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Are IOs Democratic? The Politics of Preference Aggregation in Global Governance

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International organizations (IOs) aggregate their principals' preferences to achieve cooperative outcomes. How do IOs accomplish this, and whose preferences receive the most weight? We extend existing research arguing that institutional design features influence which states are best able to advance their preferences in IOs. We specifically examine the deliberations that take place in the IMF's Executive Board. Global South countries are structurally disadvantaged at the Fund—large, wealthy states represent themselves, while smaller states belong to multi-member constituencies. Leadership over these constituencies rotates amongst members. We contend that the policymaking process at the Fund should be most influenced by members that communicate consistent, intense preferences at Board meetings. A given state's ability to do so is a product of whether they represent themselves or are part of a constituency, and, if the latter, whether they lead the constituency. Focusing on issues related to climate change, we leverage text-as-data tools to examine the extent to which countries' preferences over climate issues, measured using the content of their General Debate speeches in the UNGA, are realized at IMF Board meetings. Strikingly, we find evidence that contradicts our theory—countries' climate preferences impact the Fund's agenda regardless of whether they have privileged positions on the Board. These findings suggest that IOs can operate democratically even when institutional design favors certain states.

Keywords: international organizations, democratic deficit, climate, IMF, United Nations

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Introduction

Scholars of international relations have long debated whether international organizations (IOs) are democratic. Skeptics contend that IOs rarely realize the collective will of member state publics (Dahl 1999; Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Miller 2010), since IOs are delegated power from states (Pollack 1997; Hawkins et al. 2006) who themselves are delegated authority from their citizens. Moreover, multilateral institutions typically aggregate members' preferences unevenly, with powerful countries holding the most sway (Mearsheimer 1995; Nielson and Tierney 2003; Copelovitch 2010; Stone 2011; Carnegie and Clark 2023). Such states exert control through formal processes like weighted voting schemes (Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal 2001; Kaya 2015) and informal channels, including the selection and socialization of operational staff (Kilby 2013; Clark and Dolan 2021).

Preference aggregation is particularly challenging when IOs have broad memberships that encompass states with divergent political systems and worldviews (Putnam 1988).² As such, many IOs are “clubs” of like-minded and geopolitically-aligned states, which facilitates easier decision-making (Gowa and Kim 2005; Davis and Pratt 2020). More inclusive IOs, meanwhile, are often mired in stagnation, as evidenced by the World Trade Organization's inaction in recent decades (Gray 2018).³ Other scholars, however, strike a more optimistic tone on the democraticness of IOs, arguing that IOs allow for compromise and burden-sharing in quasi-democratic ways (Moravcsik 2004; Drezner 2008).

Though important, these literatures bring little data to bear on the extent to which individual countries' preferences are expressed in various stages of IO policymaking. Instead, they often place the complex technical processes of multilateral preference aggregation in a black box, focusing only on powerful actors' assumed ex ante preferences and IOs' most

²Also see Olson (1965).

³In a worst case, stagnation can compel states to exit IOs, which can in turn cause them to die off (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019, 2022).

consequential and politicized policies (e.g., judicial economy, important resolutions, or the policy conditions attached to loans).⁴ Building on a nascent literature interested in earlier stage and intermediate policy outcomes in IOs (e.g., Arias [2022b](#); Carnegie, Clark and Kaya [2023](#)), we open up the black box of IO policymaking to examine how preferences are aggregated, adjusted, and moderated in multilateral policymaking.

Our theory highlights the importance of two factors that shape whether principals' preferences are expressed in IOs' decisions: institutional design and the intensity of member state preferences. Cooperation and compromise are cumbersome when IOs have more members and when those members possess heterogeneous preferences (Copelovitch [2010](#); Colgan, Keohane and Van de Graaf [2012](#); Schneider and Tobin [2013](#)).⁵ As such, the architects of IOs include mechanisms to assist in achieving convergence—these can include facilitating side payments and issue linkages (Keohane [1984](#); Davis [2004](#); Dreher, Sturm and Vreeland [2015](#); Dellmuth, Gustafsson and Kural [2020](#)), weighting countries' influence by their economic might (Kaya [2015](#); Pratt [2021](#)), and allotting leadership positions by regional blocs, quotas, or rotational schemes.

The IMF, for example, operates by weighted votes and groups smaller countries into constituencies, each represented by a single Executive Director on its Board, while more powerful states have their own representatives. These design features often sacrifice egalitarianism for the sake of compromise, providing powerful states the ability to unduly influence the policymaking process. We therefore contend that how states are represented in IOs, both in terms of their voting shares and representation in decisionmaking fora, affect whether their preferences are reflected in IOs' policymaking processes. This follows a large literature interested in the drivers and consequences of institutional design in IOs

⁴See Brutger and Morse ([2015](#)) on judicial economy; Dreher, Nunnenkamp and Thiele ([2008](#)) on important UNGA votes; Stone ([2011](#)); Nelson ([2017](#)); Clark ([2022](#)) on conditionality.

⁵This is despite the fact that inclusive IOs are thought to be legitimate and often garner greater public approval (Bechtel and Scheve [2013](#); Tallberg and Zürn [2019](#)).

(Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal 2001; Copelovitch and Putnam 2014).

Second, we theorize that states expressing more consistent and intense preferences on a given issue are more likely to have such preferences reflected in IOs' policies. Member state attitudes on cooperation through an IO often change over time—the result of domestic pressures, external shocks, and leadership changes (Vreeland 2005; Caraway, Rickard and Anner 2012; Bearce and Scott 2018; Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019). This means that when a country is persistent and unwavering in their support for a given policy, it is a uniquely strong signal to other member states and decisionmakers in IOs. We therefore anticipate that when a principal communicates their positions forcefully, and does so more frequently, they should be more likely to affect change in IOs.

Combining these theoretical insights, we expect that states that represent themselves in IOs, whether alone or as leaders of a bloc, are better able to accomplish their foreign policy goals because these design features enhance the states' ability to consistently articulate their positions. In the case of the IMF, states that are part of constituencies and not currently in positions of leadership must first engage in negotiations amongst their group, unlike states that directly represent themselves. Such states are therefore expected to be less likely to successfully translate their foreign policy priorities into institutional outcomes.

We test our contentions by utilizing textual data from two of the most influential IOs on the global stage: the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and International Monetary Fund (IMF). From the former, we leverage the text of speeches from each member state's diplomats in the UNGA to capture their underlying preferences on a given issue and the intensity of those preferences. From the latter, we make use of the text of written statements, or Grays, submitted by Executive Directors before the IMF Board. In empirical tests, we examine when countries' latent preferences as communicated in UNGA speeches are reflected in Grays. By looking at Grays, which are an intermediate piece of the policymaking process at the IMF, we are able to trace how member state preferences

are expressed, diluted, and aggregated in international institutions.

We specifically focus on countries' attitudes on climate change, energy policy, and the environment. We do so for empirical tangibility and since climate issues are increasingly salient in an array of IOs including the UNGA and IMF (Graham and Serdaru 2020; Clark and Zucker 2022; Arias 2022a). For instance, at the 2022 IMF-World Bank Annual Meetings, powerful member states like Germany and the United States pushed for the World Bank to develop new lending instruments to tackle climate risk, and the IMF introduced the Resilience and Sustainability Trust to help climate-vulnerable countries shore up their economies.⁶ Furthermore, we focus on climate change as a normatively and substantively important topic for scholars of international relations to attend to (Javeline 2014; Green and Hale 2017), and one in which the role of IOs such as the IMF is relatively understudied. We therefore approximate countries' preferences on climate issues using UNGA speeches, and then examine when these preferences are expressed in Grays. Our theory holds that countries' climate preferences should be better reflected in Grays when they lead a constituency or represent themselves on the IMF Board than otherwise.

Our findings contradict these expectations—we show that countries' underlying climate attitudes affect the contents of Grays regardless of whether they represent themselves, lead a constituency, or are represented by another country's Executive Director. The results suggest that even putatively biased decision-making processes in IOs, such as the asymmetric constituency system in the IMF, can operate democratically. More broadly, the findings suggest IOs can be effective outlets for policy deliberation on critical issues like climate change.

⁶*The Washington Post*, 2022, [<https://wapo.st/3CVSX3I>]

IOs and Preference Aggregation

At their core, the primary objective for most IOs is to aggregate member states' preferences in order to drive cooperative outcomes (Keohane 1984). IOs' ability to do so, however, hinges on the degree of authority that states delegate to them and the processes through which decisions are made. Large and complex organizations, like the IMF, are often delegated greater authority than those with fewer members in order to help them navigate relatively high transaction costs (Hooghe and Marks 2015), which raises concerns about IOs' ability to adequately reflect majority preferences (e.g., Moravcsik 2004). Some argue that IOs can only gain authority via such delegation (cf. Pollack 1997), while others identify IOs, their leaderships, and operational bureaucrats as agents that can accrue autonomy themselves (Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Honig 2018; Copelovitch and Rickard 2021). IOs may be particularly able to do so when members' preferences are weak and/or heterogeneous on a given issue (Copelovitch 2010; Clark and Zucker 2022). Otherwise, member states' preferences may weigh more heavily on policymaking, and powerful member states may interject themselves in decision-making processes to realize their preferences (Stone 2011).

More generally, powerful states can manipulate formal and informal levers to get their way in IOs. Formally, as at the IMF, states' control over policymaking is often weighted by their economic might; for instance, the U.S. retains around 16 percent of the vote at the Fund, which affords them a veto over major institutional reforms.⁷ Major powers often also control leadership positions and can even affect rank-and-file staffing procedures; for example, the World Bank President is always an American, and U.S. natives are more likely to be promoted within the bureaucracy (Kilby 2013). When powerful states flex their muscles in these ways, it can undermine the democraticness of IOs, threaten their

⁷Also see Lim and Vreeland (2013) on Japan and the ADB; Kaya, Kilby and Kay (2021) on China and the AIIB.

legitimacy (Stone 2011; Tallberg and Zürn 2019), and drive disadvantaged countries to splinter and seek alternative venues (Urpelainen and Van de Graaf 2015). At the Bretton Woods institutions, rising states' demands for greater influence have largely fallen on deaf ears (Kaya 2015), and competitor IOs have proliferated in recent decades (Lipsky 2015; Pratt 2021).

Others argue that IOs are undemocratic because they fail to account for public opinion in member states (Dahl 1999; Miller 2010). In practice, like other foreign policy issues, IOs are often low on the totem pole for voters in developed democracies, and publics are receptive to elite cues on such topics (Guisinger and Saunders 2017; Brutger and Clark 2021).⁸ Elites have stronger (and often more supportive) attitudes towards IOs than publics in these contexts (Dellmuth et al. 2022), so they may be more likely to influence leaders' positions on international cooperation than the masses. In contrast, publics in developing countries are often more attuned to how IOs affect their personal welfare, and they may be more likely to mobilize politically on these issues (Dolan and Milner 2023; Clark, Dolan and Zeitz 2023).

In sum, devising policies that adequately reflect the positions of heterogeneous member states can be extremely challenging for IOs with universal memberships. The task is further complicated by powerful state meddling and the independent efforts of IO leaders and bureaucrats. IOs are therefore often judged to be biased in favor of powerful principals and to assign relatively less weight to the concerns of weaker countries. They are also prone to bureaucrat-driven mission creep and agency drift.

⁸Though recent research shows that populists, via their attacks, are raising the profile of IOs in advanced economies (Voeten 2020; Carnegie, Clark and Kaya 2023; Kaya, Günaydin and Handlin 2023).

Agenda Influence

The ability of states to influence an IO's agenda is central to their ability to achieve desired policy goals. For a state to advance its issue priorities or preferred policy proposals in an IO, it must secure recognition from other countries and the IO's leadership of the importance of said issues. Understanding which countries are influential in setting the agendas of IOs, therefore, informs who shapes the set of policy outcomes produced by those institutions.

Different institutional design features can affect actors' abilities to influence IO agendas. For example, the extent to which member states share authority through collective decision-making procedures affects their degree of influence over the agenda (Koremenos 2015; Hooghe et al. 2017). In the European Union, when member states delegate agenda-setting powers to IOs, focal points are achieved and the choice set narrowed (Garrett and Weingast 1993; Pollack 1997). Temporary leadership positions can accentuate a country's ability to set the agenda; for instance, the country controlling the European Council's presidency can raise the profile of its preferred issues and policy solutions (Tallberg 2003).

Institutional rules often privilege powerful states in agenda-setting. For example, powerful states leverage informal agenda-setting processes to constrain policymaking in the WTO and IMF (Steinberg 2002; Stone 2011). Formal veto power is also often retained by such powerful countries—the U.S. retains a veto at the IMF and World Bank, as does China at the AIIB and the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. These are cases of negative agenda control since vetoes deter other member states from raising issues that veto players prefer to ignore or strike down (Bachrach and Baratz 1962).⁹ We build on this line of research, which conceptualizes how institutional design privileges specific states in agenda-setting. We expand on such logic, theorizing a role for institutional design features in shaping how preferences are aggregated in IOs in the agenda-setting and policy-

⁹Of course, such design features also award veto players positive agenda influence (Iwanami 2012; Allen and Yuen 2020; Binder and Golub 2020).

making processes. We innovate, however, by focusing on states' ability to articulate their preferences in global governance.

Preference Aggregation in the IMF

We specifically focus on how preferences are aggregated at the International Monetary Fund. The Fund is the global lender-of-last-resort and one of the most prominent and influential international institutions on the global stage. In addition to financial assistance, the IMF provides technical support and surveillance of member state economies to help preempt and mitigate financial crises. A given state's ability to realize its preferences at the IMF is therefore substantively important. Recipients of IMF loans often incur substantial economic costs from structural adjustment, and political backlash and volatility are common side effects of Fund programs (Vreeland 2003; Caraway, Rickard and Anner 2012; Kaya, Günaydin and Handlin 2023). Large literatures have therefore probed IMF policy-making and performance (Barro and Lee 2005; Beazer and Woo 2016; Kentikelenis, Stubbs and King 2016).

We contribute to this strand of research by honing in on the contents of documents submitted by Executive Directors (EDs) ahead of IMF Executive Board meetings; these documents are referred to as "Grays." The Board is the highest decision-making body at the Fund and is responsible for its most consequential decisions, including approving loan programs, amending the Articles of Agreement, and altering voting shares. Grays are written in consultation with home governments and lay out a country's pre-meeting positions on the issues to be discussed at a given Board meeting.¹⁰ That Grays are filed and read by Executive Directors in advance of Board deliberations offers an advantage for this empirical study over alternatives, such as meeting minutes, since deliberations blunt disagreements

¹⁰A Gray denotes "a specific view" by the country presenting it, and they are "structured to assist the Board's deliberations by focusing on points of strategic interest" (EBD/15/55 2015, 19).

among member states. Although the submission of a Gray is optional for a given Executive Director, EDs submit them around two-thirds of the time (Chelsky 2008)—they have strong incentives to do since submitting a Gray ensures that staff and the Managing Director (who is also Chair of the Board) are aware of their position on a given issue. Notably, Grays are classified in the IMF Archives for 3–5 years after they are filed. EDs can therefore express their views on sensitive topics without fear of domestic blow-back (Carnegie, Clark and Kaya 2023).¹¹ Data on the contents of Grays between 1987 and 2017 comes from Carnegie, Clark and Kaya (2023).

Not all countries represent themselves at the IMF; most countries are party to a constituency, which is a grouping of countries. Leadership over a given constituency rotates amongst the members of the bloc. Only seven powerful countries have their own EDs: the U.S., Japan, Germany, China, France, the U.K., and Saudi Arabia. The remaining 15 EDs lead constituencies, which often (but not always) follow regional configurations.¹² When a country leads a constituency, the ED hails from their country and writes Grays in consultation with their home government, though they are tasked with representing the interests of all members of the constituency. That said, it is often assumed that the country leading a given constituency privileges its own narrow interests when composing Grays (Carnegie, Clark and Kaya 2023). This especially holds because, as Momani (2010, 172) notes, EDs “have little room to diverge from the positions of their ministries of finance and central banks.”

Overall, then, two critical power asymmetries arise from the design of the IMF Executive Board. The first is between countries that have their own EDs and those that are party

¹¹Grays are made public after three years unless the topic is the use of IMF resources, the Policy Support Instrument, or the Policy Coordination Instrument; such Grays are made public after five years.

¹²From 1992-2002, EDs were appointed by country representatives for those countries that had their own EDs, or they were elected by the members of the constituency. Since 2012, all EDs are elected by member countries or by groups of countries, though this has done little to change the outcome of the appointment process in most cases (Kaya 2015). The number of EDs was 24 prior to the reconfiguration in 2012.

to constituencies; the latter countries' preferences are diluted and mixed with the positions of other members of a constituency before they are articulated in Grays. The second asymmetry is between countries that lead their constituencies and those that do not. Leadership of a constituency places the member state in the driver's seat of both the process of drafting the Gray and its final contents—purposefully or not, this could lead their preferences to be disproportionately reflected in the Gray.¹³

Theory and Expectations

We posit that institutional design features that advantage certain countries in IOs' agenda-setting and policymaking processes play an important role in shaping IO deliberations. We specifically contend that when states can more forcefully and consistently express their policy positions, they are more likely to influence deliberations in IOs. Institutional procedures that aggregate member states into blocs, such as constituencies at the IMF, attenuate a given state's ability to consistently and forcefully advocate for their preferred issues and policies. Indeed, members of a bloc must accommodate heterogeneous preferences within their group before subsequently negotiating with other member states. Furthermore, the leadership of such blocs may vary over time, and this awards certain states the ability to disproportionately influence deliberations.

When states can directly represent their perspective in negotiations, they are able to avoid *ex ante* jockeying with other countries, and their position in subsequent negotiations should directly reflect the country's foreign policy priorities. The final policy agreement, institutional reform, or agenda item, *ceteris paribus*, is therefore more likely to reflect the preferences of states that do not participate in such "first round" aggregation processes.

We can directly test this expectation at the IMF due to the unique institutional features

¹³For this reason, some countries pour considerable resources into campaigns to lead constituencies (Vreeland 2011).

described above. Because states that are represented by a constituency must share an Executive Director among the members of the constituency, they are less able to advance their policy priorities than are states with their own Executive Directors. The Grays should reflect this variation and should be more likely to mirror the underlying policy priorities of states outside of constituencies than of states within constituencies.

We specifically focus our hypotheses and empirical tests on states' positions on climate change and energy politics. The IMF has become an increasingly important player in the climate domain in recent decades; environmental challenges are increasingly seen as macro-critical by IMF staff and management alike, as reflected by the contents of Fund working papers and surveillance documents (Clark and Zucker 2022), as well as by Christine Lagarde and Kristalina Georgieva's rhetoric on the topic (cf. Copelovitch and Rickard 2021). Countries, likewise, have begun to raise climate as an issue in their Grays—Figures 1 and 2 show that the prevalence of such rhetoric has increased over time and that climate is most often discussed by leading Western powers like the U.S. and especially climate vulnerable states like India.

Applying our general theoretical framework to climate, we anticipate that countries' preferences on climate and environmental issues are not equally reflected in the contents of Grays. Instead, we argue that the mechanisms of representation at the Fund should result in structural bias that favors the positions of large, wealthy states that have their own EDs. The correlation between these countries' underlying preferences and the contents of their Grays should be stronger than for members of constituencies. If these expectations are incorrect and the IMF operates democratically, we should find no difference in such states' abilities to represent their preferences in the Grays.

Hypothesis 1. *Grays are more likely to reflect the preferences of states outside of constituencies than states inside of constituencies.*

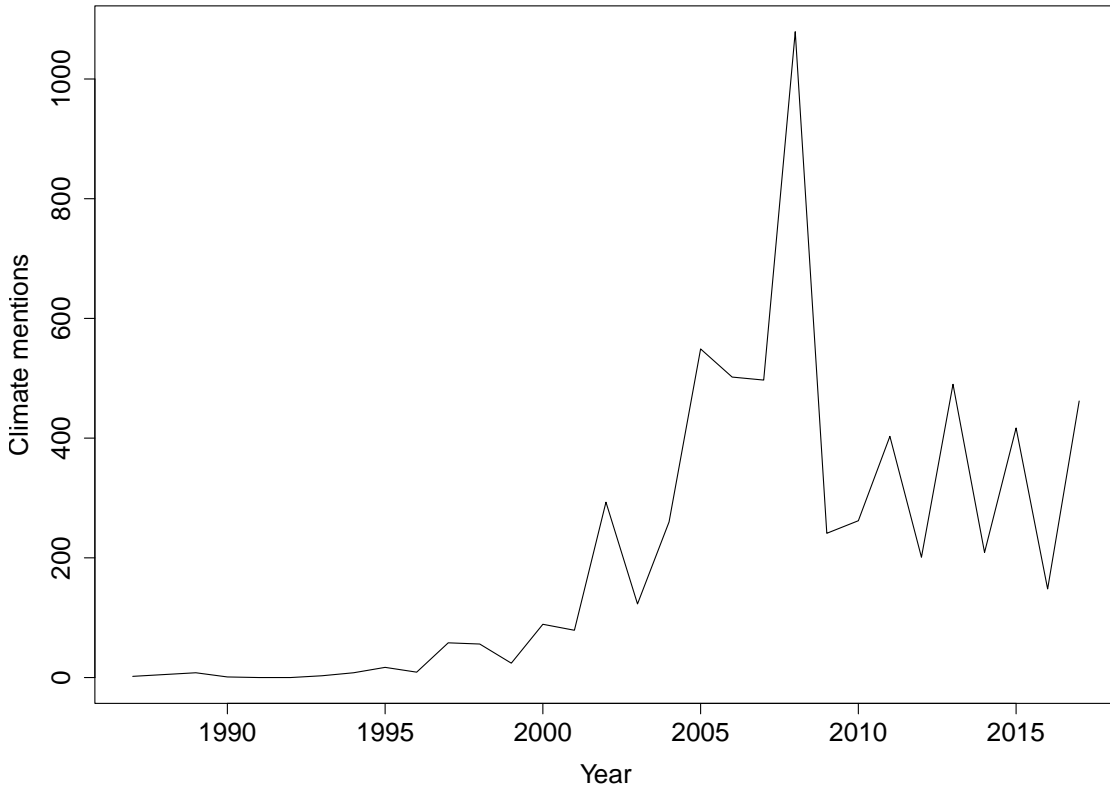


Figure 1: Mentions of climate-related issues in Grays over time 1987–2017. We include the following keywords in our climate dictionary, which we constructed based on a close reading of a random sample of 100 Grays: "adaptation", "bali action plan", "bali roadmap", "cap and trade", "carbon", "clean development mechanism", "climate change", "climate finance", "climate politics", "conference of the parties", "disaster risk", "disaster hazard", "emissions trading scheme", "framework convention on climate change", "ghg", "global average temperature", "global environmental facility", "global warming", "green climate fund", "greenhouse effect", "greenhouse gas", "environmental politic", "intergovernmental panel on climate change", "ipcc", "kyoto protocol", "mitigation", "nationally determined contribution", "natural disasters", "ndc", "paris accord", "paris agreement", "renewables", "renewable energy", "unfccc".

We also hypothesize an important role for for a second design feature at the Fund: leadership over a constituency. Compared to constituency members that do not lead their constituencies, we anticipate that constituency leaders’ underlying preferences should be better reflected in the contents of Grays. EDs should privilege the positions of their home country out of a desire to please their government and out of a sense of loyalty to their

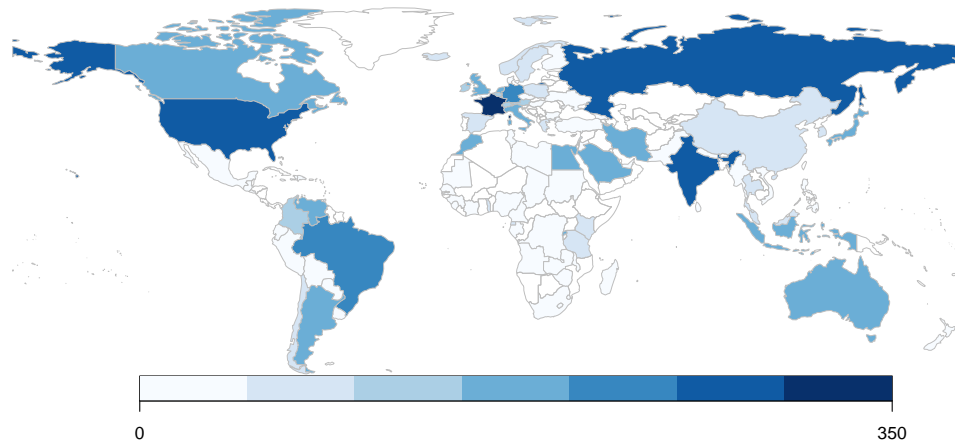


Figure 2: Mentions of climate-related issues in Grays by country 1987–2017. The relevant keywords appear in the caption to Figure 1. In this plot, for ease of interpretation, we attribute Grays to the country submitting them (i.e., to the country leading a constituency). Countries that have their own EDs also receive credit for their Grays.

native country.¹⁴ EDs have the final say over the content of Grays and can realize these preferences.

Hypothesis 2. *Grays are more likely to reflect the preferences of constituency leaders than non-leading members of a constituency.*

There are also reasons to believe countries might not wield their structural influence in IOs as freely as our hypotheses suggest. Countries have an interest in protecting the legitimacy and perceived neutrality of IOs (Buchanan and Keohane 2006; Stone 2011). More-

¹⁴See Clark and Dolan (2021) for similar mechanisms.

over, IOs are deliberative bodies in which country representatives seek to maintain friendly relationships. This enables countries to work towards consensus in Board meetings as well as facilitates side payments and issue linkages (cf. (Keohane 1984; Davis 2004)). Especially within constituencies, country officers must continuously interact, which may create incentives for more democratic preference aggregation processes. EDs are also subject to socialization pressures; they may be socialized by the organization, its leading member states, or other country representatives. This can lead EDs to become more invested in organizational missions and more prone to cooperative and democratic outcomes (Johnston 2008; Chwieroth 2015; Nelson 2017; Clark 2021). Last, officials may have long time horizons and wish to see their preferences reflected in Grays even after they rotate out of a leadership position. This can drive them to assign other countries' preferences equal weight when in positions of power themselves. Such reciprocity is common in IOs (Abbott and Snidal 1998; Bagwell and Staiger 2009).

Data

We expect that states that are the most threatened by the effects of climate change have the strongest preferences on the issue and are therefore the most likely to demand climate action by in IMF policymaking. Developing states and states in geographically vulnerable regions are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change—including from rising sea-levels, drought, and extreme weather events (IPCC 2018). Indeed, small and developing states have been recognized as policy leaders in the climate sphere for decades (Corbett, Xu and Weller 2019; Arias 2022a; Long 2022), and they are most in need of adaptation and mitigation support.

To measure preference intensity and consistency on climate issues, we employ unique data capturing expressed preferences on these topics. Specifically, we utilize data on states'

discussions of climate change in their General Debate speeches delivered in the UN General Assembly. These speeches are not linked to particular resolutions or votes and are therefore not anchored to a specific policy proposal. Rather, they reflect independent observations of a state's underlying priorities and positions (Smith 2006; Chelotti, Dasandi and Jankin Mikhaylov 2022).

We believe states' expressed stances in official speeches to be an adequate proxy for their underlying policy positions and priorities for several reasons. First, states rarely miss the opportunity to participate in the General Debate, and they invest substantial resources to produce and deliver credible statements on topics of interest. Each year, nearly all countries participate in the Debate, and most states send high-level representatives to the session, with 44.3% represented by heads of state or government, 49.3% by vice-presidents, deputy prime ministers, and foreign ministers, and only 6.4% by country representatives to the UN (Baturu, Dasandi and Mikhaylov 2017, 3). This is a credible and costly signal of the value countries place on such speeches—they provide a unique opportunity to raise foreign policy priorities before an elite global audience.

Second, and relatedly, the decision to address a particular topic in the General Debate entails tradeoffs. Speeches are limited by institutional norms to fifteen minutes, and though some countries ignore the limitation on length, speech-length has declined over time. Speech-time, then, is a finite resource—countries cannot address every issue in a given speech because of time considerations. Allocating the limited resource of speech-time to discuss a particular topic signals that a country considers it to be a core foreign policy priority. Prioritization of a given topic is then noted by other states, institutional bureaucrats, domestic audiences, media, and civil society groups (Kentikelenis and Voeten 2021).¹⁵

¹⁵Countries may incur audience costs domestically, or be subject to international shaming, if they renege on commitments made in the General Debate. See e.g., Tomz (2007); Chaudoin (2014); Tingley and Tomz (2020); Casler and Clark (2021).

Third, there are methodological advantages to using the General Debate to study state preferences compared to other research strategies. The General Debate facilitates comparison of positions across countries and years in a consistent setting (Simmons and Shaffer 2023). Every country has an equal opportunity to speak for an equal period of time, mitigating biases against smaller, resource-constrained states that may affect other measures of state preferences (Gray and Baturo 2021). General Debate speeches can be assessed directly, without mediation by media or propaganda outlets, and this allows for much greater nuance than preference measures based on roll-call voting (e.g., Voeten 2013).

As such, the General Debate corpus is increasingly utilized by international relations scholars to capture states' foreign policy priorities and attention to specific topics (e.g., Arias 2022a; Chelotti, Dasandi and Jankin Mikhaylov 2022; Finke 2023; Debre and Dijkstra 2023). For example, Simmons and Shaffer (2023) use the corpus to measure states' concerns about their borders, as well as the sentiments, frames, and correlates associated with this discourse. Kentikelenis and Voeten (2021) utilize these data to illustrate preferences vis-à-vis the international economic order, and they validate that the expressed preferences in these speeches correlate with statements of policy preferences in other institutional settings.¹⁶

To operationalize our text-based measures of climate preferences, we begin with the texts from the UN General Debate Corpus (Baturo, Dasandi and Mikhaylov 2017), which consists of all speeches given by state representatives in the General Debate from 1970-2014. This corpus comprises 7,897 speeches and 205,913 distinct speech segments, which are analogous to paragraphs. Following the processes described in Arias (2022a), we use text keywords to identify speeches that discuss climate.¹⁷ We construct three independent variables based on these data—the number of paragraphs that mention climate, the number

¹⁶We show the correlation of our text-based measure with other geophysical measures of climate change exposure in Appendix Figure 6.

¹⁷More detail on the speech data and processing can be found in the Appendix.

of times climate is mentioned in total, and the proportion of text devoted to climate. The intensity of countries' preferences over climate change varies greatly, as it makes up between 1% and 73% of countries' speeches. As we illustrate in Figure 3, climate change has been an important topic in the General Debate, with an average of 126 and a maximum of 169 out of 193 countries speaking about climate change each year, and this share is increasing over time.

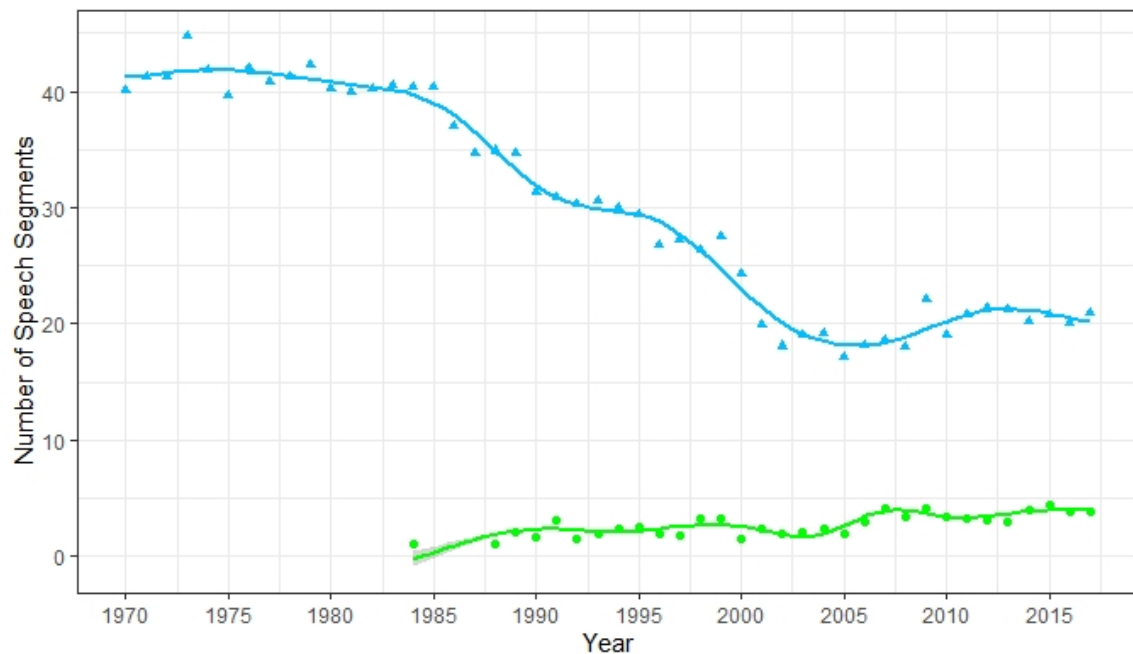


Figure 3: Blue triangles are total number of speech segments in a given year, green dots are number of speech segments that discuss climate change. Trend lines are Loess smoothed. Figure adapted from Arias (2022a).

Our main dependent variable is a count of the number of climate-related mentions in Grays at the IMF. We utilize the same keywords as discussed previously for the UNGA variables. The Grays measure is constant in a given year for all members of a constituency since each member of the bloc's preferences are supposed to be reflected in a given Gray. If countries' underlying preferences on climate are reflected at the Fund, we should identify a positive relationship between our UNGA measures and the Grays measure.

In some specifications, we also include an array of theoretically-motivated covariates. First, we control for the number of Grays filed by a country or constituency in a given year. The number of climate mentions should increase with the number of Grays filed overall, and accounting for the number of Grays allows us to detect changes in the number of climate mentions per Gray on average. Second, since richer and more developed countries have both greater bureaucratic capacity to write Grays and are more climate-focused, we control for GDP per capita.¹⁸ We similarly include Polity2 democracy scores since democratic states tend to do better on climate change (Battig and Bernauer 2009).¹⁹ Next, we account for UN voting distance from the U.S. in the UNGA; ties to the U.S. affect an array of outcomes at the Bretton Woods IOs from loan size to the stringency of conditionality (Andersen, Hansen and Markussen 2006; Fleck and Kilby 2006; Kilby 2009; Copelovitch 2010; Stone 2011; Clark and Dolan 2021).²⁰ Countries party to an IMF program might speak up more at the Fund, so we also include a binary for program participation.²¹ Last, we include a binary measure for right-wing government since concern for climate can vary with political ideology.²²

Because our DV is an over-dispersed count variable, we utilize negative binomial models in subsequent testing. Descriptive statistics for our data can be found in Appendix Table 5. The formulas for our tests of Hypotheses 1-2 appear below.

$$DV_{ct} = \beta_1 Member_{it} + \beta_2 UNGA_{it} + \beta_3 Member_{it} UNGA_{it} + \alpha(\mathbf{r}) + \delta(\mathbf{t}) + u_{it} \quad (1)$$

¹⁸Data comes from the WDI.

¹⁹Data comes from Jagers and Gurr (1995).

²⁰Also see Kilby (2006, 2011); Lim and Vreeland (2013) on the ADB; Kaya, Kilby and Kay (2021) on the AIIB.

²¹Data comes from Kentikelenis, Stubbs and King (2016).

²²Data comes from the Database of Political Institutions.

$$DV_{ct} = \beta_1 Leader_{it} + \beta_2 UNGA_{it} + \beta_3 Leader_{it} UNGA_{it} + \alpha(i) + \delta(t) + u_{it} \quad (2)$$

DV_{ct} measures the number of Grays submitted by constituency c in year t , $Member_{it}$ is whether country i is a member of a constituency in year t , $Leader_{it}$ is whether country i leads a constituency in year t , $UNGA_{it}$ is the strength of climate preferences expressed in the UNGA General Debate by country i in year t , $\alpha(r)$ is a vector of region fixed effects, $\alpha(i)$ is a vector of country fixed effects, $\delta(t)$ is a vector of year fixed effects, and u_{it} represents the unobserved error term. In most models, the theoretically-motivated covariates discussed above are also included. Region fixed effects take the place of country fixed effects in our tests of $H1$ since constituency membership is constant within countries over time for all but a select few cases. In contrast, leadership of constituencies rotates over time. The DV is measured at the constituency level in all tests since the number and content of Grays are the same for each constituency member. When countries have their own ED, this DV is equivalent to a country-level measure.

Empirical Results

We begin by discussing our tests of our first hypothesis, which focus on constituency membership, and then proceed to analysis of the second hypothesis, with tests focused on constituency leadership.

Constituency Membership

Results from our focal tests of our first hypothesis, with all covariates included, appear in Table 1. Bivariate results can be found in Appendix Table 6. The effect of the inter-

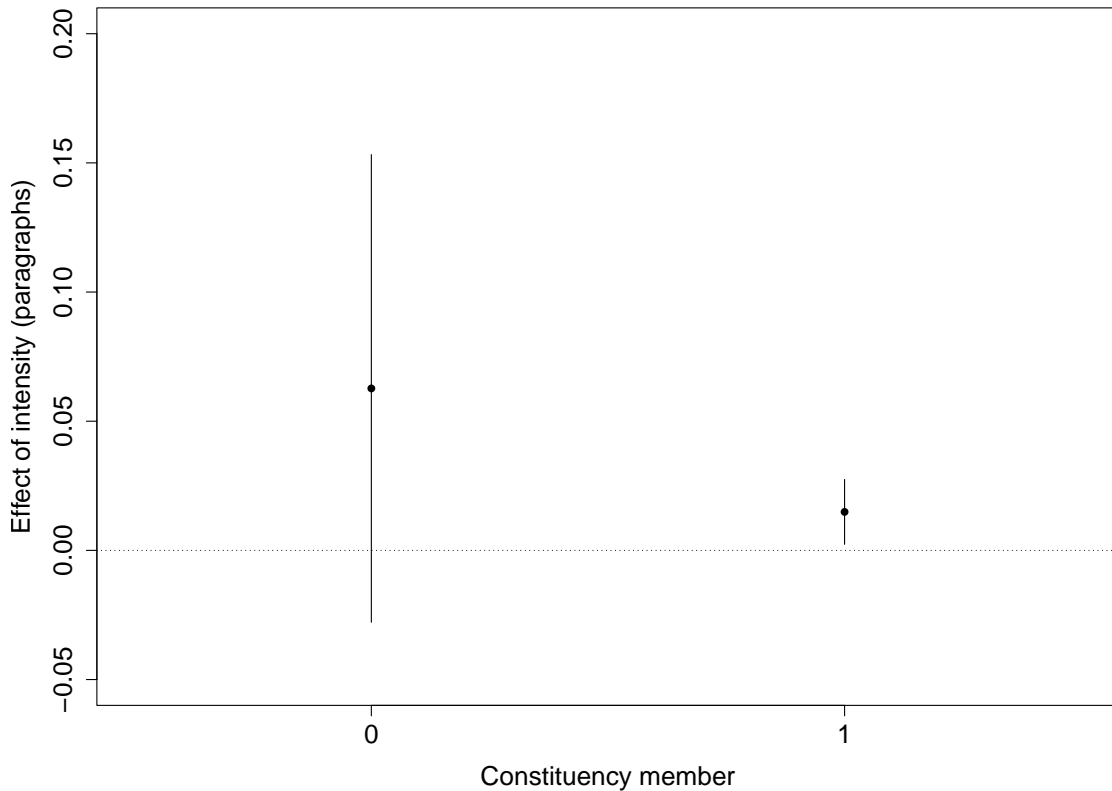


Figure 4: Marginal effect of climate intensity in the UNGA (count of paragraphs with climate mentions) on the number of climate mentions in Grays. Full model results can be found in Table 1, column 1.

action between climate preference intensity as expressed in the UNGA and constituency membership at the IMF on the number of climate mentions in Grays is plotted in Figure 4 (derived from the model in column 1 of Table 1). Interaction plots for the other two UNGA preference measures are similar and appear in Appendix Figures 7-8.

In each case, the results contradict our expectations. Across all three measures of UNGA climate preference intensity, we identify a positive relationship between preference intensity and climate discussion in Grays regardless of whether a country belongs to a constituency or not (see Figure 4). The negative and statistically insignificant sign on the interaction terms in Table 1 tells us that there is not a significant difference between

	Number of climate mentions in Grays		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
UNGA climate intensity (paragraphs)	0.063 (0.046)		
UNGA climate intensity (mentions)		0.040 (0.027)	
UNGA climate intensity (proportion)			1.348 (0.849)
Constituency member	0.415*** (0.077)	0.416*** (0.074)	0.419*** (0.073)
Number of Grays	0.011*** (0.0003)	0.011*** (0.0003)	0.011*** (0.0003)
GDPPC	-0.0002 (0.0003)	-0.0003 (0.0003)	-0.0003 (0.0003)
Polity2	-0.0001 (0.002)	-0.0002 (0.002)	0.00002 (0.002)
UN ideal pt distance from U.S.	-0.024 (0.016)	-0.024 (0.016)	-0.023 (0.016)
IMF program	0.048 (0.030)	0.048 (0.030)	0.049 (0.030)
Right-wing government	-0.039* (0.022)	-0.040* (0.022)	-0.040* (0.022)
UNGA climate intensity (paragraphs) X Member	-0.048 (0.046)		
UNGA climate intensity (mentions) X Member		-0.031 (0.027)	
UNGA climate intensity (proportion) X Member			-1.054 (0.854)
Region fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	4826	4826	4826

***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1

Table 1: Regression results with controls (constituency membership). Robust standard errors are clustered at the region-level. Model type is negative binomial.

constituency members and non-members in their ability to realize their climate preferences in Grays. Rather, there is a positive association between climate mentions in Grays and the frequency of climate discussions in the UNGA General Debate for both constituency members and non-members — states that more actively articulate their climate policy positions in the UNGA are better positioned to influence the IMF agenda. This is true even controlling for the general volume of Grays activity.

These findings suggest that while countries with strong climate preferences *do* seek to advance those preferences in Greys, constituencies *do not* significantly dilute members' foreign policy priorities when integrating them into Grays. In fact, there is no evidence that IMF member states that have their own EDs do a better job reflecting their foreign policy goals in Grays than do members of constituencies. This is partial evidence, then, that the IMF Board operates according to democratic principles despite rules that advantage more powerful countries. The Fund's Board is then perhaps not dominated by powerful countries like the U.S. and G5 to the extent that prior work would suggest (cf. Copelovitch 2010; Stone 2011; Kaya 2015). This also implies that weaker and developing countries are not precluded from influencing the agenda at the IMF, and that their foreign policy priorities — such as climate mitigation — could be meaningfully addressed through such institutions.²³

Constituency Leadership

We perform nearly identical tests of our second hypothesis — whether constituency leaders are better able to influence Grays content — by swapping the constituency membership binary for a constituency leadership one. The baseline results with all covariates included can be found in Table 2; bivariate results can be found in Appendix Table 7. Figure 5 illustrates the main interaction between constituency leadership on the IMF Executive Board and climate attentiveness in the UNGA as measured by the number of paragraphs in a country's

²³On weak state influence, see Schneider (2011); Clark and Zucker (2022).

UNGA speech that contain climate mentions (derived from the model in column 1 of Table 2). Interaction plots for the other preference intensity measures are again substantively similar and can be found in the Appendix, Figures 9-10.

	Number of climate mentions in Grays		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
UNGA climate intensity (paragraphs)	0.023*** (0.008)		
UNGA climate intensity (mentions)		0.013*** (0.004)	
UNGA climate intensity (proportion)			0.426*** (0.139)
Constituency leader	-0.006 (0.039)	-0.006 (0.037)	-0.007 (0.038)
Number of Grays	0.011*** (0.0004)	0.011*** (0.0004)	0.011*** (0.0004)
GDPPC	0.008** (0.004)	0.008** (0.004)	0.008** (0.004)
Polity2	-0.006* (0.003)	-0.006* (0.003)	-0.005* (0.003)
UN ideal pt distance from U.S.	-0.012 (0.024)	-0.012 (0.024)	-0.011 (0.024)
IMF program	0.033 (0.033)	0.032 (0.033)	0.033 (0.033)
Right-wing government	-0.056** (0.026)	-0.056** (0.026)	-0.057** (0.026)
UNGA climate intensity (paragraphs) X Leader	0.001 (0.018)		
UNGA climate intensity (mentions) X Leader		0.002 (0.009)	
UNGA climate intensity (proportion) X Leader			0.006 (0.264)
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	4826	4826	4826

***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1

Table 2: Regression results with controls (constituency leadership). Robust standard errors are clustered at the country-level. Model type is negative binomial.

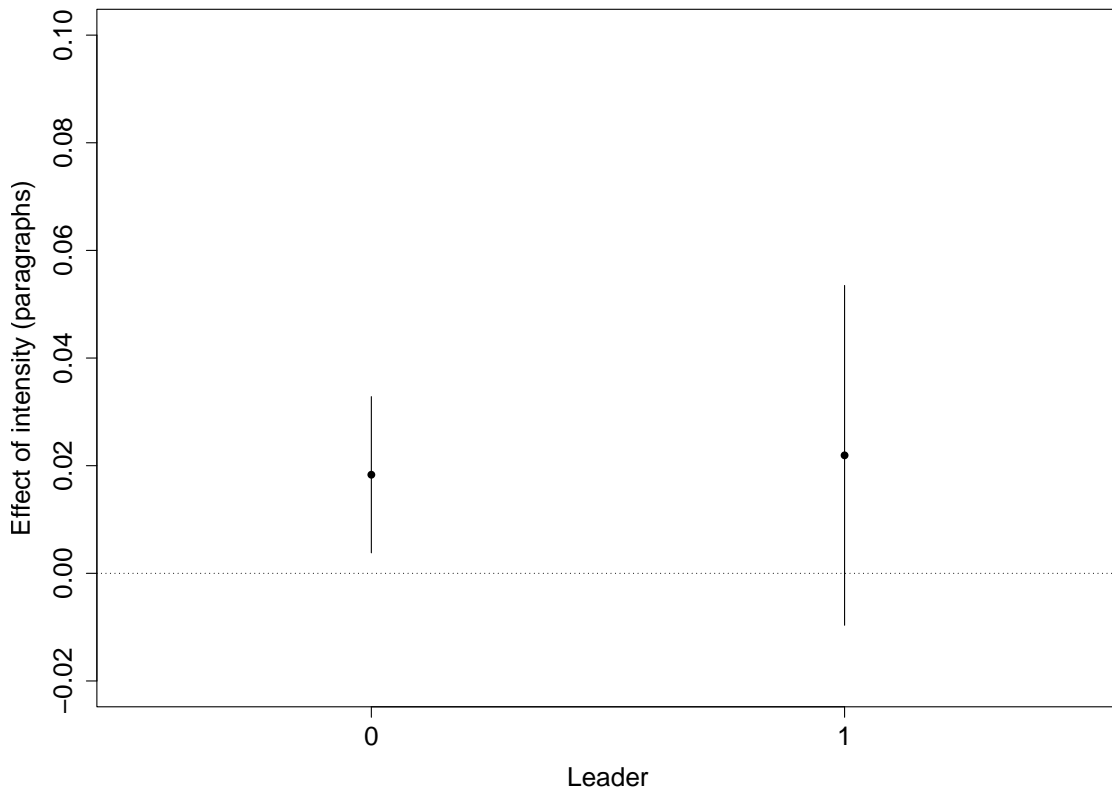


Figure 5: Marginal effect of climate intensity in the UNGA (count of paragraphs with climate mentions) on the number of climate mentions in Grays. Full model results can be found in Table 2, column 1.

As in our tests of H1, we again find evidence that contradicts our expectations — climate preference intensity is positively associated with mentions of climate in Grays for countries that lead constituencies and those that do not, as evidenced by Figure 5. The relationship achieves statistical significance at conventional levels for countries that do not lead constituencies; the relationship is less precisely estimated for leaders, perhaps because leadership is relatively rare for any given country. The interaction terms, however, have coefficients only slightly larger than zero and fail to achieve statistical significance, which suggests no real difference between constituency leaders and other IMF members. Substantively, a one paragraph increase in climate intensity (using the paragraph measure) corresponds to around a three percent increase in the number of climate mentions in a country’s Grays if they are not the leader of a constituency.

Once again, these results point to democratic preference aggregation at the IMF’s Executive Board. EDs appear to integrate the preferences of their constituency members fairly rather than leveraging their leadership over a constituency to elevate their own foreign policy priorities.

Additional Tests

We conduct two additional tests that further illustrate the democraticness of agenda-setting on the IMF Board. The first drops the interaction terms to examine whether there is an association between our UNGA climate preference intensity measures and climate mentions in Grays on average. The results can be found in the Appendix, Table 8. All three of the climate preference measures are positively associated with discussion of climate topics in Grays. In substantive terms, an additional paragraph devoted to climate in the UNGA General Debate is associated with around a two percent increase in climate mentions in Grays; adding one climate mention in the UNGA is associated with a one percent increase in climate mentions in Grays; and a 100 percent increase in the percent of text devoted

to climate at the UNGA is associated with around a 44 percent increase in climate mentions at the Fund. These findings again highlight how all countries, regardless of stature or institutional privilege, can influence the agenda at the Fund.

Second, we perform a test that attempts to aggregate preference within constituencies in ways that reflect power inequalities between states. This test specifically aims to account for potential variation *within* constituencies in states' abilities to advocate for climate change in Grays—that is, to capture that possibility that more 'important' members of a constituency are more likely to be listened to by the constituency's ED. Specifically, we weight each country's UNGA climate intensity score by their GDP share of their constituency (i.e., country GDP / total GDP of all constituency members) and then sum across all constituency members. This yields a constituency-level climate intensity measure that accounts for variation in countries' size and influence. We then regress climate mentions in Grays on these constituency-level measures with constituency fixed effects included. Results appear in Table 9, and they are similar to the pooled country-level tests discussed above. All three climate intensity measures are again positively associated with climate mentions in Grays. This shows that not only do state-level climate concerns matter, but constituency-level concerns about climate in the aggregate are associated with more climate mentions in their Grays. These results also suggest that while structural power in terms of design features may not impact IO deliberations, imbalances in economic might do matter.

Conclusion

This paper builds on existing research by positing an important role for institutional design in shaping how preferences are aggregated in IOs. It is well-established that design features like voting protocols, representation in decision-making bodies, and membership

size impact a given state's ability to set the agenda and influence policymaking in IOs. We therefore anticipated that the design of the IMF Executive Board would dilute the influence of countries that (1) belong to constituencies and (2) are not in leadership positions in those constituencies.

Counterintuitively, we offered evidence suggesting that even when design features appear biased in favor of certain countries, IOs can still operate in quasi-democratic ways. At the IMF, regardless of where a country sits on the Executive Board, their preferences on climate change are reflected in documents reflecting the Board's agenda.

These findings strike an optimistic tone for relatively weak countries, many of which happen to be especially climate-vulnerable (e.g., small island developing states). Such states devote their efforts in many international forums to calling attention to climate change and its detrimental effects. At the IMF, these countries seem to be gaining ground, whether we look at agenda-setting power or policy initiatives like the Resilience and Sustainability Trust. This is a positive development for scholars and policymakers interested in combating the world's greatest existential threat as well as those keen to preserve the legitimacy and neutrality of leading IOs (Buchanan and Keohane 2006; Dellmuth et al. 2022). This is especially important as populist and anti-globalization leaders call attention to inequities in many multilateral organizations—biased governance features need not equal democratic deficits.

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Appendices

Speech Data

We utilize the data collected by Baturo, Dasandi and Mikhaylov (2017), which consists of all speeches given by state representatives in the General Debate from 1970-2014. Each year at the opening of the UNGA in September, the General Debate gives the opportunity for each state to speak in a largely unconstrained setting (Smith 2006). This data is pre-processed by a text tiling procedure, which identifies features based on semantic similarity to divide speeches into segments that are analogous to paragraphs (Hearst 1997). After separating the speeches into segments, we extract the speeches on climate change from the full corpus by identifying segments that contain any of a set of the following keywords: "adaptation", "bali action plan", "bali roadmap", "cap and trade", "carbon", "clean development mechanism", "climate change", "climatenchange", "climate changen", "climate finance", "climate politics", "conference of the parties", "disaster risk", "disaster hazard", "emissions trading scheme", "framework convention on climate change", "ghg", "global average temperature", "global environmental facility", "global warming", "green climate fund", "greenhouse effect", "greenhouse gas", "greenhousengas", "environmental politic", "environmentalpolitic", "intergovernmental panel on climate change", "ipcc", "kyoto protocol", "mitigation", "nationally determined contribution", "natural disasters", "ndc", "paris accord", "paris agreement", "renewables", "renewable energy", "renewablenenergy", "unfccc." Descriptive statistics of the full corpus and the climate subset are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: All Speech Paragraphs

	Number of Segments per Speech	Number of Speeches per Year	Avg. Number of Segments per Year	Total Segments by Year	Avg. Segments Per Country
Min.	4	120	17.1	2963	10.0
1st Qu.	16	191	19.1	3271	22.7
Median	19	193	20.8	3552	28.6
Mean	20	190	21.2	3593	27.8
3rd Qu.	23	194	21.4	3662	32.1
Max.	106	196	44.7	5550	51.9

Table 4: Climate Speech Paragraphs Only

	Number of Segments per Speech	Prop. of Speech	Number of Speeches per Year	Avg. Number of Segments per Year	Total Segments per Year	Avg. Segments per Country
Min.	1	0.01	1	1.0	1	1.0
1st Qu.	2	0.10	108	3.4	229	2.4
Median	3	0.17	147	4.1	384	3.3
Mean	4	0.20	127	3.7	332	3.7
3rd Qu.	5	0.27	158	4.3	428	4.4
Max.	16	0.73	170	4.5	532	8.3

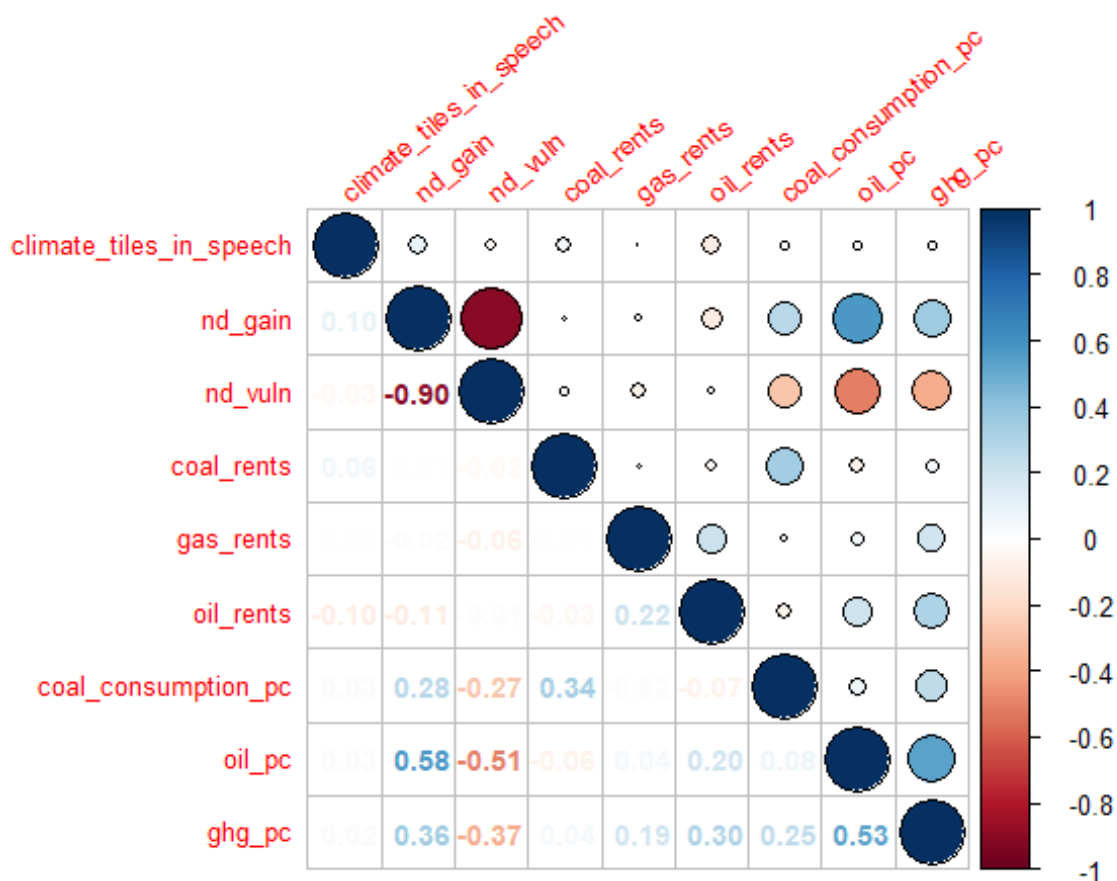


Figure 6: Correlation of text based preference measure with geophysical correlates of climate preference intensity.

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Pctl(25)	Pctl(75)	Max
Number of climate mentions (Grays)	7,252	3.652	6.708	0	0	5	55
UNGA climate intensity (paragraphs)	6,914	0.618	1.362	0.000	0.000	1.000	16.000
UNGA climate intensity (mentions)	6,914	0.989	2.477	0.000	0.000	1.000	40.000
UNGA climate intensity (proportion)	6,914	0.034	0.078	0.000	0.000	0.036	0.727
Constituency leader	7,252	0.163	0.370	0	0	0	1
Number of Grays	4,971	61.195	50.657	1.000	14.000	97.000	233.000
GDPPC	7,252	13.418	29.546	1.654	3.497	8.644	336.727
Polity2	7,252	1.997	7.209	-10	-6	9	10
UN ideal pt distance from U.S.	7,252	2.765	0.862	0.007	2.121	3.392	4.848
IMF program	7,252	0.151	0.358	0	0	0	1
Right-wing government	7,252	0.233	0.423	0	0	0	1

Table 5: Descriptive statistics.

	Number of climate mentions in Grays		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
UNGA climate intensity (paragraphs)	0.062 (0.045)		
UNGA climate intensity (mentions)		0.039 (0.026)	
UNGA climate intensity (proportion)			1.350* (0.820)
Constituency member	0.421*** (0.077)	0.420*** (0.074)	0.426*** (0.073)
Number of Grays	0.010*** (0.0003)	0.011*** (0.0003)	0.011*** (0.0003)
UNGA climate intensity (paragraphs) X Member	-0.049 (0.045)		
UNGA climate intensity (mentions) X Member		-0.031 (0.026)	
UNGA climate intensity (proportion) X Member			-1.088 (0.825)
Region fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	4826	4826	4826

***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1

Table 6: Bivariate regression results (constituency member). Robust standard errors are clustered at the region-level. Model type is negative binomial.

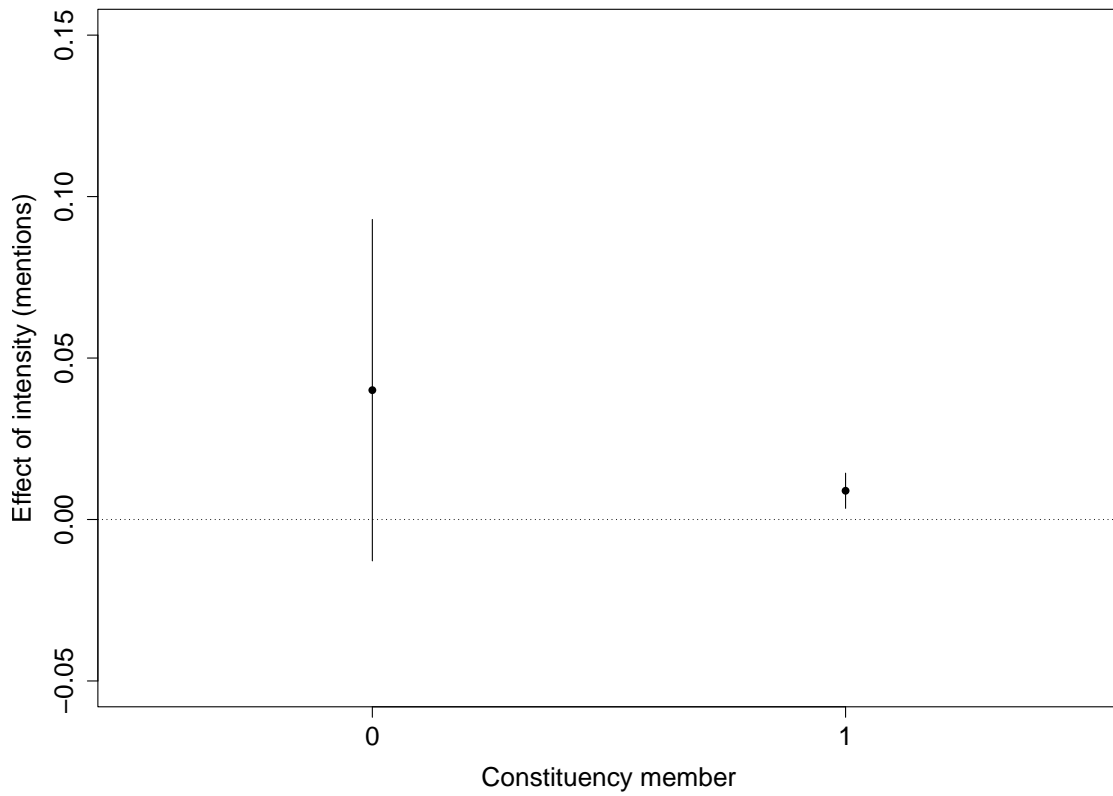


Figure 7: Marginal effect of climate intensity in the UNGA (count of climate mentions) on the number of climate mentions in Grays depending on whether a country belongs to a constituency or not. Full model results can be found in Table 1, column 2.

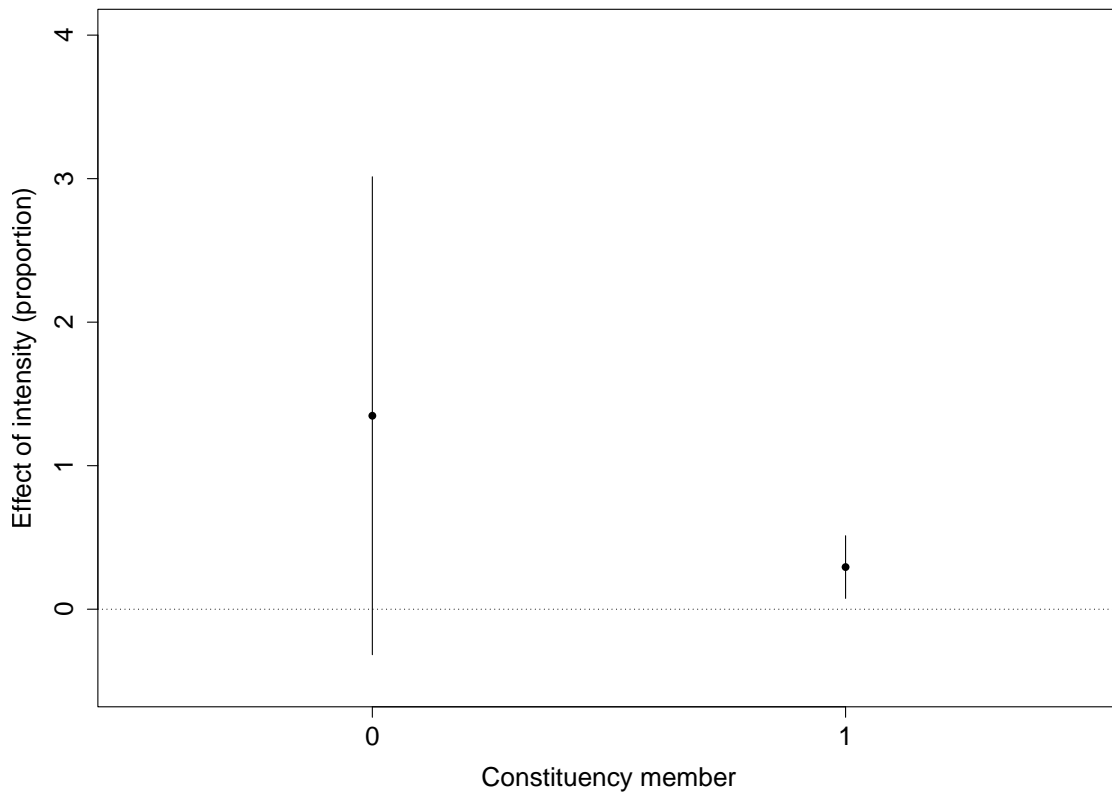


Figure 8: Marginal effect of climate intensity in the UNGA (proportion of paragraphs with climate mentions) on the number of climate mentions in Grays depending on whether a country belongs to a constituency or not. Full model results can be found in Table 1, column 3.

	Number of climate mentions in Grays		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
UNGA climate intensity (paragraphs)	0.023*** (0.008)		
UNGA climate intensity (mentions)		0.013*** (0.004)	
UNGA climate intensity (proportion)			0.418*** (0.140)
Constituency leader	-0.007 (0.039)	-0.007 (0.037)	-0.008 (0.038)
Number of Grays	0.011*** (0.0004)	0.011*** (0.0004)	0.011*** (0.0004)
UNGA climate intensity (paragraphs) X Leader	0.001 (0.018)		
UNGA climate intensity (mentions) X Leader		0.002 (0.009)	
UNGA climate intensity (proportion) X Leader			0.008 (0.265)
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	4826	4826	4826

***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1

Table 7: Bivariate regression results (constituency leadership). Robust standard errors are clustered at the country-level. Model type is negative binomial.

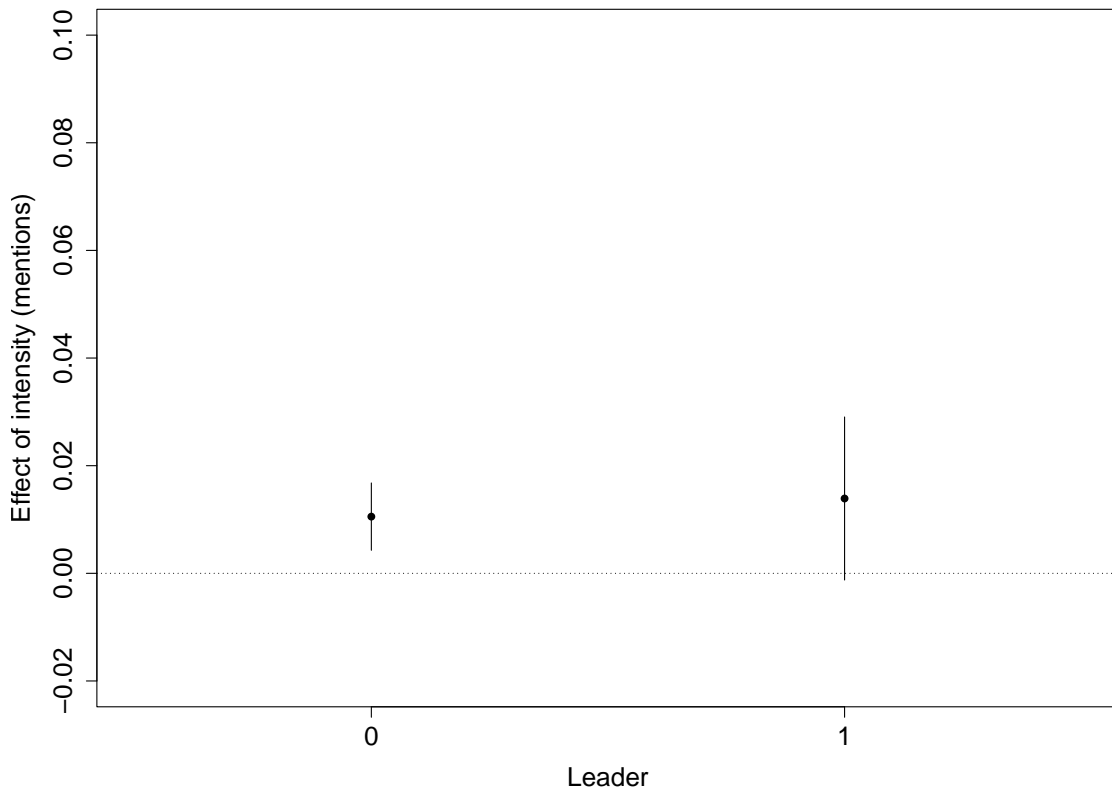


Figure 9: Marginal effect of climate intensity in the UNGA (count of climate mentions) on the number of climate mentions in Grays depending on whether a country leads a constituency or not. Full model results can be found in Table 2, column 2.

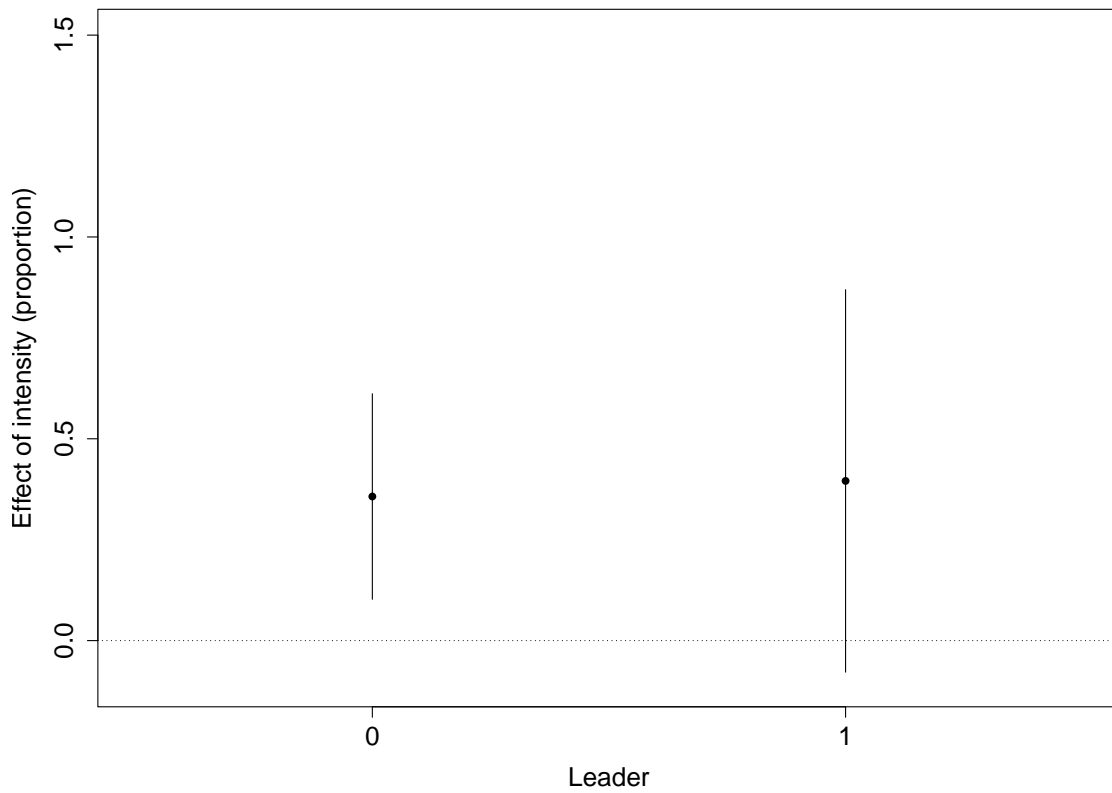


Figure 10: Marginal effect of climate intensity in the UNGA (proportion of paragraphs with climate mentions) on the number of climate mentions in Grays depending on whether a country leads a constituency or not. Full model results can be found in Table 2, column 3.

	Number of climate mentions in Grays		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
UNGA climate intensity (paragraphs)	0.019*** (0.007)		
UNGA climate intensity (mentions)		0.011*** (0.003)	
UNGA climate intensity (proportion)			0.364*** (0.124)
Constituency leader	0.011*** (0.0004)	0.011*** (0.0004)	0.011*** (0.0004)
Number of Grays	0.008** (0.004)	0.008** (0.004)	0.008** (0.004)
GDPPC	-0.006* (0.003)	-0.006* (0.003)	-0.006* (0.003)
Polity2	-0.011 (0.024)	-0.010 (0.024)	-0.011 (0.024)
UN ideal pt distance from U.S.	0.033 (0.033)	0.031 (0.033)	0.033 (0.033)
IMF program	-0.055** (0.026)	-0.056** (0.026)	-0.057** (0.026)
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	4826	4826	4826

***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1

Table 8: Pooled regression results. Robust standard errors are clustered at the country-level. Model type is negative binomial.

	Number of climate mentions in Grays		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
UNGA climate intensity (paragraphs)	0.044* (0.023)		
UNGA climate intensity (mentions)		0.028** (0.012)	
UNGA climate intensity (proportion)			0.939** (0.383)
Constituency fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	1014	1014	1014

***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1

Table 9: Constituency-level regression results. The UN variables are aggregated to the constituency-level by weighting each country's climate scores by their GDP share of the constituency (country GDP / total GDP of all constituency members) and then summing across the members of the constituency. Robust standard errors are clustered at the constituency-level. Model type is negative binomial.