are also presented with a list of five arguments favoring the proposal, and are asked to *rank* the arguments from best to worst. For each set of arguments, we identify one argument as an *ex ante* "good" argument and another as an *ex ante* (i.e., intentionally) "bad" argument.[21] Respondents in the treatment group see text in which either the good argument invokes a presidential legacy or the bad argument invokes a presidential legacy. For respondents in the control group, none of the arguments invoke a legacy.

We test the legacies of two popular ex-presidents, one from each party: Bill Clinton and Ronald Reagan. The policy we invoke in each instance is randomly assigned to be either relevant or irrelevant to the politician's legacy. The relevant Clinton policy is balancing the budget, and the irrelevant policy is requiring school uniforms in public schools. The relevant Reagan policy is reducing taxes on the rich, and the irrelevant policy is making it more difficult to purchase a firearm. Note that by "irrelevant," we do not mean that Bill Clinton and Ronald Reagan had nothing to do with school uniforms and gun control, respectively. Indeed, both presidents did issue statements on these policy domains and the prompts would therefore be sensible to respondents. We mean simply that respondents are unlikely to mainly associate the two presidents with these respective policies. Conversely, balancing the budget was a key achievement of the Clinton presidency and supply-side tax policy was a core Reagan governing philosophy. Indeed, the open-ended responses in the survey presented in Study 1 corroborate these labels.[22]

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[20]The question wordings and experimental design are presented in Online Appendix 6.

[21]We use the descriptive statistics from the control group to validate that the good argument was indeed better than the bad argument, precluding the need for a pre-test rating of argument quality.

[22]Fourteen respondents mention Clinton's budget surplus whereas only a single one mentions education (and that comment has nothing to do with school uniforms). Eight respondents mention Reagan's tax policy and supply-side economics (and many more mention the economy more generally), while only two mention guns.

Table 4: Ranking of Arguments by Characteristics

	Legacy	No Legacy	Difference	t-statistic
Bad Argument with Relevant Policy	2.55	1.86	0.68	6.61
Bad Argument with Irrelevant Policy	2.65	2.28	0.37	3.41
Good Argument with Relevant Policy	3.82	3.64	0.18	1.87
Good Argument with Irrelevant Policy	3.72	3.83	-0.11	-1.03

Note: Argument rankings range from 1-5, where 5 denotes the strongest argument. Relevant policy pertains to whether the issue at hand is relevant to the politician being remembered. These results only include the effect of Reagan on Republicans and Clinton on Democrats.

In summary, we employ a 3×2 factorial design, where the first factor is attaching the legacy to a good argument, a bad argument, or to no argument, and the second factor is whether the issue is relevant or irrelevant to the president's legacy. Note that this design allows us to assess whether presidential legacies *merely* function as party cues, which a plethora of literature has shown to influence policy attitudes. If legacies were just party cues, then they should have the same effect for bad arguments as for good arguments, and for relevant and irrelevant issues. This is not what we find.

Table 4 presents average rankings for eight argument groups, where 5 is the highest ranking and 1 is the lowest. The table presents the effects of Reagan's legacy on Republicans and of Clinton's legacy on Democrats. Three features are immediately apparent. First, the good arguments are ranked higher than the bad arguments, confirming the logic of the design. Second, the effect of attaching a legacy to any argument is stronger for relevant policies than irrelevant policies. Third, the effect of attaching a legacy is stronger for bad arguments than for good arguments

We present estimates from regression models predicting the argument rankings in Table 5. As shown in columns (1) and (3), legacies have no significant effect on good arguments and a substantial, positive effect on bad arguments. Attaching a legacy to a bad argument improves the ranking by 0.54 units ($p < 10^{-6}$) whereas attaching a legacy to a good argument increases the ranking by a negligible 0.03 units ($p = .70$). Incorporating the interaction between

legacies and relevance, legacies are more potent for relevant policy areas for both good and bad arguments. Because the coefficients for legacy and its interaction with relevance have different signs for good arguments, we must test whether the total effect for legacies on relevant policies is positive. To do this, we take 1000 bootstrap samples and calculate the sum of the coefficients for legacy and its interaction with relevance in each sample. We obtain a 95% confidence interval of (-0.03, 0.36) for good arguments and (0.49, 0.88) for bad arguments. The 95% confidence interval of the difference between the total effects for bad arguments and the total effect for good arguments is (0.25, 0.79). Thus, there is at best weak evidence for a positive effect of a legacy (even for relevant issue areas) for good arguments, and there is a significant—and significantly larger—total effect for bad arguments.

Table 5: Effect of Legacy on Argument Rankings

	Bad Argument		Good Argument	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Legacy	0.54*	0.39*	0.03	−0.11
	(0.07)	(0.10)	(0.07)	(0.10)
Legacy × Relevant	———	0.30*	———	0.27
		(0.14)		(0.14)
Budget FE	1.79*	1.72*	3.50*	3.44*
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.09)
Uniforms FE	1.55*	1.63*	3.47*	3.54*
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.09)
Taxes FE	2.07*	2.00*	3.90*	3.83*
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Guns FE	2.82*	2.90*	4.03*	4.10*
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
N	1359	1359	1383	1383
R^2	0.15	0.15	0.03	0.04

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)

Note: Estimates from a linear model of argument ranking for good and bad arguments as a function of issue fixed effects, the presence of legacy, and whether the issue is relevant to the politician's legacy. As in Table 4, argument rankings range from 1-5, where 5 denotes the strongest argument. Relevant policy pertains to whether the issue at hand is relevant to the politician being remembered. These results only include the effect of Reagan on Republicans and Clinton on Democrats.

Estimating the same models for the effect of Bill Clinton's legacy on Republicans and Ronald Reagan's legacy on Democrats, we find that the pattern is similar but the substantive effect of legacies is smaller (see Online Appendix 7 for the table). Repeating the same bootstrap exercise for the relevant-issue legacy effect in the different party sample, we find a 95% confidence interval of (-0.33, 0.05) for good arguments and (0.06, 0.47) for bad arguments. Bootstrapping the difference between the total effect of a legacy on a relevant argument for in-partisans and out-partisans, we find a 95% confidence interval of (0.14, 0.71). Thus, legacies for relevant policy positions have a stronger effect for in-partisans than for out-partisans.

To summarize the findings of Study 3, we find that legacies improve the perceived quality of bad arguments—particularly when the arguments pertain to an issue area that is closely associated with the politician. The effect is stronger when the politician is in the same party as the receiver of the argument. They do not affect the perceived quality of good arguments. This effect defies simple categorization as a party cue since there is no reason to expect that a party cue would operate for bad arguments but not good arguments, nor for why the cue would be stronger for relevant issue areas. Rather, political legacies seem to function as a specialized brand, one which holds more appeal for co-partisans and exerts more influence for relevant issue areas.

Study 4: How Are Legacies Contested?

Jointly, the previous three studies establish that memories of past politicians are widespread and potentially consequential in the discussion of contemporary politics. This study establishes that members of the mass public recognize the importance of political legacies by contesting them on Wikipedia. Wikipedia is a critical source of information about politicians and as such plays a crucial role in shaping and reflecting their legacies. In fact, Google searches of the politician's name typically yield Wikipedia as the first result if the politician is no longer in office, and the second result (after that politician's official website) if she is

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still in office (Kalla and Aronow 2015). To tap into the degree to which citizens rely on these pages for information, we collected data about the number of views for selected Wikipedia pages from 2015.

Consistent with our findings in the other studies, information about presidents is far more in demand than information about other officeholders. As a baseline, Barack Obama's page was viewed 5,506,250 times in 2015. Lyndon B. Johnson's page, the least popular presidential page, was viewed over a million times. Besides Hillary Clinton, no former or current Cabinet official or Congressional leader broke this threshold. Few were even close. Henry Kissinger got 725,414 views, and Condoleezza Rice got 527,488 views. Bob Dole, the most viewed Congressional leader who is no longer in office, got only 283,679 views. Some pages go almost unseen. John McCormack, a Massachusetts Congressman who retired in 1971, page was seen only 14,504 times. Figure 3 shows the number of views for each Wikipedia page, by office and by year in which the politician left office. The best fit lines show that interest decays much more slowly for presidents than it does for either Cabinet secretaries or Congressional leaders.

Furthermore, the *timing* of these page views suggests that citizens seek out information about past politicians to better understand current events. Figure 4 plots the number of times the pages of presidents from Dwight Eisenhower to George W. Bush were viewed each month. Presidential pages were especially popular during March 2016, November 2016, and January 2017. Nancy Reagan died on March 6, 2016, and the spike in March of 2016 can be attributed almost entirely to increased interest in Ronald Reagan. The presidential election was held in November 2016 and Donald Trump was inaugurated as President of the United States in January 2017. Together with the finding that Reddit users frequently discuss current and past politicians in the same comments, this finding illustrates how citizens find past politicians relevant to the present.

Another key feature of Wikipedia is that the information on its pages is curated by hundreds of thousands of editors. Revisions made to Wikipedia pages therefore provide a

Figure 3: Number of Views for Wikipedia Pages in 2015
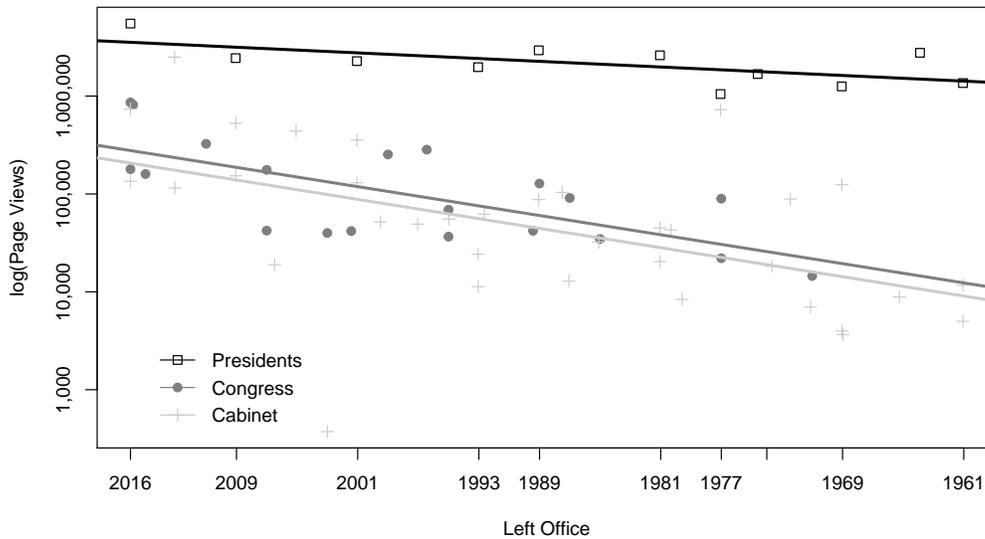
Note: The y-axis is the number of page views on the log scale. The x-axis is the year that politician last held the given office. Politicians who are still currently in office are placed at 2016.

Figure 4: Presidential Page Views Over Time
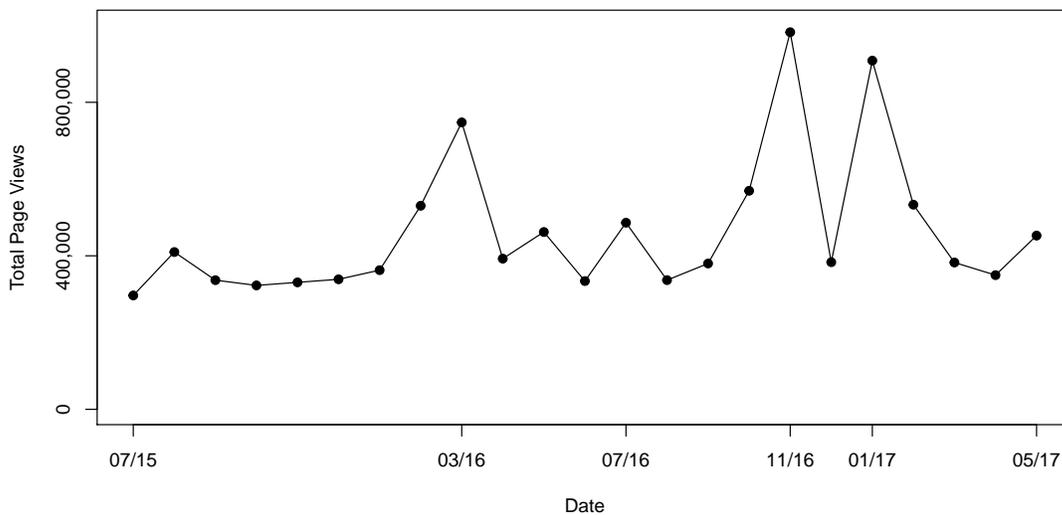
Note: The y-axis is the number of page views for Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, George H.W. Bush, Clinton, and George W. Bush. The x-axis is the month where page views are measured.

window into which politicians' legacies are most carefully maintained or hotly contested by political sophisticates. In many ways, Wikipedia entries represent the collective memory of a society of a given person or thing. To study the supply of information about past politicians, we downloaded the Wikipedia pages of all presidents, Secretaries of the Treasury, Secretaries of State, Senators, and Representatives. In Online Appendix 9 we present a more detailed analysis of these Wikipedia pages. One noteworthy finding is that a high share of presidential pages (64%) have a dedicated section expanding on their legacy, far more than in the pages of former Cabinet members (28%) or former members of Congress (5%). Moreover, presidential legacy sections tend also to be a good deal longer.

We also find that the Wikipedia pages of presidents are the target of far more changes than the pages of any other office holders, indicating that presidential legacies are the most fiercely contested. George W. Bush's page has attracted some 14,502 distinct editors, who have together made 45,971 revisions. In fact, his page is the most heavily edited on the site.[23] George H.W. Bush, whose page has attracted the fewest revisions, has still been more heavily revised than any non-president besides John Kerry and Hillary Clinton. Figure 5 illustrates a by-now familiar refrain: presidents' pages are more heavily revised, and the level of activity decays more slowly as a function of temporal distance than it does for the other office holders. One obvious explanation for this activity is that Wikipedia editors spend more time on presidential pages because they perceive their legacies as being more important—a perception that is validated by the traffic patterns.

Study 5: Do Political Elites Care About Their Legacies?

Our final study links political legacy to the important debate on the motivations of politicians by showing that elites care about their legacies. We further establish two important supplementary findings that put the legacy motivation and our account of it on firmer foun-

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[23]See "George W. Bush has the most controversial Wikipedia page of all time," *Business Insider*, 8/13/2015.

Figure 5: Number of Revisions for Wikipedia Pages
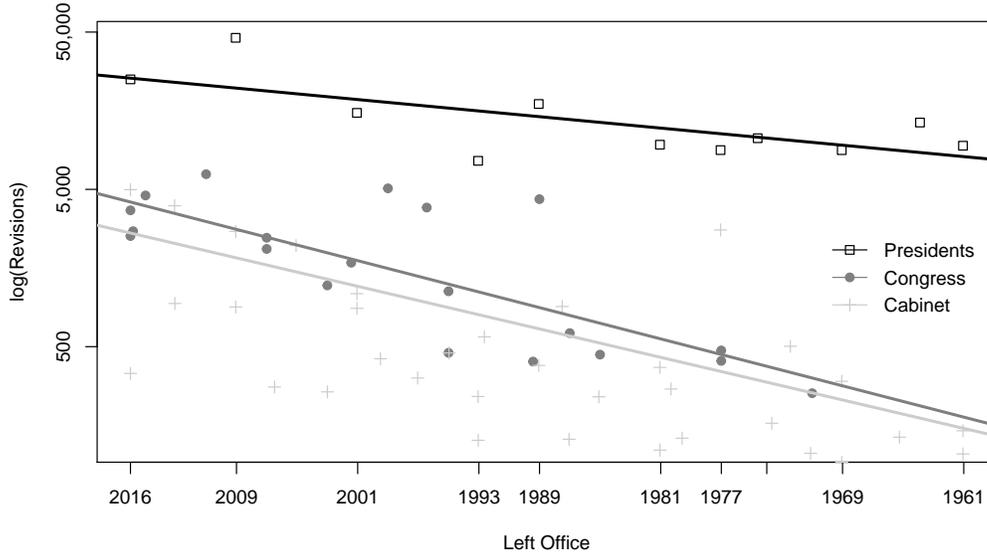
Note: The y-axis is the number of revisions on the log scale. The x-axis is the year that politician last held the given office. Politicians in office as of 2016 are placed at 2016.

dations. First, the legacy motivation does not rely on rosy delusions about the mass public's capacity to remember past politicians. Second, politicians recognize that soft legacies act as specialized brands, as we argued in Study 3.

In 2015 we obtained a list of email addresses of 62,146 individuals from the firm KnowWho. These individuals include: legislators at the federal, state, and local levels; executives at all three government levels; regulators and executive branch staff at the federal and state levels; and federal and state legislative staffers. From this list we contacted a random sample of 10,400 officials and invited them in October 2016 to complete our survey. We obtained 437 completed surveys through two reminders, producing a response rate of 4.2%. The vast majority of our responses came from state and local officials. The questionnaire for Study 5 can be found in Online Appendix 10.

We asked public officials about the importance of five motivations when making decisions: being remembered, making a lasting impact, making their parents proud, appealing to their core supporters, and appealing to swing voters. Table 6 shows that making a lasting

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Table 6: Motivations of Public Officials and Their Perceptions of Others

Own Motivations ($n = 430$)					
	Remembered	Impact	Parents Proud	Core Supporters	Swing Voters
A great deal	10.9%	62.6%	22.5%	20.8%	10.0%
A lot	22.0	4.4	15.6	13.7	18.8
A moderate amount	21.1	24.9	23.9	28.7	21.2
A little	26.0	6.7	22.0	30.8	34.2
Not at all	20.0	1.4	16.0	6.0	15.8

Others' Motivations ($n = 440$)					
	Remembered	Impact	Parents Proud	Core Supporters	Swing Voters
A great deal	9.6%	21.%	7.8%	56.2%	18.0%
A lot	33.4	20.2	34.9	2.7	14.6
A moderate amount	15.5	24.0	15.3	27.1	34.8
A little	31.8	28.8	23.5	13.3	29.6
Not at all	9.8	5.9	18.5	0.7	3.2

Note: Responses of public officials. Question wordings for survey items can be found in Online Appendix 10.

impact (building a hard legacy) emerged as the most important motivation. Only 8.1% of respondents reported that it mattered to them only a little or not at all. Being remembered, making their parents proud, and appealing to core supporters were all about equally important, while appealing to swing voters was clearly the least important.

To investigate politicians' deliberate or accidental duplicity in describing their own motivations, we also asked respondents how much they think that each of these factors motivates politicians generally. The bottom panel of Table 6 shows that they believe other politicians are much less motivated by making a lasting impact than they themselves are. Although they are relatively hesitant to say that they themselves want to be remembered, they are quicker to attribute these motivations to politicians generally.

Interestingly, these political elites believe the soft legacy motivation is important to their peers even though they are quite pessimistic about the mass public's propensity to remember

Table 7: Political Elites' Perceptions of Political Legacies

Predictions of How Many People Would Remember... ($n = 435$)

	$0 - 25\%$	$26 - 50\%$	$51 - 75\%$	$76 - 100\%$	Actual %
President	7.4%	31.5%	36.3%	24.8%	93.5
Secretary of State	81.9	14.2	3.4	0.5	60.5
Secretary of Treasury	96.6	3.2	0.2	0.0	33.3
Speaker of the House	75.3	19.0	5.5	0.2	54.5
Senate Majority Leader	87.6	11.0	1.2	0.2	46.5

Note: Responses of public officials. "Actual %" is the percentage of respondents from Study 1 who recalled a randomly assigned holder of that office.

politicians. 50% of the respondents believe they will be forgotten within 5 years of their departure from office. A paltry 10% believe they will be remembered for at least 10 years. Table 7 shows that they significantly underestimate the proportion of the mass public that will remember high-profile, national politicians after they leave office. Recall that Study 1 showed that virtually every one of our officeholders was remembered by at least one quarter of ordinary people, and all presidents were remembered by more than 80% of respondents. The vast majority of respondents in our elite survey believe that less than 25% of people will remember the non-presidents, and only a quarter of the respondents believe that more than 75% of the public will remember presidents. This illustrates that the importance of the legacy motivation does not rely on a widespread, self-serving illusion that politicians will be widely remembered by the public. Even with skepticism about the likelihood of being remembered, it clearly still serves as a strong source of motivation.

Finally, these political elites seem to intuit that legacies operate as specialized brands. 83% of those interviewed anticipate that the invocation of a political legacy will influence which arguments are perceived as most persuasive. 62% believe that legacies operate as specialized brands against only 21% who believe that legacies will operate as generalized brands. Thus, politicians appear to recognize that how they are remembered can influence future political debates on issues to which they devote their time and attention. Accordingly,

they perceive that their decisions about which issues they choose to work can have far-reaching consequences.

Discussion

In thinking about the essence and impact of political legacies, we contend that one needs to take account of both hard and soft legacies, where the former consist of concrete policy changes, whereas the latter consists of the people's recollections of a politician's time in office. Here, we have focused on soft legacies, but the two forms of legacies are surely closely tied, as one's soft legacy is likely to be at least partly shaped by her hard legacy. Indeed, in Study 1, we found that policy achievements are an important but not dominant component of what people remember about past politicians. Yet as we argued earlier, the effect might also operate in the opposite direction, as the soft legacy may influence the durability of a politician's hard legacy. This not only highlights the potential implications of soft legacies, but also suggests that the nature of the interaction between the two forms of legacies is an important avenue for further research.

The finding that political legacies are effective in elevating the influence of weak political arguments is perhaps not surprising given how often people invoke former politicians in justifying their positions in current debates. Yet we find this effect to be far stronger in domains associated with the accomplishments of the former politician, suggesting that legacies, like specialized brands, have a limited halo effect. This pattern suggests that political parties have a strong interest in building and cementing their leaders' legacies in the broadest range of domains they possibly can. Indeed, case studies of the historical evolution of specific legacies — ranging from Columbus and Lincoln to Nixon and Reagan — indicates that interested parties, including the media, can have substantial influence on they way the public remembers specific figures and events (Fine 2014; Schudson 1993; Schuman, Schwartz, and Darcy 2005; Schwartz and Schuman 2005). An instrumental approach to legacy-building therefore suggests that parties have a strong interest in carefully cultivating how their lead-

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ers' accomplishments are shaped in the public mind if they are to later benefit from the specialized brand that is the soft legacy.

In a speech to Congress in 1862, President Lincoln sought support for emancipation and an end to slavery by appealing to his audience's legacy concerns: "We of this Congress and this Administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance or insignificance can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass will light us down in honor or dishonor to the latest generation."[24] This inspiring rhetoric may have been effective in garnering support from Congress, but our findings suggest that, at least with respect to enshrining their own place in the public's memory, Lincoln may have offered his listeners false hope. Although we find that citizens do often remember former politicians and invoke their names in contemporary political debates, the evidence both from our survey and from the analysis of millions of online political discussion posts indicates that at the national level, soft legacies are largely a phenomenon confined to presidents. Other office holders, even ones in very senior Cabinet positions or Congressional leaders, leave a far shallower footprint in the public's consciousness. Nonetheless, for Lincoln himself, the hard and soft legacies of his presidential actions loomed large for multiple generations.

This does not mean that officeholders other than presidents are not thinking about, or acting to cement, their legacies. They may hold other, more optimistic beliefs about the longevity of future generations' recollections of past leaders. However, even if politicians recognized the short memory of the public, they may be still concerned with establishing their legacy among a much narrower group of influence, such as historians, public intellectuals, or party elites. In other words, the preoccupation with posterity does not necessarily mean that the only target of actions is the mass public.

Moreover, office holders may harbor hopes of being enshrined in the public memory, but perhaps not at the national level. For example, members of Congress and other state/local officials may seek to cement a legacy in smaller geographic units that our study did not

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[24]Annual message to Congress, December 1st, 1862.

examine. The extent to which our findings extend to lower-ranked office holders and their political legacies at the local level is therefore an open question.

This paper has examined political legacies primarily in the American context. Yet the concepts and arguments we advance in the paper are not unique to U.S. politics. In fact, based on studies of collective political memories in other countries (Kligler-Vilenchik, Tsfati, and Meyers 2014; Bischof and Pelinka 1997), we expect most of the insights gleaned from the American evidence to hold up in other advanced democracies. However, one notable source of difference is the U.S. presidential system, in which Cabinet members are not career bureaucrats but are instead personal appointments made by the president. This institutional feature suggests that our finding regarding the dominant presence of presidential legacies as compared to those of other senior office holders is possibly a U.S.-specific finding. Whether that is so requires replicating this investigation in countries with parliamentary systems, a challenge we hope to pursue in future work.

In the classic existentialist essay "The Tragic Sense of Life," Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno ruminates about people's deep concern with their legacies, describing the "tremendous struggle to singularize ourselves, to survive in some way in the memory of others and of posterity. It is this struggle...that gives tone, colour, and character to our society..." (de Unamuno 1921). Indeed, this old notion that people are preoccupied with being remembered after they die, and that this preoccupation has substantial social consequences, is taken almost as given in contemporary political discussion, where the actions of elected officials are often explained by their supposed concern with their legacies. But whether politicians have the capacity to make a lasting impression and whether these memories of politicians past influence subsequent political developments are empirical questions. This paper represents a first attempt to systematically study the concept of a political legacy and its key features: its content and prevalence in contemporary discussions, the endurance of legacies and variation across offices, the impact of invoking legacies in contemporary political debates, and how contested they are. Our goal in this paper, of course, is not to provide

the final word on these issues, but rather to offer a systematic account of this wide-reaching and omnipresent phenomenon. In doing so, we hope to have set the grounds for a promising new research program.

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Online Appendix: Supporting Information

Appendix 1: Question Wordings for Study 1

We'd now like to ask you some questions about recent U.S. politicians. We are interested in what people remember about American public figures. Some politicians are remembered by many people, while others are remembered by very few.

Which of the following political figures do you recognize? (response options: definitely remember, somewhat remember, do not remember)

[PRESENT RESPONDENT WITH NAME OF FIVE OFFFICIALS, ONE FROM EACH OFFICE. RANDOMIZE ORDER OF NAMES/OFFICES]

[INSERT NAME OF PRESIDENT/SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE/SENATE MAJORITY LEADER/SECRETARY OF STATE/SECRETARY OF TREASURY]

[FOR EACH NAME]

What do you remember the most about [NAME]?

[TEXT BOX]

What do you remember the second most about [NAME]?

[TEXT BOX]

What do you remember the third most about [NAME]?

[TEXT BOX]

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

In what year were you born?

What is the highest level of education you have obtained?

- Less than high school
- High school diploma
- Some college
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate degree

Which of the following terms best describes your race or ethnicity?

- White
- Black/African-American
- Hispanic/Latino
- Asian/Asian-American
- Other

Generally speaking, do you consider yourself to be a Republican, Democrat, or something else?

- Republican
- Democrat
- Something else

[if pid1=1,2] Do you consider yourself to be a strong [Republican/Democrat] or a not strong [Republican/Democrat]?

- Strong Republican/Democrat
- Not strong Republican/Democrat

[if pid1=3, MISSING] Do you consider yourself to be closer to the Republican Party or the Democratic Party?

- Closer to the Republican Party
- Closer to the Democratic Party

In politics today people often think of themselves as liberal or conservative. How liberal or conservative do you consider yourself to be?

- Extremely conservative
- Somewhat conservative
- Slightly conservative
- Moderate/middle-of-the-road
- Slightly liberal
- Somewhat liberal
- Extremely liberal

How often do you use the media, including television, newspapers, radio and the internet, to get political news or information?

- Several times a day
- Once a day
- Most days of the week
- 1-3 days a week
- Less than 1 day a week
- Never

Appendix 2: Age Cohort Analysis, Study 1

One natural question is whether this decay is being driven solely by age of the respondent. In other words, are people only remembering a politician because they have personal memories of that person in office? Although legacies would still matter even if only those who were politically aware while the politician was in office were susceptible, their role in political affairs would be far more circumscribed than if the collective experiences and memories could be passed down to people who did not personally experience them. We replicate the analysis by terciles of age cohorts (age 18-33, age 34-52, age 55+). As shown in Figure 6, members of the oldest cohort have higher intercepts for members of Congress and Cabinet officials. However, the general patterns of the relationships are similar across age groups. Presidents are remembered by nearly all people and the decay rate is minimal; substantially fewer people remember other officeholders and the decay rate is steep.

Figure 6: Recall Proportion by Age
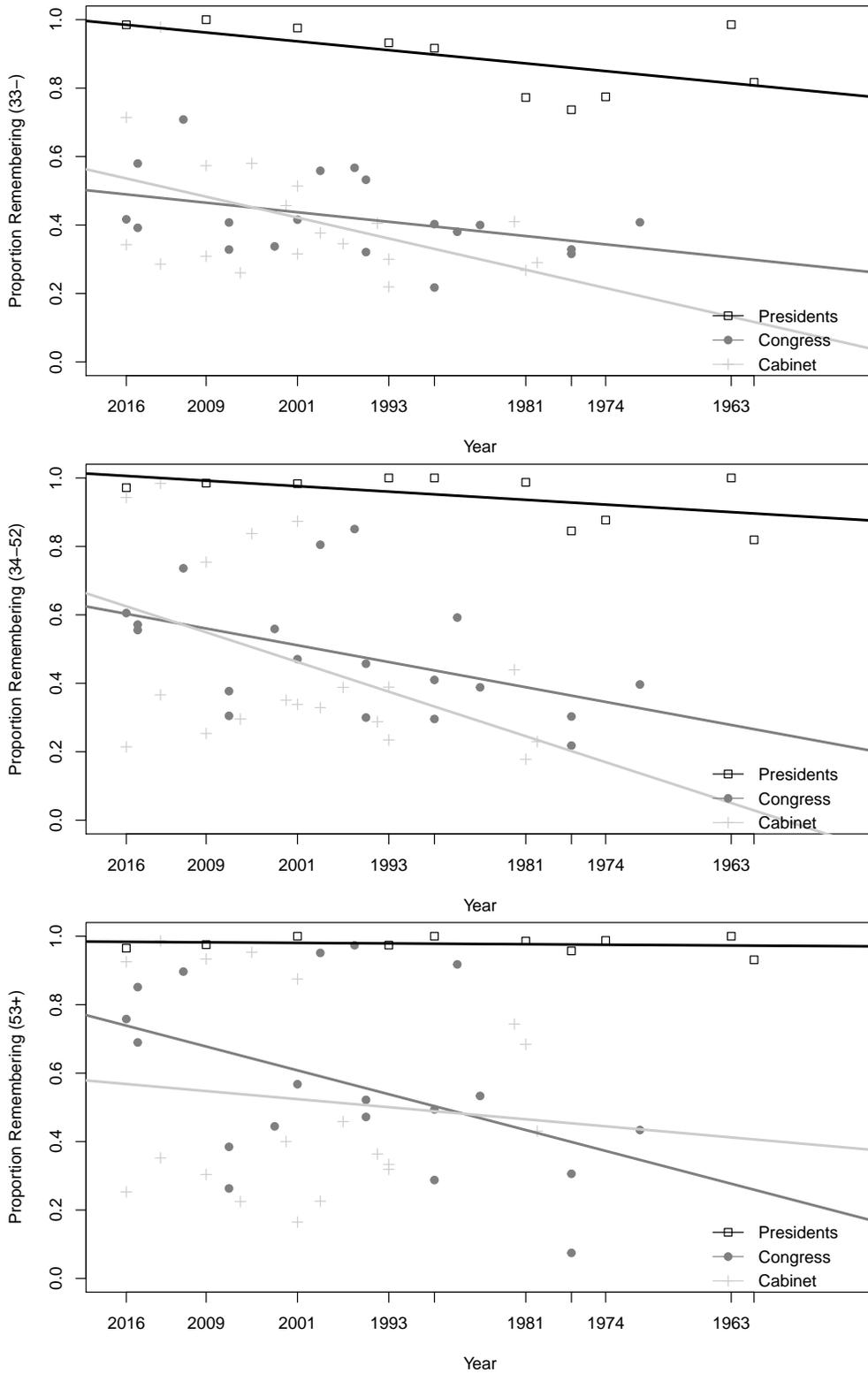
Appendix 3: Coding Procedures for Open-Ended Survey Responses, Study 1

Note: Research assistants were instructed to try to assign each response to a single category but in a few cases responses were assigned to multiple categories.

Monument: The response mentions something that is named after the person.

Policy-Relevant: The response points to a policy-related achievement of the politician, the politicians policy preferences (at a finer level of resolution than labels such as "conservative" or "liberal"), issues on the politicians agenda, or important events with which the politician was associated.

Scandal or Gaffe: The response refers to a specific event that reflects poorly on the character of the speaker or is otherwise embarrassing. Merely having held office during another politicians scandal (e.g., "was Senate Majority Leader during the Monica Lewinsky scandal") or electoral defeats do not count.

Affective Evaluation: The response either states whether the respondent likes the politician or not, performance evaluations, or subjective statements that imply an unambiguous position on the politicians performance (e.g., that the politician is "a liar" or that the politician did his best to move the country forward). Character traits which do not clearly imply the respondents evaluation of the politicians performance, such as "serious or "cantankerous count as biographical details. If there is any ambiguity, classify as a biographical detail.

Ideological/Partisan Affiliation: The response provides the individuals partisan affiliation or ideological predispositions. Statements that the politician was "bipartisan, "reached across the aisle, or was "divisive are all included here.

Biographical Detail: The response recalls details of the politicians life that are not relevant to public policy or how much the respondent likes that politician. Memories of the offices the politician held, the name of the politicians spouse, reports of how others felt about the politician, achievements that do not pertain directly to policy ("first Black president or "longest serving Senator), election campaigns, or personality traits that do not unambiguously show whether the respondent likes the politician or not.

Non-Response: The response is nonsense or is not a memory of that politician. Memories of a different individual with the same name (for example, John Snow recollections that are about *Game of Thrones*) or confuse the politician with someone else (for example, memories about Donald Regan that are clearly about Ronald Reagan) are included in this category. If you cannot figure out what the response is trying to say, put it in this category. Responses that are clearly copied from Wikipedia are also included in this category. However, factually incorrect statements should not be included in this category.

Appendix 4: Free Response Categories Regressed on Co-partisanship, Study 1

Table 8: Relationship between Open-Ended Responses and Co-Partisanship

	(1) Biographical	(2) Sentiment	(3) Ideology	(4) Policy	(5) Scandal
Co-Partisan	0.051	-0.032	-0.012	-0.021	0.000
	(0.033)	(0.028)	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.012)
Intercept	0.472*	0.161*	0.068*	0.079*	0.042*
	(0.025)	(0.017)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.008)
Observations	1105	1105	1105	1105	1105

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Partisan identifiers only.

* $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)

Appendix 5: Reddit Comment Classifications, Study 2

Features	Definition
Legacy	Using the name of a President, Vice-President, Speaker for the House, House Minority Leader, Senate Majority Leader, Senate Minority Leader, Secretary of the Treasury, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, or Attorney General whose tenure has come to an end by January 1, 2012.
Current Politician	Using the name of a President, Vice-President, Speaker for the House, House Minority Leader, Senate Majority Leader, Senate Minority Leader, Secretary of the Treasury, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, or Attorney General who held office between January 1, 2012 and December 31, 2014.
Source	Using the name of one of 22 major online news sources: New York Times, Wall Street Journal, The Guardian, Washington Post, NPR, Fox News, Huffington Post, CNN, Daily Kos, Drudge Report, Wonkette, AmericaBlog, Politico, Salon, Slate, Townhall, Real Clear Politics, Political Wire, Conservative Voice, Factcheck.org, and Redstate.
Think Tank	Using the name of one of 16 major think tanks: Brookings Institution, RAND Corporation, Cato Institute, Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, National Bureau of Economic Research, Pew Research Center, Council on Foreign Relations, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Peterson Institute for International Economics, Center for American Progress, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Hoover Institution, and Atlantic Council.
Numbers	Providing a figure in dollars, a percentage, or a number in the hundreds, thousands, millions, billions, or trillions.

Appendix 6: Question Wordings and Experimental Design for Study 3

[ORDER OF WHETHER CLINTON EXPERIMENT OR REAGAN EXPERIMENT IS PRESENTED FIRST IS RANDOMIZED; ORDER OF ARGUMENTS IS FULLY RANDOMIZED]

[EXPERIMENT TESTING CLINTON'S LEGACY]

[RESPONDENTS ARE ASSIGNED TO ONE OF SIX CONDITIONS: demleg1, demleg2, demleg3, demleg4, demleg5, demleg6]

demleg1 (Legacy Attached to Good Argument; Relevant Issue). Experts disagree on whether governments should cut spending on social programs in order to balance the budget. Listed below are some of the arguments proponents have advanced in favor of making a balanced budget a priority. Please read the different arguments and rank them based on how convincing you find each one. Place the most convincing argument on top and the least convincing one at the bottom.

- Balancing the budget helps boost the economy by reducing the interest payments on debt.
- When the budget deficit is smaller, the market's confidence in the economy grows, leading to more investments.
- When President Clinton signed The Balanced Budget Act of 1997, one justification was that balancing the budget ensures that future generations don't have to pay for the overspending of the current generation.
- A balanced budget ensures that the government operates within clear bounds of the resources it has.
- If the government does not balance its budget, ordinary people won't balance their personal budgets.

demleg2 (No Legacy Attached; Relevant Issue). Experts disagree on whether governments should cut spending on social programs in order to balance the budget. Listed below are some of the arguments proponents have advanced in favor of making a balanced budget a priority. Please read the different arguments and rank them based on how convincing you find each one. Place the most convincing argument on top and the least convincing one at the bottom.

- Balancing the budget helps boost the economy by reducing the interest payments on debt.
- When the budget deficit is smaller, the market's confidence in the economy grows, leading to more investments.
- Balancing the budget ensures that future generations don't have to pay for the overspending of the current generation.
- A balanced budget ensures that the government operates within clear bounds of the resources it has.
- If the government does not balance its budget, ordinary people won't balance their personal budgets.

demleg3 (Legacy Attached to Bad Argument; Relevant Issue). Experts disagree on whether governments should cut spending on social programs in order to balance the budget. Listed below are some of the arguments proponents have advanced in favor of making a balanced budget a priority. Please read the different arguments and rank them based on how convincing you find each one. Place the most convincing argument on top and the least convincing one at the bottom.

- Balancing the budget helps boost the economy by reducing the interest payments on debt.
- When the budget deficit is smaller, the market's confidence in the economy grows, leading to more investments.
- Balancing the budget ensures that future generations don't have to pay for the overspending of the current generation.
- A balanced budget ensures that the government operates within clear bounds of the resources it has.
- When President Clinton signed The Balanced Budget Act of 1997, one justification was that if the government does not balance its budget, ordinary people won't balance their personal budgets.

demleg4 (Legacy Attached to Good Argument; Irrelevant Issue). Experts disagree on whether compulsory school uniforms are a good idea. Listed below are some of the arguments proponents have advanced in favor of school uniforms. Please read the different arguments and rank them based on how convincing you find each one. Place the most convincing argument on top and the least convincing one at the bottom.

- School uniforms help create an environment of seriousness and discipline.
- When President Clinton issued a memorandum to the Department of Education advocating a school uniform requirement, one justification was that uniforms allow students to focus on school rather than on what they are wearing.
- School uniforms reduce instances where young students wear age-inappropriate clothes.
- School uniforms decrease stress among students from poorer families who cannot afford expensive clothes.
- School uniforms are more comfortable than what students voluntarily choose to wear.

demleg5 (No Legacy Attached; Irrelevant Issue). People debate whether compulsory school uniforms are a good idea. Listed below are some of the arguments proponents have advanced in favor of school uniforms. Please read the different arguments and rank them based on how convincing you find each one. Place the most convincing argument on top and the least convincing one at the bottom.

- School uniforms help create an environment of seriousness and discipline.
- Such uniforms allow students to focus on school rather than on what they are wearing.
- School uniforms reduce instances where young students wear age-inappropriate clothes.
- School uniforms decrease stress among students from poorer families who cannot afford expensive clothes.

  School uniforms are more comfortable than what students voluntarily choose to wear.

demleg6 (Legacy Attached to Bad Argument; Irrelevant Issue). People debate whether compulsory school uniforms are a good idea. Listed below are some of the arguments proponents have advanced in favor of school uniforms. Please read the different arguments and rank them based on how convincing you find each one. Place the most convincing argument on top and the least convincing one at the bottom.

- School uniforms help create an environment of seriousness and discipline.
- Such uniforms allow students to focus on school rather than on what they are wearing.
- School uniforms reduce instances where young students wear age-inappropriate clothes.
- School uniforms decrease stress among students from poorer families who cannot afford expensive clothes.
- When President Clinton issued a memorandum to the Department of Education advocating a school uniform requirement, one justification was that school uniforms are more comfortable than what students voluntarily choose to wear.

[EXPERIMENT TESTING REAGAN'S LEGACY]

[RESPONDENTS ARE ASSIGNED TO ONE OF SIX CONDITIONS: repleg1, repleg2, repleg3, repleg4, repleg5, repleg6]

repleg1 (Legacy Attached to Good Argument; Relevant Issue). Experts disagree on whether Congress should reduce tax rates even for taxes primarily paid by the very wealthy. Listed below are some of the arguments proponents have advanced in support of cutting taxes on the wealthy. Please read the different arguments and rank them based on how convincing you find each one. Place the most convincing argument on top and the least convincing one at the bottom.

- When President Reagan reduced taxes from a top marginal rate of 50% to 28% by signing the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981, one justification was that when tax rates are too high, lowering tax rates increases gross tax revenue due to increased economic activity.
- Reductions in marginal income and capital gains tax rates encourage greater allocation of resources to investment.
- The wealthy worked hard to earn their money, and it is unfair to punish success.
- Reallocation away from public investment to private investment will always yield superior economic results.
- Cutting taxes on the wealthy helps reduce the high workload on IRS employees.

repleg2 (No Legacy Attached; Relevant Issue). Experts disagree on whether Congress should reduce tax rates even for taxes primarily paid by the very wealthy, such as capital gains taxes. Listed below are some of the arguments proponents have advanced in support of cutting taxes on the wealthy. Please read the different arguments and rank them based on how convincing you find each one. Place the most convincing argument on top and the least convincing one at the bottom.

- When tax rates are too high, lowering tax rates increases gross tax revenue due to increased economic activity.

- Reductions in marginal income and capital gains tax rates encourage greater allocation of resources to investment.
- The wealthy worked hard to earn their money, and it is unfair to punish success.
- Reallocation away from public investment to private investment will always yield superior economic results.
- Cutting taxes on the wealthy helps reduce the high workload on IRS employees.

repleg3 (Legacy Attached to Bad Argument; Relevant Issue). Experts disagree on whether Congress should reduce tax rates even for taxes primarily paid by the very wealthy, such as capital gains taxes. Listed below are some of the arguments proponents have advanced in support of cutting taxes on the wealthy. Please read the different arguments and rank them based on how convincing you find each one. Place the most convincing argument on top and the least convincing one at the bottom.

- When tax rates are too high, lowering tax rates increases gross tax revenue due to increased economic activity.
- Reductions in marginal income and capital gains tax rates encourage greater allocation of resources to investment.
- The wealthy worked hard to earn their money, and it is unfair to punish success.
- Reallocation away from public investment to private investment will always yield superior economic results.
- When President Reagan reduced taxes from a top marginal rate of 50% to 28% by signing the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981, one justification was that cutting taxes on the wealthy helps reduce the high workload on IRS employees.

repleg4 (Legacy Attached to Good Argument; Irrelevant Issue). Experts debate the justification and merits of policies designed to make it harder for Americans to own guns. Listed below are some of the arguments proponents have advanced in support of placing tough restrictions on gun ownership. Please read the different arguments and rank them based on how convincing you find each one. Place the most convincing argument on top and the least convincing one at the bottom.

- When President Reagan supported the Brady Bill, one justification for instituting an extended waiting period before a handgun purchaser could take delivery was that it would provide time for background checks reduce instances where felons or mentally ill people obtain guns.
- The more citizens have easy access to guns, the more homicides there are. Making guns more difficult to acquire will reduce the level of homicides.
- In the last two decades, almost 80% of the mass shootings in the U.S were carried out using legal weapons. To reduce mass killings, the U.S must make it hard to obtain guns.
- Successful interventions by armed civilians occur in only a tiny fraction of mass shootings, therefore it is better to reduce the overall number of weapons because they rarely provide protection.
- Instituting tough restrictions on guns would put the U.S. in line in with more cultured European nations.

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repleg5 (No Legacy Attached; Irrelevant Issue). Experts debate the justification and merits of policies designed to make it harder for Americans to own guns. Listed below are some of the arguments proponents have advanced in support of placing tough restrictions on gun ownership. Please read the different arguments and rank them based on how convincing you find each one. Place the most convincing argument on top and the least convincing one at the bottom.

- Instituting an extended waiting period before a handgun purchaser could take delivery would provide time for background checks and reduce instances where felons or mentally ill people obtain guns.
- The more citizens have easy access to guns, the more homicides there are. Making guns more difficult to acquire will reduce the level of homicides.
- In the last two decades, almost 80% of the mass shootings in the U.S were carried out using legal weapons. To reduce mass killings, the U.S must make it hard to obtain guns.
- Successful interventions by armed civilians occur in only a tiny fraction of mass shootings, therefore it is better to reduce the overall number of weapons because they rarely provide protection.
- Instituting tough restrictions on guns would put the U.S. in line in with more cultured European nations.

repleg6 (Legacy Attached to Bad Argument; Irrelevant Issue). Experts debate the justification and merits of policies designed to make it harder for Americans to own guns. Listed below are some of the arguments proponents have advanced in support of placing tough restrictions on gun ownership. Please read the different arguments and rank them based on how convincing you find each one. Place the most convincing argument on top and the least convincing one at the bottom.

- Instituting an extended waiting period before a handgun purchaser could take delivery would provide time for background checks and reduce instances where felons or mentally ill people obtain guns.
- The more citizens have easy access to guns, the more homicides there are. Making guns more difficult to acquire will reduce the level of homicides.
- In the last two decades, almost 80% of the mass shootings in the U.S were carried out using legal weapons. To reduce mass killings, the U.S must make it hard to obtain guns.
- Successful interventions by armed civilians occur in only a tiny fraction of mass shootings, therefore it is better to reduce the overall number of weapons because they rarely provide protection.
- When President Reagan supported the Brady Bill, one justification for instituting an extended waiting period before a handgun purchaser could take delivery was that it would put the U.S. in line in with more cultured European nations.

Appendix 7: Results for Opposite-Party Politician, Study 3

Table 9: Effect of Legacy on Argument Rankings for Out-Partisans

|	Bad Argument		Good Argument	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Legacy	0.20*	0.14	−0.21	−0.28
	(0.07)	(0.11)	(0.07)	(0.10)
Legacy × Relevant	_____	0.12	_____	0.14
		(0.15)		(0.14)
Budget FE	1.86*	1.83*	3.46*	3.43*
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.09)
Uniforms FE	1.68*	1.72*	3.47*	3.50*
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.09)
Taxes FE	2.33*	2.30*	3.83*	3.80*
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Guns FE	2.75*	2.78*	3.72*	3.76*
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.09)
N	1359	1359	1383	1383
R^2	0.15	0.15	0.03	0.04

Standard errors in parentheses

* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)

Note: A linear model of argument ranking for good and bad arguments as a function of issue, the presence of legacy, and whether the issue is relevant to the politician's legacy. As in Table 4 and Table 5 in the main text, argument rankings range from 1-5, where 5 denotes the strongest argument. Relevant policy pertains to whether the issue at hand is relevant to the politician being remembered. These results only include the effect of Reagan on Democrats and Clinton on Republicans. There are two important substantive differences between the results here and the copartisans analysis in Study 3. First, there is no significant relevance interaction. Second, invoking legacies for a good argument tends to backfire.

Appendix 8: Length of Wikipedia Pages of Former Politicians

Figure 7: Distribution of Length of Wikipedia Articles
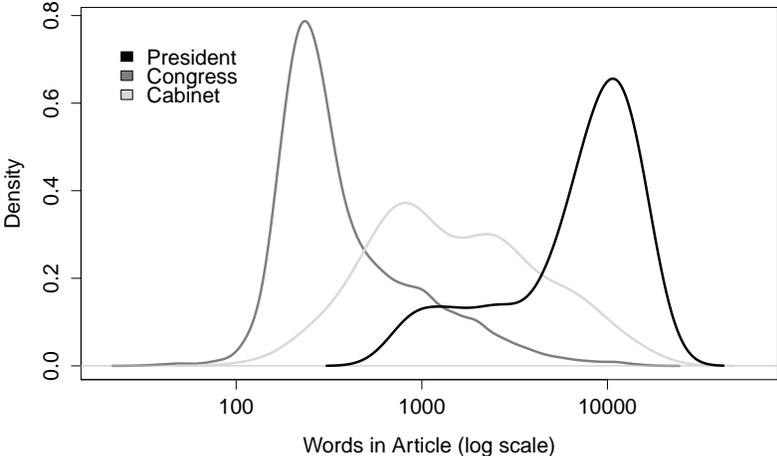
Note: Congress includes all Republicans and Democrats who have served in the House or Senate. Cabinet includes every Secretary of State, Secretary of the Treasury, Secretary of Defense, and Attorney General.

Table 10: Discussion of Legacies on Wikipedia

Office	Average Number of Words	Proportion with Legacy Section	Number of Sentences in Legacy Section	Number of Articles
President	2771	0.64	27.9	75
Congress	656	0.05	12.5	9568
Cabinet	859	0.28	17.5	237

Note: Legacy sections are coded by the presence of words such as "legacy" or "historical" in the section title. The number of sentences in the legacy section is the average for the subset of articles which have legacy sections.

Appendix 9: Characteristics of Wikipedia Pages of Former Politicians

Appendix 10: Question Wordings for Political Elite Study (Study 5)

Q1. In making decisions about what actions to take, people are often motivated by different factors. How much do you think the following factors motivate U.S. politicians when they are making decisions (e.g., voting on a bill, crafting a policy proposal, writing a speech)? Do not think about your personal motivations, but what you think motivates public officials generally. (response options: a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, not at all)

Wanting to...

- appeal to core supporters
- appeal to voters on the fence
- be remembered by future generations
- have a lasting impact on people's lives
- do something of which their parents would be proud

Q2. In making decisions about what actions to take, people are often motivated by different factors. How much do the following factors motivate you when you are making a decision (e.g., voting on a bill, crafting a policy proposal, writing a speech)? (response options: a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, not at all)

Wanting to...

- appeal to core supporters
- appeal to voters on the fence
- be remembered by future generations
- have a lasting impact on people's lives
- do something of which their parents would be proud

Q3. In your assessment, what percentage of the public do you think would be able to recall the names and very basic information about the people who have held the following positions over the last 20 years? (response options: 0%-25%, 26%-50%, 51%-75%, 76%-100%)

- Secretary of State
- President of the United States
- Speaker of the House
- Secretary of the Treasury
- Senate Majority Leader

Q4. When speaking to voters about current issues, elected officials often invoke the names of respected former political leaders (e.g., Ronald Reagan, John F. Kennedy) in order to make their points. For what types of issues do you think such a strategy would be effective?

- For almost all issues
- Only when discussing issues with which the politician was associated
- For almost no issues