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Veto Bargaining and the Legislative Process in Multiparty Presidential Systems

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Perhaps the most expansive analysis of the veto prerogative in different settings is that by Alemán and Schwartz (2006), which undertakes the analysis of veto prerogatives in comparative perspective. Presidential veto powers are, in their words, "richer, more varied, and more regionally distinctive than hitherto appreciated" (p. 98). For that reason, they classify the patterns observed in 18 Latin American countries into 4 game forms, with emphasis placed precisely where needed most: on distinguishing consequential details. Their work advances expectations specific to the distinct game forms identified in the article. Of those game forms, several represent contexts where presidents have line-item or item-reduction vetoes, which expand presidential prerogatives by allowing the president to revise versions passed by Congress.¹ This is the case in 15 countries in Latin America: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.² This argument is also central in Tsebelis and Alemán (2005) in which they claim that item vetoes and the possibility to make amendatory observations empower presidents by enabling them to choose the final form of any bill.

Recent work by Indridason (2011), who also places emphasis on the line-item veto, does a fine job of bringing together important issues in legislative politics to assess commonly held expectations regarding vetoes. He advances a model of veto bargaining over public goods and pork barrel spending in the presence of credit-claiming incentives. Indridason's theoretical findings, that is, (a) that the item veto will reduce pork barrel spending and (b) that the gains attained from the reduction of pork may be offset by greater incentives to attach riders to legislative proposals, provide theoretical guidance even as they call for empirical testing.

A related literature has focused on the incidence of vetoes in specific Latin American countries: Uruguay (Buquet, Chasquetti, & Moraes, 1998; Magar & Moraes, 2012), Argentina (Figueroa-Schibber, 2005; Magar, 2001; Mustapic & Ferretti, 1995), Chile (Aristegui, 2010; Bravo & Castillo, 2010; Magar, 2001), and Brazil (Hidalgo, 2010). These works provide a valuable comparative tool and have taught us how the veto prerogative is used in different institutional settings and under which conditions vetoes seem to prosper. On average, presidents produce 4 vetoes per year in Chile, approximately 4.5 vetoes in Uruguay, 13 vetoes per year in Brazil, and 14 in Argentina. A common feature of these studies is their focus on partisan affinities of the President and Congress and levels of significance of laws as explanatory variables. While summarizing their findings is not what this article sets out to do, we note that these studies provide a wealth of hypotheses, some of which are addressed in this article.

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