

# Digital Diplomacy and Consensus-Building in International Organizations

September 3, 2024

## Abstract

Has the adoption of digital diplomacy hurt consensus-building in multilateral negotiations? Building on elite interviews, I posit a theoretical framework to predict when digital diplomacy should pose a greater challenge. I argue that in institutions with strong consensus norms and diverse membership, digital diplomacy renders consensus-building more difficult. I test these expectations in the UN General Assembly, comparing consensus under the digital protocol adopted during COVID-19 to face-to-face negotiations. I also conduct an external validity probe in the EU Council. I find that, although consensus rates in aggregate did not decline, diplomats engaged in strategic selection, freezing negotiations on controversial and emerging issues to focus on easier issue areas. To separate the effects of digital diplomacy from the larger impacts of COVID-19, I propose two laboratory experiments. My findings suggest that digital diplomacy can be a useful tool for diplomatic ‘maintenance,’ but not for addressing many pressing issues.

# Introduction

Diplomacy is a fundamentally social endeavor, as individuals engage with their counterparts to negotiate over policy responses. Trust, communication, and empathy are all critical ingredients of successful diplomacy (e.g., [Wheeler, 2013](#); [Sending et al., 2015](#); [Holmes, 2018](#); [Keys & Yorke, 2019](#)). Yet, as digital communication tools proliferate, diplomats are increasingly urged to conduct their work online to reduce costs and increase efficiency (e.g., [Burns & Thomas-Greenfield, 2020](#)). Can these types of social interactions take place just as effectively on Zoom as they do in the physical spaces of multilateral organizations? Does digital diplomacy undermine the ability of diplomats to forge consensus—one of their most important functions?<sup>1</sup> Under what conditions can digital diplomacy be an effective tool for diplomatic negotiations and consensus-building? There is an ongoing debate in diplomatic studies about the effects of such technologies on negotiations—some argue that they are helpful (e.g., [Bjola & Manor, 2022](#)), some claim that they are detrimental (e.g., [Naylor, 2020](#)), and some argue that they have no discernible substantive impact on the work of diplomacy ([Bjola & Copen, 2022](#)).

Drawing on elite interviews conducted with 27 diplomatic practitioners during March and April 2020 at the UNGA, I suggest that this indeterminacy is the result of a failure to adequately account for institutional design features in theorizing the effects of digital technologies on diplomatic negotiations, as well as for the complexities of institutional agendas. I develop a theoretical framework that predicts that the effects of digital diplomacy are particularly detrimental in international organizations with strong consensus norms and large memberships. In organizations that operate based on principles of consensus rather than voting, it becomes more important for diplomats to accurately assess the positions of the *entire* membership, rather than simply a voting majority, increasing the challenges that must be overcome through digital negotiation. Assessing these preferences is made substantially more difficult when the membership of the organization is large and diverse. At the same time, the work of diplomacy cannot

---

<sup>1</sup>I specifically define digital diplomacy as a set of practices performed using internet-based communication technologies to further diplomatic objectives, including multilateral negotiations (see also [Eggeling, 2023](#); [Vadrot & Ruiz Rodríguez, 2022](#)).

fully be paused when a digital shift becomes necessary. I therefore theorize that under conditions of digital diplomacy, diplomats strategically shift the institutional agenda away from controversial or emergent issues, because in such cases a new consensus must be forged. In contrast, on administrative or continuing work, existing agreements can simply be translated into a virtual environment, and thus the challenges of digital negotiation are expected to be not as great. Thus, digital diplomacy can serve an important—but constrained—role in the diplomatic toolkit.

To test these expectations, I leverage the case of COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated an enormous change in the business of diplomacy, as professional negotiators were forced to move from informal meetings in the hallways of New York and Brussels to virtual sessions on Zoom and Microsoft Teams. According to Singapore’s long-time ambassador Ashok Mirpuri, “[o]perating online is not real diplomacy.”<sup>2</sup> Estonian ambassador Sven Jürgenson was similarly critical: “WhatsApp chats can’t replace the corridor diplomacy for getting consensus.” These critiques are reminiscent of perennial concerns among professional diplomats about the potential of new technologies to undermine face-to-face diplomacy, including from eminent diplomats such as William Burns<sup>3</sup> and Lord Palmerston.<sup>4</sup> The immediate and shock created by COVID-19 accelerated existing trends towards digitally mediated ‘synthetic situations’ (Eggeling & Adler-Nissen, 2002). Against the background of this slow-moving adoption, the exogenous shock of COVID-19 forced diplomats to simultaneously and immediately move their day-to-day operations online.

I assess these expectations in the empirical setting of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). This institutional context is characterized by diverse membership and strong norms of consensus, and as such is a case when we should expect to see substantial disruptions to consensus-building caused by the rapid adoption of digital negotiation. I examine consensus rates on resolutions that were adopted under the virtual negotiation procedures that were employed by the UNGA after the COVID-19 crisis hit,

---

<sup>2</sup>Ryan Heath in Politico, April 16, 2020.

<sup>3</sup>William Burns in Foreign Policy, October 23, 2014.

<sup>4</sup>Jeffrey Robertson for the Lowry Institute, October 21, 2020.

and compare these rates to other recent sessions. I show that while consensus rates did not decline in aggregate, this overall pattern is the result of strategic decision-making by diplomats. There were new challenges that were created in forging consensus, particularly in communication, social bonding, and informal bargaining. In response to these challenges, diplomats focused on issue areas that they expected to be easier to negotiate over, including already decided matters such as regulatory affairs. These findings suggest that while digital diplomacy can be used as a tool for successfully addressing routine, quotidian work that builds upon already forged consensus, it does not appear to be a useful tool for building new consensus, particularly on emerging and controversial issue areas. To illustrate that these effects are not unique to the UNGA, I conduct an external validity probe in the European Union (EU) Council—an IO characterized by similarly large, heterogeneous membership and consensus norms—and find similar results. Thus, while digital diplomacy may serve a valuable role in the diplomat’s toolbox, increasing efficiency for administrative affairs, it clearly cannot supersede the face-to-face meeting.

Nevertheless, establishing the effects of digital diplomacy separately from the broader impact of COVID-19 is difficult in an observational setting. While COVID-19 proves a hard case for diplomats to do effective work under digital diplomacy, as they faced many substantive challenges simultaneously, it is important to isolate the effects of digital methods on the success of multilateral diplomatic negotiations. Furthermore, observational analysis does not allow for identification of the causal effects of institutional features and agenda dynamics on consensus-building under digital diplomacy. To capture these dynamics, I propose two laboratory experiments. The experimental sample of student Model United Nations participants more closely reflects the real-world expectations of diplomats than a general convenience sample. In the first experiment, participants construct an agenda for a virtual or in-person simulation, capturing the effect of digital contexts on diplomats’ issue selection. In the second experiment, agenda dynamics are manipulated to measure their actual effects on consensus-building over easy and difficult issue items.

[Hedling & Bremberg \(2021, 1597\)](#) call for researchers to examine digital diplomacy

more deeply, and to specifically draw attention to the practical differences that result in the shift from face-to-face diplomacy to digital diplomacy. While scholars are paying increasing attention to digital diplomacy in international negotiations, this work contributes the first empirical examination of the effects of digital negotiations on policy adoption.<sup>5</sup> I help to adjudicate in the debate about whether the advent of digital diplomacy has overall negative or positive effects on the ability of diplomats in multilateral institutions to effectively conduct their work, contributing a unified framework that can generate predictions about the impact of digital diplomacy across international organizations. Building on the ‘practice turn’ in diplomacy (e.g., [Adler & Pouliot, 2011](#); [Adler-Nissen & Pouliot, 2014](#); [Sending et al., 2015](#))<sup>6</sup> I also extend previous work on digital diplomacy with quantitative analyses in two cases—the UNGA and the EU Council—and in an experimental context, which provides an important test of theoretical expectations in institutions with strong norms of consensus and large membership.

## Digital Diplomacy

The dynamics of diplomatic representation take place in deeply social environments. Individual diplomats must interact with their counterparts to develop social relationships ([Berridge & Jennings, 1985](#)), cultivate empathy ([Wheeler, 2013](#)), and build trust ([Holmes, 2018](#)). Diplomacy is based on practice, “socially meaningful patterns of action [that are] being performed more or less competently,” ([Adler & Pouliot, 2011, 6](#)).<sup>7</sup> While digital tools are being increasingly advocated for by policymakers, we lack clear answers as to how digital mediation affects the ability of diplomats to engage in these types of social interactions. While there are certainly some benefits that digital diplomacy affords, scholars have also detailed many ways in which digital diplomacy potentially

---

<sup>5</sup>[Maurer & Wright \(2020\)](#); [Eggeling & Adler-Nissen \(2002\)](#) have conducted valuable analyses of the EU Council during COVID-19, which is complemented by the quantitative analysis conducted here.

<sup>6</sup>[Adler & Pouliot \(2011, 6\)](#) define practice as “socially meaningful patterns of action [that are] being performed more or less competently.”

<sup>7</sup>See also [Adler-Nissen & Pouliot \(2014\)](#); [Sending et al. \(2015\)](#) for more on the practice turn in diplomacy studies, and [Clark & Zucker \(2023\)](#); [Clark & Dolan \(2022\)](#); [Heinzel & Liese \(2021\)](#); [Heinzel \(2022\)](#); [Malis \(2021\)](#) for more on the influence individuals in IOs.

undermines the ability of diplomats to effectively conduct their work. Previous work has focused on the influence of digital diplomacy on social relations and trust between diplomats, inequality, legitimacy, and policy creation. Across each of these areas, there are indeterminate theoretical expectations and empirical findings about the effects. I contend that one explanation for this indeterminacy is that existing studies have focused on a variety of different types of fora, which vary in key dimensions, and that these dimensions have not been sufficiently theorized with respect to the influence of digital diplomacy. I assess these findings before laying out a unified set of expectations that take institutional features into account in generating expectations about the effects of digital diplomacy on consensus-building.

## Social Relations and Trust

Digital diplomacy may have direct effects on the vitality of the diplomatic corps. It is through face-to-face interactions that diplomats make efforts to persuade and influence their counterparts, the key goals of diplomacy (e.g., [Wendt, 1999](#); [Risse, 2000](#); [Johnston, 2001](#); [Gray & Baturu, 2021](#)). The transmission of emotions in face-to-face diplomatic interactions allows negotiators to credibly communicate intentions, which are attenuated or distorted through other channels ([Wong, 2020](#)). Though recent work argues that diplomats can use technological developments such as emojis to communicate their emotions online ([Cornut, 2022](#)), such technologies are not substitutes for in-person communication ([Cornut et al., 2022](#)). Interactions are also necessary to learn the positions and preferences of their counterparts. Permanent, standing representation creates a social environment in which these dynamics can play out ([Pouliot, 2016](#)). As [Maurer & Wright \(2020, 561\)](#) argue:

Diplomats and officials who attend meetings regularly develop a detailed understanding 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.

Engaging face-to-face regularly maximizes the opportunities to develop social rela-

tionships and standing (Pouliot, 2016). Indeed, recent work on digital diplomacy shows that digital meetings diminish the sense of understanding and togetherness between diplomats (e.g., Wheeler, 2013; Bramsen & Hagemann, 2021). As Wheeler & Holmes (2021) argue, bodily copresence is required for diplomats to form strong social relationships, though the authors do note that mediated interaction—such as digital engagement—can serve to create weak bonds (see also Bjola & Manor, 2022). Informal negotiations, which create opportunities for arguing and persuasion (Risse & Kleine, 2010) are particularly aided by social relations, and digital diplomacy offers limited opportunities for such interactions (Vadrot & Ruiz Rodríguez, 2022). 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. Virtual meetings do not allow for this to happen organically.

As Chasek (2021) highlights, trust is one specific dimension of these social relations that is posited to be negatively impacted by digital diplomacy (see also Hedling & Bremberg, 2021). These expectations are borne out in the experiences of policymakers. For example, Josep Borrell, Vice President of the European Commission lamented:

[P]hone calls and even video conferences miss a key ingredient to make diplomacy work: human interaction. To forge deals, you need to look people in the eye, to engage directly, and have a quiet word in a corner. Multilateral diplomacy, inside the EU and globally, is difficult at the best of times. Now this is especially true as trust—that magic and necessary ingredient for people to compromise—is harder to build over a video line with poor audio.

Other work finds mixed effects of digital diplomacy on trust. For example, Eggeling & Adler-Nissen (2002, 12) argue that digital diplomacy can still allow for trust to be managed in interpersonal relationships between diplomats, transforming their in-person activities to a new domain but not necessarily undermining their traditional role. Eggeling & Versloot (2022) similarly argue that trust can be effectively translated online, but only when it is first established via in-person relations.

## Policy Creation

In addition to these social dynamics, the instrumental task of communication can be more difficult in a digital setting compared to face-to-face, hindering the practical work of policy negotiation. Miscommunication becomes more likely in digital diplomacy, as participants cannot observe the informative signals provided by non-verbal expressive behaviors such as gestures, posture, and eye contact (Jervis, 1976; Holmes, 2022). As the activities of diplomacy move into digital spaces, cognitive load induced by ‘Zoom fatigue’ reduces the quality of interactions (Holmes, 2022). In a limited survey of diplomats, Bjola & Coplen (2022) find that diplomats struggled to ‘read the room’ in the virtual spaces. This limited their ability to know who was following the discussion, what issues resonated with their counterparts, and which negotiators were engaging with each other (Bjola & Coplen, 2022, 12). Together, these effects make policy creation more difficult.

Adler-Nissen & Drieschova (2019) illustrates that technology creates opacity in the drafting process and makes it more difficult for diplomats to control negotiations. While negotiations can take place more rapidly, the substance of a proposal can become less important in the process. (Chasek, 2021, 62) observes that in digital negotiations, it is harder for the meeting chair to ‘read the room’ and move the parties forward, to convene informal discussions on brackets, and to engage in common tactics such as horse-trading and brinkmanship, ultimately rendering it more difficult to arrive at a consensus as compared to in-person negotiation. On the other hand, Galin et al. (2007, 794) find that there was no perceived difference in the effectiveness of virtual versus in-person negotiation.

## Legitimacy

In addition to being harder to craft, the proposals adopted through digital negotiations may suffer from diminished legitimacy (Vadrot et al., 2021) and be bereft of the symbolic power that renders high-level meetings effective (Naylor, 2020). Legitimacy—the subjective normative belief by an actor that a rule or institution ought to be obeyed—is a crucial characteristic of IOs that allows them to exercise authority in international



politics (Hurd, 2008). Socialization, which is developed by physical co-presence at IOs with permanent representation, leads to the internalization of community norms that also legitimate arguments and consensus-building (e.g., Lewis, 2005, 939).

By derogating from traditional rules and in-person practices, digital negotiations can have negative effects on perceptions of institutional legitimacy by the participatory actors. State actors must believe that they have opportunities to influence IO policy-making through their participation (Stone, 2011), and shifts in the agreed-upon rules can undermine this belief. As Tallberg & Zürn (2019, 594) observe, “[w]hen IOs fall short of widely recognized procedural standards, this creates an opportunity for opponents to delegitimize the IO with reference to these limits.” As IOs face growing backlash and retrenchment (Walter, 2021), considering the implications of digital diplomacy on IO legitimacy takes on increasing importance.

## Inequality

By increasing the ease with which actors can participate, digital fora can have equalizing, equity-enhancing effects on negotiations. This is particularly important for small states, which tend to have smaller diplomatic missions in multilateral organizations compared to larger states. In traditional face-to-face diplomacy, this can put diplomats from smaller states at a disadvantage as they struggle to cover the many meetings that occur simultaneously (e.g., Panke, 2013, 2010). Digital meetings broaden and equalize access across participants (Bramsen & Hagemann, 2021). Participating in digital meetings is less costly than attending international summits, which can further aid small states with limited foreign affairs budgets, and has additional benefits of reducing the carbon footprints of traditional meetings (Chasek, 2021). Bayer et al. (2024), for example, show that virtual meetings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change allowed for greater numbers of delegates to participate, but also that this shift did not increase meaningful participation.

While some research points to digital diplomacy as equalizing, others suggest that digital negotiations can exacerbate inequality in diplomatic work. For example, Towns

et al. (2020) draws attention to the gender inequality that digital diplomacy creates. Vadrot & Ruiz Rodríguez (2022) argue that digital negotiations reinforce existing inequalities between states and non-state actors, and create new inequalities between wealthy, Western states and developing, non-Western states. Because of weaker internet connections, Global South delegates have less ability to employ their cameras during negotiations, which hinders their ability to fully communicate with non-verbal cues. Meeting time zones tend to favor delegates in Europe and the Americas, to the disadvantage of Pacific states. Finally, employing English as the only language of negotiation without simultaneous translation was particularly difficult for the work of non-native English speakers, which proved to be particularly salient for African Group negotiators.<sup>8</sup>

## Digital Diplomacy in International Organizations

Existing work has made important strides in unpacking the potential effects of digital diplomacy on social relations, inequality, policy creation, and effectiveness, taking on particular relevance in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this increasing attention, as I have shown, the literature is generally indeterminate as to whether these effects are positive, negative, or null. Suggest two considerations that existing literature has not incorporated, which can account for these indeterminacies. The first is agenda dynamics: the types of issues that diplomats negotiate over vary in their complexity and difficulty, and diplomats can engage in strategic selection to craft institutional agendas based on contextual challenges. The second feature is institutional variation: existing studies have focused on institutions ranging from the EU Committee of Permanent Representatives (Eggeling & Adler-Nissen, 2002) to intergovernmental conferences on marine biodiversity (Vadrot et al., 2021) to the major UN environmental bodies (Chasek, 2021). These institutions vary on a variety of dimensions, from the number of actors involved to the types of issues under consideration, which have been undertheorized with respect to the effects of digital diplomacy. International organizations take on many different forms. For a

---

<sup>8</sup>Interviews 33, 38.

start, they vary in their formality (Abbott & Snidal, 1998), their voting rules (Stone, 2011), and their independence (Barnett & Finnemore, 1999).

I develop a set of theoretical expectations that consider agenda dynamics and institutional variation in understanding the likely effects of digital diplomacy on consensus-building. Within institutions, I highlight issue salience as a key dimension over which the effects of digital diplomacy may vary. Across institutions, I focus on two specific features that are expected to condition the impact of digital diplomacy: consensus norms and membership composition. Considering this nuance can illuminate the contexts in which digital diplomacy can be applied as a useful negotiation tool—and in which contexts its utility is constrained.

In generating these theoretical expectations, I draw on 27 interviews I conducted between March and April 2022 with high-level diplomats at the UN.<sup>9</sup> Elite interviews provide insight into events and contexts that one cannot otherwise observe. Interviews can illuminate causal mechanisms in unique ways compared to other research strategies (Mosley, 2013, 5). The UN diplomats discussed the effects of the specific mechanism through which digital diplomacy was adopted in their context: the adoption of the Silence Procedure for the first time in UN history.<sup>10</sup> Laid out in Resolution 74/544 on March 27, 2020, the Silence Procedure required the President of the General Assembly (PGA) to circulate draft resolutions to the membership, and if no objections were raised within 72 hours, the resolution was considered adopted by consensus. If a state wished to object, they would email it to the PGA. If objections were raised, the PGA would notify all member states, and could choose to inform the sponsors of the objections, but did not identify the objecting state.<sup>11</sup> All negotiations over resolution drafts were conducted virtually. Texts were required to be submitted in English, and translations were made available in some (but not all) cases. These procedures remained in effect until August

---

<sup>9</sup>7 states declined to be interviewed. More details on interview procedures can be found in the appendix.

<sup>10</sup>See [here](#) for the resolution text, and [here](#) for detailed explanations of the steps.

<sup>11</sup>For example, see [the case of the resolution entitled “Declaration of Solidarity of the United Nations in the Face of the Challenges Posed by the Coronavirus Disease.”](#)

2020.<sup>12</sup>

## Issue Saliency

Within institutions, I expect that the effects of digital diplomacy's disruption are moderated by diplomats' *perception* of issues, and that when faced with the challenges posed by digital negotiations, diplomats elect to prioritize easier issue areas rather than address more challenging issues. Diplomats discussed the selection processes that they engaged in during the digital negotiations necessitated by COVID-19. They chose to focus on negotiating over resolutions that they expected could be more easily passed without the need for re-negotiating over previously agreed-upon texts. These types of resolutions were easier than others to adopt under Silence because:

[T]he solution lies, then, in going back to agreed language or reducing the volume of text....And do a few rounds of negotiations and input, and then it usually comes to a silence procedure whereby you say that this is our proposal after listening carefully to all of you. We'll put it on a Silence and we hope that it will pass, and then it doesn't. Somebody will break Silence and say that you haven't fully addressed our concerns, and then you do a couple more rounds....[T]his is an example of a process whereby maybe the text is not already there. I mean for some of the mandate renewal, for example, there is just a technical rollover. You don't have these lengthy processes, but you basically have an agreement to change the date to one year, prolong it with one year, and then continue with the sign and say, a mandate for a peace operation, for example. <sup>13</sup>

As the diplomat describes, in cases when a new resolution text is being crafted, the outcomes under virtual negotiations are much more uncertain, and there is a chance that disagreements over the language could lead to Silence being broken, a sentiment that was

---

<sup>12</sup>See [here](#).

<sup>13</sup>Interview 34.

echoed by other diplomats as well.<sup>14</sup> On renewals and administrative matters—which were the majority of the work that diplomats were able to move forward during the Silence period—these concerns are largely mitigated. These features cannot necessarily be known *ex ante*, and instead, diplomats evaluate their expectations about success and difficulty with respect to a particular topic based on their previous experiences.

Diplomats are strategic actors with incentives to adopt policies—these successful outcomes are important for their future career advancement. This logic implies that we may not observe declining rates of policy adoption *on average*—that is, diplomats may be able to negotiate a similar number of resolutions under digital and in-person negotiations—but that the qualitative nature of these resolutions are likely to be different.

I therefore theorize that we should also observe variation in the effects of digital diplomacy across issues within a given organization. Hedling & Bremberg (2021, 1602) suggest, based on evidence from EU negotiators, that the negative effects of digital diplomacy on consensus-building are particularly salient on sensitive issues, and Maurer & Wright (2020, 561) argue that virtual negotiation can be effective in continuing existing negotiations but not on new questions. Bjola & Manor (2022, 483) similarly finds that because relationships created through virtual negotiations are more superficial than those established in face-to-face settings, virtual meetings can be useful for routine work, but less so for high-level policy issues.

***H<sub>1</sub>: Diplomats are more likely to focus on lower salience and continuing issues under digital diplomacy compared to in-person diplomacy, and are less likely to focus on emergent or controversial issues.***

## Consensus

I also theorize that the effects of digital diplomacy vary across IOs based on institutional features. UN diplomats emphasized that a crucial feature of their day-to-day practice—crafting consensus—was undermined by the digital negotiations necessitated by COVID-19. Diplomats noted, for example, that the inability to convene informal

---

<sup>14</sup>Interviews 32, 33.

meetings hindered their ability to craft consensus. These informal events are opportunities to gauge preferences, establish issue coalitions, and try out different issue frames. Some diplomats lamented the inability to host effective side events online.<sup>15</sup> One diplomat pointed out that under virtual negotiation, it was harder to arrive at agreed-upon texts if diplomats were not able to convene informal meetings, and that these types of disagreements would cause Silence to be broken:

Somebody will break silence and say that you haven't fully addressed our concerns, and then you do a couple more rounds and then a mix of plenary meetings and bilateral outreach to try to tweak the text, so you can put it under silence again and hopefully have it passed.<sup>16</sup>

The importance of consensus—not simply a majority coalition—is an important dynamic at the UN that does not exist across all IOs (Lockwood Payton, 2010). Both normative and strategic considerations can make consensus adoption preferable to voting (Novak, 2013). When decisions are adopted by consensus, signaling widespread agreement by the member states (or at least a lack of overt dissension), this can contribute to strengthening the normative power of the decision. I therefore theorize that the presence of strong consensus norms is an important feature in understanding the disruptivity of digital diplomacy.

In fora where consensus norms are strong, it is more important for diplomats to have a strong sense of their counterparts' preferences and positions on a given issue, to assess their redlines, their flexibility in instructions from capital, and their commitment to developing a policy solution. As Blake & Payton (2015, 381) observe, adopting a measure by consensus may not reflect unanimous support, but rather “awareness among member states that under the [intergovernmental organization]’s voting procedures sufficient support for a proposed measure exists to pass it and therefore opponents see little value in forcing a formal vote and/or officially noting their opposition to the measure.”<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup>Interviews 33, 32, 21, 12, 37, 43, 5, 42.

<sup>16</sup>Interview 34.

<sup>17</sup>But see Peterson (2006), who argues instead that consensus actions are akin to unanimous votes in favor.

In a consensus-based organization such as the UN, the EU Council, the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and many others, a diplomat must have a sense of these preferences across the entire diplomatic corps, whereas in an institution that is characterized by voting norms, one must only have a sense of the majority preferences. In institutions with weighted voting—for example, the International Monetary Fund—these demands can be even less if a diplomat knows the preferences of the more powerful member states (Stone, 2011). The move from in-person to virtual is likely to have a less substantial effect on policy development in such institutions.

## Membership

UN diplomats noted several ways in which the adoption of digital diplomacy made it harder for them to advance policy initiatives that directly flowed from the composition and nature of the institution’s membership. First, they expressed that it was harder to form social relationships with their counterparts, especially for diplomats who had recently arrived.<sup>18</sup> This was particularly salient given the number of diplomats participating in any given negotiation. Without the ability to personally visit and get to know colleagues, the social relationships between diplomats were harder to leverage for moving policies forward. As one European diplomat noted, “COVID has really disrupted our work, I have to say, but you know, by and large, you get a very good feeling very early on about your colleagues who are.”<sup>19</sup> However, for diplomats who had been in post for a long time before COVID-19 struck, these effects did not appear pronounced, mirroring the findings of Eggeling & Versloot (2022); Eggeling & Adler-Nissen (2002).

Second, diplomats observed difficulties presented by communication challenges that resulted from the rapid adoption of digital diplomacy. Several diplomats from non-Western states noted increased difficulty in negotiations that resulted from language barriers.<sup>20</sup> According to respondents, online negotiations were conducted 90% in En-

---

<sup>18</sup>Interviews 18, 46, 47, 33, 2.

<sup>19</sup>Interview 10.

<sup>20</sup>Interviews 33, 38.

glish, which made it more difficult to follow along. There was an increased likelihood of miscommunication under virtual negotiations, without the benefit of in-person informals to discuss agreed language. In describing a negotiation with another state’s diplomat who was threatening to break Silence on a proposed resolution, an African diplomat described the challenge, and the added imperative to communicate clearly:

[M]aybe they need just you to clarify. They just need you to go and try to explain to them, to explain to them that no do not be misled, because this is what is really the meaning of the language. That way also, when you are drafting the language to be very clear and very simple. Do not go, you know, using you know extra words, no. Be simple. Be clear. Use the word that anyone can understand. And then you try to explain to them, maybe they will be okay to say, “Okay, so we are okay,” and then no one will break the Silence.<sup>21</sup>

These social and communication challenges were exacerbated by the size and diversity of the UN membership. I therefore theorize that these features are also central in predicting which type of organizations are more likely to be disrupted by digital diplomacy. More parties participating in negotiation increases the difficulty of finding an amenable position to the entirety of the group (Tsebelis, 2000; Mansfield et al., 2007), problems which are exacerbated when there are disagreements among the members over what types of policy responses are appropriate. Large memberships also make it more likely that members will have heterogenous preferences. Strong variations in preferences are more likely to be present in institutions with universal membership rather than small, regional institutions—such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations—or club-based institutions—such as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries—into which members select based on shared interests. Multi-purpose organizations with broad-based membership are also sites in which strong inequalities across members based on resources, geographic locale, and internet accessibility are likely to be present, creating the subsequent inequalities in participation in digital diplomacy that were discussed above. For

---

<sup>21</sup>Interview 33.



these reasons, large, diverse IOs are more likely to be disrupted by digital diplomacy than more narrowly constrained institutions.

***H<sub>2</sub>: Digital diplomacy is more disruptive in IOs with large memberships with consensus norms compared to IOs with smaller, homogenous memberships that lack consensus norms.***

Given these general expectations—that digital diplomacy should be more disruptive to negotiators in IOs with large memberships and strong consensus norms, and within institutions, particularly so on issues perceived as emergent or salient—I combine observational data with an experimental approach. First, I leverage the shock caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in negotiation procedures at the UNGA. If digital diplomacy does not substantially diminish consensus-building in such a context, it is less likely that it poses a significant threat to diplomacy and policymaking in other institutions. I also conduct an external validity probe in the EU Council to verify that the disruptions of digital diplomacy are not unique to the case of the UNGA. Then, I develop a lab experimental protocol which allows me to isolate the effects of digital diplomacy from other contextual features associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, while also varying the key theoretical features that I posit: virtual and in-person settings, issue difficulty —both objective and perceived—membership size, and consensus norms.

## Silence in the UNGA

I first provide observational evidence that illustrates the observable implications of my theoretical expectations: that in an IO where I expect digital diplomacy to pose a significant challenge, diplomats elected to shift their focus under digital diplomacy away from difficult issues areas. For these purposes, I argue that the UNGA represents a useful case as a hard empirical test of the theory and a substantively important case to understand. Furthermore, an analysis of this institution is likely to provide insights that are generalizable to a broad set of different IOs.

First, the UNGA is an IO that is an appropriate test of the theoretical expectations that I laid out. I expect digital diplomacy to be more disruptive of consensus-building

in IOs with large, diverse memberships and strong consensus norms. The UNGA meets all of these criteria. The UNGA operates based on a strong consensus norm (Häge & Hug, 2016), which is often overlooked by empirical international relations literature that leverages UNGA voting (e.g., Signorino & Ritter, 1999; Bailey et al., 2017). When possible, diplomats prefer that a resolution is adopted by consensus rather than by voting. Indeed, in nearly 40% of interviews with diplomatic practitioners (10 out of 27 interviews), respondents made a specific point to emphasize the importance and prevalence of consensus norms in the UNGA.<sup>22</sup> Consensus is not only popular in the UNGA; it is substantively important, as it strengthens the normative import of UN resolutions.

Not only did strong consensus norms exist in the UNGA before COVID-19, but the institution was also in the midst of its session when digital diplomacy procedures were adopted. This creates an opportunity to assess the adoption of digital diplomacy as a discontinuity in standard practice. Unlike many other studies on the adoption of digital technologies by different countries' foreign ministries, in this case, there are no concerns about selection effects—in other words, whether certain states were more likely to implement digital technologies than others. Because the shock of COVID-19 affected *all* country missions, all states experienced the shock at the same time. The UNGA is also characterized by heterogeneous member preferences. The UNGA has universal membership of all states, including those in the Global North and Global South. Thus, there is tremendous diversity in member preferences and resources (Panke, 2013; Voeten, 2000). Additionally, the institution is a multi-issue forum, which allows for the examination of whether the effects of digital diplomacy vary across issues.

Second, the substantive importance of the UNGA makes its policymaking process important to understand. The regular UN budget for 2020 was more than \$3 billion, which financed a variety of programs around the world, and which is allocated by the UNGA. Funds cannot be allocated in the budget unless legislation is passed on an issue. Thus, the potential for digital diplomacy to hinder resolution adoption has substantial financial implications. While resolutions passed by the UNGA are non-binding, previous

---

<sup>22</sup>Interviews 37, 21, 31, 40, 48, 11, 5, 42, 24, 29.

works (e.g., [Waltz, 2001](#); [Simmons et al., 2018](#)) show that UNGA resolutions can translate to policy outputs with substantial legal, economic, normative, and political ramifications. The UN's high status in international media and public opinion arguably renders it the most prominent of any IO, and thus a crucial case to test for validity.

Third, the effects of digital diplomacy on consensus-building in the UNGA are likely to generate insights that are generalizable to other IOs. The UN, as one of the oldest and largest IOs is likely to be a source of diffusion for other IOs through socialization, emulation, and learning (e.g., [Simmons & Elkins, 2004](#); [Lenz, 2012](#); [Lenz & Burilkov, 2017](#); [Lenz & Viola, 2017](#)). Because institutional rules and norms in other institutions may therefore be similar, we may also expect the dynamics of diplomatic capital to translate into other IOs. Further, the UN is highly interconnected with other IOs, through both formal channels ([Sommerer & Tallberg, 2019](#)) and networks of bureaucrats ([Johnson, 2013](#)), which increases the likelihood that institutional structures in these institutions serve as models for other IOs.

Drawing on the theoretical logic I laid out in the previous section, I expect that the adoption of digital diplomacy in the UNGA in March 2020 onset by the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have weakened the ability of diplomats to craft consensus. Given the large number of negotiating actors with heterogeneous preferences in the UNGA, achieving consensus can be difficult compared to institutions with fewer parties. This institution also confronts a large agenda every year and is expected to respond to rapidly developing situations, for example, addressing the global health crisis of COVID-19. There are structural inequalities in the UNGA that are likely to be exacerbated by digital negotiations. Global North actors and Global South actors, subject to differences in time zones, English language facility, and internet connectivity ([Vadrot & Ruiz Rodríguez, 2022](#)), are likely to have a harder time achieving convergence around policy language. Structural inequalities also exist in the EU, though to a lesser extent.

To test these expectations, I descriptively examine consensus rates in the UNGA under normal procedures and the extraordinary measures adopted during COVID-19. There are important advantages and disadvantages to this approach. One key advantage

is that the adoption of digital diplomacy came as a largely exogenous shock to existing practices, interrupting the middle of a regular session and affecting all member states at the same time, to the same degree. The agenda for the session had already been established before the move to virtual negotiations (except for emergent issues that were added to the agenda later). These features allow us to examine consensus practices immediately before the COVID-19 shock and immediately afterward. We can also compare these rates to the previous and subsequent normal sessions for a broader empirical lens.

One disadvantage to consider is selection problems. Legislative proposals are generally not put forward until diplomats have a strong sense that they will succeed. That is, if a diplomat has a sense that a consensus outcome is unlikely, they will not put the resolution on the floor. This results in the rate of consensus appearing artificially high if we only examine outcomes on resolutions that have been put forward at the final stage, and ignore draft resolutions that do not arrive at this final decision point. However, given that this positive bias exists in both the virtual and in-person cases—in other words, we have no reason to expect these incentives to vary in digital diplomacy compared to in-person diplomacy—they do not bias the comparison *between* these practices. If differences in consensus rates do exist, we can attribute this to the difficulties in consensus-building under digital diplomacy—not a change in the broader strategic logic.

## Consensus in UN Resolutions

Publicly, assessments of the effects of the Silence Procedure by UN leadership were mixed. Official reports claimed that Silence had not hampered the work of UN diplomats, and that “[s]ince silence procedure came into effect, the General Assembly has adopted several resolutions, including on the financing of the UN-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), and on COVID-19.” The UN Secretary-General António Guterres claimed that “our critical work is continuing largely uninterrupted,” and Ambassador Mari Skåre, Chef de Cabinet to the PGA asserted that there had not been any slowdown.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, the PGA of the seventy-fifth session—the session that began in September

---

<sup>23</sup>UN News, April 7, 2020

2020, after the Silence Procedure was no longer in use—was more critical of the effects of the Silence Procedure, observing that:

We have an advantage now that, until the end of August, we only had the possibility of having decisions with the silence procedure. And the silent process was really becoming something which didn't help in making decisions. But a few countries, or even one country, could have stopped the whole process. So, we now have the advantage of dealing with things in the General Assembly, and the voting is back. When we have voting, we will understand whether the majority of the General Assembly, the majority of the member countries, are in favor of something or they oppose something.<sup>24</sup>

How does that empirical record bear out these assessments? I examine changes in the rates of consensus in the adoption of resolutions under the Silence procedure compared to normal operations. I obtain the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly from the 71-75 sessions, scraping these data from the [UN website](#), which I summarize in Table 1. Between March 30 and August 31, 2020, 37 resolutions were adopted via the Silence Procedure, as well as 35 decisions (see Table 2 for the full list of resolutions adopted by Silence, including the relevant adopting committee and the topic of the resolution). There were 5 resolutions on which the Silence Procedure was broken, representing a 12% failure rate of resolution adoption.<sup>25</sup> Of these, two resolutions specifically focused on UN COVID responses.

Does this 12% failure rate represent an increase compared to normal operations? It is hard to assess, given the lack of records of resolutions that come to a vote and fail. Nevertheless, we can construct a “consensus failure rate” as the proportion of adopted

---

<sup>24</sup>[PGA 75, Volkan Bozkir 15 September 2020](#)

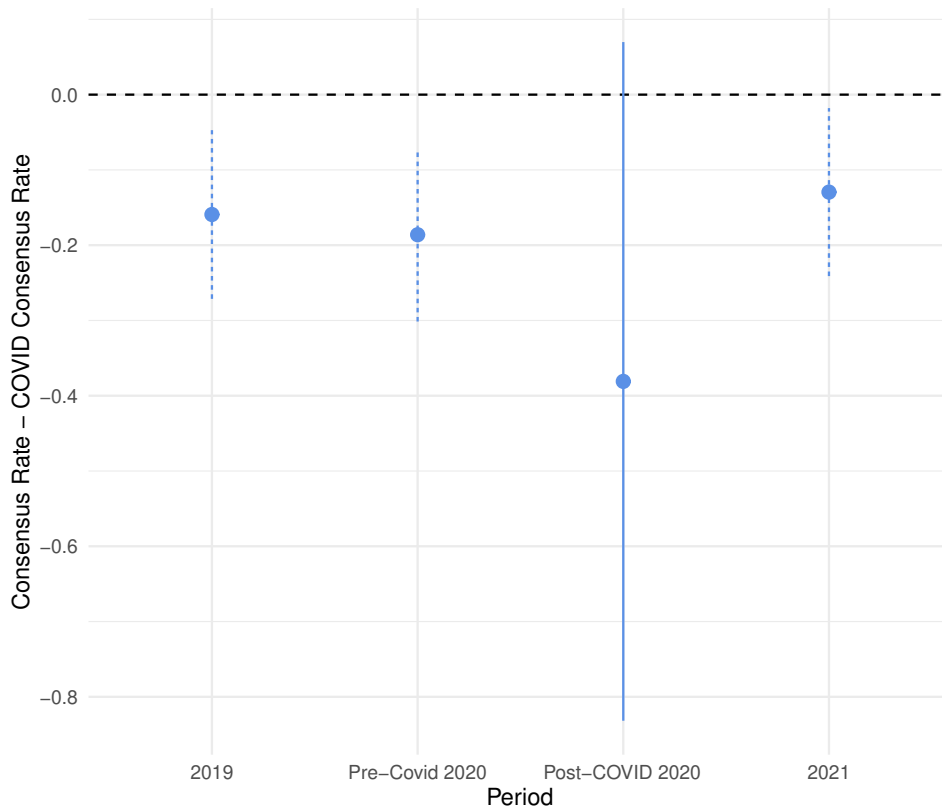
<sup>25</sup> (1) “Review process of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 67/290 and 70/299 on the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level and resolution 72/305 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council,” (2) “Declaration for the Commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations,” (3) “Declaration of solidarity of the United Nations in the face of the challenges posed by the coronavirus disease 2019,” (4) “Procedure for taking decisions of the General Assembly, excluding elections, by a vote while a plenary meeting of the Assembly is not practicable owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic,” and (5) “United response against global health threats: combating COVID-19.”

Table 1: Resolution Consensus Rates

Session	Num. Resolutions	Consensus Rate	Voting Rate
71	334	—	0.853
72	321	0.735	0.296
73	354	0.721	0.333
74: Pre-COVID	272	0.695	0.335
74: During Silence	42	0.88	—
74: Post-Silence	8	0.5	0.625
74: Total	315	0.687	0.305
75	338	0.751	0.296

*Notes:* Segments of the 74th session shaded in gray. Consensus rate data is currently unavailable for the 71st session.

Figure 1: UNGA Consensus rates do not decrease under digital diplomacy



*Notes:* Mean differences between consensus rates during the COVID period and the relevant comparison period, 95% confidence intervals of t-test comparisons.

resolutions that are adopted by a non-unanimous vote, compared to the resolutions that are either adopted without a vote or adopted with a vote and without any ‘no’ votes. Table 1 illustrates consensus rates in adjacent sessions of the UNGA that we can use for illustrative comparisons. On resolutions negotiated virtually via Silence Procedures, there is an 88% consensus rate. In this same session of the UNGA, 31% of 315 resolutions were voted on (in the 73rd session, 33% of 354 resolutions were voted on, and in the 75th session, 30% of 338 were voted on).

With the exception of the latter segment of session 74 (which contained only 8 resolutions), in general, consensus rates remain consistently between 69 and 75%. Excluding the resolutions adopted through the Silence Procedure (i.e., including the other resolutions that were adopted without a vote or were voted upon), the rate of consensus in the 74th session is 69%, in the 73rd session, the consensus rate is 72%, and in the 75th session, the consensus rate is 75%. We can also examine the consensus rates for the 74th session in the periods before and after silence: before March 30, 33% of 272 resolutions were voted on with a consensus rate of 69%.

Figure 1 shows comparisons between the rate of consensus during COVID and relevant comparison periods: the earlier and later portions of the 74th session, as well as the 73rd and 75th session. Except for the post-COVID period in 2020, for which there is limited data, in all cases consensus rates were significantly higher under digital diplomacy, with an average increase of 16 percentage points across these comparison periods. The consensus rate during the period of virtual negotiation is significantly different from the rate in the early part of the 74th session ( $p = 0.002$ ), from the previous session ( $p = 0.006$ ), and from the subsequent session ( $p = 0.02$ ).

Based on these descriptive comparisons, it seems that digital negotiation *did not* have an overall negative impact on consensus-building. In fact, under Silence, the consensus rate *increased* to a statistically significant degree. By examining the substantive content of these resolutions, I show that because diplomats adjusted their agenda to focus on administrative and continuing issues, avoiding controversial matters that they likely would have expected would be harder to negotiate over, they were able to maintain a

high rate of consensus. Of the 37 resolutions that were adopted by Silence, a substantial majority continued existing actions or dealt with were limited to administrative matters. Just 9 (24%) addressed emergent issues that had not been previously addressed in the 73rd, 72nd, or 71st session. These new resolutions (Table 2, rows shaded in gray) addressed issues such as sustainable development, program delivery, closed peacekeeping missions, COVID-19, education, and genocide commemoration. 28 of the resolutions (76%) addressed administrative questions, including financing ongoing peacekeeping missions and operations. This is much lower than the typical ratio of new versus continuing work: in the period immediately before COVID, 118 of 272 resolutions (43%) were new, i.e., did not repeat topics addressed in the 73rd, 72nd, or 71st sessions.

This suggests that while digital diplomacy was an effective tool for continuing ongoing, routine negotiations, it may not have proven effective at crafting new policymaking, which diplomats would have expected to be more challenging. This evidence is in line with the theoretical predictions laid out in [Hypothesis 1](#) and [Hypothesis 2](#), which suggest that digital diplomacy particularly poses challenges to negotiators in large, consensus-based IOs—like the UNGA—and poses is particularly detrimental to consensus-building on emergent issues, which diplomats accordingly select out of negotiating over. It also explains the counter-intuitive aggregate finding that consensus rates increased under digital diplomacy: by focusing on easier negotiations, or in other words, selecting out of scenarios in which it would be difficult to forge agreements, diplomats employed Silence effectively but narrowly. The cases of failed Silence, which highlighted contentious debates over institutional priorities, visions, and programmatic responses (see fn. 25) further illustrate these dynamics: as the degree of existing consensus declined and the stakes of the issue were higher, Silence was less likely to be successful in forging consensus.

In the appendix, I conduct an external validity probe to illustrate that these dynamics were not unique to the UNGA. I show that in the case of the EU Council—another IO with a large membership and consensus norms— negotiators shifted towards lower salience issues and amendments to previously agreed-up texts, and fewer negotiators over higher-salience economic and financial affairs. In both the case of the UNGA and the



Table 2: Resolutions Adopted by Silence in the UNGA

Resolution Num.	Committee	Topic
A/RES/74/299	Plen.	Improving global road safety
A/RES/74/298	Plen.	Review process of the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 67/290 and 70/299 on the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level and resolution 72/305 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council
A/RES/74/297	Plen.	Progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system
A/RES/74/296	C.5	Global service delivery model
A/RES/74/295	C.5	Financing of the activities arising from Security Council resolution 1863 (2009)
A/RES/74/294	C.5	Financing of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara
A/RES/74/293	C.5	Financing of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan
A/RES/74/292	C.5	Financing of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
A/RES/74/291	C.5	Financing of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force
A/RES/74/290	C.5	Financing of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
A/RES/74/289	C.5	Financing of the United Nations Mission in Liberia
A/RES/74/288	C.5	Financing of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
A/RES/74/287	C.5	Financing of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti
A/RES/74/286	C.5	Financing of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
A/RES/74/285	C.5	Financing of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus
A/RES/74/284	C.5	Financing of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
A/RES/74/283	C.5	Financing of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei
A/RES/74/282	C.5	Financing of the United Nations Logistics Base at Brindisi, Italy
A/RES/74/281	C.5	Financing of the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe, Uganda
A/RES/74/280	C.5	Support account for peacekeeping operations
A/RES/74/279	C.5	Triennial review of the rates and standards for reimbursement to Member States for contingent-owned equipment
A/RES/74/278	C.5	Closed peacekeeping missions
A/RES/74/277	C.4	Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects
A/RES/74/276	Plen.	Special session of the General Assembly against corruption
A/RES/74/275	Plen.	International Day to Protect Education from Attack
A/RES/74/274	Plen.	International cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to face COVID-19
A/RES/74/273	Plen.	International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda
A/RES/74/272	Plen.	Construction of a new facility for the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, Arusha branch
A/RES/74/271	Plen.	Progress towards an accountability system in the United Nations Secretariat
A/RES/74/270	Plen.	Global solidarity to fight the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)
A/RES/74/269	Plen.	Scope, modalities, format and organization of the summit on biodiversity
A/RES/74/261C	C.5	Financing of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur
A/RES/74/261B	Plen.	Financing of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur
A/RES/74/260B	C.5	Financing of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti
A/RES/74/254 B	C.5	Seconded active-duty military and police personnel
A/RES/74/249B	C.5	Financial reports and audited financial statements, and reports of the Board of Auditors
A/RES/74/232 B	Plen.	Follow-up to the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

Notes: New resolutions (that is, resolutions not adopted in the 73rd, 72nd, or 71st sessions) shaded in gray.

EU Council, diplomats addressed the challenges posed by digital diplomacy by selectively focusing on easier issue areas with high pre-existing levels of agreement.

## Proposed Experimental Design

One major concern in identifying the effects of digital diplomacy during the disruptions caused by COVID-19 is that many other key features that could affect the success of diplomatic negotiations were altered at the same time. For example, COVID-19 raised new, complex, international issues that could have proved challenging for diplomats to negotiate over. Political tensions between states were also high, and the salience of domestic politics could prove to be an additional demand on the attention and capacity of ministries of foreign affairs. Thus, it is difficult to attribute the observational decline in the negotiation over difficult issues to digital diplomacy itself and not to the other bundled effects of COVID-19. Furthermore, the observational analysis does not allow for the manipulation of the key theoretical features to test for their causal effects on negotiation outcomes. In an attempt to disentangle the specific effects of digital diplomacy, agenda dynamics, and institutional features, I propose two laboratory experiments. The results from these experiments will validate that the patterns observed in the observational data are in fact due to the hypothesized mechanisms rather than an alternative explanation.

In the first experiment, I capture whether diplomats select out of more difficult topics when faced with the challenges of digital negotiations (H1). Participants rate the difficulty of topics and then construct agendas to discuss in a negotiation simulation. I manipulate features of the simulation: whether it takes place in-person or virtually, the size of the membership, and the presence of consensus norms—to assess the impacts of these features on diplomats' strategic selection of agenda items (H2). The key feature of *perceived* difficulty in negotiating, rather than *objective* difficulty can be directly measured, as well as how this interacts with institutional features can be directly measured. In the second experiment, agenda dynamics can be manipulated to assess their *objective* effects on negotiations in digital and in-person contexts. Given a set of easy or difficult topics, participants in a digital or in-person simulation will negotiate, and the time taken

to reach a consensus outcome can be measured as a proxy of negotiation difficulty.

These experiments represent a substantial simplification of a traditional diplomatic context. While more complex simulations or wargames (e.g. [Lin-Greenberg et al., 2022](#); [Maass, 2022](#)) can more accurately model the intricate interactions that take place in multilateral diplomacy, simplified designs can still provide relevant insights into the interactions that take place in the diplomatic context.<sup>26</sup> As a first effort to test the comparative effects of digital and in-person diplomatic negotiations, an experimental design that is as simple as possible can provide face validity that can motivate future simulations that incorporate greater degrees of complexity.

## Sample

Both experiments will be run on a convenience sample of undergraduate students participating in Model United Nations at Princeton, Lehigh, and Rutgers Universities. Each participant will be paid a show-up fee of \$20 with the additional opportunity to obtain bonus payments to ensure incentive compatibility (described below). As many participants will be recruited as possible, determined by logistics, available participants, and budget limitations. I contend that results generated on this convenience sample will be generalizable to the target sample for several reasons. This sample from an elite and large public university mirrors the pool of talent that diplomats are frequently drawn from and allows for a high degree of diversity in the respondent pool. The inclusion of students with an active interest in international diplomacy will help the sample to more closely mirror the target population. Finally, recent works on elite-public gaps (e.g., [Kertzer, 2020](#)) suggest that such gaps are not a substantial threat to inference and that elites generally respond to treatments in the same ways as members of the public.

After completing both experiments, respondents will complete demographic questions before completing their worksheet, including questions about digital comfortability, risk attitudes ([Dohmen et al., 2011](#); [Kam, 2012](#)), Big-Five personality traits ([Gosling](#)

---

<sup>26</sup>See, for example, [Holmes & Wheeler \(2020\)](#)'s inferences on diplomacy drawn from speed dating contexts.

et al., 2003), and experience in Model UN simulations.<sup>27</sup> In addition to difference-in-means testing on the experimental outcomes, demographic information will be used as control measures to analyze outcomes in a linear regression framework. For multi-item measures (i.e., the digital comfortability and risk attitudes measures), indices will be constructed using inverse covariance-weighting and Chronbach's alpha will be calculated to assess inter-item reliability.

## Experiment One: Strategic Selection by Issue Difficulty

### Assignment and Manipulation

After arriving at the experiment site and completing informed consent materials, participants will be randomly assigned to an experimental condition.<sup>28</sup> Participants will be asked to sit quietly, without talking to any other participants. Participants in all conditions will be told that they will soon be participating in a shortened (one hour) in-person Model United Nations negotiation simulation with other students. Participants will each be given a list of topics that might be discussed during the negotiation simulation.<sup>29</sup> Participants will be asked to score each topic on a scale of 1-5 scale of easy to hard in their perceived difficulty in negotiating a successful consensus outcome and complete several evaluation questions to probe their rating rationale, including questions that capture which mechanisms guided the evaluations of difficulty (e.g., "How much of a challenge did you expect communication to be in the negotiations?").<sup>30</sup>

After rating the topics on difficulty, participants will then be given information about their simulation, which is based on their treatment assignment. Treatment assignment varies on three dimensions: virtual or in-person, large or small membership (10 or 5 participants), and the presence or absence of consensus norms. Assignment to treat-

---

<sup>27</sup>Instructions and evaluation worksheets included in the Appendix.

<sup>28</sup>All randomization will be conducted in advance using random number generation in R.

<sup>29</sup>Topics and their descriptions were selected from actual resolutions adopted by the 76th General Assembly of the UN. Topics are selected to represent a variety of different substantive domains and to vary in the degree of difficulty expected in negotiations, including those discussed in the observational context described above. See appendix for topic list.

<sup>30</sup>See appendix for full participant instructions and materials.

ment is fully crossed across respondents, there are therefore 2x2x2 treatment conditions assigned with equal probability. In all conditions, participants will be provided with similarly detailed information about the logistics and parliamentary procedures that will be implemented in their negotiations to increase the realism and strength of the treatment. Participants are then informed that they will participate in selecting the topics for negotiation in their simulation. Participants will be told that they will earn a bonus payment of \$4 for each topic on which they negotiate a successful resolution, but will be penalized \$2 for any topics that they include on which a successful resolution *cannot* be negotiated. Participants will then be asked to indicate which topics they would like to include in the simulation, and will complete several more evaluation questions. Respondents will evaluate whether they expect that negotiating over the topics will be easy or hard in each of the experimental conditions (e.g., “Do you think negotiating over these topics will be easy or hard in a simulation that is on Zoom?”). Several questions are repeated before and after the information about the experimental condition is revealed to capture pre- and post-differences in evaluations.<sup>31</sup>

## Outcome

The design of this incentive structure aims to establish the difficulty threshold of negotiations in the digital versus in-person context and how these key differences interact with institutional features. I design the study with several outcomes that can be measured to test for robustness and reliability, but the key outcome of interest is the average difficulty of topics selected for the negotiations.<sup>32</sup> I expect that participants in the in-person, small, no consensus conditions will establish a higher difficulty threshold than those in the virtual, large, consensus conditions. The incentive structure is also designed to mirror those of actual diplomats: diplomats obtain greater utility from successfully completing negotiations while paying a penalty by wasting their limited time and resources on negotiating issues on which a successful outcome is unlikely. A null

---

<sup>31</sup>See appendix for details.

<sup>32</sup>Power analysis for this measure is shown in the appendix.

result would suggest that the difference between virtual and in-person negotiations is not salient enough to affect the strategies of agenda-setting made by diplomats.

In addition to these main quantities of interest (number of topics and difficulty evaluations), the responses to the perceptual questions asked before and after treatment assignment will be evaluated. These quantities will be compared across the experimental conditions. The distribution of topics can also be compared to those adopted in the observational data. Text analysis of open-ended questions will also illuminate common themes in topic selection and perceived negotiation challenges. In addition to the core outcome measures of topic selection, participants will be asked to explain why they selected the number of topics (and why they did not select more or fewer), and what considerations went into their topic selection. Participants will also be asked questions that will allow for measurement of the mechanisms: communication, social bonding, and informal bargaining (e.g., “How much of a challenge did you expect communication to be in the negotiations?”).

## **Experiment Two: Effects of Key Theoretical Features**

### **Assignment and Manipulation**

After completing Experiment One, participants will be re-randomized into groups of 5 in either a virtual condition or an in-person condition between subjects, and will be randomly assigned a country to represent.<sup>33</sup> Participants will be assigned a country to represent. Participants will be informed that they will be negotiating over two topics that were selected based on the selections that all participants submitted in the previous activity. They will be informed again of the parliamentary rules that will be observed for the simulation, which will be a simplified version those of a typical Model UN simulation, except that the resolution must be adopted by consensus. A member of the experimental team will act as the chair in each simulation and will record the length

---

<sup>33</sup>In the event that the number of students in the lab cannot be divided into groups of 5, a group of 4 or 6 will be created. Results will be analyzed with and without these irregularly sized groups for robustness.

of time of each negotiation. Details on the rules and topics will be provided.<sup>34</sup> Language in the topic briefings are adapted from official UN reports and adopted resolutions. Each group will negotiate over an easy topic (“Improving global road safety”) and a difficult topic (“Eradicating rural poverty”) that are held constant across groups, but the order of topics is randomized within-group. If participants are not able to reach a consensus outcome on the topic within thirty minutes, the simulation on that topic will be ended automatically.<sup>35</sup> After completing Experiment Two, respondents will be debriefed.<sup>36</sup>

## Outcome

The key outcome in Experiment Two is the amount of time taken to reach the consensus outcome for each topic, measured in number of minutes. I expect that the amount of time will be longer in the digital condition than the in-person condition and for the harder topic than the easier topic.<sup>37</sup> I further expect that there will be an interaction effect: the digital penalty should be especially large for difficult topics. Textual analysis of the adopted negotiation text can also be analyzed as a supplementary outcome, measuring differences in features such as length and specificity.

## Conclusion

Building on previous studies of digital diplomacy, which have yielded indeterminate expectations about whether the adoption of these tools should have positive, negative, or null effects on the work of diplomats, I attempt to develop a unified theoretical logic that takes into account agenda dynamics and institutional design features in predicting the effects of digital diplomacy on consensus-building. I argue that digital diplomacy has negative effects on negotiation success specifically in IOs that have strong consensus norms and large memberships. I also expect that these effects should be particularly

---

<sup>34</sup>See appendix for materials.

<sup>35</sup>Results will be analyzed with these outcomes omitted and included, coded as 40 minutes.

<sup>36</sup>See appendix for details.

<sup>37</sup>Power analysis for this measure is shown in the appendix.

salient when it comes to negotiations over emergent or particularly controversial issues, which diplomats select out of negotiating over in digital contexts. I test these expectations in the case of the UNGA, which meets the criteria of large membership and consensus norms. If digital diplomacy does not have negative effects on consensus-building in these institutions, it is unlikely that these effects should exist elsewhere.

Using data on consensus rates during the interruption to in-person meetings caused COVID-19 combined with elite interviews with 27 UN diplomats, I provide an illustration in support of these expectations. I show that although the consensus rates were not negatively impacted by the adoption of digital diplomacy, this overall trend is driven by strategic choices that diplomats made. Virtual negotiations created new challenges in communications, social relations, and informal bargaining, which pushed diplomats to sideline work on new, controversial issues and instead focus their efforts on administrative and continuing matters. In these issue agendas, diplomats were able to successfully use digital tools to continue the day-to-day operations of the IOs. These findings imply that while digital diplomacy can be useful for dealing with routine tasks that build on existing agreements, it may not be effective for creating new agreements, especially in contentious or emerging areas. Therefore, while digital diplomacy can improve administrative efficiency and be a valuable tool for diplomats, it cannot fully replace the importance of face-to-face meetings.

I also propose two lab experimental designs that isolate the particular dynamic of theoretical interest—issue difficulty and institutional features—that condition the expected impact of digital diplomacy. Experiment One focuses on perceptual effects, examining how diplomats may select into easier agenda items when faced with the challenge of digital diplomacy, and how this interacts with institutional features that exacerbate the challenge (i.e., large membership and consensus norms). Experiment Two assesses the objective effects of digital negotiations on consensus-building, assessing whether it is indeed more difficult for diplomats to achieve consensus outcomes in virtual versus in-person settings, and whether these challenges are particularly salient when the issue in question is a difficult one.



This suggests that the global regulatory order is not in danger of collapse when faced with emergent challenges that require digital meetings, and to address such emergency demands, diplomats can continue to conduct routine work. However, it also suggests that multilateral negotiations are unlikely to thrive in a fully digital environment, as when new issues and highly salient questions arise, digital tools appear to be insufficient for forging consensus in these challenging situations.

Adler-Nissen & Eggeling (2022) correctly point out that, as analog and digital practices become more deeply intertwined, examining these strategies in a dichotomy can be limiting. With digital negotiations as part of their toolkits, diplomats must consider in which situations the application of such tools is most appropriate. Despite a return to in-person meetings for most work, as well as the adoption of e-voting procedures, Silence is still in use in some UN operations, for example, by the negotiators on [strengthening the Economic and Social Council](#) and the [review of Global Counter Terrorism Strategy](#) in 2021. This work suggests, however, that diplomats working on negotiating over these types of high-salience matters should strive to—as best as possible—adopt or replicate in-person negotiation. By applying a unified theoretical framework and taking institutional design features seriously, scholarship on digital diplomacy can point towards a clearer picture of the future landscape of diplomatic negotiations.

## References

- Abbott, K. W., & Snidal, D. (1998). Why States Act Through Formal International Organizations. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 42(1), 3–32.
- Adler, E., & Pouliot, V. (2011). International practices. *International theory*, 3(1), 1–36.
- Adler-Nissen, R., & Drieschova, A. (2019). Track-Change Diplomacy: Technology, Affordances, and the Practice of International Negotiations. *International Studies Quarterly*, 63(3), 531–545.
- Adler-Nissen, R., & Eggeling, K. A. (2022). Blended Diplomacy: The Entanglement and Contestation of Digital Technologies in Everyday Diplomatic Practice. *European Journal of International Relations*, 28(3), 640–666.
- Adler-Nissen, R., & Pouliot, V. (2014). Power in practice: Negotiating the international intervention in Libya. *European Journal of International Relations*, 20(4), 889–911.
- Bailey, M. A., Strezhnev, A., & Voeten, E. (2017). Estimating Dynamic State Preferences from United Nations Voting Data. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 61(2), 430–456.
- Barnett, M. N., & Finnemore, M. (1999). The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations. *International organization*, 53(4), 699–732.
- Bayer, P., Crippa, L., Hughes, H., & Hermansen, E. (2024). Government Participation in Virtual Negotiations: Evidence from IPCC Approval Sessions. *Climactic Change*.
- Berridge, G., & Jennings, A. (1985). *Diplomacy at the UN*. Springer.
- Bjola, C., & Coplen, M. (2022). Virtual Venues and International Negotiations: Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Negotiation*, 1(aop), 1–25.
- Bjola, C., & Manor, I. (2022). The rise of hybrid diplomacy: from digital adaptation to digital adoption. *International Affairs*, 98(2), 471–491.
- Blake, D. J., & Payton, A. L. (2015). Balancing design objectives: Analyzing new data on voting rules in intergovernmental organizations. *The Review of International Organizations*, 10, 377–402.
- Bramsen, I., & Hagemann, A. (2021). The missing sense of peace: diplomatic approachment and virtualization during the COVID-19 lockdown. *International Affairs*, 97(2), 539–560.
- Burns, W. J., & Thomas-Greenfield, L. (2020). The Transformation of Diplomacy. *Foreign Affairs*, 99(6), 100–111.
- Chasek, P. (2021). Is It the End of the COP as We Know It? An Analysis of the First Year of Virtual Meetings in the UN Environment and Sustainable Development Arena.

- International Negotiation*, 1(aop), 1–32.
- Clark, R., & Dolan, L. R. (2022). Conditionality and the Composition of IO Staff. *Unpublished manuscript*.
- Clark, R., & Zucker, N. (2023). Climate Cascades: IOs and the Prioritization of Climate Action. *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Cornut, J. (2022). Emotional Practices and How We Can Trace Them: Diplomats, Emojis, and Multilateral Negotiations at the UNHRC. *International Studies Quarterly*, 66(3), sqac048.
- Cornut, J., Manor, I., & Blumenthal, C. (2022). WhatsApp with Diplomatic Practices in Geneva? Diplomats, Digital Technologies, and Adaptation in Practice. *International Studies Review*, 24(4), viac047.
- Crombez, C., & Hix, S. (2015). Legislative Activity and Gridlock in the European Union. *British Journal of Political Science*, 45(3), 477–499.
- Dohmen, T., Falk, A., Huffman, D., Sunde, U., Schupp, J., & Wagner, G. G. (2011). Individual risk attitudes: Measurement, determinants, and behavioral consequences. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 9(3), 522–550.
- Eggeling, K. A. (2023). Digital Diplomacy.  
URL <https://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-790>
- Eggeling, K. A., & Adler-Nissen, R. (2002). Public Diplomacy. *Global Studies Quarterly*, 1(2), ksab005.
- Eggeling, K. A., & Versloot, L. (2022). Taking trust online: Digitalisation and the practice of information sharing in diplomatic negotiations. *Review of International Studies*, (pp. 1–20).
- Galín, A., Gross, M., & Gosalker, G. (2007). E-negotiation versus face-to-face negotiation what has changed—if anything? *Computers in Human Behavior*, 23(1), 787–797.
- Gosling, S. D., Rentfrow, P. J., & Swann Jr, W. B. (2003). A very brief measure of the Big-Five personality domains. *Journal of Research in personality*, 37(6), 504–528.
- Gray, J., & Baturo, A. (2021). Delegating diplomacy: rhetoric across agents in the United Nations General Assembly. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 87(4), 718–736.
- Häge, F., & Hug, S. (2016). Consensus Decisions and Similarity Measures in International Organizations. *International Interactions*, 42(3), 503–529.
- Hagemann, S. (2020). Politics and Diplomacy: Lessons from Donald Tusk’s Time as

- President of the European Council. *European Journal of International Law*, 31(3), 1105–1112.
- Hagemann, S., Bailer, S., & Herzog, A. (2019). Signals to their parliaments? Governments' use of votes and policy statements in the EU Council. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 57(3), 634–650.
- Hedling, E., & Bremberg, N. (2021). Practice Approaches to the Digital Transformations of Diplomacy: Toward a New Research Agenda. *International Studies Review*, 23(4), 1595–1618.
- Heinzel, M. (2022). International Bureaucrats and Organizational Performance. Country-Specific Knowledge and Sectoral Knowledge in World Bank Projects. *International Studies Quarterly*, 66(2), sqac013.
- Heinzel, M., & Liese, A. (2021). Managing performance and winning trust: how World Bank staff shape recipient performance. *The Review of International Organizations*, 16(3), 625–653.
- Heisenberg, D. (2005). The institution of 'consensus' in the European Union: Formal versus informal decision-making in the Council. *European Journal of Political Research*, 44(1), 65–90.
- Hix, S., Frantescu, D., & Hagemann, S. (2022). VoteWatch Europe European Parliament and EU Council Voting Data.
- Holmes, M. (2018). *Face-to-Face Diplomacy: Social Neuroscience and International Relations*. Cambridge University Press.
- Holmes, M. (2022). Diplomacy in the Rearview Mirror: Implications of Face-to-Face Diplomacy Ritual Disruption for Ministries of Foreign Affairs. In *Ministries of Foreign Affairs in the World*, (pp. 352–368). Brill Nijhoff.
- Holmes, M., & Wheeler, N. J. (2020). Social bonding in diplomacy. *International Theory*, 12(1), 133–161.
- Høyland, B., & Hansen, V. W. (2014). Issue-specific policy-positions and voting in the Council. *European Union Politics*, 15(1), 59–81.
- Hurd, I. (2008). *After Anarchy*. Princeton University Press.
- Jervis, R. (1976). *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. Princeton University Press.
- Johnson, T. (2013). Looking beyond States: Openings for international bureaucrats to enter the institutional design process. *The Review of International Organizations*, 8(4), 499–519.

- Johnston, A. I. (2001). Treating International Institutions as Social Environments. *International Studies Quarterly*, 45(4), 487–515.
- Kam, C. D. (2012). Risk attitudes and political participation. *American Journal of Political Science*, 56(4), 817–836.
- Kertzer, J. D. (2020). Re-Assessing Elite-Public Gaps in Political Behavior. *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Keys, B., & Yorke, C. (2019). Personal and Political Emotions in the Mind of the Diplomat. *Political Psychology*, 40(6), 1235–1249.
- Lenz, T. (2012). Spurred Emulation: The EU and Regional Integration in Mercosur and SADC. *West European Politics*, 35(1), 155–173.
- Lenz, T., & Burilkov, A. (2017). Institutional Pioneers in World Politics: Regional Institution Building and the Influence of the European Union. *European Journal of International Relations*, 23(3), 654–680.
- Lenz, T., & Viola, L. A. (2017). Legitimacy and institutional change in international organisations: a cognitive approach. *Review of International Studies*, 43(5), 939–961.
- Lewis, J. (2005). The Janus Face of Brussels: Socialization and Everyday Decision Making in the European Union. *International organization*, 59(4), 937–971.
- Lin-Greenberg, E., Pauly, R. B., & Schneider, J. G. (2022). Wargaming for International relations Research. *European Journal of International Relations*, 28(1), 83–109.
- Lockwood Payton, A. (2010). Consensus Procedures in International Organizations.
- Maass, R. W. (2022). DiploSim: A Flexible Framework for Diplomatic Simulations in International Relations. *International Studies Perspectives*.
- Malis, M. (2021). Conflict, Cooperation, and Delegated Diplomacy. *International Organization*, 75(4), 1018–1057.
- Mansfield, E. D., Milner, H. V., & Pevehouse, J. C. (2007). Vetoing Co-operation: The Impact of Veto Players on Preferential Trading Arrangements. *British Journal of Political Science*, 37(3), 403–432.
- Maurer, H., & Wright, N. (2020). A New Paradigm for EU Diplomacy? EU Council Negotiations in a Time of Physical Restrictions. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 15(4), 556–568.
- Mosley, L. (2013). *Interview Research in Political Science*. Cornell University Press.
- Naylor, T. (2020). All That’s Lost: The Hollowing of Summit Diplomacy in a Socially

- Distanced World. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 15(4), 583–598.
- Novak, S. (2013). The Silence of Ministers: Consensus and Blame Avoidance in the Council of the European Union. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 51(6), 1091–1107.
- Panke, D. (2010). *Small States in the European Union: Coping with Structural Disadvantages*. Ashgate.
- Panke, D. (2013). *Unequal Actors in Equalising Institutions: Negotiations in the United Nations General Assembly*. Springer.
- Peterson, M. (2006). *The United Nations General Assembly*. Routledge.
- Pouliot, V. (2016). *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Risse, T. (2000). “Let’s Argue!”: Communicative Action in World Politics. *International Organization*, 54(1), 1–39.
- Risse, T., & Kleine, M. (2010). Deliberation in negotiations. *Journal of European public policy*, 17(5), 708–726.
- Sending, O. J., Pouliot, V., & Neumann, I. B. (2015). *Diplomacy and the Making of World Politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Signorino, C. S., & Ritter, J. M. (1999). Tau-b or Not Tau-b: Measuring the Similarity of Foreign Policy Position. *International Studies Quarterly*, 43(1), 115–144.
- Simmons, B. A., & Elkins, Z. (2004). The Globalization of Liberalization: Policy Diffusion in the International Political Economy. *American Political Science Review*, 98(1), 171–189.
- Simmons, B. A., Lloyd, P., & Stewart, B. M. (2018). The Global Diffusion of Law: Transnational Crime and the Case of Human Trafficking. *International Organization*, 72(2), 249–281.
- Sommerer, T., & Tallberg, J. (2019). Diffusion Across International Organizations: Connectivity and Convergence. *International Organization*, 73(2), 399–433.
- Stone, R. W. (2011). *Controlling Institutions: International Organizations and the Global Economy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tallberg, J., & Zürn, M. (2019). The legitimacy and legitimation of international organizations: Introduction and framework.
- Towns, A. E., Jezierska, K., Kreft, A.-K., & Niklasson, B. (2020). COVID-19 and Gender:

- A Necessary Connection in Diplomatic Studies. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 15(4), 636–647.
- Tsebelis, G. (2000). Veto Players and Institutional Analysis. *Governance*, 13(4), 441–474.
- Vadrot, A. B., Langlet, A., Tessnow-von Wysocki, I., Tolochko, P., Brogat, E., & Ruiz-Rodríguez, S. C. (2021). Marine Biodiversity Negotiations During COVID-19: A New Role for Digital Diplomacy? *Global Environmental Politics*, 21(3), 169–186.
- Vadrot, A. B., & Ruiz Rodríguez, S. C. (2022). Digital Multilateralism in Practice: Extending Critical Policy Ethnography to Digital Negotiation Sites. *International Studies Quarterly*, 66(3), sqac051.
- Voeten, E. (2000). Clashes in the Assembly. *International Organization*, 54(2), 185–215.
- Walter, S. (2021). The Backlash Against Globalization. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 24, 421–442.
- Waltz, S. (2001). Universalizing Human Rights: The Role of Small States in the Construction of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 23, 44.
- Wendt, A. (1999). *Social Theory of International Politics*, vol. 67. Cambridge University Press.
- Wheeler, N. J. (2013). Investigating diplomatic transformations. *International Affairs*, 89(2), 477–496.
- Wheeler, N. J., & Holmes, M. (2021). The strength of weak bonds: Substituting bodily copresence in diplomatic social bonding. *European Journal of International Relations*, 27(3), 730–752.
- Wong, S. S. (2020). Mapping the Repertoire of Emotions and Their Communicative Functions in Face-to-face Diplomacy. *International Studies Review*, 22(1), 77–97.

# Supporting Information for Digital Diplomacy and Consensus-Building in International Organizations

September 3, 2024

## Contents

<b>SI-1 External Validity Probe: Videoconferencing in the EU</b>	<b>SI-1</b>
<b>SI-2 Research Ethics</b>	<b>SI-6</b>
SI-2.1 Consent . . . . .	SI-6
SI-2.2 Deception . . . . .	SI-7
SI-2.3 Confidentiality . . . . .	SI-8
SI-2.4 Harm and Impact . . . . .	SI-8
SI-2.5 Compensation . . . . .	SI-8
<b>SI-3 Interview Procedures</b>	<b>SI-10</b>
<b>SI-4 Experiment One</b>	<b>SI-11</b>
SI-4.1 Introductory Information . . . . .	SI-11
SI-4.2 Treatment / Topic Selection Task . . . . .	SI-13
<b>SI-5 Experiment Two</b>	<b>SI-14</b>
SI-5.1 Introductory Information / Assignment to Treatment . . . . .	SI-14
<b>SI-6 Final Evaluation Worksheet</b>	<b>SI-15</b>
<b>SI-7 Additional Materials Provided to Participants</b>	<b>SI-17</b>
SI-7.1 Parliamentary Procedures (adapted from Georgetown Model UN . . . . .	SI-17
SI-7.2 Topic Briefing . . . . .	SI-18
SI-7.2.1 Improving global road safety . . . . .	SI-18
SI-7.2.2 Eradicating rural poverty . . . . .	SI-19
<b>SI-8 Power Analysis</b>	<b>SI-20</b>





## SI-1 External Validity Probe: Videoconferencing in the EU

Like the UNGA, the features of the EU Council make it an appropriate case to test the theoretical expectations that I generate. The EU Council is also characterized by a large and diverse membership. Resource disparities are not quite as extensive in the case of the EU, yet there is still large heterogeneity across members (e.g., [Panke, 2010](#)). There is also a strong norm of consensus in the EU Council, and votes against legislative proposals are rare ([Crombez & Hix, 2015](#); [Høyland & Hansen, 2014](#); [Hagemann et al., 2019](#)). As [Høyland & Hansen \(2014, 60\)](#) describe, “[n]ew Council members are immediately introduced to the norms governing this culture of consensus. Because of the high frequency of meetings and negotiations, the trust among partners is high...the actors engage in repeated interactions that facilitate a stable norm of consensus.” While consensus practices are common across EU institutions, the EU Council is known as the principal institution of consensus in the EU ([Heisenberg, 2005](#)). Informal negotiations are a central feature of the policymaking process in EU institutions, including the EU Council and the European Parliament, and are an important fora for consensus-building ([Hagemann, 2020, 1109](#)). Also, like the UNGA, the EU Council was mid-way through its regular session when COVID-19 necessitated the adoption of digital negotiation technologies. Finally, the EU Council is also a multi-issue forum dealing with substantively important questions. The EU Council constitutes one of the main decision-making bodies of the EU, engaging in the process of creating binding standards that apply to the member states. At Council meetings EU country ministers amend, adopt, and coordinate laws, committing their governments to comply with the outcomes ([Crombez & Hix, 2015](#)), and making decisions with respect to the €170.6 billion EU budget (as of 2022).

As in the case of the UNGA, meeting in person was the dominant mechanism for diplomatic negotiation in the EU Council, and social distancing requirements brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated rapid changes in procedures. Compared to the UNGA, however, the procedures adopted by the EU Council were much more

straightforward than the Silence Procedure implemented in the UNGA. On March 10, 2020, the Council began to hold its meetings by videoconference (Maurer & Wright, 2020). The Council formally adopted this derogation from normal procedure on March 23, and continued to hold meetings via videoconference until June 16. Acts would be adopted through “ordinary written procedure,” which had previously been codified but rarely used due to its “cumbersome and time-consuming” processes. Indeed, European diplomats were critical of the limitations that these procedures imposed on them and their ability to “engage in corridor diplomacy in order to reach consensus on sensitive issues.”<sup>38</sup>

To assess the effects of digital diplomacy on consensus in the EU Council, I utilize the VoteWatch Europe data (Hix et al., 2022), which records a variety of metadata on each legislative decision by the EU Council and European Parliament. We should not expect to observe cases of legislative proposals that are not adopted—the Council President will not bring a measure for a vote without resolving conflicts in advance (Høyland & Hansen, 2014). However, we may observe that digital negotiations reduce the ability of members to achieve unanimity compared to in-person negotiations, and thus, as in the case of the UNGA, we can examine changes in the rate of consensus adoption. This data is summarized in Table A-1. Between March 3 and June 16, 2020, 34 pieces of legislation were adopted via videoconference, representing a similar rate of legislative productivity as in the UNGA, which adopted 37 resolutions during roughly the same period.

As in the case of the UNGA, we can examine a “consensus failure rate” as the proportion of pieces of legislation that are adopted by a non-unanimous vote, compared to the resolutions that are without any ‘no’ votes. Table A-1 shows that during COVID videoconferencing, the consensus rate was 71%, compared to 66% in the later part of 2022 and 52% in 2019.<sup>39</sup> Between 2011 and 2021, consensus rates range between 52% and 77% with an overall average of 64%, so the patterns during COVID are not markedly lower than normal.

---

<sup>38</sup>Jacopo Barigazzi, Maïa de la Baume, and David M. Herszenhorn in Politico, March 18, 2020.

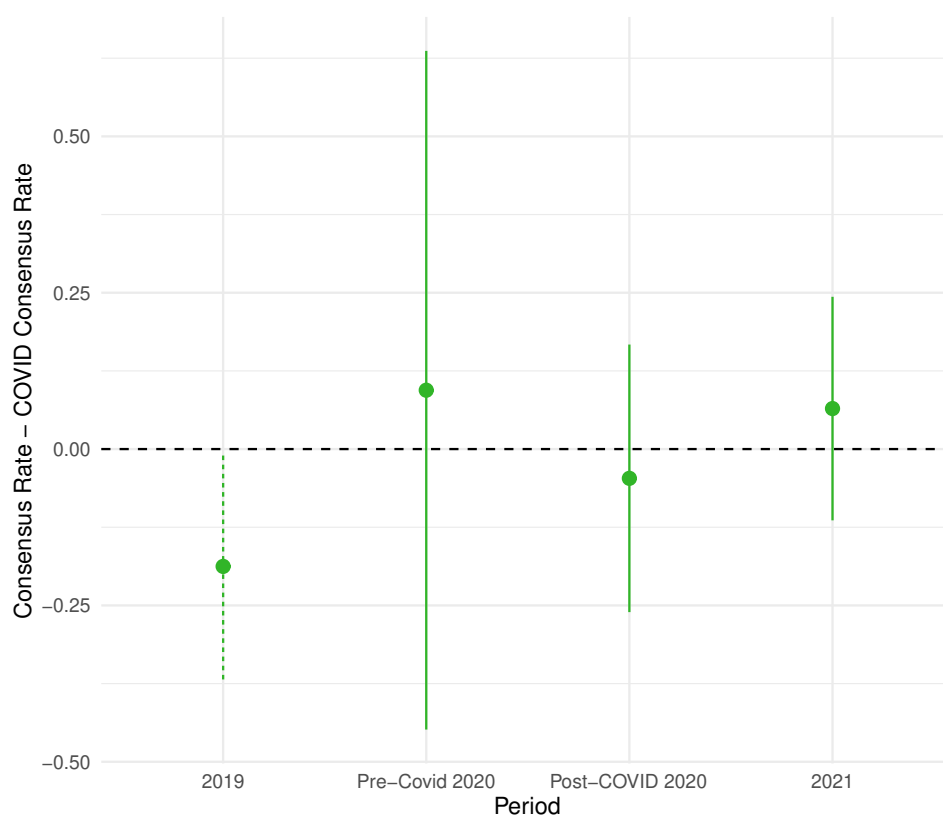
<sup>39</sup>Given the small amount of legislation adopted in 2020 before COVID—only 5 pieces—figures based on this period are likely not a reliable indicator of consensus rates.

Table A-1: Legislation Consensus Rates

Year	Num. Legislation	Consensus Rate	QMV Rate
2011	113	0.655	0.947
2012	90	0.656	0.933
2013	136	0.632	0.912
2014	165	0.655	0.885
2015	82	0.646	0.927
2016	79	0.658	0.911
2017	91	0.659	0.912
2018	99	0.596	0.899
2019	137	0.518	0.912
2020: Pre-COVID	5	0.8	0.4
2020: Videoconferencing	34	0.706	0.971
2020: Post-COVID	44	0.659	0.977
2020: Total	83	0.687	0.940
2021	109	0.771	0.963

Notes: Segments of the 2020 session shaded in gray. Videoconferencing took place between March 3 and June 16.

Figure A-1: EU Consensus rates do not decrease under digital diplomacy



Notes: Mean differences between consensus rates during the COVID period and the relevant comparison period, 95% confidence intervals of t-test comparisons.

Figure A-1 shows that the consensus rate during videoconferencing is significantly different from the rate in 2019 ( $p = 0.04$ ), but is not significantly different from the portion of 2020 before ( $p = 0.68$ ) or after ( $p = 0.66$ ) videoconferencing was phased out, or from the subsequent year ( $p = 0.47$ ). This suggests that consensus rates were *not* adversely affected, in the aggregate, by digital diplomacy, though we do not observe the same positive effect as was the case in the UNGA.

Once again, to further interrogate these results, we can probe the substantive content of the legislation under negotiation. As we observed previously, these high rates of consensus are driven by strategic selection by diplomats, who restricted their legislative agenda to focus on regulatory and administrative issues, as well as continuing prior work. Table A-2 illustrates the content of the legislation in more detail. Compared to the legislative work in 2019, during videoconferencing, the Council adopted a much smaller share of directives as part of its workload (from 27% in 2019 and 11% in 2021 to 6% under videoconferencing), while the relative share of budgets, decisions, and regulations was roughly consistent.<sup>40</sup> Nearly two-thirds of the legislation that was adopted under videoconferencing consisted of amendments to previously adopted rules. The subjects of the legislation were primarily transport and tourism (35%), budgetary matters (29%), and regional development (2%). These are relatively lower salience issue areas compared to the 2019 and 2021 legislative agendas, which were led by economic and monetary affairs (18% in 2019 and 15% in 2021) and civil liberties and justice (9% in 2019 and 14% in 2021).

Once again, we see suggestive evidence that digital tools allowed diplomats to continue to conduct ongoing, lower-salience negotiations, but that they were less able to use such tools to begin new negotiations on novel topics.

---

<sup>40</sup>A directive is a legal act of the EU that requires member states to achieve particular goals without dictating how the member states achieve those goals.

Table A-2: Resolutions Adopted by Teleconference in the EU Council

Legislation Num.	Type	Policy Area
2018/0154 (COD)	Regulation	Civil Liberties, Justice & Home Affairs
2018/0330/B (COD)	Regulation	Civil Liberties, Justice & Home Affairs
2020/0044 (COD)	Regulation	Regional Development
2020/0043 (COD)	Regulation	Regional Development
2020/0043 (COD)	Regulation	Regional Development
2020/0042 (COD)	Regulation	Transport & Tourism
2018/0140 (COD)	Regulation	Transport & Tourism
2018/0169 (COD)	Regulation	Environment & public health
2017/0123 (COD)	Regulation	Transport & Tourism
2017/0122 (COD)	Regulation	Transport & Tourism
2017/0121 (COD)	Directive	Transport & Tourism
2020/2057(BUD)	Decision	Budget
2020/2055(BUD)	Budget	Budget
2020/2055(BUD)	Budget	Budget
2020/2056 (BUD)	Decision	Budget
2020/2053 (BUD)	Decision	Budget
2020/2052(BUD)	Budget	Budget
2020/2052(BUD)	Budget	Budget
2018/0178 (COD)	Regulation	Economic & Monetary Affairs
2020/0055 (APP)	Regulation	Budget
2020/0060 (COD)	Regulation	Environment & public health
2020/0059 (COD)	Regulation	Fisheries
2020/0054 (COD)	Regulation	Regional Development
2020/0058 (COD)	Regulation	Employment & Social Affairs
2020/0068 (COD)	Regulation	Transport & Tourism
2020/0067 (COD)	Regulation	Transport & Tourism
2020/0067 (COD)	Regulation	Transport & Tourism
2020/0065 (COD)	Decision	International Trade
2020/0071 (COD)	Directive	Transport & Tourism
2020/0069 (COD)	Regulation	Transport & Tourism
2020/2069(BUD)	Decision	Budget
2020/2069(BUD)	Budget	Budget
2019/0108 (COD)	Decision	Transport & Tourism
2019/0107 (COD)	Decision	Transport &+ Tourism

Notes: New resolutions (that is, resolutions that are not amendments to earlier decisions) shaded in gray.

## SI-2      **Research Ethics**

I have taken various measures and made consideration to minimize potential risks associated with this research. The interview protocol was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at the author's university, which determined that it met eligibility criteria for review exemption. The lab experiment will be submitted for IRB approval following initial review.

### SI-2.1      **Consent**

- Key information about the study:
  - Your informed consent is being sought for research. Participation in the research is voluntary.
  - The purpose of the research is to understand how diplomats conduct negotiations in international organizations.
  - The expected duration of the subject's participation is 45 minutes.
  - The procedures that the subject will be asked to follow in the research are to complete a worksheet and participate in a simulated negotiation.
  - There are no reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts to the subject as a result of participation.
  - The benefits to the subject or to others, e.g., society that may reasonably be expected from the research are a better understanding of international diplomacy.
  - The alternative procedures, if any, that might be advantageous to the subject are not applicable.
- Additional information about the study:
  - Confidentiality: All records from this study will be kept confidential. Your responses will be kept private, and we will not include any information that

will make it possible to identify you in any report we might publish. Research records will be stored securely in a locked cabinet and/or on password-protected computers. The research team will be the only party that will have access to your data.

- Compensation: A \$20 show-up payment will be provided to all respondents. Bonuses and penalties will be available and explained as part of the experimental procedures.
- Who to contact with questions:
  - Principal investigator: (Author)
  - If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Investigator, please contact the Institutional Review Board at: (IRB Information)
- Summary: I understand the information that was presented and that:
  - My participation is voluntary.
  - Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.
  - I do not waive any legal rights or release XX University or its agents from liability for negligence. I hereby give my consent to be the subject of the research.

## **SI-2.2 Deception**

The only deception employed in the lab experiment is minor: participants are told that their selection of topics in Experiment One will inform the agenda of Experiment Two; in fact, the agenda in Experiment Two is pre-set by the research team. This choice is necessary to the validity of both experiments: for Experiment One, it ensures that participants have incentives to carefully consider the selection of topics with respect to their difficulty and ability to be negotiated over. In Experiment Two, it maintains the



consistency of the topical difficulty, which is necessary for comparison of the easy and hard conditions. Participants will be debriefed about the deception following the completion of the experiments. I do not anticipate any harm resulting from this deception. There is no deception with respect to compensation. There was no deception involved in the interview research.

### **SI-2.3 Confidentiality**

Interview subjects are not identified to ensure confidentiality. Personally identifying data on lab experimental participants will not be collected by the research team, ensuring confidentiality.

### **SI-2.4 Harm and Impact**

I conducted the interviews and designed the lab experiments with the principle of “do no harm” in mind, aiming to minimize risks to human subjects. In my assessment, the potential benefits of the project are substantial compared to the risks, which are minimal. Understanding the utility or challenge posed by digital technologies to the ability of international diplomats to conduct their work could have profound implications for global policymaking across key issue areas including development and conflict. It further has implications for academic theories of international cooperation, bargaining, and the role of individuals in international cooperation.

I took additional steps to mitigate potential risks posed to interview and experimental participants. All interviewees were informed of their rights, including their ability to refuse to participate or to withdraw consent at any time.

### **SI-2.5 Compensation**

Compensation for the experiments is described in the main text. Respondents will receive a \$20 show-up fee. Respondents will also have an opportunity to receive up to \$8 in bonus payments if they successfully complete negotiations on both topics, or a penalty of -\$2 for each topic they do not complete negotiations on. Thus, for groups

that complete two topics, each participant receives a total of \$18; if the group completes negotiation of 1 topic, participants receive \$12; if the group completes negotiation of 0 topics, participants receive \$8. No compensation was provided to interview respondents.

## SI-3 Interview Procedures

I obtained the contact information for each country Mission from the most current [Blue Book](#), maintained by the Protocol and Liaison Office, as of November 2021.<sup>41</sup> I followed a stratified sampling procedure to avoid selection bias and ensure that the sample was representative of the full population of member states. For each country, I made up to three contact attempts at least one week apart to secure an interview, including two email contacts and one phone contact.

Interviews were conducted over Zoom or phone based on the preference of the respondent, and one interview was conducted in person in New York. All interviews were conducted in English. Respondents were informed that the interview would be conducted on background, and specifically, that I would not identify them as individuals or country representatives unless they explicitly gave permission to do so. The interviews followed a semi-structured format. I focus on process-related questions centered around the daily conduct of diplomacy in an attempt to avoid sensitive issues. Indeed, respondents were generally excited to participate in research about the behind-the-scenes, day-to-day work that they engage in as a change from most interviews, which focus on salient political issues. When respondents requested, I provided the questionnaire in advance. Interviews ranged from 28 minutes to 135 minutes, with an average length of 46 minutes and a median length of 41 minutes. Respondents represented a wide variety of different state types across levels of size (proxied with GDP) and regions. The respondents were also generally high-level officials, with more than half of respondents at the Permanent Representative or Deputy Permanent Representative level.

---

<sup>41</sup>The interview protocol described in this section was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at the author's university, which determined that it met eligibility criteria for review exemption (Protocol Number 844833).

## SI-4 Experiment One

### SI-4.1 Introductory Information

Thank you for participating in this negotiation simulation! In a few minutes, you will join with other students to participate in a UNGA simulation. The simulation will follow the standard procedural rules of Model UN parliamentary procedure — additional materials with detailed rules are available if you request them.

You will get to play an active role in deciding what topics will be the subject of negotiations in your simulation. Below, you will find a list of possible topics that you will select from. You can select any number of topics from the list to include on the agenda for your simulation. Each topic on the agenda will be debated, and you and the other participants will aim to adopt a resolution on the topic. You will have one committee session's amount of time to complete the simulation (*approx. 1 hour*). For every topic on which you and the other negotiators successfully adopt a resolution, you will receive a bonus payment of \$4. However, for topics that you include on your agenda that you and the negotiators *do not* adopt a resolution on, you will lose \$2 from your total payment. So, for example, if your agenda includes 3 items that are successfully negotiated over and 1 that is not, your total payment would be  $\$20 + (3 \times \$4) - (1 \times \$2) = \$30$ .

For each topic on this list, rate it on a scale of 1-5 of how difficult you think it will be to achieve an agreement on (1 being the easiest and 5 being the most difficult). In addition, please complete the response questions.

- Topic list
  - Financing peacekeeping
  - Peacekeeping reform
  - Cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines, and medical equipment

- International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda
  - Organization of the summit on biodiversity
  - Diamonds and conflict
  - Improving global road safety
  - Corruption in the UN
  - Women in development
  - Malaria
  - Agriculture development, food security and nutrition
  - Sovereignty of the Palestinian people
  - South-South cooperation
  - Eradicating rural poverty
  - Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
  - Protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind
  - External debt
  - Measures to eliminate international terrorism
  - The rule of law
- *Response questions after rating*
    - Why did you rate the topics the way you did?
    - What makes you believe this topics will be easy or difficult to achieve a negotiated agreement on?
    - How much of a challenge did you expect communication to be in the negotiations? *Very challenging to not challenging at all, 3 categories)*
    - How much of a challenge do you expect social interactions to be in the negotiations? *Very challenging to not challenging at all, 3 categories)*

## SI-4.2 Treatment / Topic Selection Task

Thank you for rating each topic! Now, let's get to the details of the simulation.

- *Digital diplomacy*: Your negotiation will take place with other students [ in-person / virtually through Zoom].
- *Membership size*: Your negotiation will take place with other [4 / 9] other students.
- *Consensus norms*: Your resolutions [ will be adopted by a vote / will be adopted by consensus ].

Now, for each item on the list, select whether you want to include it on the agenda for your simulation. Your selections will be fed into our computer program to select the agenda, but will not be shared with any other participants. In addition, please complete the response questions.

- Topic list (same as previous)
- *Response questions after topic selection (i.e., after treatment assignment)*. Now that you know more about the specifics of your negotiation:
  - Why did you select the number of topics that you did?
  - How much of a challenge did you expect communication to be in the negotiations? *Very challenging to not challenging at all, 3 categories)*
  - How much of a challenge do you expect social interactions to be in the negotiations? *Very challenging to not challenging at all, 3 categories)*
  - Do you think negotiating over these topics will be easy or hard in a simulation that: *Very easy to very hard, 5 categories)*
    - \* Is in-person
    - \* Is on Zoom
    - \* Has 5 participants
    - \* Has 10 participants
    - \* Adopts resolutions by consensus
    - \* Adopts resolutions by voting

## SI-5 Experiment Two

### SI-5.1 Introductory Information / Assignment to Treatment

Thank you for helping to select the topics for the simulation! We will begin shortly. You will be representing: [randomly assign country: Uruguay / Belgium / Ethiopia / New Zealand / Vietnam. If 6 students in a group: Niger] in a simulation with 4 other students. Your simulation will take place [in-person / over Zoom]. You will be provided detailed information about the parliamentary procedures of your simulation (they are a simplified version of a typical Model UN simulation), as well as a brief introduction to your topics: “Improving global road safety” and “Eradicating rural poverty.” [randomize order of topics]. Negotiations on each topic will continue until a resolution is adopted by consensus by all the delegates. If your group is not able to achieve a consensus on a topic within the allotted 30 minute period, you will automatically move on to the next topic.

## SI-6 Final Evaluation Worksheet

Thank you for participating in this activity. Before we can finish up, we have some final demographic questions.

- What is your year?
- What is your age?
- What is your major (or school/program, if you are a graduate student)?
- What is your sex?
- Is English your native language?
- How many Model UN conferences have you attended?
- Have you ever won an award at a Model UN event?
- Here are a number of personality traits that may or may not apply to you. Please write a number next to each statement to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement. You should rate the extent to which the pair of traits applies to you, even if one characteristic applies more strongly than the other. (*1: Disagree strongly; 2: Disagree moderately; 3: Disagree a little; 4: Neither agree nor disagree; 5: Agree a little; 6: Agree moderately; 7: Agree strongly*). I see myself as:
  - Extraverted, enthusiastic.
  - Critical, quarrelsome.
  - Dependable, self-disciplined.
  - Anxious, easily upset.
  - Open to new experiences, complex.
  - Reserved, quiet.
  - Sympathetic, warm.
  - Disorganized, careless.
  - Calm, emotionally stable.
  - Conventional, uncreative.
- Which of the following best describes you and the Internet?



- Very comfortable with Internet navigation, could teach a class
- Somewhat comfortable with Internet navigation, need some assistance
- Hardly know the basics, enough to get on and off the Internet
- How often do you use the internet in an average day?
  - 4 or more hours
  - 3-4 hours
  - 2-3 hours
  - 1-2 hours
  - Less than an hour
  - Not at all
- How easy or hard do you find it to adapt to new technologies? (*Very easy to very hard, 5 categories*)
- How willing are you to take risks, in general?
- Some people say you should be cautious about making major changes in life. Suppose these people are located at 1. Others say that you will never achieve much in life unless you act boldly. Suppose these people are located at 7. And others have views in between. Where would you place yourself on this scale?
- Suppose you were betting on horses and were a big winner in the third or fourth race. Would you be more likely to continue playing or take your winnings? (*Definitely continue playing; Probably continue playing; Not sure; Probably take my winnings; Definitely take my winnings*)
- I like new and exciting experiences, even if I have to break the rules. (*Strongly disagree to strongly agree, 5 categories*)
- I prefer friends who are exciting and unpredictable. (*Strongly disagree to strongly agree, 5 categories*)

## SI-7 Additional Materials Provided to Participants

### SI-7.1 Parliamentary Procedures (adapted from [Georgetown Model UN](#))

Your simulation will begin with a 6-minute moderated caucus during which delegates can be called on by the chair to speak on the topic for up to 45 seconds. The chair will call on speakers during the moderated caucus; delegates should signal that they wish to speak by raising their hand. Speakers can yield excess time to the chair, to questions, or to other delegates.

After the initial moderated caucus, delegates can request to continue the moderated caucus or for an unmoderated caucus, during which delegates can [ leave their seats / create breakout rooms and discuss topics freely and write resolution working papers. ] (either requires a vote by the majority of the participants, and the delegate must request a specific amount of time, i.e. “Motion for a 5-minute unmoderated caucus.”). There will not be speakers for or against because of the shortened format of the simulation.

Delegates can introduce a resolution working paper text at any time, which will be introduced to the delegates by the chair in the order that they are submitted (at this point, the working paper is considered a draft resolution). There is no requirement for draft resolutions to have signatories, and there need not be more than one resolution if all delegates agree to collaborate. For each draft resolution, there will be up to 2 minutes of questions and answers for the authors, if the sponsors desire. Delegates can introduce amendments to any resolution, which will be voted on before the draft resolutions during voting procedures, unless all sponsors agree to the amendment, which would in this case be incorporated into the draft resolution automatically.

To enter into voting procedure on the draft resolution(s), a delegate must motion to close debate, which must be supported by 2/3 of the delegates. There will not be speakers

for or against because of the shortened format of the simulation. If multiple draft resolutions were submitted, they are voted on in the order in which they were presented. Amendments to each draft resolution are voted on prior to voting on the draft resolution as a whole. To pass, draft resolutions must be supported by consensus (in this case, a unanimous vote in favor by all delegates). Motions to roll call vote, reorder resolutions, and divide the question are not available as part of the simplified simulation.

Delegates can raise a *Point of Order* to point out a discrepancy in parliamentary procedure or another delegate's actions at any time. Speakers can raise a *Point of Personal Privilege* to ensure that they can participate or a *Point of Parliamentary Inquiry* to ask the chair to clarify any step of parliamentary procedure in between speakers.

## **SI-7.2 Topic Briefing**

### **SI-7.2.1 Improving global road safety**

Road traffic crashes claim nearly 1.3 million lives every year and are the leading cause of death among children and young adults. In addition to the human suffering caused by road traffic injuries, they also incur a heavy economic burden on victims and their families, both through treatment costs for the injured and through loss of productivity of those killed or disabled. More broadly, road traffic injuries have a serious impact on national economies, costing countries 3% of their annual gross domestic product. 90% of road traffic deaths occur in the world's low- and middle-income countries. For these reasons, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) called for the halving of the number of road traffic deaths and serious injuries by 2020.

The World Health Organization emphasizes the importance of ensuring sustainable financing (short- and long-term) as well as the engagement of relevant actors from different sectors as critical factors for the achievement of the 2030 target. In addition to the importance of adequate, predictable, sustainable and timely international financing, capacity-building, knowledge-sharing, technical support and technology transfer pro-

grams, especially in developing countries, remain as major challenges in improving global road safety. Advocates also call for policies that foster safe urban and rural road infrastructure design and engineering and the adoption of evidence-based good practices for addressing key risk factors, such as the non-use of seat belts, child restraints and helmets, and driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs.

### **SI-7.2.2 Eradicating rural poverty**

659 million people, or about 8% of the global population, live in extreme poverty. Over 80 percent of those living in extreme and multidimensional poverty work in agriculture and live in rural areas. A large share of those affected by these interlocking crises are Indigenous Peoples, ethnic minorities, migrants, and internally displaced persons. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the pace of rural poverty reduction had slowed after more than two decades of sustained progress. The pandemic resulted in massive job and income losses that most severely affected populations in socially and economically vulnerable situations, especially women and children, young people, the poorest households and those in the informal economy. Price volatility in international commodity markets, the persistence of conflict, and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events have brought the pace of rural poverty reduction almost to a halt.

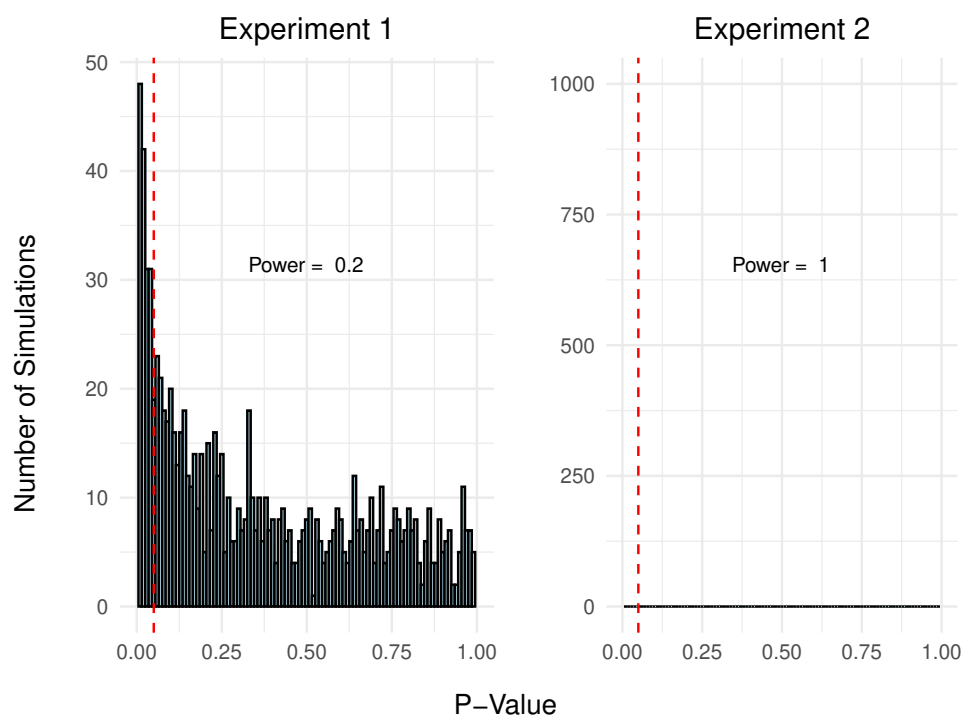
A transformative development strategy that is inclusive, multi-sectoral and integrated is needed to mitigate the negative impacts of multiple concurrent shocks and to address long-standing and intergenerational deprivations that affect people living in rural areas around the world. A lack of data on rural poverty eradication is another, disempowerment of rural women and indigenous peoples, food insecurity and malnutrition, low education, and a lack of economic opportunities outside the agricultural and informal sectors—as well as other structural challenges present in the developing world—are persistent issues. Environmental hazards and climate stresses pose another hurdle.

## SI-8 Power Analysis

I utilize the benchmark effect size from the observational analysis (0.16 in the UN case) to conduct power analysis for Experiments 1 and 2. The key outcome of interest that I simulate for Experiment 1 is the difference in the average difficulty level of selected topics across conditions, and in Experiment 2, I simulate the amount of time taken to reach an agreement between the in-person and virtual conditions. I focus only on one of the three treatment conditions in Experiment 1 for the power analysis because I do not have benchmark effect sizes for the postulated impact of small vs. large negotiation groups or consensus vs. no consensus norms; I therefore conduct power analysis only for the expected effect of virtual vs. in-person negotiations. I assume four rounds of the experiment to be conducted in each of the three field sites, with 40 students participating in each experiment. Results of the power analysis are shown in Figure A-2, and the code used to conduct the analysis follows. Though the expected power is less than typical levels for Experiment 1, the use of multiple outcome measures to get at similar quantities of interest will allow suggestive results to be triangulated.

```
1
2 # Simulation study
3 remove(list=ls())
4 library(tidyverse)
5 library(ggplot2)
6 set.seed(8675309)
7
8 # Define effect size based on observational analysis
9 ##### Assumptions #####
10 # Difference between digital and in-person
11 effect_size <- 0.16
12
13 # Number of simulations
14 num_simulations <- 1000
15
16 # Number of participants x number of lab sessions per simulation
17 N_participants <- (40 * 12)
```

Figure A-2: Distribution of P-values for the Effects of Virtual



Notes: Power analyses based on an expected effect size of 0.16 (derived from observational analysis), 1000 simulations of 12 lab sessions with 40 participants.

```

18 N_groups <- round((N_participants / 5), digits = 0)
19
20 # Perform simulations
21
22 ##### Exp 1 #####
23 # 3 treatments: virtual v in person, large v small group, consensus vs
    not: focus on treatment 1
24 # key outcome: mean difficulty of selected topics (1-5) post-info
25
26 ATE_pvalues <- rep(NA, num_simulations)
27
28 for (i in 1:num_simulations){
29   # Generate random data for effect of virtual vs in person
30   # Create vectors of difficulty scores for each of the 19 topics, then
    average
31   scores <- rep(NA, N_participants)
32
33   for (j in 1:N_participants){

```

```

34     scores[j] <- mean(sample(1:5, size = 19, replace = T))
35 }
36
37 # Simulate outcome variable Y
38 ATE <- effect_size * scores + rnorm(N_participants)
39
40 # Fit linear model and obtain p- value
41 # demographics would be added to this model to increase precision
42 model_ATE <- lm(ATE ~ scores)
43 ATE_pvalues[i] <- summary(model_ATE)$coefficients['scores', 'Pr(>|t|)']
44
45 }
46
47 ##### Exp 1 #####
48 # 1 treatment: virtual vs in person
49 # key outcome: amount of time for negotiation (number of minutes)
50 ATE_pvalues2 <- rep(NA, num_simulations)
51
52 for (i in 1:num_simulations){
53     # Generate random data for effect of virtual vs in person, 2 topics
54     # for each group
55     A <- sample(1:30, N_groups*2, replace = TRUE)
56
57     # Simulate outcome variable Y
58     ATE <- effect_size * A + rnorm(N_groups)*2
59
60     # Fit linear model and obtain p- value
61     # demographics would be added to this model to increase precision
62     model_ATE <- lm(ATE ~ A)
63     ATE_pvalues2[i] <- summary(model_ATE)$coefficients['A', 'Pr(>|t|)']
64 }
65
66

```

```

67 ##### Results #####
68 # Summary of p- values for effect of shaming
69 p_level_ATE <- sum(ATE_pvalues < 0.05) / num_simulations
70 cat("Proportion of significant p-values for effect of virtual (p <
      0.05) :",
71     p_level_ATE, "\n")
72
73 p_level_ATE <- data.frame(p_level_ATE)
74 # Create data frames for ggplot
75 data_ATE <- data.frame(p_values = ATE_pvalues,
76                        effect = "Effect of Virtual vs. In-Person \n ATE
      =0.16")
77
78 exp1 <- ggplot(data_ATE, aes(x = p_values)) +
79   geom_histogram (binwidth = 0.01 , fill = "lightblue", color = "black"
80                 ) +
81   xlim(0, 1)+
82   geom_vline (xintercept = 0.05 , linetype = "dashed", color = "red") +
83   labs(title = "Experiment 1",
84        x = "",
85        y = "") +
86   theme_minimal ()+
87   theme(plot.title = element_text(hjust = 0.5)) +
88   geom_text(data = p_level_ATE, aes (x = 0.5 , y = 30,
89         label = paste ("Power = ", round (p_level_ATE, 2))),
90         color = "black", size = 3, vjust = -0.5)
91
92 # Summary of p- values for effect of shaming
93 p_level_ATE2 <- sum(ATE_pvalues2 < 0.05) / num_simulations
94 cat("Proportion of significant p-values for effect of virtual (p <
      0.05) :",
95     p_level_ATE2, "\n")
96
97 # Create data frames for ggplot
98 data_ATE2 <- data.frame(p_values = ATE_pvalues2,

```



```

98         effect = "Effect of Virtual vs. In-Person \n ATE
          =0.16")
99
100 p_level_ATE2 <- data.frame(p_level_ATE2)
101
102 exp2 <- ggplot(data_ATE2, aes(x = p_values)) +
103   geom_histogram (binwidth = 0.01 , fill = "lightblue", color = "black"
104     ) +
105   xlim(0, 1)+
106   geom_vline (xintercept = 0.05 , linetype = "dashed", color = "red") +
107   labs(title = "Experiment 2",
108     x = "",
109     y = "") +
110   theme_minimal ()+
111   theme(plot.title = element_text(hjust = 0.5)) +
112   geom_text(data = p_level_ATE2, aes (x = 0.5 , y = 625,
113     label = paste ("Power = ", round (
114       p_level_ATE2, 2))),
115     color = "black", size = 3, vjust = -0.5)
116
117 exp_plots <- ggarrange(exp1, exp2,
118   ncol = 2, nrow = 1, common.legend = T, legend = "right")
119
120 annotate_figure(exp_plots,
121   bottom=text_grob("P-Value", vjust=-.5),
122   left = text_grob("Number of Simulations", rot = 90)
123   # top = text_grob("Distribution of P-values for the
124     Effects of Virtual", face = "bold")
125 )

```

## SI-9 Design Table

1. **Question:** Q1: How does digital diplomacy affect diplomats ability to craft consensus?

- **Hypothesis:** H1: Diplomats are more likely to focus on lower salience and continuing issues under digital diplomacy compared to in-person diplomacy, and are less likely to focus on emergent or controversial issues.
- **Sampling plan:** In the first experiment (E1), I capture whether diplomats select out of more difficult topics when faced with the challenges of digital negotiations. Participants rate the difficulty of topics and then construct agendas to discuss in a negotiation simulation. There are three experimental factors between subjects (2x2x2): digital vs. in-person simulation, large versus small simulation, and consensus norms vs. no consensus norms simulation. The key factor is the first, though the second and third present important potential moderators. In E1, the key feature of *perceived* difficulty in negotiating can be directly measured, as well as how this interacts with institutional features can be directly measured. In each of three field sites (a large state university, a private R2 university, and a private Ivy League university), 4 experiments will be conducted with 40 students each. A power analysis is shown in the previous section, with effect sizes based on benchmarks from observational analysis of actual UN negotiations.
- **Analysis Plan:** Perceived difficulty is measured in several ways to triangulate different approaches. The key measure is the average difficulty score given by respondents to the set of issues that they select for the simulation agenda. Additional outcome measures include the number of items selected for the agenda, differences in difficulty evaluations before and after the experimental condition is revealed, mechanism questions, and open ended responses. Results will be assessed with and without demographic controls. I will evaluate the effects of each treatment condition separately, and test for interaction effects.
- **Interpretation given to different outcomes:** If the ATE does not approach statistical significance ( $p > 0.1$ ) I will conclude that there is no evidence that digital diplomacy leads diplomats to select into easier agendas.  
If the ATE is positive and statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) or approaches sta-

tistical significance ( $p < 0.1$ ), I will conclude that there is evidence that digital diplomacy leads diplomats to select into easier agendas.

If the effects of the simulation size or consensus norms, or the interaction effects of these measures with digital formats, are positive and statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) or approach statistical significance ( $p < 0.1$ ), I will conclude that there is evidence that these features contribute to diplomats' selection into easier agendas.

2. **Question:** Q2: How do institutional (IO-level) features condition the effects of digital diplomacy?

- **Hypothesis:** H2: Digital diplomacy is more disruptive in IOs with large memberships with consensus norms compared to IOs with smaller, homogeneous memberships that lack consensus norms.
- **Sampling plan:** In the second experiment (E2), I manipulate features of the simulation: whether it takes place in-person or virtually, the size of the membership, and the presence of consensus norms—to assess the impacts of these features on diplomats' strategic selection of agenda items. In groups of 5, participants conduct negotiations to achieve a consensus resolution on an easy and difficult issue. In E2, the key feature of *objective* difficulty in negotiating, as well as how this interacts with institutional features can be directly measured. Given a set of easy or difficult topics, participants in a digital or in-person simulation will negotiate, and the time taken to reach a consensus outcome can be measured as a proxy of negotiation difficulty. In each of three field sites (a large state university, a private R2 university, and a private Ivy League university), 4 experiments will be conducted with 40 students each. A power analysis is shown in the previous section, with effect sizes based on benchmarks from observational analysis of actual UN negotiations.
- **Analysis Plan:** Objective difficulty is as the number of minutes taken to

arrive at a consensus resolution by the group. Results will be assessed with and without demographic controls, aggregated to the group level. Results will be assessed in aggregate and by issue difficulty (i.e., hard and easy issue) separately.

- **Interpretation given to different outcomes:** If the ATE does not approach statistical significance ( $p > 0.1$ ) I will conclude that there is no evidence that digital diplomacy makes it more difficult for diplomats to achieve consensus.

If the ATE is positive and statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) or approaches statistical significance ( $p < 0.1$ ), I will conclude that there is evidence that digital diplomacy leads diplomats makes it more difficult for diplomats to achieve consensus.