

Proximity Matters: Exploring the Impact of Physical Arrangement on Diplomatic Interactions*

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Draft Last Updated: August 30, 2024

Abstract

Multilateral diplomacy is a deeply social activity, in which interpersonal interactions allow diplomats to negotiate compromises across heterogeneous preferences. Deeper social ties enable diplomats to develop trust, exchange information, and reduce miscommunication, which are instrumental in successful negotiations. Can physical proximity between diplomats facilitate social relationships, thus fostering increased multilateral cooperation? We leverage the randomized seating arrangement of the UN General Assembly to investigate this question, probing whether spatially proximate diplomats are more likely to collaborate and vote similarly compared to spatially disparate diplomats. We find support for our expectation that diplomats seated next to each other are more likely to vote similarly, even after controlling for measures of state influence and affinity, and that the mechanism behind this effect is individual-level social relations between diplomats. Our results speak to the importance of face-to-face diplomacy conducted through international organizations (IOs), as well as the role of individual bureaucrats in shaping international political outcomes.

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Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that personal relationships between international leaders have played an important role in fostering international cooperation. The strong ties between US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev “fundamentally changed the relationship between Russia and the United States,” establishing a friendly atmosphere and making possible subsequent arms control agreements (Hall & Yarhi-Milo, 2012; Bramsen, 2023). While the importance of friendly relations at the leader level is generally well-established (e.g., Holmes & Yarhi-Milo, 2017; Wheeler, 2018; Cooper, 2022; Lindsey, 2023), less attention is paid to the importance of social relationships in the more routine conduct of diplomacy: how do social relations between *diplomats* affect the development of multilateral cooperation?

As a deeply social endeavor, it is no surprise that there are countless anecdotal stories of diplomatic ‘odd couples’: diplomats from countries with tense relationships who nonetheless forged close social ties, and in many cases, translated these personal relationships into intrastate cooperation. Positive social relationships between multilateral diplomats seem to play an important part in building coalitions around international policymaking.

For example, in 2014, US Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power sought to block a Russian proposal to prevent spouses of UN employees in same-sex marriages from receiving benefits. In her efforts to obtain enough votes to block the proposal, Power focused on personal relationships with other diplomats. Power describes these personal friendships—forged informally through activities such as playing soccer with Latin American ambassadors and singing in a UN band with the Korean ambassadors—as integral in building trust, gaining the benefit of the doubt, and creating spaces for her counterparts to advocate on her behalf with their home governments to support key US proposals. Through informal personal relations, Power established mutual respect and social capital with colleagues. When it came to the issue of the LGBT staff benefits, this inspired them to go back to their capitals and argue in favor of taking a difficult position (Power, 2019, 422-426), ultimately resulting in enough votes to block the Russian proposal by a

unexpectedly strong showing in a vote of 43-80 with 37 abstentions.¹

While scholars of diplomatic studies take these personal relationships seriously in seeking to understand the dynamics of diplomatic engagement (e.g., [Sending et al., 2015](#); [Pouliot, 2016](#); [Holmes & Wheeler, 2020](#); [Chasek, 2021](#); [Arias, 2024](#); [Manulak, 2024](#)), little work has investigated the social relationships of diplomats as a *determinant* of their propensity to cooperate. Indeed, most research in international cooperation and international organizations (IOs) utilizes measures of state power and influence—for example, foreign aid flows, alliances, cultural affinity, and overlapping IO memberships (e.g., [Voeten, 2000](#); [Dreher et al., 2008, 2009](#))—to predict when states are likely to cooperate in IOs. Such studies largely omit the personal relationships between diplomats—the agents charged with the on-the-ground task of reaching cooperative outcomes between nation-states in meetings of IOs—in order to focus on state-level features. With increasing attention being paid to the importance of individuals in diplomacy (e.g., [Gertz, 2018](#); [Clark & Zucker, 2023](#); [Malis, 2021](#); [Heinzel, 2022](#); [Forster, 2024](#); [Arias, 2022](#)), an unanswered question thus remains: to what degree do social relationships between diplomatic negotiators affect state cooperation in IOs?

In this paper, we empirically assess whether social relationships between diplomats—not just state power and affinity—affect the likelihood of cooperation between delegations in IOs. We build on the literature on spatial proximity and voting behavior in legislatures, extending these applications to multilateral diplomacy (e.g., [Masket, 2008](#); [Rogowski & Sinclair, 2012](#); [Saia, 2018](#); [Harmon et al., 2019](#)). Diplomats in IOs—like legislators—need to collaborate with their peers to advance policy outputs, and therefore may be likely to collaborate with spatially proximate representatives in similar patterns. In several respects, however, spatial proximity may matter in different ways for diplomats. First, unlike legislators, diplomats cannot rely on party identification as a heuristic for their votes. Second, diplomats potentially represent a more heterogeneous set of policy positions on issues. Third, while legislators are autonomous decision-makers, diplomats must navigate a balance of their personal evaluations with their instructions from their

¹See also Power's [interview](#) on BBC, January 17, 2021.

home government. Thus, there are reasons to expect that the effects of spatial proximity on social relationships—and subsequently on political behavior—vary in the context of multilateral diplomacy compared to domestic policymaking. We therefore extend the empirical approaches of such legislative studies to an important new theoretical domain.

Researchers have long asserted that spatial proximity induces legislators to collaborate more frequently, but problems of network selection complicate empirical assessment of such claims (Battaglini & Patacchini, 2019). Rigorous examination of the impact of social relationships on collaboration between diplomats faces severe obstacles of endogeneity. In most situations, when legislators or diplomats take seats in a parliamentary body, these decisions are driven by homophily—individuals with similar backgrounds or interests would select to sit together (McPherson et al., 2001)—or a strategic selection process implemented by a ranking member (Masket, 2008). In a diplomatic context, states that have strong interests in working together and have had successful collaborations in the past will certainly have diplomats with established relationships, confounding the estimation of an unbiased association.

To overcome these obstacles, we take advantage of the randomization process in which seating positions are assigned in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), mapping the spatial proximity of delegates. These procedures result in delegates sometimes sharing a desk, and sometimes being split apart across rows. We can accordingly examine the causal effect of seating proximity on affinity between delegations over time, as well as between delegations in the same year. Since bodily co-presence is crucial for developing trust and empathy between diplomats (Wheeler & Holmes, 2021; Arias, 2024), we theorize that delegates who are physically seated together are more likely to cooperate. We proxy for the dependent variable of cooperation, or affinity, by using a measure of ideal point distance between two countries (Bailey et al., 2017) and capture the *degree* of social relationship as proxied by spatial distance.

Because membership in the UNGA is large and heterogeneous, it serves as an appropriate and useful case for us to examine the effects of social ties on cooperation, creating pairs of diplomats who would not normally be expected to cooperate. Further,

as meetings of UN bodies can often be long and sometimes tedious, diplomats that sit immediately beside each other are likely to share informal conversations, to learn about each others' personal character, and to engage in other interactions that build affinity. To a lesser degree, these types of interactions are also expected to occur between diplomats in the immediate radius. The diverse agenda of the UNGA also allows us to measure these impacts across a variety of issue areas, capturing matters of high politics and more mundane questions.

In line with our expectations, we find that, even controlling for measures of state power and influence, physical proximity is predictive of diplomats' likelihood of voting similarly on UN resolutions. Being randomly assigned as seat neighbors has a negative and statistically significant effect on the foreign policy ideal point distance between two countries as estimated by UNGA voting patterns. This is most consistent for countries that already hold similar policy positions. However, the effect is not sufficiently strong to overcome long-standing historical and cultural factors. Exploration of mechanisms yields suggestive evidence that the effect of spatial proximity indeed operates through interpersonal relationships between individual ambassadors: we find that when the individual diplomats representing their states share desks for long periods of time, this also significantly contributes to their countries' likelihoods of voting similarly. We also examine heterogeneous effects across different types of dyads and issues. We find that spatial affinity may be more likely to matter when dyads have moderate levels of prior affinity based on country-level features, and when one of the dyad members is a powerful state. We also conduct a preliminary analysis of heterogeneity across issue areas, as we expect that spatial proximity should induce more similar voting on issues of lower-salience.

These findings build on existing theories that center state-level power in explaining cooperation in IOs (e.g., [Kim & Russett, 1996](#); [Voeten, 2000](#); [Dreher et al., 2008](#); [Vreeland & Dreher, 2014](#)) and contribute to a growing consensus that individual diplomats matter in explaining these outcomes. We further show that diplomatic social relationships are independent of state-level relationships, and that spatial proximity contributes to diplomats' likelihood of cooperation. This finding has practical implications for the practice

of diplomacy in IOs, and suggests that the social lives of diplomats—which are often dismissed as trivialities or excesses—in fact serve an important role in advancing international cooperation. As calls for the digitalization of diplomatic interactions and attention to its implications increase (e.g., Burns & Thomas-Greenfield, 2020; Bjola & Coplen, 2022; Hedling & Bremberg, 2021), our findings raise questions about the likelihood that cooperative outcomes can be achieved without physical proximity.

Individuals and Social Relations in Diplomacy

Mainstream theories of IO politics tend to center state-level features to explain how representatives vote. Large powers have been shown to shape the behavior of smaller powers through inducements and threats to act in accordance with their preferences (e.g., Voeten, 2000). For example, a prominent explanation for vote choice in the UN is the receipt of foreign aid (Alesina & Dollar, 2000; Dreher et al., 2008; Carter & Stone, 2015; Dreher & Sturm, 2012; Vreeland & Dreher, 2014). Smaller states exchange their votes in exchange for material rewards from larger states, expressed through foreign aid flows. Other sources of political influence, including formal alliances, military aid, and regional, and developmental groups are also found to be predictors of voting similarity. In these predominant accounts, there is little room for individuals to affect political outcomes: it is only state-level power that matters in shaping negotiated outcomes between states—even in the context of IOs (e.g., Mearsheimer et al., 2001; Krasner, 1991; Keohane & Nye, 1977).

However, scholars are increasingly taking seriously the role of individuals in the process of achieving multilateral cooperation and in IO policymaking. While earlier works on individuals in IR focused on the importance of individual leader characteristics (e.g., Horowitz et al., 2015; Saunders, 2017; Nieman & Allamong, 2023; Goldfien et al., 2023) and relationships between leaders (Hall & Yarhi-Milo, 2012; Holmes & Yarhi-Milo, 2017; Wheeler, 2018), scholars increasingly take into account the importance of individuals at the more quotidian levels of policymaking—namely, diplomats and bureaucrats—who conduct the background work of diplomacy and regulation are often conducted.

For example, studies examine the differences between political appointees versus career diplomats (e.g., Haglund, 2015; Arias & Smith, 2018), experience in different types of prior postings (e.g., Clark & Zucker, 2023), and variation within the experiences of political appointees (e.g., MacDonald, 2021)—in explaining diplomatic and effectiveness on a range of performance-based outcomes including militarized disputes (MacDonald, 2021) and trade (Malis, 2021). Other demographic features such as military background, gender, and the nature of previous work experience are shown to condition the effectiveness of diplomats (e.g., Lindley, 2007; MacDonald, 2021; Towns & Niklasson, 2017; Niklasson & Towns, 2023). In IOs, individual backgrounds are also important predictors of how diplomats and bureaucrats may influence policymaking (Clark & Dolan, 2022; Heinzel & Liese, 2021; Heinzel, 2022; Arias, 2022; Forster, 2024; Manulak, 2024).

Individual diplomats are certainly not unconstrained actors. Diplomacy is a delegation of authority from a principal (the state) to an agent (the diplomat), who may more or less accurately represent the preferences of their state (e.g., Goldfien et al., 2023). When states have well-articulated or intense preferences on an issue, they may expect their agent to act with little room for independent maneuvering. If a diplomat deviates from home-state instructions in such circumstances, they run the risk of being recalled. In other circumstances, a state may not have a preference over the issue under consideration (for example, a landlocked state may not have strongly articulated preferences over a resolution related to marine biodiversity), and the agent can have more room to develop and independent position on an issue.² Thus, while there is expected to be variation in the degree to which diplomats are actors that operate independently from their home governments, it appears clear that diplomats are not simply pass-throughs for foreign ministries.

We build on two key facts from existing work on the role of individuals in the conduct of diplomacy: first, that social relations between diplomats are crucial for constructing policy outcomes in multilateral negotiation, and second, that physical proximity contributes to the development of these diplomatic social relationships.

²Agent independence may be particularly likely for small state diplomats, who are serviced by a smaller foreign ministry that may lack the ability to cover as many issue areas (e.g., Panke, 2013; Arias, 2022).

Even accounting for personal characteristics, individuals do not conduct diplomacy in a vacuum, but rather through social processes (e.g., [Sending et al., 2015](#); [Keys & Yorke, 2019](#)). Diplomacy is a practice of “socially meaningful patterns of action [that are] being performed more or less competently,” ([Adler & Pouliot, 2011](#), 6). Individual diplomats must interact with their counterparts to cultivate empathy ([Wheeler, 2013](#); [Holmes & Yarhi-Milo, 2017](#)) and build trust ([Holmes, 2018](#); [Rathbun, 2011](#)). Informal negotiations, which create opportunities for arguing and persuasion ([Risse & Kleine, 2010](#)), are particularly aided by social relations. [Chasek \(2021, 62\)](#) suggests:

It is often these personal interactions that allow delegates to get to know each other, understand their positions and red lines, and build the trust necessary to forge agreements.

A dense social network is also necessary to build issue coalitions and develop consensus ([Pouliot, 2016](#)). Diplomats with a strong social position can act as brokers amongst others in the network ([Sending et al., 2015](#), 94). Social relations between individuals develop trust that is crucial in diplomatic relations ([Lindsey, 2023](#)). For example, the personal friendship between American President Theodore Roosevelt and the German Ambassador to the US, Hermann Speck von Sternburg, “paid substantial diplomatic dividends: in 1907 Roosevelt wrote to Sternburg: ‘In the history of America no foreign representative has ever held the trust of her people as you do and in the future no foreign representative ever can hold this trust,’” ([Lindsey, 2023](#), 94). As [Pouliot \(2016\)](#) observes in the case of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, [Cooper & Shaw \(2009\)](#) show in the case of the World Trade Organization, and [Manulak \(2024\)](#) shows in the International Monetary Fund, a diplomat’s social skills can make up for the weakness of their state’s position.

Face-to-face, in-person interactions are integral to diplomats’ work. The essential tasks of diplomats are to persuade and influence their counterparts (e.g., [Wendt, 1999](#); [Risse, 2000](#); [Johnston, 2001](#)). Interactions between individuals are also necessary to learn the positions and preferences of their counterparts. Engaging face-to-face regularly maximizes the opportunities to develop social relationships and standing ([Pouliot,](#)

2016; Holmes & Wheeler, 2020; Arias, 2022). When leaders can meet in person, they can better communicate sincerity and develop empathy compared to virtual meetings (Hall & Yarhi-Milo, 2012; Holmes & Yarhi-Milo, 2017). Engaging in formal settings would also be likely to induce spillovers into informal contacts that occur outside of official meetings, for example, leading to shared coffee breaks or meals outside of meetings. Though recent work argues that diplomats can use technological developments such as emojis to communicate online (Cornut, 2022), technology cannot substitute for in-person communication. As Wheeler & Holmes (2021) argue, bodily co-presence is required for diplomats to form strong social relationships. Indeed, nascent research on digital diplomacy shows that virtual meetings may diminish the sense of understanding and togetherness between diplomats (e.g., Wheeler, 2013; Bramsen & Hagemann, 2021).

Spatial Proximity and Voting in Legislatures

In studies of domestic legislatures, a long tradition suggests that spatial proximity between legislators' offices or seats on the legislative floor contributes to their likelihood of working together by building social networks (e.g., Truman, 1956; Young, 1966; Caldeira & Patterson, 1987; Masket, 2008).³ Such work recognizes the impact of spatial proximity on policymaking, with many scholars arguing that legislators who sit, live, or work near one another are more likely to vote together.⁴ Social ties between legislators serve as a means of transferring information and facilitating the exchanging of votes (Battaglini & Patacchini, 2019), and are likely to facilitate the generation of connections that spillover outside of the formal meeting room. Related work also shows the importance of social ties and friendship on legislator behavior, illustrating that lawmakers are more likely to vote with members that they identify as their friends (e.g., Caldeira & Patterson, 1987; Arnold et al., 2000) or who are part of the same alumni network (Cohen & Malloy, 2014). In contexts outside the US, similar dynamics have been observed among members

³See Battaglini & Patacchini (2019) for a review of this literature.

⁴On the other hand, see also Rogowski & Sinclair (2012), who show that members of the US Congress with offices near each other do not vote together or cosponsor legislation more frequently.

of the European Parliament (Harmon et al., 2019) and the Icelandic legislature (Saia, 2018). Importantly, the role of affinity is theorized to operate via mechanisms such as cue-taking, information provision, goodwill, and horse-trading—which do not necessarily entail the changing of preferences.

How does our context of interest—multilateral diplomacy—compare to existing findings on spatial proximity and legislative behavior, which for the most part focuses on domestic legislatures and parliaments? Diplomats in IOs—like legislators in a Congress or parliament—need to collaborate with their peers to advance policy outputs, and therefore may be likely to collaborate with spatially proximity representatives in similar patterns. Unlike in a domestic legislature, however, diplomats in IOs face potentially greater challenges in collaborating that could moderate the effects of spatial proximity.

In a legislature, individuals and the legislation that they propose can be identified by party, which can serve as an informative heuristic as to whether the measure should be supported or not. In an IO, by contrast, country positions across a diverse array of issues under consideration cannot be neatly identified by party positioning.⁵ Heterogeneity across diplomats representing countries is also likely to be greater than heterogeneity across legislators representing different regions of the same country. For these reasons, we may potentially expect the effects of spatial proximity on collaboration to be larger for multilateral diplomats than for domestic legislators. However, unlike legislators, diplomats are not necessarily autonomous agents. Nearly all diplomats must obtain authorization from home governments before taking a position on an issue, and therefore government-level policy positions may outweigh the effects of social affinity between individuals.

⁵This is not to suggest that there are not heuristics for country affinity—for example, shared cultural norms or other overlapping institutional memberships—but rather that the availability of such heuristics is less obvious than the signal of partisanship.

Theory of Spatial Proximity and IO Diplomacy

We draw on these bodies of research to understand how spatial proximity affects diplomats' propensity to collaborate. Social relationships between diplomats in IOs are essential to accomplish collective goals in developing policy outputs in a social conceptualization of diplomacy (Sending et al., 2015; Pouliot, 2016). Physical proximity between diplomats is an important factor in developing these social relationships, allowing for the formation of trust, empathy, and friendship (Wheeler & Holmes, 2021). We therefore argue that physical, spatial proximity between diplomats leads to greater cooperation between diplomats in multilateral institutions.

H_1 : Diplomats with more spatially proximate seats are more likely to collaborate in IOs than diplomats that are seated further apart.

How—and why—does the social relationship created via proximity affect legislative behavior? Spatial proximity creates opportunities for social interaction and familiarity (Caldeira & Patterson, 1987, 964). As Figure 1 illustrates (left panel), physical proximity between diplomats can facilitate informal conversation and create opportunities for building relationships. Meetings of the UNGA are often quite lengthy, and there are frequent opportunities for diplomats to engage informally during and between speeches. When diplomats are seated less proximately, as in Figure 1 (right panel), physical space between seats makes it more difficult for diplomats to communicate informally. Increased social interaction may have cognitive effects through joint deliberations, generate greater

Figure 1: Spatial dynamics and diplomatic social relations



Note: American and Romanian delegates, 2023 (left panel); American and North Korean delegates, 2015 (right panel).

tolerance of other viewpoints, and provide informational cues for low-salience or unfamiliar issues (Mutz, 2002).

As Ambassador Samantha Power described, she was able to leverage affinity with her colleagues—or in other words, her friendships—to encourage their home governments to support the US position on the LGBT staff benefits vote. However, she was not necessarily working to reverse their existing positions. In some cases, strong social ties also result in vote-trading across issue areas when priorities might vary. As we discuss below, affinity is expected to be less likely to affect diplomatic behavior when *ex ante* issue positions are strong and divergent. Drawing on the studies of domestic policymaking, which we discuss in the previous section, we do not necessarily argue that affinity change diplomats' *ex ante* preferences.⁶ UN diplomats vote on a large number of issues throughout the course of a session, which can provide an information burden for diplomats—particularly those from small states who lack the resources to attend every meeting, and whose governments are unlikely to prepare position briefs on every topic (Panke, 2013; Arias, 2022). Friendly relations with other diplomats can provide an informational cue of how to vote in the absence of other sources of information.

We specifically test our hypothesis in the case of the UNGA. In an international organization like the UNGA in particular, where the membership comprises a large number of states with heterogeneous membership, social ties can be particularly important in bridging divides. In a regional or affinity-based IO, the effects of spatial proximity could be less impactful on patterns of collaboration, given that diplomats are already highly inclined to share policy positions and thus are already highly likely to collaborate. The UNGA is also a likely case to observe strong interpersonal relations because it is characterized by standing representation that remains in New York for large parts of the year, as opposed to other IOs in which delegates only meet for brief conferences one or more times during the year (Pouliot, 2016). As Maurer & Wright (2020, 561) argue:

Diplomats and officials who attend meetings regularly develop a detailed un-

⁶Exploring these mechanisms is beyond the scope of this study, but poses a potentially fruitful avenue for future work.

derstanding of their peers' positions and needs on a given issue; moreover, repeated interactions over an extended period make it feasible to anticipate likely demands and problems, itself a core task of Permanent Representations.

Finally, because the UNGA is a multi-issue forum, we can observe the effects of spatial proximity averaged across a variety of issue areas—but we can also theorize and examine how the effects of spatial proximity may affect collaboration differently across issue areas. On highly salient matters that are deeply linked to national security, there may be less room for social affinity to affect position-taking, given the likelihood of specific instructions from home governments on such matters. On unimportant procedural matters, diplomats may have full autonomy to act as they like and to cooperate with individuals with whom they feel strong social affinity, however, the implications of such collaboration have limited importance in shaping international policy. In a multi-issue forum that addresses a wide set of important (and procedural) matters—from nuclear weapons proliferation to development to normative principles—we can identify the bounds of the effects of physical proximity on collaboration across issue areas.

Just as the nature of the issue under consideration presents a scope condition as to when spatial proximity can or cannot be expected to influence diplomat behavior, the distance between pairs of diplomats also presents a constraining condition. Individual diplomats that are already highly predisposed to collaborate because of shared national positions—for example, diplomats representing the United States and the United Kingdom—are highly likely to collaborate on resolutions and vote similarly whether they have close social ties or not, and thus, spatial proximity is unlikely to affect the behavior of such dyads. Similarly, the delegates of the United States and North Korea are unlikely to behave similarly, even if spatial proximity cultivates a strong interpersonal relationship between diplomats. Just as [Gray & Potter \(2020\)](#) show that diplomacy increases the chances of positive outcomes only among states with moderate levels of affinity, we expect the effects of spatial proximity to be strongest for diplomats representing states with some pre-existing level of affinity. Thus, we develop two theoretical expectations with respect to heterogeneous effects of proximity across different types of country dyads,

and across different issue areas.

***H₂*: The effect of spatial proximity on collaboration in IOs is greatest for country-dyads with pre-existing affinity.**

***H₃*: The effect of spatial proximity on collaboration in IOs is greatest on lower-salience issue areas.**

Research Design and Data

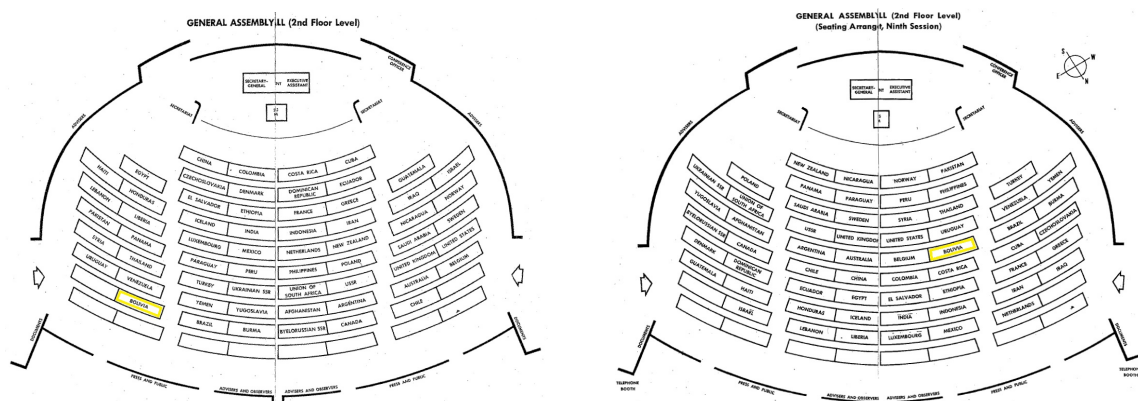
Testing such hypotheses about the importance of spatial proximity requires creative research design. Scholarship—particularly in American politics—has long asserted that spatial proximity induces legislators to collaborate, but network selection problems have made the empirical assessment of such claims difficult (Battaglini & Patacchini, 2019). More recently, scholars have leveraged examples of random seating or office assignment to evaluate the role of spatial proximity and social relationships. For example, Rogowski & Sinclair (2012) assess the importance of spatial proximity of legislators’ offices, exploiting randomization in the office selection mechanism in the US Congress, under which members select offices in an order determined by lottery. In other work, Cohen & Malloy (2014) assert the seating of freshman Senators is as-if random because Senators select their seats based on seniority, employing this mechanism in their research design. Similarly, Caldeira & Patterson (1987) argue that although Iowa state legislators selected their seats in the 1965 session because so many legislators were newly elected, sitting together created an as-if random relationship as legislators had no prior information about their potential seatmates. However, such lotteries induce a constrained choice process rather than a fully randomized procedure, so the authors are unable to identify the full effect of spatial proximity. Masket (2008) partially avoids these concerns by exploiting a mechanism in the California state legislature under which the Speaker assigned delegates to shared desks, though it is impossible to know whether the Speaker employed an underlying strategic rationale for assignments. We improve upon these prior efforts to understand the effects of spatial proximity on voting similarity by leveraging the unique seating rules of the UNGA, which is built upon a truly randomized seating procedure.

Context on the UNGA Seating Arrangement

In the UNGA, the yearly session begins in September and typically runs until December, although delegates often return in January to complete work on outstanding agenda items. At least three months in advance of the opening session, the General Assembly elects a President. On the day of this election, the Secretary-General conducts a random draw to determine which country will occupy the first seat of the Assembly Hall (at the right end of the front row as seen from the podium). Subsequent seats are filled in English alphabetical order. In 2023, for example, North Macedonia was selected to fill the first seat, while in 2022, Belize was drawn.⁷ This procedure creates year-on-year random variation in the spatial distance between delegates, based on the configuration of seats. In some years, for example, delegations will occupy a single seat, while in others they will share desks as a dyad-pair. Sometimes these dyads will be split across two rows or across an aisle, while sometimes they will be contiguous. Figure 2 illustrates these patterns: in the 1955 session, Bolivia occupied a single seat (left panel), while in 1956, the delegation was seated next to Belgium (right panel).

Further variation in seating arrangements is induced over time. First, when countries change their names: for example, the delegation of Ceylon was seated next to the delegate from Chad in 1971, but in 1972, the same individual—now as the representative

Figure 2: Spatial dynamics and diplomatic social relations



Note: Seating charts for 1955 (left) and 1956 (right). The seat of the Bolivian delegate is highlighted in yellow for illustration.

⁷See [here](#) for the first country selected each year.

of Sri Lanka—would have been seated next to Sudan. Secondly, as the number of UN members increased over the years, the seating arrangement of the Assembly Hall was altered several times, resulting in different pairing configurations. These new members fill into the alphabet, interjected between pairs of delegations that previously would have been alphabetically next to each other. For example, when Burundi joined the UN and was seated in the 1963 session, it was placed between Burma and the Byelorussian SSR, which had previously been seated next to each other. Finally, variation is induced in years in which accessibility accommodations are made for members of country delegations who need wheelchair access, and are thus placed near the accessible exits. In 2022, for example, to accommodate members of the US delegation, the members were seated next to Marshall Islands.

The randomization of seating is essential to identify the effect of socialization. Without a random procedure assigning delegates to sit near each other, such decisions would likely be driven by homophily: individuals with similar backgrounds or interests would select to sit together (McPherson et al., 2001). The randomization process employed to assign seats in the UNGA has unique features that improve upon prior research designs, but are in other ways limiting. Unlike other procedures, there are no concerns about strategic processes influencing the spatial arrangement (either by the legislators themselves or the individual assigning them to positions): delegates in the UNGA have no agency to *decide* where they sit. This approach mirrors that employed by Harmon et al. (2019), who similarly leverage breaks in physical proximity caused by changes in the arrangement of members of the European Parliament. In this case, MPs are seated in alphabetical order but alternate sessions between venues with different seating layouts. However, the alphabetical procedure is not fully randomized, as in the Icelandic parliament (see e.g, Saia, 2018; Darmofal et al., 2023; Jo & Lowe, 2023), which limits the number of potential combinations. Thus, while not offering the full ideal, the UNGA seating arrangement mechanism still creates a quasi-experimental setting to explore the “treatment effect” of spatial proximity between country delegations.

Of course, formal meetings are not the only spaces in which UNGA diplomats inter-

act. As part of their typical day, diplomats meet for coffee, drinks, or lunch, they attend cocktail parties, and they attend a number of informal side events. These events often take place during the breaks between the two daily three-hour meetings of the UNGA, or at the end of the day. While our measure of spatial proximity only captures relations in the formal portion of the diplomats' work, it represents a substantial amount of time that individuals would spend side-by-side. Further, we expect that affinity cultivated by sitting nearby in formal meetings spills over into informal contexts outside (for example, seat-mates often leave the Assembly Hall to share a meal at the lunch break). In this way, seat assignments have an even more substantial effect on diplomatic social relations.

Independent Variable: Seating Assignments

We collect the seating charts for all available sessions of the UNGA from the UN Digital Library. Seating charts were available for sessions 7-44 (1952-1989) and 72-78 (2017-2023). For each session, we record the country delegation assigned to each seat and create a spatial representation of seating relationships. This allows us to capture whether delegations were directly next to each other, in front or behind each other, to the left or right, or in a diagonal-dyadic pair. We also capture whether these relationships are contiguous or non-contiguous (i.e., whether there is a gap or aisle between the seats), as well as whether the seat is a singleton position. For example, in Figure 2, Bolivia and Belgium are recorded as a contiguous dyad, while Bolivia and Brazil are captured as filling non-contiguous left and right positions. Uruguay is captured as the front position of Bolivia, and the US occupies Bolivia's diagonal-front-dyadic position. These details allow us to capture variation in spatial proximity: contiguous dyads are expected to have the closest relationships, while non-contiguous surrounding delegations are one degree less proximate. We subsequently match each delegation listed in the seating chart with the delegation name recorded in the UN voting data, which we describe in the following section.

For some years, countries became members of the UNGA after the session officially started, and were thus not included in the initial seating chart. While the country was

not a member, their pending application would have been placed before the Credentials Committee in advance of the session beginning. Therefore, in most such cases, the seating chart reflects a blank space where that new country member would be added according to English alphabetical order in anticipation of their being granted membership. As countries are typically voted into the UNGA at the opening session, we assume that the new members were seated immediately and code the data as such. For years in which countries were added towards the end of the session (e.g., Spain joined the UN on December 14, 1955 and voted on December 16, 1955) or in which there are no clear blank seats in the seating chart, we do not include such countries for that year.⁸

To build the measure of spatial proximity, we first list all the possible country dyad pairs for each year given the set of countries who were members of the UNGA, yielding a dyad-year dataset. Then, using the spatial representation of the seating relationship as described above, we create multiple binary dyad-year variables. First, “Seat Dyad” captures whether countries are a contiguous dyad, meaning that the variable takes on a value of 1 if delegates are seated directly next to each other and 0 if not. Second, we create similar binary variables for “Left-Right,” “Back-Front,” “Neighbor,” and “Back-Front Dyad.”⁹

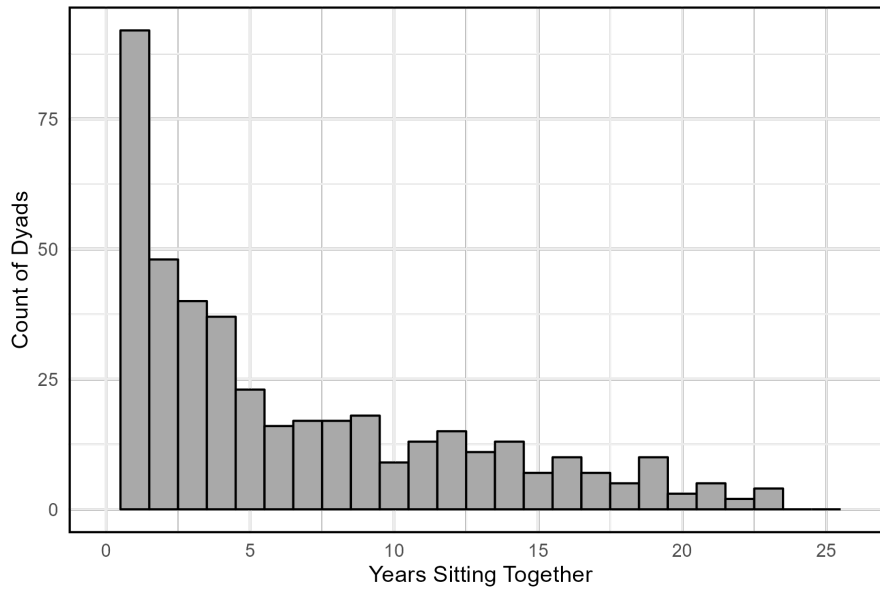
Out of the 19,544 unique country dyad combinations within our sample, 423 are direct dyads (“Seat Dyad” = 1) for at least one UNGA session (approximately 2% of all possible dyads). The vast majority of countries do not sit next to one another, which is unsurprising given the seating arrangement mechanism. Of those country pairs that sit next to each other at least once, the average number of sessions (i.e., years) that two countries sit next to one another is 6.65 sessions total. However, there is significant variation in the number of years that two countries are a seated dyad. As Figure 3 demonstrates, 240 dyads sit together for less than five years while just fifteen sit together for more than twenty.

In addition, we can examine the pairs of individual ambassadors who occupy paired

⁸We validated this approach with staff from the UN Dag Hammarskjöld Library.

⁹While our current variable construction is binary, the structure of the data allows us to create continuous measures representing distance between countries for future analysis.

Figure 3: Distribution of Total Years that Country Dyads Sit Next to Each Other



seats together. We draw on data from [Arias \(2022\)](#) to match each country with their individual Permanent Representative for each year (more detail on additional individual-level measures is included below). This is a distinct quantity from the number of years countries sit in dyad-pairs. Given that our theory is based on the social relationships between diplomats, it is imperative to account for the turnover in individuals separately from the turnover in countries. Like the measure of country dyad length, this measure varies substantially. Ambassadors from Djibouti were most likely to be in longstanding (more than 10 years) pairs with other individual ambassadors, forming 29 such relationships.¹⁰

Dependent Variable: Behavior in the UNGA

We are interested in understanding how spatial proximity affects collaboration between states in the UNGA. There are many different ways in which diplomats collaborate: sponsoring resolutions together ([Dijkhuizen & Onderco, 2019](#); [Seabra & Mesquita, 2022](#)), hosting side events, supporting each others candidates for positions ([Dreher et al., 2014](#)), and even raising similar issues in their speeches ([Baturu et al., 2017](#)). We hone in on one specific and crucial way in which diplomats seek to influence each others' behavior—

¹⁰Ambassadors from Madagascar, Turkmenistan, and Trinidad and Tobago had the next highest numbers of longstanding ambassador-level dyads. Ambassadors from 16 individual countries formed 10 or more longstanding ambassador-level dyad pairs.

voting on resolutions. To pass a resolution, diplomats must obtain votes from their counterparts. Indeed, even in cases in which a resolution is certain to pass, diplomats may seek to collaborate and obtain more votes to illustrate a large show of support, or even a consensus across countries (Blake & Payton, 2015; Arias & Shaffer, 2022; Arias, 2024).¹¹

We operationalize this by examining voting behavior as our key dependent variable, looking to see whether states hold more similar positions after sitting next to one another. While there are multiple ways that states interact in the assembly (including through speeches, side discussions, and resolution sponsorship), votes provide the clearest record of the positions that a country is willing to take publicly (Mattes et al., 2015). UNGA voting data are commonly employed in research in international relations to capture state affinity—both as an independent measure, i.e., to show whether states share foreign policy preferences (e.g., Arias & Hulvey, 2023), and as a dependent measure, i.e., to show whether states can influence each others' voting outcomes (e.g., Carter & Stone, 2015).

Additional Factors

We include a number of additional dyad-level factors in the model that are known to determine affinity between countries. We utilize the Centre d'Études Prospectives et d'Informations Internationales (CEPII) Gravity dataset for many of these covariates as it assembles data spanning 1948 to 2020 from various sources. We employ data on geographic contiguity (neighbors) and common official language from CEPII, religious similarity from La Porta et al. (2008). Both variables are binary, with the former taking the value of 1 if countries are neighbors and the latter taking the value of 1 if countries have the same common official language. Data on colonial history comes from Head et al. (2010), again a binary variable that takes the value of 1 if countries have ever been in a colonizer-colony relationship. We use total trade flow data in USD millions from UN Comtrade, and bilateral official development assistance (ODA) commitments (USD

¹¹We plan to expand our analysis to examine co-hosting side events as another way to measure the effect of spatial proximity on diplomats' proximity to collaborate.

millions) from the OECD DAC¹² that is available for 1966 to 2022.¹³ Finally, we utilize data on the total number of bilateral alliances from the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) dataset (Leeds et al., 2002).

As our argument focuses on the interpersonal relationships that country-level representatives form based on spatial proximity, we also include a number of variables capturing ambassador-level characteristics from Arias (2022). This ambassador-level data was collected from the Blue Book listings of Permanent Missions to the United Nations, from which the name of every country’s ambassador and first deputy was recorded, creating a database of 21,159 ambassador and deputy entries from 1946 to 2019.¹⁴ In addition to the number of years of tenure of each ambassador in the dyads, as well as the number of years the dyad ambassadors served together, we also capture the gender of each ambassador. To do so, Arias (2022) employs the `genderize` API to construct a “male” indicator based on the ambassador’s name. This information is useful to account for since women diplomats may face additional challenges in a traditionally male-dominated role (Towns & Niklasson, 2017; Towns, 2020), and mixed-gender pairs may face greater challenges in developing affinity. Missing individual-level data was interpolated using Amelia, averaging estimates over 5 imputations; results were robust to listwise deletion and missingness was not systematically correlated other key measures, see Arias (2022) for details. We do not include a measure of diplomat-level language, as almost all UN diplomats have extremely high facility with English and other official UN languages.

Estimation

We are interested in the effect of spatial proximity in the UNGA on voting behavior. We analyze voting behavior at the dyad-year level using ideal point distance as a measure

¹²This measure only includes aid commitments from OECD countries so does not include aid from China, India, etc. We plan to add this data for future versions.

¹³We use net, or total flows, for both trade and aid. This is preferred to directional because we are interested in socialization rather than coercion. Furthermore, our theory does not specify which member of a dyad is expected to change the preferences or voting behavior of the other, therefore, net aid flows are a more appropriate way to capture these non-directional expectations.

¹⁴We do not utilize the deputy-level data.

of similarity between two countries. We estimate a set of models that can be described as follows:

$$Ideal\ Point\ Distance_{ijt} = \alpha + \beta_1 Seat\ Neighbors_{ijt} + \gamma_1 \mathbf{X}_{ijt} + \gamma_2 \mathbf{X}_{it} + \gamma_3 \mathbf{X}_{jt} + \delta_t + \epsilon$$

where $Seat\ Neighbors_{ijt}$ is a binary variable representing whether country i and country j were seat neighbors in year t , \mathbf{X}_{ijt} represents a vector of dyad-year level covariates that might affect ideal point distance, \mathbf{X}_{it} and \mathbf{X}_{jt} represent a vector of country-year level covariates, and δ_t represented fixed year effects.

We estimate an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model where β_1 can be interpreted as the local average treatment effect (LATE) of two countries being seat neighbors on their ideal point distance in the UNGA in a given year. We include year fixed effects in our main specification, as they absorb any unobserved variation that affects a large number of units similarly at a given point in time, such as the agenda items up for debate in a given UNGA session. We also cluster standard errors at the year level to capture uncertainty *within* years.

Results

In Table 1, we assess the effects of being a direct neighbor dyad on the ideal point distance between two countries. Column 1 displays the main effect of this measure, which can also be interpreted as the negative partial correlation which holds with the inclusion of key economic and political variables, which we add to the model in Column 2. As expected by our theory (H1), sitting together in a dyad-pair has a negative and statistically significant effect on the dyad’s ideal point distance. When countries go from not sitting next to one another to sitting next to one another, their ideal point distance shrinks by 0.029, or about 3% of a standard deviation. This holds to the same degree when key measures of economic and political ties—trade, ODA, and alliances—are included. And, while this effect may sound small, it is a tenth as large as the effect of an additional bilateral alliance—something that countries enter into after much planning

and negotiation. Substantively for 2023, it amounts to Romania becoming as aligned with the US as Australia (a move from 1.188 to 1.159) or Jordan becoming as aligned with the US as Malaysia (a move from 3.235 to 3.206).

Table 1: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Ideal Point Distance

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Seat Dyad | -0.029*** (0.009) | -0.029*** (0.009) | -0.006 (0.013) |
| Trade Flow (\$M USD) | | 0.002*** (0.000) | 0.001*** (0.000) |
| ODA Commitments (\$M USD) | | 0.001*** (0.000) | 0.001*** (0.000) |
| Number of Alliances | | -0.207*** (0.036) | -0.216*** (0.020) |
| Common Official Language | | | -0.082*** (0.011) |
| Common Religion | | | -0.453*** (0.028) |
| Colonial History | | | 0.656*** (0.050) |
| Num.Obs. | 409 572 | 409 572 | 320 622 |
| R2 | 0.051 | 0.052 | 0.092 |
| R2 Adj. | 0.050 | 0.052 | 0.092 |
| R2 Within | 0.000 | 0.002 | 0.057 |
| R2 Within Adj. | 0.000 | 0.002 | 0.057 |
| AIC | 1 044 272.8 | 1 043 429.3 | 776 686.8 |
| BIC | 1 044 753.4 | 1 043 942.7 | 777 210.0 |
| RMSE | 0.87 | 0.86 | 0.81 |
| Std.Errors | by: year | by: year | by: year |
| FE: year | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Notes: The table presents the results of the main specification for UNGA ideal point distance. Standard errors are clustered at the year level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

However, we find that with the inclusion of cultural and historical variables in Column 3, the effect of being seat neighbors is no longer statistically significant at even the 10% level. Covariates such as the number of bilateral alliances, common official language, and common religion are all significantly and highly negatively associated with ideal point distance—indicating that more aligned countries and those with more similar cultural factors vote more similarly. In contrast, trade flow, ODA commitments, and

colonial history are all associated with larger ideal point distances or essentially null differences.

Overall, these results indicate that spatial proximity between two countries has an effect on voting similarity in the UNGA even when accounting for important geopolitical factors. However, the effect of spatial proximity is not strong enough to overcome the importance of factors like common language, religion, or colonial history. This is not surprising, as countries may only be seated next to each other for six months and even if ambassadors develop bonds during this time, they are unlikely to be sufficiently strong to overcome long-standing historical factors such as prior colonial dependencies.

To better understand what is driving these results, in Table 2, we introduce a number of covariates at the ambassador level. This approach draws on our theoretical framework, which posits that the social ties between individuals—fostered by spatial proximity—increase the likelihood of collaboration on voting. Column 1 includes a variable that captures the number of years of ambassadorial overlap between countries, i.e., the number of years that the ambassadors of both states serve together. We remove year fixed effects in this model to allow for the importance of this variable over time. We subsequently introduce variables for the total years of ambassador service and the ambassador gender for both countries within a dyad in Column 2 and then re-include year fixed effects in Column 3.

We find that the introduction of these ambassador-level variables, especially the number of years with the same ambassador pair between two countries, reduce the importance of the seat dyad variable. Given that the mechanism by which sitting together operates is theorized to be via the social relationships between the individual ambassadors, this result is in line with our theoretical expectations. The negative and statistically significant association of the ambassador-dyad variable indicates that the more years a country-dyad has overlapping ambassadors, the smaller their ideal point distance. This aligns with the idea that spatial proximity operates through relationship development between two ambassadors, and that the longer they work together, the closer they become. Ambassador experience and gender do not appear to have clear effects on the

Table 2: Importance of Individual Ambassadors in the UNGA on Ideal Point Distance

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Seat Dyad | 0.024 (0.018) | 0.039** (0.019) | 0.012 (0.014) |
| Trade Flow (\$M USD) | 0.001*** (0.000) | 0.001*** (0.000) | 0.001*** (0.000) |
| ODA Commitments (\$M USD) | 0.001*** (0.000) | 0.001*** (0.000) | 0.001*** (0.000) |
| Number of Alliances | -0.213*** (0.021) | -0.220*** (0.022) | -0.218*** (0.019) |
| Common Official Language | -0.086*** (0.005) | -0.092*** (0.005) | -0.095*** (0.013) |
| Common Religion | -0.459*** (0.006) | -0.492*** (0.007) | -0.498*** (0.031) |
| Colonial History | 0.668*** (0.014) | 0.657*** (0.014) | 0.641*** (0.051) |
| Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair | -0.013*** (0.001) | -0.014*** (0.002) | 0.009* (0.005) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1) | | 0.001** (0.001) | -0.002 (0.003) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2) | | -0.006*** (0.001) | -0.006** (0.002) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 1) | | 0.047*** (0.007) | -0.031 (0.058) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 2) | | 0.092*** (0.007) | 0.045 (0.029) |
| Num.Obs. | 291 393 | 267 755 | 267 755 |
| R2 | 0.059 | 0.060 | 0.092 |
| R2 Adj. | 0.059 | 0.060 | 0.092 |
| R2 Within | | | 0.059 |
| R2 Within Adj. | | | 0.058 |
| AIC | 722 675.8 | 669 178.4 | 659 994.5 |
| BIC | 722 792.2 | 669 335.9 | 660 540.4 |
| Log.Lik. | -361 326.896 | -334 574.215 | |
| RMSE | 0.84 | 0.84 | 0.83 |
| Std.Errors | | | by: year |
| FE: year | | | ✓ |

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Notes: The table presents the results of the specification for UNGA ideal point distance with ambassador-level variables. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

ideal point distance between countries as independent measures, particularly in the year fixed effects model (Model 3). This suggests that it is not the experience or skill of one individual ambassador that enables them to convince or lead their seat-mate, but rather the shared social experience between two individuals.

Heterogeneous Effects

We examine heterogeneous effects across several relevant dimensions. First, we assess whether spatial proximity affects cooperation differently depending on the nature of the dyadic pair. We examine whether dyads with more affinity and those in which one member is a great power are more likely to experience increased affinity as a result of spatial proximity. Second, we assess whether these effects vary by issue area, and specifically whether on lower-salience matters, diplomats may have more autonomy in taking voting decisions. In these types of issue spaces, we theorize that spatial affinity matters more.

Based on prior research on spatial proximity and our argument about how social ties develop, we theorized in Hypothesis 2 that being seat neighbors will only matter in certain types of dyad-pairs. Specifically, we expect that it is unlikely that two very different countries that sit next to each other for one year will begin to vote more similarly. For example, even if the representatives from two countries like Iran and Israel developed close interpersonal relationships, their country preferences are so far apart that we would not expect an effect of them being seated dyads. However, for countries that are already relatively similar, we would expect that spatial proximity should exert an independent effect.

Table 4 presents the results of our models estimated only for the lower, first, quartile of ideal point distance, meaning those countries that are already fairly similar. Columns 1 - 3 replicate the models from Table 1 while Columns 4 - 6 replicate those from Table 2. We find a consistent negative and statistically significant effect of seat dyad on ideal point distance across these models, even with the inclusion of cultural-historical dyad variables and ambassador-level variables. This indicates that there is likely something

Table 3: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Ideal Point Distance, 1st Quartile

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|---|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Seat Dyad | -0.013*** (0.003) | -0.013*** (0.003) | -0.009** (0.004) | -0.008** (0.004) | -0.009** (0.004) | -0.009* (0.005) |
| Trade Flow (\$M USD) | | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) |
| ODA Commitments (\$M USD) | | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) |
| Number of Alliances | | -0.060*** (0.006) | -0.042*** (0.006) | -0.042*** (0.004) | -0.043*** (0.004) | -0.043*** (0.006) |
| Common Official Language | | | -0.002 (0.001) | -0.001 (0.001) | -0.001 (0.001) | -0.001 (0.001) |
| Common Religion | | | -0.011*** (0.002) | -0.011*** (0.001) | -0.011*** (0.001) | -0.011*** (0.002) |
| Colonial History | | | -0.007 (0.005) | -0.007 (0.005) | -0.006 (0.005) | -0.006 (0.006) |
| Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair | | | | -0.001*** (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.001) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1) | | | | | 0.000* (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2) | | | | | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 1) | | | | | 0.001 (0.001) | -0.001 (0.002) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 2) | | | | | 0.004** (0.002) | 0.002 (0.002) |
| Num.Obs. | 99 826 | 99 826 | 79 200 | 69 957 | 63 340 | 63 340 |
| R2 | 0.002 | 0.006 | 0.006 | 0.005 | 0.005 | 0.007 |
| R2 Adj. | 0.001 | 0.005 | 0.006 | 0.005 | 0.005 | 0.006 |
| R2 Within | 0.000 | 0.004 | 0.004 | | | 0.005 |
| R2 Within Adj. | 0.000 | 0.004 | 0.004 | | | 0.005 |
| AIC | -187 832.5 | -188 238.5 | -149 886.8 | -132 349.9 | -119 707.7 | -119 753.5 |
| BIC | -187 414.0 | -187 791.4 | -149 432.0 | -132 249.2 | -119 571.9 | -119 282.6 |
| Log.Lik. | | | | 66 185.954 | 59 868.861 | |
| F | | | | 37.091 | 26.120 | |
| RMSE | 0.09 | 0.09 | 0.09 | 0.09 | 0.09 | 0.09 |
| Std.Errors | by: year | by: year | by: year | | | by: year |
| FE: year | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: The table presents the results of the main specification for UNGA ideal point distance for dyad-years in the sample in the lowest quartile of ideal point distance. Standard errors are clustered at the year level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

unique about how the spatial proximity mechanism operates on countries that are more similar rather than those that are more different. We argue that this is quite strong evidence in favor of our expectations of heterogeneous effects, given that the first quartile sample also includes states that are highly similar, and therefore have little room to move their ideal points closer to each other, thus introducing cases in which there is a ceiling effect on the ability of sitting together to affect political behavior. Even including such cases, we observe that among the set of states with high affinity, sitting together has significant effects on inducing cooperation in terms of voting behavior.

Extending this analysis, we also consider whether the power differential within the dyad—not just their level of affinity—affects the degree to which spatial proximity matters. Specifically, we expect that the effect of spatial proximity may vary based on whether one of the dyad members is the US or a P5 member. This is because diplomats from powerful states may have greater capacity to generate affinity. This could be due to the pull of their soft power (e.g., [Nye, 1990](#)) or because of their ability to offer inducements to their seatmate to vote for their preferred outcomes (e.g., [Voeten, 2000](#); [Dreher et al., 2008, 2009](#)). We illustrate these results in Tables 17 - 18 in the Appendix in which we first operationalize in interaction indicating whether one of the dyad members is the United States, and second whether one of the dyads is a member of the P5 (the United States, United Kingdom, France, China, or Russia). We find suggestive evidence that powerful states have a greater capacity to use spatial proximity to generate affinity: in two of three models, the interaction term indicating whether one of the dyad members is a P5 is negative and statistically significant, i.e., that ideal point distance is decreased. We observe directionally similar (but statistically insignificant) results in the specific analysis of the US, which may suffer due to lower power.

Turning from dyadic-level heterogeneity to issue-level heterogeneity, we assess the expectations we laid out in Hypothesis 3. Given that diplomats are more likely to have clear national instructions on highly salient issues—particularly those that are relevant for matters of national security—there is likely to be less room for them to deviate from pre-specified voting positions, and therefore less opportunity for them to be influenced by

their seat-mates. For example, the US Department of State developed a list of resolutions that it deems as especially important every year, and specifically tracks how countries vote on these resolutions—but not on others. On the other hand, on issues of lower salience, diplomats may not have pre-specified instructions from capital about what position to take. For these questions, they may have more opportunity to allow for affinity with their seatmate to shape their voting decision. We anticipate that on procedural matters and issues related to economic development, the effects of spatial proximity should be greater.

To begin our assessment of issue heterogeneity, we utilize the issue coding by [Bailey et al. \(2017\)](#), who categorize resolution votes on several issue topics: colonialism, Palestine, human rights, arms control and disarmament, nuclear issues, and economic development.¹⁵ Agreement scores for each issue area are calculated using three category vote data (1 = “yes,” 2 = “abstain,” and 3 = “no”) where abstention is counted as half-agreement with a yes or no vote ([Voeten, 2013](#)). Scores are only calculated for roll-call votes, or those that do not pass unanimously. Higher scores are associated with greater agreement, so the spatial proximity hypothesis would predict a positive relationship between seat dyad and agreement on low-salience issues.

As the closest cut to test our expectations, we focus on votes on nuclear and disarmament matters as issues where spatial proximity should matter less—these questions concern highly salient matters related to national security, and therefore diplomats are likely to have clear instructions—compared to votes on economic development matters, where diplomats may have more latitude on voting decisions, and therefore affinity generated through spatial proximity is more likely to matter.¹⁶ In the case of votes on nuclear and disarmament issues (Tables 4 and 5) the results are as expected by H3: after controlling for key predictors of alignment (i.e., cultural affinity and interdependence), spatial proximity is not any more likely to induce similar voting. However, we observe the same dynamic in the case of voting on economic development (Table 6), where our theoretical expectations would suggest that proximity should in fact induce more similarity.

¹⁵Not all votes are categorized by issue area, and resolutions can be categorized into multiple issues.

¹⁶See Tables 14 - 16 for other issue codes. Future extensions of this analysis will employ the more fine-grained topical codes from [Arias & Shaffer \(2022\)](#).

Table 4: Effect of Being Seating Dyads on Agreement Score, Nuclear Votes

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Seat Dyad | 0.008*** (0.003) | 0.007** (0.003) | 0.003 (0.003) | 0.000 (0.003) |
| Trade Flow (\$M USD) | | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) |
| ODA Commitments (\$M USD) | | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) |
| Number of Alliances | | 0.004 (0.010) | 0.007 (0.010) | 0.006 (0.010) |
| Common Official Language | | | 0.014*** (0.005) | 0.015*** (0.005) |
| Common Religion | | | 0.068*** (0.006) | 0.067*** (0.006) |
| Colonial History | | | -0.235*** (0.022) | -0.223*** (0.022) |
| Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair | | | | -0.002 (0.002) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1) | | | | 0.002** (0.001) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2) | | | | 0.003*** (0.000) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 1) | | | | 0.016 (0.015) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 2) | | | | -0.007 (0.005) |
| Num.Obs. | 380 276 | 380 276 | 296 766 | 249 170 |
| R2 | 0.073 | 0.076 | 0.121 | 0.123 |
| R2 Adj. | 0.073 | 0.076 | 0.121 | 0.122 |
| R2 Within | 0.000 | 0.002 | 0.050 | 0.048 |
| R2 Within Adj. | 0.000 | 0.002 | 0.050 | 0.048 |
| AIC | -108 067.1 | -108 960.9 | -114 226.9 | -115 699.7 |
| BIC | -107 644.0 | -108 505.3 | -113 760.5 | -115 209.7 |
| RMSE | 0.21 | 0.21 | 0.20 | 0.19 |
| Std.Errors | by: year | by: year | by: year | by: year |
| FE: year | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: Agreement scores as dependent variable. Standard errors are clustered at the year level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 5: Effect of Being Seating Dyads on Agreement Score, Arms Control & Disarmament Votes

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|---|-------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Seat Dyad | 0.004* (0.002) | 0.004* (0.002) | 0.001 (0.002) | -0.001 (0.002) |
| Trade Flow (\$M USD) | | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) |
| ODA Commitments (\$M USD) | | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) |
| Number of Alliances | | 0.003 (0.010) | 0.001 (0.010) | 0.000 (0.010) |
| Common Official Language | | | 0.012*** (0.003) | 0.014*** (0.003) |
| Common Religion | | | 0.062*** (0.006) | 0.061*** (0.006) |
| Colonial History | | | -0.195*** (0.015) | -0.189*** (0.016) |
| Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair | | | | -0.002 (0.001) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1) | | | | 0.002* (0.001) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2) | | | | 0.002*** (0.000) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 1) | | | | 0.011 (0.013) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 2) | | | | -0.012** (0.006) |
| Num.Obs. | 386 841 | 386 841 | 302 390 | 254 597 |
| R2 | 0.077 | 0.079 | 0.122 | 0.125 |
| R2 Adj. | 0.077 | 0.079 | 0.122 | 0.125 |
| R2 Within | 0.000 | 0.002 | 0.047 | 0.046 |
| R2 Within Adj. | 0.000 | 0.002 | 0.047 | 0.046 |
| AIC | -205 562.2 | -206 521.5 | -183 112.3 | -158 620.1 |
| BIC | -205 127.6 | -206 054.3 | -182 634.4 | -158 118.6 |
| RMSE | 0.19 | 0.19 | 0.18 | 0.18 |
| Std.Errors | by: year | by: year | by: year | by: year |
| FE: year | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: Agreement scores as dependent variable. Standard errors are clustered at the year level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 6: Effect of Being Seating Dyads on Agreement Score, Economic Development Votes

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Seat Dyad | 0.008*** (0.002) | 0.007*** (0.002) | 0.001 (0.002) | 0.002 (0.003) |
| Trade Flow (\$M USD) | | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) |
| ODA Commitments (\$M USD) | | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) |
| Number of Alliances | | 0.007 (0.011) | 0.013 (0.010) | 0.014 (0.009) |
| Common Official Language | | | 0.012*** (0.003) | 0.014*** (0.004) |
| Common Religion | | | 0.065*** (0.006) | 0.066*** (0.006) |
| Colonial History | | | -0.177*** (0.014) | -0.168*** (0.014) |
| Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair | | | | -0.003** (0.001) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1) | | | | 0.001** (0.001) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2) | | | | 0.002*** (0.000) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 1) | | | | 0.012 (0.015) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 2) | | | | -0.011** (0.005) |
| Num.Obs. | 392 541 | 392 541 | 306 980 | 256 545 |
| R2 | 0.112 | 0.115 | 0.162 | 0.169 |
| R2 Adj. | 0.112 | 0.115 | 0.162 | 0.169 |
| R2 Within | 0.000 | 0.003 | 0.050 | 0.049 |
| R2 Within Adj. | 0.000 | 0.003 | 0.050 | 0.049 |
| AIC | -173 109.8 | -174 460.7 | -167 905.4 | -139 251.4 |
| BIC | -172 652.8 | -173 971.1 | -167 405.6 | -138 728.6 |
| RMSE | 0.19 | 0.19 | 0.18 | 0.18 |
| Std.Errors | by: year | by: year | by: year | by: year |
| FE: year | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: Agreement scores as dependent variable. Standard errors are clustered at the year level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

How can we explain this null effect? While more analysis is needed, one explanation could be the nature of the resolution votes included in the observations. Specifically, we expect that affinity should induce more similar behavior specifically on lower-stakes, lower-salience decisions. These types of resolutions are more likely to be adopted by a consensus decision rather than a voted outcome. Indeed, more than two-thirds of decisions adopted by the UNGA are taken without a vote (Arias, 2024). The resolutions on which votes are taken are by construction those on which there is more disagreement and higher stakes, and therefore our sample would be biased against detecting movement on lower-salience decisions. In future work, we will take additional steps to probe these dynamics, including looking at voting behavior specifically on resolutions for which votes were overwhelmingly in favor—such scenarios approximate a consensus decision where one individual vote was unlikely to sway the overall outcome, and therefore individual diplomats may have had more leeway to make their own determinations of how to vote.

Robustness

To further probe the robustness of our results, we conduct several additional analyses. First, Tables 7 - 9 in the Appendix replicate our main results using agreement scores, representing the degree of voting agreement between two countries in the UNGA as the dependent variable. We find confirmation of our hypotheses that predict that two countries will have a higher agreement score in a year in which they are seat dyads, except with the inclusion of the ambassador variables which represent the mechanism at play.

Second, we test the robustness of our results to alternative model specifications, including on each of the separate time periods for which we have data, with clustering of standard errors by dyad and year, and on the sample subset with variation in the seat dyad variable (i.e., dyads that switch between 0/1s). These results can be found in Tables 10 - 13 in the Appendix. The direction of effect is robust across these specifications, but the results are not always significant. We also hope to implement dyad FE but do not currently have sufficient power - we hope to address this by filling in the years for which our data is missing, which will significantly extend the coverage of the time series.

Conclusion & Next Steps

This paper asks whether social relations between diplomats affect multilateral cooperation in IOs. We argue that diplomacy is a deeply social endeavor, and that positive relationships between individual ambassadors play an important role in determining who works together and the types of outcomes that result. We focus on spatial proximity as a key determinant of social interaction, as people who are physically closer to one another have higher levels of contact, and are thus more likely to develop affinity and subsequently to collaborate. In constructing our argument, we build on the literature on spatial proximity and voting behavior in legislatures in conversation with diplomacy studies, asking how findings translate to a setting with greater diversity of policy positions and without partisan factors.

We leverage the unique seating mechanism of the UNGA to estimate the causal effect of spatial proximity on collaboration, measured as policy position similarity. As hypothesized, we find that physical proximity is predictive of diplomats' likelihood of voting similarly throughout a UNGA session. The random assignment of being seat neighbors has a negative and statistically significant effect on the ideal point distance between two states. However, the impact is not strong enough to overcome historical and cultural factors—except for countries that already hold similar positions (i.e., those in the lowest quartile of ideal point distance). Examining the importance of ambassador-level variables yields early evidence that this effect is likely due to relationship development between ambassadors who serve and sit near each other for repeated years. Further interrogating these results, we conduct several analyses of heterogeneous effects. We find suggestive evidence that spatial affinity matters in specific contexts: when dyads have moderate levels of prior affinity based on country-level features, and when one of the dyad members is a powerful state. We continue to explore issue heterogeneity, as we expect that spatial proximity should induce more similar voting on issues of lower-salience.

Our findings challenge a consensus in the literature that state-level power determines patterns of cooperation in IOs, as spatial proximity exerts an independent effect from factors such as aid, trade, and alliances. We contribute to a growing literature on

the importance of individuals in IR, employing a unique research design that allows us to estimate the causal effects of spatial proximity.

We have a number of next steps for this project. First, we plan to develop the empirics further by interpolating data for the missing years, exploring alternative DVs (e.g., co-hosting events, co-sponsorship, speech similarity), and examining other conceptualizations of spatial proximity (e.g., front-back, neighbor across aisle, Manhattan distance). We will also probe the temporal dynamics of proximity: how does dosage/decay affect this social affinity? Secondly, we intend to build out the theory further by thinking through the most likely mechanisms behind the importance of spatial proximity in the UNGA. To do so, we will incorporate qualitative data such as interviews with diplomats and observation of UNGA sessions. Finally, we plan to continue our examination heterogeneity in the effects of spatial proximity across issue areas, as we theorize that social affinity is less likely to override country-level policies on matters of high politics.

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Appendix

A Alternative Model Specifications

Table 7: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Agreement Scores

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Seat Dyad | 0.007*** (0.002) | 0.007*** (0.002) | 0.004 (0.002) |
| Trade Flow (\$M USD) | | -0.001*** (0.000) | -0.001*** (0.000) |
| ODA Commitments (\$M USD) | | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) |
| Number of Alliances | | 0.033*** (0.009) | 0.027*** (0.007) |
| Common Official Language | | | 0.006** (0.003) |
| Common Religion | | | 0.076*** (0.006) |
| Colonial History | | | -0.146*** (0.010) |
| Num.Obs. | 415 895 | 415 895 | 326 187 |
| R2 | 0.144 | 0.148 | 0.205 |
| R2 Adj. | 0.144 | 0.148 | 0.205 |
| R2 Within | 0.000 | 0.004 | 0.060 |
| R2 Within Adj. | 0.000 | 0.004 | 0.060 |
| AIC | -387 774.6 | -389 561.6 | -337 489.0 |
| BIC | -387 282.4 | -389 036.5 | -336 954.2 |
| RMSE | 0.15 | 0.15 | 0.14 |
| Std.Errors | by: year | by: year | by: year |
| FE: year | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Notes: The table re-estimates Table 1 using agreement score as the dependent variable. Standard errors are clustered at the year level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 8: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Agreement Scores, with Ambassador Variables

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Seat Dyad | -0.005 (0.003) | -0.006* (0.004) | 0.002 (0.002) |
| Trade Flow (\$M USD) | -0.001*** (0.000) | -0.001*** (0.000) | -0.001*** (0.000) |
| ODA Commitments (\$M USD) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) |
| Number of Alliances | 0.020*** (0.004) | 0.022*** (0.004) | 0.028*** (0.007) |
| Common Official Language | 0.007*** (0.001) | 0.008*** (0.001) | 0.008*** (0.003) |
| Common Religion | 0.074*** (0.001) | 0.078*** (0.001) | 0.080*** (0.007) |
| Colonial History | -0.153*** (0.003) | -0.151*** (0.003) | -0.145*** (0.010) |
| Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair | 0.008*** (0.000) | 0.009*** (0.000) | 0.000 (0.001) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1) | | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.001 (0.001) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2) | | 0.002*** (0.000) | 0.002*** (0.000) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 1) | | -0.004*** (0.001) | 0.012 (0.013) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 2) | | -0.021*** (0.001) | -0.009** (0.004) |
| Num.Obs. | 296 958 | 272 906 | 272 906 |
| R2 | 0.062 | 0.064 | 0.218 |
| R2 Adj. | 0.062 | 0.064 | 0.218 |
| R2 Within | | | 0.063 |
| R2 Within Adj. | | | 0.063 |
| AIC | -255 970.4 | -236 277.8 | -285 089.4 |
| BIC | -255 853.8 | -236 120.0 | -284 532.0 |
| Log.Lik. | 127 996.188 | 118 153.881 | |
| RMSE | 0.16 | 0.16 | 0.14 |
| Std.Errors | | | by: year |
| FE: year | | | ✓ |

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: The table re-estimates Table 2 using agreement score as the dependent variable. Standard errors are clustered at the year level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 9: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Agreement Scores, Quartile 4

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Seat Dyad | 0.001*** (0.001) | 0.002*** (0.001) | 0.001** (0.001) | 0.002** (0.001) | 0.003*** (0.001) | 0.002*** (0.001) |
| Trade Flow (\$M USD) | | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) |
| ODA Commitments (\$M USD) | | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) |
| Number of Alliances | | 0.014*** (0.001) | 0.011*** (0.002) | 0.010*** (0.001) | 0.010*** (0.001) | 0.012*** (0.002) |
| Common Official Language | | | 0.001*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.001** (0.000) |
| Common Religion | | | 0.003*** (0.001) | 0.002*** (0.000) | 0.002*** (0.000) | 0.003*** (0.001) |
| Colonial History | | | -0.001 (0.001) | 0.010*** (0.001) | 0.010*** (0.001) | -0.001 (0.001) |
| Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair | | | | -0.001*** (0.000) | -0.001*** (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1) | | | | | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2) | | | | | 0.000** (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 1) | | | | | -0.001*** (0.000) | -0.001** (0.001) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 2) | | | | | -0.001*** (0.000) | -0.001 (0.001) |
| Num.Obs. | 97 189 | 97 189 | 78 281 | 69 733 | 61 788 | 61 788 |
| R2 | 0.219 | 0.227 | 0.256 | 0.013 | 0.015 | 0.318 |
| R2 Adj. | 0.219 | 0.226 | 0.256 | 0.013 | 0.015 | 0.317 |
| R2 Within | 0.000 | 0.010 | 0.017 | | | 0.024 |
| R2 Within Adj. | 0.000 | 0.010 | 0.017 | | | 0.024 |
| AIC | -546 016.5 | -546 983.0 | -443 464.6 | -374 742.5 | -334 777.4 | -357 411.9 |
| BIC | -545 589.7 | -546 527.7 | -443 001.2 | -374 641.9 | -334 641.9 | -356 933.2 |
| Log.Lik. | | | | 187 382.267 | 167 403.698 | |
| F | | | | 100.226 | 71.006 | |
| RMSE | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.01 |
| Std.Errors | by: year | by: year | by: year | | | by: year |
| FE: year | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: The table re-estimates Table 4 using agreement score as the dependent variable. Standard errors are clustered at the year level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 10: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Ideal Point Distance for 1952 - 1989

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|---|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Seat Dyad | -0.026** (0.011) | -0.024** (0.011) | 0.000 (0.014) | 0.024 (0.019) | 0.039* (0.020) | 0.015 (0.014) |
| Trade Flow (\$M USD) | | 0.006*** (0.001) | 0.005*** (0.001) | 0.003*** (0.001) | 0.002*** (0.001) | 0.005*** (0.000) |
| ODA Commitments (\$M USD) | | 0.001*** (0.000) | 0.001*** (0.000) | 0.001*** (0.000) | 0.001*** (0.000) | 0.001*** (0.000) |
| Number of Alliances | | -0.230*** (0.043) | -0.238*** (0.020) | -0.208*** (0.025) | -0.218*** (0.025) | -0.244*** (0.020) |
| Common Official Language | | | -0.090*** (0.013) | -0.093*** (0.005) | -0.097*** (0.005) | -0.098*** (0.014) |
| Common Religion | | | -0.480*** (0.032) | -0.475*** (0.007) | -0.510*** (0.007) | -0.518*** (0.031) |
| Colonial History | | | 0.637*** (0.058) | 0.656*** (0.015) | 0.646*** (0.015) | 0.630*** (0.054) |
| Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair | | | | -0.007*** (0.001) | -0.010*** (0.002) | 0.009* (0.005) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1) | | | | | 0.003*** (0.001) | 0.000 (0.003) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2) | | | | | -0.008*** (0.001) | -0.007*** (0.002) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 1) | | | | | 0.061*** (0.009) | 0.022 (0.082) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 2) | | | | | 0.098*** (0.008) | 0.077** (0.031) |
| Num.Obs. | 299 007 | 299 007 | 261 981 | 261 981 | 241 023 | 241 023 |
| R2 | 0.048 | 0.049 | 0.092 | 0.060 | 0.061 | 0.093 |
| R2 Adj. | 0.047 | 0.049 | 0.091 | 0.059 | 0.061 | 0.093 |
| R2 Within | 0.000 | 0.002 | 0.057 | | | 0.060 |
| R2 Within Adj. | 0.000 | 0.002 | 0.057 | | | 0.060 |
| AIC | 792 276.5 | 791 747.2 | 646 991.9 | 655 991.9 | 608 099.7 | 599 952.1 |
| BIC | 792 679.7 | 792 182.1 | 647 463.3 | 656 107.2 | 608 255.6 | 600 471.8 |
| Log.Lik. | | | | -327 984.960 | -304 034.845 | |
| RMSE | 0.91 | 0.91 | 0.83 | 0.85 | 0.85 | 0.84 |
| Std.Errors | by: year | by: year | by: year | | | by: year |
| FE: year | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: The table presents the results of the main specification for UNGA ideal point distance for sample years 1952 - 1989. Standard errors are clustered at the year level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 11: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Ideal Point Distance for 2017 - 2023

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| Seat Dyad | -0.044* | -0.045* | -0.040 | -0.036 | -0.028 | -0.028 |
| | (0.017) | (0.018) | (0.018) | (0.059) | (0.062) | (0.030) |
| Trade Flow (\$M USD) | | 0.001*** | 0.001*** | 0.001*** | 0.001*** | 0.001* |
| | | (0.000) | (0.000) | (0.000) | (0.000) | (0.000) |
| ODA Commitments (\$M USD) | | 0.001** | 0.001*** | 0.001*** | 0.001*** | 0.001 |
| | | (0.000) | (0.000) | (0.000) | (0.000) | (0.000) |
| Number of Alliances | | -0.137*** | -0.148*** | -0.147*** | -0.154*** | -0.154** |
| | | (0.009) | (0.007) | (0.036) | (0.036) | (0.006) |
| Common Official Language | | | -0.039** | -0.025* | -0.065*** | -0.065* |
| | | | (0.010) | (0.013) | (0.014) | (0.009) |
| Common Religion | | | -0.316*** | -0.319*** | -0.319*** | -0.319** |
| | | | (0.008) | (0.018) | (0.019) | (0.017) |
| Colonial History | | | 0.773*** | 0.763*** | 0.790*** | 0.790** |
| | | | (0.034) | (0.043) | (0.045) | (0.041) |
| Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair | | | | -0.008** | 0.011** | 0.012 |
| | | | | (0.003) | (0.004) | (0.007) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1) | | | | | -0.022*** | -0.022* |
| | | | | | (0.002) | (0.002) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2) | | | | | 0.003** | 0.003 |
| | | | | | (0.001) | (0.001) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 1) | | | | | -0.127*** | -0.127 |
| | | | | | (0.010) | (0.022) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 2) | | | | | -0.024** | -0.024 |
| | | | | | (0.012) | (0.020) |
| Num.Obs. | 110 565 | 110 565 | 58 641 | 29 412 | 26 732 | 26 732 |
| R2 | 0.001 | 0.005 | 0.060 | 0.055 | 0.066 | 0.066 |
| R2 Adj. | 0.001 | 0.004 | 0.060 | 0.055 | 0.065 | 0.065 |
| R2 Within | 0.000 | 0.004 | 0.059 | | | 0.066 |
| R2 Within Adj. | 0.000 | 0.004 | 0.059 | | | 0.065 |
| AIC | 244 899.3 | 244 483.7 | 127 516.5 | 64 529.7 | 58 572.9 | 58 572.3 |
| BIC | 244 966.6 | 244 579.8 | 127 624.3 | 64 620.9 | 58 695.8 | 58 695.2 |
| Log.Lik. | | | | -32 253.844 | -29 271.454 | |
| RMSE | 0.73 | 0.73 | 0.72 | 0.72 | 0.72 | 0.72 |
| Std.Errors | by: year | by: year | by: year | | | by: year |
| FE: year | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: The table presents the results of the main specification for UNGA ideal point distance for sample years 2017 - 2023. Standard errors are clustered at the year level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 12: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Ideal Point Distance, SEs Clustered by Dyad and Year

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Seat Dyad | -0.029 (0.049) | -0.029 (0.049) | -0.006 (0.052) |
| Trade Flow (\$M USD) | | 0.002*** (0.000) | 0.001*** (0.000) |
| ODA Commitments (\$M USD) | | 0.001*** (0.000) | 0.001** (0.000) |
| Number of Alliances | | -0.207** (0.091) | -0.216*** (0.075) |
| Common Official Language | | | -0.082*** (0.021) |
| Common Religion | | | -0.453*** (0.036) |
| Colonial History | | | 0.656*** (0.082) |
| Num.Obs. | 409 572 | 409 572 | 320 622 |
| R2 | 0.051 | 0.052 | 0.092 |
| R2 Adj. | 0.050 | 0.052 | 0.092 |
| R2 Within | 0.000 | 0.002 | 0.057 |
| R2 Within Adj. | 0.000 | 0.002 | 0.057 |
| AIC | 1 044 272.8 | 1 043 429.3 | 776 686.8 |
| BIC | 1 044 753.4 | 1 043 942.7 | 777 210.0 |
| RMSE | 0.87 | 0.86 | 0.81 |
| Std.Errors | by: year & dyad | by: year & dyad | by: year & dyad |
| FE: year | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Notes: The table presents the results of the main specification for UNGA ideal point distance with standard errors clustered at the year and dyad level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 13: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Ideal Point Distance for Dyads with Variation

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Seat Dyad | -0.048*** (0.012) | -0.048*** (0.012) | 0.012 (0.016) | 0.028* (0.016) |
| Trade Flow (\$M USD) | | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) |
| ODA Commitments (\$M USD) | | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) |
| Number of Alliances | | 0.141 (0.124) | -0.335** (0.165) | -0.316* (0.166) |
| Common Official Language | | | -0.063*** (0.020) | -0.055** (0.023) |
| Common Religion | | | -0.411*** (0.019) | -0.439*** (0.020) |
| Colonial History | | | 1.220*** (0.073) | 1.162*** (0.077) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1) | | | | -0.001 (0.003) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2) | | | | -0.001 (0.002) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 1) | | | | 0.021 (0.076) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 2) | | | | 0.143*** (0.041) |
| Num.Obs. | 11 569 | 11 569 | 9176 | 8015 |
| R2 | 0.053 | 0.054 | 0.116 | 0.116 |
| R2 Adj. | 0.050 | 0.050 | 0.112 | 0.111 |
| R2 Within | 0.000 | 0.001 | 0.082 | 0.084 |
| R2 Within Adj. | 0.000 | 0.001 | 0.082 | 0.083 |
| AIC | 31 126.2 | 31 127.6 | 21 992.2 | 19 492.2 |
| BIC | 31 449.8 | 31 473.3 | 22 341.3 | 19 848.7 |
| RMSE | 0.93 | 0.93 | 0.80 | 0.81 |
| Std.Errors | by: year | by: year | by: year | by: year |
| FE: year | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: The table presents the results of the main specification for UNGA ideal point distance with standard errors clustered at the year level for dyads with variation. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 14: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Agreement Score, Palestine/Israel Votes

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Seat Dyad | 0.009*** (0.003) | 0.009*** (0.003) | 0.008** (0.003) | 0.006* (0.003) |
| Trade Flow (\$M USD) | | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) |
| ODA Commitments (\$M USD) | | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) |
| Number of Alliances | | 0.059*** (0.009) | 0.045*** (0.007) | 0.046*** (0.006) |
| Common Official Language | | | -0.033*** (0.008) | -0.023*** (0.007) |
| Common Religion | | | 0.106*** (0.009) | 0.111*** (0.010) |
| Colonial History | | | -0.055*** (0.012) | -0.064*** (0.010) |
| Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair | | | | 0.005* (0.003) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1) | | | | -0.001 (0.001) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2) | | | | 0.001* (0.001) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 1) | | | | 0.024 (0.017) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 2) | | | | -0.008 (0.006) |
| Num.Obs. | 366 502 | 366 502 | 284 195 | 235 149 |
| R2 | 0.117 | 0.119 | 0.154 | 0.173 |
| R2 Adj. | 0.117 | 0.119 | 0.154 | 0.172 |
| R2 Within | 0.000 | 0.003 | 0.024 | 0.028 |
| R2 Within Adj. | 0.000 | 0.003 | 0.024 | 0.028 |
| AIC | -71 589.8 | -72 518.9 | -75 208.5 | -65 297.2 |
| BIC | -71 200.5 | -72 097.3 | -74 775.6 | -64 841.0 |
| RMSE | 0.22 | 0.22 | 0.21 | 0.21 |
| Std.Errors | by: year | by: year | by: year | by: year |
| FE: year | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: The table presents the results of the effect of being seat dyads on voting agreement on all resolutions and amendments pertaining to Palestine/Israel. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 15: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Agreement Score, Colonialism Votes

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Seat Dyad | 0.005*** (0.002) | 0.005** (0.002) | 0.003 (0.002) | 0.001 (0.003) |
| Trade Flow (\$M USD) | | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) |
| ODA Commitments (\$M USD) | | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) |
| Number of Alliances | | 0.032*** (0.007) | 0.024*** (0.006) | 0.026*** (0.006) |
| Common Official Language | | | -0.008* (0.004) | -0.008** (0.003) |
| Common Religion | | | 0.076*** (0.007) | 0.078*** (0.007) |
| Colonial History | | | -0.188*** (0.013) | -0.183*** (0.013) |
| Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair | | | | 0.001 (0.001) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1) | | | | 0.001 (0.001) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2) | | | | 0.002*** (0.000) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 1) | | | | 0.010 (0.016) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 2) | | | | -0.017*** (0.005) |
| Num.Obs. | 403 699 | 403 699 | 316 935 | 265 891 |
| R2 | 0.114 | 0.118 | 0.166 | 0.174 |
| R2 Adj. | 0.114 | 0.118 | 0.166 | 0.174 |
| R2 Within | 0.000 | 0.004 | 0.048 | 0.047 |
| R2 Within Adj. | 0.000 | 0.004 | 0.048 | 0.047 |
| AIC | -182 652.8 | -184 243.9 | -164 464.8 | -138 416.8 |
| BIC | -182 172.8 | -183 731.2 | -163 942.1 | -137 871.3 |
| RMSE | 0.19 | 0.19 | 0.19 | 0.19 |
| Std.Errors | by: year | by: year | by: year | by: year |
| FE: year | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: The table presents the results of the effect of being seat dyads on voting agreement on all resolutions and amendments pertaining to colonialism. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 16: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Agreement Score, Human Rights Votes

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|---|------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Seat Dyad | 0.002 (0.003) | 0.001 (0.003) | -0.004 (0.004) | -0.007 (0.005) |
| Trade Flow (\$M USD) | | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) |
| ODA Commitments (\$M USD) | | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) |
| Number of Alliances | | 0.069*** (0.009) | 0.058*** (0.007) | 0.059*** (0.007) |
| Common Official Language | | | 0.000 (0.003) | 0.000 (0.003) |
| Common Religion | | | 0.095*** (0.012) | 0.099*** (0.014) |
| Colonial History | | | -0.139*** (0.012) | -0.135*** (0.012) |
| Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair | | | | 0.001 (0.001) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1) | | | | 0.001 (0.001) |
| Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2) | | | | 0.002*** (0.000) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 1) | | | | 0.018 (0.014) |
| Ambassador Gender (country 2) | | | | -0.010* (0.006) |
| Num.Obs. | 392 171 | 392 171 | 306 323 | 255 482 |
| R2 | 0.127 | 0.129 | 0.161 | 0.167 |
| R2 Adj. | 0.126 | 0.129 | 0.161 | 0.167 |
| R2 Within | 0.000 | 0.003 | 0.040 | 0.041 |
| R2 Within Adj. | 0.000 | 0.003 | 0.040 | 0.041 |
| AIC | -64 474.2 | -65 504.9 | -85 720.5 | -76 393.2 |
| BIC | -64 017.2 | -65 015.3 | -85 220.8 | -75 870.7 |
| RMSE | 0.22 | 0.22 | 0.21 | 0.21 |
| Std.Errors | by: year | by: year | by: year | by: year |
| FE: year | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: The table presents the results of the effect of being seat dyads on voting agreement on all resolutions and amendments pertaining to human rights. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 17: Effect of Being Seating Dyads on Ideal Point Distance, US binary

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Seat Dyad | -0.029*** (0.009) | -0.027*** (0.009) | -0.026*** (0.009) | -0.007 (0.013) |
| Trade Flow (\$M USD) | | | -0.001** (0.000) | -0.001** (0.000) |
| ODA Commitments (\$M USD) | | | 0.000*** (0.000) | 0.000*** (0.000) |
| Number of Alliances | | | -0.317*** (0.037) | -0.365*** (0.034) |
| Common Official Language | | | | -0.106*** (0.009) |
| Common Religion | | | | -0.437*** (0.029) |
| Colonial History | | | | 0.666*** (0.052) |
| US Member of Dyad | 1.307*** (0.107) | 1.309*** (0.107) | 1.307*** (0.106) | 1.241*** (0.115) |
| Seat Dyad \times US Member of Dyad | | -0.156 (0.140) | -0.157 (0.140) | 0.002 (0.128) |
| Num.Obs. | 409 572 | 409 572 | 409 572 | 320 622 |
| R2 | 0.080 | 0.080 | 0.081 | 0.122 |
| R2 Adj. | 0.080 | 0.080 | 0.081 | 0.122 |
| R2 Within | 0.031 | 0.031 | 0.032 | 0.089 |
| R2 Within Adj. | 0.031 | 0.031 | 0.032 | 0.088 |
| AIC | 1 031 304.3 | 1 031 305.0 | 1 030 852.1 | 765 643.6 |
| BIC | 1 031 795.9 | 1 031 807.5 | 1 031 387.3 | 766 188.1 |
| RMSE | 0.85 | 0.85 | 0.85 | 0.80 |
| Std.Errors | by: year | by: year | by: year | by: year |
| FE: year | X | X | X | X |

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Notes: The table presents the results of the main specification for UNGA ideal point distance with the addition of a binary variable for whether one member of the dyad is the US * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 18: Effect of Being Seating Dyads on Ideal Point Distance, P5 binary

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Seat Dyad | -0.028*** (0.009) | -0.016 (0.010) | -0.017* (0.010) | -0.005 (0.012) |
| Trade Flow (\$M USD) | | | -0.001*** (0.000) | -0.001*** (0.000) |
| ODA Commitments (\$M USD) | | | 0.001*** (0.000) | 0.001*** (0.000) |
| Number of Alliances | | | -0.530*** (0.040) | -0.365*** (0.022) |
| Common Official Language | | | | -0.091*** (0.011) |
| Common Religion | | | | -0.411*** (0.031) |
| Colonial History | | | | 0.295*** (0.030) |
| P5 Member of Dyad | 0.782*** (0.028) | 0.783*** (0.028) | 0.800*** (0.028) | 0.664*** (0.044) |
| Seat Dyad x P5 Member of Dyad | | -0.189*** (0.060) | -0.157** (0.062) | 0.001 (0.058) |
| Num.Obs. | 409 572 | 409 572 | 409 572 | 320 622 |
| R2 | 0.097 | 0.097 | 0.100 | 0.121 |
| R2 Adj. | 0.097 | 0.097 | 0.099 | 0.121 |
| R2 Within | 0.049 | 0.049 | 0.052 | 0.087 |
| R2 Within Adj. | 0.049 | 0.049 | 0.052 | 0.087 |
| AIC | 1 023 734.9 | 1 023 728.5 | 1 022 537.0 | 766 095.3 |
| BIC | 1 024 226.4 | 1 024 231.0 | 1 023 072.2 | 766 639.9 |
| RMSE | 0.84 | 0.84 | 0.84 | 0.80 |
| Std.Errors | by: year | by: year | by: year | by: year |
| FE: year | X | X | X | X |

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Notes: The table presents the results of the main specification for UNGA ideal point distance with the addition of a binary variable for whether one member of the dyad is a P5 country * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.