# ON MEASURING MEXICAN PRESIDENTIAL IDEOLOGY THROUGH BUDGETS: A REAPPRAISAL OF THE WILKIE APPROACH

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### INTRODUCTION

In recent studies by historians and political scientists there has been increasing attention paid to the question of executive impact on the budgetary process in Latin America. Wilkie's prize-winning research¹ into the broad outlines of budgetary discretion in Revolutionary Mexico has both stimulated controversy² and redoubled efforts to employ budgetary data productively in assessing the impact of who governs upon how people are governed.³

In the present research we return to the Mexican case to reexamine a question which we believe, contrary to Skidmore and Smith, can be productively addressed. It is one which we regard as treated inconclusively by Wilkie, however. In examining the question of executive impact on the policy orientation of government he used data which tended to conceal rather than reveal the idiosyncratic propensities of individual presidents. We do not fault Wilkie for the limits of his study; it was a truly massive enterprise of data collection, synthesis, and interpretation and one which was handled extraordinarily well by a scholar who was breaking new methodological ground in his own discipline. However, by focusing on the broad contours of public expenditure, Wilkie may have examined precisely those areas of policy-making where the institutional constraints of bureaucratic politics are greatest. 4 Hence, we propose to examine an area in which executive impact can be more clearly isolated. We have chosen to examine the blend of political and economic considerations which seem to characterize the allocation of subsidies to the Mexican

states by three Mexican presidents: Adolfo Ruíz Cortines, Adolfo López Mateos, and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz.

#### THEORY

To recapitulate the relevant portions of Wilkie's study, it was argued that the Ruíz Cortines budgetary policy represented the continuation of a trend, started in 1946 by President Miguel Aleman, in which allocations for economic development or infrastructure became the dominant feature of government expenditure patterns, often at the cost of social programs. As Wilkie observes:

Overt governmental neglect of social programs and lower level bureaucrats, however, led to struggle in the official family which resulted in the apparent rejection of the Aleman ideology by Ruíz Cortines; but . . . he became more *alemanista* than Aleman. Not until López Mateos did the minimum wage and social expenditure again become important in government policy.<sup>5</sup>

The López Mateos era is characterized by Wilkie as a period of "Balanced Revolution" in which an emphasis on the social welfare expenditures, which had been dormant since the Cárdenas era, was reasserted. The average expenditures (both projected and actual for each regime since 1934) are listed in Table 1, which is adopted from Wilkie. It will be noted that social expenditures returned to the level of the Cárdenas era for the first time in the López Mateos era. However, it will also be noted that:

- (a) all presidents expended a greater proportion of funds than they had planned on economic matters;
- (b) all presidents expended a smaller percentage of funds than planned on social policy;
- (c) all presidents, except López Mateos, 6 expended a smaller percentage of total funds than originally planned in the administrative arena; and,
- (d) there is little variation in percentage of mean actual social expenditures (range=13.3%-19.2%). Moreover the significance of these small differences is not assessed by Wilkie with respect to any standard, common or otherwise.

Supplementing these observations with the corollary finding that actual expenditures were almost always 50% higher than those projected, sometimes as much as 90% higher, 7 we can begin to understand something of the institutional constraints of budgetary politics in Mexico. 8 In a budgetary process in which social welfare expenditures lose out no matter who is president and in which advocates of economic development expenditure emerge victorious in the yearly battle over how monies exceed-

ing initial projections will be expended, it seems likely that Wilkie's study would underestimate the desire or ability of individual presidents to put their own imprint on the budgetary process. Wilkie treats projected budgets as indicative of presidential desires and discusses actual expenditures as reflective of presidential compromises with bureaucratic and domestic political reality. Yet the meaning of a 5% or a 10% difference in proposed allocations is not clear.

For the purpose of describing the nature of public expenditure, Wilkie's methodology may be adequate. For the purpose of empirically delimiting "ideological periods," as Wilkie purports to do,9 we find his procedure inadequate because of the constraints referred to above. In place of that procedure, we suggest examination of those areas of expenditure in which presidential preference is largely unconstrained by bureaucratic environment. As one such area, we shall examine subsidies by the federal government to the Mexican states. We expect to find larger and more easily interpretable differences between presidents than those encountered by Wilkie, as displayed in Table 1. Presentation of specific hypotheses will follow below in the two succeeding sections. Prior to discussing the criteria which might be invoked in allocating subsidies, we shall first discuss the subsidies themselves.

TABLE 1 Average Percent Annual Expenditures, Projected and Actual, by Presidential Term and by Policy Emphasis

	Economic*		Social*		Administrative*	
	Proj.	Actual	Proj.	Actual	Proj.	Actual
Cárdenas: 1935-40	30.5%	37.6%	23.0%	18.3%	46.5%	44.1%
Avila Camacho: 1941-46	30.7	39.2	23.5	16.5	45.8	44.3
Aleman: 1947-52	39.2	51.9	18.6	13.3	42.2	34.8
Ruíz Cortines: 1953-58	43.8	52.9	20.4	14.4	35.8	32.9
López Mateos: 1959-64	38.8	39.0	30.8	19.2	30.4	41.8

<sup>\*</sup>For the operational definition of each category of policy emphasis, see Wilkie, op. cit., Chapter 1, esp. Table 1-4.

The subsidies to which we refer are included in the budget in a lump sum. They are *not* described on a line-item basis in the budget; however, they are allocated within the Secretariat of the Presidency. Interviews with officials in the Ministry of Hacienda revealed that Ha-

## Latin American Research Review

cienda has almost no influence over how these monies are disbursed.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, in contrast to some forms of federal assistance to the states (such as *participaciones* in federal taxes), allocation of subsidies is in no way constrained by the legal restrictions of a *convenio*. In short, these are among the most unrestricted funds which any Mexican president has at his disposal. These are funds for which both economic and political criteria may be invoked in making allocative decisions. They are, in effect, contingency funds to be disbursed as the president wishes. Budgetary officials are of the opinion that political forces are determining factors in the use of such funds.<sup>11</sup> We shall now develop alternative hypotheses of how economic influences might enter into such dispensations.

## CRITERIA OF DECISION-MAKING: ECONOMIC

Charles Anderson has commented on the dangers and the difficulty of categorizing Latin American development strategies by observing that even "ideologically antagonistic regimes do most things the same way." 12 However, Anderson does suggest three ideal-type development strategies which can be abstracted from recent Latin American experience. They are (1) the conventional approach, in which development is defined as the elaboration of the existing modern sector; (2) the "democratic" reform approach, in which development is seen as the accommodation of redistributive demands already present in the political-economic system; and (3) the revolutionary approach, in which the modern sector is seen as the obstacle to development. 13 If there are differential presidential ideologies, we would expect such differences to be manifested in the pursuit of expenditure patterns which would reflect markedly distinct priorities. The quotes from Anderson, listed below, are presented in order to outline the first two alternative strategies. In the case of the third strategy, regardless of the rhetoric of the Institutional Revolution, we find Anderson's ideal-type so far from Mexican reality that we omit discussion herein. Readers unfamiliar with the ideal-types may wish to consult the text of Anderson for a discussion of truly revolutionary strategies of development.

# Conventional Approach:

For a significant proportion of those engaged in the policy-making process in Latin America, economic development is primarily to be realized through the continued elaboration and vitality of the institutions and processes that characterize the "modern community." The present productive capacity of the modern sector is the vehicle for further development. The question is one of building

## MEASURING MEXICAN PRESIDENTIAL IDEOLOGY

increased growth into this system. The role of public policy is to support, stimulate, and protect industry, commerce, and market agriculture. The argument is not laissez-faire in nature, except in its most extreme formulations. Rather, government is to establish a climate propitious for further investment, and to provide appropriate, in some cases extensive, services within the modern sector. However, government need not self-consciously concern itself with bringing change to the premodern community. Gradually, the fruits of productivity will "filter down." Secular forces will draw the peasant farmer to the industrial life of the city, or toward market agriculture.<sup>14</sup>

# Reformist Approach:

The focus for analysis of the problem of development, the basic notion of the community to be taken into account, is . . . not primarily the modern sector delimited by the effective extent of the commercial economy, but the formal political community defined by the jurisdictional limits of the nation-state. The democratic reformer would "incorporate" those heretofore only marginally affected by the modern political economy "into the life of the nation." He would mobilize and organize their support, sift from their aspirations and desires demands appropriate to the powers of the modern state, and inject such demands into the process by which the state's powers and resources are allocated.

Such an effort would imply less the redefinition of the state's role in the economy and more the redirection and intensification of its product. The model remains the political economic role of the Western nation-state. However, the services generally assumed to pertain to this institution must be extended not only to those presently engaged in the modern relation of state and economy, but to those who in the future must be so engaged. The extension of the program of the state in public works, urban services, public health, education, credit, and so on, is of this type. Where the existing balance of the private and public sectors is to be altered . . . the justification is often in terms of the effective extension of a vital modern service to the total national community. Even in the case of such controversial policies as agrarian reform, the argument of the democratic reformer is generally couched in terms of the universalization of practices prevalent and accepted in the extant modern sector, in this case, that of private property, individually owned, and widely distributed.<sup>15</sup>

In the specific context with which we are dealing, we shall take as indicative of the utilization of a conventional strategy any propensity to extend subsidies to "rich" states over "poor" states. Conversely, we shall treat a tendency to extend subsidies to "poor" states over "rich" states as indicative of the presence of reformist development strategy. We shall dichotomize Gross State Product per capita, at the median, in order to operationally distinguish "rich" and "poor" states.

In terms of our theoretical expectations, it should be clear that, notwithstanding the language of Mexican political discourse, the economic policies pursued have recently been quite unrevolutionary. Roger D.

Hansen, for example, concludes his survey of recent economic policy with the following observations:

After 1940 the trends reversed. A development strategy emerged which tightly controlled labor union activity, slowed the pace of agrarian reform, and reduced the relative share of total income of the bottom 60 percent of the Mexican population. How is it that the only Latin American country to have experienced a profound revolution before the 1950's chose to follow an approach to economic development which combined sustained sacrifices at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale with growing rewards at the top?<sup>16</sup>

Hansen's answer to that closing query is not our concern in this study. We do, however, emphasize his description of an economic development policy in the post-1940 era which could by no stretch of the imagination be called revolutionary.

Hence, we reiterate that the only alternative development strategies which could realistically be attributed to Mexican presidents of the 1952-70 era would fall into the range delimited by Anderson in his discussion of conventional and reformist approaches. Therefore, we hypothesize (I) that if ideology varies among presidents it will be manifested in how *subsidios* are distributed among the states and territories on economic grounds such that (a) relatively conservative presidents (Ruíz Cortines and Díaz Ordaz) would follow a conventional strategy of "investing" subsidies in the more well-to-do states, while (b) centrist or leftist presidents (López Mateos) would follow a reformist strategy of allocating subsidies to the poorer states. As a corollary hypothesis we suspect that conservative presidents would be more likely to use economic criteria in distributing monies than would chief executives to their left.

## CRITERIA OF DECISION MAKING: POLITICAL

Theoretically, two types of situations might be conceived in which budgets could be used as a political tool in one-party systems. For each of these abstract situations a separate strategy of political budget-making would correspond. In the first case, the political encounter between a government and its opposition would be symbolically important in terms of prestige or "face." In this situation the model strategy would be one in which the party government disproportionately increases investment in those states or localities where the opposition had relatively high support in recent elections. Interpreting poor electoral performance as evidence that the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) was regionally weak, national party elites would attempt to assist the local party chieftains by giving the state government monies to spend. Let us refer to this strategy as the "rationally-competitive" strategy.

A second situation is that which, given the minimum condition of a legal opposition, approximates the logical opposite of the first situation. If the governmental party does not feel greatly threatened by the opposition, either in terms of votes or in terms of prestige, it may well perceive electoral dissent as merely a matter of regional intra-party housekeeping. Budget makers in this situation might (1) perceive the budget as a tool relevant to the ambitions of local party leadership, and (2) expect that local leaders would wish to avoid budgetary restrictions which might hamper their own upward mobility within the party, or, at least, make present work conditions more difficult. In this perceptually non-competitive situation, the strategy for suppressing electoral dissent is an indirect one. Hence the budget makers would punish local chieftains who have allowed the opposition to make electoral gains, punishment taking the form of withdrawing federal subsidies after the elections. The expectation of receiving federal assistance might stimulate greater local effort to bring out the vote for the PRI in the next election. Let us refer to this as the "intraparty punishment" strategy.

Our next hypothesis in testing the general proposition that ideology influences presidential action is: (II) If political criteria are invoked in allocating federal subsidies, conservative presidents will be more likely to pursue the "intra-party punishment" strategy and center-left presidents the "rationally competitive" strategy. We make this assumption because we assume that center-left presidents will have a more populist orientation toward political strategy than conservative presidents who could be expected to have a kind of "managerial" orientation.

We also expect that political criteria will be used more by left and centrist presidents than by their more conservative counterparts.

The measure of PRI electoral success in this study will be the total percentage of votes going to all opposition candidates in the previous presidential election. Once again the states are divided into high and low opposition states by dichotomizing about the median opposition vote.

## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Data on subsidies for this research come from unpublished records maintained in the Dirección General de Estadística, Secretaría de Industria y Comercio. Examination of that data source indicates that in any given year not all states receive subsidies. From one year to the next subsidies are withdrawn from some states and given to others, while some states practically never receive subsidies. In any given administration there are a maximum of 192 possible subsidies to be given (6 years x 32 states or territories). In the Ruíz Cortines term 115 subsidies were allocated, in the

López Mateos administration 90 were given, and in the Díaz Ordaz regime only 81 were distributed. Hence, although the peso amounts of subsidies have been growing, the number given has decreased. Nevertheless, there are sufficient cases to allow us to test our two hypotheses by examining just how these subsidies were allocated within the administrations under consideration.

Hypothesis I would be validated if rich states received more subsidies than poor states in the Ruíz Cortines and the Díaz Ordaz administrations, while more poor than rich states got subsidies under López Mateos. This hypothesis, of course, assumes the salience of economic matters to those presidents.

Hypothesis II would be validated if, under López Mateos for example, high opposition states received more subsidies than did low opposition states. The converse should obtain in the Ruíz Cortines and Díaz Ordaz administrations. This hypothesis presupposes the salience of electoral stimuli to the presidents.

Obviously, observed differences in frequencies of allocations of subsidies may not be conclusive. Some kind of test is required to determine whether a difference is likely to occur by chance alone. To that end the binomial test is used to determine the probabilities that the frequency distributions could have occurred by pure chance.<sup>17</sup>

# **FINDINGS**

The data in Table 2 confirm both hypotheses. Insofar as the data show clear differences in the directions predicted between the strategies employed by López Mateos on the one hand and Ruíz Cortines and Díaz Ordaz on the other, we see reflections of ideology in budgeting behavior.

Consider first the economic decision making criteria. Ruíz Cortines and Díaz Ordaz, both relatively conservative presidents, more frequently gave subsidies to rich states than to poor states, while López Mateos did the opposite. Note, however, that the likelihood of López Mateos giving more frequently to poor states in the fashion that he did could be attributed to chance 23% of the time. On the other hand the proclivity of Ruíz Cortines and Díaz Ordaz to favor the rich states could be attributed to chance less than 5% of the time. We can pretty safely assert, therefore, that the two more conservative presidents did use the discretionary subsidios to pursue a conventional development strategy, while the more centrist or leftist president's use of subsidios is indeterminate, less clearly conventional but not yet reformist.

When political criteria of decision making are examined, the sec-

ond hypothesis is confirmed. López Mateos overwhelmingly gave subsidies to states wherein the PRI made a relatively poor showing in the previous presidential election. The other two presidents favored the states where the PRI did relatively well. It becomes apparent here that López Mateos seems to have relied heavily on political criteria in deciding where to distribute subsidies. The frequency with which he favored states where the opposition had scored heavily could have occurred by chance only once in a hundred times. The probability that the allocation of subsidies by the more conservative presidents occurred by chance is considerably higher, 19% with Díaz Ordaz and 13% with Ruíz Cortines. Consequently, it appears that López Mateos relied on a political criterion for distributing monies while we cannot infer with much certitude that the two conservative presidents under study here employed a political criterion at all, let alone a different one.

TABLE 2: Frequency Distribution of the Number of States Given Subsidios

Eco	nomic Deci	sion Makir	ıg Criteria	
	State 1	Wealth		
Administration	Rich	Poor	Z	Probability
Ruíz Cortines	67	48	1.67	.0475
López Mateos	41	49	0.73	.2327
Díaz Ordaz	49	32	1.77	.0384
Pol	itical Decis	sion Makin	g Criteria	
	Opposition	n Strength		
Administration	High	Low	Z	Probability
Ruíz Cortines	51	64	1.11	.1335
López Mateos	58	32	2.63	.0043
Díaz Ordaz	36	45	0.88	.1894
Z is corrected for 1 tailed tests wer		,		

While the frequencies with which the subsidies were allocated tend to substantiate our hypotheses, it is worth noting the differences in the salience of economic and political criteria to the various presidents. The conservatives Ruíz Cortines and Díaz Ordaz both appear to respond more strongly to economic criteria while the centrist López Mateos most strongly responds to political criteria. There is a certain intuitive sense to this, as one would expect those pursuing a developmental strategy aimed at strengthening the modern and more industrialized section would take more cognizance of economic matters, while those seeking to be sensitive to the more have-not portions of the society would be more attuned to the political variables.

## CONCLUSION

This brief study attempted to assess whether there was any differential financial behavior reflective of ideological leanings among three recent Mexican presidents. We noted that Wilkie's attempts to do this were plagued by institutional "contamination" of the presidents' efforts and were difficult to interpret as a result of the absence of any measure of significance for the small differences he found. Our effort focused on a spending category that was impervious to institutional constraints and we attempted to determine the significance of the differences we found.

In summary, our data indicate that there were significant differences in the strategies used by the three presidents, differences which were largely congruent with popular ideological characterizations made of the presidents. Ruíz Cortines and Díaz Ordaz appeared to pursue a conventional strategy of economic development through the modern sector, while López Mateos might be interpreted as a more populist figure who responded to apparently political cues to strengthen his party by "investing" money where the political opposition was the strongest. In short, López Mateos exhibited the characteristics of a "political entrepreneur," choosing to invest the political resources at his personal disposal in those areas in which the political market was depressed. Survey results collected by the senior author of this note would suggest that the López Mateos strategy, of which we have examined only a small part, paid off handsomely in public affection, much more so than did the behaviors engaged in by the more conservative presidents. 18

What are the implications of these findings for assessing studies such as Wilkie's? We interpret the fact that rather dramatic differences occurred in presidential subsidy-granting behavior to be supportive of our assertion that his examination of *total* government expenditures may suppress rather than reveal ideological differences among Mexican presidents.

We believe this approach is, indeed, useful if one wants to measure the degree to which individual presidents have succeeded in imposing their priorities on the bureaucratic machinery. However, if that is one's goal, one should remember that there are at least two sources of the variation which will be observed: (a) underlying ideological visions among presidents, and (b) differences in presidential ability to command those resources necessary to overcome bureaucratic resistance. The two phenomena may vary independently. We would suspect in the context of contemporary Mexico that leftist presidents would encounter the greatest bureaucratic resistance; hence, presidents such as Luis Echeverría A. might be expected to wreak less change in the budget than they might desire.

Alternatively, if one truly seeks to characterize ideological preferences of presidents, then we feel that Wilkie's methodology is less appropriate than an examination of those areas where presidents are less constrained by bureaucratic environments. We agree with his implicit premise that one should not judge ideology merely by the proclamation of goals; one should also examine what is done. But we submit that the notion of ideology properly refers to what one believes should be done, rather than to what one has the political skill or the political resources to accomplish. Therefore, a methodology which examines budgetary decisions upon which few external pressures are levied is preferable.

We should conclude by noting that we do not believe that this research implies anything more damning than a modest caveat to Wilkie's pathbreaking research. By and large, he displays a sensitivity to bureaucratic constraints upon the budgetary process in the text of his work. However, when he concludes with the observation that ". . . we have shown that presidential power in Mexico is closely related to the budgetary system which gives the chief executive great flexibility of operation . . "19 we must enter our caveat. Great flexibility of operation, perhaps—unlimited ability to pursue his own preferences, no. Therefore, we submit that the ability to use budgets as a basis for inference about presidential ideology will vary inversely with the number of bureaucratic constraints operative.

### NOTES

- 1. James W. Wilkie, *The Mexican Revolution: Federal Expenditure and Social Change Since 1910*, Second Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).
- 2. Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, "Notes on Quantitative History: Federal Expenditure and Social Change in Mexico Since 1910," *LARR*, 5: 1: 87-91 (Spring 1970). See also Felix G. Boni and Mitchell A. Seligson, "Applying Quantitative Techniques to Quantitative History: Poverty and Federal Expenditures in Mexico," *LARR*, 8: 2: 105-10 (Summer 1973).
- 3. Among recent calls to research one might note: William P. McGreevy, "Recent Materials and Opportunities for Quantitative Research in Latin American History: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," LARR, 9: 2: 73-82 (Summer 1974), and James W. Wilkie, "New

# Latin American Research Review

- Hypotheses for Statistical Research in Recent Mexican History," LARR, 6: 2: 3-17 (Summer 1971). A recent example of the type of research stimulated by Wilkie is Enrique A. Baloyra, "Oil Policies and Budgets in Venezuela, 1938-1968," LARR, 9:2: 23-72 (Summer 1974). Other recent unpublished examples are cited in Note 16 of the Baloyra article.
- See, for example, the literature review by Carolyn and Martin Needleman, entitled "Who Rules Mexico? A Critique of Some Current Views on the Mexican Political Process," Journal of Politics, 31: 4: 1011-34 (November 1969), for a discussion of those schools of scholarship which hold that the Mexican president is severely circumscribed by bureaucratic or political forces beyond his control. See also Note 8 below.
- Op. cit., p. 278.
- This exception is primarily because Wilkie places public debt repayment in the administrative category. Hence, López Mateos, who pushed to pay off prematurely a good number of national debts, found himself spending well above projected figures for debt repayment in almost evesy year of his presidency. *Ibid.*, pp. 115-16.
- *Ibid.* See Table 1-10, p. 26.
- See Note 4. In the context of United States budgetary practice there is ample evidence of institutional and technical constraints that reduce the latitude of the chief executive in working his will with the budget. Mandated and near mandated expenditures, for example, constituted about 75% of the fiscal year 1974 budget in the U.S. See U.S. Congress, House, Joint Study Committee on Budget Control, Improving Congressional Control Over Budgetary Outlay and Receipt Totals, 93rd Congress, 1st Session, House Report No. 93-13 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), p. 22; John R. Gist, The Effect of Budget Controllability on the Theory of Incrementalism (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, 26 April 1974); John Wanat, "Bases of Budgetary Incrementalism," American Political Science Review, 68: 3: 1221-28 (September 1974); Murray Weidenbaum, "On the Effectiveness of Congressional Control of the Public Purse," National Tax Journal, (December 1965).
- Ibid., pp. 35-39.
- 10. Interview by Kenneth M. Coleman with a bureau chief in Ministry of Hacienda, 27-28 June 1973.
- 11. Ibid.
- 12. Charles W. Anderson, Politics and Economic Change in Latin America: The Governing of Restless Nations (New York: Van Nostrand, 1967), p. 162.
- 14. Ibid., p. 163.
- 13. *Ibid.*, pp. 162-96. 15. *Ibid.*, pp. 175-76.
- 16. Roger D. Hansen, The Politics of Mexican Development (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), p. 95. Similarly, Morns Singer's discussion of income distribution leads one to the conclusion that Mexico's economic development strategy of the late 1950s and 1960s was far from revolutionary, indeed not even wholly reformist. See his Growth, Equality and the Mexican Experience (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), esp. pp. 184 and 274-75.
- 17. Sidney Siegel, Nonparametric Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences, (New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1956), pp. 36-42.
- 18. In surveys executed by Coleman in Mexico City during 1969, 1971 and 1973, López Mateos emerged as the most favorably evaluated recent president since 1934. On a scale from 1-10, 10 being most favorable, the mean 1973 ratings of recent presidents were: Lázaro Cárdenas, 8.417; Manuel Ávila Camacho, 6.979; Miguel Aleman, 5.900; Adolfo Ruíz Cortines, 7.480; Adolfo López Mateos, 9.157; Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, 6.922; and Luis Echeverría Álvarez, 7.233.
- 19. Wilkie, op cit., p. 284.