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Author(s): George Tsebelis
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Decision Making in Political Systems: Veto Players in Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, Multicameralism and Multipartyism

GEORGE TSEBELIS*

The article compares different political systems with respect to one property: their capacity to produce policy change. I define the basic concept of the article, the 'veto player': veto players are individual or collective actors whose agreement (by majority rule for collective actors) is required for a change of the status quo. Two categories of veto players are identified in the article: institutional and partisan. Institutional veto players (president, chambers) exist in presidential systems while partisan veto players (parties) exist at least in parliamentary systems. Westminster systems, dominant party systems and single-party minority governments have only one veto player, while coalitions in parliamentary systems, presidential or federal systems have multiple veto players. The potential for policy change decreases with the number of veto players, the lack of congruence (dissimilarity of policy positions among veto players) and the cohesion (similarity of policy positions among the constituent units of each veto player) of these players. The veto player framework produces results different from existing theories in comparative politics, but congruent with existing empirical studies. In addition, it permits comparisons across different political and party systems. Finally, the veto player framework enables predictions about government instability (in parliamentary systems) or regime instability (in presidential systems); these predictions are supported by available evidence.

There is general agreement in contemporary political science that 'institutions matter'. However, consensus breaks down when analyses focus on the outcomes of specific institutional structures. Several studies exemplify this lack of agreement over what outcomes are produced by which institutions.

With respect to regime type (parliamentarism vs. presidentialism), some researchers argue that presidential systems are more likely than parliamentary systems to experience breakdown and be replaced by an authoritarian regime;[1] others make the opposite argument;[2] while still others argue that there is no relationship whatsoever.[3]

With respect to two-party versus multi-party systems, researchers have argued that two-party systems promote both the moderation of party positions

* Department of Political Science, University of California, Los Angeles. I would like to thank the Hoover Institution for financial support. While writing this article I profited from comments from Jeff Frieden, Geoff Garrett, Miriam Golden, Sada Kawato, Peter Lange, Michael Laver, Terry Moe, Bjorn Eric Rasch, Ron Rogowski, Kaare Strom, Sidney Tarrow and Michael Wallerstein. I also thank Albert Weale and two anonymous referees for their suggestions.

[1] Juan J. Linz, 'The Perils of Presidentialism', *Journal of Democracy*, 1 (1990), 51–69.

[2] Donald L. Horowitz, 'Comparing Democratic Systems', *Journal of Democracy*, 1 (1990), 73–9.

[3] Matthew Soberg Shugart and John M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

and clear choices for the electorate. However, as Lijphart notes, these two characteristics are contradictory. Moderate parties ensure unclear choices because clear choices depend on distinct differences between parties.[4]

With respect to bicameralism, there seems to be general agreement (ranging from Montesquieu, to the founding fathers of the American constitution, to various contemporary analyses)[5] that it creates a system of checks and balances by giving each chamber the power to cancel the other's decisions. However, in countries where bicameralism does not reflect a federal organization of government, some argue that the upper house does not have 'power' but rather 'authority', stemming from its considered opinions and its distance from the political conflicts of the lower chamber.[6] Even when there is agreement that the upper house has power, there are disagreements over the mechanisms that create checks and balances between the two houses. Riker argues that bicameralism does not alter the legislative outcome in only one policy dimension, but that in two dimensions it delays choices until an agreement is reached.[7] However, this argument is both partial and incorrect. It is partial because it is quite unlikely that a bicameral legislature will be deciding in one dimension. It is incorrect because, as we shall see, bicameralism permits any number of outcomes (the 'winset' of the status quo). Levmore argues that 'the best explanation of bicameralism' is that it selects 'a strong Condorcet winner'[8] if one exists. However, the probability that a strong Condorcet winner exists in more than two dimensions is zero.

As the above arguments suggest, institutional debates are conducted in pairs: presidentialism is compared to parliamentarism, bicameralism to unicameralism, and two-party systems to multi-party systems. For example, some argue that presidentialism has advantages over parliamentarism because it secures the accountability of elected officials to citizens, the identifiability of likely winners, mutual checks of legislature and executive, and an arbiter.[9] On the other hand,

[4] Arend Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-one Countries* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984).

[5] See William H. Riker, 'The Justification of Bicameralism', *International Political Science Review*, 13 (1992), 101–16, and 'The Merits of Bicameralism', *International Review of Law and Economics*, 12 (1992), 166–8; Thomas H. Hammond and Gary J. Miller, 'The Core of the Constitution', *American Political Science Review*, 81 (1987), 1155–74; Philip P. Frickey, 'Constitutional Structure, Public Choice, and Public Law', *International Review of Law and Economics*, 12 (1992), 163–5; and Saul Levmore, 'Bicameralism: When Are Two Decisions Better than One?', *International Review of Law and Economics*, 12 (1992), 145–62.

[6] Jean Mastias and Jean Grangé, *Les Secondes Chambres du parlement en Europe occidentale* (Paris: Economica, 1987). For a discussion of the 'authority' approach to bicameralism as well as for an approach where the influence of the Senate is attributed to institutional factors, see Jeannette Money and George Tsebelis, 'Cicero's Puzzle: Upper House Power in Comparative Perspective', *International Political Science Review*, 13 (1992), 25–43.

[7] Riker, 'The Justification of Bicameralism', and The Merits of Bicameralism'.

[8] Strong Condorcet winner is an alternative that wins against all others in both chambers. See Levmore, 'Bicameralism'.

[9] Shugart and Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies*, p. 44.

presidentialism suffers from such negative factors as temporal rigidities, majoritarian tendencies and dual democratic legitimacies.[10] Arguments over bicameralism closely parallel the arguments on presidentialism by focusing on checks and balances versus dual democratic legitimacies. Finally, two-party systems are thought to provide moderation of parties, stable executives, clear choices and responsible majorities. But Lijphart systematically rebuts each one of these points;[11] and Huber and Powell actually find smaller distances between the median voter and the government median in multi-party systems than in two-party systems.[12]

On the empirical side, analysts often compare countries which differ along a cluster of characteristics. For example, Anglo-Saxon authors frequently compare the United Kingdom with the United States. But the differences between these two countries are numerous: presidential vs. parliamentary systems, bicameralism vs. (*de facto*) unicameralism, undisciplined vs. disciplined parties, appointed vs. independent bureaucracies, and the presence vs. the absence of a strong supreme court.[13] Without a theoretical model, it is difficult to sort out which of these differences are causally prior to others. Alternatively, with a small number of like cases, any particular outcome will be overdetermined by the relevant variables. For example, Linz attributes the breakdown of democracy in Chile to the country's presidential system,[14] whereas Horowitz argues it was due to the plurality electoral system in use in presidential elections there.[15] This problem can be corrected by increasing the sample size to include a large number of countries,[16] or preferably the universe of relevant countries.[17]

From this short and incomplete account of extensive literatures, I want to

[10] Shugart and Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies*, p. 29.

[11] Lijphart, *Democracies*.

[12] John D. Huber and G. Bingham Powell, 'Congruence between Citizens and Policymakers in two Visions of Liberal Democracy', *World Politics*, forthcoming.

[13] The most famous authors that used this approach are Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867); and Woodrow Wilson, *Congressional Government* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973 (first edn, 1885)). For a recent article using the United Kingdom and the United States as representatives of parliamentary and presidential systems, see Terry M. Moe and Michael Caldwell, 'The Institutional Foundations of Democratic Government: A Comparison of Presidential and Parliamentary Systems', *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics*, 150 (1994), 171–95.

[14] Linz, 'The Perils of Presidentialism'.

[15] Horowitz, 'Comparing Democratic Systems'.

[16] See Lijphart, *Democracies*; G. Bingham Powell, *Contemporary Democracies: Participation, Stability and Violence* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); Kaare Strom, *Minority Government and Majority Rule* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Shugart and Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies*.

[17] For examples of bias introduced by case selection on the dependent variable, see Barbara Geddes, 'How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics', *Political Analysis*, 2 (1990), 131–49. However, even the increase of sample size does not correct for a bias due to the selection of existing cases from a population of possible cases with different characteristics (see Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, 'Selection, Counterfactual and Comparisons' (mimeo, University of Chicago); and for an empirical example along these lines

highlight one point. Recurrent themes in all the theoretical debates include the responsibility of elected representatives, the identifiability of decision makers, and single or dual legitimacies. However, these themes are used exclusively to examine different variables as dichotomous pairs (regime types, legislature types, party systems); they are not used to assess the effects of combinations and hybrids, such as comparing a unicameral presidential multi-party system with a bicameral parliamentary two-party system.

This article does not replicate the pairwise structure of these ongoing debates separating regime type (parliamentarism vs. presidentialism), legislature type (unicameral vs. bicameral) and party system (two-party vs. multi-party). In fact, I show that it may be misleading to examine these factors in isolation. I will argue that the logic of decision making in presidential systems is quite similar to the logic of decision making in multi-party parliamentary systems. Similarly, bicameralism and presidentialism share common characteristics of decision making. In addition, I do not aim to discuss the pros and cons of each of the institutional alternatives found in the title. Instead, I compare all of these institutions with respect to *one* important variable: the capacity for policy change. My goal is to provide a consistent framework for comparisons across regimes, legislatures and party systems.

One important contribution of such an approach is that by permitting a simple and conceptually consistent method of making comparisons across systems, it helps to resolve a pervasive problem of comparative politics: small sample size. If comparisons are permitted only across countries with the same regime type – for example, presidential systems – then the sample size is essentially reduced to the Latin American countries. However, these countries also share a host of other characteristics (economic development, party systems, party discipline, administrative structures, etc.), creating a serious problem of multicollinearity. One way of resolving this problem is to expand the sample size by including countries that differ along some of these variables. However, such an expansion requires a theory of comparison *across* regime types (as well as across party systems and legislature types), which is the purpose of this article.

Another purpose, and perhaps the major contribution of this approach, is to help generate hypotheses in several other areas, such as the importance and independence of judiciaries, the independence of bureaucracies, government stability (in parliamentary systems) and regime stability (in presidential systems). Preliminary evidence in favour of the expectations of this model will be presented in the third part of this article.

The dependent variable of my study is the *potential* for policy change in different institutional settings. I will call the absence of such potential *policy*

(F'note continued)
see George Tsebelis, 'The Power of the European Parliament as a Conditional Agenda Setter', in D. Ruloff and G. Schneider, eds, *Towards a New Europe: Stops and Starts in European Integration* (New York: Praeger, forthcoming).

stability. To paraphrase V. O. Key, a potential for policy change does not guarantee such change, but the absence of this potential precludes it.[18] Policy stability is different from both government stability and regime stability. In fact, as I argue in the last part of this article, they are inversely related: policy stability causes government or regime instability. This analysis is based on the concept of the veto player in different institutional settings. A veto player is an individual or collective actor whose agreement is required for a policy decision. I demonstrate that policy stability increases with (i) the number of veto players, (ii) their incongruence (the difference in their political positions) and (iii) the internal cohesion of each one of them.

The article is organized into three sections. Section I discusses the dependent variable (policy stability) and how it can be operationalized using the concept of 'winset', a concept taken from collective choice theory. Section II discusses the three independent variables that explain policy stability and relates them to easily observable characteristics like regime types, the number of parties in government, the number of chambers, party cohesion and other important political variables like electoral systems. Section III discusses the model's predictions and compares it with other middle-range theories in comparative politics as well as some available empirical evidence.

I. POLICY STABILITY AND ITS PROXY

Several studies correlate specific institutions with particular (mainly economic) outcomes. Starting with Bagehot, presidential regimes, with the diffusion of responsibility they entail, have been associated with high deficits.[19] Both Katzenstein and Rogowski argue that proportional representation is correlated with, or is conducive to, trade openness and economic growth.[20] Alternatively, Grilli *et al.* associate proportional representation with high debt and inflation, and presidential systems with more responsible fiscal policies.[21] Tiebout and, more recently, Weingast associate federalism with high levels of growth because it induces competition among constituent units.[22]

Political scientists are often interested in the decisiveness of a political system, in other words, its capacity to solve problems when they arise. For

[18] V. O. Key Jr, *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups*, 5th edn (New York: Crowell, 1964), p. 688.

[19] Bagehot, *The English Constitution*.

[20] Peter J. Katzenstein, *Small States in World Markets: Industrial Policy in Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); and Ronald Rogowski, 'Trade and the Variety of Democratic Institutions', *International Organization*, 41 (1987), 203–23.

[21] Vittorio Grilli, Donato Masciandaro and Guido Tabellini, 'Political and Monetary Institutions and Public Financial Policies in the Industrial Countries', *Economic Policy*, 13 (1991), 341–92.

[22] Charles Tiebout, 'A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures', *Journal of Political Economy*, 64 (1956), 416–24; and Barry Weingast, 'Federalism and the Political Commitment to Sustain Markets' (mimeo, Hoover Institution, 1993).

example, in a thoughtful analysis of the effects of political institutions, Weaver and Rockman distinguish:

> ten different capabilities that all governments need: to *set and maintain priorities* among the many conflicting demands made upon them so that they are not overwhelmed and bankrupted; to *target resources* where they are most effective; to *innovate* when old policies have failed; to *coordinate conflicting objectives* into a coherent whole; to be able to *impose* losses on powerful groups; to *represent diffuse, unorganized interests* in addition to concentrated, well-organized ones; to *ensure effective implementation* of government policies once they have been decided upon; to *ensure policy stability* so that policies have time to work; to *make and maintain international commitments* in the realms of trade and national defense to ensure their long-term well-being; and, above all, to *manage political cleavages* to ensure that society does not degenerate into civil war.[23]

While Weaver and Rockman are interested in the capabilities of governments, a great volume of economic literature is concerned with the credible commitment of the government *not* to interfere with the economy (starting with Kydland and Prescott).[24] Weingast pushes the argument one step further and attempts to design institutions that would produce such a credible commitment. His suggestion is that 'market preserving federalism' combines checks and balances that prevent government interference in the economy, with economic competition among units to assure growth.[25]

In all these very diverse bodies of literature the flexibility or the stability of policy is considered an important variable. Some scholars consider flexibility a desirable feature (in order to resolve problems faster), whereas others point out that frequent interventions may worsen the situation. I take a more agnostic position with respect to policy stability. It seems reasonable to assume that those who dislike the status quo will prefer a political system with the capacity to make changes quickly, while advocates of the status quo will prefer a system that produces policy stability. Even if majorities are large (in which case the argument can be made that outcomes should conform to the will of these majorities), it may still be the case that institutional structures will respond at a faster or slower pace than desired. It is not clear to me that a consensus exists (or is even possible) over whether a faster or slower pace of institutional response is desirable. Decisiveness in changing the status quo is good when the status quo is undesirable (whether it is because a small minority controls the government as in the French *ancien régime* or in South Africa recently), or when an exogenous shock disturbs a desirable process. Commitment to non-interference may be preferable when the status quo is desirable (as when civil rights are established), or if an exogenous shock is beneficial (like an increase

[23] R. Kent Weaver and Bert Rockman, *Do Institutions Matter? Goverment Capabilities in the US and Abroad* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1993), p. 6.

[24] Finn E. Kydland and Edward C. Prescott, 'Rules Rather than Discretion: The Inconsistency of Optimal Plans', *Journal of Political Economy*, 85 (1977), 473–91.

[25] Barry Weingast, 'Economic Role of Political Institutions' (mimeo, Hoover Institution, 1993).

in the oil price in an oil-producing economy). Finally, decisiveness is required when the default solution is not the previous status quo, but some other detrimental default solution. In the rest of the article I shall speak about the status quo, but the more general term 'default solution' is more appropriate. Let me now turn to the concepts I shall use in the remainder of the article.

Figure 1 is intended to familiarize the reader with the concepts I use in the rest of this analysis. Imagine a unicameral legislature making decisions over issues in two dimensions with three legislators (or three parties), none of whom has an absolute majority. Imagine further that these three legislators are deciding the size of the defence and social security budgets. Each legislator has an 'ideal point' in the policy space, that is, a most preferred combination of budget sizes. In addition, each legislator is indifferent among budgets that are an equal distance from his ideal point, in other words, each has a circular indifference curve.[26] In this case, if the legislature decides by a majority of its members, and if its members are not on the same straight line, no matter where the status quo is located, it can be defeated. Indeed, the three shaded petals in Figure 1 are composed of all points that can defeat the status quo. I will call this shaded area the *winset of the status quo.*

I use the size of the winset of the status quo as a proxy for stability. There are several reasons for this. First, the more points (i.e. policy proposals) that can defeat the status quo, the more susceptible to change is the status quo. Secondly, the bigger the winset of the status quo is, the more likely it is that some subset of it will satisfy some external constraints. Thirdly, if there are transaction costs in changing the status quo, then players will not undertake a change that leads to a policy which is only slightly different, which means that the status quo will remain. Fourthly, even without transaction costs, if players undertake a change, a small winset of the status quo means that the change will be incremental. In other words, a small winset of the status quo precludes major policy changes. Each of these reasons is sufficient to justify the use of the size of the winset of the status quo as a proxy for policy stability. Consequently, I now turn to the variables that affect the size of the winset of the status quo.

Consider decision making that is delegated to one individual player (a dictator, a charismatic leader in a one-party system, or the leader of a disciplined party). By definition, the policies selected by this person will reflect his ideal point. For this reason, the status quo will follow the positions of this player, as long as he remains the decision maker. If his preferred policy shifts from one point to another, the status quo will follow; and if he is replaced by another decision maker, the status quo will move to her ideal point.

If instead of a single decision maker there were two, they would prefer any point inside the intersection of their indifference curves over the status quo. For

[26] A more realistic representation would have the legislator care whether a budget is above or below his own point, as well as about other factors. While such complications would affect the simplicity of the presentation of the argument they would not affect its logic. I will proceed with the simplest expositional convention of 'Euclidean preferences', that is, circular indifference curves.

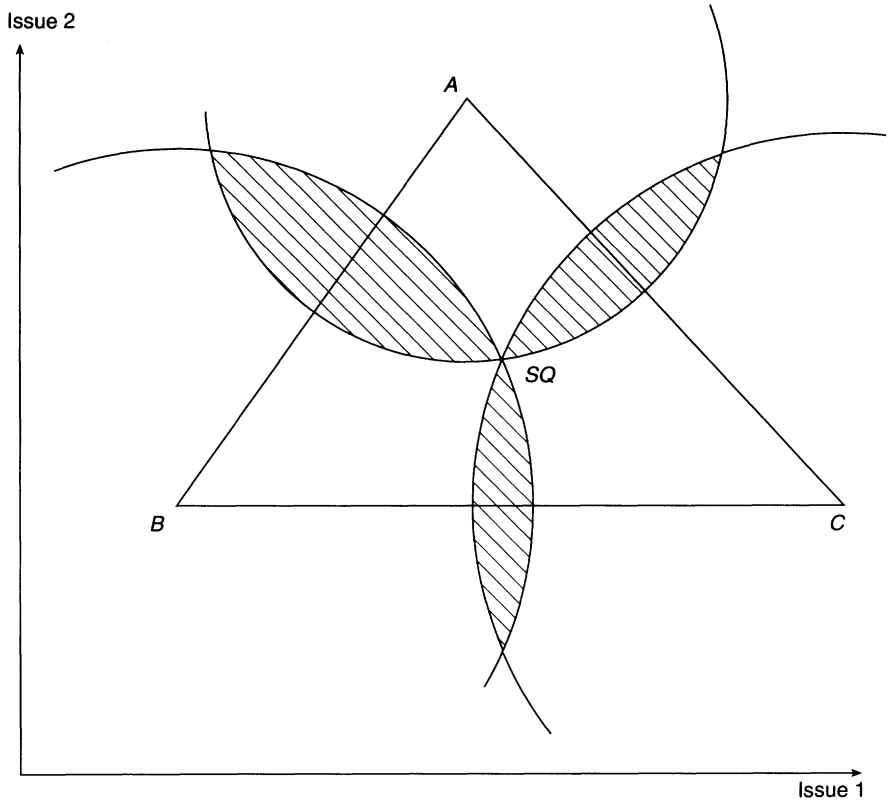

Fig. 1. Winset of status quo with three players in two dimensions

example, in Figure 1 players A and C would prefer anything inside the shaded area that represents the intersection of their indifference curves. Note that this area is a subset of the circle around A, that is, that the introduction of a second player restricts the area of feasible outcomes.

Let us increase the number of requirements now, and assume that the unanimous agreement of three individual players is required for a change of the status quo. Consider the players A, B and C in Figure 2 and the status quo SQ. As long as the players remain in the same positions, the status quo cannot be changed (since any change will be opposed by at least one of the players). Consider now that player A changes his position from A_1 to A_2. In this case, the status quo remains unchanged because players B and C are not willing to move anywhere outside the area of WBC, and player A_2 would not like to move inside this area. Despite the change of policy positions by player A, there is no change in policy. On the other hand, if player A is replaced by player D, then changes in policy become possible. Indeed, any point inside $WBCD$ can defeat the status quo and be selected by all three players.

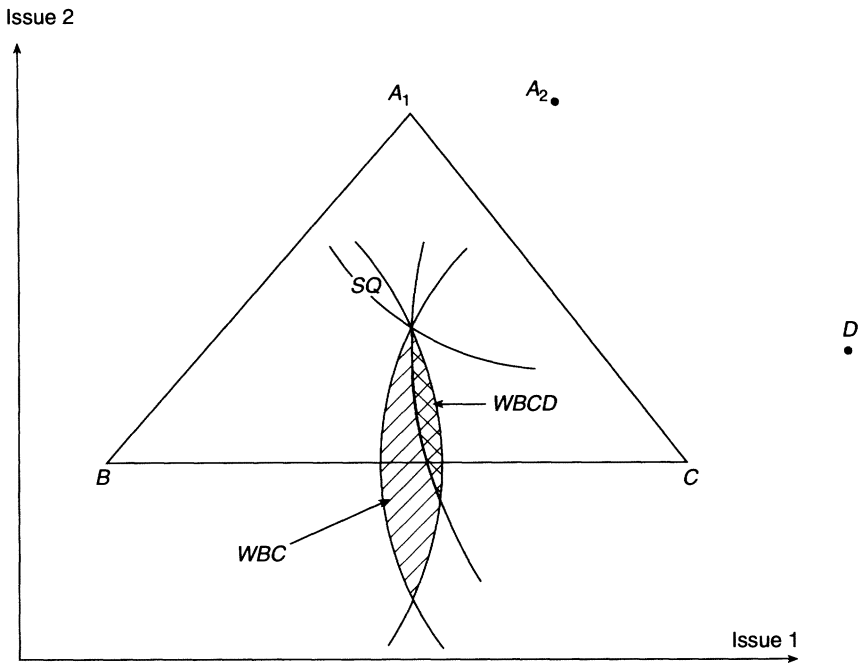

Fig. 2. Change of status quo with three individual decision makers

Some of these results depend on the number of policy dimensions considered. For presentational purposes I use a two-dimensional space. For example, in Figure 2 we found that a movement of player A from A_1 to A_2 did not have any effect on the status quo. This result would not have been the same in more than two dimensions. However, there is one important conclusion that holds true regardless of the number of dimensions. I present this as a proposition to be used throughout the remainder of the article.

> *PROPOSITION 1:* As the number of players who are required to agree for a movement of the status quo increases, the winset of the status quo does not increase (i.e., policy stability does not decrease).

The argument behind Proposition 1 is simple: the winset of the status quo of $n + 1$ players is a subset of the winset of the status quo of n players. For this reason, adding one or more veto players will never increase the size of the winset of the status quo.

Consider now two individual players having to agree on a movement of the status quo SQ, as in Figure 3. If player B is close to player A (position B_1 in the figure), the winset of the status quo is WAB_1. If, however, player B is further

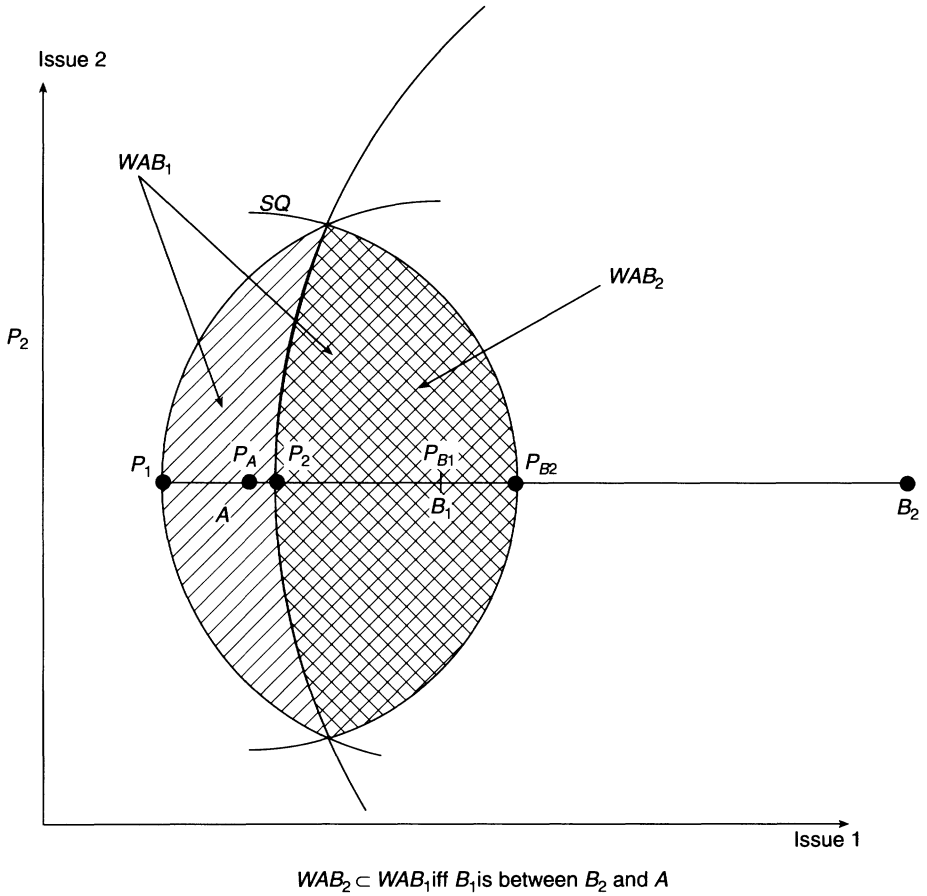

Fig. 3. Change of status quo as a function of the distance of individual decision makers

away from A on the same line the size of the winset of the status quo is reduced. As we can see, WAB_2 is a subset of WAB_1. We know this to be true because the side B_2SQ of the triangle B_1B_2SQ is smaller than the sum of the other two sides, and consequently, the distance B_2P_2 is smaller than the distance B_2P_1. This is another general property which I shall single out for subsequent use.

> *PROPOSITION 2:* As the distance of players who are required to agree for a movement of the status quo increases along the same line, the winset of the status quo does not increase (i.e., policy stability increases).

In the previous examples, players were considered single individuals (or some other entity that could reasonably be assimilated to an individual). What happens if players are collections of individuals without identical positions? I now turn to this point. I will assume collective players are composed of individuals with

circular indifference curves who decide by simple majority rule. This discussion will permit us to transpose the findings of the previous discussion to more realistic situations with collective, rather than individual players.

Social choice theory has demonstrated that within every collective actor there is a centrally located sphere which is called the 'yolk'.[27] The size r of the radius of the yolk is usually very small, and on the average it decreases with the number of individual voters with distinct positions.[28] If one calls C the centre of the yolk of a collective actor and d the distance of the status quo (SQ) from C, the winset of SQ for this actor is included in a sphere of centre C and radius $d + 2r$. This is an important social choice finding for our purposes because it permits us to replace the individual players in the previous figures with collective players.

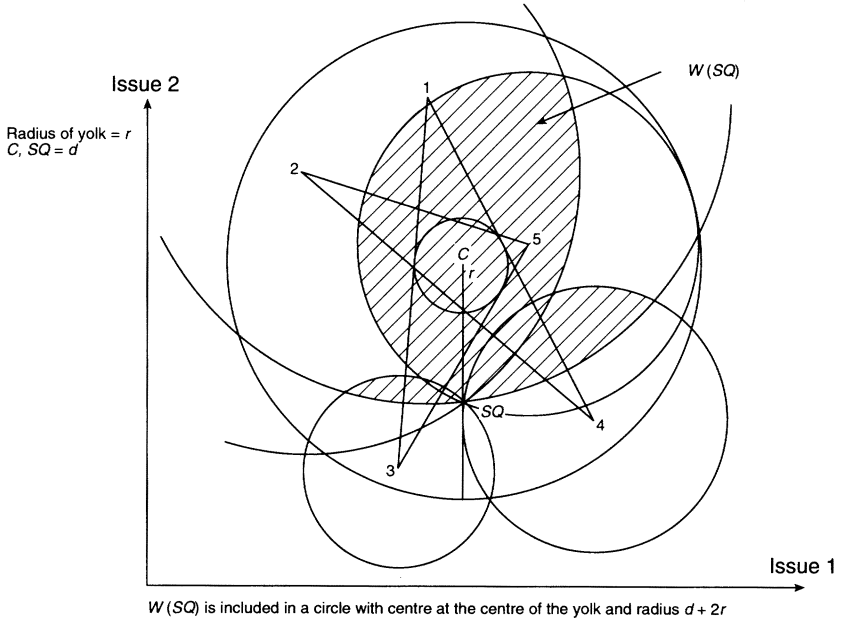

Fig. 4. Yolk and winset of SQ *of a collective decision maker*

[27] The yolk is defined as the smallest sphere that intersects all median hyperplanes. Hyperplanes are planes in more than two dimensions. A median hyperplane is a hyperplane that divides the individual voters into three groups so that those voters on the hyperplane or on one side of it can form a majority, as can those on it or on the other side of it. For a more complete discussion, see John A. Ferejohn, Richard D. McKelvey and Edward W. Packell, 'Limiting Distributions for Continuous State Markov Voting Models', *Social Choice and Welfare*, 1 (1984), 45–67. For a non-technical discussion of the yolk and the calculation of winsets, see Nicholas R. Miller, Bernard Grofman and Scott L. Feld, 'The Geometry of Majority Rule', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 4 (1989), 379–406.

[28] D. H. Koehler, 'The Size of the Yolk: Computations for Odd and Even-Numbered Committees', *Social Choice and Welfare*, 7 (1990), 231–45.

Figure 4 provides a visual representation of the argument. Five individual players form a collective actor whose agreement by majority rule is required for a change in the status quo. The figure indicates the yolk (centre C and radius r) of this collective actor, and the winset of the status quo. It is easy to verify that the winset of the status quo is included in the circle with centre equal to the centre of the yolk and radius $d + 2r$, where d is the distance between the status quo and the centre C of the yolk.

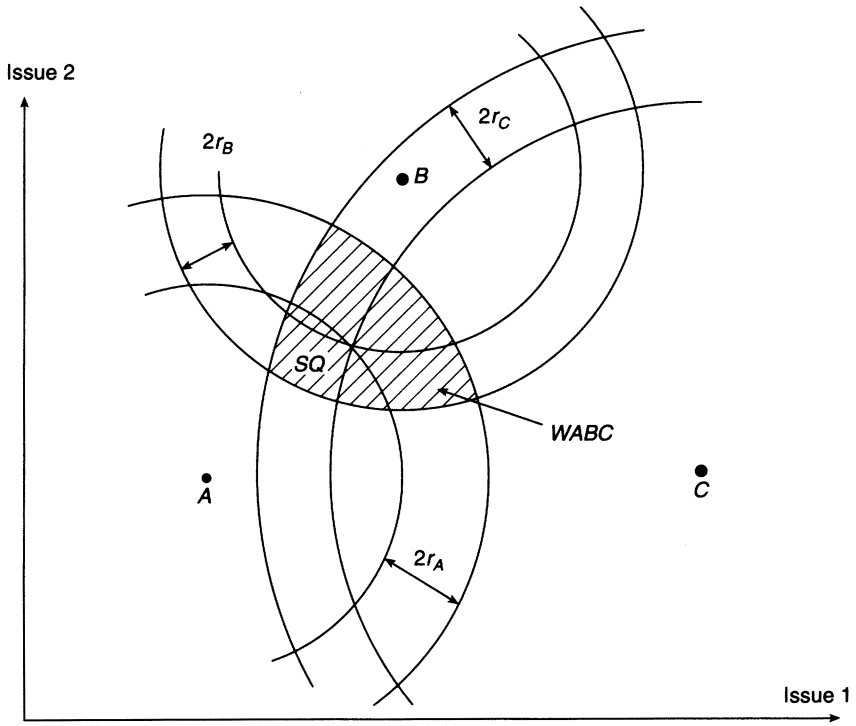

Fig. 5. Differences between individual and collective decision makers for the change of the status quo; agreement of three players required for decision

Figure 5 uses the argument presented in Figure 4 to replace the individual players with collective players. One can think of Figure 5 as the extension of Figure 2 for the case of collective, rather than individual players. I call r_A, r_B, and r_C the radii of the yolks of the collective players A, B and C respectively. In this case, the winset of the status quo includes points that are at greater distance from the centres of the yolks of the collective players than the status quo itself. I have drawn the corresponding circles in Figure 5, and the set

of points that can defeat the status quo is included inside *WABC*.[29] The next proposition follows straightforwardly.

> *PROPOSITION 3:* As the size of the yolk of collective players who are required to agree for a movement of the status quo increases, the area that includes the winset of the status quo increases (i.e., policy stability decreases).

It is easy to see that individual players are merely a special case of collective players with yolk radius equal to zero. However, as we will see below, there are also collective players with a yolk size equal to zero who can be assimilated to individual players for our purposes.

To recapitulate, the size of the winset is a proxy for the policy stability of a political system. Propositions 1, 2 and 3 give the size of the winset as a function of different variables that we will consider subsequently.

II. THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES: VETO PLAYERS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

In this section I define the fundamental concept for understanding the logic of different institutional settings: the veto player. I use Propositions 1, 2 and 3 to demonstrate that the policy stability of a political system depends on three characteristics of its veto players: their number, their congruence (the difference in their political positions) and their cohesion (the similarity of policy positions of the constituent units of each veto player). While I use the number of veto players, their congruence and cohesion as *independent* variables, I discuss the connections that have been made in the literature between these variables and other institutional factors, mainly the electoral system.

A *veto player* is an individual or collective actor whose agreement (by majority rule for collective actors) is required for a change in policy. The veto player concept stems from the idea of 'checks and balances' in the American Constitution and the classic constitutional texts of the eighteenth century and later, and is repeated implicitly or explicitly in contemporary studies.[30] For example, Montesquieu defends the need for bicameralism by arguing:

> In a state there are always some people who are distinguished by birth, wealth or honours, but if they were mixed among the people and if they had only one voice like the others, the common liberty would be their enslavement and they would have no interest in defending it, because most of the resolutions would be against them.

[29] In fact, one can locate the winset of the status quo in a smaller area, but while such an increase in precision would greatly complicate the exposition it would not alter the results reported here. For such an example, see George Tsebelis, 'The Core, the Uncovered Set and Conference Committees in Bicameral Legislatures' (paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 1993).

[30] See Lijphart, *Democracies*; Riker, 'The Merits of Bicameralism'; and Weaver and Rockman, *Do Institutions Matter?*

Therefore, the part they have in legislation should be in proportion to the other advantages they have in the state, which will happen if they form a body that has the right to *check the enterprises of the people, as the people have the right to check theirs*.[31]

Similarly, Madison, in *Federalist* No. 51, defends the separation of powers in the following way: 'contriving the interior structure of the government as that its *several constituent parts may, by their mutual relations, be the means of keeping each other in their proper places*'.[32] These texts both discuss veto players specified by the Constitution. I shall call these institutional veto players.

There is, however, another category of veto players that exists in multi-party parliamentary systems, and possibly in presidential systems as well: the parties that are members of a government coalition. I will call these coalition members *partisan veto players*.

To simplify matters, I assume that a government proposal has to be approved by a majority of the relevant actors within each party of the government coalition.[33] This is only a first approximation. It assumes that there is no difference between the approval of a policy by the majorities in the upper and lower chambers of a bicameral system (institutional veto players), and the approval of a policy by the majorities of the two partners of a government coalition (partisan veto players). Of course, there is one important difference between institutional and partisan veto players: according to the constitution, the agreement of institutional veto players is a necessary and sufficient condition for policy change, while the agreement of partisan veto players is, *strictly speaking*, neither necessary nor sufficient.

Agreement of partisan veto players is not sufficient for policy change because a proposal which is approved by all partners in a government coalition may be defeated in parliament, in which case no law is adopted. This is a case of a non-enforceable coalition agreement. The parties participating in government lack the resources to prevent their own MPs from defecting on parliamentary votes. Examples of such cases include the French Fourth Republic and post-war Italy. It is ironic that what General de Gaulle sneeringly referred to as the '*régime des partis*' was suffering precisely from the opposite: a lack of parties. The differences were not over policies, but over personalities and the distribution of government portfolios. Similarly, in Italy, *franchi tiratori* were taking advantage of the system of secret ballots to embarrass the government with defeats

[31] Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, A. M. Cohler, B. C. Miller, and H. S. Stone, trans. and eds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), part 2, bk. 11, chap. 6 (emphasis added).

[32] Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and James Madison, *The Federalist* (any edition: emphasis added).

[33] Here is how Maor reports the position of a leader of the liberal party, member of the government coalition in Denmark: 'We could stop everything we did not like. That is a problem with a coalition government between two parties of very different principles. If you cannot reach a compromise, then such a government has to stay away from legislation in such areas.' See Moshe Maor, 'Intra-Party Conflict and Coalitional Behavior in Denmark and Norway: The Case of "Highly Institutionalized" Parties', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 15 (1992), 99–116.

in Parliament.[34] In both of these cases, the stability of policy making increases because the government is unable to modify the legislation that it intends to abolish. Below we see how we can take into account such increased stability inside the framework of veto players.

Agreement of partisan veto players is not necessary for policy change because coalition partners may be bypassed or played off against each other. There are two situations in which this can occur: minority governments, and oversized majority governments.

Minority governments may have their proposals approved by Parliament. Strom has analysed minority governments and finds that they are common in multi-party systems (around one-third of the governments in his sample).[35] Moreover, most of them (79 out of 125) are single-party governments which resemble single-party majority governments. Further, Laver and Schofield have argued that there is a difference between a governmental and a legislative majority, and that the party forming the minority government is usually located centrally in space. For this reason, it can lean slightly towards one or another possible partner in order to have its policies approved by parliament.[36] Consequently, from a policy-making point of view, a single-party minority government, as long as it stays in power, resembles a single-party majority government. There are two reasons for this. First, when the minority party occupies a centrally located area in space (technically speaking, the core), it needs no formal allies, as Laver and Schofield, Strom and many others have indicated.[37] Secondly, regardless of the location of the party in government, several constitutions provide ruling governments with a series of agenda-setting powers, such as the giving of priority to government bills, the possibility of closed or restricted rules, the practice of counting abstentions in favour of government bills, the possibility of introducing amendments at any point of the debate (including before the final vote), and others. The most frequent and serious of all these agenda-setting measures is the threat of government resignation followed by the dissolution of parliament. This measure exists in all parliamentary systems with the exception of Norway.[38]

Oversized majority governments are almost as common as minority governments in Western Europe. Laver and Schofield calculate that 4 per cent of the time (of the 218 governments they examine), a party which forms a majority alone will ask another party to join the government; and 21 per cent

[34] The government introduced open votes in 1988 and did away with the problem.

[35] Strom, *Minority Government and Majority Rule*, p. 61.

[36] Michael J. Laver and Norman Schofield, *Multiparty Government: The Politics of Coalition in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[37] Laver and Schofield, *Multiparty Government*; and Strom, *Minority Government and Majority Rule*. This idea originated with Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).

[38] For a systematic discussion of positional and institutional advantages of governments in parliamentary democracies, see George Tsebelis, 'Veto Players and Law Production in Parliamentary Democracies' in Herber Doering, ed. *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe* (New York: St Martin's Press, forthcoming).

of the time, while there is no majority party, the coalition formed contains one or more parties more than necessary.[39] In these cases, some of the coalition partners can be disregarded, and policies will still be passed by a majority in parliament. Such a situation occurs frequently in Italy, where five parties participated in the governments of the 1980s. The Christian Democrats and the Socialists together had a majority of seats, making the other three partners numerically unnecessary. However, ignoring coalition partners, while numerically possible, imposes political costs. If the disagreement is serious the small partner can resign, and the government formation process must begin over again. Simple arithmetic disregards the fact that there are political factors which necessitate oversized coalitions. Regardless of what these reasons might be, for the coalition to remain intact, the will of the different partners must be respected. For this reason, each partner in the coalition is a veto player. Consequently, while the arithmetic of the legislative process may be different from the arithmetic of government, a departure from the status quo must usually be approved by the government before it is introduced to parliament and, at that stage, the participants in a government coalition are veto players.

In general, either constitutionally, or through the coalition bargaining process, the government is given extraordinary agenda-setting powers. An example of the former is the extraordinary legal arsenal of which the French government disposes (particularly Article 49.3 of the Constitution) allowing it to avoid amendments and even final votes on the floor of Parliament.[40] An example of the latter is the following statement from the Norwegian Prime Minister Kare Willoch regarding his coalition government: 'I wanted their leading personalities in the government. It was my demand that their party leaders should be in government because I did not want to strengthen the other centres which would be in parliament. That was my absolute condition for having three parties in government'.[41]

The outcome of all these agenda-setting procedures is that in more than 50 per cent of all countries, governments introduce more than 90 per cent of the bills. Moreover, the probability of success for these bills is very high: over 60 per cent pass with probability greater than 0.9, and over 85 per cent pass with probability greater than 0.8.[42]

In sum, one can say that whereas the number of institutional veto players is specified by the Constitution, the number of partisan veto players is specified

[39] Laver and Schofield, *Multiparty Government*, p. 70.

[40] See John D. Huber, 'Restrictive Legislative Procedures in France and the US', *American Political Science Review*, 86 (1992), 675–87; and George Tsebelis, *Nested Games* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), chap. 7.

[41] Quoted in Maor, 'Intra-Party Conflict and Coalitional Behavior in Denmark and Norway', p. 108.

[42] What these numbers do not specify, however, is how many amendments were made to the bills or, how many times the government may have altered the bill in anticipation of amendments. For data see Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Parliaments of the World*, 2nd edn (Aldershot, Surrey: Gower, 1986), Table 29.

endogenously by the party system and the government coalitions of each specific country. However, both categories of veto players are easily identifiable. In this article I shall restrict my discussion to these two groups of veto players, but I shall also indicate later how the logic of the analysis can include other veto players, and how such players can be identified.

Once institutional and partisan veto players in a system are identified, we can use Propositions 1, 2 and 3 to calculate the size of the winset of the status quo, and therefore the policy stability of that system. The remainder of this section is a discussion of the political aspects of Propositions 1, 2 and 3.

Number of Veto Players

From the definition of veto players, the counting rules are straightforward: a veto player is any player – institutional or partisan – who can block the adoption of a policy. Since, however, this counting rule sometimes results in outcomes that go against received wisdom, I shall be more specific about how to count.

An institutional player will not count as a veto player unless it has formal veto power. With respect to bicameralism, there are countries where the upper chamber has only a delaying veto power.[43] For example, while Britain and Austria are formally bicameral systems, in both systems the lower chamber can ultimately overrule the objections of the upper chamber. Consequently, these two systems must be classified as unicameral legislatures. A complete list of bicameral legislatures and their decision-making rules can be found in the literature, so I will not duplicate the information here.[44] However, some important cases should be mentioned. For example, for counting purposes France is a unicameral legislature. Germany, on the other hand, is a mixed case: only legislation concerning federalism requires the agreement of both chambers. But the number of such laws requiring the agreement of the Bundesrat *Zustimmungsgesetze*, i.e. agreement laws) has increased over time to more than 50 per cent. Consequently, depending on the issue, the number of institutional veto players in Germany is either one or two.

With respect to presidentialism, not all popularly elected presidents have veto powers, and when they do, their veto can almost always be overruled by an appropriate majority in the legislature.[45] I will not discuss the complication of veto override here.[46] The point I want to make is that in several presidential regimes – Venezuela, Haiti and Peru – the president does not have veto powers

[43] Lijphart calls these bicameral legislatures asymmetric. See Lijphart, *Democracies*, pp. 95–100.

[44] Money and Tsebelis, 'Cicero's Puzzle'.

[45] With the exception of the Portuguese Constitution of 1976, which was revised on this and other points in 1982. See Shugart and Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies*, p. 155.

[46] For a discussion of veto override, see Hammond and Miller, 'The Core of the Constitution'. The essence of the argument is that if players House (H), Senate (S), and President (P) have veto powers but P's veto can be overruled, then the final outcome can be not only in the intersection of the winsets of H, S, and P, but also in some part of the intersection of the winsets of H and S which does not belong to the winset of P.

and so does not count as a veto player. In addition, in all the regimes that Duverger labels semi-presidential (with the exception of Portugal), the president does not have veto powers.[47] Consequently, a group of popularly elected presidents, even some of them who are considered 'strong' – like the presidents of France, Finland and the Weimar Republic – along with the weaker popularly elected presidents of Ireland, Iceland and Austria, are not veto players according to my definition.[48] (A complete list of presidential powers in different countries is provided by Shugart and Carey and will not be duplicated here.)[49]

At this point the reader may object that my argument does not produce unambiguous classifications – for instance, Germany is sometimes unicameral and sometimes bicameral in terms of institutional actors – and seems to misclassify countries – for example, France with a strong president and a bicameral legislature is considered a pure parliamentary regime with one institutional veto player. My response to such objections is to plead guilty and claim that it is the constitutional requirements and the logic of policy making within these countries that lead to these results. The traditional classifications of 'strong' or 'weak' presidents are based not only on their legislative roles but also on their non-legislative powers (to appoint or dismiss the government, to ask for referendums, to declare a state of emergency), which are criteria irrelevant to my analysis.

Counting becomes more difficult when applied to partisan veto players. The same parliamentary system is classified as a one veto-player system when it has a minority government, but as a two or three veto-player system when two or three parties are in government. It is not only possible but also frequent that the transition from one government to another occurs without an election. In fact, this is a frequent complaint about parliamentary democracy: it is mediated, and the link between the popular vote and the government coalition is not always clear.

There are two additional questions which need to be addressed with respect to counting: (1) Are institutional and partisan players the only veto players that exist in a system? (2) How do we count in the presence of both institutional and partisan actors?

The answer to the first question is negative. There are several additional categories of veto players in different political systems. For example, one can think of powerful interest groups as veto players, at least in the policy areas of their concern. The army could also be a group of particular importance.[50] Political systems with few veto players may delegate policy making to several

[47] Maurice Duverger, 'A New Political System Model: Semi-Presidential Government', *European Journal of Political Research*, 8 (1980), 165–87.

[48] In fact the president of the Weimar Republic had an indirect or conditional veto: he could submit legislation he did not like to a referendum.

[49] See Shugart and Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies*.

[50] See Barry Ames, *Political Survival in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

additional veto players. For example, in corporatist countries decisions over wages (which carry broad economic consequences) are made by the government, but only in agreement with two additional veto players, representatives of workers and of firms. Conversely, political systems with many veto players may delegate decision making to a few veto players. For example, certain instruments of monetary policy may be delegated to a central bank that will be able to react more quickly and decisively than the political system. In addition, individuals in particularly sensitive positions may operate as *de facto* veto players. For example, the chair of the armed services committee in the US Senate has demonstrated his capacity to block nominations and policies by both President Bush (the Tower nomination) and President Clinton (gays in the military). However, the existence of such veto players is quite idiosyncratic. It varies with the policy area (such as farmers on agriculture), with some specific balance of forces (the strength of the army in some societies), or with the personality of the occupant of a position.

Additional veto players that are more institutionalized include the courts, constitutionally required super majorities, and referendums. Requiring the agreement of the courts for certain legislation is equivalent to adding another chamber to the legislative process. For example, after the victory of the left in France in 1981, the Constitutional Council became the only veto player acting on behalf of the previous majority. Most important government decisions were challenged in front of the Constitutional Council. The fear of constitutional review became so serious that parliamentary majorities included the language of previous court decisions in legislation in an attempt to prevent the court from overruling their decisions.[51]

With the exception of the veto override, constitutionally required super majorities are rare. However, whenever and wherever they exist, they give veto powers to particular coalitions of players and consequently increase the stability of the status quo. Belgium – which, among other things requires two-third majorities in each chamber for constitutional reform – had an incomplete constitution for a long period because of the multiplicity of veto players.[52]

Finally, referendums play an ambiguous role depending on who controls the agenda. If they can be ordered by popular initiative, they are one additional constraint that the usual veto players must anticipate and diffuse (in which case policy stability increases). If they are controlled by one veto player (usually the president), they can be equivalent to a veto override of all other players in the system (much like legislatures overrule presidential vetoes).

Generally speaking, the number of veto players varies by issue. Consider a policy area where the speed of adjustment is of paramount importance, such as monetary policy. A system, like that in the United States, with multiple incongruent and incoherent veto players would be completely inappropriate to

[51] See Alec Stone, *The Birth of Judicial Politics in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[52] Tsebelis, *Nested Games*, chap. 6.

handle adjustments of interest rates. Consequently, the different political actors have agreed to delegate these decisions to *one* independent authority. These independent banks decide by a simple majority of their members rather than giving veto powers to different groups of representatives.[53]

Conversely, a country with a decisive political system, like the one-party governments of Sweden and Norway, may want to increase policy stability by including additional veto players in a particular decision-making process such as wage bargaining. Corporatist structures of interest representation provide veto powers to the different actors involved, so that the final outcome is guaranteed to meet their approval, and thus to be more stable. Luebbert argues that this method of corporatist decision making takes pressure off the political system and places it on interest groups.[54]

Most countries with bicameral legislatures use different procedures for the adoption of financial versus other kinds of bills, giving more power to lower chambers (as well as to the government) in financial matters.[55] Similarly, other important policy-making decisions may incorporate a bias in favour of the status quo: modification of constitutions requires super majorities, laws regarding federalism in Germany require the agreement of both chambers, laws require more scrutiny than executive decrees, etc.

Because the purpose of this article is broadly comparative, from here on I focus only on those actors that I have called institutional and partisan veto players, ignoring other – less frequent – veto players. The assumption is that while the number of veto players may vary by issue or over time, these variations will cancel each other out when applied across several issues for sufficiently long periods of time. However, in case studies one must identify *all* the relevant veto players.

The second question concerning counting rules is how to count in the presence of both institutional and partisan veto players. The answer to this question requires discussion of the second independent variable: the distance between veto players.

Distance Between Veto Players

According to Proposition 2, the size of the winset of the status quo decreases with the distance between veto players. I shall call this distance the congruence of the veto players, in which case congruence increases as the distance decreases. On what do these distances depend? Let me summarize some arguments presented in the literature. First of all, partisan players are distinct

[53] I am focusing here on the internal organization of the Federal Reserve, not on its independence. Several countries have created independent central banks to isolate them from political pressures and assure independence of decisions from pressures of interest groups or the government.

[54] Gregory Luebbert, *Comparative Democracy: Policy Making and Governing Coalitions in Europe and Israel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

[55] Money and Tsebelis, 'Cicero's Puzzle'.

from each other, because parties have, in general, different policy positions. Cases in which nearly identical policy positions are advocated by two different parties are rare.[56] The reason is that in proportional representation, if two parties are similar along a series of dimensions, they will stress the differences that they have along other policy dimensions as a means of winning votes. Consequently, for all practical purposes, different parties should be counted as different veto players.

A major factor that affects the policy congruence of parties is the electoral system. Downs has argued that a two-party system promotes convergence and party moderation.[57] Sartori has expanded this argument by claiming that 'polarization' increases with the number of parties.[58] Recently, Cox has proved that in electoral competition for a single seat, regardless of the electoral system, parties converge to the median voter.[59] However, a necessary assumption for Downs's and Cox's results is that there is no abstention, or that abstentions are not correlated with the policy positions of parties. This assumption makes moves towards the centre of the political spectrum rewarding for political parties, while they suffer no negative consequences from moving away from the strongest ideological elements of their constituency.

Empirical cases that seem counter to these expectations (the elections of Reagan, Thatcher and Mitterrand), along with the lack of realism of the assumption of the absence of policy-related abstentions, have led some researchers to claim that plurality systems are compatible with polarized parties.[60] Moreover, it is possible to find polarization in proportional systems (Allende's Chile, the Weimar Republic, Spain before the civil war, Austria between the wars), so the argument cannot be settled on the basis of the selective use of data (indeed, I am not sure that it can be settled even if all relevant data are collected (see fn. 3)).

While there is a widespread belief that congruence depends on the electoral system, the direction of this relationship is less clear. On the one hand, there are theoretical proofs of convergence in single-member districts (including presidential races), but they are based on highly restrictive assumptions. On the other hand, the empirical evidence is (to say the least) incomplete.

One remaining issue is the distance of institutional veto players, that is, chambers and presidents. This distance can vary from one election to another. Two institutional veto players with different political compositions should be counted as two distinct players. Again, the distance varies as a function of the composition of the chambers. If this composition is identical, the two veto

[56] And, as we shall see below, are restricted to countries with single-member plurality electoral systems.

[57] A. Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), chaps 4 and 8.

[58] Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

[59] Gary W. Cox, 'Electoral Equilibrium under Alternative Voting Institutions', *Journal of Political Science*, 31 (1987), 82–108.

[60] Rogowski, 'Trade and the Variety of Democratic Institutions'.

players are identical and should be counted as only one. I shall call this last statement the *absorption rule* and apply it when counting veto players.

In general, the different chambers represent different 'principals' or 'legitimacies', that is, different parts of the electorate or ways to represent the electorate. Upper chambers historically represented the aristocracy. As the importance of the aristocracy declined, the role of upper chambers in some countries declined (e.g., the United Kingdom), while in others it was modified to represent some other aspect of the electorate (territorial, as in France; professional, as in Ireland). In still other countries (New Zealand, Sweden, Denmark) the second chamber was abolished altogether. Lastly, in some countries the upper chamber developed into an exact duplicate of the lower chamber (Italy, Belgium, Holland). In all of these cases, despite nominal bicameralism, the actual number of institutional veto players is one, whether because the upper chamber is not a veto player, or because it is congruent with the lower chamber, or both (Holland). The only cases where upper chambers continue to have veto powers, despite incongruence with the popularly elected lower chamber, are federal states such as the United States, Germany, and Switzerland.[61] In these cases the legislatures should be counted as two veto players, except for the rare cases where electoral results produce identical majorities in both chambers. These same counting rules can be also applied to presidents.

On the basis of this argument we can specify how to count combinations of institutional and partisan actors. Countries like the United States generally have three institutional veto players. The number of the players will be reduced to two or to one to the extent that an argument can be made that the two houses are congruent (absorption rule), or that all three actors are congruent (for example, during the first hundred days of the New Deal). Similarly, after the 1992 election the three institutional players have been congruent at least on some dimensions, and according to the 'absorption rule' should be counted as one. The preliminary results are that the Clinton administration has eliminated 'deadlock' and is able to move quickly in several legislative areas (e.g., family leave), as well as to issue executive orders without fear of a legislative overrule (e.g., abortion). Consequently, comparisons even of the same issue across different periods of time have to take account of these political changes.

Federal countries like Germany will have two institutional actors, but varying numbers of veto players. For most of the post-war period Germany has had a coalition government that included the small Free Democratic Party (FDP) and either the Christian Democrats (CDU–CSU) or the Social Democrats (SPD). In the periods when both houses are controlled by the government, the number of veto players is two (the two partners of the coalition) with high congruence (the FDP is in the middle between CDU–CSU and SPD), while if the opposition controls the Bundesrat the number of veto players becomes three, and the level of congruence is low.

[61] For examples, see Money and Tsebelis, 'Cicero's Puzzle', Tables 1 and 2.

In Japan, the dominant Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) controlled both chambers of Parliament until July 1989 when it lost its majority in the upper chamber. In order to continue its legislative dominance it created a coalition with two ideologically proximate parties (the Social Democrats and the Clean Government party (KOMEY)). The number of veto players thus increased from one to three congruent players.

In France the number of institutional veto players is one (since neither the president nor the Senate has veto powers), but the number of partisan veto players has shifted from two and congruent (before 1981 and after 1993 when the right was in power), to two incongruent (from 1981 to 1984 when the Communists were part of the government coalition), to one (from 1984 to 1986 with the Socialist majority, and again from 1988 to 1993 with the Socialist minority). The increased policy stability of the incongruent Socialist–Communist coalition was demonstrated by the fact that this coalition could not agree on policy changes; the Socialists had to get rid of the Communists in order to enact an austerity programme.

As a general rule of thumb, partisan actors should be counted as distinct, while institutional actors may be absorbed (that is, eliminated from counting because of congruence). The outcome is that if the two parliamentary groups of all parties (sitting in the upper and lower houses) are identical, the final number of veto players is the number of partisan players required for the government coalition. If the parliamentary groups of the parties are not congruent, the number of veto players is higher than the number of parties in the government coalition.

Size of the Yolk of Veto Players

The third independent variable is the size of the yolk of each veto player. According to Proposition 3, policy stability decreases when the size of the yolk of each veto player increases. The size of the yolk depends on how cohesive a party is: cohesive parties have smaller yolks. A party with small ideological differences will be cohesive because the yolk will necessarily be small. However, the converse is not true. A party with big ideological distances among its members is not necessarily non-cohesive. If the spatial arrangement of MPs is such that they are symmetrically located around the leadership, the size of the yolk will be small. In this case, despite individual differences, the party as a whole will behave in a cohesive and co-ordinated way.

At this point I must distinguish between cohesion and party discipline. Cohesion refers to the difference of positions within a party *before* a discussion and a vote take place inside the party. Party discipline refers to the ability of a party to control the votes of its members inside parliament. Let me elaborate.

Consider one particular bill, or a set of such bills, or even a whole coalition programme. Assuming that the members of each party have different ideal positions on the relevant dimensions, there are three possible ways to proceed in coalition politics. The first is for the party leaders to meet and sign an

agreement without referring back to their parties (or going back for formal ratification); the second is for each party to discuss the issues first, agree on a party platform (an ideal point for the whole party) and then negotiate an agreement with the other parties; the third is for the leaders of the different parties to meet, come to an agreement, and then submit it as a whole to their own parties. In the first two cases, each party (with or without a discussion and a vote) is represented by a unique ideal point, and the radius of the yolk is zero. Thus the policy stability of the system increases. In the third case, however, the outcome of the negotiations will be less restricted.

It is possible that leaders will select the sequence of negotiations that best suits their own ideal positions. For example, centrist leaders (leaders closer than their followers to the ideal positions of the other parties) will prefer the third method of negotiations because it gives them more leeway.[62] Extremist leaders (leaders who are further away than their own party from their coalition partners) will prefer to 'tie their hands' and have a party vote that restricts their freedom of movement. However, such manoeuvring may become complicated when one considers the behaviour of the other players as well. For example, even centrist leaders may prefer to 'tie their hands' so that they will not make important concessions initially.

No matter which procedure is selected, a precommitment, along with party discipline, reduces the number of dimensions of the negotiations and restricts the winset of the status quo. This also means that as long as the parties continue to have the same ideal points, the agreement cannot be upset (see Figure 4). Alternatively, if no precommitment is made, or if it is not credible (due to a lack of discipline), the winset of the status quo will be larger and small movements made possible even if no individual actor changes his position.

Which factors affect cohesion? First of all, the size of the veto player has an effect on cohesion. A single person player (like a president or a party with a charismatic leader) has the highest cohesion. However, if we exclude the case of the individual player, as I argued in Section I, cohesion is likely to *increase* with the number of distinct individuals comprising a veto player. Everything else being equal, a veto player with more members will be more cohesive than a veto player with less members.

Another factor that may increase the cohesion of veto players is the electoral system. Some have argued that single-member plurality districts promote the personal vote,[63] while list proportional representation promotes strong parties.[64] It is not clear whether these arguments deal with party discipline (the ability of

[62] For two interesting cases in which centrist leaders were able to put together a compromise only to see it break down when submitted to their parties, see Tsebelis, *Nested Games*, chap. 6; and Kaare Strom, 'The Presthus Debacle: Interparty Politics and Bargaining Failure in Norway', in *American Political Science Review*, 88 (1994), 112–27.

[63] Bruce Cain, John Ferejohn and Morris P. Fiorina, *The Personal Vote* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

[64] Shugart and Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies*.

parties to eliminate dissent *after* a decision is made) or cohesion (the size of differences *before* the discussion). It is possible, however, that the electoral system affects both for different reasons: plurality systems promote wide coalitions, which means that their cohesion is reduced; while list proportional electoral systems give the party leadership control over nominations, and consequently increase party discipline.

The final factor that may affect cohesion is the institutional structure. Mainwaring, summarizing the relevant literature, has argued that presidential regimes promote a lack of cohesion because the president constantly tries to exploit differences among MPs to build coalitions to promote his programmes. On the other hand, parliamentarism promotes party discipline because voting against one's own government can bring the government down and result in new elections.[65]

Although both the institutional structure and the electoral system seem to affect cohesion independently of one another, it is not clear which has the greater impact. It is also not clear whether there are still other factors affecting cohesion, and what a multivariate regression would produce. For this reason, in this model I use cohesion as an independent variable.

In conclusion, according to Propositions 1, 2 and 3, the policy stability of a political system increases with the number of veto players, decreases with their congruence (in fact, if two actors are completely congruent, they can be counted as one), and increases with the cohesion of each of them.

III. CONSEQUENCES

In this section I discuss the implications of my analysis. I focus on three different issues: the conditions under which change is likely to occur; differences in predictions made by the veto player analysis presented here and the standard classifications found in political science; and preliminary evidence that empirical analyses corroborate my model rather than existing theories.

Predictions of Policy Change

Let us consider comparisons across time in a more systematic way. If a change in the identity or the positions of a veto player occurs, it is likely that it will be reflected in policy. In this case, as I have shown, the larger the number of veto players, the less significant the marginal impact of the change of one of them.

Movements of veto players may or may not be associated with elections, and they may or may not be associated with changes in the identity of the veto players. It is possible to have elections that do not change the incumbents, to have a change in incumbents without a change in policy and, lastly, to have

[65] Scott Mainwaring, 'Presidentialism in Latin America: A Review Essay', *Latin American Research Review*, 25 (1989), 157–79; and 'Politicians, Parties and Electoral Systems: Brazil in Comparative Perspective', *Comparative Politics*, 23 (1991), 21–43.

changes in policy that are the result of neither changes in electoral outcomes nor changes in incumbents. Let me provide some examples.

Consider a country like Japan, which has been dominated by the Liberal Democratic Party since the Second World War. Elections in Japan do not result in a change of veto players. If we ignore the factionalization of the party, there is only one veto player and, even if we do not, the veto players have still remained the same. Consequently, any policy changes which occur are the result of neither elections nor of a change in the identity of the veto player, but rather a modification in the policy position of the ruling party.

Consider a country like the United Kingdom with a two-party system in which the parties alternate in government. *If* the differences between the programmes of the two parties are large, one would expect important policy changes. This is an important conditional statement because there have been periods in British history when the two parties have held similar positions. For example, during the 1950s and 1960s the term Butskellism was coined from the names of Rab Butler (a Conservative) and Hugh Gaitskell (the Labour leader) to indicate that the two parties had no real policy differences (a position which was not tested since only one party held power). For this reason, convergence of policies may lead to policy stability, despite a change of veto players.

Consider a coalition government with several veto players, like Italy. Elections modify the composition of the Parliament slightly, but they rarely change the government coalition (in fact, throughout the post-war period Italy has had very few changes in the ruling coalition).[66] This is the source of policy stability in Italy. By contrast, if a veto player with significant differences enters or leaves the government coalition, important policy changes will follow. This characterizes the period 1976–79 when the Communist party participated (without portfolios) in the ruling coalition.[67]

Finally, consider a presidential system like the United States, where changes in the two chambers over time are small, but changes in the White House may be of more significance. Again, while replacement of legislators will not greatly affect policy stability, replacement of the president *may* make a difference if the new president has a different agenda (Reagan), but it may be of little impact if the new president has a policy agenda similar to that of his predecessor (Carter).

Differences with Existing Theories in Comparative Politics

It may seem to the reader that the arguments presented in this article lead to extremely variable expectations, both by issue and by time period. In a more pessimistic vein, it might be argued that there is no need for theory because a theory makes assumptions that are not true, and when these assumptions are replaced by conditions prevailing in real countries the results collapse.

[66] Carol Mershon, 'Expectations and Informal Rules in Coalition Formation', *Comparative Political Studies*, forthcoming.

[67] Peter Lange and Marino Regini, *State, Market and Social Regulation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

I want to address these arguments by making two related points. First, all the arguments introduced so far in this section are more detailed applications of the same framework, which is based on the concept of the veto player. This framework provides a navigation map that incorporates features of decision-making processes in different issues across countries or over time. The framework is sufficiently precise to permit the formation of *a priori* expectations which can subsequently be tested, as opposed to tautological arguments. What remains to be done is to make more general statements and predictions. So I will now construct a more general map, one using a larger scale. It will use the same principles of cartography, but will contain a very strong *ceteris paribus* clause.[68]

The logic of policy-making processes is such that, for a particular change of the status quo to occur, a number of veto players must agree on it. According to this approach, only three characteristics of veto players matter: the number of veto players, their congruence and their cohesion. All other characteristics are irrelevant, unless they affect these three. This approach does not distinguish between presidentialism and parliamentarism, between bicameralism and unicameralism, or between two-party and multi-party systems. These dichotomies do not affect policy stability in an unambiguous way, but rather their combinations (as well as other variables) determine the three independent variables of this study, which in turn affect policy stability.

For example, everything else being equal, there is no difference to the logic of the policy-making process between a bicameral legislature of a parliamentary system (like Germany) and a unicameral presidential system (like Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras or Nicaragua). In a first approximation (ignoring the party system), the two systems present similar features of stability: both require the agreement of two institutional veto players. A more focused comparison indicates that the presidential system includes an individual veto player (that is, a player with very high cohesion), while the parliamentary system includes two collective veto players, that is, two players with low cohesion. However, neither of these features are necessary characteristics of parliamentarism or presidentialism. There are countries with collegial entities selected by voters as 'presidents' like Cyprus (1960–63) and Uruguay (1952–67),[69] and it is possible to find legislatures where one cohesive party controls the majority in one chamber but not in the other (the Labor party in Australia since 1983).[70]

More generally, it is possible through a combination of institutional features to produce similar features of policy stability across different regimes. Consider

[68] I do not think I need to remind the reader that *cetera* are almost never *pares*.

[69] Arend Lijphart, ed., *Parliamentary vs. Presidential Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 6.

[70] This discussion ignores the possible complications of veto-override by legislatures, but then again, there is nothing unique about the presidential veto. In Japan the lower house can overrule the upper by a two-thirds majority; similarly in Germany a decision of the Bundesrat by a two-thirds majority requires a two-thirds majority in the Bundestag to be overturned.

the following threefold comparison of the United Kingdom, the United States and Italy. Different approaches in comparative politics group the United Kingdom either with the United States or with Italy. According to Duverger, the United Kingdom and the United States share plurality electoral systems, and (consequently) have two-party systems. According to Almond, the United Kingdom and the United States are both Anglo-Saxon countries with similar political cultures, while Italy has different cultural characteristics. According to Lijphart, the United Kingdom and the United States are both majoritarian systems, while Italy is a consensus system.

Other comparative theories would classify the United Kingdom and Italy together against the United States. For example, the United Kingdom and Italy are both parliamentary regimes, while the United States is presidential.[71] Also, the United Kingdom and Italy come close to having unicameral legislatures because in Italy both houses have the same composition, while in the United Kingdom the House of Lords is weak (it can only delay most legislation for a year, and financial legislation for only a month). According to Lijphart's classification, along the dimension of unicameralism vs. bicameralism, only the United States is a symmetric incongruent legislature, while Italy has a congruent legislature and the United Kingdom has an asymmetric legislature.

From the previous discussion it follows that according to comparative theories, the United Kingdom is lumped together either with the United States or with Italy. In none of the standard comparisons is Italy grouped with the United States against the United Kingdom. Yet in terms of policy stability this is exactly what happens. The United States has, in general, three institutional veto players and Italy has a variant number of partisan veto players (currently four), while the United Kingdom has only one veto player. Consequently, policy change is much easier in the United Kingdom than in Italy or the United States. In fact, common complaints in the United Kingdom concern frequent policy reversals (adversary politics, 'stop and go' policies), while in the United States the standard argument revolves around divided government and 'gridlock', and in Italy around immobilism.

The model presented above thus comes to different conclusions concerning policy stability than do existing medium-range theories in comparative politics. Before proceeding to additional comparisons, I want to remind the reader that I am focusing exclusively on policy stability across systems, while other authors may choose to focus on many more issues for a narrower set of countries. However, to the extent that the different theories generate predictions of policy stability, these predictions can be compared.

Laver and Shepsle have argued that ministers in coalition governments have exclusive jurisdiction over their respective policy areas.[72] While it is true that

[71] Linz, 'The Perils of Presidentialism'.

[72] Michael J. Laver and Kenneth A. Shepsle, 'Coalitions and Cabinet Government', *American Political Science Review*, 84 (1990), 873–90.

ministers exercise 'primary influence over individual policy areas',[73] this influence is under constraints imposed by the partners of the government coalition and cannot be equated with exclusive jurisdiction. If ministers have to respect the vetoes of their coalition partners, they will select the best (from their point of view) policy *inside the intersection of the winsets* of the veto players, not their own ideal point.[74] In its extreme version of exclusive jurisdictions, this argument predicts a high probability of changes in policies with changes of ministers. For example, in a country like Italy, where the reshuffling of government ministers is frequent, the exclusive jurisdiction model would predict constant policy shifts rather than policy stability. However, it is possible to reconcile the two models if we assume that the most important issues are decided by the whole coalition, while minor issues are delegated to individual ministers. In this case, stability at the macro level could be combined with an instability of secondary issues (those in the exclusive jurisdiction of the minister).

If one adds the minority socialist governments of Sweden, Norway or France to the comparison set, my model would classify them as close to Britain and distinct from Italy or the United States, with one qualification: the socialists in Sweden and Norway have been in power for a long period of time, and consequently they may not have wanted to modify their previous policies. However, my argument is that had they wanted to modify them, they would have been able to, like their French counterparts. Again, the expectation that minority single-party governments will have similar features to majority single-party governments is congruent with some, but not all, of the literature.[75]

In the most general form, according to my argument, systems with multiple incongruent and cohesive veto players will present higher levels of stability in policy making than systems with one veto player or a small number of incohesive and congruent veto players. This is a dichotomous (and very crude) way to summarize the argument presented in this article. For the time being, existing data make more subtle distinctions non-testable. According to this crude summary, coalition governments in parliamentary systems, like Italy, will present features of stability in their decision making similar to those of bicameral presidential systems like the United States. Similarly, a one veto player system – whether in a two-party system like the United Kingdom, a dominant party regime like Japan, a semipresidential system like France or a minority government like Sweden – is more susceptible to change. Below is some empirical evidence to support this statement.

[73] Eric Browne and Mark Franklin, 'Aspects of Coalition Payoffs in European Parliamentary Democracies', *American Political Science Review*, 67 (1973), 453–69, p. 445.

[74] Unless, of course, their ideal point is included in the intersection of the winsets of the status quo.

[75] For a similar position, see Strom, *Minority Government and Majority Rule*; for a different position, see Laver and Shepsle, 'Coalitions and Cabinet Governments', who argue that minority governments are like presidential regimes because they separate legislative from executive power. According to the Laver and Shepsle's point of view, Sweden and Norway should be classified with the United States.

Empirical Evidence

Feigenbaum *et al.* examine energy policy in five countries (the United States, Canada, France, Germany and Japan) after the oil shocks (more precisely, in the period 1970–90).[76] They summarize their findings in scores for the five countries along three dimensions: innovation, co-ordination of conflicting objectives and implementation. The scores range from very high to low. Constructing an aggregate index from these scores, and giving 5 points for 'very high', 4 for 'high', 3 for 'fairly high', 2 for 'mixed' or 'moderate', and 1 for 'low,' the five countries receive the following scores: United States = 5, Canada = 9, France = 10, Germany = 7, Japan = 12. Obviously, this is a very crude measure, but it is interesting to note that the countries below average (8.6) have multiple veto players (the presidential system of the United States has three institutional veto players, and the coalition government of Germany ranges between two and three veto players throughout this period, depending on whether the coalition that controlled the Bundestag also controlled the Bundesrat). The countries above average have either a single veto player (a party government which has a majority in Japan, and a minority in Canada), or two congruent veto players (France was ruled for most of the period by a coalition of two very similar right-wing parties, or a minority Socialist government, and only for three years in this period included two non-congruent parties, Socialists and Communists, in government).

Feigenbaum *et al.* argue that 'policy and resource inheritances are more important in determining policy choices than are government capabilities or specific institutional arrangements'.[77] According to this argument, resources are major variables that distinguish the energy-rich North American countries from the rest. Again, the United States, with three veto players, scores low in policy innovation and implementation (5), compared to the one veto player Canada (9) (single-party government); similarly, the two or three veto player coalition government in Bonn scores lower (7) than the more congruent party governments in Paris (10) or Tokyo (12). So the expectations of my model are corroborated.

These conclusions jibe with Eneloe, who pioneered comparative environmental policy studies: 'Among the countries here surveyed (the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, the Soviet Union) the United States is perhaps the most severely underdeveloped in terms of planning and coordinating capacity.'[78]

Regarding reduction of the budget deficit, Schick compares the United States,

[76] Harvey Feigenbaum, Richard Samuels and R. Kent Weaver, 'Innovation, Coordination, and Implementation in Energy Policy', in Weaver and Rockman, *Do Institutions Matter?*, pp. 42–109.

[77] Feigenbaum *et al.*, 'Innovation, Coordination, and Implementation', p. 99.

[78] Cynthia Eneloe, *The Politics of Pollution in a Comparative Perspective: Ecology and Power in Four Nations* (New York: D. McKay, 1975), p. 326.

the Netherlands and Sweden in the 1980s.[79] The multiple veto player systems of the United States (presidential) and the Netherlands (coalition) produced similar patterns of high deficits; these patterns were very different from Sweden which is a single veto player system (party government). It is interesting to note that the period of a coalition of bourgeois parties in government (1980–82) produced the same lack of priorities and inability to act as in the other two countries.[80] However, while Schick argues that both divided party control of executive and legislative branches in the United States, and coalition governments, as in the Netherlands, have reduced capacities for setting priorities,[81] it is not clear that an increase in the sample size would confirm the findings for these three countries. The reason is that deficit reduction is part of a bigger trade-off, and assuming that all governments would equally prefer deficit reduction is inaccurate.

Pierson and Weaver introduce government preferences when they compare Britain, the United States, and Canada with respect to the reduction of pension entitlements.[82] They point out that there are several indicators of reduction (each with particular deficiencies), which lead to different conclusions. However, the most reasonable classification would place Britain first, the United States second and Canada third in terms of pension reductions. Pierson and Weaver explain the difference between Britain and Canada by the difference in government preferences: the Canadian Conservatives were afraid to take unpopular measures for fear of losing their majority. Consequently, controlling for government preferences is an important part of determining the impact of institutions on policy change.[83]

These examples are three of the ten empirical studies included in a detailed and careful volume edited by Weaver and Rockman.[84] Not all studies are relevant for my purposes. However, in their conclusions, Weaver and Rockman present a table scoring four different types of regimes – separation of powers, coalitional, party government, and single-party dominant – along ten different dimensions which assess their levels of risk and of opportunity.[85] The similarities between separation of powers and coalitional governments, on the one hand, and party governments and single-party dominance, on the other, are impressive. Here is how Weaver and Rockman summarize their findings:

[79] Allen Schick, 'Governments versus Budget Deficits', in Weaver and Rockman, *Do Institutions Matter?*, pp. 187–236.

[80] Schick, 'Governments versus Budget Deficits', p. 217.

[81] Schick, 'Governments versus Budget Deficits', p. 228–9.

[82] Paul D. Pierson and R. Kent Weaver, 'Imposing Losses in Pension Policy', in Weaver and Rockman, *Do Institutions Matter?*, pp. 100–50.

[83] Garrett uses fear of electoral defeat as his major explanatory variable when he compares the structural changes introduced in Sweden in 1930s and in Britain in the 1980s. See Geoffrey Garrett, 'The Politics of Structural Change: Swedish Social Democracy and Thatcherism in Comparative Perspective', *Comparative Political Studies*, 25 (1993), 521–47.

[84] Weaver and Rockman, *Do Institutions Matter?*

[85] Weaver and Rockman, *Do Institutions Matter?*, p. 448.

As a result, parliamentary institutions do not have a uniform effect on governing capabilities. Instead, the Westminster and single-party-dominant systems tend to concentrate power while coalitions systems tend to diffuse it, as does the US separation-of-powers system. The US separation-of-powers system tends to cluster closely with the coalitional parliamentary regime types in terms of its associated risks and opportunities, while party government and single-party-dominant systems also tend to cluster together on most capabilities. Systems within the two clusters are not identical in their decision making attributes or in their government capabilities, as we will show when we discuss individual capabilities, but their effects tend to be in the same general direction.[86]

One important issue missing from the Weaver and Rockman volume is health reform. However, Immergut compares the health reform efforts in France (Fourth and Fifth Republics), Switzerland and Sweden and comes to similar conclusions.[87] In all three countries, the status quo favoured doctors; in all three countries reforms were attempted. Sweden was the most successful in introducing socialized medicine, followed by the French Fifth Republic. Attempts at reform failed in the French Fourth Republic and Switzerland. Immergut's explanation is that the governments of Sweden and the French Fifth Republic were able to move swiftly to introduce reforms accepted in Parliament (in fact, attempts to modify the government plan in France failed because of the special agenda-setting powers of the government). In the French Fourth Republic and in Switzerland, however, the reforms failed because of shifting majorities in parliament (France) and because of the use of a referendum originating outside the government (Switzerland). The differences reported in Immergut's study I have identified as those between single (Sweden, France Fifth Republic) and multiple (Switzerland and French Fourth Republic) veto players.

Kreppel tested statistically whether the number of veto players affected the production of legislation in Italy since the Second World War. She found that the number of parties in government (veto players) is inversely correlated with the number of both significant and non-significant laws.[88]

Finally, Jones, re-examining Mayhew's data[89] about the production of important laws in the United States, found that while divided government (defined as the absence of congruence between all three institutional actors) has no effect on law production, 'cohesion' in the House has a highly significant negative effect (he measures cohesion as the percentage of bills where the majorities of the two parties oppose each other). His argument is that the Senate,

[86] Weaver and Rockman, *Do Institutions Matter?*, p. 450.

[87] Ellen M. Immergut, *Health Politics: Interests and Institutions in Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[88] In Italy committees can act either in order to introduce legislation on the floor of a house or instead of a house. Kreppel used the number of laws that were approved by the floor of a house instead of by committees as a proxy for significance of legislation. See Amie Kreppel, 'The Effect of Veto Players and Coalition Stability on Legislative Output in Italy' (mimeo, UCLA, 1993).

[89] David Mayhew, *Divided We Govern* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991).

regardless of party control, is moderate (one of the reasons being that a two-thirds or three-fifths majority is required to prevent filibuster). Consequently, partisan legislation from the House gets aborted even before it reaches the President. In my terminology, his variable captures the congruence between the moderate Senate and the (possibly) partisan House.[90]

This account exhausts the empirical evidence of which I am aware with respect to policy stability. However, there is additional indirect evidence in favour of my model. This evidence concerns government and regime stability in parliamentary and presidential systems respectively.

There is an obvious relationship between policy stability and government instability: a government with policy stability may become immobile, and if change is required by other political and social actors, it may be replaced through constitutional means (government instability). Similarly, in regimes where government change is impossible (except for fixed intervals like in presidential systems), policy immobilism may lead to the replacement of the leadership through extra-constitutional means (regime instability).

According to this account, the very factors that lead to policy stability would be associated with both government instability (in parliamentary systems) and regime instability (in presidential systems). Consequently, government or regime instability would be associated with multiple veto players, with lack of ideological congruence between them and with ideological cohesion of each one of them. Preliminary evidence indicates that this is the case.

Warwick has found that the number of and the ideological distances between government partners lead to government instability.[91] In a more detailed forthcoming study, he goes one step further: while standard game-theoretic approaches to government survival expect characteristics of the *Parliament* (number of parties in the party system, ideological distances of the parties in Parliament) to affect the probability of survival, he introduces *government* characteristics in his model (number of parties and ideological distances of the parties in government). His result is that when all variables are introduced, government characteristics are statistically significant, while parliamentary characteristics are not. This finding is a puzzle for standard game-theoretic models of coalitions, because government survival should depend on the chances of different parties' being included in a new government (that is, characteristics of the parliament). The model presented here accounts for Warwick's findings. If parties participate in government for policy reasons, then coalitions will break down, and governments will be replaced whenever an exogenous shock cannot be addressed by the existing government. This happens because either the number of veto players is too big, or their ideological distances are too large for them to have a common reaction. For example, the

[90] David R. Jones, 'Policy Stability in the United States: Divided Government or Cohesion in Congress?' (mimeo UCLA, 1993).

[91] Paul Warwick, 'Ideological Diversity and Government Survival in Western European Parliamentary Democracies', *Comparative Political Studies*, 24 (1992), 332–61.

coalition between Socialists and Communists in France broke down in 1984 when Mitterrand decided to apply austerity policies in order to stay inside the European Monetary System, while the Communists refused to 'manage the crisis of capitalism'. Similarly, strained economic conditions led the coalition between SPD and FDP in Germany to break down in 1982 and to be replaced by the more congruent coalition between FDP and CDU–CSU.

The argument that policy stability leads to instability of the veto players can also be extended to presidential systems. In presidential systems, the only possible changes of veto players are through elections or other exogenous changes (like military coups or violations of the constitutional order by one actor like Fuzimori's dissolution of Parliament in Peru). My theory predicts that the variables associated with policy stability will also be associated with regime instability. There is existing evidence on this issue as well.

Shugart and Carey find that strong presidential powers (both legislative and non-legislative) are more likely to lead to breakdown.[92] According to their data (which includes presidential and semi-presidential regimes since the beginning of the century), regimes where the president had weak legislative powers broke down 23.5 per cent of the time (4 out of 17), while the probability of a breakdown was almost double (40 per cent of the time (6 out of 15)) in regimes with legislatively strong presidents. Their finding is consistent with the theory of veto players presented here. In my terminology, regimes with legislatively weak presidents have one veto player less, so they are more stable.

CONCLUSIONS

I have introduced a model permitting comparisons across different political systems, such as presidentialism and parliamentarism, unicameralism and bicameralism, and two-party and multi-party systems. This model is based on the veto player concept introduced by constitutional writers centuries ago, and directly or indirectly used in the comparative literature since. I have divided veto players into two categories, institutional and partisan, which has enabled me to compare parliamentary and presidential regimes.

My analysis led to the conclusions that the policy stability of a political system increases when the number of veto players increases, when their congruence decreases and when their cohesion increases. The basic macro-political results of the analysis are that none of the standard independent variables used in comparative analysis, such as regime type, party system or number of chambers in the legislature, produce the same results independently of the others. In particular, presidential systems (with multiple institutional veto players) present characteristics of policy-making stability similar to coalition governments in parliamentary systems (with multiple partisan veto players). These common characteristics of presidential and multi-party parliamentary systems contrast

[92] Shugart and Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies*, pp. 154–8.

with two-party systems, dominant parties and minority governments in parliamentary democracies (which have single veto players). Empirical studies of policy making produce results congruent with the expectations of the model. Similarly, empirical studies of government and regime instability provide indirect evidence in favour of it.

The veto players framework can be expanded to include courts, super majorities, referendums, corporatist structures of decision making, local governments and other institutional devices. It can also be used to generate predictions about judicial and administrative importance and independence. If courts and bureaucracies are interested in seeing their decisions stand, and not being overruled by the political actors, they will be more important and independent in systems with multiple incongruent and cohesive veto players.

With respect to the independence of bureaucracies, two seemingly opposing arguments have been presented in the literature. Hammond and Knott[93] use a two-dimensional model and argue that the size of the 'core' (i.e. the set of points with empty winsets) increases with multiple principals of the bureaucracy, providing bureaucrats with the opportunity to select any point inside the core without fear of being overruled. Their argument includes congressional committees, floors and the presidency. In essence, their approach is similar to the one adopted here.[94]

Both Moe, and Moe and Caldwell,[95] however, start with similar premises but reach seemingly opposite conclusions. They argue that parliamentary regimes will have fewer bureaucratic rules and more independent bureaucracies than presidential regimes; and presidential regimes will have extremely detailed laws and procedures reducing the autonomy of bureaucrats. The empirical examples come almost exclusively from the United Kingdom and the United States (which are considered the prototypes of parliamentary and presidential systems). There is an important difference in the arguments here. I believe that for bureaucracies as well, the dividing line is not between parliamentary and presidential systems as Moe argues, but between single and multiple veto players (Italy would be a perfect test case, because according to my argument its bureaucracy would be

[93] See Thomas H. Hammond and Jack H. Knott, 'Presidential Power, Congressional Dominance, and Bureaucratic Autonomy in a Model of Multi-Institutional Policy Making' (paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 1993). This expectation is consistent with Lohmann's finding that in periods of divided government in Germany the Bundesbank is more independent (see Susanne Lohmann, 'Federalism and Central Bank Autonomy: The Politics of German Monetary Policy, 1960–89' (mimeo, UCLA, 1993)).

[94] Notable differences between the Hammond and Knott model and my approach is that they are interested in the special case when the winset of the status quo is empty (while I am interested in the size of the winset), and they use two dimensions (that can be generalized up to four; see Tsebelis, 'The Core, the Uncovered Set and Conference Committees in Bicameral Legislatures'), while my approach holds for any number of dimensions.

[95] See Terry M. Moe, 'Political Institutions: The Neglected Side of the Story', *Journal of Law, Economics and Organization*, 6 (1993), 213–53, and Terry M. Moe and Michael Caldwell, 'The Institutional Foundations of Democratic Government'.

more similar to that of the United States than that of the United Kingdom, while Moe's expectation would be the opposite).

Setting this difference aside, I agree with Moe's arguments. Single veto players do not need detailed descriptions of bureaucratic procedures written into law. The party in power can decide how the bureaucracy is going to work, and for the bureaucracy it makes no difference if rules are written into law or come from a ministerial decision. In addition, crystallizing procedures into laws for the next government makes no sense, because the new government can write new laws with equal ease, or issue new ministerial instructions. For these reasons, single veto players have no need to restrict bureaucracies through legal procedures.

Multiple veto players, on the other hand, will try to crystallize the balance of forces at the time they write a law, in order to restrict bureaucracies as much as they can. How restrictive the procedures will be depends on the level of agreement among these veto players. For example, their disagreements may not be only political but also institutional and procedural. In this case, if there is a law it will be quite general, giving leeway to the bureaucrats. So, the existence of multiple veto players does not guarantee that detailed procedural descriptions get written into law.

Now we can synthesize the different arguments into one. On average, systems with multiple veto players are more likely to have cumbersome bureaucratic procedures than single veto player settings, as Moe argues. However, cumbersome bureaucratic procedures should not be confounded with lack of independence; in fact, they might be a weapon of bureaucrats against political interference in their tasks. Bureaucracies are more likely to be independent when they have multiple principals (multiple veto players) than when they have a single principal.

Focusing on the judiciary, my model generates the expectation that courts will be important in federal countries, as well as in countries where they adjudicate between veto players (presidential systems). Within parliamentary systems, the judiciary will be more important in countries with multiple veto players like Germany or Italy, than in countries with single veto players like the United Kingdom or Sweden. Similarly, supreme courts will be more important in federal than in unitary countries.[96]

Finally, the same framework accounts for government stability in parliamentary systems and regime stability in presidential systems. The connection is simple: policy stability leads to the inability of governments to change the status quo, even when such changes are necessary or desirable. Consequently, a government with multiple, incongruent and cohesive players gets replaced by

[96] One variable that is missing from this account, and should be included in a comparative study of courts, is who has standing in front of the court. For example, the condition for the increase of importance of the Constitutional Court in France was the introduction of the reform (at the time it was called 'reformette' because of lack of understanding of its significance) that the Court could be asked to deliberate by sixty Members of Parliament.

other actors either endogenously (parliamentary systems) or exogenously (presidential systems).

Further theoretical and empirical research is required to complete and validate this model. At the theoretical level, one needs to investigate the effect of qualified majorities and referendums on the number and cohesion of veto players. While speculations were offered in this article, the analysis is far from complete. At the empirical level, systematic research is needed to validate this model. While existing policy studies indicate that the number and incongruence of veto players leads to policy stability, the evidence is sparse and for the most part not quantifiable. The predictions of the model concerning government and regime instability find more quantitative support, but here too the model itself has to be tested against the available data.

In this article I focused on the similarities between presidential and parliamentary systems with respect to policy making; I did not discuss any of the differences. This does not mean that such differences do not exist. I already referred to the major difference which is that changes in veto players are endogenous in parliamentary systems, but exogenous in presidential ones. There is one important remaining difference between the systems that my model highlights. In parliamentary systems the executive (government) controls the agenda, and the legislature (parliament) accepts or rejects proposals, while in presidential systems the legislature makes the proposals and the executive (president) signs or vetoes them. It is easy to verify from Figure 3 that each one of the two veto players A and B_1 will select his own ideal point if they can select among the points in the winset of the status quo. Even Player B_2 will select the point P_{B2} which is the closest point to him of the feasible set (WAB_2). The property is more general: the veto player who has the power to propose will have a significant advantage in policy making.[97] The analysis indicates that *with respect to legislation*, parliaments will be more significant in presidential than in parliamentary systems, and presidents will be less significant than governments. Again, this is a proposition that jibes with the debate about decline of parliaments on one side of the Atlantic, and the requests of presidents for a line-item veto on the other. However, further empirical analysis is needed to establish this pattern.

[97] For an example of interaction between two players one of which has the power to propose and the other to accept, see Tsebelis, 'The Power of the European Parliament as a Conditional Agenda Setter'.