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Why do states change positions in the United Nations General Assembly?

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Abstract
Many international organizations deal with repeated items on their agendas. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is no exception as many of its resolutions reoccur over time. A novel dataset on UNGA voting on repeated resolutions reveals considerable, but variable, amounts of change on resolutions by states over time. To shed light on underlying causes for voting (in)consistency, this paper draws on IR literature on negotiations and foreign policy changes to develop hypotheses on the role of domestic and international constraints. Our findings suggest that states with limited financial capacity cannot develop their own, principled, voting positions on all norms on the negotiation agenda. Consequently, these states can be more flexible in adjusting their voting position for reoccurring IO norms and are more prone to change their positions over time. Moreover, states with constrained decision-makers change position less frequently due to pluralistic gridlock. Finally, while large and rich states make a small number of purposive vote shifts, poor and aid-recipient states engage in 'serial shifting' on the same resolutions, a finding suggestive of vote-buying. The prevalence of position changes suggests that the international norm environment may be more fragile and susceptible to a revisionist agenda than is commonly assumed.

Keywords
UNGA, foreign policy, international norms, diplomacy, foreign aid

Introduction

International organisations (IO) and regimes often deal with repeated issues. For example, International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan programs, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's

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(OECD) DAC or the International Whaling Commission (IWC), repeatedly affirm similar norms or resolutions, often with only circumstantial updates. Given that states' resources are ultimately scarce, one would expect to see path-dependence in state behaviour concerning an international norm once a position has been established.[1]

However, in the UNGA, for example, state positions change on roughly 10% of votes on reoccurring norms, although the frequency of change varies widely by state. While there is a wide literature on the general voting behaviour of states in IOs,[2] there have been no explicit investigations into inconsistent voting behaviour concerning reoccurring norms. Nevertheless, vote shifts on reoccurring resolutions take place in policy areas ranging from the Israel–Palestine conflict to human rights abuses, to nuclear proliferation, to issues of development. That a number of states change their positions on UNGA resolutions suggests that what may commonly be considered as 'established norms' (Barnett and Finnenmore, 1999) are indeed in fact open to substantial contestation and revision, as suggested by Van Kersbergen and Verbeek (2007).

This paper draws on the UNGA as an empirical example of an IO with broad membership and a large number of issues on the negotiation agenda. While voting in the UNGA has received considerable academic attention, there are no systematic studies of changing votes over time.[3] In the next section, we take a closer look at voting patterns on repeated resolutions and identify an interesting empirical puzzle: the frequency with which states tend to shift their votes for reoccurring resolutions varies considerably. In order to shed light on underlying reasons for variation in the voting consistency between states and the motivations of states to change their votes on an issue over time, the following section draws on international relations (IR) negotiation and foreign policy literatures to develop hypotheses on the role of aid receipt, resource and institutional constraints. In addition to these hypotheses this section identifies a set of international level control variables prominent in the negotiation and foreign policy literatures (e.g. socialisation, crises).

The final section provides an empirical examination of the hypotheses. Our major findings are that vote shifts can be accounted for by a combination of capacity and international-level factors. Most notably, states with limited capacity struggle to develop their own, principled voting positions on all norms on the IO agenda.They instead prioritise those few issues which most impact their national interests. Consequently, these poor, and often small, states shift their votes more as they develop priorities on resolutions where they have previously either abstained or remained absent. Moreover, we show that voting inconsistency is related to aid-dependence, which is in line with previous research on 'vote-buying' in the UNGA (e.g. Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Carter and Stone, 2015; Dreher et al., 2008; Kegley and Hook, 1991; Wang, 1999). Finally, pluralistic societies are less prone to vote-inconsistency, due to competing interests and veto-players, which can result in 'democratic gridlock'.

This paper draws on a novel dataset that captures resolution-level vote shifts. Since this phenomenon has not been explored before, it serves as the first exploratory exercise of its kind. Answering questions on the role of domestic level capacities and international level constraints for voting behaviour provides valuable insights into the mechanisms and constraints that determine how states engage with international institutions.

The phenomenon of vote shifts

Reoccurring norms are not rare exceptions on negotiation agendas of IOs (Panke, 2014). This paper draws on the UNGA as an empirical example, since the UNGA not only provides roll call data on an issue basis, but is also representative of institutional features in a number of IOs. Similar to the ILO, WTO, IMF, WHO, IOM, UNCTAD, UNFCC or IAEA, the UNGA has a broad

membership and its norms are developed in multilateral intergovernmental negotiations. Moreover, while UN treaties and conventions are legally binding, the norms developed in the UNGA (GA resolutions) resemble 'soft law' (similar to recommendations of the ILO, IAEA or OECD). Since the UNGA covers a broad range of policies, ranging from security and disarmament to economic and decolonisation issues to human rights and current political questions, studying state alignment with/against GA resolutions provides insights into a state's position on a broad range of international normative questions (Abbott and Snidal, 1998; Shelton, 2000). Thus, the UNGA is a good arena to analyse how states cope with reoccurring norms on an IO agenda.

In the decade from 1999/2000 to 2009/2010, the UNGA passed between 277 and 360 resolutions in each GA session.[4] Each member state has the formal right to call for a vote on a resolution, or an operative paragraph in a resolution. Yet, most of the 3,510 resolutions on the UNGA agenda in this period were consensual and not put to an official vote. In total, we identified 994 instances in which the member states could not all agree on the text of a resolution or operative paragraph which, therefore, was voted on in the UNGA. In each of the GA sessions (GA 54–GA 64) the number of items put to a formal vote varied between 64 and 108. We used a title search algorithm to identify 311 unique resolutions of which 154 appear in more than one, and up to ten, GA sessions.[5] For these 154 unique, repeating, issues, we coded vote shifts of all UNGA member states. Whenever language is sufficiently controversial to come to a vote, states can choose between four different options. They can cast a yes vote, a no vote, register their abstention or not press a button at all and be recorded as absent. On average, for all the votes cast for the 994 contested issues, roughly 71% were positive, 6% negative, 10% abstention, while absences accounted for 12% of all the voting opportunities.[6] We code as shifts whenever states change their vote on a repeated resolution in a subsequent vote. We record 19,698 total shifts.

Zooming into the country-level, we see that there is considerable variation in the voting consistency between states. Most remarkably, smaller states tend to shift their votes more often than bigger states. For example, the Republic of the Congo, with a population of less than five million, shifts, on average, almost 25 times per GA session, with a remarkable 52 altered positions in GA session 55. Likewise, small island states Vanuatu, Sao Tome and Principe, Saint Lucia, and Tuvalu, all averaged over 30 shifts per GA session. Contrast this with the United States, India and China, who move their positions on just five, three and three resolutions in a typical GA session, respectively.

Accounting for vote shifts

Accounting for the observed cross-country variation in vote shifts is important for several reasons. First, changing votes is costly for the states concerned, as relevant state ministries and stakeholders need to coordinate to construct a national position. This domestic policy formulation requires considerable capacities (Bräutigam, 1996; Ingraham and Donahue, 2000; Martin-Vazquez and Boex, 1997). This suggests that a substantial incentive may be necessary for states to re-visit and change their previous positions. Second, approaches to state socialisation and international norms often implicitly assume that the foreign policy of states shows features of temporal path dependency (Alderson, 2001; Checkel, 1999; Katzenstein, 1996; Kowert and Legro, 1996; Risse and Sikkink, 1999). Extensive variation in a state's UNGA voting position would suggest that this path dependence is disrupted, and that other factors may facilitate or hinder a state's socialisation to international norms. Finally, IO members often deal with similar issues in repeated negotiations, and the extent to which states are inclined to shift their positions and votes can be very important for the dynamics and outcomes of negotiations, as well as the stability and robustness of international norms. Accordingly, voting incoherencies beg explanation.

Theory: capacity, regime type and pressure

Discrepancy in voting consistency raises an interesting question. Why are smaller states less consistent in their voting than bigger states? Voting at the UN is traditionally thought to be based on national positions. These positions are developed at the domestic level (most often in ministries of foreign affairs (MFAs)) and sent to national diplomats who represent the state by negotiating and voting at the international level (Halperin, 1974; Moravcsik, 1998; Panke, 2013a, 2013b; Putnam, 1988). States with limited capacity may face shortages in staff numbers or expertise that hinders swift development of national positions back home. As a result, instructions can be delayed, or are only selectively developed, for resolutions on the UNGA negotiation agenda (Bräutigam, 1996; Hanf and Soetendorp, 1998; Panke, 2013a, 2013b). States with such constraints should have increased vote shifts, since in the absence of instructions from the capital, the national diplomats in New York may autonomously decide on how to vote on a given resolution. This autonomy may lead to inconsistency, especially if diplomats change with relative frequency. By contrast, states with a high level of capacity should be able to develop national positions for all issues on the UNGA agenda and should, consequently, have relatively higher voting coherency as their positions are costly to reformulate and change (H1).

H1: The higher a state's level of capacity, the less likely it will be to change its UNGA vote.

Next to capacity, institutional structures also matter for states' foreign policies (Brown et al., 1996; Risse-Kappen, 1995; Russett, 1993). States with a high number of veto players are more likely to have lengthy internal negotiations and a greater chance of deadlocks which renders changing national positions less likely and induces a higher voting coherency (Gray and Lowery, 1995; Tsebelis, 2002). This form of gridlock may lead to policy inertia in democracies once a UNGA position is established. According to this same logic, an increase in veto players (democratisation) would reduce the likelihood of vote shifts, while a decrease in veto players (move towards an authoritarian state) would increase vote shifts. In the extreme, an autocrat governing in the absence of checks and balances is fully autonomous in determining a national position and, thus, is free to adjust it to suit any transitory preferences. As a consequence, there should be more vote shifts in authoritarian states compared to democracies (H2).

H2: The more autocratic a state, the greater the likelihood of vote shifts.

Finally, the dominant narrative in the literature suggests smaller or poorer states might be willing to 'sell' their international positions to bigger or richer states that 'buy' voting support via developmental aid payments. The logic is that developmental aid donors may seek to maximise the support for their own position concerning a resolution and offer aid increases in exchange for voting support (Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Kegley and Hook, 1991). Wang (1999) presents evidence of US vote-buying for strategic votes, Lai and Morey (2006) findings show that *non*-democracies are prone to having their vote bought by the US, Dreher et al. (2008) suggest that vote-buying depends on the type of aid used, while Carter and Stone (2015) use strategic game theory to suggest how vote-buying occurs. However, the challenge with evidencing vote-buying rests on the difficulty in finding a tit-for-tat exchange from a coincidental or natural *alignment* of voting positions. Our data of vote-*changes* (a focus on voting *dynamics*) brings an element of agency lacking in studies that rely on vote-*alignment* data. As vote-buying may induce states to change their positions, we expect that states with higher levels of aid-dependence will have increased vote shifts. While this expectation cannot show direct causality of vote-buying, failure to reject the hypothesis would be consistent

with a vote-buying story. If aid-dependent states shift their votes more frequently than non-aid-recipients, then we would have grounds to suspect that vote-buying takes place (H3).

H3: States with higher levels of Official Development Assistance will have an increased likelihood of vote shifts.

Control variables

We also control for one-off events that may lead to vote shifts. The process of regime change (e.g. a revolution) or a severe domestic crisis (e.g. a civil war) may demand state resources that could otherwise be used to formulate new national positions or invest in policy adjustments (De Mesquita and Siverson, 1995; Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). Once the new regime is in place, or once the severe crisis has ended, these capacities can be redirected to the formulation of national positions on resolutions where the state previously abstained or was absent. Also, such severe changes can lead to domestic reconfiguration across a broad range of policies, which are reflected in the stances the respective state takes on the UN-level. Dreher and Jensen (2013) find evidence that new rulers are more likely to support US positions in the UNGA while Smith (2014) finds just the opposite. Thus we also control for government turnover and end of conflict prompting change in UNGA positions. Finally, we control for UNGA 'socialisation'. States that have been in the UNGA longer will have had more time to develop their 'true preferences' and national voting positions, and establish a path-dependency in voting (Alderson, 2001; Checkel, 1999; Moravcsik, 1998).

Operationalisation and empirical analysis

The formulation of the dependent variable is a binary construction that captures shifts on a given resolution, by GA session, at the member state level (shift events). This binary measure provides us with a 'generic' shift event and is the simplest way to test factors that lead to an increase in the general propensity to shift votes in the UNGA. We are explicitly able to model the panel data using a random effects panel logit.[7]

We operationalise capacity by using the natural log of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. We use a combined Freedom House index as a proxy for the extent of pluralism (continuum between democracy and autocracy, with 1 being most democratic and 7 being most autocratic).[8] Finally, we operationalise aid dependency using an aid to GDP ratio. In order to capture the relationship between stochastic (exogenous) events and UNGA vote shifts we use binary year-dummy variables of regime change and end of intrastate war. We assign a duration of UN membership as of 1999 as proxy for maturing and consolidating positions. As a basic control of size, based on our descriptive observation, we include the natural log of population. Finally, we include a time variable to capture any temporal trend in shift frequency. Our general model specification is given below.

$$P(Voteshift_{rti} = 1) = \Phi(\beta_0 + \boldsymbol{\beta} \boldsymbol{X_{ti}} + \gamma \boldsymbol{V_{ti}})$$

Where *Voteshift* is a binary variable indicating a change in position on resolution r at time t for country I, **X** is the vector of primary independent variables described above, **V** is the vector of control variables and Φ is the cumulative logistic distribution function.

More information on the data sources and measurement of these variables is available in Appendix I. In addition to the regression analysis, we use more than 60 semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with diplomats posted in New York in the respective national

Table 1. UNGA vote shifts.

	Dependent variable		
	Model I	Model II	Model III
	All Shifts	1st Shift	2+ Shifts
ln(GDP per Capita)	−0.319**	−0.161**	−0.257**
	(10.74)	(5.72)	(6.24)
Freedom House	0.055**	0.076**	−0.011
	(2.88)	(3.65)	(0.43)
ODA/GDP	−0.053	-1.524**	0.789**
	(0.36)	(6.46)	(4.54)
UNGA Duration	−0.004	−0.005†	−0.001
	(1.08)	(1.69)	(0.25)
ln(Population)	−0.192**	−0.144**	−0.257**
	(5.92)	(5.79)	(6.24)
End of Civil War	0.050	0.210**	−0.253**
	(3.03)	(2.97)	(3.03)
Regime Change	−0.171**	−0.192*	−0.123
	(2.75)	(2.41)	(1.47)
GA Session (Year)	−0.003	−0.129**	0.080**
	(0.84)	(26.51)	(12.58)
Constant	3.255**	8.096**	−0.536
	(6.96)	(19.08)	(0.88)
Observations	161668	161668	147188
Groups (Clusters)	184	184	184
Wald/LR χ^2	365.71	1452.75	248.50
Pr>χ^2	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000

Absolute value of z score in parentheses. † significant at 10% level, * significant at 5% level, ** significant at 1% level.

missions between 2010 and 2014. The interviewees were selected to represent large and small states from all over the globe. In addition, we used a content analysis of diplomatic cables from the WikiLeaks documents to shed light on the mechanisms underlying the hypotheses on vote shifts. Results from the empirical model is presented in Table 1.

The capacity hypothesis and the regime hypothesis receive empirical support in model I in Table 1.[9] In line with H1, low capacity states are more likely to shift their votes. For example, ‘in the ministry there are not so many capacities as to follow everything closely’ (interview 54, 08.01.14). In instances in which capacity was lacking in the capital and instructions were not sent to the missions in New York, diplomats either do not cast a vote at all and stay absent (interview 59, 13.03.14)[10] or vote as they please.[11] As a diplomat explained ‘you may contribute through your personal contacts to have a delegation even change its position because let’s face it, some of the smaller member states of the organisation, of the UN, have also relatively small missions here and a relatively also flexible decision making process. So sometimes delegates here write their own instructions, so if you have good personal relations with them you can achieve a lot more than a demarche in (the) capital’ (interview 32, 21.02.12).

Political institutions also matter. As expected by H2, less pluralism (and more autocracy) in states significantly increases vote shifts in model I.[12] Unlike democratic governments, which are usually embedded in systems of checks and balances, autocrats are free to decide on policy

positions at the UNGA negotiation table. As a diplomat explained ‘it is an autocratic regime, for that regime it is easier apparently to take decisions, because there is only one, or maybe two. But in the case of a democratic government, you have a parliament, and of course it is more and more difficult to reach a decision – it takes more time. But once a decision is taken, it gives you more stability because you have the support of the majority guaranteed’ (interview 24, 01.09.11).

Finally, there is no evidence in model I that aid-dependent states are more prone to vote shifts, with a negative and statistically insignificant coefficient on ODA/GDP. This is a surprising finding given the weight of evidence in the existing literature on the presence of vote-buying. However, as noted in the introduction, our data-generating algorithm only matches resolution *titles*. The algorithm does not match resolution *text*. As mentioned in the descriptive statistics, while large as well as rich states change their votes less often, they do indeed change their votes. One explanation would be that when large states change their vote, these changes are purposive and in response to a change in resolution wording. For example, the EU member states successfully negotiated text changes in 2011 that considerably softened the resolution on the elimination of racism (also known as Durban-review resolution), resulting in vote shifts where all EU members abstained (cf. Panke 2013a).[13] Thus, while we cannot code changes in resolution text, we can differentiate between the *first* and the *second and subsequent* shift for member-resolution dyads. We would argue that the former class of shifts would be more indicative of substantive shifts, where a state negotiated a language change and therefore adjusted its voting stance.[14] By contrast, second and subsequent shifts, or ‘serial shifting’ is less likely to reflect textual changes as comparative case study analysis has shown that substantive changes are not taking place each GA session (Panke, 2013b).[15] Thus, states that are serial shifters are more likely to be responding to variation in international pressure. We would expect vote-buying to induce multiple shifts, either because aid-recipient states are playing donors with different interests off one another, a variant of the multiple-principal ‘problem’, or because these states are ‘demanding’ payment in each GA session, and if that payment is not forthcoming then they revert their vote. Accordingly, we update our expectation on the impact of ODA/GDP on vote shifting, such that we expect it to only be significant for member-resolution pairs where the member engages in *multiple* shifts (H3a).

> *H3a: States with higher levels of Official Development Assistance will have increased likelihood of* ***serial vote shifts****.*

To evaluate this revised hypothesis, we recode our data in two ways: 10,214 of the shifts we record are ‘first’ shifts, with the remaining 9,484 as second or subsequent shifts for a given state on a given resolution. In model II, we code shifts *only* when it is the first shift by a member state on a given resolution (‘1st shift’). Then, in model III, we code shifts *only* when the shift is a second or subsequent shift by a member states on a given resolution (‘2+ shift’).

The results from models II and III support our refined hypothesis. The coefficient on ODA/GDP is *significantly* negatively signed in model II, meaning that aid-receiving states are *less* likely to shift only once on a resolution compared to the remainder of the population. However, in model III, the coefficient ODA/GDP is *positive* and significant. These two results together are a strong indication of our causal logic. If aid-receiving states are going to shift their vote on a given resolution, they will not do it just once, but instead they will shift multiple times in order to accommodate heterogeneous donor positions. In this context, a diplomat stated ‘A lot of small states, and you have the European small states that are more developed, and I think they have in way there agenda is clearer because they have certain things that they want to push – value-based positions, human rights, democracy. I guess the other main small group that you’d think of is that developing countries, whoose main priority quite honestly is to just make sure that they continue to get aid [...] so

Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of vote shifts for key variables.

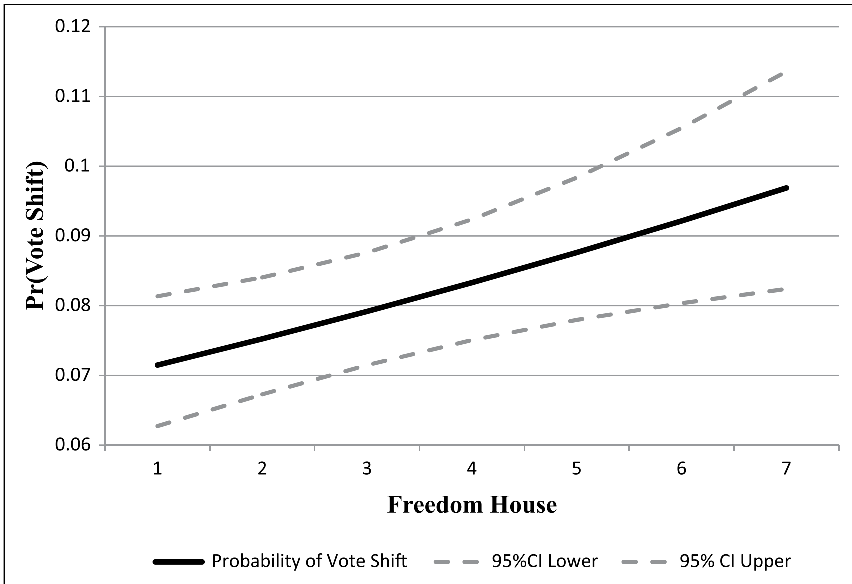

Figure 1.1. Marginal impact of autocracy on shifts.

their objective is about asking for more developmental aid' (interview 5, 22.10.10). In line with this, qualitative insights also point towards several donors approaching aid-recipients in order to talk them into voting support (e.g. interview 46, 20.03.12).[16] Again, while not a direct test of vote-buying, we think that this result is strongly consistent with that logic.

To more systematically examine the marginal effects of our key variables we plot the linear predictions for ln(GDP pc) and Freedom House for all vote shifts, and ODA/GDP for second and subsequent vote shifts, at the means of all other variables in the models in Figure 1.

The graphs in Figure 1 display the probabilities of vote shifts at given values of the independent variables.[17] Figure 1.1 shows autocracy increasing the probability of a vote shift from just over 7% at full democracy (FH=1) to nearly 10% at full autocracy (FH=7), roughly a 35% increase in the chance of a vote shift. Even more striking, however, is the impact of capacity on the propensity to shift a vote in Figure 1.2. Very low income countries, with per capita incomes in the range of $150, have an 18.5% chance of shifting on any given vote, a figure nearly *seven times* higher than the highest per capita income countries. Broadening to countries classified as least developed countries (LDCs), we still see a nearly 11% chance of shifting on any given vote, 2.5 times higher than the richest countries. Finally, in Figure 1.3, and perhaps as a corollary to Figure 1.2, we see the receipt of ODA/GDP, when controlling for GDP per capita, increases the probability of second and subsequent shifts. Though not as stark as the GDP per capita results, the probability of nominally 'aid-dependent' states (ODA/GDP ~ 10%) shifting their vote is roughly 8% higher than non-aid-recipients. Heavily aid-dependent states (ODA/GDP ~ 30%), such as the Federated States of Micronesia, have a probability of shifting some 25% higher than states which receive no aid.

The controls both conform and diverge from our expectations. Our measure of socialisation, duration of UNGA membership, is, as expected, negatively correlated with the propensity to shift, although only statistically significant (weakly) in the first shift model (II). The conclusion of civil

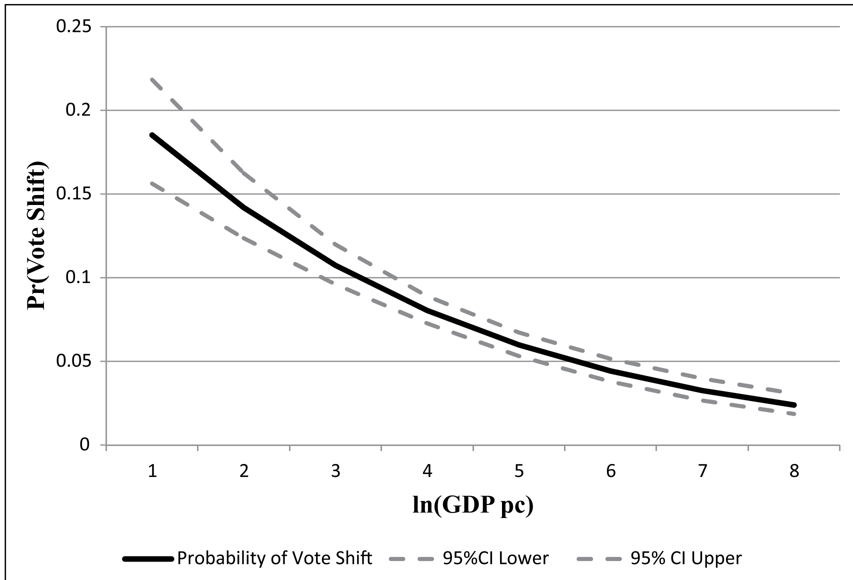

Figure 1.2. Marginal impact of ln(GDP pc) on shifts.

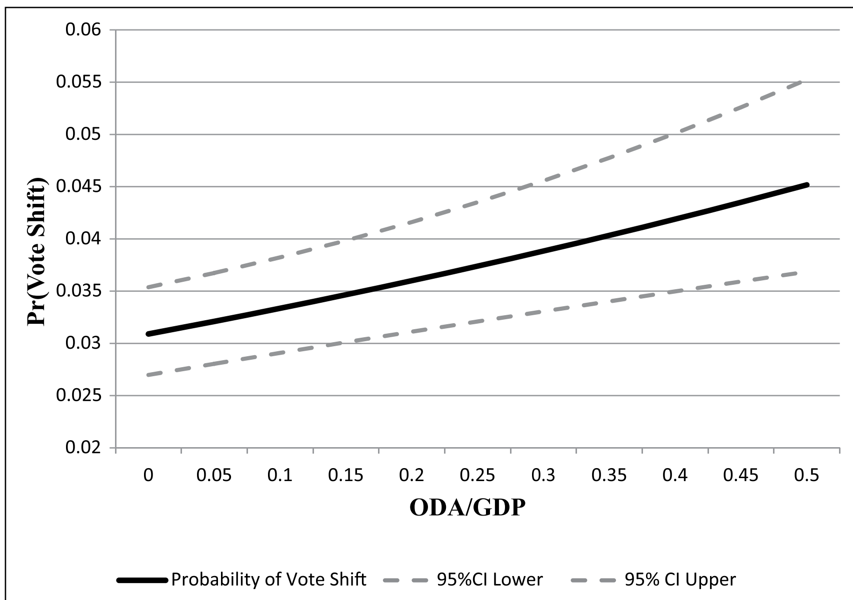

Figure 1.3. Marginal impact of ODA/GDP on 2+ shifts.

wars is positively associated with a first shift (model II) but is negatively associated with subsequent shifts (model III). Qualitative insights corroborates the finding in model II. For example, in answering whether his country would reconsider its voting position on UN resolutions after severe crises at home, a diplomat responded 'Naturally […] if there is a crisis […] we will prioritise the

resolutions we follow to ensure that our views are in those resolutions' (interview 59, 13.03.14). There is little statistical evidence that regime changes increase the probability of vote shifts, and in fact, the results suggest they can decrease the likelihood of shifts (models I and II). Finally, as expected, the population control is negatively signed and statistically significant in all models.

Conclusions

In international negotiating fora such as the UNGA, norms are often (re-)negotiated over time. To date country level negotiation and preference dynamics of repeated international norms have not been examined. This paper seeks to shed light on this blind spot. Based on a unique database on vote shifts for repeated UNGA agenda items, we demonstrate that states' adjusting their voting preference for particular resolutions is not as rare a phenomenon as one might assume. However, the 19,698 total vote shifts in our study are not equally dispersed across member states. While some states shifted their positions hundreds of times, others changed only a handful.

This variation begs why some states are more consistent in their voting patterns than others. We analyse how domestic and international level variables prominent in international relations negotiation research and foreign policy analysis influence the propensity and frequency of vote shifts. It is striking that smaller and poorer states change their UNGA position far more frequently than financially well-off larger states. We suggest that the latter have sufficient capacities to systematically develop principled foreign policy positions on the broad range of resolutions on the UNGA agenda. By contrast, the governments of smaller and poorer countries grapple with capacity limitations and only formulate principled national positions for the resolutions that are of great interest to them. As a consequence, diplomats on the ground are often relatively unconstrained in how they vote and flexible to shift votes if they wish to do so.

In addition, political institutions matter. *Ceteris paribus*, democratic systems have higher levels of voting coherency than autocracies. We suggest that this effect is due to the greater flexibility of autocratic governments to adjust foreign policy positions as they deem fit, whereas pluralities of competing interests and institutional checks and balances lead to a 'democratic gridlock' that inclines democracies towards greater path-dependency. Once a UN position is agreed to in a democracy, it becomes very difficult to change. However, our results show that this finding only holds for the *first* shift by a member state on a given resolution. When considering second, or subsequent, shifts, levels of democracy or autocracy appear to have no impact on the likelihood of shifting. This finding points to a qualitatively different mechanism for first shifts compared to later shifts. While first shifts may constitute measured and considered policy shifts based, perhaps, on a substantive change in the negotiated text of a resolution, serial shifting points towards strong variation in international pressures. Descriptive statistics bear out this logic. Some 36 of the US's 53 shifts (68%) are first shifts. Likewise, 25 of China's 28 shifts (89%) are first shifts. Conversely, of The Gambia's 361 total shifts, only 125 (35%) are first shifts, suggesting that the US and China act purposively in the UNGA, while The Gambia's position is more variable and not always linked to successfully negotiated text changes. In line with this, second and subsequent shifts are indicative of a policy position that is not settled, perhaps due to capacity limitations, or perhaps due to external pressure. The latter mechanism is supported by our findings on the relationship between the receipt of foreign aid and the likelihood to shift. While we evidenced no relationship between ODA and vote shifting when considering all shifts, we find a *negative* relationship between ODA and *first* shifts, while our results show a *positive* relationship between ODA and second and subsequent shifts. That 'aid-recipient' states are less likely to make purposive 'first' shifts, but instead are much more likely to be 'serial shifters', is entirely consistent with a broad literature that suggests that aid may be used to influence vote positions in international institutions, and the UNGA in

particular, especially when considering small, poor and highly aid-dependent countries. While our investigation is not direct evidence of vote-buying, it is the first to consider how the *dynamics* of voting in IOs might be related to the receipt of aid.

Our results have important implications for the UNGA and broader IO literatures. Most importantly, we have illustrated that state positions on international norms are substantially malleable. Developing and autocratic states have yet to consolidate and entrench national positions across the broad range of international norms on the UNGA agenda. As the normative positions of these states are still in flux, it is clear that there is not yet an 'established' and/or 'internalised' consensus on all of the international norms in the UNGA – including issues of human rights, disarmament, and geopolitics. At the same time, poor and autocratic states appear to be influenced in their voting behaviour by international pull factors, primary aid-dependence. This instability in domestic preference and a mechanism for external influence open the possibility that if powerful international actors held a different vision for the international norm environment there is scope for changing the norms that prevail in the UNGA, or other IOs. Norms appear to only become entrenched at high levels of capacity, suggesting that states that value the current international norm environment redouble their efforts to raise income levels across the community of states.

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Notes

1. For example, a diplomat reported 'We take into account what we did last time … If it's the same resolution, then there would be no reason to change vote' (interview 50, 15.11.13). Another diplomat explained 'We're trying to remain as consistent as possible' (interview 59, 13.03.14).
2. E.g. Vincent, Jack E. (1969) The Convergence of Voting and Attitude Patterns at the United Nations. *The Journal of Politics* 31: 952–983; Vincent, Jack E. (1970) An Analysis of Caucusing Group Activity at the United Nations. *Journal of Peace Research* 7: 133–150; Vincent, Jack E., Hanna Newcombe, Michael Ross and Alan G. Newcombe (1970) United Nations Voting Patterns. *International Organisations*, 24: 100–21; Vincent, Jack E., Soo Yeon Kim and Bruce Russett (1996) The New Politics of Voting Alignments in the United Nations General Assembly. *International Organisations* 50(4): 629–652; Vincent, Jack E. and Robert O. Keohone (1969) Institutionalization in the United Nations General Assembly. *International Organisations* 23: 859–896.
3. Where voting in the UNGA has been most prominently studied by Voeten (2000, 2004).
4. The period between 1999/2000 and 2009/2010 has been chosen as timeframe for this analysis because membership of the UNGA has remained relatively constant. In addition, this time period is representative for UNGA negotiations in the post-Cold War era.
5. A large number of UNGA resolutions reoccur annually or biannually, typically because the sponsors of the resolutions want to reaffirm the norms entailed in 'their' resolutions and legitimise/delegitimise certain behaviour.
6. The treatment of absences is controversial in the UNGA voting literature. While scholars such as Panke (2014) suggests that absences can be a strategic voting decision, others such as Bailey et al. (2013)

exclude absences from their analyses. Bailey et al. (2013) follow a similar approach of identifying repeated resolutions in order to generate ideal point estimates of UNGA voting. However, their data differs from ours in both form and purpose. First, their search algorithm identifies only those resolutions with 'exact' matching content, while our search algorithm identifies votes by title. We choose this approach since changes in the resolution content may very well be associated with changes in voting on an item. Second, while their outcome of interest is a country-level ideal point on UNGA voting position, ours is the vote shift itself. Finally, Bailey et al. (2013: 11) data does not include 'absences' in their voting data, noting in that 'in 68% of votes where a state is absent it will also be absent on the next roll call.'

7. We use a random effects model as one of our variables of interest, Freedom House scores, is largely time-invariant country-level characteristic. Both ln GDP per capita and ODA/GDP fail to reject the null hypothesis of a Hausman test, suggesting consistency for these variables under either a random effects or fixed-effects specification.
8. We also investigated using the Polity measure to operationalise our hypotheses for political capacity and constraint. Unfortunately, however, the Polity measure covers 30 less countries (162) compared to Freedom House (192), and many of these are small and more states display a high level of vote shifting in the UNGA. Accordingly, we use the Freedom House measure, which is highly correlated (-0.8933) with the Polity score.
9. This finding remains robust and significant for different specifications of the dependent variable (cf. discussion concerning hypothesis 3).
10. States with small budgets tend to run into capacity constraints, not only in developing instructions back home (cf. Panke, 2013b), but also in participating in UNGA negotiations. A diplomat noted 'The best way to get island votes is to spend time with these small delegations and to provide written talking points for them to share with their capitals, when needed. […] Kiribati, due to cost, is now the only Pacific island without a UN Mission in New York […] For many of the islands with small missions, just showing up for a vote is a major feat. Some have made effective use of interns to supplement their small delegations' (WikiLeaks, 2007). Similarly, 'All the big countries like China have at least two, three or four election officers who deal with these issues so they can concentrate profoundly, solely on election issues or on committee number 1, second committee, third committee etc. so that would be an advantage for them, because they have the capacity to provide an officer for each issue or each committee, where I have to do everything' (interview 41 38, 16.03.12). Another diplomat explained 'like I've mentioned, sometimes we're absent because we just couldn't be at the same place' (interview 59, 13.03.14).
11. For example, 'There is an advantage in the sense that the mission has more space for maneuvering, which is good, but also require that the head of the mission … have the experience and capacity to deal with' (interview 41, 19.03.12). Similarly another diplomat explained 'Diplomats in UNGA are career diplomats and they have a free-hand in negotiations, they do what they see fit in New York, on the issue. Unless it's an important, politically sensitive issue' (interview 51, 22.11.13).
12. This finding is robust in model II, which focuses only on the first vote shifts, but loses significance and changes the sign in model III in which we capture the second and subsequent vote shifts. This finding most likely reflects the fact that while autocrats shift votes more often than democrats, their first vote shifts are purposeful, while serial shifts are not (cf. discussion for hypothesis 3).
13. A diplomat from one of the largest EU states reported 'the fact that we stuck together and we got some of what we wanted meant that the whole of the EU was able to abstain on the resolution, which was the real shift' (interview 28, 06.12.11). Another example for a negotiated language change that led to a once-off vote shift is the US in regard to the resolution on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons: 'After being the lone dissenter last year, the U.S. was able to persuade the lead sponsors (South Africa, Japan, Colombia) to accept two U.S. edits and convince the many co-sponsors to go along with the changes. The U.S. voted in favor of the resolution and co-sponsored it' (WikiLeaks, 2009a).
14. In line with this, a diplomat explained 'Because of the volume of the First Committee resolutions unless there is a 360 degree change in the language we have a little flexibility where we can […] we can go ahead and maintain whether that be co sponsorship or voting in favor of […] unless it is a totally revamped resolution we can go and maintain our traditional position' (interview 8, 08.03.11).

15. A diplomat explained 'Most of the resolutions are repeated every year, two years or three years. Technically there are some updates but substantively there are minimal changes. The context of the resolution doesn't change much' (interview 9, 08.03.11).
16. For example, 'It is a truth which needs to be put very indirectly, but a truth none the less: one of the few ways many countries can return the support we give them is to be helpful to our interests in the UNGA. But the issues come with a history, often unfavorable to us. And it requires much one-on-one diplomacy. This, however, over time is having an effect, especially since some of the factors which have conditioned Africa-wide responses are changing' (WikiLeaks, 2009b). Also 'We very often perceive this development assistance that we grant them as something that is possibly overdue, you know that we owe them, and in fact that it is too little compared to what we should be offering them. So you have to again tread a very careful balance there between reminding those countries that hey you know we are the biggest donor in terms of development aid, in terms of humanitarian assistance in the world by far, the UN's member states collectively. But then you cannot buy a country into adopting your position just because you offer it some development aid, and you have to convince them with your argument that it is in their best interest to be partners with you on that particular issue […] You know, partnerships, it's not about as I said buying a country to aligning itself' (interview 32, 21.02.12).
17. Authors' calculations using STATA13's 'margins' command to generate a linear prediction (log odds) at the specified values which authors then transformed to probabilities and plotted in Figure 1.

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Appendix 1: Data

Table 1. Data sources and summary statistics.

Variable	Source	Mean (SD)	Min	Max	N=
VoteShift	http://www.un.org/en/ga/documents/voting.asp Author's Calculations	0.104 (0.304)	0	1	189885
1st VoteShift	http://www.un.org/en/ga/documents/voting.asp Author's Calculations	0.053 (0.226)	0	1	189885
2+ VoteShift	http://www.un.org/en/ga/documents/voting.asp Author's Calculations	0.050 (0.226)	0	1	189885
Ln(GDP pc)	http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators (Thousands of Current USD)	7.969 (1.651)	4.46	12.13	184484
Democracy (FH)	https://freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-world#.VOdQDXysWJo	3.35 (1.97)	1	7	188949
Regime Change	http://dictators.la.psu.edu/.	0.005 (0.13)	−1	1	190271
End of Civil War	http://www.prio.no/Data/Armed-Conflict/	0.025 (0.158)	0	1	190271
ODA/GDP	http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=crs1 Author's Calculations	0.030 (0.072)	−0.030	0.972	190271
Duration UN Membership	http://www.un.org/en/members/ (in 1999)	34.21 (17.79)	–7	54	190271
Ln(population)	http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators	15.470 (2.142)	9.15	21.01	186307