
Legislative Constraints: A Path to Peace?

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Abstract

Tsebelis' veto players theory predicts that legislative veto players constrain the executive's political decisions because their approval is needed to implement policy change. This study extends the veto players argument into international conflict literature, specifically in regard to legislative constraints emanating from the number of legislative veto players, their policy preferences, and their internal cohesion. A cross-sectional, time-series dyadic data analysis shows that, in general, an increase of legislative constraints notably reduces the likelihood of the onset of militarized interstate disputes. However, while legislative constraints in democratic and mixed dyads are likely to discourage democratic executives' use of force, those in autocratic dyads do not produce effective pacifying effects.

Keywords

legislative constraints, veto players, regime type, international conflict

Existing studies of international conflict maintain that domestic political constraints significantly dampen the ability of democratic leaders to make aggressive foreign policy decisions (e.g., Russett and Oneal 2001; but for a dissenting view, see James, Solberg, and Wolfson 1999; James, Park, and Choi 2006; Choi, forthcoming). Veto players, such as congressional legislatures, high courts, and the media, are examples of political constraints because their consensus is necessary for policy change. In democratic countries, legislative veto players exist specifically to provide constructive institutional checks and balances, without which executives would be free to make any public policy decision. Although many believe that legislative veto players play an important role in foreign policy decision making, their specific effect on executives' conflict behavior

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remains unexplored. Rather than exclusively focusing on legislative constraints via multiple legislative veto players as an independent cause of peaceful conflict resolution, existing studies investigate the overall implications of political constraints by lumping together the legislature and other political actors into one contiguous group. This results in a theoretical conundrum because it is not possible to establish a direct causal relationship between legislative constraints and conflict.

Built on Tsebelis' (1995, 1999, 2002) formal theory of veto players, this study is the first attempt to address three possible ways by which legislative constraints influence an executive's conflict behavior, namely, via (1) the number of legislative veto players, (2) their policy preferences, and (3) their internal cohesion. Consistent with the veto players theory, I begin by developing a causal link between legislative veto players and conflict to formulate the general hypothesis that increasing legislative constraints under *any* type of political system should produce a pacifying effect on conflict. Next, three more nuanced hypotheses are developed in accordance with differences between regime types: the general hypothesis regarding any and all veto players is deconstructed into legislative veto players in democratic dyads, those in autocratic dyads, and those in mixed dyads. These more nuanced hypotheses provide a sufficient test of Tsebelis' (2002, 90) contention that the number of veto players is "not a fundamental difference between democratic and nondemocratic regimes".

The cross-sectional, time-series dyadic data analysis for 164 countries during the period from 1885 to 2001 presented in this study shows that, in general, legislative constraints imposed on executives across all dyads are likely to decrease the likelihood of the onset of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs). However, when classifying the sample data into three different types of dyads, the dampening effect of legislative constraints varies. Although legislative constraints in both democratic and mixed dyads are likely to restrain democratic executives' decisions to engage in conflict, those in autocratic dyads do not reduce autocrats' propensity to use military violence. By applying the veto players theory to conflict studies, this study highlights the different constraining effects that legislative constraints produce under democratic versus autocratic political systems.

The Effect of Legislative Constraints on International Conflict

Generally speaking, veto power is the ability of political actors to wield power to entirely block a political initiative or action. The most commonly used example of veto power is that of a power vested in a chief executive to prevent—either temporarily or permanently—the enactment of measures passed by a legislature. In addition, the chief executive's political authority may itself be restrained by other veto players, including congressional legislators, high courts, the ruling political party, the mass media, interest groups, military juntas, and so on (Choi and James 2007). It follows then that the existence of multiple veto players creates a high level of institutional

constraints on the decision-making powers of chief executives, such as presidents and prime ministers. That said, it is unrealistic to address every kind of veto player in a single study, and typical analyses of veto power disregard the implications of one or another kind of politically influential people (e.g., military juntas and journalists) that exist outside formal political institutions (see Tsebelis 2002; MacIntyre 2003). Therefore, the scope of this study confines itself to two independent branches of government: lower and upper legislative chambers. In contemporary politics, many consider these legislative institutions the two most essential veto players in producing institutional constraints on the executive.

The Veto Players Theory

From a unified theoretical perspective, Tsebelis (1995, 1999, 2002) offers the most advanced veto players theory articulated to date. He defines veto players as a certain number of individual or collective actors, identifiable in each nation's constitution and political game (i.e., institutional and partisan veto players), whose consensus is necessary to change the legislative status quo. He stresses three fundamental features of veto players that determine the chance of a significant policy change: (1) number of veto players involved, (2) their policy preferences, and (3) their internal cohesion.¹ Essentially, he argues that it is more difficult to achieve policy change as the number of veto players involved increases, as differences in policy preference or ideological distance among them increase, and as internal cohesion among them decreases. In this context, multiple legislative veto players are likely to produce high levels of political checks and balances on an executive's policy action, which may have otherwise resulted in a significant departure from the status quo.

To better understand the nature of veto players' politics, it is important to note that the veto players theory is not about how legislative veto players perform strategic bargaining for policy changes but about how effectively legislative veto players impose institutional constraints on the executive. The advantage of the veto players theory is that it does not speculate about invisible political interactions, such as sending policy signals between different veto players or how veto groups interact across national borders. Instead, it underscores the policy implications of legislative constraints emanating from three simple facts: the number of veto players, their policy preferences, and their internal cohesion.² Following Tsebelis' parsimonious approach, I argue that an analysis that focuses exclusively on legislative constraints enables one to explain an executives' foreign policy choices since, compared to the other understandings of veto players mentioned above, congressional legislators place more direct institutional checks and balances on executive action. If one stretched the theory of veto players too far by incorporating abstract concepts such as signaling or perceptions, it would only serve to undermine the simplicity of Tsebelis' contribution. More importantly, without an accurate indicator for each of those abstract concepts, any empirical study would fail to make a direct connection between theory and empirical analysis (see King, Keohane, and Verba 1994; Adcock and Collier 2001).

The concept of veto power may apply to conflict studies while avoiding the mistakes discussed above. Since a foreign intervention is a significant departure from the peaceful status quo, imposing burdensome taxes and personal sacrifices on political constituencies, a variety of legislative veto players are likely to oppose such actions. However, in circumstances where veto players agree with the executive, or where veto groups lack cohesion, the increased participation of legislative veto players is not necessarily an effective constraint on the executive's inclination to use force. If legislative veto players share similar policy preferences or ideologies with the executive, the level of legislative constraints will not increase in proportion as the total number of legislative veto players increases.³ In this situation, legislative veto players can actually lower the barriers to foreign policy change by complying with the executive's preferences rather than exercising appropriate political checks and balances. Thus, the executive may not fear waging war because he or she will consider the approval of legislative veto players as a simple matter of formality. Similarly, the sheer number of veto players may matter little if their internal cohesion against the executive is lacking; legislative veto players will be unable to oppose the determination of the executive if there is no unity among them. The likelihood of a decision toward conflict will rise in the absence of cohesive constraints from multiple legislative veto players on the executive. Ideology and cohesion aside, it is important to note how such legislative constraints can limit executives' conflict behavior in a practical sense. I use the United States and the United Kingdom as two examples to illustrate this point. The two countries are chosen because the former represents a presidential system while the latter embodies a parliamentary system.

The influence of the U.S. Congress on the conflict behavior of the president. Under the U.S. Constitution, the president is the military's commander in chief, while Congress is responsible for declaring war and raising armies. Put differently, the president's foreign policy decisions are subject to multiple veto players (specifically the House of Representatives and the Senate) in the form of legislative checks and balances (see Howell and Pevehouse 2005).⁴ When confronted with legislative opposition, the president takes enormous political risks by going to war without the approval of Congress. This risk might also spill over into other policy areas: the president may fear domestic political backlash since legislative veto players can also threaten his or her ability to influence the domestic agenda. The risk of spillover seems especially true when the opposition party controls Congress. Because of these risks, it is reasonable to assume that the president is less likely to start or continue a war if he or she foresees mounting difficulties from legislative veto players capable of restricting, redirecting, and terminating military operations. In other words, while the president maintains the title of the commander in chief of the armed forces, it is understood that Congress has a prerogative to authorize programs and appropriate funds, thereby defining and limiting presidential war powers. In fact, the president's authority to direct the movements of the naval and military forces at his or her command by law implies that Congress's role, by statute, is to control the scope of the commander-in-chief powers, especially through the power to finance military operations.

Legislative control over all expenditures, including those for foreign and military affairs, weakens the president's incentives to take actions regarding use of armed forces overseas without congressional approval. In particular, congressional appropriation power gives multiple legislators the ability to shape military policy through the budgets, structures, and duties of the armed forces. There are several historical examples of legislative enactments that reflect congressional efforts to constrain presidential war power. It is common knowledge that Congress used the power of the purse to end the Vietnam War in 1973. Another example is that Congress passed a supplemental appropriations act in June 1973 to cut off all funding for additional military affairs in Indochina—including Cambodia, Laos, North Vietnam, and South Vietnam—after August 15, 1973. Three years later, during the Ford administration, Congress again refused the president financial support for any kind of U.S. military involvement in Angola despite his desire to take action. In November 1993, Congress passed a Department of Defense appropriations act, stipulating that no funds could be used for military action after March 31, 1994, unless the president requested an extension from Congress and received legislative approval. In the next year, a similar congressional action took place against the president's potential military affairs in Rwanda. According to the 1994 Department of Defense Appropriations Act, the funds could be used to protect the lives of U.S. citizens but not to finance U.S. military participation to continue Operation Support Hope in or around Rwanda after October 7, 1994 (Snow 1998; Fisher 2007; Howell and Pevehouse 2007; Rudman and McDonough 2007).

In addition to the initiation of legislative enactments, Congress is capable of constraining the president's use of armed forces through public appeals that often precede military actions. Rather than enact laws that are designed to oppose presidential war powers, Congress can go public by participating in open debates about the effectiveness of military operations and the human cost of military campaigns. In doing so, Congress can sway a significant number of citizens to voice against the president engaging in misguided or costly military adventures. In response, the president is more likely to make all necessary midcourse corrections to the military venture itself. For example, in 1954, Congress's public appeals and vocal dissent erupted against President Eisenhower's policy decisions regarding Indochina. Rather than passing legislation, congressional leaders seized every opportunity to make their concerns known to the American public by holding congressional hearings and appearing on radio and television broadcasts. In the midst of congressional opposition, President Eisenhower was unable to launch a unilateral U.S. intervention. It is important to note that through their public appeals, congressional leaders intend to invoke an anticipatory effect that makes the president more cautious in future military ventures. When presidents anticipate that congressional opposition will stimulate large numbers of public debates concerning the appropriate use of U.S. forces, they are less likely to deploy troops (Howell and Pevehouse 2007).⁵

The influence of the British Parliament on the conflict behavior of the prime minister. Unlike the U.S. Constitution, the British Constitution stipulates no clear division of foreign policy decision-making power between the prime minister and Parliament. The

power to deploy armed forces is a prerogative power still vested in the Crown and exercised according to convention by the prime minister, while parliament is formally relegated to a consulting role. In this sense, British members of Parliament (MPs) appear to impose much weaker constraints on executive power than the U.S. Congress members. Nonetheless, there are ample examples to indicate the influence of the British parliamentary veto players on the prime minister's war powers. They include the vote of censure or no confidence, adjournment debates, debates on a motion, parliamentary questions, ministerial correspondence, and scrutiny by select committee. The use of these tools can be seen in a number of historical examples: there was a parliamentary debate on a substantive motion in the case of the Korean War, a debate on a motion to adjourn in the case of the Falklands War, and during the Gulf War of 1991 there were seven statements and one debate, which was on a substantive motion. MPs scrutinized the U.K. deployment of armed forces in Afghanistan, which was coupled with an inquiry conducted by the House of Commons Defence Committee; in total, there were 168 parliamentary questions and four debates. The Secretary of State for Defence made two statements on the deployment in January 2006. In relation to the conflict in Iraq, there were thirteen debates in both Houses and thirty ministerial statements. Although Prime Minister Tony Blair was not obligated to seek parliamentary approval, there was a vote on a substantive motion about military conflict in Iraq on March 18, 2003. He won the vote with the Conservatives' support in spite of 121 Labour MPs voting against it, but he still had to face fierce political opposition to staying the course (Gantham and George 1988; U.K. Parliament 2006).

It is also worth noting that parliamentary decisions on the funding of individual military missions are an essential primary source of legislation that affects the prime minister's conduct of an ongoing military action. If any military measure needs an appropriation of public money, parliamentary legislation must be introduced to authorize the ways and means for the government to carry out its foreign policy. When dealing with governments with very slender majorities (e.g., John Major's), multiple MPs can utilize their appropriation power to effectively impose checks on the prime minister's military campaigns. Furthermore, parliamentary influence becomes far more constraining on the foreign policy decision making of a minority government or a coalition government in which multiple MPs from the opposition or coalition party are likely to prefer peace over war. However, because the prime minister can exercise the royal prerogative of waging war in the absence of parliamentary approval, and because his or her party generally controls the House of Commons through a majority, he or she is considered to have financial authority regarding military operations. In this case, especially at the point of initiation, Parliament may impose virtually no financial constraints on the conflict behavior of the prime minister; parliament's main avenue of recourse is to retrospectively raise a voice against mismanaged military adventures. As the war goes on and a new budget and a new vote are required, multiple MPs can force a withdrawal of troops by introducing a defense appropriation act that requires a cut in the military budget (Gantham and George 1988).

Parliament is also capable of constraining the prime minister's foreign policy by shaping public opinion. Whenever the prime minister orders a major military deployment

around the world, Parliament is likely to put checks on the prime minister's inclination to resort to arms via public debates and media contacts. The *Waging War: Parliament's Role and Responsibility* report of the Lords Constitution Committee was commissioned not long after the Iraq War, and it was a significant contribution in stirring public disapproval. The report examined the exercise of the prerogative power to deploy armed forces and recommended that it be removed from the prime minister and placed instead in Parliament. This followed the House of Commons vote on the commitment of troops in Iraq in 2003 and the 2004 House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee report that recommended that decisions to engage in armed conflict be approved by Parliament (House of Lords Constitution Committee 2006; Hague 2007). MPs and cabinet members who disagree with the prime minister's military campaigns are free to advocate a different view. For example, in 2005 Clare Short, who resigned from the Blair Cabinet over the Iraq War, introduced the Armed Forces (Parliamentary Approval for Participation in Armed Conflict) Bill, which stipulated that the prime minister must seek the approval of both Houses of Parliament for the dispatch of British troops in conflict or for a declaration of war. Through parliamentary debates, Short made this popular perspective heard (McSmith 2005), which undoubtedly made Prime Minister Tony Blair more cautious in his use of armed forces overseas.

The U.S. and British cases illustrate that legislative veto players can hinder an executive's militaristic ambitions through appropriations that cut funding for the use of force and by appealing to the public through congressional debates and mass media appearances. Such legislative actions are likely to tie the executive's hands and undermine a foreign intervention, decreasing the likelihood of such interventions. Furthermore, the executive may fear for his or her political survival if he or she goes to war despite the protests of legislative veto players only to then end up losing the war (see Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). The failure of his or her foreign policy, in the absence of congressional support, will signal further opposition to a military campaign. As a result, the executive may fear electoral reprisal in the next election, further discouraging his or her incentive to go to war.

In summary, it is likely that executives will show restraint with their conflict decisions if multiple legislative veto players oppose conflict. As legislative constraints increase in both states of a dyad, the likelihood of conflict is expected to be much lower. Similarly, a dyad where only one state is constrained by legislative veto players should also be less likely to engage in conflict because at least one side could constrain the development of a dyadic conflict. Furthermore, the veto players theory would also predict that dyadic states with no constraints are more likely to resort to the use of force.

Legislative Constraints in the Context of Regime Type

Because Tsebelis (2002, 67-90) explains the effect of legislative constraints without taking regime type into account, he has not yet expanded his veto players theory into the democracy-related literature. He defends his choice by making a brief remark that "most of the differences between regimes discussed in the traditional [i.e., democracy-related] literature can be studied as differences in the number, ideological distances,

and cohesion of the corresponding veto players” (67). If his remark is correct, however, then it makes sense that the political role of legislative veto power should be studied in the context of regime type as well. Given the fact that the democratic peace phenomenon has been at the center of scholarly debate for the past two decades (e.g., Russett 1993; Russett and Oneal 2001) and that legislative veto players in democratic countries are major foreign policy makers, it seems natural to look into the regime effect by posing the following question: Do legislative veto players under nondemocratic regimes produce the same level of constraints on leaders’ conflict behavior as those under democratic regimes?⁶ To answer this question, I begin by discussing the political function of legislative veto players in democracies and then move on to consider their function in autocracies.

It is well known that the constitutions of democratic countries embrace Montesquieu’s (1748/1977) ideas about the separation of powers as the basis for formal institutional checks and balances. Since legislatures in liberal democracies exercise an important veto power over executive policy making, the veto players theory is closely related to democracy theories (Tsebelis 2002, 9; Mansfield, Milner, and Pevehouse 2005, 8). Numerous existing empirical studies report that too many veto players under a democratic political system make it difficult to reach an agreement to change the legislative status quo in the midst of political, economic, and social crises. For example, Roubini and Sachs’ (1989, 931, emphasis added) study on major industrial democracies finds that “the greatest difficulties [dealing with fiscal deficit adjustments] appear to arise because *small coalition partners* have veto power over changes in the status quo.” Tsebelis (1999) also reports empirical evidence that the increasing number of veto players and their diverging ideologies in fifteen West European countries, for the period from 1981 to 1991, prevented European leaders from passing several legislative proposals, resulting in far fewer laws enacted during that time.

These democratic aspects of the veto players theory are in line with the structural argument of the democratic peace theory to the extent that both pay close attention to the policy implications of political constraints; however, their theoretical emphases are substantially different. While the theoretical focal point of veto players is solely on formal legislative constraints on the executive, the democratic peace theory implicates political constraints in a general sense. To be precise, although studies of the democratic peace theory present legislative constraints in democracies as part of the broad theoretical discussion, they do not pinpoint the specific effect from differences in the number of legislative veto players, their diverging policy preferences, and their internal cohesion.

Before delving into the peace-building effect of legislative constraints in democracies, I briefly review the main structural argument of the democratic peace theory and its potential drawbacks in explaining leaders’ conflict behavior.⁷ Democratic peace studies argue that democratic leaders in both states in a dyad are restrained from engaging in war because of pacific public opinion or antiwar groups (e.g., Russett 1993; Russett and Oneal 2001). The nature of democratic governance in both states invites various political actors such as politicians, bureaucrats, and interest groups into

the policy-making process, which inevitably slows down the onset of military violence. For example, Leblang and Chan (2003, 386) contend that “the leaders of democracies are unable to decide unilaterally to go to war but must instead engage in tedious efforts to build the necessary political coalition for such matters of great importance to their nation.”⁸ The structural argument of the democratic peace has been further refined by formal theorists. According to Fearon (1994) and Schultz (1998), democratic leaders face tremendous audience costs from concerned citizens or opposition parties compared to those faced by autocratic leaders; hence, democratic leaders are likely to be cautious about waging war. If two democracies are in a crisis, the level of uncertainty between them is lower because of the ability to efficiently demonstrate resolve, making it easier to negotiate peaceful solutions.⁹ The selectorate approach of Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003) looks into the relative size of the winning coalition within each member of a dyad (labeled “W”) to explain not only the choices that produce the democratic peace but also a set of auxiliary hypotheses about war. Some of these hypotheses include that “large coalition systems (democracies) try harder; political incentives in systems with a large W (democracies) do not make them immune from wars of imperial expansion; they do not try harder during such wars; and they offer more concessions in negotiations than autocracies do” (264).

Interestingly, while discussing the overall implications of political constraints, most democratic peace studies maintain that two democracies do not go to war because each *perceives* its counterpart to be politically constrained in a similar way; however, this underlying logic of the democratic peace may be faulty. According to Rosato (2003, 578, first emphasis added, second emphasis original), “It may not be necessary for two [democratic] states to *perceive* each other to be constrained [or to send a clear signal to each other]. The fact they *are* both constrained may in itself be sufficient to ensure that war does not break out.” In this sense, the seeming ubiquity of the democratic peace phenomenon may have little to do with how two states perceive each other and more with the fact that effective institutional constraints are in force in both democratic states in a dyad. In addition, the success of democratic peace studies in measuring the concept of perception or signaling is questionable; a direct indicator of mutual perception does not yet appear in existing studies. Fortunately, the logic of the veto players theory relies not on mutual perception but on the relatively simple information about the level of legislative constraints. For this reason, the veto players theory may enable the researcher to conduct a more powerful and direct empirical analysis about leaders’ conflict behavior than the democratic peace theory. The simplistic application of the veto players theory to international conflict also complies with the principle of Occam’s razor, that the explanation of any phenomenon should make as few assumptions as possible.

Consistent with the veto players theory, it can be inferred that because the existence of multiple veto players under democratic regimes increases the chance of policy disagreements, the barriers to foreign policy decision making will increase accordingly. More importantly, if legislative veto players have diverse foreign policy preferences and are united together, an unfavorable political environment is created for executives

who prefer military actions to nonviolent measures. It will be challenging for executives to defend the conduct of war in face of opposition from multiple legislative veto players. Thus, legislative opposition can effectively undermine a military intervention by the executive. For example, legislative veto players in the United States have the constitutional authority to enact limitations on presidential war powers. These methods include using funding limitations, using limitations on the scope and duration of military exercises, and prescribing annual appropriation laws to limit the engagement of hostilities (Snow 1998; Fisher 2004, 2007; Rudman and McDonough 2007). In the end, because executives understand that legislative opposition will ultimately undermine the chance of war victory, they are less likely to go to war. Furthermore, because legislative opposition has recourse to influencing public opinion, it can generate popular opposition to the executive's foreign policy, leading to a rise of audience costs (Fearon 1994; Schultz 1998). Because the electoral stakes of engaging in unpopular wars, over the objection of legislative veto players, are too high, the rational choice for democratic executives is to maintain a peaceful status quo. In the case of a conflict between two democratic countries, since both executives in the dyad are politically constrained by legislative veto players, they are unlikely to resort to military violence. In summary, because of opposition from multiple legislative veto players with diverging preferences, regardless of the perceptions of their counterparts, the chance of conflict between two democracies is less likely.

Regarding the situation between two autocratic countries, according to Tsebelis' (2002, 67-90) veto players theory, autocrats' conflict behavior should also be discouraged as legislative constraints in both states of an autocratic dyad increase. However, this line of theoretical expectation may be imprecise because it does not take into account autocratic executives' unique power on foreign policy decision making, despite any action by veto players. If an autocratic executive's security policy decisions are made out of personal whims (often referred to as "whimsical autocrats"), he or she is likely to ignore any policy preferences of legislative veto players, resulting in a situation where no effective legislative constraints are in force.

Some existing studies evidence the existence of whimsical autocrats. After analyzing different types of autocratic regimes, Geddes (1999, 5) concludes that an autocrat "may wear a uniform and may have created a party to support himself, but neither the military nor the party exercises independent decision-making power insulated from the whims of the ruler" (also see Linz and Chehabi 1998, 4-45; Diamond 1999; Geddes 2003). Miller (1995) goes a step further, arguing that autocratic leaders have a propensity to use force for their personal interests. He contends that autocracies are more willing than democracies to resort to arms to divert attention from domestic problems. In a similar vein, Bebler (1987) states that socialist regimes are more likely to use military violence against each other because they lack an appropriate conflict resolution mechanism.

Nonetheless, other existing studies present an equally contrasting argument that many autocratic leaders are not atypically bellicose but are rather cautious. Andreski (1992, 103) maintains that "military dictators (at least in modern times) have been

notably pacific in external relations, while all the most aggressive and successfully imperialist polities have been ruled by civilians.” Andreski concludes that authoritarian leaders are concerned more about their political influence at home than about their reputation abroad. Doyle’s (2000, 84) observation concurs with Andreski’s, stating that “many dictators—think of Napoleon or Hitler—have been aggressive. Many dictators, however, are also quite shy and cautious. They like the benefits of being absolute ruler and may fear overburdening the quiescence of their subjects with costly foreign adventures.” By employing a cross-sectional, time-series dyadic data analysis covering 1945 to 1994, Peceny, Beer, and Sanchez-Terry (2002) report that the relationship between two states led by personalist dictators or military regimes tends to be peaceful.

When these two opposing literary arguments on the conflict behavior of autocrats are incorporated into the veto players theory, a realistic theoretical expectation should be as follows: Whimsical autocrats should not interact with legislative veto players in the same way as cautious autocrats. Legislative veto players are unlikely to be successful in opposing the military campaigns of a whimsical autocrat, but they should be capable of exerting a significant level of political constraints on a cautious autocrat. In this context, the number of legislative veto players, their policy differences, and their internal cohesion serve as the three most important constraining forces only against cautious autocrats. Put differently, these two contradictory expectations of autocratic rulers create difficulty in generalizing a conflict between two autocracies in a dyad, specifically because of the unpredictable behavior of the whimsical autocrat. The pacifying effect of legislative veto players depends on the specific type of autocrats across countries and time periods. Thus, given the ambiguity of the causal expectation, I do not expect statistically consistent and meaningful findings about the effect of legislative veto players in pure autocratic dyads.

I now explain the case of a conflict within a mixed dyad containing both a democracy and an autocracy. According to Tsebelis’ (1995, 1999, 2002) veto players theory, a mixed dyad should be peace prone as long as both democratic and autocratic executives are constrained by legislative veto players. I concur with this prediction of the nonviolent nature of mixed dyads, but with a caveat. As discussed, the number, preferences, and cohesion of legislative veto players help restrain the conflict behavior of the democratic executive but do not necessarily develop into effective legislative constraints against the autocrat’s foreign policy. Mixed dyads of democratic and nondemocratic states are less likely to engage in a conflict not because legislative veto players in both states are capable of producing considerable legislative constraints but because the democratic executive is effectively constrained by legislative veto players while the autocratic executive, concerned more with his country’s domestic situation, instead may prefer avoiding conflict altogether.¹⁰ In these cases, the affect of veto players is not the only significant factor; autocratic executive preferences play a major role as well. At the very least, we can say that by negotiating an outcome or acquiescing, democratic legislative veto players within a mixed dyad are capable of producing a constraining effect on the development of a dyadic war.

This line of reasoning does not support the argument of democratic peace studies that mixed dyads are destined to be conflict prone. Some argue that in a mixed dyad, an autocracy is automatically considered the culprit that instigates military confrontations, thereby forcing a democracy to resist and defend itself with counterthreats and force (e.g., Huth and Allee 2002, 2). However, democratic peace studies are inadequate in explaining the inconvenient truth that autocratic leaders have an enormous incentive to preclude costly military conflicts as long as their chance of being attacked is slim. The question then becomes, "In times of crisis, what are the odds of an autocracy being invaded by a democracy's military force?" As the veto players theory predicts, it is unlikely to be high because the democratic executive may have trouble winning the necessary support of multiple legislative veto players. Knowing information about the intricate domestic constraints of his or her democratic counterpart, the autocratic executive will typically avoid being the first to instigate military action out of fear of being attacked itself and may rather seek nonviolent resolutions to a conflict. Thus, realizing both the potential costs of military adventures and the difficulty of the democratic executive's foreign policy decision making, the autocratic executive is likely to avoid being charged a warmonger, thereby increasing the likelihood of a peaceful settlement between an autocracy and a democracy in a mixed dyad.¹¹

To capture the theoretical discussion of legislative veto players outlined above, I propose one general hypothesis about legislative constraints to test the Tsebelis veto players theory and three more nuanced hypotheses to test the veto players theory in the three different types of dyads. These hypotheses are as follows:

General Hypothesis (H_G): In all dyads, rising legislative constraints in either state are more likely to restrain executives' conflict behavior.

Hypothesis 1 (H_1): In democratic dyads, rising legislative constraints are more likely to restrain democratic executives' conflict behavior.

Hypothesis 2 (H_2): In autocratic dyads, rising legislative constraints should produce no statistically discernible pattern of influence on autocratic executives because of the unpredictable behavior of certain autocratic rulers.

Hypothesis 3 (H_3): In mixed dyads, the likelihood of conflict is small because rising legislative constraints in the democratic state produce a dampening effect on the dyad.

Research Design: Statistical Model Building, Operationalization, and Data

These four legislative constraints hypotheses are tested using a standard statistical model of conflict studies with a sample that includes all possible dyads for 164 countries during the period from 1885 to 2001, for a total of 425,980 dyads. In particular, Oneal and Russett's (2005) research design is used as the frame of reference to examine the effect of legislative constraints on executives' conflict behavior while controlling for conflict-related variables, such as economic interdependence and national capability.¹²

Since their statistical model has been widely replicated for years and proven to be highly reliable (e.g., Choi and James 2003, 2004, 2008), the possibility of coding errors or faulty model building on my part should be reduced. However, compared to Oneal and Russett, this study is notably different in two ways: (1) the inclusion of my legislative constraints variable and (2) the exclusion of their democracy variable. The former is self-explanatory, but the latter is necessary because Oneal and Russett's democracy variable is conceptually related to my variable, as both variables intend to examine the pacifying effect of political constraints. While my variable captures the specific effect of legislative constraints, Oneal and Russett's democracy variable detects the overall consequences of political constraints in five different areas—competitiveness of participation, regulation of participation, competitiveness of executive recruitment, openness of executive recruitment, and constraints on the executive.¹³

The empirical equation is expressed as follows:

$$\text{Onset of International Conflict}_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 (\text{Legislative Constraints in All Dyads}_{it-1}, \text{Legislative Constraints in Democratic Dyads}_{it-1}, \text{Legislative Constraints in Autocratic Dyads}_{it-1}, \text{or Legislative Constraints in Mixed Dyads}_{it-1}) + \beta_2 (\text{Economic Interdependence}_{it-1}) + \beta_3 (\text{Capability Ratio}_{it-1}) + \beta_4 (\text{Allies}_{it-1}) + \beta_5 (\text{Contiguity}_{it-1}) + \beta_6 (\text{Geographic Distance}_{it-1}) + \beta_7 (\text{Major Power}_{it-1}) + \beta_8 (\text{System Size}_{it-1}) + \varepsilon$$

The equation includes a variable for legislative constraints in all dyads, those in democratic dyads, those in autocratic dyads, and those in mixed dyads plus seven independent control variables that commonly appear in studies of international conflict. These seven control variables are economic interdependence, national capability ratio, allies, contiguity, geographic distance, major power involvement, and the number of states in the international system. The choice of these control variables primarily reflects a desire to maintain consistency with existing studies of international conflict (see Oneal and Russett 2005).¹⁴ To mitigate problems of reverse causality, all independent variables are lagged one year. The data analysis employs logistic regression models with peace-years correction (logit splines) and generalized estimating equations (GEEs); these are two of the most commonly used estimation methods in studies of international conflict (see Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1998; Zorn 2001). It should be noted that although Oneal and Russett's study relies exclusively on logit splines, I also implement GEEs to further confirm the statistical robustness of the main findings reported below.

This study employs two dependent variables representing conflict among dyads. The first dependent variable is dichotomized for the onset of an MID of any severity. An MID is "a set of interactions between or among states involving threats to use military force, displays of military force, or actual uses of military force" (Gochman and Maoz 1984, 587; also see Jones, Bremer, and Singer 1996; Sarkees 2000). The second dependent variable is dichotomized for the onset of a fatal MID where at least one soldier is killed per dyad-year. It should be noted that how national leaders respond to

military fatalities continues to stimulate scholarship, so the onset of a fatal militarized dispute is implemented as an additional check for robustness (e.g., Oneal, Russett, and Berbaum 2003; Choi and James 2005; Oneal and Russett 2005).

To test the four legislative constraint hypotheses, I use Henisz's (2000) veto players data collection.¹⁵ Henisz measures the level of institutional constraints produced by the three key veto players in each country's policy-making process: (1) the executive, (2) the lower legislative chambers, and (3) the upper legislative chamber. Regardless of the specific policy issues, the Henisz measure captures the political constraints imposed by the lower and upper legislative chambers on the executive. It is a continuous measure on a scale of 0 (*least constrained*) to 1 (*most constrained*). Tsebelis (2002, 204) himself acknowledges that "Henisz's [measure] is conceptually very closely correlated with [my theory of] veto players, and covers an overwhelming number of countries." With Tsebelis' recommendation, it appears that Henisz's data collection is the best measure available for assessing the level of legislative constraints in all types of political regimes over the past one hundred years. The measure is especially instrumental for this study, whose main research question is how legislative constraints influence the executive's conflict behavior.¹⁶

The variable for testing the general legislative constraints hypothesis, H_G , assumes the weak link (see Dixon 1994), which holds that the state with weaker legislative constraints is the stronger determinant of how things will proceed. The stronger legislative constraints that state has, the more constrained it will be from resorting to military force, and, in turn, the dyad will be more peaceful.

Since the Henisz measure does not differentiate legislative constraints in democracies from those in nondemocracies, it is difficult to analyze the independent effect of legislative constraints under democratic versus autocratic regimes. For this reason, a new measure of only legislative constraints in democracies is designed by combining the Henisz measure with a dichotomous indicator based on Polity data collection (on Polity, see Gurr, Jagers, and Moore 1989, 1991). A country is defined as a democracy if the Polity composite indicator is greater than or equal to 6 on a scale from -10 (*least democratic*) to 10 (*most democratic*). The cutoff value of 6 follows the conventional practice instituted by other conflict studies (e.g., Dixon 1994; Li 2005). The legislative constraints in democratic dyads are coded as equal to the Henisz measure if, and only if, a country is coded as a democracy by the Polity indicator; otherwise the dyad is excluded. In doing this, I use only 14 percent, or 58,821, of the observations for legislative constraints in democracies.

As discussed above, I have turned to Tsebelis' formal theory and Henisz's measure of veto players to examine the specific effect of legislative constraints on interstate disputes. Both Tsebelis and Henisz explain how the politics of legislative veto players influences policy outcomes, while democratic peace studies explore the overall implications of political constraints based on the Polity data collection. The validity of Polity, however, remains controversial. Munck and Verkuilen (2002, 26) observe, "Not only is virtually no theoretical justification for this operation provided, but it also is open to criticism due to the [Polity] index's problems of conceptual logic" (for a

similar criticism, also see Gleditsch and Ward 1997). In this context, it would be a mistake to claim that the level of legislative constraints increases only if the level of political constraints measured by Polity increases. In other words, the above method is for identifying legislative constraints in democracies using the Polity composite indicator but not to claim that there is necessarily an interaction effect between the Henisz measure and Polity.

To test the first nuanced hypothesis, H_1 , the variable measuring legislative constraints in democracies again assumes the weak link. Similar to testing the general legislative constraints hypothesis, H_G , the score for the state with weaker legislative constraints in a dyad is taken to be the stronger determinant of how veto players' politics will proceed. Hence, the stronger legislative constraints that the state has, the more constraint it will encounter from resorting to military violence and, therefore, the more peaceful the dyad.

A measure of legislative constraints in autocracies is similar to that of legislative constraints in democracies, combining the Henisz measure with a dichotomous Polity indicator. A country is defined as an autocracy if a Polity composite indicator is smaller than 6 on a scale from -10 (*least democratic*) to 10 (*most democratic*). Only in autocratic dyads are the legislative constraints variable coded as equal to the Henisz measure. As a result, I use only 41 percent, or 175,648, of the observations for legislative constraints in autocratic dyads. This operationalization enables us to detect variations of legislative constraints only under autocratic regimes.

The smaller score for legislative constraints in autocratic dyads is recorded to test the second nuanced hypothesis, H_2 , according to which the variable should produce no clear peace-building effect.

A measure of legislative constraints in mixed dyads is constructed after excluding democratic and autocratic dyads from all other dyads. This leaves only 45 percent, or 191,511, of the observations. Using the same process as before, the smaller score of legislative constraints in mixed dyads is recorded to test the third nuanced hypothesis, H_3 , according to which the variable should show a negative coefficient with significance.

Appendix A summarizes the descriptive statistics for legislative constraints and the other control variables. The minimum and maximum levels of legislative constraints in democratic dyads, autocratic dyads, and mixed dyads are from 0 to 0.6627, from 0 to 0.6226, and from 0 to 0.6738, respectively. This indicates that some legislative veto players in autocratic regimes produce high levels of institutional constraints similar to their counterparts in democratic regimes, while others may be subject to whimsical autocrats.

The explanations for the rest of the variables are summarized from Oneal and Russett's (2005) study. The economic interdependence variable assumes the weak link: the score for the less interdependent state in a dyad is taken to be the stronger determinant of interstate disputes. The national capability ratio variable is introduced to control for power preponderance theory. It is expected that an asymmetric power relationship creates a favorable environment for peaceful coexistence. The allies variable

is included to account for the argument that military alliance has a dampening effect on conflict, especially within the bipolar international system. It has been argued that the likelihood of conflict increases if a major power is involved in a dispute or if dyadic states share a border. Students of realism view these two factors as important because of their highly detrimental effects on the stability of the international system (e.g., Russett and Oneal 2001). To consider such realist expectations, both major power involvement and contiguity variables are controlled. Since certain studies argue that geographical proximity increases dyadic states' opportunity and willingness to pursue military adventures, the geographic distance variable is included. To control for the increasing number of states in the international system, especially during the past fifty years, the system size variable is introduced.¹⁷ Finally, to account for the years of peace since the last dyadic conflict, the years of peace and its cubic splines are included in the logit regression (see Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1998; Russett and Oneal 2001; Oneal and Russett 2005).

Empirical Results

This section consists of three parts: (1) a basic analysis that reports the results from the testing of the general legislative constraints hypothesis and its three more nuanced hypotheses, (2) substantive effects that are reported to determine whether the main findings reported below have a meaningful or practical application, and (3) a robust analysis of the veto players variable.

Basic Analysis

Table 1 shows the multivariate regression resulting from the testing of the general hypothesis of legislative constraints, H_G .¹⁸ A one-tailed test for each variable is employed because all of the hypotheses are directional and because it follows Oneal and Russett's (2005) study. While the first two columns report the results where the dependent variable is the onset of *all* MIDs, the last two columns show the results where the dependent variable is the onset of *fatal* MIDs. The standard logit regression with peace-years correction and GEEs are run against each dependent variable. The use of logit splines follows Oneal and Russett's practice, while GEEs are employed for further robustness. To save space, the estimated coefficients for system size and years of peace and its cubic splines, all of which are statistically significant, are not reported.

As shown in the first column, H_G of legislative constraints is supported with a correct negative sign while taking into account all the conflict-related control variables. This suggests that formal institutional constraints created by legislative veto players inhibit executives from engaging in a militarized dispute. The legislative constraints variable in the third column is also supported in the context of fatal MIDs. The GEEs results in the second and fourth columns concur with the logit splines results. This suggests that legislative veto players are likely to place effective constraints on executives' conflict behavior. In terms of the level of significance and the sign of the coefficient

Table 1. Legislative Constraints in All Dyads and the Onset of International Conflict, 1885–2001

Variable	All militarized interstate disputes		Fatal militarized interstate disputes	
	Logit splines	GEEs	Logit splines	GEEs
Constraints in all dyads	-2.5789*** (0.4450)	-2.8255*** (0.4703)	-4.6930*** (1.0057)	-4.2968*** (0.9423)
Economic interdependence	-28.5353** (12.0305)	-41.0754** (15.9896)	-118.1323** (41.8119)	-141.4146** (51.4454)
Capability ratio	-0.2590*** (0.0393)	-0.2605*** (0.0468)	-0.3589*** (0.0570)	-0.3667*** (0.0625)
Allies	-0.0131 (0.1242)	-0.3087** (0.1440)	-0.3150* (0.1810)	-0.5421** (0.2023)
Contiguity	1.0230*** (0.1936)	1.2833*** (0.2495)	0.7212** (0.3002)	0.7494* (0.3291)
Geographic distance	-0.3850*** (0.0647)	-0.4710*** (0.0716)	-0.5280*** (0.0999)	-0.5683*** (0.1136)
Major power	0.9593*** (0.1713)	1.0551*** (0.2283)	0.7929** (0.2719)	0.7728** (0.3020)
Constant	0.3647 (0.4959)	-0.6287 (0.5800)	0.4619 (0.7797)	-0.3220 (0.8982)
χ^2	2303.98	1583.48	1013.54	824.25
<i>p</i> of χ^2	.0001	.0001	.0001	.0001
Pseudo- <i>R</i> ²	.34	N/A	.26	N/A
<i>N</i>	425,980	425,974	425,980	425,974

Note: GEEs = generalized estimating equations. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors adjusted for clustering on dyads with the logit splines; semirobust standard errors adjusted for clustering on dyads with the GEEs.

p* < .05, one-tailed. *p* < .01, one-tailed. ****p* < .001, one-tailed.

across the four models, the two different measurements for the dependent variable and the two different estimation methods do not distort the robustness of the legislative constraints variable.¹⁹ These results reveal that executives' conflict behavior is likely to be restrained as legislative opposition increases. On the whole, these findings corroborate the prediction of Tsebelis' (1995, 1999, 2002) formal theory of veto players.

Once the other control variables are considered, it appears that the economic interdependence variable produces a pacifying effect, showing a negative sign at the .01 significance level, across all the models. The greater the level of interdependence, the less likely MIDs are to occur. These findings concur with Oneal and Russett's (2005, 301) recent report that "there is clear evidence that interdependence is correlated with lower levels of interstate violence when the influence of contiguity is taken into account." The significance of the five realist variables, in general, turns out to be consistent across all the models. As expected, an asymmetric power relationship in a dyad decreases interstate disputes not only because the strong state can achieve its political

Table 2. Legislative Constraints in Democratic Dyads and the Onset of International Conflict, 1885–2001

Variable	All militarized interstate disputes		Fatal militarized interstate disputes	
	Logit splines	GEEs	Logit splines	GEEs
Constraints in demo dyads	-2.1962*** (0.6659)	-2.0325*** (0.6609)	-4.2295** (1.7809)	-3.8592* (1.8071)
Economic interdependence	-19.2230 (19.7875)	-19.9724 (20.1824)	-99.8743 (120.8900)	-94.1602 (120.3076)
Capability ratio	-0.0667 (0.1437)	-0.0617 (0.1428)	0.0790 (0.2216)	0.1251 (0.2196)
Allies	0.6404* (0.3268)	0.6251* (0.3261)	0.5003 (0.4740)	0.5857 (0.4841)
Contiguity	1.6930** (0.6321)	1.7609** (0.6443)	2.1162* (0.9439)	2.3403** (0.9330)
Geographic distance	-0.0457 (0.2092)	-0.0267 (0.2126)	-0.2943 (0.2685)	-0.1875 (0.2619)
Major power	-0.0298 (0.3888)	-0.0115 (0.3924)	-0.1235 (0.6934)	-0.1025 (0.7123)
Constant	-4.4745** (1.8186)	-4.7022** (1.8567)	-4.3341* (2.2259)	-5.5280** (2.0383)
χ^2	166.59	164.20	55.55	51.60
p of χ^2	.0001	.0001	.0001	.0001
Pseudo- R^2	.24	N/A	.27	N/A
N	58,821	58,372	58,821	58,372

Note: GEEs = generalized estimating equations. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors adjusted for clustering on dyads with the logit splines; semirobust standard errors adjusted for clustering on dyads with the GEEs.

* $p < .05$, one-tailed. ** $p < .01$, one-tailed. *** $p < .001$, one-tailed.

goals without resorting to force but also because the weak are not likely to challenge the strong. The results for the allies variable provide support for its hypothesis, except for the logit splines model in the first column. Military alliances between dyadic states, on average, appear to produce a dampening impact on MID. When the two states in a dyad are geographically contiguous, the likelihood of conflict increases. It also appears that the presence of a major power in a dyad increases the likelihood of conflict. Among the five realist controls, the effect of the major power variable appears to be most consistent across two different statistical estimations.²⁰

Tables 2 to 4 demonstrate the effects of legislative constraints in the context of the three different types of dyads. Specifically, Table 2 shows empirical results for the first nuanced hypothesis, where the constraining effect of legislative veto players in democratic dyads is tested while controlling for the other conflict-related variables, Table 3 reports results for the second nuanced hypothesis of legislative constraints in autocratic dyads, and Table 4 displays results for the third nuanced hypothesis of legislative

Table 3. Legislative Constraints in Autocratic Dyads and the Onset of International Conflict, 1885–2001

Variable	All militarized interstate disputes		Fatal militarized interstate disputes	
	Logit splines	GEEs	Logit splines	GEEs
Constraints in auto dyads	-1.4235 (0.9472)	-1.0532 (0.9852)	-2.3871 (2.1196)	-1.9174 (2.1112)
Economic interdependence	-16.9982 (12.6559)	-23.1399 (17.0218)	-88.2593* 43.6672	-98.4998* (50.4122)
Capability ratio	-0.2543*** (0.0544)	-0.2702*** (0.0625)	-0.3713*** (0.0907)	-0.3803*** (0.0968)
Allies	-0.1390 (0.1639)	-0.3968* (0.1850)	-0.4268* (0.2314)	-0.5591* (0.2573)
Contiguity	1.7037*** (0.3603)	1.7087*** (0.3983)	1.1805* (0.5695)	1.0961* (0.5866)
Geographic distance	-0.4373*** (0.0821)	-0.5342*** (0.0870)	-0.5552*** (0.1320)	-0.5672*** (0.1402)
Major power	0.9996*** (0.2407)	1.1692*** (0.3002)	1.0085** (0.3998)	0.9949** (0.4232)
Constant	-0.2654 (0.7440)	-0.8511 (0.7997)	-0.1647 (1.2250)	-0.9326 (1.2618)
χ^2	1080.71	842.05	470.11	417.94
p of χ^2	.0001	.0001	.0001	.0001
Pseudo- R^2	.34	N/A	.25	N/A
N	175,648	175,526	175,648	175,526

Note: GEEs = generalized estimating equations. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors adjusted for clustering on dyads with the logit splines; semirobust standard errors adjusted for clustering on dyads with the GEEs.

* $p < .05$, one-tailed. ** $p < .01$, one-tailed. *** $p < .001$, one-tailed.

constraints in mixed dyads. The hypothesis of legislative constraints in democratic dyads in Table 2 is supported with a correct negative sign across all the models. Corroborating the prediction of the veto players theory, it appears that rising legislative constraints in democratic dyads help decrease the onset of conflict because democratic executives value the constitutional and political rights of legislative veto players. As hypothesized, legislative constraints under autocratic regimes, in Table 3, turn out to be insignificant across all four models; it is not determined how legislative constraints in autocratic dyads are associated with the conflict behavior of whimsical or cautious autocratic leaders. This result is inconsistent with the prediction by the veto players theory that increasing legislative constraints on *any* type of political leader should reduce the likelihood of armed conflicts. As shown in Table 4, the coefficient for legislative constraints in mixed dyads is statistically significant, with a correct negative sign. Hence, the likelihood of conflict between a democracy and an autocracy is small, lending support to the veto players theory.

Table 4. Legislative Constraints in Mixed Dyads and the Onset of International Conflict, 1885–2001

Variable	All militarized interstate disputes		Fatal militarized interstate disputes	
	Logit splines	GEEs	Logit splines	GEEs
Constraints in mixed dyads	-3.2770*** (0.6060)	-3.0265*** (0.6208)	-5.3190*** (1.3066)	-4.7814*** (1.2180)
Economic interdependence	-48.6573* (22.9047)	-76.6836** (31.6063)	-207.8762* (99.2928)	-230.1284* (108.7711)
Capability ratio	-0.2874*** (0.0547)	-0.2978*** (0.0604)	-0.3912*** (0.0737)	-0.4272*** (0.0762)
Allies	-0.2149 (0.1988)	-0.3302 (0.2142)	-0.5059 (0.3476)	-0.5337 (0.3672)
Contiguity	1.1045*** (0.2545)	1.4799*** (0.3113)	0.5760 (0.4063)	0.6754* (0.3924)
Geographic distance	-0.4512*** (0.1016)	-0.5308*** (0.1121)	-0.5291*** (0.1321)	-0.6113*** (0.1400)
Major power	1.1686*** (0.2536)	1.3377*** (0.3041)	0.4208 (0.4198)	0.6603 (0.4091)
Constant	0.7687 (0.6950)	-0.0893 (0.8188)	0.9441 (0.9324)	0.5242 (1.0446)
χ^2	1270.04	924.80	730.22	511.66
<i>p</i> of χ^2	.0001	.0001	.0001	.0001
Pseudo- <i>R</i> ²	.33	N/A	.27	N/A
<i>N</i>	191,511	191,125	191,511	191,125

Note: GEEs = generalized estimating equations. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors adjusted for clustering on dyads with the logit splines; semirobust standard errors adjusted for clustering on dyads with the GEEs.

p* < .05, one-tailed. *p* < .01, one-tailed. ****p* < .001, one-tailed.

These results shed new light on the veto players theory, which would predict that institutional constraints from congressional legislators deter executives' conflict behavior regardless of regime type. By incorporating democracy-related arguments, I elaborate on the veto players theory and argue that the politics of legislative veto players does matter in democratic dyads but not necessarily in autocratic ones. The above empirical analysis confirms my theoretical expectation that legislative veto players under democratic regimes are real political competitors for chief executives, while those under nondemocratic regimes do not possess consistent and independent decision-making power.

I also examine whether legislative constraints create a systematically different effect under presidential versus parliamentary forms of government. The results of these examinations indicate no notable difference and are not reported here to save space.

Table 5. Substantive Effects of the Onset of Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs), 1885–2001

Variable	Based on the logit splines models	
	All MIDs (%)	Fatal MIDs (%)
Legislative constraints in all dyads increased by 1 standard deviation	-31	-50
Legislative constraints in all dyads increased by 2 standard deviations	-53	-75
Legislative constraints in democratic dyads increased by 1 standard deviation	-27	-44
Legislative constraints in democratic dyads increased by 2 standard deviations	-46	-68
Legislative constraints in autocratic dyads increased by 1 standard deviation	N/A	N/A
Legislative constraints in autocratic dyads increased by 2 standard deviations	N/A	N/A
Legislative constraints in mixed dyads increased by 1 standard deviation	-32	-47
Legislative constraints in mixed dyads increased by 2 standard deviations	-54	-71

Note: The baseline values are as follows: mean for continuous variables, 0 for allies, 0 for contiguous, and 0 for major power.

Substantive Effects

It is possible that with a large sample size, even a small effect can be statistically significant though it may not be a meaningful finding. Thus, it becomes increasingly important to estimate the substantive effects of variables as the sample size increases. Table 5 reports the substantive effects of each of the four legislative constraints variables that appear in the logit splines models in Tables 1 to 4.²¹ It is apparent that regardless of different model specifications, institutional constraints imposed by legislative veto players notably reduce the percentage changes for the likelihood of an armed conflict. Specifically, legislative constraints in democratic dyads produce the dampening effect on interstate disputes, those in mixed dyads consistently accomplish peaceful outcomes, and those in autocratic dyads do not clearly affect executives' conflict behavior. One of the interesting findings of Table 5 is that legislative veto players appear to be more concerned about battle fatalities than mere dispute incidents given the fact that the substantive effects of fatal MIDs are about 20 percent higher on average than those of all MIDs. This evidence supports the so-called casualty hypothesis or "body-bag syndrome," indicating that with the possibility of military fatalities, legislative lawmakers tend to recoil or withdraw support for their executive (see Oneal, Russett, and Berbaum 2003).

Robust Analysis of the Legislative Constraints Variable

So far, Oneal and Russett's democracy variable has not been incorporated in the analysis in response to the two following criticisms: (1) it is conceptually related to legislative constraints, both of which intend to capture the effect of political constraints, and (2) Henisz uses the Polity data (i.e., the component of executive constraints) to construct part of his measure of legislative constraints. However, the problem with leaving out democracy is that it leaves uncertainty regarding whether we are estimating the influence of legislative constraints or democracy.²² The first column in Table 6 is meant to account for this concern. When the democracy variable is incorporated in the logit splines model, it fails to achieve significance, while the legislative constraints variable is supported.²³ It is speculated that despite the large sample size, the presence of multicollinearity may have blurred the significance of the democracy variable. In fact, the correlation between legislative constraints and democracy turns out to be .79. It may also be the case that legislative constraints are more effective than other types of political constraints.

Some scholars suggest that one of the ways of addressing the potential multicollinearity problem between democracy and a conceptually related variable is to residualize democracy (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). The second column in Table 6 includes the democracy variable, which is the residual of a regression of democracy on legislative constraints. While the legislative constraints variable shows significance, the democracy variable does not. It should be noted, however, that the residualization procedure is controversial, having been criticized by Clarke and Stone (2008) for effectively leaving democracy out altogether.

To address Clarke and Stone's criticism, I introduce another democracy measure, which is created by excluding the executive constraints component (i.e., XCONST) from the Polity composite index. In doing so, we can assuage a concern that the legislative constraints variable may essentially capture the same phenomenon as the executive constraints element of Oneal and Russett's democracy variable. The third column in Table 6 reports the results, which confirm the previous findings: in the presence of democracy minus XCONST in the same model, legislative constraints produce a dampening effect on conflict.

It would also be useful to see whether an interaction effect between legislative constraints and democracy exists. The fourth column in Table 6 shows the results. While the legislative constraints variable is supported, the interaction term is not. In fact, this multiplicative interaction model turns out to be inferior to the standard additive model in the first column. By comparing the overall fit of the two competing models, we can determine whether the interaction variable included in the fourth column contributes enough additional information to assist in explaining the likelihood of conflict. I implement two comparative statistics: an information criterion (AIC) test and the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) test. The AIC value turns out to be 12376.82 for the additive model in the first column and 12378.64 for the multiplicative interaction model in the fourth column. The smaller number of the additive

Table 6. Legislative Constraints and the Onset of All Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1885–2001

Variable	Logit splines				
	Democracy included	Democracy residual	Democracy minus XCONST	Constraints × democracy	Constraints in each state
Constraints	-2.1315*** (0.4323)	-2.5973*** (0.4471)	-2.1160*** (0.4522)	-2.0634*** (0.4363)	
Democracy	-0.0144 (0.0096)	-0.0144 (0.0096)	-0.0122 (0.0136)	-0.0131 (0.0105)	
Constraints × democracy				-0.0206 (0.0555)	
Constraints of state a					0.0210 (0.2236)
Constraints of state b					-0.6214** (0.2431)
Democracy of state a					0.0016 (0.0073)
Democracy of state b					-0.0009 (0.0067)
Economic interdependence	-27.7568** (11.8579)	-27.7568** (11.8579)	-25.4406* (11.4481)	-27.5577** (11.8214)	-45.5701*** (14.0653)
Capability ratio	-0.2563*** (0.0391)	-0.2563*** (0.0391)	-0.2652*** (0.0396)	-0.2560*** (0.0392)	-0.2710*** (0.0395)
Allies	-0.0136 (0.1251)	-0.0136 (0.1251)	0.0312 (0.1257)	-0.0116 (0.1247)	-0.0666 (0.1258)
Contiguity	1.0235*** (0.1929)	1.0235*** (0.1929)	1.1057*** (0.1968)	1.0248*** (0.1934)	1.0205*** (0.2064)
Geographic distance	-0.3861*** (0.0649)	-0.3861*** (0.0649)	-0.3113*** (0.0622)	-0.3867*** (0.0650)	-0.3590*** (0.0624)
Major power	0.9677*** (0.1714)	0.9677*** (0.1714)	0.9361*** (0.1716)	0.9691*** (0.1715)	0.8929*** (0.1808)
Constant	0.2768 (0.4910)	0.3697 (0.4969)	-0.2547 (0.4855)	0.2847 (0.4901)	0.2468 (0.4850)
χ^2	2307.60	2307.60	2043.24	2354.10	2181.87
<i>p</i> of χ^2	.0001	.0001	.0001	.0001	.0001
Pseudo- <i>R</i> ²	.34	.34	.34	.34	.33
<i>N</i>	425,980	425,980	406,727	425,980	425,980

Note: Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors adjusted for clustering on dyads.
 p* < .05, one-tailed. *p* < .01, one-tailed. ****p* < .001, one-tailed.

model indicates that the standard additive specification does a better job than the multiplicative specification in explaining the effect of legislative constraints on international conflict. The BIC value is 12530.29 for the additive model and 12543.07 for the multiplicative interaction model. Since the model with the lower value of BIC

indicates the better result, the additive model is again shown to be the better choice. In short, the two comparative statistics point to the superiority of the additive model over the multiplicative interaction model.

One may argue that given that a monadic versus a dyadic argument of institutional constraints may generate different predictions, it might be interesting to relax the weak link assumption by introducing a separate legislative constraints variable for both state A and state B. I create constraint scores of each variable for both state A and state B but randomize who is A and B for each observation (for the randomization procedure, see Mansfield, Milner, and Pevehouse 2007). The last column in Table 6 shows the results. Legislative constraints of state B alone show significance while the other three variables do not, indicating that there is no clear relationship between each constraints variable and a militarized dispute. These results are not surprising given that most conflict scholars including Dixon (1994) and Oneal and Russett (2005) argue for the utility of the weak link-based measure over other measures based on the theoretical reasoning that the state with weaker institutional constraints is the stronger determinant of how dyadic interactions proceed.

The Database of Political Institutions includes a measure of CHECKS, which some contend captures a similar concept of Henisz's legislative constraints (Beck et al. 2001; Keefer and Stasavage 2003). The correlation between legislative constraints and CHECKS is .71. However, it is worthwhile to note that the CHECKS data covers a much shorter time period than Henisz's, beginning in 1975. Table 7 presents two sets of results. The odd columns test the effect of legislative constraints during the period from 1975 to 2001, while the even columns examine that of CHECKS. While legislative constraints matter in reducing the likelihood of conflict, the CHECKS measure does not. These findings indicate that as far as international conflict is concerned, the CHECKS measure provides no explanatory power. I speculate that these two different findings are related to the fact that the CHECKS measure emphasizes the electoral rules and the degree of electoral competition in a country, while the Henisz measure distinguishes veto players based on the number of formal constitutional veto points present in a political system (i.e., executive and houses of the legislature).

Conclusion

In conflict studies, democratic peace studies present a compelling argument about the impact of overall political constraints on leaders' conflict behavior. However, their theoretical development has overlooked the specific effect of legislative constraints stemming from differences in the number of legislative veto players, their diverging policy preferences, and their internal cohesion. Built on Tsebelis' (1995, 1999, 2002) veto players theory, I have probed the potential influence of legislative constraints on executives' foreign policy choices between war and peace, an unexplored subject matter in the area of international relations. I have proposed a general hypothesis that, regardless of regime type, an increase of formal institutional constraints imposed by legislative veto players inhibits leaders' conflict behavior. I have also proposed three

Table 7. Legislative Constraints in All Dyads and the Onset of International Conflict, 1975–2001

Variable	All militarized interstate disputes		Fatal militarized interstate disputes	
	Logit splines	GEEs	Logit splines	GEEs
Constraints in all dyads	-1.5442** (0.5512)	-1.9127*** (0.5784)	-3.7607*** (1.2115)	-3.7214*** (1.1957)
CHECKS in all dyads	0.0249 (0.0581)	-0.0424 (0.0631)	-0.0825 (0.0949)	-0.0792 (0.0943)
Economic interdependence	-58.4050** (20.8715)	-47.0500* (22.7254)	-125.1205* (58.1419)	-130.8510* (61.5908)
Capability ratio	-0.2760*** (0.0489)	-0.2844*** (0.0543)	-0.3182*** (0.0704)	-0.3215*** (0.0720)
Allies	-0.2209 (0.1519)	-0.3604* (0.1722)	-0.3398 (0.2421)	-0.4617* (0.2516)
Contiguity	1.5646*** (0.2615)	1.8584*** (0.3016)	0.7794 (0.4911)	0.8697* (0.5040)
Geographic distance	-0.3602*** (0.0730)	-0.4193*** (0.0769)	-0.5530*** (0.1065)	-0.5780*** (0.1092)
Major power	1.0354*** (0.2348)	1.2275*** (0.2785)	0.5584 (0.4960)	0.6170 (0.5114)
Constant	-0.3056 (0.5729)	-1.4042* (0.6210)	0.3073 (0.8762)	-0.5385 (0.9299)
χ^2	1972.66	1441.20	718.73	589.08
p of χ^2	.0001	.0001	.0001	.0001
Pseudo- R^2	.33	N/A	.22	N/A
N	240,750	240,617	240,750	240,617

Note: GEEs = generalized estimating equations. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors adjusted for clustering on dyads with the logit splines; semirobust standard errors adjusted for clustering on dyads with the GEEs.

* $p < .05$, one-tailed. ** $p < .01$, one-tailed. *** $p < .001$, one-tailed.

Table 8. Tsebelis' Veto Players Theory and My Hypotheses

		Tsebelis	Mine	
		Veto players theory	Hypotheses	Findings
General hypothesis	Legislative constraints in all dyads	More likely to decrease conflict	More likely to decrease conflict	More likely to decrease conflict
1st nuanced hypothesis	Legislative constraints in democratic dyads	More likely to decrease conflict	More likely to decrease conflict	More likely to decrease conflict
2nd nuanced hypothesis	Legislative constraints in autocratic dyads	More likely to decrease conflict	No discernible effect on conflict	No discernible effect on conflict
3rd nuanced hypothesis	Legislative constraints in mixed dyads	More likely to decrease conflict	More likely to decrease conflict	More likely to decrease conflict

more nuanced hypotheses by evaluating legislative constraints based on the three different types of dyads.

The cross-sectional, time-series dyadic data for 164 countries during the years 1885 to 2001 were fitted by two different statistical estimation methods for robustness: logit splines and GEEs. The results for legislative constraints in all dyads corroborate the prediction of the veto players theory that rising legislative constraints decrease the likelihood of conflict. Legislative constraints in democratic dyads, in particular, appear to hamper executives' military violence, further supporting the veto players theory. The results for legislative constraints in mixed dyads indicate that mixed dyads are as peaceful as democratic dyads, which again coincides with the veto players theory. The results for legislative constraints in autocratic dyads, however, appear to be quite distant from the prediction of the veto players theory since such constraints produce no effective pacifying influence on autocrats' conflict behavior. Table 8 summarizes these findings by comparing the veto players theory to my hypotheses.

The conceptual development and empirical findings of this study are an important advancement of our scientific knowledge over previous studies of veto players and international conflict. Although the veto players theory is being used to analyze various economic policy outcomes in the field of comparative politics, its potential is underappreciated in the foreign policy arena. This study addresses this conceptual and empirical paucity of knowledge by extending the scope of the veto players theory into conflict studies and elaborating the constraining effects of legislative veto players in the different types of political systems. Thus, this study contributes to a constructive ongoing dialogue about our understanding of leaders' conflict behavior. Future research should consider these findings as it becomes increasingly clear that legislative veto players are essential political actors in the foreign policy decision-making process.

Appendix A

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Observations	M	SD	Min	Max
Onset of all militarized interstate disputes	425,980	0.0032	0.0569	0.0000	1.0000
Onset of fatal militarized interstate disputes	425,980	0.0010	0.0319	0.0000	1.0000
Legislative constraints in all dyads	425,980	0.0713	0.1455	0.0000	0.6738
Legislative constraints in democratic dyads	58,821	0.3324	0.1433	0.0000	0.6627
Legislative constraints in autocratic dyads	175,648	0.0070	0.0436	0.0000	0.6226
Legislative constraints in mixed dyads	191,511	0.0501	0.1178	0.0000	0.6738
Economic interdependence	425,980	0.0005	0.0028	0.0000	0.1925
Capability ratio	425,980	1.9917	1.4919	0.0000	10.1638
Allies	425,980	0.0691	0.2537	0.0000	1.0000
Contiguity	425,980	0.0408	0.1979	0.0000	1.0000
Geographic distance	425,980	8.2045	0.7969	1.6094	9.4212
Major power	425,980	0.0760	0.2649	0.0000	1.0000

Appendix B

Multicollinearity Diagnostics

	Variance inflation factors	Tolerance	R ²
Legislative constraints in all dyads	1.04	0.9571	.0429
Economic interdependence	1.16	0.8632	.1368
Capability ratio	1.16	0.8593	.1407
Allies	1.18	0.8507	.1493
Contiguity	1.41	0.7083	.2917
Geographic distance	1.48	0.6746	.3254
Major power	1.16	0.8596	.1404
Mean variance inflation factors	1.23		

	Eigenvalues	Condition index
1	3.3906	1.0000
2	1.3567	1.5809
3	0.8703	1.9738
4	0.8183	2.0356
5	0.7393	2.1415
6	0.5997	2.3777
7	0.2220	3.9084
8	0.0031	32.8895
Condition number		32.8895
Det (correlation matrix)		.467

Note: A general rule of thumb: a serious multicollinearity problem is suspected if the mean of all the variance inflation factors is considerably larger than 1, if R^2 is greater than .80, or if condition number (that is derived from the eigenvalue) exceeds 1000. Eigenvalues and condition index computed from the scaled raw sum-of-squared and crossproducts with an intercept.

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Author's Note

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Notes

1. Tsebelis' emphasis on those three features of veto players is also in line with Milner's (1997, 244) argument: "One must consider both preferences and institutions when trying to explain policy outcomes."
2. Tsebelis (1999, 593) himself stresses the straightforward nature of the theory: "The argument underlying the veto players' theory is very simple."
3. The argument is also consistent with Milner's (1997, 259) observation that "in general, the more groups internally with which an executive must share power and the more the preferences of these groups differ, the less likely it is that cooperation or conflict will occur."
4. Much of the literature on legislative constraints in American politics and the use of force, however, suggests that congressional constraints on presidential war powers has been weakened. For example, in *Presidential War Power*, Fisher (2004) concludes that there are no effective congressional checks and balances on executive power. But as Howell and Pevehouse (2007, 6) point out, Fisher's conclusion may be drawn from the limited scope of inquiry and normative reasoning.
5. Milner (1997, 250), however, states a cautious warning that "executives often fail to anticipate correctly their domestic constraints."
6. It would be incorrect to think that incorporating a perspective of the regime effect into the veto players theory sacrifices the general applicability of the argument of veto players, an argument discussed in detail in the previous section.
7. The normative arguments of the democratic peace theory are not discussed in this study because the main focus is on its institutional arguments.
8. Prins and Sprecher (1999), however, report that militarized disputes are more likely in coalition governments.
9. Despite the theoretical development of audience costs, no empirical studies with longitudinal data have directly tested the argument. This is because no precise measures of the

existence and magnitude of audience costs are yet developed. However, by examining American public opinion with regard to U.S. foreign policy, Tomz (2007) finds the direct existence of domestic audience costs in *American society*.

10. Some studies report that domestic constraints could encourage aggressive behavior of autocracies. When an autocracy faces a democracy constrained with multiple veto players, it should pursue strategic avoidance behavior by raising its demands, thereby increasing the likelihood of conflict. Howell, Pevehouse, and Kriner (2007, 112) investigate the possibility of strategic avoidance behavior of foreign states against America during the period from 1945 to 2000 and conclude that “our findings, for the most part, suggested that it [i.e., strategic avoidance] does not [exist].”
11. An exception is a case of preemptive self-defense. If one side is intent on fighting and attacks, the other side would have to respond regardless of legislative constraints.
12. The data set is publicly available at <http://www.bama.ua.edu/~joneal/CMPS2005>.
13. Robustness tests with Oneal and Russett’s democracy variable will be conducted in the next section.
14. For a more detailed discussion on a similar model specification and certain debates such as the inclusion of contiguity and geographic distance in the same model, see Oneal and Russett’s (2005, 298) recent compelling arguments and findings. I do not include inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) as a control, following Oneal and Russett’s approach that “we focus on the effects of the liberal variables democracy and interdependence because . . . research on the role of IGOs is rapidly evolving.”
15. The data set is publicly available at <http://www-management.wharton.upenn.edu/henisz/>.
16. Tsebelis also notes that the Henisz measure does not take into account the ideological distance of the different actors. For this reason, Tsebelis has created a veto player data set that measures the different actors in regard to their policy positions. However, his data set includes only twenty-two advanced industrialized countries during the post–Cold war period.
17. According to Raknerud and Hegre’s (1997) study, membership in the international system has expanded over years, so the probability of a dispute for any given pair of nonrelevant states has declined over time. In this context, the dramatic growth in the number of sovereign countries since World War II should be considered.
18. Spearman’s correlation analysis indicates that the strength of relationship between the onset of all militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) and legislative constraints is $-.0085$ and statistically significant at the .001 level; the strength between the onset of fatal MIDs and legislative constraints is $-.0114$ and statistically significant at the .001 level. This simple analysis shows that, as hypothesized, an increase of legislative constraints appears to discourage executives’ conflict behavior.

Multicollinearity problems may be suspected among the independent variables. This study has conducted three sets of rigorous diagnostic tests for multicollinearity: variance inflation factors, R^2 statistics, eigenvalues, and condition index (see Belsley, Kuh, and Welsch 1980; Gujarati 2003). The test results for the legislative constraints equation are found in Appendix B, and none indicate severe multicollinearity.

19. Following Green, Kim, and Yoon's (2001) recommendation, conditional logit with fixed effects are also used, and their results are similar to those estimated by the logit splines and the generalized estimating equations (GEEs). The results can be obtained from the author on request.
Nonlinearity for the legislative constraints variable was tested with its squared term. It turned out that nonlinearity is not an issue, so the results are not reported here.
20. As noted in note 14, following Oneal and Russett's (2005) practice, I have not incorporated the third leg of the Kantian tripod, joint membership in International organizations. When included, its significance is not consistent across models.
21. The substantive effects resulting from the GEEs tests are similar to those from the logit splines and can be obtained from the author on request.
22. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for bringing up the point.
23. The results with fatal MIDs are similar to those in the first column.

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