When Ayes sound like Nays?  
Measuring Legislative Input on Presidential Agendas  
(Argentina, 1999-2007)

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Paper prepared for delivery at the 21st World Congress of Political Science –  
Santiago, Chile, July 12 to 16, 2009

Abstract

The literature on Executive-Legislative relations in presidential systems usually measures interbranch cooperation using legislative approval rates of presidential initiatives. But this measure actually conceals the various ways in which legislators may alter presidential initiatives not only to cater to their own particularistic interest but also to bring policy outcomes closer to their preferred points. We develop a database of legislative decision-making in Argentina that focuses on the procedural tools and opportunities for legislators to change draft bills, and use to measure the level of legislative input on presidential initiatives during the de la Rua, Duhalde, and Kirchner administrations. Our results suggest that the hypotheses usually deployed to account for presidential agenda success do not hold when the substance of legislation is analyzed. Contrary to the extant literature, Argentine presidents can shape the substance of the bills they present to Congress regardless of their popularity, the length of their term, the size of their legislative coalition, and the electoral cycle. These findings suggest that literature on Executive-legislative relations should delve into legislative substance and also bring to the forefront the issue of presidential leadership.
Introduction
Legislative approval rates of presidential initiatives have typically been used to measure interbranch cooperation in presidential systems. The more bills initiated by the President that Congress passes, the greater the cooperation. Legislative approval rates thus operate as indicators not only of interbranch collaboration, but also of presidential agenda success. The more bills sponsored by the President that Congress approves, the more successful Presidents are in pushing through their agenda.

However, the legislative approval rate of presidential initiatives is not an accurate measure of presidential agenda success because it does not account for the ability of presidents to shape the substance of legislation (Barrett and Eshbaugh-Soha, 2007). Approval rates only indicate whether presidential initiatives have been accepted or rejected by Congress; they do not convey any information about the content of those initiatives. Consequently, approval rates are unable to show whether the bills passed by Congress were consistent or inconsistent with the President’s preferences or wishes. Given the existence of presidential veto power, approval rates may be interpreted as signals of the President’s consent with laws passed by Congress – but consent is not equivalent to agreement, let alone success in pushing an agenda through. Approval rates may be taken as indications of a compromise between the Executive and Legislative branches, but they tell nothing about the substance of such compromise.

Legislative approval rates cannot account for presidential agenda success because they provide no information about the ways in which legislators may alter presidential initiatives. Learning that any given presidential initiative was made into law does not inform whether the bill was modified during passage, and tells nothing about the nature of modifications. A bill sponsored by the President may have passed with amendments that catered to the particularistic interest of legislators, or in a policy position closer to the preferred point of Congress than to that of the Executive. This information is crucial for assessing a President’s success in pushing through their agenda: without it, a high approval rate of bills inconsistent with the President’s policy preferences may be credited as evidence of high presidential agenda success.

Few attempts have been made to measure presidential agenda success in terms of the substance of legislation. Some scholars have focused on the degree of participation of the President in the legislative process (Jones, 1994) and tried to measure its impact on legislative content (Krutz, 2001). Others, notably Rudalevige (2002) and particularly Barrett and Eshbaugh-Soha (2007), have concentrated on measuring the substantive distance between legislative outcomes and presidential initiatives. Both approaches point to significant dimensions in the legislative process. A low participation of the President in the process would be equivalent to a high participation of legislators, and a high participation of legislators would be tantamount to the introduction of amendments to presidential initiatives. On the other hand, Congressional amendments to presidential initiatives may bring outcomes closer to legislators’ preferred points, or may not amount to significant distance from the President’s preferences. Hence both dimensions should be taken into account for the measurement of presidential agenda success: data on the occurrence of amendments without information on the substance of those amendments is as blind on the extent of presidential agenda success as mere legislative approval rates.
This paper intends to combine these two approaches to the measurement of presidential agenda success by concentrating both on the frequency of legislative amendments to presidential initiatives and on the nature of those amendments. To measure the frequency of amendments we focus on the two instances in which legislators may amend proposals: the committee reports, and the floor deliberation. In both instances, we identify whether amendments were introduced, and we measure the frequency of introduction.

To measure the nature of amendments, we use two procedures which purport to account for the legislative input on presidential initiatives. On the one hand, we develop a measure that consists of determining the party identity of the legislators who introduced amendments in either stage – committee or floor – of the legislative process. On the other hand, we follow a more qualitative approach by using the scale proposed by Barrett and Eshbaugh-Soha (2007: 105) to assess the substance of legislation.

We put these measures into use by analyzing the legislative process of presidential initiatives enacted into law in Argentina between 1999 and 2007. This period of Argentine history is particularly useful to test the effect on presidential agenda success of the variables typically used to account for legislative approval rates. The period includes a minority president who resigned his office, an interim president who called for early elections, and a majority president who managed to get his preferred successor elected into office; plus there were significant variations in the economic cycle. So it is possible to test for the effect of the electoral cycle, the popularity cycle, and institutional variables such as the size of the President’s legislative coalition.

The next section describes the database on the Argentine legislative process used throughout the paper. The second section defines how the dependent and independent variables are operationalized, and proposes the hypotheses to be tested. The third section presents the results of our analysis. The conclusion recaps on the argument and findings and proposes questions for further research.

1. The Database
Over the eight-year period between December 10, 1999, and December 9, 2007, Argentina had three different administrations, headed respectively by Fernando de la Rua, Eduardo Duhalde and Nestor Kirchner.¹ Largely because of the political crisis of 2001-2002, these presidential terms had different durations. Even though Argentine Presidents are elected for a four-year term, De la Rua was in office little more than two years (10-12-1999/21-12-2001), Duhalde for barely a year and a half (01-01-2002/25-05-2003), and Kirchner for four and a half years (25-05-2003/10-12-2001).

These presidencies were also different in origin and partisanship. Both De la Rua and Kirchner had been popularly elected (with 47% and 22% of the positive votes, respectively), while Duhalde was appointed by Congress after De la Rua’s resignation in order to complete the latter’s term. Kirchner and Duhalde were members of the working-class based Partido Justicialista (PJ), while De la Rua was member of the working-class based Partido Justicialista (PJ).

¹ Three interim presidents were also in office between December 21, and January 2, 2000, but had no time to steer Congress into approving any legislative initiative.
Unión Cívica Radical (UCR), a party traditionally supported by middle-class voters. Kirchner headed a one-party administration; De la Rua a coalition government between the UCR and FREPASO (Frente País Solidario) – an offspring of the PJ; Duhalde presided over an administration supported by the main faction of the PJ, with the co-operation of the main faction of the UCR.

The focus of this study is on presidential success on the substance of legislation. Researching this issue requires the construction of a suitable data base including all the 382 bills initiated by the Executive over this eight-year period that were passed by Congress.² This set encompasses 115 bills initiated by de la Rua, 72 by Duhalde, and 195 by Kirchner.³

These figures include the legislative initiatives of De la Rua and Duhalde that were enacted after they left office. Given that the initiators would have plausibly had little capacity to ensure the legislative approval of their proposals once they were out of office,⁴ the database was trimmed down in order to include only bills that were passed while the respective initiator was still in office. This left us with 292 laws: 67, 30 and 195 bills for De la Rua, Duhalde and Kirchner, respectively.

Since our main interest is not simply the passage of legislation but rather the extent of the President’s influence on the writing of the bills, we built a smaller database consisting only of those presidential initiatives that had been amended by any of the two chambers of Congress, whether in committee or in floor meetings. This led us to eliminate 202 further laws. The set of excluded laws encompasses a great deal of pieces usually considered as minor legislation, such as 134 ratifications of international agreements (which are anyway approved under close rule, so no amendment can be introduced by Congress), and 8 bills passed on a yearly basis granting the President authorization to leave the country. We also excluded other 55 relevant bills that were passed by Congress without amendments.

Thus, the smaller database includes 90 bills: 19 initiated by de la Rua, 16 by Duhalde, and 55 by Kirchner. All these 90 bills were subject to a close scrutiny in order to trace the identity of the legislators that proposed the amendments, the stage of the legislative process at which amendments were introduced, and the extent of the modifications. The latter implied a careful analysis of the text of each law, comparing them to the text of the original bill proposed by the President.

The database excludes bills that, despite having being initiated by legislators, were part of the presidential agenda, or the content of which the President showed interest in shaping. These bills were excluded because there are no objective criteria to count

² All the information was collected from official sources, namely, the databases of the Argentine Senate and Chamber of Deputies, by Gabriela Almaraz, research assistant to the project.
³ This count excludes 86 further bills initiated by President Carlos Menem (1989-1999), that were passed under De la Rua, Duhalde or Kirchner. Most of these bills were international agreements (78, or 90.7%) while two were submitted on behalf of the just elected President De la Rua (The 2000 Budget, and the reform of the Cabinet Law).
⁴ The assumption holds even though all three presidents had different ability to exert influence over the subsequent administrations. While De la Rua had to resign two years in advance in the midst of the deepest political, social and economic crisis of, at least, the 20th century, Kirchner managed to get his wife elected as his successor to the Presidency, and Duhalde got Kirchner elected in order to block former President Menem’s attempt to gain office one more time.
them on the basis of the information provided by the official legislative databases of the Argentine Chamber of Deputies and Senate.

2. Variables and Hypotheses
This section describes the dependent and independent variables, and presents and justifies the hypotheses tested in this paper in order to assess differences in presidential success on the content of legislation.

The dependent variable of our analysis is the distance between the contents of legislative outcomes and the contents of presidential initiatives. We measure this distance in two ways. The first intends to measure the legislative input on presidential initiatives focusing on the partisan affiliation of those who proposed in either stage – committee or floor – amendments to presidential initiatives: whether opposition legislators only, government and opposition legislators, or government party legislators exclusively. We assume that amendments by opposition legislators are farthest from the President’s preferences, amendments by government and opposition legislators are even compromises between the President and Congress; and amendments by government party legislators are closest to the President’s preferred outcome. We code them 1, 2, and 3 respectively. The more amendments of the first kind, the more the legislative input on presidential initiatives and the less the President’s influence on the substance of legislation; the more amendments of the latter types, the less the legislative input and the more the President’s influence on the substance of legislation.

To explore in more detail the President’s likely impact on the content of legislation, we use as our second measure the scale proposed by Barrett and Eshbaugh-Soha (2007: 105) to assess the substance of legislation. These authors code a bill with 5 if the President received from Congress “virtually everything he wanted” except “a few minor provisions”, which would be the closest to presidential preferences. Code 4 corresponds when the President gets “most of what he wanted, yet he accepted a number of significant provisions he either opposed or did not want included”. Code 3 is for bills whose substance was “a relatively equal compromise” between the President and Congressional leaders. Code 2 designates bills the majority of whose content was not wanted by the President but that still contain “a few significant provisions that the President wanted”. And code 1 is reserved for those bills farthest from the President’s preferences, which were “nothing like what he wanted” (ibid.).

Our independent variables are the President’s popularity, honeymoon effects, the size of the President’s legislative coalition, and the electoral cycle.

We measure presidential popularity using the approval ratings in opinion polls at the moment of the final passage of the bill. The approval ratings range from a low 7% on

5 The data on presidential approval used in this paper was kindly provided by IPSOS-Mora y Araujo. Even though the data covers the whole period under study, it has not been produced on a monthly basis, so when there was no data available for the month corresponding to the enactment of the bill we imputed the score of the month closest to the enactment, or the average score of the previous and next measures when the missing data was equidistant from the available data.
June and September 2002 (Duhalde government) to a high 84% on March 2004 (Kirchner government).  

Presidential honeymoon is a nominal variable scoring 1 when a bill is passed during the first year of his term, and 0 otherwise.  

The size of the presidential legislative coalition is measured as the number of legislators from the government’s party or coalition. It ranges from a low 37% for Duhalde between March 2002 and June 2003, to a high 53% for Kirchner between February 2006 and December 2007.  

The influence of the electoral cycle is measured as the distance between the date of the next legislative election and the date of the final passage of the bill. In this period there were bills enacted shortly after an election, therefore not influenced by the next election to be held 24 months later, and also bills enacted barely 15 days before an election.  

The first three hypotheses we test deal with the impact of presidential strength - popular and institutional - on legislative outcomes. The third variable intends to account for the impact of the electoral cycle - i.e. of uncertainty about the electoral fortunes as the next election comes closer.  

**H1: The higher the President’s popularity, the closer legislative outcomes would be to the President’s preferences.**  

This is a classical hypothesis in studies assessing Presidential political influence, and it could be traced back to, at least, Neustadt’s (1990: 73) assertion that public standing is a source of influence, a factor bearing on their willingness of others, including legislators, to give the president what he wants. For the Argentine case, Calvo (2004: 18) has found that “the most significant variable affecting the Congressional rate of approval of presidential initiatives is the positive image of the president among voters”.  

**H2: The closest to the inauguration of the presidential term, the closer legislative outcomes would be to the President’s preferences.**  

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6 Yet, there is little variation within administrations regarding presidential popular standing: while Duhalde consistently obtained rates below 25% (minimum: 8%, maximum: 24%) Kirchner never had rates below 50% (minimum: 58%, maximum: 84%). Only De la Rua displayed a wide span of values, from a low 9% to a high 72%.  

7 In the case of De la Rua it includes the President’s party (Unión Cívica Radical) and the Frepaso (Frente por un País Solidario, the junior partner in the government coalition). After March 2001 it also includes Acción por la República (the party of the then appointed Minister of Economy, Domingo Cavallo), and the figures were adjusted in order to account for substantive defections from both UCR and Frepaso subsequent to the cabinet reshuffling. In the case of Duhalde it includes the PJ (Partido Justicialista), adjusted in order to account for substantive defections after March 2002. In the case of Kirchner the legislative coalition includes the FV-PJ (Frente para la Victoria-Partido Justicialista), also adjusted to account for important defections between May 2005 and January 2006. After February 2006 Kirchner’s coalition also includes Peronismo Federal.  

8 In Argentina there are legislative elections every odd year.  

9 See also Alemán and Calvo (2008: 23).
This is the “honeymoon effect” hypothesis. Going back to Roosevelt in 1933 it has been argued that presidents have a higher influence on legislative outcomes in the 100 days following presidential inauguration than at other moments in their term.\textsuperscript{10} Alemán and Calvo have also found that in Argentina “presidential bills introduced during the first year in office are more likely to become law that those introduced in later years” (2008: 23). Here we will assess whether the honeymoon effect also stands for the shaping of the content of legislation.

\textit{H3: The bigger the size of the President’s legislative coalition in the Chamber of Deputies, the closer legislative outcomes would be to the President’s preferences.}

This is also a classical hypothesis in the studies on presidential influence. The size of the presidential legislative coalition has been regarded as a crucial source of presidential support in studies on presidential governance in Latin America (Jones: 1995). Yet, the results are more disputed for the literature revolving around the impact of divided government on presidential legislative success (Mayhew, 1991; Fiorina, 1996), and even a study on presidential legislative success in Argentina has found that “the level of partisan support presidents have in the legislature does not affect approval probabilities” (Alemán and Calvo, 2008: 29).

\textit{H4: The closer the approval of a bill to the coming election, the farther legislative outcomes would be from the President’s preferences.}

This hypothesis is intended to tap the influences of the uncertainty about electoral outcomes on the behavior of legislators, and assumes that the closer the coming election, the more willing legislators will be to influence the substance of legislation. To be sure, the extent of the influence of the electoral cycle on legislative behavior is also dependent on the presidential approval rates, since it could be electorally profitable to follow the presidential intent when approval ratings rank high. Thus, the electoral cycle variable should be controlled for the presidential approval variable, though this is not attempted it this article.

3. Analysis
Since this paper focuses only on a small universe of presidential bills approved with amendments, it is convenient to provide additional information in order to have a wider picture of the legislative success of these presidents. Table 1 provides information about the legislative success of each of the presidencies analyzed here.\textsuperscript{11}

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
President & Legislative Success & Approval Rates & Electoral Cycle \\
\hline
\hline
Roosevelt & High & High & Favorable \\
\hline
JFK & Medium & Medium & Favorable \\
\hline
Truman & Low & Low & Unfavorable \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Legislative Success of Presidents}
\end{table}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{10} See also Radwin (2003), Beckmann and Godfrey (2007), Fleisher and Bond (1983), Edwards (1985).}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{11} See Calvo (2004) and Alemán and Calvo (2008) for articles focusing on this aspect of legislative success.}
Table 1
Presidential Legislative Success for all Legislation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>a- Bills Submitted</th>
<th>b- Bills passed *</th>
<th>Approval rate*</th>
<th>a/b Average bills approved per month*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De la Rua</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duhalde</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirchner</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>634</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* While the president was still in office. Source: authors’ own elaboration on the basis of the official databases of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies of Argentina.

The table shows that president Kirchner was the most successful in having his initiatives passed by Congress. Yet, it is important to note the differences in the length of the presidential tenure. The longer the president stays in office, the more likely, ceteris paribus, his initiatives will be enacted. To be sure, longer presidencies would also provide more time to submit more bills. For instance, Kirchner sent to Congress nearly twice as many bills as De la Rua submitted. However, as he stayed in office more than twice the time of De la Rua, the monthly average of bills submitted by either president is about the same (6.8 and 6.2 for De la Rua and Kirchner, respectively). Thus, the differences in success revealed by the approval rate of De la Rua and Kirchner looks less spectacular when the focus is on the average number of bills approved per month. As the table shows, while Kirchner obtained approval for about 3 and a half bills per month, De la Rua’s figures were close to 3, and Duhalde’s close to 2.

It must be noted, however, that Table 1 includes bills usually regarded as minor pieces of legislation, such as international agreements and the yearly authorizations for the President to leave the country. The whole picture, though, is barely different if we exclude these bills, which usually amount to nearly half of all bills submitted by the President, and consider only major legislative pieces.

Table 2
Presidential Legislative Success for Major Legislation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>a- Bills Submitted</th>
<th>b- Bills passed *</th>
<th>Approval rate*</th>
<th>a/b Average bills approved by month*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De la Rua</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duhalde</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirchner</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* While the president was still in office. Source: ibid Table 1.

Table 2 shows again that the Kirchner presidency was the most successful in having its initiatives passed by Congress, but it also shows that there are no dramatic differences: his difference with both De la Rua and Duhalde is below one average bill by month. These differences do not appear as significant considering the political fortunes of these presidents, and the contrast between the market-friendly context of

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12 Kirchner’s presidency was 2.2 times longer than De la Rua’s, and 3.3 times longer than Duhalde’s.
de la Rua’s administration and the state-centered economic strategy carried out under Duhalde and Kirchner.

Beyond these approval rates, the aim of this paper is to show that having proposed bills passed by Congress may not be tantamount to legislative success. In fact, a presidential initiative might be converted into law after being so heavily amended that little is left of the presidential intention. Table 3 provides preliminary information on amendments.

**Table 3**

**Amendments on Major Legislation Submitted by the President**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>Bills Passed</th>
<th>Bills Amended</th>
<th>Amendment rate*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De la Rua</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>76.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duhalde</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirchner</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>60.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* While the president was still in office. Source: ibid. Table 1.

The table shows that Kirchner has been more successful in having his proposals passed without any amendments than the other two presidents. Yet, none of these presidents were able to get enacted even half of their bills without any amendment. In the light of the literature on divided government, this should not be surprising given that Kirchner headed a unified government over most of his four-and-a-half-year term while, for instance, De la Rua was confronted by a Senate where the main opposition party had nearly 2/3 of the seats. Still, differences are not striking.

All this said, we are more interested here in the extent of the amendments that in their frequency. In other words, while frequency only shows that an amendment has been made, the aim of this paper is to assess the extent to which these amendments changed the intent of the President. For doing so the paper focuses on the 92 amended bills reported in Table 3.

As described above, we use two different scores to measure the quality of amendments. The Legislative Input Score (LIS) ranges from 1 when amendments are proposed solely by opposition parties, to 3 when they are promoted by the President’s party, and takes the value of 2 when both government and opposition parties amend a presidential bill. On the other hand, the Barret-Eshbaugh Soha Score (BESS) ranges from 5 when presidents get everything they wanted even after amendments are introduced to 1 when they get nothing.
Table 4
Amendments on Major Legislation submitted by the President*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>Legislative Input Score (Mean)</th>
<th>Barrett-Eshbaugh Soha Score (Mean)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De la Rua</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duhalde</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirchner</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* While the president was still in office. Source: ibid. Table 1.

Table 4 shows little difference on either score when we focus on the output of each presidency. This suggests that these presidents were equally able to get more or less what they wanted when they decided to submit a legislative proposal to Congress. Yet, it is possible that differences on legislative support, public standing, and even the electoral cycle make a difference on these scores. At least, this is what we would expect according to the independent variables typically used by the literature to account for presidential legislative success.

However, none of the hypotheses tested achieved the expected results. Presidential popularity appears to have no effect on the level of legislative input on presidential initiatives. As Table 5 shows, the mean scores for the LIS range between 2.0 and 2.2, a slight variation itself, and are exactly the same for both high and low approval ratings. The BESS changes in the expected way, increasing the value of the score as the presidential popularity rates get higher, though differences are not as marked as expected. This implies that amended presidential initiatives in the de la Rua, Duhalde, and Kirchner administrations were introduced by both government and opposition legislators regardless of the presidential level of popularity, and these deals made presidents similarly able to get what they wanted.

Table 5
Presidential Popularity and Legislative Input on Presidential Initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presidential Approval Ratings (%)</th>
<th>Legislative Input Score (Mean)</th>
<th>Barrett-Eshbaugh Soha Scale</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-25</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-50</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+50</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: authors’ own elaboration on the basis of data from Ipsos-Mora y Araujo for approval ratings and own database for input scores.

The same pattern obtains for the honeymoon effect hypothesis. As Table 6 depicts, mean LIS are consistently low and exhibit only slight variations across time. Legislators appear to have had slightly less influence on the content of legislation in the first year of each presidential term, but their input score is only 0.1 lower than that registered for subsequent years. Furthermore, figures of BESS suggest that presidents were more successful in getting what they want on non-honeymoon years, though differences are small. This would mean that in these administrations honeymoon periods had little influence on the substance of legislation.
### Table 6
**Honeymoon Effect and Legislative Input on Presidential Initiatives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Honeymoon</th>
<th>Legislative Input Score (Mean)</th>
<th>Barrett-Eshbaugh Soha Scale</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>4,1</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>4,5</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: authors’ own elaboration.

The legislative coalition size hypothesis has almost no effect on the level of legislative input on presidential initiatives. As Table 7 shows, the mean LIS had almost no variation regardless of whether the President’s legislative coalition held the majority in the Chamber of Deputies, while BESS varied on the expected direction, but with no striking differences. This implies that in the De la Rua, Duhalde, and Kirchner administrations the loss of the legislative majority by the government party had little impact on the President’s ability to shape the content of the initiatives they sent to Congress.

### Table 7
**Presidential Legislative Coalition Size and Legislative Input on Presidential Initiatives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Presidential Coalition in the Chamber of Deputies (Percentage of Seats)</th>
<th>Legislative Input Score (Mean)</th>
<th>Barrett-Eshbaugh Soha Scale</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-50</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>4,3</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 50</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>4,7</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: authors’ own elaboration.

Finally, the electoral cycle also seems to have had little impact on the President’s ability to shape the content of the bills sent to Congress. Table 8 shows little variation on LIS and BESS regardless of the time distance between the moments the bills are passed and the coming election. This means that in the de la Rua, Duhalde, and Kirchner administrations the proximity to elections did not increase legislators’ ability to influence on the content of presidential initiatives.

### Table 8
**Electoral Cycle and Legislative Input on Presidential Initiatives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance from Next Election Day (Months)</th>
<th>Legislative Input Score (Mean)</th>
<th>Barrett-Eshbaugh Soha Scale</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>4,5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>4,3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-18</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>4,3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>4,5</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: authors’ own elaboration.

### Conclusion
This paper has shown that the hypotheses usually deployed to account for presidential agenda success do not hold when the focus of analysis is the substance of legislation. By probing into the legislative process and assessing the level of legislative input on presidential initiatives, we have demonstrated that – at least in the case of Argentina –
presidents can consistently shape the substance of the bills they present to Congress regardless of their popularity, the length of their term, the size of their legislative coalition, and the electoral cycle.

Our findings suggest that the literature on Executive-Legislative relations should incorporate the issue of legislative substance and reassess its claims on the basis of new analyses that explicitly account for this dimension of legislative outcomes. If unpopular presidents get as much legislation approved close to their preferences as popular presidents do; if presidents in their honeymoon, Congressionally-dominant presidents, and presidents under electoral cycles also get their way as much as their exact opposite types, then different independent variables should be proposed and analyzed in order to understand how these patterns obtain.

Consequently, research on presidential agenda success should develop along at least two different lines. On the one hand, it should strive to construct new measures of the substance of legislation and/or refine the ones proposed and used in this paper. We acknowledge that our legislative input scores require the strong assumption of identity of preferences between the President and the presidential party in Congress. This assumption may of course not obtain if parties are not cohesive. To correct for the classification mistakes this assumption may lead to, measures that take more detailed account of how the legislative process enables individual legislators to express their dissidence and/or propose constructive amendments need to be developed. We also recognize that more sophisticated statistical analyses should be carried out in order to increase the confidence in our findings.

On the other hand, research on presidential agenda success should probably bring the issue of presidential leadership into the forefront of analysis. If presidents may obtain what they want from Congress both when they are strong and when they are weak, then their ability to lead might have something to do with such remarkable feat. Developing more tractable measures of presidential leadership and its likely impact on the substance of legislation is thus an impending task for the comparative politics of Executive-Legislative relations.

Bibliography


