

# The Political Consequences of Drafting Strategies in International Organizations

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## Abstract

How and why do delegates adopt distinct drafting strategies in international organizations (IOs)? Do delegates in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) address issues on an ad hoc basis or establish a precise and durable body of law? How do the adoption of different drafting strategies affect political outcomes, such as resolution sponsorship and voting patterns? To address these questions, we examine two drafting strategies – citation and recycling – and consider the tradeoffs that state representatives make in employing such tools. We contend that these tradeoffs explain variation in policy outputs across different institutional and topical contexts. We then describe a machine learning approach designed to measure citation and recycling, which we apply to a novel dataset of all UN resolutions passed from 1946-2018. We find that distinct bodies of law and legal norms have developed in the UNGA and UNSC, and that these practices are related to resolution sponsorship and voting outcomes. We further find that resolutions on more controversial topics – particularly security matters – exhibit higher citation rates. Our research sheds light on both the agenda-setting process in the United Nations and the development of formal norms and rules in international organizations.

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## Introduction

In September of 2018, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted [Resolution 73/110](#) on the “Question of the British Virgin Islands” with respect to self-determination. Immediately afterwards, it adopted a nearly identical resolution – [Resolution 73/111](#) – on the “Question of the Cayman Islands.” Despite the substantive differences between the two cases, the texts of the two resolutions were practically interchangeable, and both included very few citations to resolutions adopted in previous years. In the same year, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolutions [2449 \(2018\)](#) and [2450 \(2018\)](#), both on the topic of violence in Syria. However, unlike the UNGA, the UNSC employed completely new language in each resolution. Resolution [2449 \(2018\)](#) extensively cited resolutions adopted previously. Why did delegates in these two bodies adopt such different drafting strategies? What effects do institutional rules and norms have on the development of legislative practice, and how do such practices affect political outcomes?

We argue that variation in institutional remit and rules can explain variation in drafting strategies across international organizations. We focus on two drafting strategies: *recycling* existing legal language, and *citing* previously adopted texts. Adopting different drafting strategies, we suggest, involves a tradeoff between flexibility and efficiency. Recycling offers efficiency gains at the cost of specificity, and should be adopted more frequently by delegates in institutions with wide-ranging scope and extensive agendas. On the other hand, citation offers legitimacy and flexibility but few efficiency gains, and should be deployed in institutions where legitimacy concerns are most salient.

Drafting strategies bear not only on the development of international law, but also on political outcomes reached by international organizations. By signaling ideological consistency with a country’s foreign policy record, citations to a country’s previously sponsored resolutions – or those of that country’s allies – increase the likelihood that the country will sponsor and vote in favor of the matter under consideration. Thus, we theorize that citation practices influence whether a country is likely to sponsor and vote in favor a resolution, implying that drafting strategies have a direct relationship with

resolution's adoption.

We apply this theory to the UNGA and UNSC, a unique institutional context in which we can examine the effects of institutional rules and norms on drafting strategies, and in which we can probe the connections between these legislative practices and political outcomes. While previous work has examined recycling and citation individually, they have not been studied jointly in the same institutional domain. Further, previous studies of legislative practices have largely examined specific topical and institutional settings. We extend the insights of previous work by allowing topical and institutional features to vary. By examining drafting strategies in the multi-issue context of the UN, and further leveraging differences between sub-institutional units, we can examine the effects of these changes on the development and adoption of law, and test our theoretical expectations on a novel, large-scale dataset, significantly expanding the temporal and topical frontiers of previous work.

In our analysis of all resolutions passed by the UNGA and UNSC since 1946, we find support for our theoretical expectations. We observe that the UNSC, for which legitimacy concerns are highly salient in addressing questions of high politics, cites existing law more frequently when it addresses controversial security issues. The UNGA, where efficiency concerns are primary in confronting a large agenda, employs recycling to a greater degree. Because the institutional dynamics and ambits of these two bodies are highly distinctive, we hypothesize and find that the legislative products of the UNGA and UNSC represent distinct bodies of law that rarely engage cross-chamber. We also find that drafting strategies have political ramifications: countries are more likely to sponsor and vote in favor of a resolution if it cites one or more resolutions sponsored by that country or by its allies.

Leveraging within-institutional differences allows us to draw robust inferences about the importance of institutional rules and norms, agenda dynamics, and topical remit on the adoption of drafting strategies over time, and on the relationship between these legislative practices and political decision-making in international organizations. These findings can help to shed light on variation in drafting strategies across the international

system, and help us to understand how and why international organizations develop robust legal canons.

## Citation, and Recycling in International Law

International law has long been studied as an important influence over state behavior. Yet there is substantial variation in the content and form of international law. For example, some international agreements are codified in informal, ad hoc documents and may hold only normative power over states, while others are represented in formalized resolutions or treaties that impose binding obligations (Abbott & Snidal 1998). In some domains, international agreements extensively reproduce the content from earlier texts, while in other areas, dense networks of legal precedent are developed. The drafting strategies chosen by state representatives in international organizations determine this variation. The norms and practices of legislative drafting can encourage delegates to write precise and explicit texts, or to favor more general language.

Two types of drafting strategies employed in international organizations have received substantial attention: *citation* and *recycling*. Citations – explicit linkages to previous decisions or legal texts – serve as a signalling device that indicates the decisions that have influenced the contemporary decision-making process, indicating underlying legal ideology at work (Voeten 2010; Charlotin 2017, 284). These precedents serve as examples or guides to be considered in subsequent similar circumstances. Previous legal principles create the “framework for case-by-case interpretation,” which is linked to and explained by the same set of clear legal concepts. In a context with a highly developed set of precedent, the application of previous rules to current scenarios is unambiguous. Absent precedent, each case is decided individually, rules are ambiguous, and expectations for state behavior are unclear. References to well-developed precedent can facilitate agreement among heterogenous actors by highlighting previously agreed upon principles, making negotiations more efficient. Demonstrating that a piece of law builds on past decisions can provide political cover to actors negotiating controversial decisions, and can increase the influence and perceived legitimacy of the outcome (Cronin & Hurd 2008;

Lupu & Voeten 2012).

Recycling – the use of the same language in a legal document as that employed in earlier legal documents – serves a similar but distinct purpose. Like citations, re-using previously negotiated text can facilitate agreements in contested areas and create efficiencies for legislators and resource-limited states (Allee & Elsig 2019). By reusing the same language developed in previous agreements, states can draw on their understanding of the prior legal document, easing the burden of implementation. Recycled policy arrangements are also low-cost to produce and provide consistency across instruments (Allee et al. 2017b, 338), though they are also less tailored to particular situations.

Recycling of legislative language represents a rational response by legislators and negotiators to limitations on time and negotiating capacity. Formalizing international legal language minimizes transaction costs by re-using existing rules and procedures (Abbott & Snidal 1998). Given that policymakers – including diplomats – are constrained by limited time and personnel resources, this efficiency is desirable. Recycling texts also minimizes the potential number of veto points (Mansfield et al. 2007). The more veto points involved in negotiating a text, the more opportunities are presented for blocking ratification, and the greater transaction costs. Leaning on previously agreed-upon principles limits opportunities for disagreements between negotiators with heterogeneous preferences. For example, highly similar resolutions on the Israel-Palestine conflict are adopted by the General Assembly every year, reflecting an intensely negotiated statement of principles with sufficient backing to achieve majority support. These negotiated principles serve as a focal point to facilitate agreement (Garrett & Weingast 1993; McAdams 2000). If the specific language is changed, these changes can “blow up” the settled text, requiring intensive negotiation to achieve consensus.

Cognitive biases and heuristics exhibited by boundedly rational policymakers and diplomats also encourage text recycling (Jones & Baumgartner 2005; Poulsen 2015). Previously negotiated texts provide a status quo against which negotiators anchor (Kahneman et al. 1991). Satisficing behavior strongly encourages the reuse of existing templates rather than changes to find an optimal arrangement (Simon 1982). Empirically, early

negotiation offers and treaty templates heavily influence later outcomes (e.g. [Neale & Bazerman 1992](#); [Korobkin 1998](#); [Galinsky & Mussweiler 2001](#); [Galbraith 2012](#)). In the case of BITs, for example, negotiators frequently adopted the same template agreements even when these were found to be sub-optimal ([Poulsen 2015](#)). These cognitive biases are expected to be more prevalent for diplomats with less expertise and experience in a given topic area, which is often the case in generalist representatives in the UNGA ([Sunstein 2013](#)).

Examining citation networks and recycling practices have provided fruitful insight into the development of bodies of law by many international organizations. Citation networks reveal institutional practices in the World Trade Organization ([Charlotin 2017](#)), the courts of the European Union ([Lupu & Voeten 2012](#); [Derlén & Lindholm 2015](#)), the International Court of Justice ([Alschner & Charlotin 2018](#)) and in the US domestic context ([Fowler et al. 2007](#)). Recycling of text across agreements has been examined in the context of PTAs ([Allee & Elsig 2019](#); [Allee et al. 2017a](#)), as well as in American law ([Wilkerson et al. 2015](#); [Linder et al. 2020](#)). Within issue areas, the amount of citation and recycling varies. [Allee & Elsig \(2019\)](#), for example, find that within PTAs, rates of text recycling are greater in more established areas such as antidumping, and less in newer areas like environmental protection ([Allee & Elsig 2019](#), 609). However, because such research has been unable to examine variation in citation and recycling across institutional domains, we have been unable to understand the effects of institutional rules and norms on the development of bodies of law. Further, previous work has not yet examined recycling and citation together in the same institutional domain to observe how these strategies may be used as substitutes or complements. We develop a theory about the influence of institutional remit and rules on the adoption of drafting strategies – particularly on citation and recycling – and test this theory in a unique institutional context in which we can examine the effects of institutional rules on drafting strategies and policy outputs.

## Institutional Rules and Drafting Strategies in the United Nations

Citation and recycling further many of the same goals in the development of international law. Both practices develop a framework of law that facilitates interpretation and reduces uncertainty about the applicability of legal concepts to new situations. In many cases, one would expect the adoption of citation and recycling to be highly correlated, and to serve as complementary tools to develop bodies of international law. However, citation and recycling are distinct tools available to actors negotiating international agreements, and may not necessarily move together. When would negotiating actors decide to utilize either recycling or citation, but not both? We argue that variation in institutional remit and rules can explain differential use of citation and recycling. Recycling provides a higher efficiency gain than does precedent, but also entails a greater cost in specificity in addressing a new situation. Recycling is therefore expected to be adopted more in institutions with wide-ranging scope and extensive agendas. Citation provides greater legitimacy and flexibility, but does not result in a comparable efficiency gain. Our theory posits that citation should thus be expected to be more frequently adopted in institutions with salient legitimacy concerns.

Both citation and recycling are strategies used to develop bodies of law, but the tradeoffs involved in adopting these devices are distinct. For example, citation provides a unique legitimizing function.<sup>1</sup> Explicitly linking a text to previous precedent demonstrates legal consistency, which can persuade relevant audiences to comply with the decision or agreement and demonstrate its soundness (Lupu & Voeten 2012, 417, Charlotin 2017, 282). Citation provides a distinct legitimizing benefit that cannot be obtained by recycling because recycling does not explicitly demonstrate the linkage to earlier bodies of law, while the chain of law is made clear and explicit by the use of citation (i.e. while recycling also employs previously negotiated principles as the foundation for the current outcome, this chain of ideas is not noted in the text, and may not be readily apparent). Citation also provides greater room for flexibility: a citation to a previous

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<sup>1</sup>Legitimacy is defined as “the normative belief by an actor that a rule or institution ought to be obeyed,” (Hurd 2008, 34).

legal text can inform the principles and spirit of the current text, while leaving room for tailoring to the unique situation at hand. Because recycling text involves re-using institutional arrangements and policy decisions in addition to arguments, this flexibility is largely sacrificed.

Recycling presents a different set of tradeoffs. Recycling text can be used as a tool for incrementally developing norms, for achieving symbolic goals, and to avoid creating controversy (Panke 2014). A distinct advantage presented by recycling relative to citing previous agreements is a greater time savings. These efficiency gains are particularly salient when agreements are long and complex (Allee & Elsig 2019), when the same issues need to be addressed year after year, and when many negotiating parties are involved. While citation can generate efficiencies in serving as a focal point that can bridge disagreeing perspectives, these parties must still agree on the specific language to be included in the text. In the diplomatic contexts of international organizations, the particulars of language selection can be of paramount importance to negotiators, and thus, the time savings of citation alone are limited.

The distinct costs and benefits associated with recycling and citation lead to differential expectations about patterns of recycling and citation based on institutional domains and rules. In institutional contexts where negotiating actors have salient concerns about perceived legitimacy, these actors should frequently *cite* existing precedent, while negotiating actors in institution with broad and demanding agendas should frequently *recycle* existing language.

While these theoretical expectations about drafting strategies are general across international organizations, we test them in the context of the United Nations. The UN offers several advantages. First, the UN is a robust data source, documenting resolutions over the course of seventy-five years. Second, the UN is the most representative of any IO, with the longest serving membership. States engage in repeated interaction year after year in the same institutional environment, creating opportunities for developing legislative practices and protocols. Thus, the UN is an institutional environment where there is a high likelihood of detecting recycling and citation. Third, the matters that



the UN addresses in its resolutions are of substantive importance. The UNSC is unique among IOs in its ability to compel state action through hard law, and to authorize the use of force. The UNSC develops international law through its declarative, interpretive, promotive, and enforcement functions (von Einsiedel et al. 2015; Malone 2004). While resolutions adopted by the General Assembly (UNGA) do not constitute hard law, they are substantively important. UNGA resolutions recognize international norms, call for the development of legally binding treaties, allocate development aid, and set institutional priorities across a variety of topics. States, therefore, have substantial incentives to invest time and political capital in negotiating resolutions. Fourth, and most importantly, the UN is a multi-issue forum. While previous work on drafting strategies has extensively examined their development in particular issue areas, the UN provides an opportunity to examine variation in such legislative practices across issue areas. Further, while previous works have investigated sponsorship of (e.g. Mower Jr. 1962; Jacobsen 1969; Rai 1977; Smith 2006b; Dijkhuizen & Onderco 2019; Finke 2021) and voting on (e.g. Keohane 1967; Kim & Russett 1996; Alesina & Dollar 2000; Voeten 2000) UN resolutions, they tell us little about how legal features contribute to sponsorship or voting outcomes.

Resolutions adopted in the UN are the products of negotiations between states. To understand variation in legislative practices, we must understand the tradeoffs countries make in adopting different drafting strategies. Our theory predicts that recycling should be employed in institutional contexts when agendas are extensive, making the time-efficiency gains highly desirable. In the UN, this is particularly the case in the General Assembly. In 2019, for example, the agenda of the General Assembly covered 174 items, spanning “The effects of atomic radiation” to the “Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance,” to “Agriculture development, food security and nutrition.” Because the attention of the UNGA is more spread, delegates are less likely to possess experience or staffing resources necessary to address the issues raised by a given resolution in detail. For example, Panke (2013, 2014) observes the extensive workload for representatives in the UNGA, and that delegations of small states in particular may struggle to keep up with the demanding pace. In such a scenario, relying

on previously negotiated language can be a tool of efficiency and resource maximization (Allee & Elsig 2019). By contrast, because the UNSC focuses narrowly on security matters, its agenda is narrower. For example, in 2019, the UNSC addressed only 39 topics on its agenda, all of which were specific to matters of international peace and security. UNSC representatives are more likely to be experts in the topics raised by a given resolution, and thus lack the same need for efficiency shortcuts, and would be less likely to sacrifice the flexibility and specificity that would be result from recycling preexisting legislative language. We therefore expect to observe higher rates of recycling in the UNGA than in the UNSC.

$H_1$ : Recycling is higher in the UNGA than the UNSC.

Our theory also predicts that citation should be observed at higher rates when concerns about perceived legitimacy are salient. In the UN context, legitimacy concerns are particularly high for the UNSC because it renders legally binding decisions, and therefore securing legitimacy is instrumental to securing compliance (Tallberg & Zürn 2019, 582). The ability of the UNSC to act effectively depends upon its perceived legitimacy by member states (Caron 1993). Concerns about the erosion of the legitimacy of the UNSC are salient both for its members and for the general membership of the UN (Hurd 2008; Binder & Heupel 2015). Therefore, the negotiating actors in the UNSC have strong incentives to use citation to previous precedent as a legitimizing strategy. Such moves are anecdotally observed to occur frequently, as Cronin & Hurd (2008) describe:

[the] Council draws from past decision to determine current courses of action and justify expanding the scope of their activities [...] following precedent legitimizes a political action by demonstrating that like cases are judged alike and that judgements are not just predilections or random events. When the Security Council initiatives and action that states may view as overstepping its authority, the existence of even a single precedent is enough to challenge the argument that a particular course of action cannot be taken, inasmuch as it already has been (Cronin & Hurd 2008, 203).<sup>2</sup>

Legitimacy concerns are less salient in the UNGA. Because the resolutions adopted by the UNGA are non-binding, the implications for institutional authority are not as

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<sup>2</sup>See also Malone 2004, 593.

significant when states fail to comply with their directives, and the need to justify a legal basis for adopting these resolutions is not as great. We therefore expect to observe higher rates of citation in the UNGA than in the UNSC.

$H_2$ : Use of precedent is higher in the UNSC than the UNGA.

Arguably, the most famous example of this phenomenon is the case of UNSC activity on Iraq. A chain of UNSC resolutions on the matter constructed a body of legal precedent, beginning during the Iran-Iraq war in 1980. Early resolutions on Iraq (S-RES-479, S-RE-598) called for a ceasefire in the conflict, and later for troop withdrawals, verification, and supervision of the cease-fire. These early precedents developed a formula that was called upon again in 1990 with S-RES-660, which declared the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait to be a breach of international peace and security and demanded Iraqi troop withdrawal. Follow-up included economic sanctions (S-RES-661), an arms embargo (S-RES-665), and finally an authorization for military action (S-RES-678), all to implement S-RES-660 (Malone 2007, 11, 37-69). By 1998, consensus between the P5 members began to break down, but this body of legal precedent provided cover to smooth over political disagreements and lent legitimacy to subsequent decisions. These resolutions provided precedential cover even for S-RES-1441 in 2002, offering Iraq a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations. Directly citing more than ten of the previous resolutions on Iraq, S-RES-1441 provided a path forward between a strongly divided P5. Rather than conducting extensive and potentially divisive debates on the matter, Council members were able to refer to previously authorizing resolutions, citing these resolutions directly.

As noted above, our theoretical expectations are grounded in the assumption that differences in institutional domains and rules lead to distinct legislative practices. While the agendas of the UNGA and UNSC lead us to expect differential rates of citation and text recycling in these two chambers, the formal mandates of these bodies should also lead to differences in the substance of their work. The UN Charter tasks the UNSC with addressing issues of global security, while allowing the UNGA to address any issue that is not being concurrently worked on by the UNSC. These differences in both substantive

mandate and legislative practice are likely to result in distinct and separate legal norms and practices across the chambers. Topical focus reduces the incentives for diplomats to engage in the work of the other chamber, while differences in legal norms make such cross-chamber interaction more challenging for diplomats to conduct. We expect that this differentiation in purpose and practice should lead to the development of distinct bodies of law in the two chambers, with little cross-over between the two. We expect denser, more developed networks of citation and text reuse within each legislative body than across them.

$H_{3a}$ : Use of precedent is higher within chamber than across chambers.

$H_{3b}$ : Consistency is higher within chamber than across chambers.

Our final set of theoretical expectations highlight the political implications of drafting strategies. Writing, proposing, and sponsoring resolutions in the UN can be costly, as sponsoring obliges a country to participate in drafting and negotiation sessions, to contract and consult with topical experts, and to expend social capital to cultivate support for the resolution amongst the membership. All of these actions are much more involved forms of cooperation than simply voting in favor of the resolution (Panke 2013; Finke 2021; Charnysh et al. 2015). Therefore, countries are only likely to *selectively* sponsor resolutions. Yet countries have an incentive to sponsor some non-zero number of resolutions in a given year to signal that they are contributing positively to the mission of the UN, which is an important factor for achieving elected position in the UNSC or UNGA organizational leadership (Mower Jr. 1962).

These patterns suggest a few basic theoretical expectations. First, if a resolution cites resolutions that a country has previously sponsored, that country is more likely to sponsor the resolution currently under consideration. Citing a country's previous contributions could invoke a sense of national pride, illustrate that the current resolution aligns with the country's values or foreign policy priorities, or create an obligation for the country to support the current resolution as a matter of ideological consistency. France, for example, employed such a tactic in crafting a UNSC resolution on a cease-fire between

Israel and Hamas in 2021, citing previous texts from the United States in an effort to increase the likelihood it would support the resolution (Rubin et al. 2021). These expectations also hold – although to a lesser magnitude – if the citation is to a prior resolution sponsored by one of that country’s allies. In these situations, the relationship between the country and the sponsor of the cited resolution indicate ideological congruence, and that supporting the resolution in question would further the foreign policy goals of a friendly state.

$H_{4a}$ : Countries are more likely to *sponsor* resolutions that cite resolution(s) previously sponsored by that country.

$H_{4b}$ : Countries are more likely to *sponsor* resolutions that cite resolution(s) previously sponsored by that country’s ally.

Based on a similar rationale, a country that is cited in a resolution is also more likely to vote in favor of adopting that resolution than it otherwise would be. Again, by citing a country’s previously sponsored resolutions, the resolution under consideration signals ideological alignment with that country’s foreign policy, and can potentially call upon obligations in legal consistency or points of national pride to encourage a vote in favor. Likewise, citations to a country’s allies should also be a signal of ideological congruence – although to a lesser magnitude than a citation to the country itself.

$H_{5a}$ : Countries are more likely to *vote in favor* of resolutions that cite resolution(s) previously sponsored by that country.

$H_{5b}$ : Countries are more likely to *vote in favor* of resolutions that cite resolution(s) previously sponsored by that country’s ally.

## Data and Estimation

The quantitative analysis of treaty design in previous work has primarily relied on manual hand-coding. Though studies based on hand-coding have produced valuable insights, such methods are labor-intensive. Relying on manual coding limits the number of international agreements that can be examined by researchers, or forces the researcher to simplify their measure to one that can be more objectively and quickly evaluated.

Further, focusing on a specific subset of international law (BITs, for example) does not readily allow for consideration of variation in drafting strategies across different topical areas or different institutional contexts. The development of text-as-data methodologies and their increasing popularity in political science applications presents an opportunity to broaden the horizon of quantitative analysis of international legal instruments (Alschner 2019). These tools have begun to be deployed in examining legal networks and legal recycling, in both international law and in domestic contexts (e.g. Allee & Elsig 2019). We apply these methodologies to examine variation in legislative practices on a large scale at the UN.

### *Data Collection*

To study variation in drafting strategies of international agreements, we constructed an original dataset consisting of all UNGA and UNSC resolutions passed since the establishment of the UN. Our data collection work proceeded as follows. First, we scraped all UNGA and UNSC resolutions posted on their respective official websites.<sup>3</sup> These resolutions – one of the key legislative outputs of the UN – are negotiated principally by state representatives at the UN, in consultation with officials in state capitals and the UN Secretariat (Smith 2006a). Second, since older resolutions are posted as scanned images, we then used optical character recognition (OCR) software to convert each document into a plain-text format.<sup>4</sup> This process yielded a dataset consisting of 14,993 UNGA resolutions and 2,331 UNSC resolutions, spanning the time period from 1946-2018, which significantly extends the time period covered by previous studies (e.g. Finke 2021) and allows for the first comparison of UNGA and UNSC activity.

As shown in Figure 1, resolution formats changed substantially over time, ranging from single-column formats with one document per page, to multi-column formats with multiple documents per page, to multi-column formats with parallel French/English text. To address this challenge, we used a series of period-specific regular expressions to remove

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<sup>3</sup>See the [UNGA](#) and [UNSC](#) indices for details.

<sup>4</sup>ABBYY FineReader v. 15.

extraneous text and isolate the actual resolution from the image on each page.<sup>5</sup>

### *Feature Extraction*

To study patterns of drafting strategies in this dataset, we extracted three types of features from each document. First, we extracted all *citations* to other UNGA and UNSC resolutions from each text.<sup>6</sup> As we describe in earlier sections, citations to precedent represent observable evidence of relationships and patterns of influence among the documents that comprise our corpus. Like other elements of document style, resolution formats and citation patterns changed substantially over the time period covered by our corpus (for example, see Figure 1). As a result, we again used a series of period-specific regular expressions to extract citations from each text. We then cross-referenced this list of extracted citations against a master database of resolutions for each point in time, and eliminated all false positive results. We also removed all self-citations. This process left us with a database of 114,943 citations from the UNGA, and 17,938 citations from the UNSC. The number of citations for each chamber can be seen in Table 1.

Second, using a structural topic model (Roberts et al. 2014), we extracted *topic proportion vectors* for each document in our corpus. Unfortunately, the UN does not provide consistent content labels for UNGA or UNSC resolutions across time. As a result, we fit a topic model to the combined UNGA/UNSC resolution corpus to summarize the broad themes present in our dataset.<sup>7</sup> To label the topics produced by our model, we read the top ten highest-probability words and the top twenty documents with the largest proportion of their content assigned to that topic and inductively constructed topic labels. We then extracted the topic label associated with the highest-probability topic for each document, which we used as the primary content label for each document in our corpus.

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<sup>5</sup>For example, translation notes, headers and footers, parallel translation text, procedural language, or trailing language from other resolutions or documents.

<sup>6</sup>A small number of citations refer to other UN bodies such as ECOSOC, which we exclude from the analysis.

<sup>7</sup>After testing several specifications to maximize semantic coherence and exclusivity, as well as manually evaluating the performance of the different models, we select a specification with 50 topics. We employ a spectral initialization and a 10 iteration burn-in period. Prevalence and content of topics are allowed to vary nonlinearly over time, which is critical given that topics on the UN agenda change in prevalence over time (for example, climate change gains in prevalence over time, while colonial conflicts decline).



Figure 1: Examples of changing resolution formats in the UNGA.

Resolutions adopted on the reports of the Fourth Committee 75

tories and at the creation by the administering Powers of military bases and installations in contravention of the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly.

*Deploing* the refusal of some administering Powers to allow visiting missions of the United Nations to visit these Territories.

*Conscious* that these situations require the continued attention and the assistance of the United Nations in the achievement by the peoples of these Territories of their objectives, as embodied in the Charter of the United Nations and in the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples,

*Aware* of the special circumstances of geographical location and economic conditions concerning some of these Territories,

1. *Approves* the chapters of the report of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples relating to these Territories;
2. *Reaffirms* the inalienable right of the peoples of these Territories to self-determination and independence;
3. *Calls upon* the administering Powers to implement without delay the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly;
4. *Reiterates* its declaration that any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of colonial Territories and the establishment of military bases and installations in these Territories is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV);
5. *Urges* the administering Powers to allow United Nations visiting missions to visit the Territories, and to extend to them full co-operation and assistance;
6. *Decides* that the United Nations should render all help to the peoples of these Territories in their efforts freely to decide their future status;
7. *Requests* the Special Committee to continue to pay special attention to these Territories and to report on the implementation of the present resolution to the General Assembly at its twenty-second session;
8. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue to provide all possible assistance in the implementation of the present resolution.

*1500th plenary meeting,  
20 December 1966.*

**2233 (XXI). Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories transmitted under Article 73 e of the Charter of the United Nations**

*The General Assembly,*

*Recalling* its resolution 1970 (XVIII) of 16 December 1963, in which it requested the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples to study the information transmitted to the Secretary-General in accordance with Article 73 e of the Charter of the United Nations and to take it fully into account in examining the situation with regard to the implementation of the Declaration,

*Recalling also* its resolution 2109 (XX) of 21 December 1965, in which it approved the procedures adopted by the Special Committee for the discharge of the func-

tions entrusted to it under resolution 1970 (XVIII)<sup>41</sup> and requested the Committee to continue to discharge those functions in accordance with the said procedures,

*Having studied* the chapter of the report of the Special Committee dealing with the transmittal of information under Article 73 e of the Charter and the action taken by it in respect of that information,<sup>42</sup>

*Having also examined* the report of the Secretary-General on this information,<sup>43</sup>

1. *Approves* the chapter of the report of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples relating to the information from Non-Self-Governing Territories transmitted under Article 73 e of the Charter of the United Nations;
2. *Expresses its profound regret* that, despite the repeated recommendations of the General Assembly, including the most recent recommendation contained in resolution 2109 (XX), some Member States having responsibilities for the administration of Non-Self-Governing Territories have not seen fit to transmit information under Article 73 e of the Charter or have done so insufficiently or too late;
3. *Once again urges* all Member States which have or which assume responsibilities for the administration of Territories whose peoples have not yet attained a full measure of self-government to transmit, or continue to transmit, to the Secretary-General the information prescribed in Article 73 e of the Charter, as well as the fullest possible information on political and constitutional developments;
4. *Requests* the Special Committee to continue to discharge the functions entrusted to it under General Assembly resolution 1970 (XVIII) in accordance with the procedures referred to above.

*1500th plenary meeting,  
20 December 1966.*

**2234 (XXI). Offers by Member States of study and training facilities for inhabitants of Non-Self-Governing Territories**

*The General Assembly,*

*Recalling* its resolution 2110 (XX) of 21 December 1965,

*Having examined* the report of the Secretary-General on offers by Member States of study and training facilities for inhabitants of Non-Self-Governing Territories under General Assembly resolution 845 (IX) of 22 November 1954,<sup>44</sup>

1. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General;
2. *Urges* Member States to continue to offer scholarships to the inhabitants of the Non-Self-Governing Territories;
3. *Requests* Member States to facilitate the travel of students from Non-Self-Governing Territories seeking to avail themselves of the educational opportunities which are offered to them;
4. *Requests* the Member States offering scholarships to take into account the necessity of furnishing com-


<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Nineteenth Session, Annexes, annex No. 8 (part I) (A/5800/Rev.1), chapter II, appendix I.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, Twenty-first Session, Annexes, addendum to agenda item 23 (A/6300/Rev.1), chapter XXIII.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, agenda items 64 and 71, document A/6455.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, document A/6503.

United Nations A/RES/59/127

 **General Assembly**

Dist.: General  
25 January 2005

Fifty-ninth session  
Agenda item 79

**Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 10 December 2004**

*[on the report of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee  
(Fourth Committee) (A/59/474)]*

**59/127. Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories transmitted under Article 73 e of the Charter of the United Nations**

*The General Assembly,*

*Recalling* its resolution 1970 (XVIII) of 16 December 1963, in which it requested the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples to study the information transmitted to the Secretary-General in accordance with Article 73 e of the Charter of the United Nations and to take such information fully into account in examining the situation with regard to the implementation of the Declaration, contained in General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960,

*Recalling also* its resolution 58/102 of 9 December 2003, in which it requested the Special Committee to continue to discharge the functions entrusted to it under resolution 1970 (XVIII),

*Stressing* the importance of timely transmission by the administering Powers of adequate information under Article 73 e of the Charter, in particular in relation to the preparation by the Secretariat of the working papers on the Territories concerned,

*Having examined* the report of the Secretary-General,<sup>1</sup>

1. *Reaffirms* that, in the absence of a decision by the General Assembly itself that a Non-Self-Governing Territory has attained a full measure of self-government in terms of Chapter XI of the Charter of the United Nations, the administering Power concerned should continue to transmit information under Article 73 e of the Charter with respect to that Territory;

2. *Requests* the administering Powers concerned to transmit or continue to transmit to the Secretary-General the information prescribed in Article 73 e of the Charter, as well as the fullest possible information on political and constitutional

<sup>1</sup> A/59/71.

Sample resolutions from the UNGA, from 1966 and 2005. Aightments are highlighted in yellow, while citations are highlighted in blue.



Encouragingly, for 92.5% of citation pairs in our dataset, the topic label of the resolution matched the modal topic label for the resolutions cited by that document. Since these citations were not part of the input data for the topic model we fit, this results suggests that the topic model we estimate is identifying similar topics to those identified by the citations we extract. In the subsequent analysis, we normalize the number of citations in each topic area by the number of resolutions in the topic area to better capture the *rate* of citation within resolutions independent of the number of resolutions adopted.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, we identified instances of *text re-use* in our corpus. As we describe in earlier sections, recycling existing language in legislation demonstrates the presence of established institutional patterns and legal norms in a particular policy domain. To identify instances of text re-use, we broadly follow the strategy employed by Linder et al. (2020). First, using the topic proportion vectors we extracted previously, we calculated pairwise Hellinger similarity values between the topic proportion vectors for each unique pair of documents. For each document, we identified the documents with the top 500 similarity values, and extracted maximally-aligned sequences of text – and corresponding alignment scores – using the Smith-Waterman alignment (SWAlign) algorithm.<sup>9</sup> SWAlign is a sequence alignment algorithm that allows users to identify sequences of shared elements in an ordered list, with user-defined tolerances for gaps or mismatches.<sup>10</sup> Finally, we calculate an adjusted alignment score by weighting each alignment score by the distinctiveness of the tokens contained in each alignment, in order to downweight common, “boilerplate” re-use (Wilkerson et al. 2015). Alignment scores by each chamber can be seen in Table 1, and topic level alignment scores can be seen in the Appendix.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>In the Appendix, we show the number of resolutions, citations, alignment, topic proportion, and age of each topic, where age is measured as the first year a resolution on the topic is adopted by either chamber.

<sup>9</sup>SWAlign differs from standard plagiarism detection approaches in two respects. First, SWAlign is more scalable than standard plagiarism detection approaches, which is important for larger corpora. Second, due to the scoring mechanism used by the algorithm, SWAlign allows for adaptively-sized gaps and editing differences between texts.

<sup>10</sup>Specifically, we find the optimal local alignment for each document, with alignment parameter set to 2 and mismatch/gap parameters set to -1.

<sup>11</sup>While Panke (2014) considers repetition of UNGA resolutions, our text-based approach provides greater nuance in examining patterns of qualitative repetition at scale.

## Results

### *Topical Patterns*

Figure 2 shows the rate of citation and alignment grouped by the topic area of the more recent resolution. As this plot suggests, rates of citation and re-use vary substantially by topic area, with only a loose relationship to one another. Specifically, we can see that topics on security-related matters tend to be characterized by higher rates of citation than other topic areas. While most topics can be found above the 45 degree axis, security-related topics in particular – including matters such as ‘occupation,’ ‘conflict\_africa1,’ ‘israel,’ ‘peacekeeping,’ and ‘peacekeeping\_elections’ – exhibit the highest citation rates. Procedural matters, including topics such as ‘courts\_law,’ ‘un\_membership,’ ‘tribunals,’ and ‘procedure,’ tend to be low in both citation and re-use, clustering near the origin. Intuitively, alignment scores are almost never higher than citation rates, as re-using legislative language without including a citation is uncommon. This finding hints at the utility of our citation and recycling measures: patterns in legislative practice may be obscured by examination of counts of resolutions alone, which are passed with roughly constant frequency across different issue areas over time.<sup>12</sup>

Our topic labels also allow us to characterize agenda dynamics more broadly across the main bodies of the UN. Based on the formal remits established by the UN Charter for the UNGA and the UNSC, we should expect the UNSC to address a smaller, more focused set of (security-related) topics. We find empirical evidence to support this expectation. For each chamber and each topic, we counted the number of resolutions from that chamber whose highest-probability topic label matched the given topic. We then calculated a normalized informational entropy value for these chamber-topic count values.<sup>13</sup> Informational entropy is a standard measure of dispersion for discrete probability distributions, which ranges from 0 (least dispersed) to 1 (most dispersed) (Boydston et al. 2014; Shaffer 2017).

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<sup>12</sup>Trends in the number of resolutions over time are explored in the Appendix.

<sup>13</sup>Normalized informational entropy is defined as  $H(X) = -\frac{1}{\ln(n)} \sum_{i=1}^n X_i \log(X_i)$ .

The results of this comparison support our topical concentration expectation. We observe an informational entropy value of 0.95 for UNGA resolutions, compared with an informational entropy value of 0.75 for UNSC resolutions. Since informational entropy is on a non-linear scale, interpreting the difference between these values is difficult. One way to ease interpretation is to use the “effective topics” transformation, which represents the number of equiprobable topics needed to produce a given entropy value [Shaffer \(2017\)](#).<sup>14</sup> For the UNGA, this transformation returns a value of 41.1, indicating that UNGA resolutions are almost equally split across all topics. By contrast, UNSC resolutions contain 18.8 effective topics, indicating that a topic proportion vector containing approximately half the number of equiprobable topics would produce an equivalent entropy value to the one observed. This pattern aligns with the institutional missions of the two chambers, which mandate the UNSC to focus on a narrower set of security-related topics compared with the UNGA’s broader orientation.

### *Chamber Differences*

Table 1: Key findings by chamber

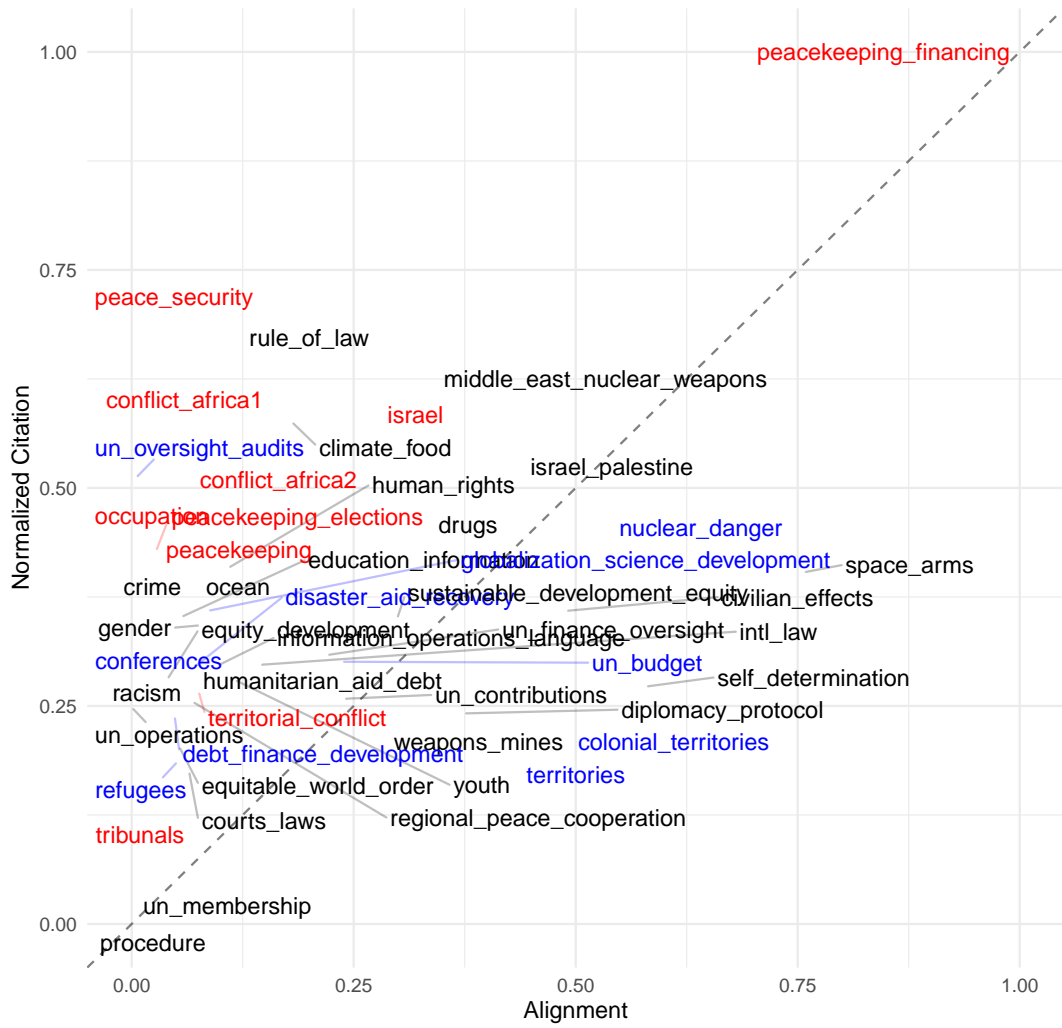
|         | Number<br>Resolutions | Number<br>Citations | Alignment<br>(97.5 Percentile) |
|---------|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| Overall | 17324                 | 132881              | —                              |
| UNGA    | 14993                 | 114943              | 139.61                         |
| UNSC    | 2331                  | 17938               | 60.57                          |

In addition to operating on agendas characterized by distinct topical areas and different numbers of topics, the UNSC and UNGA exhibit contrasting lawmaking patterns and develop largely separate bodies of law. In line with our expectations in [Hypothesis 1](#), UNGA resolutions contain a higher rate of re-use than their UNSC counterparts. The mean adjusted alignment score for UNGA documents with non-zero alignments is 25.6, compared with 20.2 for UNSC documents.<sup>15</sup> Since legal documents often contain technical language or terms of art that are frequently re-used, focusing on average alignment

<sup>14</sup>Specifically, the “effective topics” for a topic proportion vector of length  $n$  with entropy  $\eta$  is  $k = n^\eta$ .

<sup>15</sup>This comparison excludes pairs of resolutions whose alignment scores are fixed at zero due to the topic model-based pre-filtering step we describe above.

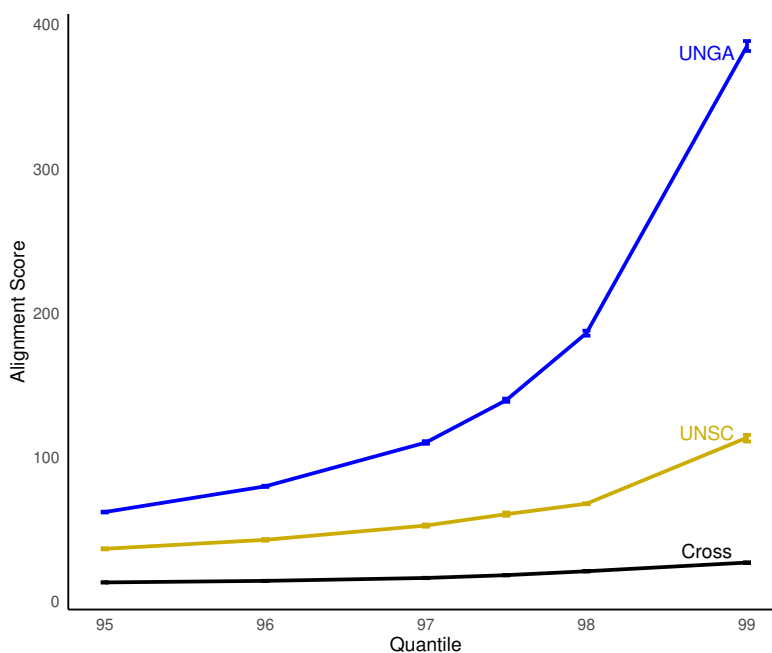
Figure 2: Recycling and citation by topic area



Topics indicated in red are the ten topics most ‘owned’ by the UNSC, that is, those on which the UNSC passes the most resolutions, while those indicated in blue are the ten topics most ‘owned’ by the UNGA. Normalized citation and alignment at the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile are both rescaled to range 0-1.

scores may conceal distinct patterns of re-use that emerge when focusing on documents with the highest alignment scores. However, this pattern of higher text recycling in the UNGA as compared to the UNSC remains consistent at all alignment score percentiles. As shown in Figure 3, 95<sup>th</sup> percentile alignment scores are approximately 72% larger for the UNGA than the UNSC, while 99<sup>th</sup> percentile alignments - which represent those documents that re-use approximately a paragraph or more of text - are approximately four times higher for the UNGA than the UNSC. This pattern suggests that the UNGA is indeed more likely to recycle language from existing resolutions than the UNSC, which supports the negotiation constraints logic we posit in [Hypothesis 1](#).

Figure 3: UNSC, UNGA infrequently borrow text cross-chamber;  
UNGA recycles more



Dots represent quantile values, and lines represent asymptotic 95% confidence intervals derived from a normal approximation of the order statistic confidence intervals.

We also find that the chambers are distinct in their citation patterns.<sup>16</sup> We expected in [Hypothesis 2](#) that the UNSC would use citation more frequently than the UNGA, as the legitimizing function of references to previous precedent would be more

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<sup>16</sup>One notable similarity in citation patterns across both chambers is an increased rates of citation over time (particularly in the UNGA), as well as increasing numbers of citations included in each resolution. Intuitively, this pattern makes sense, as the universe of precedents and thus material to cite increases over time. See the Appendix for more details.

important for the UNSC. We find mixed support for this expectation. Overall, we do not observe that the UNSC employs citation more than the UNGA, either in raw counts or at a per-resolution level (Table 1). However, the UNSC has employed more citations per resolution than the UNGA at various points in history, including before 1970 and consistently since 2001.<sup>17</sup> We also observe that on the topical areas where legitimacy concerns are likely to be the most salient – issues of international peace and security – citation rates are higher than they are for other topic areas. As noted in the previous section, security-related topics are generally the topics with the highest rate of citation (and some of the lowest rate of alignment). These topics tend to be ‘owned’ by the UNSC, by which we mean that they fall within the institutional remit of the UNSC, and are the topics on which the UNSC produces the majority of resolutions. This pattern indicates that while citation rates are generally lower in the UNSC across all measures, citation does in fact appear to be a drafting strategy used by delegates in the UNSC to provide legal cover on salient and controversial issues.

In addition to employing different citation behaviors, we also observe that the UNGA and the UNSC are highly siloed institutions based on their legislative practices. We find that almost all citation occurs within chamber, as we expect under Hypothesis 3a. We calculate a ratio of in-chamber to out-chamber citation, where 1 represents exclusive in-chamber citation and -1 represents exclusive out-chamber citation. For the UNGA, the citation ratio is 0.86, and for the UNSC is 0.98. On average, 95% of a resolution’s citations are within-chamber.<sup>18</sup> Both chambers are also more likely to re-use text from same-chamber resolutions than cross-chamber resolutions, as we outline in Hypothesis 3b. As Figure 3 shows, cross-chamber adjusted alignment scores are significantly lower across all quantiles than either set of within-chamber scores. Noting the overall tendency towards within-chamber citation, there is notable variation in cross-chamber citation and re-use across topic area. For example, on the topic of “israel”, just 70% of the average resolution’s citations are within-chamber. This is illustrated in Figure 4, which shows

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<sup>17</sup>Citation patterns for each chamber over time can be seen in the Appendix.

<sup>18</sup>A graphical depiction of this pattern can be found in the Appendix.

the dense nature of the cross-chamber citation network on the topic. Figure 5 further demonstrates variation in cross-chamber involvement on different topics, and indicates that for some topics, at different points in time, the chambers alternate leadership (for example, “humanitarian\_aid” and “gender”).

Figure 4: The topic of Israel is a dense cross-chamber citation network

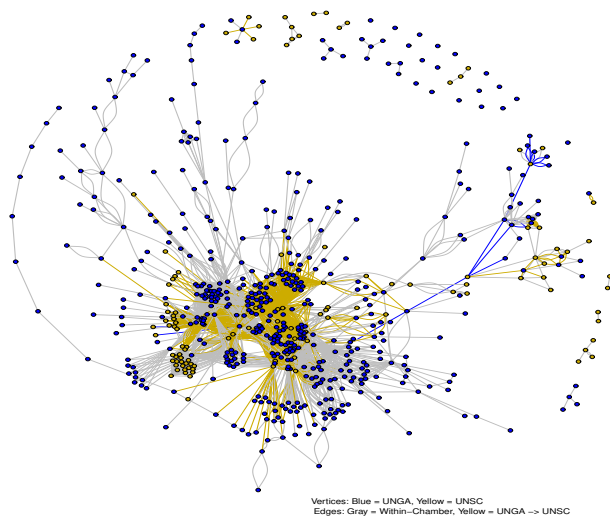
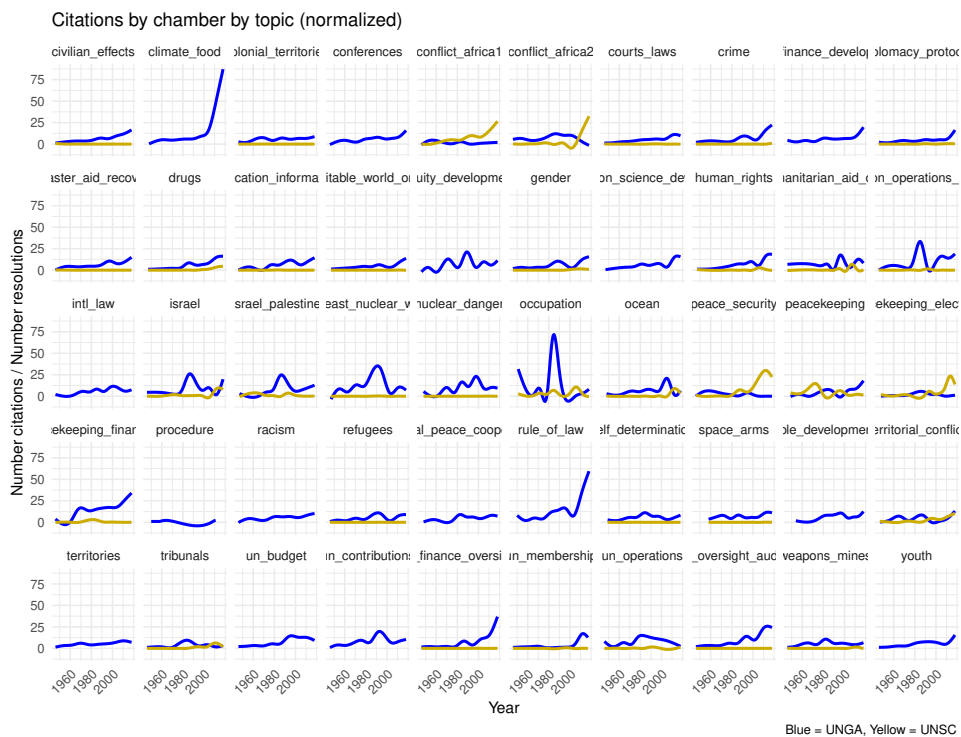


Figure 5: UNSC and UNGA lead in citations on different topics over time



## Citation, Sponsorship, and Voting

We have established that the main bodies of the UN exhibit distinct drafting strategies, and further shown that the UNGA and UNSC use *citation* and *recycling* in line with the strategic requirements imposed by their respective institutional remits. However, our measures of citation and text reuse can also illustrate connections between legislative practices and *political* outcomes. Specifically, we suggest and find evidence that citations can be a strategic tool to obtain support for a resolution.

As in most legislative contexts, sponsorship and voting decisions in the UN are strategic. Sponsorship and voting choices require countries to expend effort evaluating resolution content and consequences, and can represent a costly position-taking signal to peer nations (e.g. [Charnysh et al. 2015](#)).<sup>19</sup> Across our dataset, the average country sponsors 20% of the resolutions in a given year, which suggests that countries are indeed selective with their sponsorship choices. However, sponsoring and voting for resolutions also allows countries to credit-claim and position themselves as constructive members of the UN, which can be useful when running for international office. Noting these incentives and constraints, we hypothesized that countries should be more likely to sponsor resolutions that cite resolutions previously cited by that country ([Hypothesis 4a](#)), and that a similar relationship should hold for resolutions that cite resolutions previously sponsored by that country's ally ([Hypothesis 4b](#)).

To investigate the relationship between sponsorship and citation, we first identify state sponsors for all resolutions for which sponsorship data are available through the [UNGA Digital Library](#), which includes essentially all resolutions passed from 2000 onwards. In particular, for each resolution we identify whether each country was listed as a sponsor of that resolution prior to that resolution's passage. To study relationships between sponsorship and citation, we then calculate the following statistic:

$$S_t = \frac{1}{n_t} \sum_i^{n_t} \frac{N_{(i,t)}(\textit{sponsor}, \textit{cite})}{N_{(i,t)}(\textit{sponsor})} - \frac{N_{(i,t)}(\sim \textit{sponsor}, \textit{cite})}{N_{(i,t)}(\sim \textit{sponsor})} \quad (1)$$

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<sup>19</sup>See previous sections for a fuller discussion of political incentives for sponsorship.



Where  $n_t$  is the number of countries in year  $t$ , and  $N_{(i,t)}(sponsor, cite)$  is the number of resolutions sponsored by country  $i$  in year  $t$  that also cite country  $i$  at least once.  $S_t$  therefore represents the average difference in a country’s citation rate for resolutions that country sponsors versus those it does not, which we average across countries and years. For example, suppose that the UN passes 100 resolutions in year  $t$ , of which 18 cite country  $i$  and 82 do not cite country  $i$ . If  $i$  sponsors 12 out of 18 resolutions that cite  $i$  and 38 out of 82 resolutions that do not cite it,  $S_{i,t} = \frac{N_{(i,t)}(sponsor, cite)}{N_{(i,t)}(sponsor)} - \frac{N_{(i,t)}(\sim sponsor, cite)}{N_{(i,t)}(\sim sponsor)} = \frac{12}{18} - \frac{38}{82} \approx 0.20$ . As shown in Figure 6, we find support for [Hypothesis 4a](#): resolutions that are sponsored by a country are approximately 50-75 percentage points more likely to cite a resolution that country previously sponsored, compared with resolutions that country did not previously sponsor.

We conduct a similar exercise to compare sponsorship patterns based on defensive ally citation and sponsorship patterns. We focus on military alliances specifically, which, as a form of ‘deep’ agreement are likely to be a stronger relationship between states than trade or other types of shallow agreements. Previous findings support this decision. Joining together in the relatively shallow BRICS alliance, for example, did not increase co-sponsorship behavior between members ([Dijkhuizen & Onderco 2019](#)), while membership in the EU, an extremely deep alliance, led to coordinate co-sponsorship behavior on human rights resolutions ([Smith 2006b](#), 127). To examine ally citation and sponsorship patterns, we specifically calculate:

$$A_t = \frac{1}{|S_{(i,t)}|} \sum_{j \in S_{(i,t)}} (ally\%)_{(i,j)}$$

Where  $S_{(i,t)}$  is the set of resolutions sponsored by country  $i$  in year  $t$ , and  $(ally\%)_{(i,j)}$  is the proportion of country  $i$ ’s allies that sponsored at least one resolution cited in resolution  $j$ .  $A_{(i,t)}$  therefore represents the average proportion of country  $i$ ’s allies that sponsored at least one resolution cited in resolutions sponsored by country  $i$  in year  $t$ . We calculate an equivalent version of this statistic for non-sponsored resolutions, and compare the two in Figure 7.

The results of this comparison also support our expectations, specifically [Hypothesis](#)

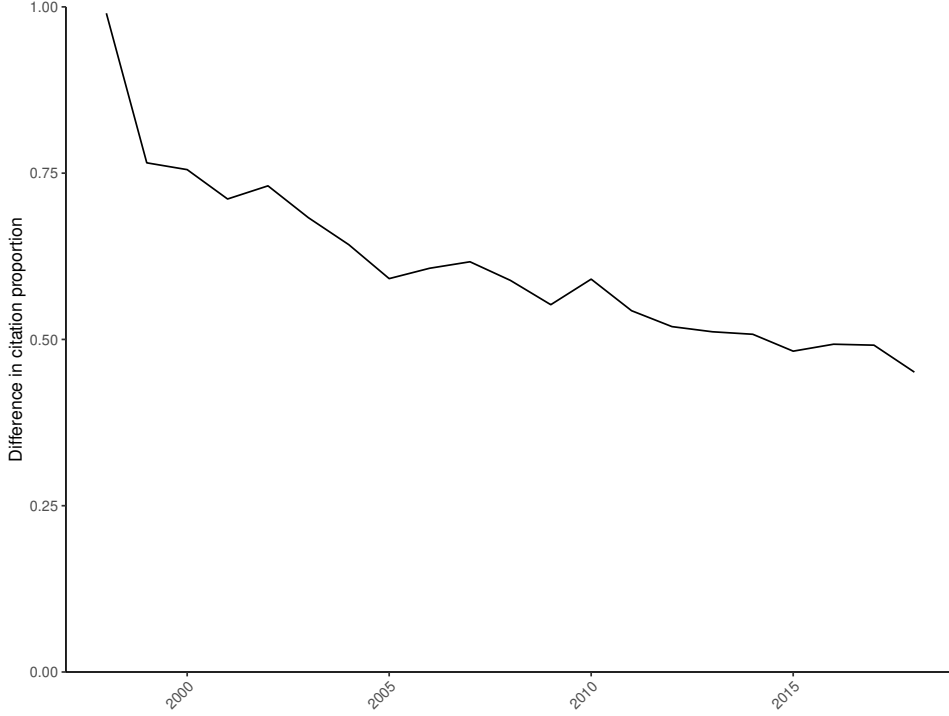


Figure 6: Difference in citation proportion, sponsored vs non-sponsored resolutions

esis 4b. We find that the average proportion of a country’s allies cited in resolutions sponsored by that country is approximately 10 percentage points higher than the average proportion of allies cited in resolutions not sponsored by that country. Since we only observe sponsorship and citation decisions at the end of the negotiation process, we cannot be sure of the causal direction between citation and sponsorship – that is, whether citation is a strategy to induce sponsorship, or whether sponsorship leads to the inclusion of citations. However, since sponsorship decisions usually come at the *end* of the negotiation process, this result suggests that citation patterns have some persuasive impact on downstream resolution sponsorship decisions.

Finally, we investigate the relationship between voting decisions and citation patterns to test the theoretical expectations we lay out in Hypothesis 5a and Hypothesis 5b, namely, that countries are expected to be more likely to vote in favor of resolutions that cite resolutions it – or its allies – have previously sponsored. In Figure 8, we calculate the following statistic:

$$S_t = \frac{1}{n_t} \sum_i^{n_t} \frac{N_{(i,t)}(\text{support}, \text{cite})}{N_{(i,t)}(\text{vote})} - \frac{N_{(i,t)}(\sim \text{vote}, \text{cite})}{N_{(i,t)}(\sim \text{vote})} \quad (2)$$

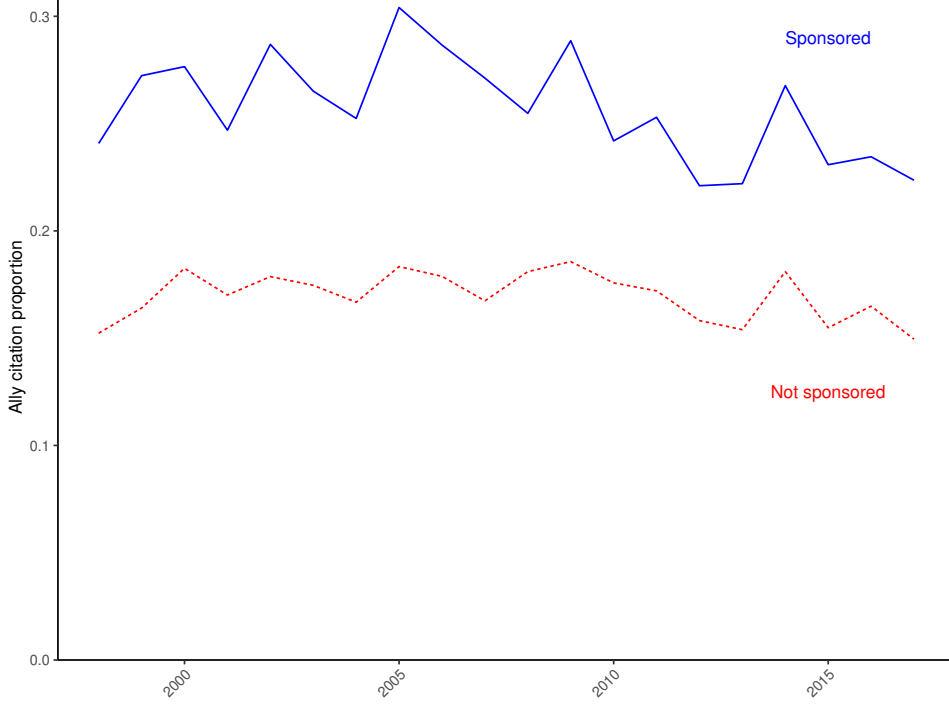


Figure 7: Ally citation proportion, self-sponsored vs non-sponsored resolutions

As before,  $S_{i,t}$  represents the average difference in country  $i$ 's voting rate in year  $t$  for resolutions that cite resolutions that country previously voted for compared with those that do not. We then average this statistic average across countries and years. This statistic therefore represents the difference in country  $i$ 's citation rate for resolutions that  $i$  voted for versus those it did not, averaged across year  $t$ . As in our comparison of citation and sponsorship, our results align with our hypotheses. Countries are approximately 50-75 percentage points more likely to vote for resolutions that cite resolutions that country had previously voted for, compared with those that do not.

We conduct a similar comparison of ally citation and voting patterns. Specifically, we calculate:

$$A_t = \frac{1}{|S_{(i,t)}|} \sum_{j \in S_{(i,t)}} (ally\%)_{(i,j)}$$

Where  $S_{(i,t)}$  is the set of resolutions voted for by country  $i$  in year  $t$ , and  $(ally\%)_{(i,j)}$  is the average yes-vote percentage for  $i$ 's allies in resolutions cited by resolution  $j$ .  $A_{(i,t)}$  therefore represents the average proportion of a country's allies voted for resolutions cited in  $S_{i,t}$ . We calculate the corresponding statistic  $\sim S_{i,t}$ , and compare the two in Figure 9.

Once again, we find support for our theoretical predictions: resolutions a country votes for are more likely to cite resolutions favored by a higher proportion of that country's allies compared with those resolutions that a country does not vote for. These findings further reinforce the strategic connection between citation patterns and other types of legal activity that we posit in this paper.

## Conclusion

We demonstrate several compelling patterns in drafting strategies in the UN and explore their effects on the political outputs of the institution. Extending previous works, we are uniquely able to examine patterns in drafting strategies across different topics and institutional contexts over an extensive period of time. We find that the UNSC employs citation when it addresses controversial matters of international security, likely because of the legitimacy-enhancing effects of citation. On the other hand, we find that the UNGA, where efficiency gains are greater than legitimacy concerns, more often recycles resolution language. Because of the distinctive rules and norms in each chamber, as well as their different agenda demands, we observe that citation and recycling are more likely to occur within-chamber than across chamber, though there are limited situations where cross-chamber collaboration occurs. Finally, we show that patterns of legislative practice have political ramifications, and that citation practices affect a country's likelihood of sponsoring and voting in favor of resolutions.

These theoretical contributions bring together distinct research threads in international law and the politics of IOs to develop a more holistic understanding of *why* drafting strategies are adopted in the context of the UN, and *how* the use of such strategies can affect the political and legal outputs of the UN's principal organs. We expect that these findings would hold in other institutional contexts. Generally, IO outputs should contain more extensive citation networks when the matters at hand are more controversial. Institutions with extensive agendas would be more likely to employ text recycling. In institutions with robust citation practices, we may expect to see more state support for resolutions. Some IOs present harder cases for observing developments in legislative prac-

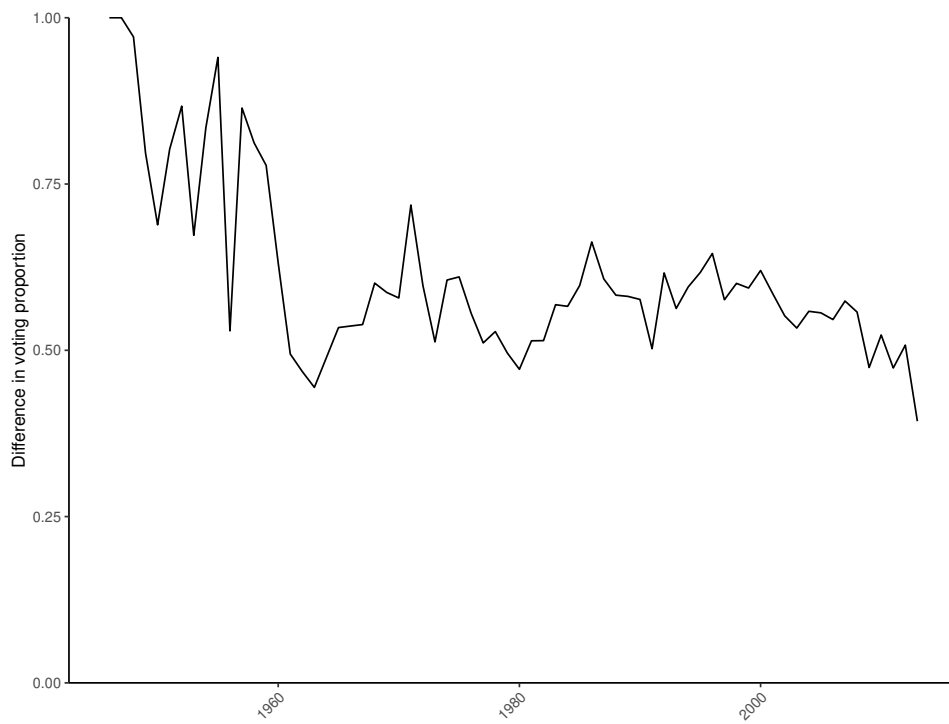


Figure 8: Difference in voting proportion, among cited and non-cited resolutions

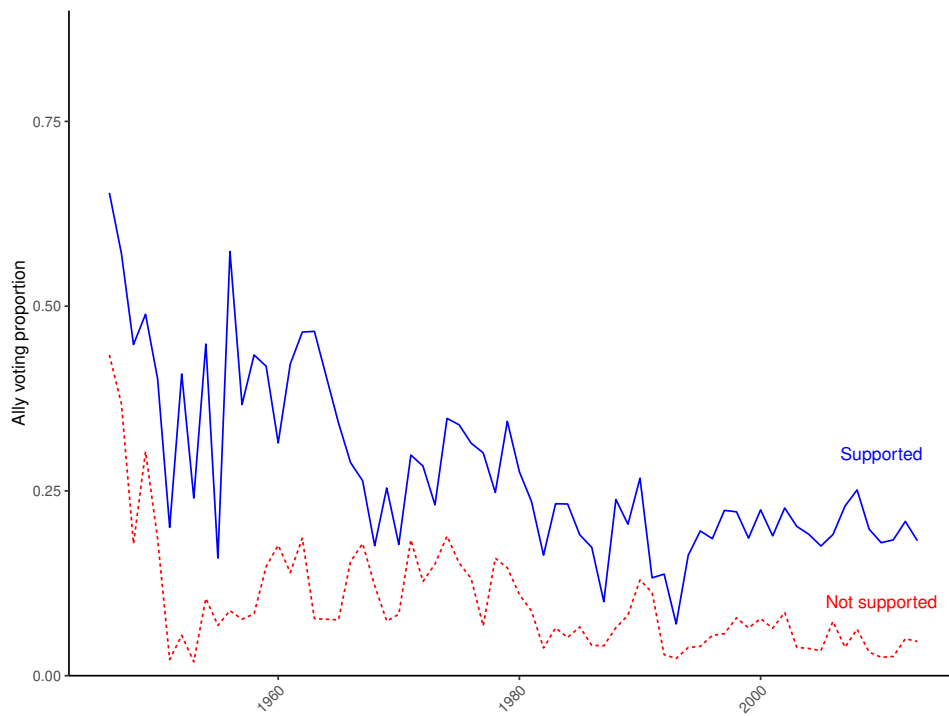


Figure 9: Ally voting proportions, among supported and non-supported resolutions

tice than the UN – for example, institutions where membership changes more frequently, or institutions in which members have fewer opportunities to interact and develop shared expectations. Future work should test these propositions in other institutional contexts to demonstrate the generalizability of our theory.

Our novel data contribution of resolution citations and alignments offer insights that simple resolution counts cannot show. By applying a machine learning approach to an extensive body of international law, we can examine macro-level trends in legislative practice unexplored by previous work. In this paper, we provide an example of the questions that these novel data can be used to address. In addition to exploring the generalizability of the theoretical predictions in other institutional contexts, future work should extend our analysis to examine relationships between power, geographical proximity, and patterns of drafting strategies. These data could also shed light on other political outcomes including compliance, conflict resolution, and funding allocations. Do the adoption of drafting strategies reflect institutional biases to focus on some issue areas to the exclusion of others, raising potential concerns for institutional legitimacy?<sup>20</sup> Finally, future work should also assess patterns of legislative practice over time to gain insight into potential future developments in international law.

Our analysis of drafting strategies over the history of the UN has illuminated areas in which the member states have successfully developed a set of norms and practices to facilitate the creation of international law, and has assessed the relationship between the *content* of international law and states' political support for it. Understanding variation in *when* and *why* international law has developed has highlighted notable successes – and failures – of the contemporary multilateral system in developing articulated sets of rules, and can help to predict the adoption of different drafting strategies in future contexts.

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<sup>20</sup>Our data also suggests this may be the case, as the priorities of countries in the Global South such as development and migration exhibit low citation and recycling, while security matters– of import to the great powers and the Global North– are characterized by high rates of citation and recycling.

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