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### Recommended Citation

Rice, Laurie L. and Kernell, Samuel, "Presidents' Vetoes and Audience Costs" (2019). *SIUE Faculty Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity*. 88.  
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Accepted for the March 2019 issue of *Presidential Studies Quarterly* © Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress. The definitive version is available at [www.interscience.wiley.com/journal/psq](http://www.interscience.wiley.com/journal/psq)

## Presidents' Vetoes and Audience Costs

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*Author's Note: This article reflects research supported by the National Science Foundation under grant to Kernell (SES-1655792). We thank Douglas Kriner and Ken Moffett for their advice and suggestions and Huchen Liu and Zoe Nemerever for research assistance.*

### Abstract

*Veto threats may offer presidents bargaining leverage, but such leverage will be diminished if they and those with whom they transact business view a veto as hurting the president's approval rating and his party's prospects in the next election. How concerned must presidents be about the audience costs associated with a veto? Political science research suggests that they should be in that the public does not like vetoes and punishes presidents when they exercise this authority. In this article we test this argument with survey responses during times after presidents have issued a veto threat but before an actual veto. While on average, respondents register opposition to a veto, this preference varies greatly with the specific policy in question and with respondents' party identification and presidential approval. The results suggest that opposition to a veto comes disproportionately, may be limited to politically distant respondents, and thus may not be as costly as the net negative numbers suggest.*

During the past several decades divided party control of Congress and the presidency and the resulting gridlock have defined politics in Washington. As presidents resist opposition majorities in Congress, they have been quick to issue veto threats. Occasionally, they have followed up their threats with actual vetoes. Various research suggests that presidents absorb serious audience costs when they rely on this Constitutional instrument. Groseclose and McCarty (2001) construct a model of an opposition-Congress strategy that has it send presidents popular legislation they are committed to vetoing.<sup>1</sup> Although the conditions necessary to set up this bind are probably exceptional – after all, presidents will be disinclined to box themselves in by committing to veto popular policies – the authors report evidence supporting their hypothesis that Congress’ selection strategy accounts for the losses in presidents’ approval ratings. After vetoing major bills, their approval rating drops an estimated 2 percentage points (Groseclose and McCarty 2001).

Recently, a different rationale has been offered for expecting vetoes to take a toll on presidents’ public support. The public simply does not like for presidents to act unilaterally (Reeves and Rogowski 2015, 2016). Across a variety of scenarios – such as, initiating military action and issuing executive orders – a plurality of survey respondents regard presidents’ unilateral actions with circumspection. More respondents than not even disapprove of presidential vetoes to block legislation approved “by both chambers of Congress.”<sup>2</sup> Although respondents’ party identification and evaluation of the current president’s job performance color their views, the findings indicate a general aversion to “presidential power that exist apart from their partisan proclivities” (Reeves and Rogowski 2015: 756). In sum, the public does not like for occupants of the office to act unilaterally. Yet, when Sievert and Williamson (2018) asked

respondents the extent to which they agreed with this use of the veto in the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study, they found a majority supported use of this power.

So, how do Americans respond as they watch presidents threaten to veto the opposition majority's legislation? This is a timely question because recent presidents have shown an ever-growing willingness to do so. Since their introduction in 1985, OMB's Statements of Administration Policy (SAPs) have become a favorite vehicle for presidents to issue veto threats to Congress. Presidents explicitly threatened 818 bills with a veto during the thirty-year period ending in 2014. Early evidence suggests that presidents' growing reliance on veto threats is well justified. Presidents have succeeded in knocking about half of the objectionable provisions out of both appropriations (Hassell and Kernell 2016) and authorization bills (Guenther and Kernell Forthcoming).

The prospect that the public would greet their veto with disapproval raises a serious strategic issue for presidents contemplating whether and how to respond to unwelcomed, opposition legislation. As they levy these threats, should presidents discount any negotiating leverage they confer by lingering audience costs that could undermine their and their party's success in the next election?

In this article we perform several exercises that test the public's support for vetoes and veto threats across a variety of issues and political settings. The results offer more sanguine prospects for presidents' selective use of veto threats in negotiating with opposition majorities in Congress. The first exercise analyzes 26 commercial public opinion surveys from 1947 through 2007 that ask respondents if the president should make good on a veto threat of a bill that Congress is poised to pass. The second exercise draws serendipitously on one of the above survey's follow up questions on the importance of a bill's party sponsorship on respondents'

support for a veto. The third exercise pools the subset of the above surveys that include partisanship and estimates multivariate models parsing the relative effects of partisanship, approval, education, and party cues. These exercises indicate that opposition will be greatest where the president's support is already weak. With few exceptions, their core constituency has their back when presidents confront opposition Congresses.

### **Exercise 1. Public Support for Veto Threats of Specific Legislation**

It is one thing for a survey respondent to favor or oppose an abstract principle about appropriate presidential actions and quite another to do so when specific policies and party commitments are on the line.<sup>3</sup> From the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research's survey archive we located 36 questions in 26 national surveys taken between 1947 and 2015 that asked respondents whether or not the president should make good on his threat to veto a specific bill.<sup>4</sup> (For more information about these survey items, see Appendix A.) Figure 1 reports that on average 39 percent supported and 48 percent opposed the use of a veto with 12 percent either not knowing or choosing a third option. So, the basic distributions lend credence to the claim that more respondents tend to oppose than support use of the veto. Yet, the distributions in Figure 1 also reveal that Americans do not automatically oppose threatened vetoes. On 9 of the 36 questions, all occurring during the Clinton presidency, at least 50 percent of respondents favored vetoing a particular bill.<sup>5</sup> Clinton also managed to round up the lowest level of support in any of our surveys when only 10 percent endorsed his 1999 threat to veto a Democrat-sponsored bill to expand prescription drug coverage for Medicare recipients. The next lowest support for a veto was 14 percent, the figure agreeing with George W. Bush's veto threat of the bipartisan McCain Feingold campaign finance reform bill.<sup>6</sup> In sum, the wide range of responses to veto threats in

Figure 1 clearly presents respondents as considering the pros and cons of a policy in judging this particular use of the president's veto authority.

**[Figure 1 About Here]**

In Figure 2 we report the results of fifteen of the questions in surveys that ask whether the president should use his veto pen and also include the respondent's partisan affiliation. In seven of these fifteen polling questions, at least half of Americans support the use of the veto (although six of these seven are related to the same bill – health care). However, partisanship clearly influences opinions. For ten of the 15 polling questions, a majority of the president's co-partisans support use of the veto. The number of polls indicating majority support for a veto drops to eight for independents and to two among opposition party respondents. Further, in all but one instance support for a veto was substantially higher among the president's co-partisans (averaging 54 percent) than among independents (averaging 43 percent) and opposition partisans (averaging 29 percent).<sup>7</sup>

**[Figure 2 About Here]**

An examination of legislative histories suggests this support from co-partisans emboldens presidents to follow through when needed and can even persuade Congress to capitulate. For all but one of the 21 bills asked about in Figure 1, we were able to identify the relevant bills and their fates. Ten bills were vetoed, seven died in Congress, and three became law. Among the seven bills covered by questions in Figure 2, four were vetoed, three became law. While Congress did attempt overrides for a few of the vetoes, all but one of these attempts (for the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947) failed. There was no significant difference in means in public support for vetoes across these fates. In sum, presidents do not need majority support from the public to prevail in legislative battles.

## **Exercise 2: Manipulating Partisan Sources of Bill Sponsorship**

To probe further into the impact of partisanship, we begin with the results of a 1999 Gallup poll that includes an experimental feature by asking respondents two hypothetical questions on vetoing tax cuts that are designed to elicit attitudinal differences based on party identification. Both questions, reproduced in Table 1, ask about a bill that would cut taxes by hundreds of billions over a ten-year period. The first presents a Republican-sponsored bill that would cut \$800 billion in taxes; the second refers to a Democratic bill that would more modestly pare \$300 billion in taxes. Although the varying dollar amounts is unfortunate for establishing a controlled environment, it arguably better reflects the political parties' well-established, differing stances on taxes. Yet in that both involve large tax cuts, and all other details are the same, except for the party identified as sponsoring it, we are afforded an opportunity to see how party referents orient attitudes toward veto threats.

### **[Table 1 About Here]**

Overall support for a veto of the larger Republican sponsored tax bill is much greater than support for the Democratic sponsored tax bill. To further disentangle the impact of partisanship, we conducted difference of means tests comparing the responses of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents to the two questions. As Table 1 shows, while overall and among independents, support is significantly higher for a veto of the Republican-sponsored bill than for the Democratic sponsored bill, we see a different pattern emerge among partisans. Nearly twice as many Democrats support a veto of the Republican sponsored tax bill (51 percent than the one identified as Democrat-sponsored (26 percent). Meanwhile, 23 percent of Republicans supported a veto of the Democrat-sponsored bill compared to nearly 17 percent for the Republican one.<sup>8</sup> The fact that Republicans are less interested in vetoing tax cuts, whatever

its partisan source, tell us that beyond partisan cues, respondents also consider the policy substance of the legislation.

### **Exercise 3: Estimating Veto Support as a Function of Party and Policy**

Evidence abounds in the relationships uncovered thus far that partisanship and policy substance contribute heavily to the public's posture on a veto. Are these two covariates all that matter and what do they tell us about attitudes toward presidents' use of their veto authority? Drawing on irregular commercial surveys that contain different question formats and wordings for all the variables offers both advantages and disadvantages. The variety prevents controlling for the effects of the broader settings that vary over time; it does allow us, however, to examine (and reject) question wording as a source of bias in these responses.

In Table 2, we estimate two multivariate models of veto support based on partisanship (measured with two dichotomous variables for the president's party and the opposition party, with independents the omitted category) and job performance approval (measured as a dichotomous variable coded one for approve) while controlling for education (measured on a four point scale, from did not graduate high school to four or more years of college) and questions that specifically identify a bill as written by the president's party (dichotomous measure). Then, in Model 2, we further unpack how partisan variations among respondents and in the White House shape support for vetoes.<sup>9</sup>

#### **[Table 2 About Here]**

Repeated cross section designs such as these pose challenges for estimation. Both temporal and spatial variation is likely. While Lebo and Weber (2015) create a solution that accounts for both types of variation for continuous dependent variables, this approach cannot be



applied to ones that are binary. We choose a modeling approach that accounts for the temporal variation through employing random effects logistic regression grouped by survey.<sup>10</sup>

The average observed level of support for vetoes across all respondents in these surveys was 42 percent. The results in Table 2 indicate that approval of the president increases the likelihood of supporting the president's use of the veto. Members of the president's party are more likely to support a veto while members of the opposition party are less likely to support a veto compared to independents. When the question identifies the bill as being written by the president's party, support for a veto declines substantially. In addition, education has a negative and statistically significant relationship with support for a veto. This differs from Reeves and Rogowski's (2015) and Sievert and Williamson's (2018) finding that higher levels of education are associated with higher levels of support for the veto. This makes sense since their question asked respondents to agree or disagree: "The president should not be able to veto legislation that has been passed by both chambers of Congress." Those with higher levels of education would be more likely to know that the Constitution gives the president this power. Yet, when it comes to support for specific vetoes, those with higher levels of education are actually less likely to support the president following through on his threat. Finally, the results in Model 2 indicate that support for vetoes is higher when the president is a Democrat.

To better understand the impact of these variables, we estimate predicted probabilities for specific covariates of interest in Figures 3 and 4. Holding education at its mean level and limiting estimates to bills not identified as sponsored by the president's party, Figure 3 reports strong likelihood of endorsement among members of the president's party, especially among those who approve of the president. Among approvers of the president, the probability of supporting a veto is .65 among members of the president's party, .53 among Independents, and .38 among

members of the opposition party. Meanwhile, disapproval of the president decreases opposition party members' predicted probability of supporting a veto by just over 11 percentage points while it decreases the predicted probability of supporting a veto among Independents and members of the president's party by nearly 13 percentage points. The predicted probabilities suggest that regardless of approval, the president's party is more likely than not to support the president's veto. Independents who approve are also more likely than not to support the president's veto, although the lower 95 percent confidence interval for this estimate dips below 50 percent. Meanwhile, regardless of approval of the president, opposition party members are more likely than not to oppose the president's veto. Clearly, partisanship has a strong impact on the likelihood of supporting a veto and approval of the president only partially mitigates this influence.

**[Figure 3 About Here]**

The question remains whether this partisan-conditioned support for a veto changes based on which party holds the presidency. Reeves and Rogowski (2015) found that Democrats were more likely to favor the president's ability to use a veto. While their question about the veto directs respondents to think "about the Office of the Presidency – and not any particular president," a Democrat held the presidency at the time and this could influence Democrats' higher support. While Model 1 cannot help us identify whether there are differences in support for a veto based on whether the president's and opposition party members are Democrats or Republicans, to explore those potential differences, we calculate predicted probabilities based on the results of Model 2, which includes a variable indicating the president's party. The predicted probabilities plotted in Figure 4 provides evidence of interesting if somewhat asymmetric party dynamics at work. Figure 4a shows Democrats link their approval more closely to the party of

the president. They swing from 72 percent probability of approving when a Democrat they like is in the White House to 14 percent when a Republican they disapprove is president. Republican endorsements change less across these dimensions – 46 to 34 percent respectively in comparable situations. Yet, given that these survey questions only span two presidencies – Democrat Bill Clinton and Republican George W. Bush – more study is needed.

**[Figure 4 About Here]**

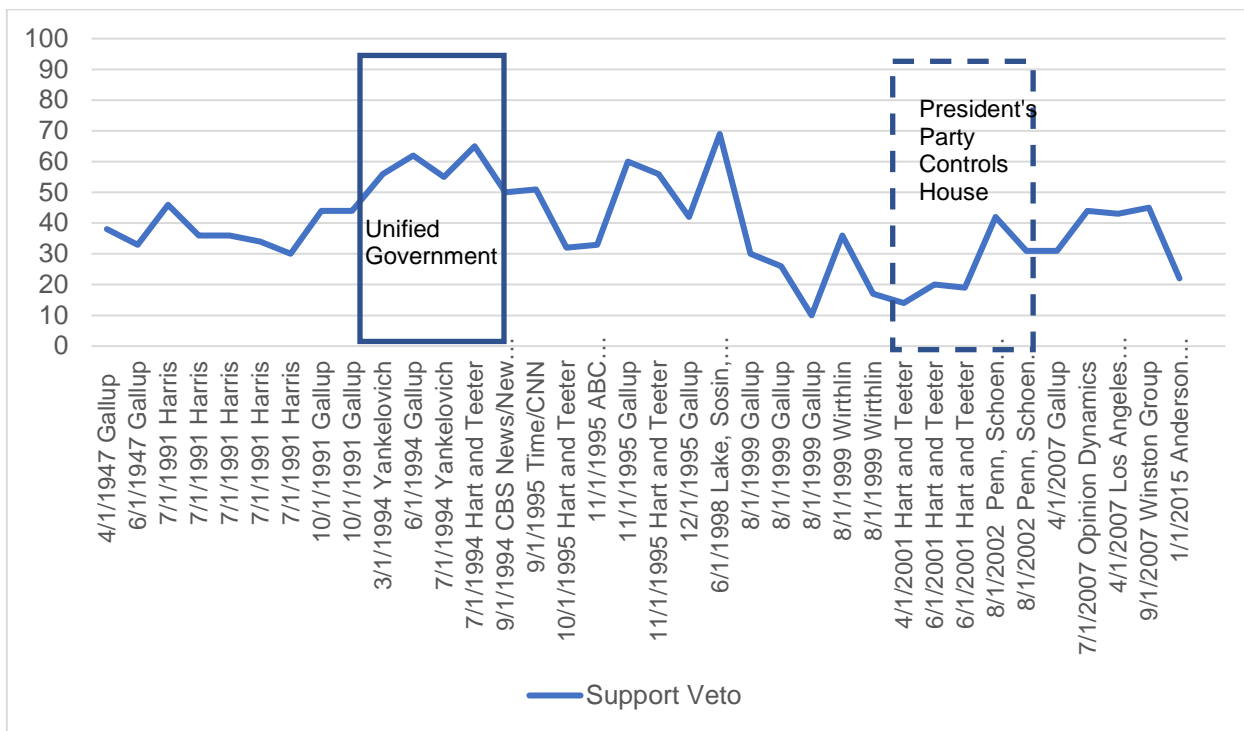
In Figure 4b we report these relationships for the highly unusual situation (occurring in only one survey) where the question identifies that the veto threat is directed at a bill proposed by the president's congressional party. Support for a veto drops dramatically in these situations. Yet, the results in Figure 4b show that the highest predicted probability of support for a veto against the president's party was at .20 among Democrats who approve of their Democratic president. Meanwhile, among Republicans who disapprove of the Democratic president, the probability of support for a veto is a miniscule .05. In contrast, the predicted probability of support for a veto among Republicans who approve of their Republican president is only .05 and this drops to .02 among Democrats who disapprove of the Republican president. Once again, Democrats exhibit larger changes in probability of support for a veto based on the president's party and whether they approve of the president than do Republicans. Our results also suggest that when respondents are told a bill is sponsored by the president's party they are highly unlikely to support a veto of it. This cue dramatically reduces the probability of support for a veto across the board. While this finding needs additional investigation, it appears that opposition to this unilateral action heightens when the question informs respondents that the president is using this defensive weapon against his own party.

## **Conclusion: How the Public Chooses Sides**

Vetoes pit presidents against Congress. Overall, when we average across all the survey questions over time, about 40% of Americans side with the president and support use of a veto. This suggests that in general, a majority do support letting the law passed by Congress prevail, and some bias against unilateral action by presidents. However, when it comes to support for specific vetoes, Americans index their opinions by partisanship and approval. Presidents can typically expect much greater support from their co-partisans and those who approve of their performance in office. They can also expect those with lower levels of education to be slightly more likely to take their side, while those with higher levels of education are slightly more likely to support Congress in these battles. We find support for vetoes also varies by the party of the president (and perhaps the president in office), a topic that merits further investigation beyond what our data allows. The results suggest Democrats may be more strongly driven by party cues in their support for a veto while Republicans seem to have a strong core that opposes vetoes regardless of the president's party. Finally, the results based on the available commercial surveys suggest that Americans' antipathy for the veto is strongest when used against policies promoted by the president's own party. This clearly deserves further study. Still, the results show that bias against unilateral action in the form of a veto is far from uniform. Instead, support for a veto is highly conditioned by political views and circumstances, a finding that comports better with the results of some recent experiments about presidents' use of unilateral action (Reeves and Rogowski 2015; Reeves and Rogowski 2016; Christenson and Kriner 2017) than others (Reeves, Rogowski, Seo and Stone 2017). In addition, we find little evidence this bias against unilateral action inhibits presidents from following through threats with acts. As noted above, presidents vetoed ten of the threatened bills examined with these surveys, and

Congress backed away, failing to pass another seven of these bills. Presidents may face audience costs when using a veto, but these costs vary across audience members and across issues. And it does not prevent presidents from issuing and executing veto threats.

Figure 1. Support for President’s Veto of Specific Legislation



N.B. Specific wording of these survey questions is available in the appendix.

Figure 2. Support for President's Veto According to Party Identification

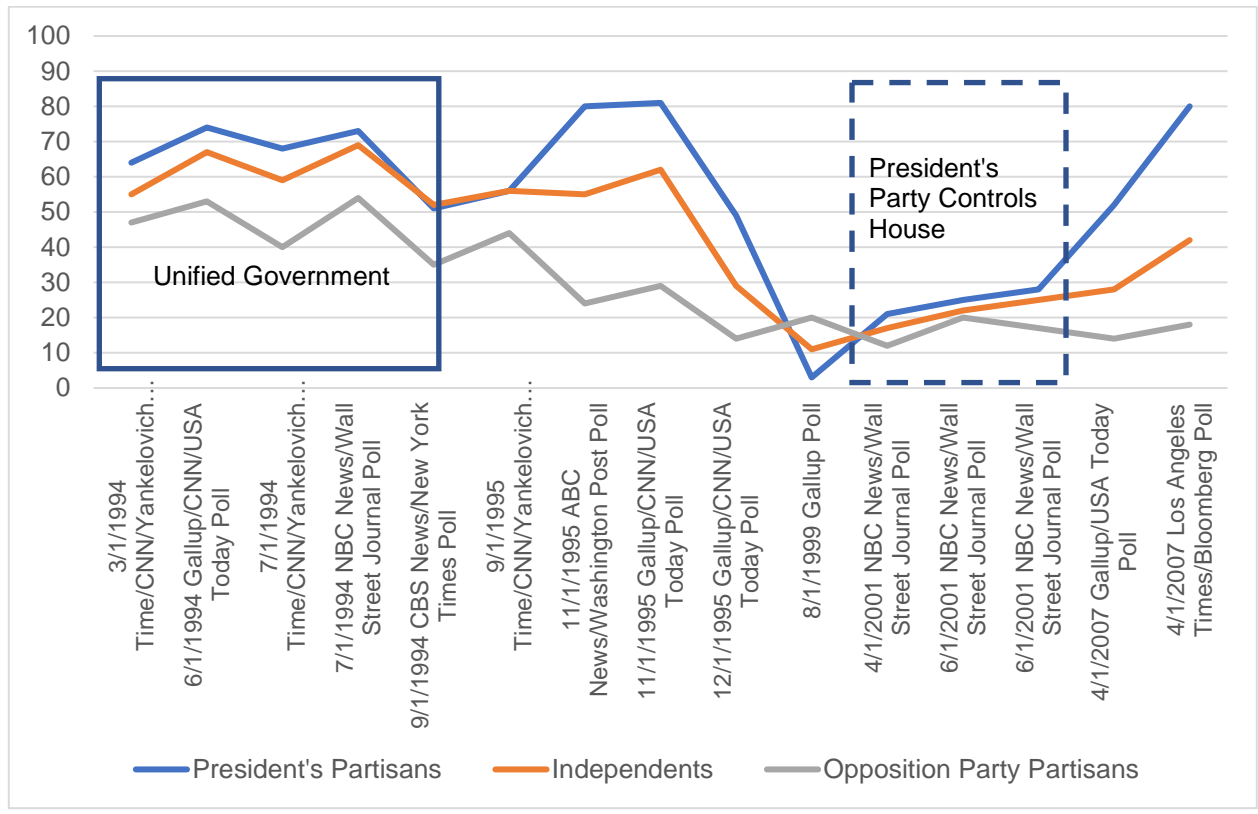


Table 1. How Support for Veto Changes by Party Sponsor of Bill\*

Survey	Date	Question	N	Overall Support for Veto	Support among the President's Fellow Democrats (N=323)	Support Among Independents (N=359)	Support Among Republicans (N=292)
Gallup Poll	Aug-99	If Congress passes a Republican-sponsored bill to cut taxes by approximately 800 billion dollars over the next 10 years, do you think President (Bill) Clinton should sign that bill into law, or should he veto the bill so it does not become law?	502	35.4% (N=177)	51.35% (N=76)	37.5% (N=72)	16.56% (N=25)
Gallup Poll	Aug-99	If Congress passes a Democrat-sponsored bill to cut taxes by approximately 300 billion dollars over the next 10 years, do you think President (Bill) Clinton should sign that bill into law, or should he veto the bill so it does not become law?	501	26.8% (N=134)	26.29% (N=46)	29.34% (N=49)	23.40% (N=33)
Results of Difference of Means Test Across Questions				t=2.92; p=.00	t=4.78; p=.00	t=1.63; p=.05	t=-1.47; p=.07

\* Partisanship is determined by the question "In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent." Those who volunteered another party, said they don't know, or refused to answer are not included in this table. Don't knows and refusals to answer the veto questions are treated as missing data. In addition, mean support for Republicans, Democrats, and Independents are all significantly different from each other for the Republican-sponsored bill at the .00 level but their mean responses are not significantly different from each other for the question about the Democrat-sponsored bill.

Table 2. Modeling Support for a Veto

	(1)	(2)
Approval	0.521*** (0.0442)	0.520*** (0.0442)
President's Party	0.479*** (0.0620)	0.479*** (0.0620)
Opposition Party	-0.619*** (0.0599)	-0.619*** (0.0598)
Education	-0.0703*** (0.0200)	-0.0696*** (0.0200)
Question Identifies Bill Written by President's Party	-1.974*** (0.445)	-2.330*** (0.568)
Democratic President		1.127*** (0.323)
_cons	-0.196 (0.217)	-0.977*** (0.280)
Insig2u _cons	-0.625 (0.387)	-1.263** (0.386)
N	13589	13589

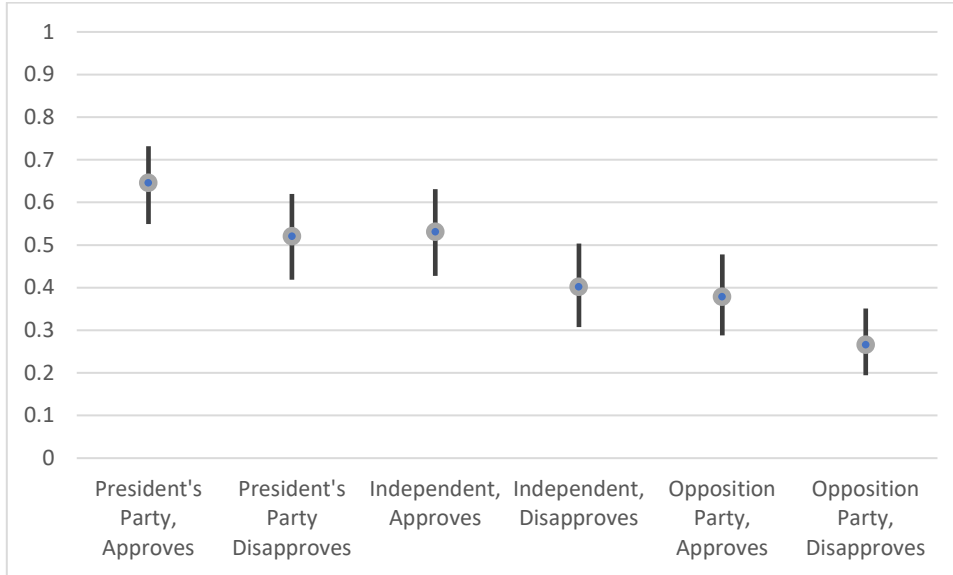
Standard errors in parentheses

\* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

Both models employ random effects logistic regression grouped by survey.



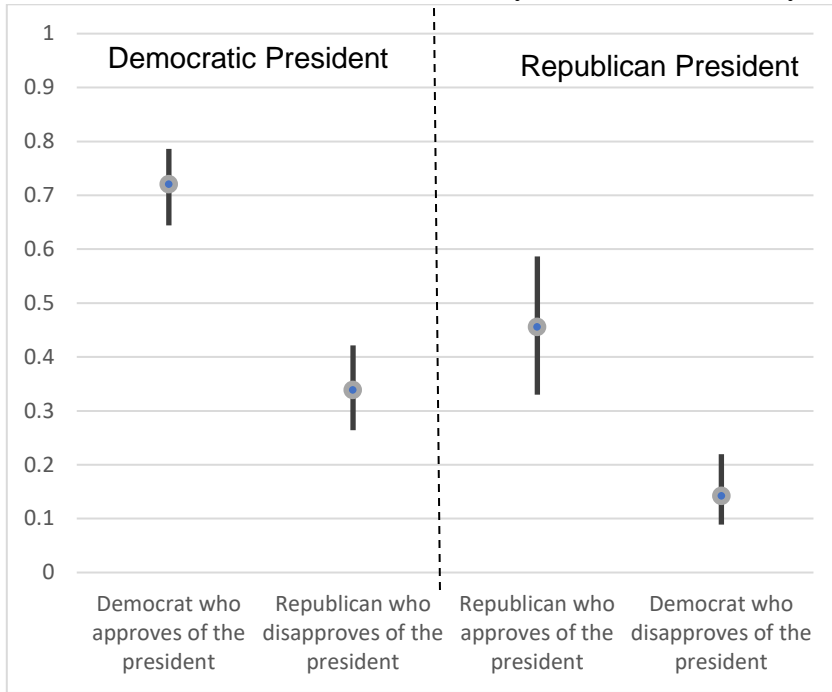
Figure 3. Support for a Veto Based on Party and Approval



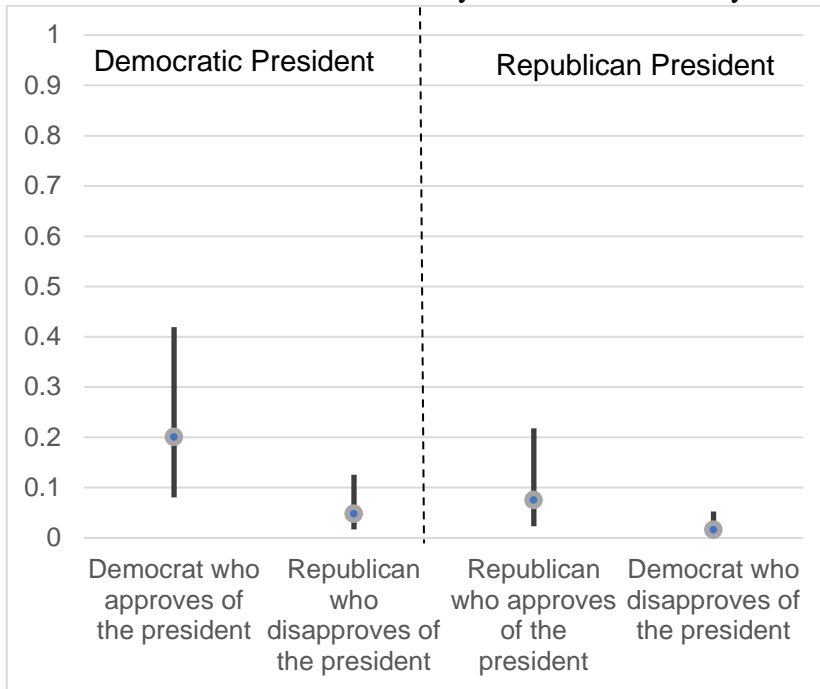
The predicted probabilities in the figure above are generated from Model 1. They are represented by dots in the figure above. They represent the probabilities of an average person supporting a veto given specific covariate values (with the random effects term at 0). To calculate each of these, education is set at its mean level and the question does not identify the bill as being written by the president's party. However, in order to generate confidence intervals for these predicted probabilities, the random effects term must be taken into account. Thus, the lines above instead represent 95% confidence intervals for probabilities for a specific individual given the quantities of interest (in other words, the random effects term is not set to 0). As a result, the predicted probabilities do not always fall in the middle of the confidence interval.

Figure 4. Predicted Probability of Approving of a Veto by President's Party

a. The Bill is Not Identified as Written by the President's Party



b. The Bill is Identified as Written by the President's Party



The predicted probabilities in the figures above are generated from Model 2. They are represented by dots in the figure above. They represent the probabilities of an average person supporting a veto given specific covariate values (with the random effects term at 0). To

calculate each of these, education is set at its mean level. However, in order to generate confidence intervals for these predicted probabilities, the random effects term must be taken into account. Thus, the lines above instead represent 95% confidence intervals for probabilities for a specific individual given the quantities of interest (in other words, the random effects term is not set to 0). As a result, the predicted probabilities do not always fall in the middle of the confidence interval.

## Appendix A: Support for Vetoes

Survey	Date	Question	Should Veto/ Positive Feeling if Veto	Should Sign/ Negative Feeling if Veto	Third Option
Gallup Poll	Apr-47	If a bill that cuts down labor's power a great deal is passed by Congress, would you like to have President Truman give it his okay or veto it?	38	46	16
Gallup Poll (AIPO)	Jun-47	Do you think that President (Harry) Truman should sign this labor bill (to regulate labor unions) or veto it (that is, refuse to approve it)?	33	49	19
Harris Poll	Jul-91	President Bush and the Democratic Congress have had major disagreements over bills the Congress has passed. As a result, he has vetoed or has threatened to veto many key bills. Let me read you several bills where that has happened.... Sharp cuts in defense spending.... Do you think President Bush is more right or more wrong to veto that bill?	46	48	6
Harris Poll	Jul-91	(President Bush and the Democratic Congress have had major disagreements over bills the Congress has passed. As a result, he has vetoed or has threatened to veto many key bills.) Let me read you several bills where that has happened.... The Civil Rights Act of 1991.... Do you think President Bush is more right or more wrong to veto that bill?	36	38	26
Harris Poll	Jul-91	(President Bush and the Democratic Congress have had major disagreements over bills the Congress has passed. As a result, he has vetoed or has threatened to veto many key bills.) Let me read you several bills where that has happened.... A bill to repeal the Supreme Court decision prohibiting a doctor from discussing abortion with a patient in a federally funded family planning clinic.... Do you think President Bush is more right or more wrong to veto that bill?	36	59	5
Harris Poll	Jul-91	(President Bush and the Democratic Congress have had major disagreements over bills the Congress has passed. As a result, he has vetoed or has threatened to veto many key bills.) Let me read you several bills where that has happened.... A bill to allow parents to take 12 week of unpaid leave after having a baby.... Do you think President Bush is more right or more wrong to veto that bill?	34	63	3
Harris Poll	Jul-91	(President Bush and the Democratic Congress have had major disagreements over bills the Congress has passed. As a result, he has vetoed or has threatened to veto many key bills.) Let me read you several bills where that has happened.... A bill to establish national health insurance paid for by the federal government, but which would not change the system of having private doctors and private hospitals.... Do you think President Bush is more right or more wrong to veto that bill?	30	65	5
Gallup Poll	Oct-91	Congress also passed a bill requiring companies to allow employees to take up to 12 weeks unpaid leave if they had a new baby, or if there were a serious illness in their immediate family. President Bush has said he opposes the bill because it might hurt the economy and create too much government interference in	44	53	3

		business. Would you like to see Bush sign this bill into law, or do you think he should veto it?			
Gallup Poll	Oct-91	Congress recently passed a bill to extend unemployment benefits beyond the regular 26-week period. To provide the 6.4 billion dollars needed to extend benefits, a budget emergency would have to be declared that President Bush says is not justified. Would you like to see Bush sign this bill into law, or do you think he should veto it?	44	50	6
Time/CNN/ Yankelovich Partners Poll	Mar-94	Suppose Congress passes a health care reform bill that does not guarantee health care coverage for all Americans. Do you think President (Bill) Clinton should veto such a bill or not?	56	33	11
Gallup/CNN/ USA Today Poll	Jun-94	Suppose Congress passes a bill which would improve the country's health care system, but would not guarantee coverage for every American. Do you think President (Bill) Clinton should veto the bill and send it back to Congress, or should he sign it?	62	26	4
Time/CNN/ Yankelovich Partners Poll	Jul-94	Suppose Congress passes a health care reform bill that does not guarantee health care coverage for all Americans. Do you think President (Bill) Clinton should veto such a bill or not?	55	33	12
NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll	Jul-94	If Congress passes a health care plan that includes a number of health care reforms, but does not guarantee health insurance for all Americans, should President (Bill) Clinton sign the bill or veto the bill?	65	26	9
CBS News/New York Times Poll	Sep-94	President (Bill) Clinton said in January (1994) that he would veto any health care bill that did not provide insurance for all Americans. If Congress passes a health care bill that improves insurance coverage, but does not provide coverage for everybody, should President Clinton sign it, or should he veto it?	50	42	8
Time/CNN/ Yankelovich Partners Poll	Sep-95	Do you think President (Bill) Clinton should veto legislation which would make changes such as these in environmental policy (expanding logging, mining, and ranching on public lands, reducing protection for endangered species, opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska to oil and gas exploration), or don't you feel that way?	51	34	15
NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll	Oct-95	As you may know, Republicans in Congress are in the process of passing a federal budget that they say will balance the budget in seven years and reduce taxes for most families. President (Bill) Clinton says he will veto the budget because he believes it cuts too much from certain domestic programs and gives tax breaks mostly to the wealthy. In your view, should the President sign or veto this budget?	32	61	7
ABC News/ Washington Post Poll	Nov-95	Do you think (President Bill) Clinton should sign the budget or veto it?	33	59	8
Gallup/CNN/ USA Today Poll	Nov-95	Currently the Republicans in Congress are in the final stages of completing an overall budget for the federal government. This is the budget bill that is intended to balance the federal budget within seven years, cut taxes, and cut the rate of spending on such programs as Medicare and Medicaid. From what you have heard or read so far about the Republican budget, do you think President (Bill) Clinton should sign the budget bill or should he veto it?	60	34	7

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll	Nov-95	Republicans in Congress are in the process of passing a federal budget that they say will balance the budget in seven years and reduce taxes for most families. President (Bill) Clinton says he will veto this budget because he believes it cuts too much from certain domestic programs and gives tax breaks mostly to the wealthy. In your view, should the President sign or veto this budget?	56	36	8
Gallup/CNN/ USA Today Poll	Dec-95	As you may know, both houses of Congress have passed a bill to change the country's welfare system. Based on what you have read or heard about this bill, do you think President (Bill) Clinton should sign this bill or veto it?	42	32	26
Legislative Riders and The Environment Survey	Jun-98	Generally speaking, if Congress attaches riders which relax environmental regulations to legislation do you think President (Bill) Clinton should veto the legislation and send it back to Congress to be passed without the rider or should he sign the legislation into law?	69	13	18
Gallup Poll	Aug-99	If Congress passes a Republican-sponsored bill to cut taxes by approximately 800 billion dollars over the next 10 years, do you think President (Bill) Clinton should sign that bill into law, or should he veto the bill so it does not become law?	30	63	7
Gallup Poll	Aug-99	If Congress passes a Democrat-sponsored bill to cut taxes by approximately 300 billion dollars over the next 10 years, do you think President (Bill) Clinton should sign that bill into law, or should he veto the bill so it does not become law?	26	65	9
Gallup Poll	Aug-99	If Congress passes a Democrat-sponsored bill to expand Medicare coverage to include prescription drugs for Medicare recipients, do you think President (Bill) Clinton should sign that bill into law, or should be veto the bill so it does not become law?	10	87	3
Wirthlin Quorum Survey	Aug-99	And, what do you think President (Bill) Clinton should do with this tax cut bill when Congress sends it to him... sign it into law, or veto it?	36	59	5
Wirthlin Quorum Survey	Aug-99	And, what do you think President (Bill) Clinton should do with this tax cut bill when Congress sends it to him... sign it into law, veto it, or reach a compromise with the Republicans on a modified tax cut?	17	35	45
NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll	Apr-01	Recently, the United States Senate passed a campaign finance bill sponsored by Senators John McCain and Russ Feingold that would ban so-called soft money contributions to the two national political parties, increase individual contribution limits, and restrict issue advertisements run by corporations, interest groups, and unions close to an election. Do you think that President (George W.) Bush should sign the bill or veto the bill, or do you not care either way?	14	51	23
NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll	Jun-01	During the spring (2001), the United States Senate passed a campaign finance bill sponsored by Senators John McCain and Russ Feingold that would ban so-called soft money contributions to the two national political parties, increase individual contribution limits, and restrict issue advertisements run by corporations, interest groups, and unions close to an election. If the bill reaches President (George W.) Bush, do you think that he should sign the bill or veto the bill, or do you not care either way?	20	51	22

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll	Jun-01	During the spring (2001), the United States Senate passed a campaign finance bill that would ban so-called soft money contributions to the two national political parties, increase individual contribution limits, and restrict issue advertisements run by corporations, interest groups, and unions close to an election. If the bill reaches President (George W.) Bush, do you think that he should sign the bill or veto the bill, or do you not care either way?	19	48	26
FDA Authority Over Tobacco Survey	Aug-02	If Congress passes a law that allows the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) to regulate cigarettes, what would you expect President (George W.) Bush to do about it when it reaches the White House?...Reject it as an unacceptable compromise and veto it, view it as an acceptable compromise and sign it	42	39	19
FDA Authority Over Tobacco Survey	Aug-02	If Congress acts on a bipartisan basis to pass a law that allows the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) to regulate cigarettes, what would you want President (George W.) Bush to do with the bill?...Sign it into law, veto the bill	31	57	12
Gallup/USA Today Poll	Apr-07	As you may know, President (George W.) Bush has said he will veto a bill to expand federal funding for embryonic stem cell research. Do you think Bush should--or should not--veto this bill?	31	64	5
FOX News/Opinion Dynamics Poll	Jul-07	Do you think President (George W.) Bush should veto legislation that sets a specific date for withdrawing US (United States) troops from Iraq, or not?	44	48	8
Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg Poll	Apr-07	As you may know, Democrats in both houses of Congress passed legislation that ties further funding of the war in Iraq to targeted dates for withdrawal of combat troops from Iraq. (George W.) Bush says he will veto any measure that sets such a timetable because he believes it would tie the hands of battlefield commanders and make defeat in Iraq more likely. Do you think that Bush should sign a funding authorization that includes a timetable for withdrawal, or should he veto that legislation?	43	48	9
New Models National Brand Poll	Sep-07	If President (George W.) Bush decided to veto this (children's health) bill, would you favor or oppose his veto?	45	45	10
Fox News Poll	Jan-15	Do you think President (Barack) Obama should sign or veto legislation approving the building of the Keystone XL Pipeline that would transport oil from Canada to refineries in the United States?	22	66	13

## Appendix B: Party Status and Support for Vetoes

Survey	Date	Question	Overall Support for Veto	Support Among the President's Partisans	Support Among Independents	Support Among the Opposition Party
Time/CNN/Yankelovich Partners Poll	Mar-94	Suppose Congress passes a health care reform bill that does not guarantee health care coverage for all Americans. Do you think President (Bill) Clinton should veto such a bill or not?	56	64	55	47
Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll	Jun-94	Suppose Congress passes a bill which would improve the country's health care system, but would not guarantee coverage for every American. Do you think President (Bill) Clinton should veto the bill and send it back to Congress, or should he sign it?	62	74	67	53
Time/CNN/Yankelovich Partners Poll	Jul-94	Suppose Congress passes a health care reform bill that does not guarantee health care coverage for all Americans. Do you think President (Bill) Clinton should veto such a bill or not?	55	68	59	40
NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll	Jul-94	If Congress passes a health care plan that includes a number of health care reforms, but does not guarantee health insurance for all Americans, should President (Bill) Clinton sign the bill or veto the bill?	65	73	69	54
CBS News/New York Times Poll	Sep-94	President (Bill) Clinton said in January (1994) that he would veto any health care bill that did not provide insurance for all Americans. If Congress passes a health care bill that improves insurance coverage, but does not provide coverage for everybody, should President Clinton sign it, or should he veto it?	50	51	52	35
Time/CNN/Yankelovich Partners Poll	Sep-95	Do you think President (Bill) Clinton should veto legislation which would make changes such as these in environmental policy (expanding logging, mining, and ranching on public lands, reducing protection for endangered species, opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska to oil and gas exploration), or don't you feel that way?	51	56	56	44
ABC News/Washington Post Poll	Nov-95	Do you think (President Bill) Clinton should sign the budget or veto it?	33	80	55	24
Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll	Nov-95	Currently the Republicans in Congress are in the final stages of completing an overall budget for the federal government. This is the budget bill that is intended to balance the federal budget within seven years, cut taxes, and cut the rate of spending on such programs as Medicare and Medicaid. From what you have heard or read so far about the Republican budget, do you think President (Bill) Clinton should	60	81	62	29



		sign the budget bill or should he veto it?				
Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll	Dec-95	As you may know, both houses of Congress have passed a bill to change the country's welfare system. Based on what you have read or heard about this bill, do you think President (Bill) Clinton should sign this bill or veto it?	42	49	29	14
Gallup Poll	Aug-99	If Congress passes a Democrat-sponsored bill to expand Medicare coverage to include prescription drugs for Medicare recipients, do you think President (Bill) Clinton should sign that bill into law, or should be veto the bill so it does not become law?	10	3	11	20
NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll	Apr-01	Recently, the United States Senate passed a campaign finance bill sponsored by Senators John McCain and Russ Feingold that would ban so-called soft money contributions to the two national political parties, increase individual contribution limits, and restrict issue advertisements run by corporations, interest groups, and unions close to an election. Do you think that President (George W.) Bush should sign the bill or veto the bill, or do you not care either way?	14	21	17	12
NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll	Jun-01	During the spring (2001), the United States Senate passed a campaign finance bill sponsored by Senators John McCain and Russ Feingold that would ban so-called soft money contributions to the two national political parties, increase individual contribution limits, and restrict issue advertisements run by corporations, interest groups, and unions close to an election. If the bill reaches President (George W.) Bush, do you think that he should sign the bill or veto the bill, or do you not care either way?	20	25	22	20
NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll	Jun-01	During the spring (2001), the United States Senate passed a campaign finance bill that would ban so-called soft money contributions to the two national political parties, increase individual contribution limits, and restrict issue advertisements run by corporations, interest groups, and unions close to an election. If the bill reaches President (George W.) Bush, do you think that he should sign the bill or veto the bill, or do you not care either way?	19	28	25	17
Gallup/USA Today Poll	Apr-07	As you may know, President (George W.) Bush has said he will veto a bill to expand federal funding for embryonic stem cell research. Do you think Bush should--or should not--veto this bill?	31	52	28	14

Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg Poll	Apr-07	As you may know, Democrats in both houses of Congress passed legislation that ties further funding of the war in Iraq to targeted dates for withdrawal of combat troops from Iraq. (George W.) Bush says he will veto any measure that sets such a timetable because he believes it would tie the hands of battlefield commanders and make defeat in Iraq more likely. Do you think that Bush should sign a funding authorization that includes a timetable for withdrawal, or should he veto that legislation?	43	80	42	18
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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Durr, Gilmour and Wolbrecht (1997) report that public approval of Congress increases after a veto. This is consistent with Groseclose and McCarty's argument that Congress sends presidents popular bills to veto to rack up audience approval.

<sup>2</sup> The question used in the recent spate of research into public opinion on presidents' unilateral efforts to make policy asks respondents to agree or disagree with the statement, "The president should not be able to veto legislation that has been passed by both chambers of Congress" (Reeves and Rogowski 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Even abstract questions appear to find respondents consulting their partisanship in deciding what they think about the president's veto authority (Reeves and Rogowski 2015; Sievert and Williamson 2018).

<sup>4</sup> For more information on these surveys see Appendix A. To find these polls, we initially searched iPoll for the term "veto," and from them identified those questions that asked specifically whether the president should sign or veto a bill. In some instances, the details of the bill included in the question are hypothetical. Other questions associating vote preferences and levels of disappointment with a veto or lack of it were excluded.

<sup>5</sup> More than two-thirds endorsed President Clinton's 1998 threat to veto appropriation bills containing riders that relax environmental regulations. Similarly, he succeeded in rallying public support for his State of the Union pledge to veto any health care reform bill that fell short of universal coverage; for spending bills containing cuts to Medicare and Medicaid; and for bills containing a widely perceived tax break for the wealthy.

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<sup>6</sup> When a similar question was asked about a potential veto of this bill a few months later, support increased to twenty percent.

<sup>7</sup> The only exception (August 1999) asked if the Democratic president should veto a Democratic bill. The smallest gap observed between the president's co-partisans and members of the opposition party, of five percentage points, was on whether George W. Bush should veto bipartisan-sponsored campaign finance reform.

<sup>8</sup> Both sets of differences are significant at .001.

<sup>9</sup> We add a dichotomous measure for the party of the president (with one indicating the president is a Democrat) We also estimated models with alternate specifications. Some of these included additional controls for bill type or unified government (although all instances of questions about veto threats during unified government were for one bill – health care reform in 1994). While some of these controls were significant, we decided to present the results of these pared down models found in Table 2 for simplicity's sake. They yield the same conclusions about our variables of interest.

<sup>10</sup> While less than ideal, it represents the best alternative among approaches commonly used in political science. Logistic regression models (that ignore this variation) and logistic regression models with clustered standard errors (that allows for the possibility of residuals correlated within surveys) produce similarly consistent estimates with one exception: education is not significant in model 2 when using logistic regression with clustered standard errors. Random effects logistic regression grouped by survey generates more accurate standard errors and conclusions about statistical significance compared to the other approaches.