

# You Had Me at Citation: How Citations Increase Support for United Nations Resolutions

Sabrina B. Arias\* and Robert Shaffer†

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Why do policymakers employ citations in the drafting of legal documents in international organizations? How does the inclusion of these citations affect political outcomes, such as resolution sponsorship and voting patterns? While previous work has examined the politics of foreign aid as a predictor of states' likelihood of supporting resolutions in the United Nations (UN), we draw on theories of international lawmaking to argue that citation, by signaling ideological consistency with a states' foreign policy goals, serve as a strategy to obtain support for resolutions. To assess this theory, we deploy a machine learning approach to measure citation, which we apply to a novel dataset of all UN resolutions passed from 1946-2018. We find that citation does increase political support for resolutions. Finally, we compare the substantive effect of citations to conventional explanations, namely, the allocation of foreign aid, and find that even accounting for foreign aid flows, citation dynamics are an important predictor of state support for resolutions.

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\*University of Pennsylvania, [sarias@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:sarias@sas.upenn.edu)

†BlueLabs Analytics, [rbshaffer0@gmail.com](mailto:rbshaffer0@gmail.com)

## Introduction

In December 2007, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted [Resolution 62/215](#) on “Oceans and the law of the sea.” The next year, it adopted a nearly identical [resolution](#). Despite the substantive similarity of the texts, the 2008 resolution obtained 9 additional votes in favor. Another pair of highly similar resolutions on “The total elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance” were adopted in [2010](#) and [2011](#), and again, the later resolution obtained 34 additional yes votes—despite nearly no substantive changes to the language of the text. These examples suggest a broader challenge for policymakers and puzzle for scholars: why did these two pairs of seemingly similar resolutions obtain different levels of support?

Previous scholarship has examined drafting strategies and their impacts (or lack thereof) on political outcomes in settings ranging from international courts to bilateral agreements to domestic lawmaking (e.g. [Allee and Peinhardt 2010](#); [Voeten 2010](#); [Charlotin 2017](#); [Wilkerson, Smith, and Stramp 2015](#); [Linder et al. 2020](#)). Yet, we lack a theoretical framework to explain the relationship between citation practices and political outcomes in multilateral legislative institutions, where the political dynamics of citation are likely to be quite different from these contexts. What strategic logic can explain a negotiator’s choice to selectively invoke previous texts, and why does the adoption of such strategies vary across different institutions and topic areas? Does the inclusion of citations matter for political outcomes? While the relationship between external political considerations—such as foreign aid—and support for multilateral resolutions has been extensively studied (e.g. [Dreher, Nunnenkamp, and Thiele 2008](#); [Carter and Stone 2015](#)), we know much less about the relationship between the *content* of resolutions and their subsequent outcomes.

We argue that invoking additional previous resolutions is a broader strategy of strategic citation used by resolution drafters to garner more support for their proposals. External political considerations alone are not sufficient to explain variation in states’ likelihood of supporting resolutions: we must also account for differences in the substantive content and legal design of resolutions. We propose several logics by which the inclusion of citations can gain political support for resolutions. Including citations to resolutions

previously supported by a country or its allies can signal ideological consistency with their preferred foreign policies and increases the likelihood that a state will support the measure currently under consideration (Voeten 2010; Charlotin 2017). Citations can also make negotiations over new texts easier to complete (Allee and Elsig 2019). We further suggest that institutional rules and remits influence the strategic logic of citation. In security domains in particular, references to previous precedent are especially desirable, as these contexts are more controversial and subject to legitimacy concerns (Cronin and Hurd 2008; Lupu and Voeten 2012)—thus, tools to obtain additional political support are more likely to be deployed.

We expect that this logic holds in many international policymaking processes. In this paper, we apply the theory to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and United Nations Security Council (UNSC), a 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 studies of drafting strategies such as citation have focused on specific topical and institutional settings (e.g. Lupu and Voeten 2012; Charlotin 2017; Alschner and Charlotin 2018), we extend these insights by allowing topical and institutional features to vary. By examining drafting strategies in the multi-issue context of the UN and 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 from 1946-2018, we find support for our theoretical expectations. We find that drafting strategies have political ramifications: across resolutions that are otherwise substantively identical in content, additional citations increases political support for resolutions. We also observe that in the domain of high politics, when legitimacy concerns are highly salient in addressing questions of international security, resolutions cite existing law more frequently. Countries are also 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. Even after accounting for foreign aid allocation, this effect significant and large. These findings have implications for the role of power in the politics of international organizations (IOs), demonstrating that legal strategies—such as strategic use of citation—can gain support for policies even after accounting for external political considerations like foreign aid payments.

Examining the dynamics of citation practices and their political implications reveals important insights into the processes of international policymaking, and the politics of multilateral diplomacy. Leveraging within-institutional differences allows us to draw inferences about the importance of institutional rules and norms, agenda dynamics, and topical remit on the citation usage over time, and on the relationship between these legislative practices and political decision-making. These findings are substantively relevant for scholarship in international law, international cooperation, and legal design generally. We demonstrate that institutional design—specifically, issue specialization—has downstream impacts on the process of creating legislation, the content of policy outputs, and the level of political support that these outcomes attract. These findings shed light on variation in drafting strategies across institutional contexts, and help to understand how and why different institutions develop—or fail to develop—robust legal canons.

## Citation 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 and Snidal 1998](#); [Koremenos 2016](#)). 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 IOs determine this variation. The norms and practices of legislative drafting can encourage negotiators to write precise and explicit texts, or to favor more general language.

One type of drafting strategy employed in international organizations has received substantial attention: *citation*. Citations—explicit invocations of previous decisions or legal texts—are well-studied from a *legal* standpoint, but the *political* rationale for such invocations to earlier texts is less understood. Examining citation networks has provided fruitful insight into the development of bodies of law by many institutions. Citation networks reveal institutional practices in the World Trade Organization (Charlotin 2017), the courts of the European Union (Lupu and Voeten 2012; Derlén and Lindholm 2015), the International Court of Justice (Alschner and Charlotin 2018) and in the US domestic context (Fowler et al. 2007). Alschner and Charlotin (2018), for example, find that the International Court of Justice cites more frequently on matters of “classic international law,” such as maritime disputes.

Focusing on judicial institutions, these works have developed strategies for identifying ‘important’ decisions (e.g. Fowler et al. 2007) and the complexity and directionality of legal canons (e.g. Alschner and Charlotin 2018; Charlotin 2017), and identifying how citations may have legitimacy-enhancing aims targeting lower courts (e.g. Lupu and Voeten 2012). Scholars point to legitimacy, consistency, legal ideology, and influence as explanations for the inclusion of citations by legal bodies (e.g. Fowler et al. 2007; Voeten 2010; Lupu and Voeten 2012; Charlotin 2017), but how well do these explanations apply to the citation practices of multilateral fora, where the drafters of legal texts are not judges, but representatives of states?

The dynamics of judicial institutions are quite different of those of multilateral policymaking organizations, where contestation over the inclusion of citation occurs between state negotiators, not judicial experts. While some of the same considerations—such as legitimacy and persuasiveness—may hold in both contexts, diplomatic negotiators must also consider how to obtain direct political support for their proposals in the form of sponsorships and votes. Furthermore, previous works on citation practices have been largely siloed by distinct institutional domains. Examining citation within one institutional context illustrates important patterns, but it cannot illuminate how variation in institutional rules and norms affect the development of bodies of law. While we draw on the theo-

retical insights of these works, we argue that in multilateral legislative contexts—unlike in courts or tribunals—we must take additional steps to account for political dynamics between negotiating actors.

Citations, we suggest, engender political support for agreements through several pathways. First, they create a *normative* basis for political support. Citations highlight the decisions that have influenced the contemporary decision-making process, and indicate commitment to a consistent underlying ideology (Voeten 2010; Charlotin 2017, 284). For an individual state, these references can demonstrate consistency with their own foreign policy in the past and ideological alignment—if that state supported a similar agreement on the topic in the past, it would be sensible for them to support the current text. At the institutional level, the references can show that the matter at hand is within the scope of the institutional mandate, building upon previous institutional works rather than expanding the scope into new domains. As a result, adding new citations to a document signals ideological alignment with the document (and its authors) being invoked.

Second, citations add to a *technical* basis for support. Citations create predictability, by serving as examples or guides to be considered in subsequent similar circumstances. Absent precedent, ambiguities in legal agreements case are decided individually, rules are ambiguous, and expectations for state behavior are unclear. Explicitly linking a text to previous precedent demonstrates legitimacy, which can persuade relevant audiences to comply with the decision or agreement and demonstrate its soundness (Lupu and Voeten 2012, 417, Charlotin 2017, 282). Ambiguities can be bracketed with assurances that problems will be addressed in the same manner as before.

Third, citations create an *efficiency* basis for support. Given that policymakers—including diplomats—are constrained by limited time and personnel resources (e.g. Hall 1998; Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Panke 2013; Allee and Elsig 2019), this efficiency is crucial. References to well-developed precedent can facilitate agreement among heterogeneous actors by highlighting previously agreed upon principles, making negotiations more efficient by reducing transaction costs and minimizing the number of veto points (Abbott and Snidal 1998; Mansfield, Milner, and Pevehouse 2007). 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 and Weingast 1993; McAdams 2000). If the specific language is changed, these changes can “blow up” the settled text, requiring intensive negotiation to achieve consensus.

To be clear, we do not contend that citation is the only drafting variables available to negotiators. References to broader international principles, external organizations, recycling of previously adopted texts, or inclusion of escape clauses, flexibility clauses, or dispute resolution mechanisms can also affect the legitimacy or efficiency of a text (e.g Rosendorff and Milner 2001; Allee and Peinhardt 2010; Allee and Elsig 2016; Morin, Tremblay-Auger, and Peacock 2022). However, citation is a readily available and impactful tool which can be used across a wide variety of contexts, and one which has received substantial attention in studies on the development of law. Citation is also substantively important to understand in the development of a framework of international law. Furthermore, citations follow a unique logic compared to previously studied features of legal design. For example, while escape clauses are included to increase compliance with trade agreements Rosendorff and Milner (2001) and delegation of dispute settlement in BITs is included to appease domestic interest groups (Allee and Peinhardt 2010), neither of these dynamics would be likely to explain why citations are included in UN resolutions. Thus, as an important theoretical and practical drafting strategy, and because of the need for theoretical logic to explain their inclusion, citations are a sensible drafting strategy on which to focus in analyzing how drafting strategies affect political support for resolutions.

# Resolution Politics in the United Nations

## *Political Support for UN Resolutions*

States express support for UN resolutions through two principal means: sponsorship and voting. For a resolution to pass, a majority of states must vote in support.<sup>1</sup> Thus, there is a clear incentive for countries who seek to pass a measure to obtain additional votes in favor. Voting behaviors in the UN have been examined by decades of international relations scholarship (e.g. [Keohane 1967](#); [Rai 1972](#); [Kim and Russett 1996](#); [Voeten 2000](#); [Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten 2017](#)), yet there is much less systematic analysis of sponsorship of UN resolutions than voting patterns.

Why do countries sponsor resolutions? 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, Lloyd, and Simmons 2015](#)). Therefore, countries are only likely to *selectively* sponsor resolutions, and as a costlier form of behavior, sponsorship can be considered a stronger signal of political support than voting.

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. Sponsoring a resolution more clearly attributes credit to a country for these purposes, and allows it to use the resolution for signaling or propaganda with domestic audiences. As [Mower Jr. \(1962, 661\)](#) notes, “In some cases it may be strategically desirable for a delegation to make a clear statement of its policy preference concerning an issue by presenting a draft resolution in its own name, either alone or jointly with others.” Soliciting more co-sponsors also serves strategic purposes, as it can signal wider agreement

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<sup>1</sup>A two-thirds majority is required on ‘important questions.’ See [Rules of Procedure 82-95](#) for full voting rules in the General Assembly, and [Article 27](#) of the Charter for voting rules in the Security Council.

among the membership, which may pressure even non-sponsors to ‘follow the herd’ and vote in favor of the resolution (Mower Jr. 1962; Rai 1977).<sup>2</sup>

Taking voting and sponsorship as the means by which states *express* their preferences on UN resolutions, how do states *form* their preferences on resolutions, and how are they influenced by the political processes at work in multilateral negotiations? Does the negotiating process of resolution writing affect countries’ support for the final product? While previous works have investigated sponsorship of and voting on UN resolutions, they tell us little about how legal features contribute to sponsorship or voting outcomes. Conventional explanations of state support for UN resolutions have focused on external political considerations—in particular, foreign aid—rather than the content of the resolution itself.<sup>3</sup>

### *Conventional Explanations of Voting and Sponsorship*

Foreign aid has been posited as a mechanism of influence on voting for more than fifty years.<sup>4</sup> Recipient states are found to vote more similarly to donor states when they receive bilateral foreign aid payments (Wittkopf 1973; Carter and Stone 2015), including on important matters (Wang 1999) and when the sources of aid are disaggregated (Dreher, Nunnenkamp, and Thiele 2008). Powerful states can also use their influence in organizations like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to direct benefits to states that vote as they desire (Dreher, Sturm, and Vreeland 2009; Dreher and Sturm 2012). These effects are observed on votes in both the General Assembly and in the Security Council. As Keohane (1967, 223) observes in one noteworthy historical

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<sup>2</sup>Mower Jr. (1962) also describes a process of ‘indirect sponsorship’, in which a state works through a proxy to table a resolution. Analytically, this type of sponsorship cannot be empirically identified.

<sup>3</sup>Other sources of political influence, including formal alliances, military aid, regional, and developmental groups are also found to be predictors of voting similarity (Rai 1972; Kim and Russett 1996; Voeten 2000), but given that foreign aid has been most widely examined by the literature, we limit our scope to this conventional explanation for strategies to gain resolution support.

<sup>4</sup>For a detailed summary of the literature, see Carter and Stone (2015); Dreher and Sturm (2012).

example, “certain members of the coalition opposing the seating of the People’s Republic of China (Communist China) probably care little about the outcome but vote as they do because the United States has provided inducements to do so.”

Foreign aid can work as both an inducement and a punishment (Rai 1980). Threats of withholding aid or imposing sanctions are also deployed to the same effect. To get support for S-RES-678 in 1990, authorizing the use of force against Iraq if it failed to withdraw troops from Kuwait, not only did the U.S. promise easing sanction on China for a favorable vote and encouraged Saudi Arabia to give \$1 billion in aid to the Soviet Union, it also cut more than \$70 billion in aid to Yemen as retaliation for their no-vote. American diplomats bluntly told the Yemenis, “That was the most expensive no vote you ever cast,” (Friedman 1990). These threats can be made explicitly, as in the case of Yemen, or more tacitly (Keohane 1967).

In the case of resolution sponsorship, we observe less systematic work on the determinants of sponsorship behavior. Jacobsen (1969) explores the correlations of country population and wealth with sponsorship frequency. Rai (1977) examined the topic areas that states were more likely to sponsor resolutions on, on which issues cosponsorship occurs more frequently, and whether resolutions sponsored by the most active states were more likely to be passed. In a more contemporary context, researchers have investigated whether countries are more likely to cosponsor with others based on their membership in an informal grouping (Dijkhuizen and Onderco 2019) and by regime type (Finke 2021). These analyses provide valuable insight into the patterns of sponsorship, but not into questions of the strategic decision-calculus of sponsorship. What makes a state more or less likely to sign on as a sponsor of a resolution?

We contend that to explain state support for UN resolutions, factors previously identified—including foreign aid—matter, but alone are not sufficient. The qualitative element of a resolution’s content must also be taken into account to predict a states’ likelihood of voting for or sponsoring the resolution. In particular, we contend that the inclusion of citation in a resolution can be used to obtain state support.

## *Strategic Use of Citation*

The use of legal language, in the form of citations, can legitimize law in the eyes of political actors and enhance implementation [Larsson et al. \(2017\)](#). We aim to show that this logic is at work during the creation of law by political actors, focusing on the role of citations in the *adoption* of international law, rather than *implementation*. Citation is not costless and not random ([Lupu and Voeten 2012](#); [Lupu and Fowler 2013](#); [Charlotin 2017](#)). The inclusion of citation requires research and argumentation, and in the case of multilateral fora, convincing other parties that its inclusion is justified. These efforts are costly in terms of time and staffing capacity, which, while a greater concern for states with small UN Mission Staffs (e.g. [Panke 2013](#)), are equally true regardless of staff size. States, with an eye towards increasing support for the proposed resolution, include citations strategically.

Our theoretical expectations highlight the *political implications* of citation. Assuming that citations cannot be included in a resolution text without limit, we argue that negotiators strategically include citations to maximize their likelihood of obtaining political support for the text. There are many mechanisms by which including citations could lead to increased political support for the text under consideration, including the normative, technical, and efficiency logics we outlined above. 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, Morris, and Miller 2021](#)).

These patterns suggest that if a resolution cites resolutions that a country has previously supported, that country is more likely to support the resolution currently under consideration. These expectations also hold—although to a lesser magnitude—if the citation is to a prior resolution supported 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*<sub>1</sub>: Countries are more likely to support resolutions that cite resolution(s) previously supported by that country.**

***H*<sub>2</sub>: Countries are more likely to support resolutions that cite resolution(s) previously supported by that country's ally.**

We measure support with two observable behaviors: sponsorship and voting. As discussed in the previous section, a robust body of research has probed the determinants of voting for UN resolutions, though it has generally focused on external factors like foreign aid. The practices of sponsorship have not been examined to the same extent, and investigations into the *determinants* of sponsorship behavior are even less well understood.

We expect countries to sponsor resolutions only selectively because of the costs involved in sponsorship, as we previously discussed. Because of this potential costliness, sponsorship can be considered a strong test of our expectations. 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.

These political incentives are not expected to be homogeneous across all issue areas. Resolutions on matters related to security issues are likely to be particularly contentious compared to other matters addressed in the UN. 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 in these cases (Cronin and Hurd 2008; Lupu and Voeten 2012). In other issue areas, for example, development matters, support for resolutions is likelier to be easier to obtain, and the rationale for including citations to gain support from additional states is less

strong. Furthermore, on security matters, the legal justification that citations contribute to may be more convincing than on other issue areas, where opposition may be more likely to come from budgetary concerns than legal concerns. By clarifying the framework for interpretation and reducing the flexibility of the proposed resolution, the inclusion of citations may add to the precision of the text. Indeed, [Koremenos \(2016, 163\)](#) finds that most agreements on security matters are somewhat or very precise, which is a greater proportion than either environmental or human rights agreements. For these reasons, we should expect to find more citations on matters of security.<sup>5</sup>

***H<sub>3</sub>: Negotiators are more likely to include citations in resolutions related to security matters than other issue areas.***

While these theoretical expectations about drafting strategies are expected to hold across different multilateral institutions, we test them in the context of the UN. 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, promotional, and enforcement functions ([von Einsiedel, Malone, and Ugarte 2015](#); [Malone 2004](#)). While resolutions adopted by the General Assembly 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

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<sup>5</sup>While the Security Council is specifically tasked with addressing matters of international peace and security, both the UNSC and UNGA address security-related topics. Furthermore, the institutional rules and norms of the two chambers are distinct. We therefore examine resolutions on security matters in both chambers.

priorities across a variety of topics. States, therefore, have substantial incentives to invest time and political capital in negotiating both types of 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.

## **Data and Estimation**

The quantitative analysis of legal texts 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 agreements that can be examined by researchers (e.g. [Caraway, Rickard, and Anner 2012](#)), or forces the researcher to simplify their measure to one that can be more objectively and quickly evaluated (e.g. [Jo and Namgung 2012](#)). Further, focusing on a specific subset of agreements (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 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 and 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. These data are summarized in [Table 1](#). Our data collection work proceeded as follows. First, we scraped all UNGA and UNSC resolutions posted on their

respective official websites.<sup>6</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 2006). 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. 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 extraneous text and isolate the actual resolution from the image on each page.<sup>7</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>8</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

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<sup>6</sup>See the [UNGA](#) and [UNSC](#) indices for details. We are only able to observe the final resolution texts—not earlier draft versions.

<sup>7</sup>For example, translation notes, headers and footers, parallel translation text, procedural language, or trailing language from other resolutions or documents.

<sup>8</sup>A small number of citations refer to other UN bodies such as ECOSOC, which we exclude.

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

Resolutions adopted on the reports of the Fourth Committee 75

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

*Deplores* 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 or 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 development;
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/5900/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**

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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 581402 of 9 December 2003, in which it requested the Special Committee to continue to discharge the functions entrusted to it under resolution 1970 (XVIII).

*Strucing* 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.

Note: Sample resolutions from the UNGA, from 1966 and 2005. Alightments are highlighted in yellow/light shading, while citations are highlighted in blue/dark shading.

eliminated all false positive results. We also removed all self-citations, that is, occasions when the citation refers to the current resolution. This process left us with a database of 114,943 citations from the UNGA, and 17,938 citations from the UNSC.

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>9</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. 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>10</sup>

Finally, we identified instances of *textual alignment* in our corpus. Text alignment provides us a quantitative measure of how similar two resolutions are to each other, which

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<sup>9</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).

<sup>10</sup>In the Appendix (pg. 1-7), 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.

will allow us to hold this constant when examining the effects of citations. To identify instances of text alignment, 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>11</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>12</sup> Finally, we calculate an adjusted alignment score by weighting each alignment score by the distinctiveness of the tokens contained in each alignment, to downweight common, “boilerplate” recycling ([Wilkerson, Smith, and Stramp 2015](#)). Alignment scores by each chamber can be seen in [Table 1](#), and topic level alignment scores are in the Appendix (pg. 4.)<sup>13</sup>

## Citation Practices

### *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 vary substantially by topic area. Specifically, we can see that topics on security-related matters—including matters such as ‘Occupation,’ ‘Conflict Africa1,’ ‘Israel,’ ‘Peacekeeping,’ and post-conflict

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<sup>11</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>12</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>13</sup>While [Panke \(2014\)](#) considers repetition of UNGA resolutions, our text-based approach provides greater nuance in examining patterns of qualitative repetition at scale.

‘Elections’— tend to be characterized by higher rates of citation than other topic areas, as we expected in [Hypothesis 3](#). Procedural matters, including topics such as ‘Courts,’ ‘Membership,’ ‘Tribunals,’ and ‘Procedure,’ tend to be lowest in citation. This finding hints at the utility of our citation measure: 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>14</sup>

Our topic labels also allow us to characterize agenda dynamics more broadly across the main bodies of the UN. 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>15</sup> Informational entropy is a standard measure of dispersion for discrete probability distributions, which ranges from 0 (least dispersed) to 1 (most dispersed) ([Boydston, Bevan, and Thomas III 2014](#); [Shaffer 2017](#)).

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>16</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, and suggests that our topic labels are correctly picking up on these different agenda dynamics.

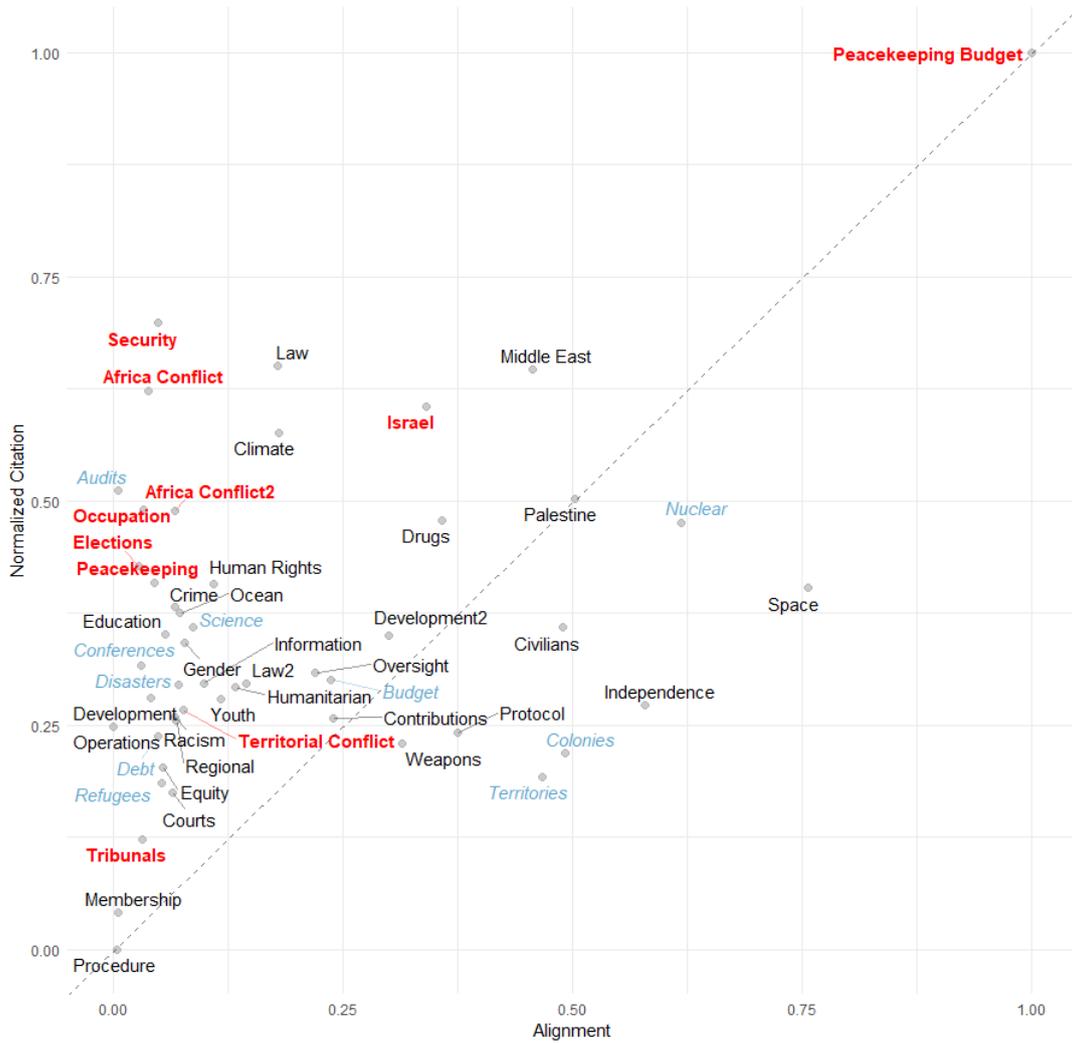
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<sup>14</sup>Trends in the number of resolutions over time are explored in the Appendix (pg. 2-7).

<sup>15</sup>Normalized informational entropy is defined as  $H(X) = -\frac{1}{\ln(n)} \sum_{i=1}^n X_i \log(X_i)$ .

<sup>16</sup>Specifically, the “effective topics” for a topic proportion vector of length  $n$  with entropy  $\eta$  is  $k = n^\eta$ .

Figure 2: Alignment and citation by topic area



Note: Topics indicated in red/bold are the ten topics on which the UNSC passes the most resolutions, while those indicated in blue/italics are the ten topics on which the UNGA passes the most resolutions. Normalized citation and alignment at the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile are both rescaled to range 0-1.

## 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                          |

Descriptively, we also find that the chambers are distinct in their citation patterns.<sup>17</sup> We expected in [Hypothesis 3](#) that resolutions on security matters would employ more citations than those on other topics, as the legitimizing function of references to previous precedent would be more important for these controversial questions of high politics. We find support for this expectation. As noted above, security-related topics are generally the topics with the highest rate of citation. 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.

We did not specifically hypothesize about differential citation practices between the UNGA and the UNSC because these institutions differ not only in the topical remits, but also on many other dimensions such as membership composition, norms, and voting rules. Bearing these differences in mind, we do find that while the UNSC does not employ citation more than the UNGA, either in raw counts or at a per-resolution level (Table 1), the UNSC has employed more *citations per resolution* consistently since 2001.<sup>18</sup> 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 negotiators to provide legal cover on salient and controversial issues.

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<sup>17</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 (pg. 1-7.)

<sup>18</sup>Citation patterns for each chamber over time can be seen in the Appendix (pg. 1-7).

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. 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. Noting the overall tendency towards within-chamber citation, there is substantial variation in cross-chamber citation and alignment across topic area. For example, on the topic of “israel”, just 70% of the average resolution’s citations are within-chamber.<sup>19</sup>

## Citation, Sponsorship, and Voting

### *Descriptive Evidence*

While our measures of citation are useful to illustrate differences in drafting strategies across topical areas and the main chambers of the UN, we can more importantly use them to illustrate that the *content* of international law—in this case, UN resolutions—affects states’ likelihood of supporting these agreements. 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, Lloyd, and Simmons 2015](#)).<sup>20</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.<sup>21</sup> However, sponsoring and voting for resolutions also allows countries to credit-claim and position themselves as

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<sup>19</sup>In the Appendix, we show variation in cross-chamber involvement on different topics over time (pg. 6-7).

<sup>20</sup>See previous sections for a fuller discussion of political incentives for sponsorship.

<sup>21</sup>Sponsorship data are obtained through the [UNGA Digital Library](#) and cover the period from 2000 onwards. See the Appendix (pg. 8-10) for fuller discussion.

constructive members of the UN, which can be useful when running for elected positions, such as agency heads or rotating seats on the UNSC.

Noting these incentives and constraints, we hypothesized that countries should be more likely to support resolutions that cite resolutions previously supported by that country ([Hypothesis 1](#)), and that a similar relationship should hold for resolutions that cite resolutions previously sponsored by that country’s ally ([Hypothesis 2](#)). We proposed to examine support with two behavioral measures: sponsorship and voting. Here, we focus on voting practices; our analysis of sponsorship patterns—the results of which are in line with our hypotheses—can be found in the Appendix (pg. 7-9).

To test our proposed mechanisms, we compare the relationship between citation and voting among UNGA resolutions with similar content. This approach allows us to hold the institutional context and language of the resolution constant while we vary the number of citations included in the text. Specifically, we first collect all pairs of resolutions with Smith-Waterman scores above a pre-specified cutoff.<sup>22</sup> For all such pairs, we then calculate a difference in the *number of citations* and *proportion of yes votes* among pair members. We then regress our citation difference measure on our voting measure, with fixed effects for the year of each resolution in the dataset. This design allows us to measure the relationship between citation and voting while keeping the text of the resolutions approximately constant.

As shown in [Figure 4](#), our results support our expectations. For document pairs with similarity values of approximately 0.8-0.9, documents with more citations are significantly more likely to receive additional positive votes. Document pairs with similarity scores above 0.9 are rarer, which limits explanatory power. However, coefficient estimates at essentially all similarity cutoffs are positive, and coefficient estimates above 0.95 - where we are most able to hold the text of the resolutions in question constant - are positive and substantively significant. In this range, we estimate that adding an additional

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<sup>22</sup>The maximum Smith-Waterman alignment score for documents A and B and per-token match score of 2 is  $2 * len(A) * len(B)$ . For all document pairs, we normalize all documents by this maximum score, and retain documents that are above the pre-specified cutoff. We vary this cutoff in [Figure 4](#) for robustness.

citation to a document in the modern UN would yield approximately one additional “yes” vote.<sup>23</sup>

While we have demonstrated the validity of our claim that citation affects support for resolutions generally—holding the text of the resolution roughly constant—we seek to specifically demonstrate that this relationship is driven by the political dynamics we lay out in [Hypothesis 1](#) and [Hypothesis 2](#), namely, that a country should be expected to be more likely to vote in favor of resolutions that cite resolutions it—or its allies—have previously supported. We calculate the following statistic:

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

$$= \frac{1}{n_t} \sum_i^{n_t} S_{(i,t)} \quad (2)$$

$S_{(i,t)}$  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  $t$ . Our results align with our hypothesis: 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 (see [Figure 3](#), left panel).

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

$$A_t = \frac{1}{|S_{(i,t)}|} \sum_{j \in S_{(i,t)}} (\text{ally}\%)_{(i,j)} \quad (3)$$

Where  $S_{(i,t)}$  is the set of resolutions voted for by country  $i$  in year  $t$ , and  $(\text{ally}\%)_{(i,j)}$  is the average yes-vote percentage for  $i$ ’s allies in resolutions cited by resolution  $j$ .  $A_t$  therefore represents the average proportion of a country’s allies that voted for resolutions cited in

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<sup>23</sup>We show in the Appendix (pg. 10-11) that these results do not depend on the number of total citations in the resolution pairs.

year  $t$ . We calculate the corresponding statistic  $\sim A_t$ . Once again, we find support for our theoretical predictions: in Figure 3 (right panel) we show that resolutions a country votes for ('supported') 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 ('not supported').

Of course, since UN negotiators likely select citations carefully, we should not expect that adding a random citation would have a large and positive effect on voting outcomes. Rather, the results of this section suggest that UN negotiators may be able to *strategically* identify citations that will cause countries to vote in favor of a proposed resolution. Understanding this selection mechanism is outside the scope of this paper but represents a direction for future research.

### *Aid as an Alternative Explanation*

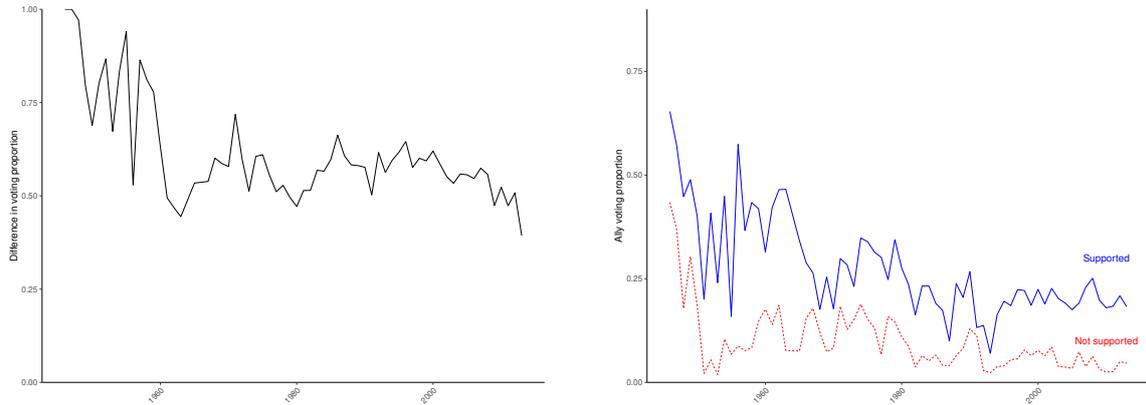
As we discussed previously, one prominent alternative explanation for vote choice in the UNGA is aid receipt. Plausibly, smaller states may sell their votes in exchange for material rewards from larger states, expressed through foreign aid flows. Under this scenario, we would expect states to vote in alignment with large donors. By contrast, we would expect citations and resolution content to have a limited relationship with vote choice, since we should not expect states pursue a coherent, consistent foreign policy or to pay attention to the resolutions cited in a resolution text. We leverage a regression framework to test this alternative explanation against our proposed theory that the citation practices increase a state's likelihood of supporting a resolution.

To test this possibility, we focus on the case of US foreign aid. Though foreign aid from other countries may affect voting behavior, since the US is the largest foreign aid donor US aid flows represent the strongest test case for the alternative explanation we posit.<sup>24</sup> In particular, we focus on resolutions on which the US voted *yes*, and ignore

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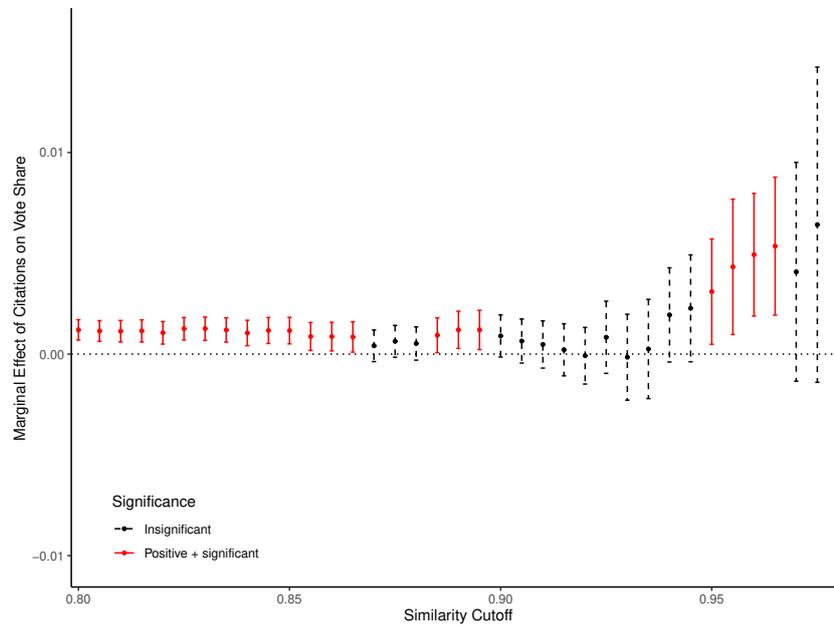
<sup>24</sup>This choice also mirrors the substantive focus of the foreign aid literature, which has also found that only US foreign aid—not other G7 countries—influenced voting behavior (Dreher, Nunnenkamp, and Thiele 2008).

Figure 3: Political dynamics of citation and resolution support



Note: Difference in voting proportions among resolutions where the state is cited vs. not-cited (left panel) and differences in ally voting proportions, among resolutions that the state votes for ('supported') vs. does not vote for ('non-supported') (right panel)

Figure 4: Increased citations increases vote share among similar resolution pairs



Note: OLS linear regression model. The dependent variable is the difference in proportion of yes votes between pairs of highly-aligned resolutions. The key predictor variable is the difference in the number of citations for each resolution. Each point represents a model fit with all pairs with similarity scores above a given cutoff. Fixed effects included for the year of each resolution in the pair.

resolutions on which the US abstained or voted *no*. Though restrictive, this choice focuses our attention on resolutions on which the US expressed a clear, affirmative position, which provides a still stronger test of the alternative scenario we posit.

Our dependent variable in this comparison is the percentage of resolutions on which a given country voted yes in a given year. Since we restrict our attention to the set of resolutions on which the US voted *yes*, this comparison is equivalent the percentage of cases on which a given country voted in the same way as the United States in a given year. Our key predictor variable is the proportion of resolutions in the same year that cite another resolution (from any prior year) on which a given country voted yes. This variable captures the extent to which the relevant set of resolutions cite other resolutions that the country under consideration has previously supported. Our key alternative variable is the amount of foreign aid provided by the US to a given country in a given year. To model the relationship between these variables, we employ an OLS linear model, with country- and year-fixed effects included to control for unobserved time- and country-constant factors.

Table 2: Aid and Vote Comparison

|                         | <i>Dependent variable:</i>  |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                         | yes                         |
| Citation Proportion     | 1.000*<br>(0.010)           |
| Aid                     | 0.00003*<br>(0.00001)       |
| Constant                | -0.003<br>(0.020)           |
| Observations            | 7,612                       |
| R <sup>2</sup>          | 0.761                       |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> | 0.753                       |
| Residual Std. Error     | 0.110 (df = 7381)           |
| F Statistic             | 102.032*** (df = 230; 7381) |

*Note:* \*p<0.05

As shown in Table 2, both explanations are supported. However, the association

between citations and vote choice is particularly potent. In a year in which 100% of the resolutions under consideration cited a resolution on which a country had previously voted yes, we would predict that a country would vote in the affirmative on *all* of those resolutions, even if that country received no foreign aid from the United States. As a result, though both aid and citations likely affect vote choice, alignment with resolutions that a country previously supported appears to be a particularly important determinant of vote choice in the UNGA. This finding suggests that while power does matter in UN politics, it does not determine outcomes. While only large, wealthy states have the capacity to use foreign aid as a source of leverage in obtaining support for their favored resolutions, any state regardless of size has the capacity to pursue a strategic citation strategy.

## Conclusion

We develop a theoretical argument about the strategic use of citation to achieve political support for international law, allowing us to examine the relationships between politics, institutional design, and policy outputs. We apply this argument to demonstrate several compelling patterns in citation practices in the UN and explore their effects on the political outputs of the institution. We find that resolution drafters are more likely to include citations on texts concerning controversial matters of high politics, and in particular, questions of international security. We show that the inclusion of citations in resolutions corresponds to increased levels of political support in terms of sponsorship and votes in favor, even when the text of the resolution is held constant. Further, we demonstrate and that countries are specifically more likely to support resolutions that cite resolutions previously endorsed by themselves and their allies. Finally, we compare our theoretical logic to the conventional explanation that foreign aid flows shape UN voting behaviors, demonstrating that while foreign aid is related to voting outcomes, even controlling for this measure, the inclusion of citations matters to a large degree in explaining vote choice.

Our theoretical contributions help to understand *why* drafting strategies are adopted

in different contexts, and *how* the use of such strategies can affect political and legal outputs of legislative bodies. We expect that these findings would hold in other institutional contexts. Generally, legislative outputs should contain more extensive citation networks when the matters at hand are more controversial, and when a larger share of the membership needs to support a text for it to be adopted. Our findings also have implications for the role of power in IOs. We show that legal strategies matter in the success of resolutions, even compared to power-based strategies like foreign aid payouts. If states can do even slightly as well by using a legal strategy than a power-based strategy, this implies that there is much more room for equity and skill in shaping political outcomes in the UN than previous work would suggest.

Our novel data contribution of resolution citations and alignments in the UN 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. Future work should test these propositions in other institutional contexts to demonstrate the generalizability of our theory, and should extend our analysis to examine relationships between power, geographical proximity, and patterns of drafting strategies, for example, assessing whether citations to resolutions sponsored by a country's neighbors or former colonial ties increases its likelihood of supporting a resolution. Do the inclusion of citations reflect institutional biases to develop denser legal networks on some issue areas to the exclusion of others, raising potential concerns for institutional legitimacy?<sup>25</sup> These data could also shed light on other political outcomes including compliance, conflict resolution, and funding allocations. Finally, future work should also assess patterns of citation dynamics over time to gain insight into potential future developments in legal outputs.

Our analysis of citation dynamics in the UN has illuminated areas in which the member states have developed a set of norms and practices to facilitate the creation of

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<sup>25</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, while security matters— of import to the great powers and the Global North— are characterized by high rates of citation.

international law. More broadly, we have assessed the relationship between the *design* of legal institutions, the *content* of law, and political *support* for these outcomes. 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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