**Short data description**

The idea behind the Institutional Checks variable (Branduse and Heller nd) is to account for constitutional provisions that both set up and potentially weaken checks in the legislative process. While the impact of checks tends to be more visible when they are controlled by different actors with conflicting interests, they can affect outcomes even without evident conflict (Heller 2001). This variable thus accounts for agenda-setting authority, bicameralism and veto authority (on the part of legislatures and executives), the possibility that actors can remove each other from office, and the ability of one or several actors to call elections (Shugart and Carey 1992). A legislative veto thus constitutes a solid check, but is for example weakened to the extent that its exercise might prompt dissolution of the legislature and new elections. The variable is constructed using original constitutional data from the Institutions and Elections Project (Regan, Frank, and Clark 2009).

Branduse, Diana, and William B. Heller. Nd. “Measuring Institutions: Independence, Authority, and Accountability, with an Application to Legislative Process.” Working paper, Binghamton University.

Regan, Patrick M., Richard W. Frank, and David H. Clark. 2009. “New Datasets on Political Institutions and Elections, 1972—2005.” Conflict Management and Peace Science 26(3): 286-304

**Full(er) data description**

Branduse and Heller (nd) construct their LegChecks variable using constitutional provisions coded by the Institutions and Elections Project (IAEP; Regan, Frank, and Clark 2009). They argue that while constitutional provisions can create checks, some provisions also can weaken checks. They do so by limiting the scope of existing checks, creating lines of accountability that might give actors whose initiatives are checked the ability to punish those doing the checking ex post, or imposing potential costs on the exercise of checks (e.g., by raising the specter of elections in the face of legislative gridlock). Their measure includes twelve variables from IAEP dataset, some of which clearly serve as checks, others of which clearly weaken checks, and some of which do both, depending on context. The variables include: the number of legislative chambers (*legcham*=1 or 2), whether an executive (e.g., president or prime minister) has a veto (*execveto*), whether the legislature can block executive action (*legveto*), whether the legislature can remove an executive from office (*removeexec*), whether an executive has the authority to dissolve the legislature (*removeleg*), whether there is an executive who is chosen independently from the legislature (*execindep*), whether an executive has legislative proposal authority (*legpres*), whether the prime minister has the authority to propose legislation (*legpm*; this variable obviously is 0 if there is no prime minister), whether (explicitly or by common practice) an executive holds a legislative seat (*exleg*), whether the prime minister has the authority to call elections (*callpm*), whether the president has the authority to call elections (*callpres*), or whether no one has the authority to call new elections (*callnone*), as is the case for example in Norway.

Broadly speaking, Branduse and Heller see *legcham* and *callnone* as clearly contributing to checks. In the case of the number of legislative chambers, even ostensibly weak chambers can affect outcomes (Heller 2002; Tsebelis and Money 1997); *callnone* is not in itself an institutional check, but by providing a guarantee that disagreement will not lead to dissolution it reduces the costs of activating checks, including the partisan checks (Tsebelis 2002) that the Branduse-Heller measure does not include. The impact of all other variables depends on context.

* *execveto* is weakened in the presence of *removeexec*;
* *legveto* is weakened when either the president or the prime minister can call elections (*callpres* and (*callpm*) and disappears entirely if both can; it also is weakened when the executive can dissolve the legislature;
* executive ability to propose legislation(*legpres*) is weakened when the legislature can remove the executive;
* *removeexec* provides a check (via threat of punishment ex post) on executive action that is weakened when the executive can dissolve the legislature or in the face of executive proposal authority;
* *removeleg* weakens the effect of a formal legislative veto and clears potential obstacles to presidential proposals;
* *execindep* is weakened where the legislature can remove the executive and reduces total vetoes where the independent executive also can dissolve the legislature; at the same time, by contrast, it strengthens the effect of presidential proposal power;
* *legpres* reduces the potential for checks where the president can call new elections, but is an authority that can be checked de facto when the legislature can remove the executive; and
* *legpm* is counted as meaningless where the prime minister is a sitting member of the legislature.

Tsebelis, George, and Jeannette Money. 1997. *Bicameralism*. Edited by J. E. Alt and D. C. North. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

*LegChecks*

=legcham

+(execveto\*(execveto/(1+execveto+removeexec)))

+legveto\*((1-callpm)+callnone+(1-callpres))

+removeexec\*((1-removeleg)+(1-legpres)+(1-legpm))

+removeleg\*((1-legveto)+(1-legpres))

+execindep\*((1-removeexec)+legpres+(1-removeleg))

+legpres\*((1-callpres)+removeexec)

+legpm-exleg

+callnone

+callpres\*(1-legpres)