

# Who Sets the Agenda? Diplomatic Experience and Small Power Influence in the United Nations

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## Abstract

Why are some small powers effective in setting the UN agenda, even in the face of larger powers' opposition? I argue that small states are more likely to be represented by experienced diplomats, who, over time, accumulate influence that can be deployed to shape the IO agenda. To test these claims, I assemble a dataset of proposed agenda items and the tenure of all states' ambassadors from 1946-2019 and conduct interviews with diplomats from 49 states. I find that smaller powers have more diplomatic experience, individuals with greater diplomatic experience are more successful at agenda-setting even after accounting for material power, and random shocks to ambassadorial tenure—ambassador deaths—have negative effects on diplomatic experience and effectiveness. These insights build on our understanding of the role of individuals and diplomacy in IR and the ways in which small powers influence international politics.

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## Introduction

In 1959, Ambassador Frank Aiken of Ireland proposed that the question of nuclear weapons proliferation be included for debate in the United Nations General Assembly (GA). Despite objections from the United States and the Soviet Union, the proposal was approved and nuclear proliferation was debated. Aiken subsequently led the GA to adopt resolutions that called for states to create an agreement on weapons dissemination.<sup>1</sup> Shortly thereafter, the Partial Test-Ban Treaty and Non-Proliferation Treaty were signed, which largely succeeded in preventing further nuclear proliferation and contributing to a nuclear taboo (Tannenwald, 1999). More recently, an initiative led by Ambassador Christian Wenaweser of Liechtenstein added a recurring item to the GA’s agenda that directed the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (United States, China, United Kingdom, France, Russia) to justify their use of the veto in the GA—a landmark accountability measure and a potential check on the most powerful member states (Miliband, 2022).<sup>2</sup> How did these relatively weak states accomplish their foreign policy objectives in the face of opposition from major powers? I argue that the answer is the experience of these states’ ambassadors. In these examples, Ireland and Liechtenstein were both represented by experienced ambassadors—7 and 23 years at the United Nations (UN), respectively—who were able to shepherd these proposals through, even in the face of opposition by more powerful states.

Conventional explanations of international politics do not account for these diplomatic successes in which smaller powers set the UN agenda, even while countries such as the US are known to use foreign aid and military threats to obtain favorable policy outcomes (Mearsheimer, 1994; Alesina & Dollar, 2000; Carter & Stone, 2015). If these material sources

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<sup>1</sup>A/RES/1380 (XIV) and A/RES/1576 (XV)

<sup>2</sup>A/RES/76/262

of power explained which states influence institutional priorities, we would expect the agenda to be more reflective of American or Soviet interests. Instead, small powers frequently use the UN's agenda to criticize the actions of major powers and their respective allies and to advance initiatives contra the preferences of powerful states. Although several important studies in international relations (IR) examine agenda-setting in international organizations (IOs) (e.g., Keck et al., 1998; Tallberg, 2003; Mikulaschek, 2021; Allen & Yuen, 2022), and others have examined examples of small states exercising influence in IOs (e.g., Cooper & Shaw, 2009; Thorhallsson, 2012; Corbett et al., 2019; Panke, 2013), we lack a generalized empirical understanding of how and why some small powers succeed in influencing institutional agendas. At the same time, other studies have shown that individuals play an important role in international cooperation (e.g., Clark & Zucker, 2023; Heinzl, 2022; Hardt, 2014), yet we lack theories about how diplomatic skill matters in IOs, which are central sites for international politics.

To address this puzzle, I account for diplomacy in explaining states' influence on agenda-setting in IOs in a two-step theory. First, I argue that *diplomatic experience* explains why some small powers find unexpected success in accomplishing their foreign policy goals in IOs. As individual ambassadors gain experience in their work in IOs like the UN, they cultivate social networks, substantive expertise, and mastery of the institutional rules that allow them to more effectively advance policy initiatives. Because small powers tend to have smaller pools of qualified individuals to fill important diplomatic posts, they acquire higher levels of diplomatic experience on average compared to larger powers as an *unintended consequence* of these resource constraints. Second, I specify that diplomatic experience is significant in understanding influence in the early-stage activities of the policymaking process, when the agenda is being set. In these settings, it is more difficult for powerful states to monitor activities, which creates space for smaller powers to operate. Combining these theoretical insights, I argue that while large powers may be able to deploy material power to dominate

late-stage activities, small and medium powers can overperform in early-stage activities, including agenda-setting.

To test the expectations generated by my theory, I develop datasets of 1,476 proposed GA agenda items from 1946 to 2018 and the tenure of all UN member states' ambassadors during that period. I find that smaller powers are more likely to have experienced ambassadors than larger powers. Further, I find that diplomatic experience is an important predictor of agenda-setting activity, even after controlling for measures of material power. Turnover from experienced to inexperienced ambassadors is negatively associated with agenda-setting, including in cases in which this turnover is exogenously determined by an ambassador's death. These analyses are buttressed by 49 in-depth interviews with UN diplomats.<sup>3</sup> This empirical approach complements prior studies of small states in international politics, which are largely qualitative.

Understanding agenda-setting politics in IOs is key in order to better explain downstream political outcomes. The ability to set the agenda confers a great deal of power by framing issues favorably (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Furthermore, agenda-setting creates path dependencies that are difficult to change later on. While large powers may wield more influence in the later stages of policymaking, agenda-setting actors have moved the proposed policy outcome away from the status quo toward their desired outcome (and potentially away from the desired outcome of powerful states), and are better positioned to extract concessions than they otherwise would be.

In addition to the relevance of understanding agenda-setting in IOs broadly, the GA itself is a substantively important case to understand. First, the UN's salience in international

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<sup>3</sup>A more systematic representation of the interviews is in Section 1.3 of the Appendix. Interview protocol was reviewed by the IRB of the author's university (Protocol #: 844833). See Appendix Section 5 for a discussion of research ethics.

media and public opinion arguably renders it the most prominent of any IO. If an issue is of importance to the international community, states are most likely to advance it in this premier IO; thus the UN is a crucial case to test for validity.

Second, agenda-setting dynamics and the importance of diplomatic experience in the GA are likely to generate insights that generalize to other IOs through diffusion, socialization, emulation, and learning of its institutional rules, norms, and political dynamics (e.g., [Simmons & Elkins, 2004](#); [Lenz & Burilkov, 2017](#); [Sommerer & Tallberg, 2019](#)). This is especially true in IOs with permanent, standing representation ([Pouliot, 2016](#)). This expectation is in line with other work that suggests that diplomatic experience matters in IOs ([Falzon, 2021](#); [Cooper & Shaw, 2009](#); [Hardt, 2014](#)) and in bilateral settings ([Gertz, 2018](#); [Malis, 2021](#); [MacDonald, 2021](#)). I suggest that diplomatic experience is particularly likely to be important in IOs like the GA, which are characterized by equal and consensus-based voting, permanent representation, multi-issue and technical domains, and formal rules constrain the influence of material resources. These features are relatively common across IOs, including important institutions like the EU, WTO, and AU.

Third, the substantive importance of the UN makes its attention a normatively important outcome to study. The regular UN budget for 2020 was more than \$3 billion, which financed a variety of programs around the world. Funds cannot be allocated in the budget unless a resolution is passed on an issue, and thus the inclusion of items on the agenda has enormous financial implications. These social and economic programs are of particular importance to small and medium states, and those who lack outside options via which they can pursue their foreign policy goals (e.g., [Voeten, 2001](#); [Sending et al., 2015](#)). While resolutions passed by the GA are non-binding, the examples highlighted at the beginning of this paper show that influence in agenda-setting at the GA can translate to policy outputs with substantial legal, economic, normative, and political ramifications, as well as symbolic power — for both weak and major powers.

I build on a growing understanding of the important role of individuals and small states in shaping IO politics, and attend to the importance of legislative processes in IOs. Previous studies (e.g., [Kim & Russett, 1996](#); [Voeten, 2000](#); [Dreher et al., 2008](#); [Vreeland & Dreher, 2014](#)) have focused on later-stage activities such as resolution sponsorship and voting patterns, and have subsequently overestimated the degree to which material resources matter in IO politics, but accounting for processes such as agenda-setting is imperative for understanding how “power is translated into influence” ([Conrad & Monroe, 2021](#), 606). Not only can we better understand the influence of small powers in these settings, we can also understand why some small powers are better at navigating these activities than others: diplomatic experience. Material power is important in explaining some IO politics, but the role of individual diplomats matters as well.

## Setting the IO Agenda

Agenda-setting is critical for understanding political outcomes.<sup>4</sup> Influencing institutional agendas can afford enormous control over what issues are addressed—or not addressed—and what policies are developed in response.

Agenda-setting is important in many legislative settings, yet little scholarship attends to agenda-setting in IOs, where it plays a crucial role ([Conrad & Monroe, 2021](#)). For example, agenda-setting was integral for Ireland’s Aiken to advance negotiations on nonproliferation. Aiken faced a competing nonproliferation proposal from Sweden, which the US was more

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<sup>4</sup>I define the institutional agenda as the set of problems that policymakers in a particular institutional decision-making body are actively considering ([Cobb & Elder, 1972](#)) and agenda-setting as the ability to add or exclude issues from the institutional agenda ([Bachrach & Baratz, 1962](#); [Kingdon, 1984](#)).

staunchly opposed to. Had this Swedish alternative set the agenda on non-proliferation, US opposition would have stymied negotiations towards the NPT.<sup>5</sup> By setting the agenda and pushing through his proposal, Aiken avoided this premature conclusion of negotiations. Furthermore, only by considering the politics of agenda-setting can we observe the topics that are actively being blocked from being discussed—such as the representation of Taiwan in the UN—compared with those that are simply not being raised. Understanding which countries are influential in setting the agendas of IOs, therefore, informs who shapes the set of policy outcomes produced by those institutions.

Proposing new agenda items is not costless: The formal institutional structures of IOs are complex and knowledge-intensive to navigate. A successful effort to add a new agenda item requires that a diplomat know matters such as voting rules, the deadlines and procedures for submitting agenda items, and relevant precedents. However, the potential payoffs of proposing are large for states' foreign policy goals. For example, Malta's ambassador Arvid Pardo introduced an agenda item on the seabed in 1967 that directly led to the Convention on the Law of the Sea.<sup>6</sup> In 2021, campaigning for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council, Malta's diplomats invoked this legacy as part of Malta's campaign platform.<sup>7</sup> In addition to state-level benefits, individual diplomats gain benefits from being active in proposing, as they can present themselves as effective agents for accomplishing their states' foreign policy goals, which is important for their career advancement.

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<sup>5</sup>[Telegram From US Department of State](#), November 21, 1961.

<sup>6</sup>A/BUR/SR.166, September 21, 1967; A/BUR/SR.171, October 5, 1967.

<sup>7</sup>E.g., [here](#); Interview 25. We cannot identify the role that this legacy played in their Security Council campaign, but Malta did win a seat for a 2023-2024 term, and ocean-related questions have featured prominently in their activities (e.g., [Programme of Work for Malta's UNSC Presidency, February 1, 2023](#); [Digney, February 2, 2023](#)).

While previous work provides insights into some of the key features of agenda-setting and legislative politics, it does not answer what *type* of power is relevant to these outcomes. Material conceptualizations of power as the possession of military capability (e.g., [Mearsheimer, 1994](#)) or economic resources (e.g., [Keohane & Nye, 1977](#)) suggest that large powers use side payments or pressure to obtain their desired outcome. While material power may matter in the end stages of the policymaking process—i.e., the highly visible and politicized matters of resolution politics<sup>8</sup>—we lack evidence of its influence on the legislative activities at the *early* stage of the policymaking process ([Conrad & Monroe, 2021](#)). Materialists might argue that the same logic should hold and that we would expect large powers with greater military and economic leverage to set IO agendas ([Mearsheimer, 1994](#)). Powerful states would use this leverage to dominate agenda-setting in the same ways that they dominate resolution politics. The large power asymmetries in IOs would make individual skill unlikely to be important in predicting influence.

However, in practice, small powers accomplish policy goals in IOs (e.g., [Thorhallsson, 2012](#); [Panke, 2013](#); [Corbett et al., 2019](#)), including through agenda-setting. Prior works on the influence of small states in IOs generally point to institutional features as explanatory of small powers' influence on agenda-setting—for example, [Aksoy \(2010\)](#) and [Allen & Yuen \(2022\)](#) show that the proposal-making role of the EU and Security Council presidencies empower small powers, and [Mikulaschek \(2021\)](#) argues that unanimity decision-making affords more influence to minor powers as non-permanent Security Council members, especially during crises. But why are some small powers more likely to succeed in influencing institutional agendas than others? Building on these accounts, I suggest that diplomacy can provide the

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<sup>8</sup>E.g., [Carter & Stone \(2015\)](#); [Finke \(2021\)](#) on resolution sponsorship; [Kim & Russett \(1996\)](#); [Alesina & Dollar \(2000\)](#); [Voeten \(2000, 2001\)](#); [Dreher et al. \(2008\)](#); [Vreeland & Dreher \(2014\)](#); [Bailey et al. \(2017\)](#) on resolution voting.



answer.

By any definition, small and medium powers' activities, which IR research has largely overlooked to focus on the behaviors of great powers (e.g., [Mearsheimer, 1994](#); [Nye, 1990](#)), make up a great deal of international politics. For example, the Forum of Small States (FOSS), an important organizing group for small powers in the UN, comprises 105 members, representing more than half of the 193 members of the UN. As an analytical category, however, there is continuing debate over the definition of small powers.<sup>9</sup>

## Diplomatic Experience

To better explain who succeeds in IO agenda-setting, I argue that diplomatic experience plays a central role. I argue that individual experience in an institution allows a diplomat to cultivate a form of social power, which they can draw upon to advance their state's interests within a diplomatic context. This form of social power is deeply related to constructivist accounts of international politics, in which "power works through behavioral relations or interactions" ([Barnett & Duvall, 2005](#), 45).

Diplomatic experience aggregates from the individual level to pool at the level of a state's representation in a given institution. That is, multiple diplomats in a state's mission to the

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<sup>9</sup>See [Baldacchino & Wivel \(2020\)](#) for an overview of this debate on small powers; small state and small power are generally used interchangeably in this literature. However, a challenge with this approach is that there are no clear cutoffs between small and non-small powers unless arbitrary cutpoints are created. I address this concern in the empirical analysis by employing continuous measures of power resources and politically defined measures of smallness: membership in FOSS, the World Bank's Small States Forum (SSF), and non-membership in the G20.

UN can contribute to its diplomatic experience there, but they do not contribute to its diplomatic experience in other institutions.<sup>10</sup> As individual diplomats gain experience, they can develop influence by cultivating social relationships, knowledge of institutional rules, and substantive expertise.<sup>11</sup> A Deputy Permanent Representative from a Latin American state observed:

When you're trying to move forward a particular initiative, you go for those colleagues that are most well-spoken and best connected regardless of the country that they represented...you reach out to because their ambassador or their delegate is particularly well-versed, particularly well-connected, or particularly influential on the basis of...experience.<sup>12</sup>

It takes time for new diplomats in an institution to “learn the ropes,” and develop relationships with other key actors (Sending et al., 2015; Karns & Mingst, 2013; Reiners, 2024). Particularly for small powers—which are also disadvantaged by factors such as social hierarchies (Pouliot, 2016)—experience mitigates these disadvantages and helps diplomats obtain favorable outcomes in confrontations with larger powers (Fox, 1977, 185). As an ambassador gains experience, I posit that they accumulate influence through three mechanisms: building their social network, developing substantive expertise in issue areas, and mastering institutional procedures. The importance of these mechanisms for developing influence is supported by evidence from interviews with diplomats. When asked “What makes an ambassador influential?” these mechanisms are the most frequent responses, followed by years of experience—which encapsulates the mechanisms (see Figure 1). While substantive expertise may be issue-specific, in general, influence is expected to operate across issue areas—skillfully maneuvering through institutional procedures, for example, provides benefits across issues.

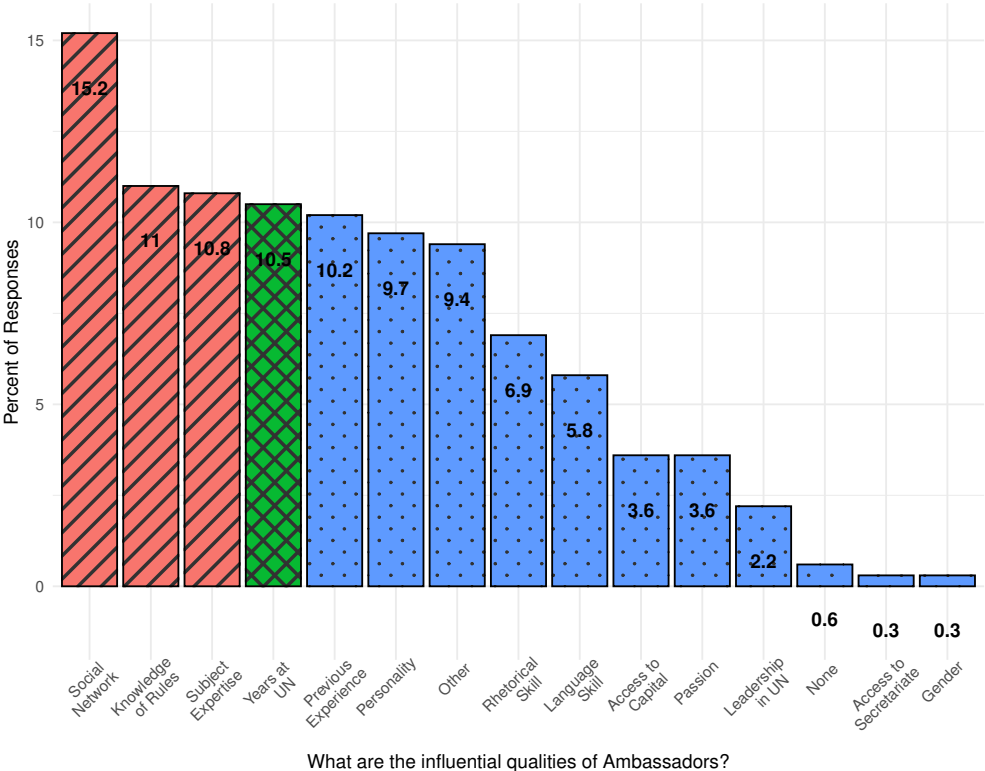
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<sup>10</sup>I discuss the operationalization of diplomatic experience in the empirical analysis.

<sup>11</sup>See Figure 1.

<sup>12</sup>Interview 12.

Figure 1: Interview Evidence for the Mechanism of Diplomatic Experience



Notes: Percent of interview responses. Red/diagonal bars show specific mechanisms theorized; green/hatched bar shows proxy mechanism theorized; blue/dotted bars show other responses.

The case of Aiken provides a useful illustration of the dynamics of diplomatic experience. Before proposing the non-proliferation initiative, Aiken had developed a strong reputation during his years at the UN (Skelly, 1997; Evans & Kelly, 2014, 210), which directly contributed to his ability to advance new policy measures such as the non-proliferation proposal (e.g., Chossudovsky, 1990, 129-30). Aiken’s reputation and time in New York translated into social networks that he leveraged to gain support, including from major powers (Skelly, 1997, 88). Aiken also developed substantive expertise on the issue of nuclear proliferation, which he leveraged to act as a leader in promoting the issue (Aiken, 1961). Particularly, Aiken seems to have excelled in his mastery of institutional rules, which contributed to the success of his proposal through his ability to shepherd it through the bureaucratic processes (Evans & Kelly, 2014, 295; Skelly, 1997, 255).

To be sure, the translation of experience to influence is not automatic. Further, individual characteristics—charisma, language skills, etc.—help some ambassadors cultivate influence more readily. Finally, the scope for diplomatic influence to affect outcomes is not unlimited: in issue areas where powerful states have critical foreign policy interests, homogenous preferences, or strong ex-ante positions, there is likely to be less opportunity for diplomats to sway positions (Copelovitch, 2010; Stone, 2011). For example, on the issue of Taiwan’s representation in the UN, even an extremely experienced diplomat with high levels of influence would not be expected to shift the outcome away from China’s preferred result. However, because of legitimacy and reputational concerns, powerful states are wary about exercising their power to ‘put their thumb on the scales’ too frequently (Hurd, 2008; Binder & Heupel, 2015; Long, 2022), thus this set of cases should be rare. Bearing this in mind, interviews with diplomats indicate that on average, experience is crucial, and a more experienced ambassador is a more effective ambassador (see Figure 1).

This argument builds on the claim that the characteristics of individual diplomats matter

in explaining the political outcomes of IOs (e.g., [Heinzel, 2022](#); [Hardt, 2014](#)).<sup>13</sup> In these fundamentally social environments, individuals can persuade and influence their counterparts (e.g., [Wendt, 1999](#); [Risse, 2000](#); [Johnston, 2001](#)). Even in IOs governed by the principles of sovereign equality, some diplomats are more influential than others ([Pouliot, 2016](#)). Competent individual diplomats may be much more influential than a baseline expectation based on state power would portend. While the importance of expertise has been claimed in other studies of international politics and small states (e.g., [Panke, 2010](#); [Thorhallsson, 2012](#)), I provide the first theory of how and when diplomatic expertise can influence IO policymaking, as well as a tractable empirical framework for assessing these claims.

## Theory of Diplomatic Experience and Agenda-Setting

To leverage diplomatic experience in order to better explain influence over IO agenda-setting, I develop a two-step theory. First, I theorize how and when diplomatic experience is cultivated. Second, I derive expectations about when diplomatic experience is most likely to affect policymaking in IOs, identifying agenda-setting as a key opportunity for diplomatic experience to affect outcomes.

I argue that small state diplomats are more likely to have more diplomatic experience. Small powers tend to have smaller diplomatic corps, which results in fewer skilled diplomats who can rotate into key posts such as the UN (e.g., [Panke, 2010](#)). These states, then, may keep diplomats in place out of necessity, which nevertheless creates an opportunity to develop expertise.<sup>14</sup> Because their Ministries of Foreign Affairs are also smaller, smaller powers may also be less likely to have institutionalized norms about rotation schedules than

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<sup>13</sup>See also the literature on the importance of leader characteristics (e.g., [Horowitz et al., 2015](#); [Saunders, 2011](#); [Lupton, 2022](#)).

<sup>14</sup>In addition to these direct impacts, resource constraints may also *indirectly* lead to longer

large powers such as the US (Gertz, 2018; Malis, 2021). A Permanent Representative from a small Caribbean island state observed this dynamic:

[F]or our small state, the PR stays longer for all the obvious reasons: we have a smaller permanent mission, we are still developing foreign service, so we don't have as many people to choose from. We stay longer, and what we lack in career training, we make up for [with] tenure on the ground, with understanding the space and therefore being better able to navigate that space...Small states benefit from longer tenures, because the longer we stay, the better...we might perform.<sup>15</sup>

While states with more material resources may be more able to invest in recruiting and training skilled diplomats, smaller powers have historically made such investments as well (e.g., Thorhallsson, 2012). Because small powers do not have the same outside options as large powers and must rely to a greater extent on IOs such as the UN to conduct their foreign policy (e.g., Voeten, 2001; Sending et al., 2015), they have greater incentives to invest in any tool that can enhance their effectiveness—including diplomatic experience.

If states can obtain advantages from leaving diplomats in post longer, why would we expect to observe variation in these practices? By keeping diplomats in post for longer periods, states make a trade-off against the utility that can be obtained from rotational schemes. For example, rotation allows newly elected parties to replace diplomats with new individuals who are more amenable to their policy agenda. Furthermore, by frequently rotating diplomats into new posts, foreign ministries can assuage concerns about “going native,” and can better recruit new diplomats, pairing less desirable ‘hardship’ posts with promises of a subsequent position in a more desirable post (Kleiner, 2010). These incentives are likely to be greater for major powers with foreign policy interests across many different

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tenure by contributing to weak state capacity and corruption.

<sup>15</sup>Interview 46.

diplomatic postings and with large diplomatic corps to manage. Furthermore, for small powers, the potential gains of investing in diplomatic experience described above are more important than they are for large powers, which are more likely to favor the benefits of rotation. For these reasons, I expect that small powers have more individuals with more diplomatic experience than large powers.

***H*<sub>1</sub>: Small power diplomats are more likely to have more diplomatic experience than large power diplomats.**

However, I do not expect that diplomatic experience is equally important across all contexts. In the second stage of the theory, I argue that it is particularly important in the early stages of the policymaking process on *agenda-setting*. I suggest that this is because, while large powers can exert influence in the late stages of the policymaking process (e.g., Mearsheimer, 1994; Alesina & Dollar, 2000; Voeten, 2000), they are less likely to do so in the early stages of policymaking because they are more difficult to monitor.

Early-stage activities such as proposing agenda items are temporally distant from policy outcomes and can be highly technical, and thus receive little media attention—despite their importance. In contrast, later-stage activities such as resolution politics are more visibly linked to policy outcomes, which results in greater attention in the media. Since actors focus their resources where success is most likely (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993), late-stage activities should receive more scrutiny by powerful states. In resolution voting, for example, it is easy to observe how others vote. This enables powerful states to leverage material power in obtaining favorable outcomes: They can promise foreign aid or levy sanctions on others and can monitor whether their efforts have been successful. However, interviews with diplomats suggest early- and late-stage activities require similar levels of resources and effort.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>E.g., Interview 40.

Large powers do not ignore early-stage activities but because they are more difficult to monitor, struggle to prevent small powers from exploiting this structural opportunity. These activities, though less visible, create path dependencies that are hard to later change, shifting the status quo towards the agenda-setter's preferences (Romer & Rosenthal, 1978; Shepsle & Weingast, 1987; Cox & McCubbins, 2005). While major powers can exercise influence over the final decision in the later stages of policymaking, by that point, concessions are difficult to avoid. Early agenda-setting also shapes issue framing, which can fundamentally shape the way an issue is considered (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Yet, major powers also care about smaller state satisfaction for institutional legitimacy (Stone, 2011, 14-16), thus major powers compensate weak states with decision-making power (Stone, 2011, 18-9).

Powerful states' ability to monitor behavior circumscribes the contexts in which diplomatic experience can influence outcomes. In late-stage activities in which monitoring is efficient, power can be deployed to obtain favorable outcomes, and even experienced, influential diplomats have little chance of altering the outcome. However, in early-stage activities like agenda-setting, where observing target states' behaviors is more difficult and thus material power cannot be applied as effectively, experienced diplomats *do* have an opportunity to set the agenda toward their states' preferred outcome.

***H<sub>2</sub>: More experienced diplomats are more likely to engage in agenda-setting than those with less experience.***

Combining both theoretical claims provides a compelling picture of diplomacy and agenda-setting in IOs: Structural features give small power diplomats the *opportunity* to influence the agenda of IOs, while experience allows them to take advantage of this opportunity in advancing their states' policy goals.



## Agenda-Setting in the UNGA

I empirically focus on the role diplomatic experience plays in explaining agenda-setting in the UN General Assembly to test these theoretical propositions. I measure the frequency with which states' diplomats propose agenda items over time and whether experience predicts this activity, as well as the determinants of experience itself. Finally, I gather data on exogenous shocks to tenure—i.e., ambassador deaths—to identify the effect of experience.

There are several features of the GA specifically that make it a good case to examine the effects of diplomatic experience on agenda-setting. First, there are agenda-setting *politics* taking place. The outcomes relate to important foreign policy interests of states, and because only a finite number of items can be included in the time-limited agenda of the GA, agenda proposals are subject to contestation and competition. States have heterogeneous preferences about what items to include on the agenda: 44% of all agenda items proposed are contested (that is, not adopted unanimously), with an average of 10 state diplomats participating in the debate. Agenda items at the UN tend to remain on the agenda and are rarely removed once they are added, with debates and meetings held on the item as each year. For many of the issues proposed, GA resolutions are adopted, which devote funds, create programs, and establish norms. The inclusion of an agenda item for debate—independent of whether any subsequent material action is taken on the matter—is itself of great importance to states (Hurd, 2008, 112-117).

Second, the setting facilitates empirical analysis. The GA's agenda-setting process is formalized and well-documented, and all states have equal standing to participate.<sup>17</sup> Proposals

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<sup>17</sup>More details on the agenda-setting procedure are in Appendix Section 1.1. This process is distinct from the main committee operations, and proposals are not subject to approval by the main committees.

represent the full universe of potential agenda items, which in many empirical settings is unobservable. Finally, because GA proposals are filed months in advance of the September meeting, they are insulated from the influence of external events—for example, only a small proportion of agenda proposals concern emergency aid relief.<sup>18</sup>

I examine all proposed agenda items submitted to the General Committee—the body that decides what proposals will be included on the GA’s agenda—from 1946 to 2018. I download these records as well as any addenda or corrections from the UN Digital Library and extract 1,500 unique proposals submitted by state diplomats. For each proposal, I collect meta-data that include the co-sponsors of the proposal, the topic, countries, and regions involved, and whether the topic involved an interstate conflict. I also note whether the item is included on the agenda, the committee to which it was allocated, the item’s number on the agenda, the number of representatives that speak on the item, whether the debate was contested, the vote tally (if one was recorded), and which representatives spoke in favor or against. I also code each item according to its qualitative content employing the UN coding scheme used in the [UN Yearbook](#) and the [Comparative Agendas Project](#) (CAP) scheme.

Ultimately, most proposed items are included on the agenda (87%); I therefore focus on proposing as the outcome of interest. Failed agenda items tend to be highly politicized matters, for example, “The colonial case of Puerto Rico” proposed by Cuba in 1971 and blocked by the US. These failed proposals, many of which contravene strong foreign policy priorities by major powers, suggest the limitations of diplomatic experience: skillful diplomacy matters, but may not matter enough to overcome very strong preferences of powerful

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<sup>18</sup>This relatively long bureaucratic process for agenda-setting is distinct from other UN organs like the Security Council, which proceed more rapidly ([Mikulaschek, 2021](#)). Issues on the agendas of the GA and SC generally do not overlap ([Arias, 2022](#)).

states, though this set of issues is expected to be narrow.<sup>19</sup>

Descriptively, the median number of proposals by a country in a given year is 2, and over the time series is 21. Proposals have a median of 17 co-sponsors. 588 proposals (13%) are sponsored by only one country, which obtain a nearly identical success rate compared to proposals with more than one sponsor.<sup>20</sup> Proposal topics vary across important substantive questions. Defense and peace, public lands (colonial territorial disputes), international affairs,<sup>21</sup> and UN governance are the most frequent topics (Figure 2, left). Based on the UN coding, political and security questions are similarly the most prevalent, followed by economic and social questions (Figure 2, right).

Overall, proposals are not dominated by powerful states (the most frequent proposers are listed in Table A-2). For example, the US and Russia/USSR combined represent only

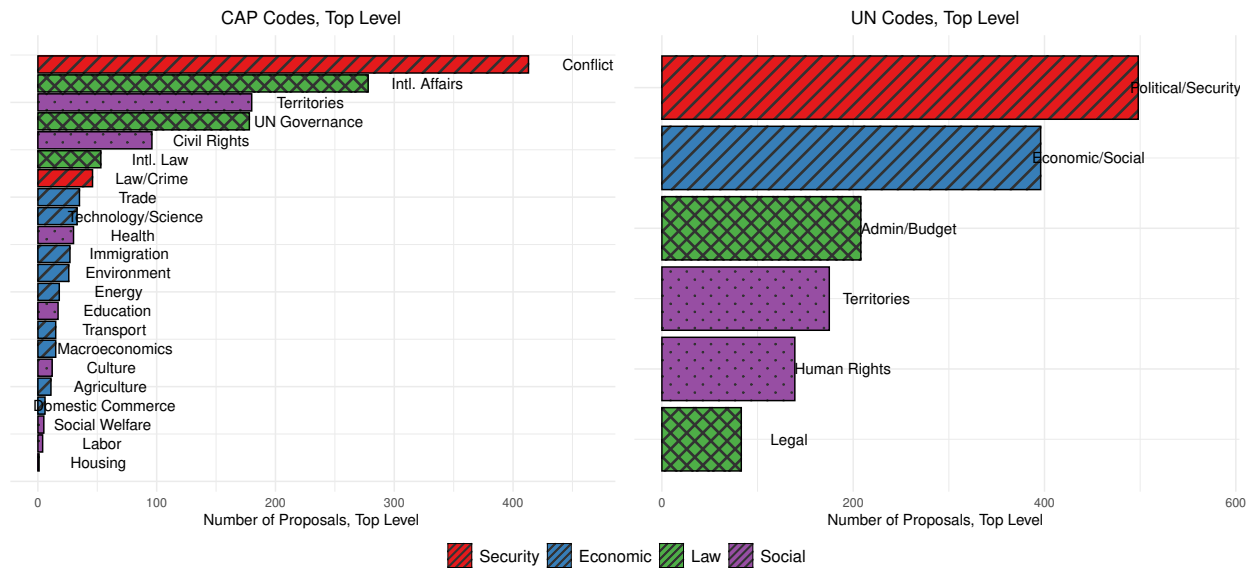
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<sup>19</sup>Given the dearth of empirical analysis of agenda-setting in IOs, we lack a baseline to assess how competitive the GA is relative to other institutional contexts. Future work should explore the relative contestation of IO agendas, though because diplomats are strategic actors and ascertain the preferences of their colleagues, it may be unrealistic to expect that agenda-setting will be extremely competitive—i.e., that one would observe a high rate of proposal failure—in any institution.

<sup>20</sup>Contrast this with co-sponsorship of GA resolutions, for which drafts *start* with an average of 55 sponsors between 2009 and 2019 (Seabra & Mesquita, 2022). This suggests that, as expected, small power influence is attenuated in later stages of policymaking, requiring more coalition-building to obtain success.

<sup>21</sup>This topic includes foreign aid, resource exploitation, Law of the Sea, development, international finance, regional issues, human rights (general), human rights (country-specific), organizations, terrorism, diplomats, and population.

Figure 2: Topics of Agenda Proposals



*Notes:* Total number of proposals according to the two major qualitative coding schemes, the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) and UN internal codes. Colors indicate thematic topic groupings.

4% of total proposal sponsorships. Only 20% of the top 25 proposers (Russia, India, the US, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia) are members of the G20. The raw results are skewed toward countries that have been UN members for longer—and thus have had greater opportunities over time to submit proposals—which is likely to bias against smaller and post-colonial states. This is especially likely given that during the early period of the UN, the institutional agenda was still largely undefined and member states thus had more opportunity to set the agenda by proposing new items. To address this, I rescale the number of proposals by the total number of years a state has been a UN member (to 2018). After scaling, the proportions of G20 proposers decreases to 16% of the top 25 (Russia, India, USA, and Indonesia). The correlation between GDP and the number of proposals submitted by a country is just 0.11, and 0.27 with population (see Figure A-2). This demonstrates that the opportunity to influence the agenda does exist for small powers.

Clearly, small powers have the opportunity to influence the UNGA agenda, and I assert

that by acquiring diplomatic experience, they can take advantage of this opportunity.

## Diplomatic Experience and Agenda-Setting

### Measuring Diplomatic Experience

I operationalize diplomatic experience with a measure of tenure in the UN. As discussed above, it is only via experience in a specific institutional milieu that a diplomat develops the social network, substantive expertise, and institutional knowledge necessary to operate effectively. While experience in other IOs might support the development of generalized diplomatic skills, it can contribute little to specific institutional and social environment of the UN. Furthermore, while support staff in the Mission may facilitate the development of substantive and institutional knowledge, only the Permanent Representative themselves may raise new agenda items, and the social environment of agenda-setting politics occurs almost exclusively at the ambassador-to-ambassador level.<sup>22</sup>

Following this logic, I use the annual [Blue Book listings of Permanent Missions to the UN](#) to capture the name of every country's ambassador and first deputy, creating a database of 21,159 ambassador and deputy entries from 1946 to 2019. To construct the tenure measure, I sum the total years each ambassador and deputy have been serving in either position. This measure is preferable to a strict count of consecutive ambassador years because it allows accounts for the experience of the Ambassador's larger diplomatic team in the form of their deputy, allows for gaps before a diplomat is reposted, and cases when a deputy is appointed as ambassador, which occurs often.<sup>23</sup>

This measurement approach entails a tradeoff. One advantage is that I can compare

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<sup>22</sup>Future work may seek to relax or empirically validate these assumptions.

<sup>23</sup>Interview 48.

tenure for all UN members in all years, which means that there are no concerns about missingness resulting in bias. A disadvantage, however, is that I cannot observe at scale other demographic features—such as education or military experience—that may be relevant for understanding diplomatic effectiveness (e.g., MacDonald, 2021; Arias & Smith, 2018; Haglund, 2015; Heinzl, 2022; Reiners, 2024). Nonetheless, a detailed smaller-scale analysis sheds some light on demographic patterns. The profiles of the ambassadors did not suggest major commonalities, with one exception: prior diplomatic experience. Generally, there do not appear to be systematic characteristics that might confound the effects of experience or suggest that particular types of individuals select into longer service.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, their backgrounds suggest that most UN ambassadors are sincere actors with career incentives aligned with serving as effective policymaking agents, rather than seekers of patronage (Goldfien, 2023).<sup>25</sup>

## Predicting Tenure

Descriptively, I observe support for the expectation that small power diplomats are more likely to have more diplomatic experience than large power diplomats (*Hypothesis 1*): All of the 25 countries with the longest diplomatic tenure are small powers (see Table A-3). To further probe the relationship between state power and diplomatic experience, I employ a regression approach. I expect ambassadorial tenure to be negatively related to measures of state power: Population (logged), GDP (logged), and military expenditure as a share of GDP.

In addition to these key measures of state power, I include explanatory variables that may

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<sup>24</sup>An additional test of selection can be found in the empirical analysis.

<sup>25</sup>See Appendix Section 2. Future work may fruitfully expand on this empirical approach to assess biographical data on international diplomats.

also explain multilateral policymaking effectiveness. At the individual level, I construct two measures to capture the ease with which the individual diplomat is likely to navigate the UN institutional system. I use the `genderize` API to construct a “male” indicator based on the ambassador’s name, since women diplomats may face additional challenges in a traditionally male-dominated role (Towns & Niklasson, 2017). I also construct an indicator of whether English is the principal language of the Mission (as of 2022) from the Mission’s preferred language for correspondence listed in the Blue Book.

At the state level, I represent different dimensions of a state’s embeddedness in the multilateral system. I include the number of IOs in which a country is a full member, associate member, or observer and the number of years of UN membership. I include a count of the number of alliances a country is a member of per year and for a stricter measure of alliances, the number of defense pacts. To proxy for the intensity of a state’s preferences for multilateralism, I include several measures. First, I include the level of representation at the UN General Debate. Second, I collect data on voluntary contributions to UN agencies from 2009 to 2019, measuring the logged total of voluntary un-earmarked and voluntary earmarked contributions. Third, I include the logged annual number of embassies hosted by that country. Fourth, I include the logged number of UN staff sent by the country to capture the potential influence of country-secretariat connections, which covers 1997-2015, as having staff in IOs may shift IO policy agendas to be closer to that state (Parizek & Stephen, 2021). Finally, democratic regimes may be better positioned to advocate in IOs, which I capture using the Polity2 measures of regime type. Missing data are interpolated using Amelia, averaging estimates over 5 imputations.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Results were robust to listwise deletion. Figure A-1 shows that missingness is not systematically correlated with regime type or GDP, though is related to years because of different time coverage in the various datasets.

All independent measures are summarized in Table A-1. I present results from a linear regression model to predict the count of agenda proposals. To avoid autocorrelation, I estimate a separate model with each predictor, though the main results were consistent in the fully saturated estimation (see Tables A-8 and A-9). To account for unobserved heterogeneity between years, I include year fixed effects. To measure uncertainty within countries and years, I estimate bootstrap standard errors clustered at the country and year level. I standardize all independent variables to mean 0 and standard deviation 1 to ease the interpretation of results.

In line with my expectations, Figure 3 shows that key measures of power—GDP and population—are negatively and statistically significantly related to tenure, and suggest substantively large impacts on predicted tenure. Averaging across the models, a 1% increase in GDP corresponds to a 12% decrease in tenure, while a 1% increase in population corresponds to a 50% decrease in tenure.<sup>27</sup> However, this relationship does not hold when examining military expenditure, which is positively and significantly related to tenure. This suggests that small powers with large militaries, relative to their size—for example, Vietnam, Korea, and Israel—also have long tenures.

In addition to these key theoretical predictors, the relationships between tenure and the other independent variables are mixed. Importantly, democratic states are less likely to have long-serving ambassadors compared to authoritarian states. This finding is not surprising, as democratic states are more likely to implement rotational rules that limit the tenure of diplomats, while authoritarian regimes are less subject to rules-based constraints. This result should not be ignored, but neither does it suggest that tenure is fully explained by authoritarianism. For example, the magnitude of the effect on regime type is not substantially larger than the positive effect of defense pacts.

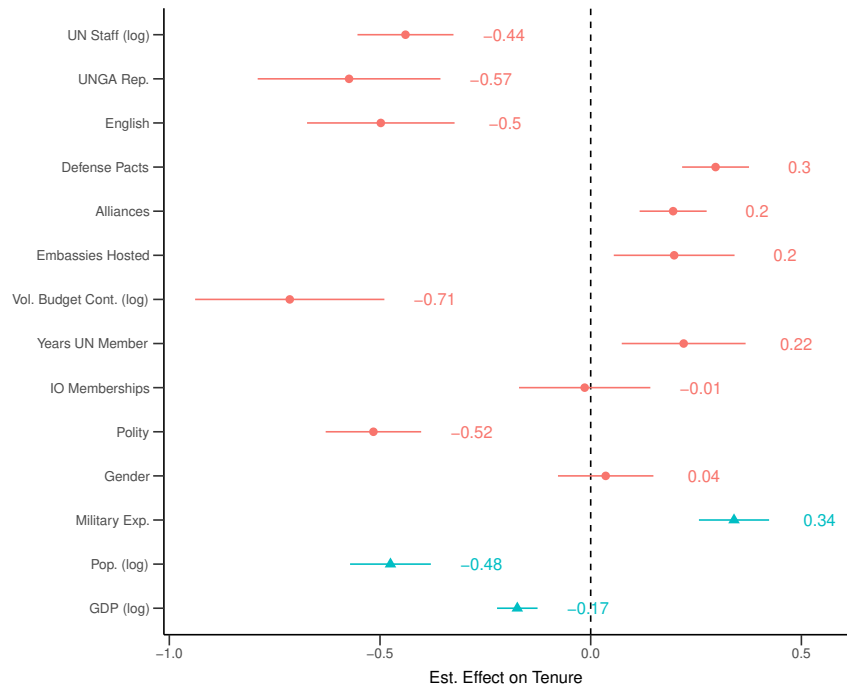
These results indicate that small powers are more likely to have long-standing diplomats

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<sup>27</sup>Full tabular results can be found in Table A-6.



Figure 3: Small Powers Have More Diplomatic Experience



Notes: Estimated coefficients from OLS models with 95% confidence intervals. Red/circle estimates show general multilateralism controls; blue/triangle estimates show material resource controls.

than large powers. I suggest that these findings imply that ambassadorial tenure is a unique dynamic that moves independently of many state-level features that previous work has examined in seeking to understand state influence in international politics. Next, I seek to examine whether this measure of diplomatic experience helps to explain states' success in influencing the IO agenda.

## Explaining Agenda-Setting

For ease of interpretation, I simplify the measure of tenure to a binary variable that indicates whether the ambassador's and deputy's combined experience is 3 years or greater.<sup>28</sup> Based on interviews with diplomats at the UN, this was the most commonly mentioned amount of time needed for diplomats to “get their feet under them” after arriving in the post.<sup>29</sup>

Per [Hypothesis 2](#), I expect that states represented by more experienced diplomats are more likely to propose agenda items. I also expect that turnover—i.e., changes from experienced to inexperienced ambassadors—should be *negatively* related to the country's success in agenda-setting. To predict proposals, I employ the model specifications described in the previous section, including tenure as the key predictor of interest.

In line with these expectations, [Figure 4](#) shows that for all of the predictors of diplomatic experience that are statistically significantly related to agenda-proposing, the relationship

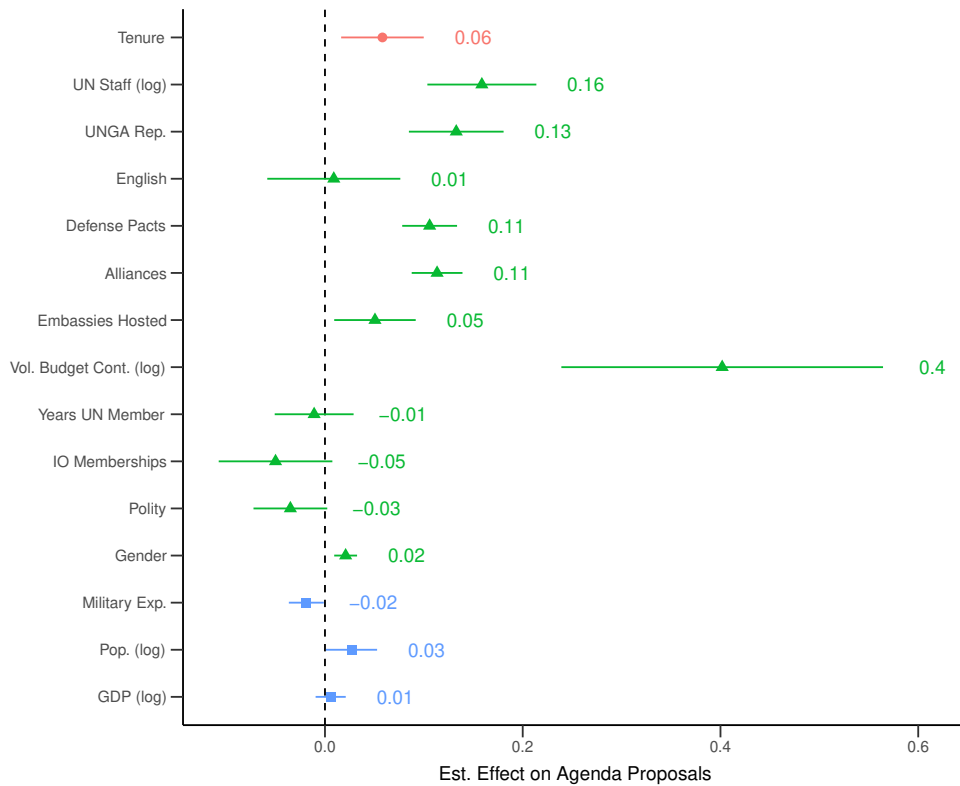
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<sup>28</sup>Figure A-3 shows the distribution of experience across countries and years.

<sup>29</sup>Results are robust to a specification with a continuous measure of tenure when excluding observations above the 95th percentile, though not when these 920 observations are included—see [Table A-10](#). This suggests a weak curvilinear relationship may exist at the extreme end of diplomatic longevity, as an individual's social networks are replaced, and substantive expertise and knowledge of rules become outdated.

is positive.<sup>30</sup> Countries with experienced ambassadors are 5.9 percentage points more likely to propose an agenda item than those with novice ambassadors. Proposals submitted by experienced ambassadors are also 6 percentage points less likely to be contested during the debate ( $p = .03$ ). Male ambassadors are 2.6 percentage points more likely to propose agenda items; English as a first language is not significantly related to proposing. Once again, relationships with the state-level measures are mixed. To examine whether tenure matters differently for democratic and autocratic states—whose ambassadors may stay in their post longer because of corruption rather than skill—I estimate a model that interacts tenure with Polity and find no significant interaction effect.

Figure 4: Diplomatic Experience Significantly Predicts Agenda-setting Frequency



*Notes:* Estimated coefficients from OLS models with 95% confidence intervals. Red/circle estimate shows key tenure measure; green/triangle estimates show general multilateralism controls; blue/circle estimates show material resource controls.

<sup>30</sup>Full tabular results can be found in Table A-7.

Even after controlling for measures of material power, diplomatic experience is a significant predictor of agenda-setting. GDP and population are generally positively and significantly related to agenda-setting across models, while the relationship with military expenditure is negative and, for the most part, not statistically significant. The magnitude of the effect of power is modest: A 10% increase in GDP or population results in an expected increase in agenda-setting of less than 1%. Though material power matters, its effects are smaller than those of tenure and most other measures of institutional embeddedness.

Small powers are not necessarily uniquely positioned to maximize diplomatic experience. I interact ambassadorial tenure with the measures of smallness and do not observe a significant effect of this interaction (Table A-11). The independent effect of tenure remains significant in all of the models, but the interaction effects do not achieve statistical significance.<sup>31</sup> While small powers may invest more in their diplomatic expertise (see Table A-3), these results suggest that any state with diplomatic experience can expect a similar payoff in its ability to engage in early-stage activities. Nevertheless, the positive effects of ambassadorial expertise may still be particularly relevant for small powers. Some investments in multilateral diplomacy—such as establishing new alliances or contributing additional funds and staff to the UN—are costly and out of reach for some small powers. The magnitude of the effect of ambassadorial experience is nearly as large as these other sources of agenda-setting influence—and is larger than the magnitude of the effect of the number of embassies hosted.

The implication of these results is not that small powers dominate agenda-setting at the UN, but rather that they are not precluded from participating in the ways that many existing theories would predict. Major powers still engage in agenda-setting by proposing

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<sup>31</sup>I also estimate the main model on a subset of only small powers and observe the same pattern of results as in the whole sample.

items and blocking agenda proposals that contravene important foreign policy priorities. Bearing this scope condition in mind, while powerful states may be able to determine the outcomes of very high salience—but also very rare—cases, for a large majority of political decisions, diplomatic experience can be a tool for small powers to gain influence.

## Robustness

I conduct additional tests to predict both tenure and agenda proposing. In both cases, I find that the main results—that small powers have longer tenure on average, and that ambassadorial tenure is a significant positive predictor of agenda proposing—hold across all specifications, which can be found in Figures A-4—A-6. First, I estimate models only using observations from 1990 and later to exclude Cold War dynamics, as it may be the case that small powers do better when major powers vie for their support. Second, I exclude China and then Belarus and Ukraine from the models to ensure these states do not drive the results. Third, I change the method of handling missing data from multiple imputation to listwise deletion. Fourth, I change the specification of standard errors from both country clusters and year clusters to only country clusters. Fifth, I add country fixed effects to account for possible unobserved heterogeneity between countries. Sixth, I estimate a negative binomial model to account for overdispersion. Seventh, I replace year fixed effects with time trends to capture potential temporal dynamics. Eighth, I test measures of small power status based on political constructs rather than material resources. As [Maass \(2009, 66\)](#) argues, “[s]ince small states exist in all kinds of forms, shapes and sizes, international relations has to account for that and apply different conceptualizations of the small state as needed and appropriate.” I conduct three additional robustness tests on agenda-setting influence. First, I estimate a model only on the agenda proposals related to security issues as a hard test. In these issue areas, we might expect to see power-based rather than rules-based bargaining, which would

especially disadvantage small powers (Steinberg, 2002). Second, I exclude procedural and commemorative proposals from the data to ensure that non-substantive proposals are not driving the results—that is, whether small powers are allowed to influence the agenda only on issues of little importance to large powers (Stone, 2011). Third, I remove countries in the bottom quartile of standard deviation in turnover to proxy for highly regularized turnover rules.

Across these specifications, the results from the main models hold. Predicting tenure, population remains negatively related to tenure in 5/8 tests and GDP remains negatively related in 6/8 tests, while military expenditures remain positively related in 6/8 models. All of the politically constructed indicators of smallness are strongly and significantly related to tenure. For the agenda-setting models, in all cases, the direction and statistical significance of the effects hold. In 12/14 robustness test, the magnitude of the effect is substantively the same, and in the two cases where the magnitudes change, it is a *larger* effect. Taking these results together, we can have a high level of confidence that the expected relationships do exist: that small power diplomats are more likely to have more experience, and diplomatic experience is positively related to success in agenda-setting.

To isolate the causal relationship between tenure and agenda-setting, I specifically examine cases of turnover and leverage an exogenous source of variation in ambassadorial turnover: deaths. Turnovers would be expected to serve as a shock to the Mission’s institutional knowledge and social positionality and to therefore negatively affect its ability to engage in agenda-setting. However, in the years following the turnover, as the new ambassador gains experience, their diplomatic expertise increases, and the Mission should start to regain effectiveness for agenda-setting.

To examine these dynamics, I first analyze all cases of turnover when experienced ambassadors/deputies are replaced by pairs with no experience. This measure is an indicator for

country-years when the summed experience is reduced from 3 or more years to 0.<sup>32</sup> I use this indicator to predict agenda-setting in the turnover year as well as the following 5 years and find that the immediate shock of turnover predicts a statistically significant 5.9 percentage point decrease in agenda-proposals (Figure 5). As expected, this effect is attenuated over time as the new team gains diplomatic experience.<sup>33</sup>

Second, I examine cases in which turnover is exogenously determined by ambassadorial death. While regular turnovers may be anticipated and planned for to reduce shocks to diplomatic expertise, the unexpected event of an ambassador's death cannot be foreseen. The foreign ministry must fill the post rapidly, which precludes a strategic selection process for the ambassador's replacement. Thus, in this case, the replacement ambassador is more similar to a randomly assigned replacement. For example, after the unexpected death of US Ambassador Adlai Stevenson in 1965, his replacement, Arthur Goldberg, took up the post in just 2 weeks, lacking relationships or expertise in urgent issues such as the Cyprus problem (Urquhart, 1998). To measure this phenomenon, I use UN meeting records, which announce when an ambassador has died in the post.<sup>34</sup> I extract these records and create the death indicator following the same procedure as for the turnover indicator described above.<sup>35</sup> Although rare, the same pattern of results holds for deaths as for turnovers—and

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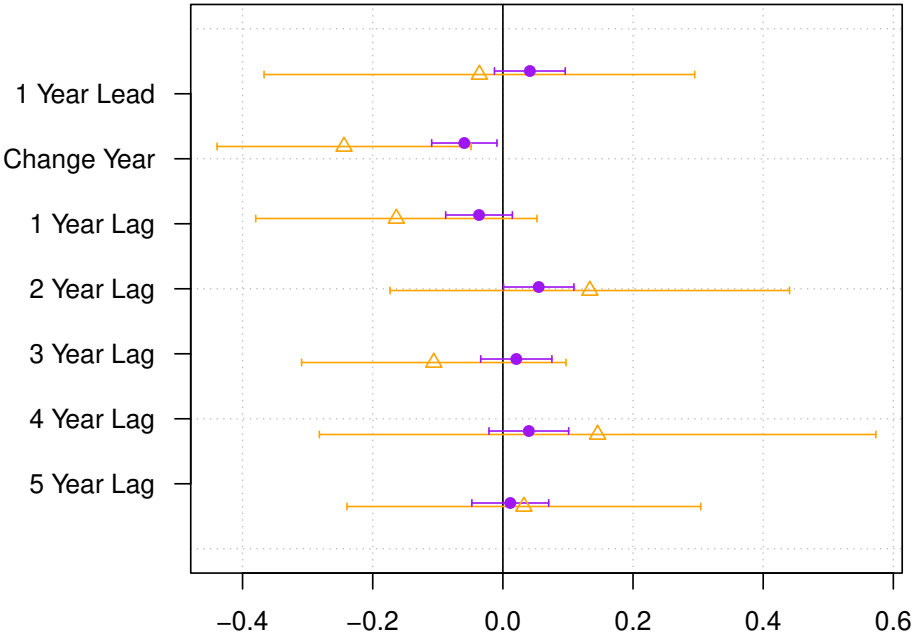
<sup>32</sup>Results are robust to alternate specifications of experience, including 5 years of experience.

<sup>33</sup>The lead term shows no pre-treatment trends. The null effects in years  $t + 3$  to  $t + 5$  may be a result of additional turnovers that occur during this period. To account for this, I repeat this test only in cases in which there is no second turnover in years  $t$  through  $t + 5$ . However, because this severely restricts the sample size, the results are not statistically significantly different from 0.

<sup>34</sup>See [here](#) for an example.

<sup>35</sup>Table A-13 shows that states that experience ambassadorial deaths and those that do not

Figure 5: Ambassador Turnover and Deaths Negatively Affect Agenda-setting Initially, Attenuated Over Time



Notes: Estimated coefficients from OLS models with 95% confidence intervals. Estimates from turnover models are shown in purple/filled circles; estimates from death models are shown in orange/open triangles.



in fact, the substantive magnitude of the effect is greater: a 24.5 percentage point decrease in agenda proposals in the year following the death, compared with the 5.9 percentage point decrease in the year following normal turnover. This is in line with my expectation that an unexpected death would serve as a larger shock than a typical turnover, but even in the case of death, diplomatic expertise recovers over time.

In the appendix, I examine another type of external shock to diplomatic experience: governmental changes. When a new government takes office, a priority is often replacing existing bureaucrats with individuals more in line with the new party. Figures A-7 and A-8 show that, as in the case of ambassador death, ambassadorial turnovers that coincide with elections where the incumbent is replaced reduce agenda-setting influence, while a placebo test of such elections alone has no effect on diplomatic experience. In other words, there is not evidence of an independent effect of party changes on influence that is not moderated by ambassadorial experience.

Finally, I conduct a test for selection effects. One could imagine that ambassadors who show early promise are those who go on to serve for long careers, making their observed effectiveness a result of selection based on initial skill rather than expertise developed over time. To assess this possibility, I compare the agenda-setting effectiveness of ambassadors who eventually serve for longer than the median tenure to those who do not in the years in which both groups are inexperienced (i.e., the first three years of service of both groups). If long-tenured ambassadors are selected because of their skill, we should observe a significant difference between the agenda-setting prowess of these two novice groups. However, Table A-12 shows that there is no statistically significant difference in agenda-setting behavior between novices who do and do not go on to have long tenures, providing additional evidence that the effects of tenure are a result of the accumulation of diplomatic expertise over time rather than selection. Together, these tests assuage concerns that the effectiveness of an

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are balanced across relevant measures such as Policy and GDP.

ambassador could predict both their tenure and their agenda-setting success.

Across these tests, I show that even after accounting for power, diplomatic experience matters in understanding how active states are in advancing their foreign policy priorities in agenda-setting, and particularly in explaining how small powers can influence IO politics.

## Alternative Explanations: Major Power Influence

An important alternative explanation to consider is whether small power diplomats are simply pass-throughs for the influence of large powers. In other political activities in IOs, great powers have been shown to shape the behavior of smaller powers through inducements and threats to act in accordance with their preferences (e.g., [Alesina & Dollar, 2000](#); [Dreher et al., 2008](#); [Vreeland & Dreher, 2014](#); [Carter & Stone, 2015](#)).<sup>36</sup>

The example of Aiken’s non-proliferation proposal illustrates that small power diplomats are independent proposers and that experienced diplomats can even be effective at setting the agenda against great power preferences. Aiken faced significant opposition from major powers—including, at various points, the US, the UK, France, and the Soviet Union. This opposition was present from the beginning, when Aiken’s proposal was contested and nearly voted down. State Department officials described the proposal as “potentially dangerous” and “disruptive,” and advised that Aiken should be discouraged from trying to advance the measure.<sup>37</sup> British diplomats echoed these assessments.<sup>38</sup> Given that several major powers

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<sup>36</sup>A standard approach to testing for great power influence—and its inverse, the importance of neutrality—would be to include alignment scores ([Bailey et al., 2017](#)) as a predictor. However, because such scores are based on voting on UN resolutions, they are endogenous to activities on setting the UN agenda and are thus inappropriate measures in this context.

<sup>37</sup>[Telegram From US Department of State, October 5, 1958.](#)

<sup>38</sup>[Telegram From US Department of State, October 14, 1958](#); [Memorandum of Conversation,](#)

opposed the measure, it seems unlikely that Aiken's proposal could have been part of a proxy campaign. The Irish Department of External Affairs claimed sole sponsorship of the measure (Manathunga, 1996, 102), pushing back on such narratives. Indeed, Ireland's diplomacy was regarded as being strongly independent (Dorr, 1996), and there was no evidence of systematic consultations with other states in advance on the non-proliferation proposal (Chossudovsky, 1990, 112).

Interviews with diplomats corroborate the independence of diplomatic proposals and suggest that they are not a function of great power influence. Diplomats emphasized that the issues that they raise at the UN must be in line with the state's foreign policy as the ultimate guiding principle. When asked about the sources of policy ideas, respondents were most likely to say capital (27% of responses) or the diplomats at the Mission (22%). If the idea originates at the Mission or with civil society partners, capital must approve the idea before the proposal can go ahead.<sup>39</sup> Collaborating with large powers on proposing agenda items is not a priority for diplomats. When respondents were asked "Who do you work with to advance an agenda proposal?" 25 respondents said the regional or sub-regional group, followed by 19 respondents who said like-minded countries. Only two respondents said that "the P5" or "the most influential states" were their partners. Similarly, when asked to identify key actors to get support from, respondents were more likely to point to regional groups than great powers. These findings are in line with other studies of small powers in IR, which point to the importance of neutrality for small powers to have normative influence (e.g., Björkdahl, 2007; Panke, 2010).

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"Irish Disarmament Resolution at 14th General Assembly," with British Note Attached, September 1, 1959.

<sup>39</sup>Interview 20.

## Conclusion

Lyne et al. (2006, 56) argue that “[i]n the study of IOs, the consensus view is that small states do not affect IO behavior in significant ways.” Challenging such assumptions, I theorize that while large powers may be able to deploy material resources to dominate late-stage activities, small and medium powers can do better in early-stage activities such as agenda-setting. It is diplomatic experience—not material resources—that small powers can deploy in these contexts, even contravening the preferences of major powers in some cases. Diplomacy, though often overlooked by international relations scholarship, matters in international politics. I show that smaller powers are more likely to have experienced diplomats than large powers, and that diplomatic experience is an important predictor of a state’s ability to influence the IO agenda. This relationship holds even in cases of exogenous shocks—ambassadorial deaths—to diplomatic experience. These findings contribute new empirical evidence to existing work on small states in IOs (e.g., Cooper & Shaw, 2009; Thorhallsson, 2012; Corbett et al., 2019; Panke, 2013), and provide new means of understanding why some small state actors are more influential than others.

I shine light on the early stages of IO policymaking, which, though they comprise the majority of the everyday work of diplomats, have been largely unexamined (Conrad & Monroe, 2021), even as scholarship develops a growing understanding of the relevance of individual bureaucrats and diplomats in international negotiations (e.g., Clark & Zucker, 2023; Heinzl, 2022; Hardt, 2014). In illuminating these early-stage policymaking dynamics, I contribute two new datasets on agenda proposals and ambassadorial tenure that can be fruitfully applied by scholars to examine questions relating to influence (e.g., Voeten, 2014) and policy entrepreneurship (e.g., Corbett et al., 2019) in IOs.

The ability to influence the IO agenda in the early stages of policymaking is substantively important. These activities can yield returns in terms of policy on key issues to small

powers—such as non-proliferation, development, and the rule of law — as well as political reputational benefits. Even non-binding GA resolutions construct durable norms, create new programs, and dedicate large amounts of funds. Agenda-setting establishes issue frames and creates path dependence in bureaucratic institutions. This can shift the final outcome closer to the preferred outcome of the agenda-setter. Thus, while large powers can influence voting outcomes on the final resolutions, agenda-setting influence by small powers forces concessions away from major powers’ preferred outcomes and from the status quo. These results are especially important for the foreign policies of small states, which lack the resources and alternative options available to powerful states. In this way, diplomatic experience can be considered a particularly effective “weapon of the weak.”

These data represent the first attempt to quantitatively measure diplomatic skill at scale, yet are nevertheless somewhat coarse measures; future work should strive to measure diplomatic expertise with greater nuance. Drawing on the literature on leader effectiveness and disposition (e.g., [Horowitz et al., 2015](#); [Saunders, 2011](#); [Lupton, 2022](#); [Rathbun, 2011](#)), the effects of serving in the military or other IOs, having trusting dispositions, or attending elite western universities could be probed for their relationship to diplomatic effectiveness. Network dynamics and examinations of informal networks may also prove a fruitful avenue for future research, building on findings that heads of state with prior relationships may collaborate more ([Krcmaric et al., 2020](#)). Such avenues could further illuminate the specific mechanisms of diplomatic experience—social networks, substantive expertise, and bureaucratic knowledge.

Future work should test the generalizability of these expectation across different contexts. The logic of my theory of diplomatic experience is not specific to the context of the UN: Because the diffusion of institutional structures from the UN to other IOs is likely (e.g., [Lenz & Burilkov, 2017](#); [Sommerer & Tallberg, 2019](#)), these insights are expected to be generalizable to other IOs. Features such as equal and consensus-based voting, permanent

representation, multi-issue and technical domains, and formal rules constrain the influence of material resources and therefore make diplomatic experience more likely to be influential. This implies that institutions such as the EU and WTO are likely cases for diplomatic experience to matter, whereas the IMF is a less likely case. Such studies could also allow for analysis of the fungibility of diplomatic experience across different institutional settings.

I contribute a more accurate understanding of IO politics—which, by accounting for the whole of the policymaking process, shows that the diplomats of small powers can be effective agents in IOs, and their influence should not be ignored, by either diplomatic practitioners or scholars of international politics.

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# *Supplementary Materials*

## Who Sets the Agenda? Diplomatic Experience and Small Power Influence in the United Nations

November 26, 2024

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# 1 Descriptive Statistics

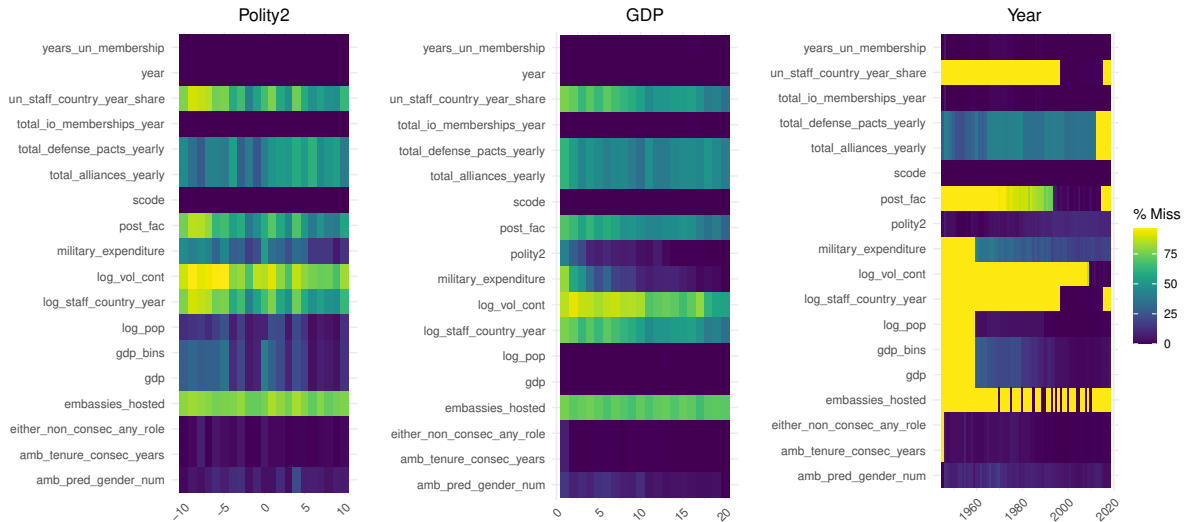
## 1.1 GA Agenda-Setting Procedures

The process of agenda setting follows a formal procedure laid out in the UN Charter and the General Assembly’s Rules and Procedures, which delegates this responsibility to the General Committee. The membership of the General Committee consists of the President of the General Assembly, the 21 Vice Presidents, and the Chairmen of the six Main Committees. This always includes the Permanent 5 members of the Security Council (United States, United Kingdom, Russia, France, and China), and rotating representation from the other geographical blocs, each of which employs separate procedures for selecting their Vice Presidents—for example, the African bloc has a rotation scheme, while some blocs have internal elections (Vreeland & Dreher, 2014). Every state has an equal right to submit new agenda proposals, which may be co-sponsored. The General Committee then considers all proposed agenda items and determines whether they will be included on the GA’s agenda. Many agenda items are adopted by consensus, though votes can be requested and are decided by a simple majority rule (Alker, 1964; Kaufmann, 1980; Smith, 2006). Each year, these items are contained in the Preliminary List of Items, the Provisional Agenda, the Supplementary List of Items, and all of the General Committee reports. While most items are proposed by states, some are also submitted by 15 institutional proposers (President of the General Assembly, Secretary-General, the Trusteeship Council, etc).

While these institutional rules are specific to the UN, they also are similar to many other IOs (and in some cases even serve as a template). For example, in the EU, Coreper II similarly determines the agenda for the EU Council.

## 1.2 Quantitative Measures

Figure A-1: Missingness Maps



**Table A-1: Independent Variable Summary Statistics**

Var.	Min.	1st Qu.	Median	Mean	3rd Qu.	Max.	Pct. Missing
Polity <sup>a</sup>	-10	-7.00	2.00	0.98	8.00	10	0.08
IO Memberships <sup>b</sup>	2	35.00	50.00	51.24	66.00	126	0.00
Duration UN Membership <sup>c</sup>	0	14.00	28.00	30.34	45.00	74	0.00
Vol. Budget Contribution <sup>d</sup>	2	13.78	15.33	15.38	17.01	23	0.84
Embassies Hosted <sup>e</sup>	0	13.00	29.00	36.97	53.00	184	0.78
Alliances <sup>f</sup>	1	1.00	2.00	2.54	3.00	21	0.45
Defense Pacts <sup>g</sup>	1	1.00	1.00	1.78	2.00	11	0.45
GDP <sup>h</sup>	13196545	1985582686.50	9931134941.00	193927349208.62	59110874241.00	20600000000000	0.19
Population (Log) <sup>i</sup>	9	14.60	15.78	15.62	16.86	21	0.11
Military Exp. <sup>j</sup>	0	1.21	1.93	2.78	3.21	117	0.33
Military Exp. Log Dollars	-Inf	17.76	19.52	-Inf	21.41	27	0.30
Log Num. of UN Staff <sup>k</sup>	0	1.79	2.83	2.78	3.74	7	0.66
Share of UN Staff <sup>l</sup>	0	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01	0	0.66
Amb. Gender <sup>m</sup>	0	1.00	1.00	0.89	1.00	1	0.08
Level Rep. <sup>n</sup>	0	1.00	1.00	1.38	2.00	2	0.60
Amb. Tenure (Strict) <sup>o</sup>	1	1.00	2.00	3.10	4.00	28	0.02
Amb. Tenure (Lenient) <sup>p</sup>	1	4.00	5.00	6.48	8.00	37	0.02

a 1945-2018 (all years) ([Center for Systemic Peace, 2018](#))

b 1945-2012, interpolated for 2012-2018 ([Pevehouse et al., 2020](#))

c 1945-2012, interpolated for 2012-2018 ([Pevehouse et al., 2020](#))

d 2009-2018, manually collected from [UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination \(2019\)](#). The agencies included are WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, UNDP, WHO, UNRWA, FAO, UN, IAEA, UNODC, UNAIDS, ILO, UNFPA, IFAD, PAHO, UNEP, UN-HABITAT, UNWOMEN, WMO, ICAO, UNIDO, WTO, IARC, OPCW, UNITAR, ITC, UNCDF, UNESCO, IMO, CTBTO, WIPO, UNU, UNSSC, UNFCCC, ITU, UNITAID, ICC, UNWTO, UNRISD, DPKO, and UNOPS.

e 1970-2010, interpolated between 3 and 5-year measurements ([Rhamey et al., 2013](#))

f 1945-2012 ([Gibler, 2009](#))

g 1945-2012 ([Gibler, 2009](#))

h 1960-2018 ([World Bank, 2019](#))

i 1960-2018 ([World Bank, 2019](#))

j 1960-2018 ([World Bank, 2019](#))

k 1997-2015 ([Parizek & Stephen, 2021](#))

l 1997-2015 ([Parizek & Stephen, 2021](#))

m 1945-2018 (all years), manually constructed with `genderize`

n 1970-2017 ([Baturu et al., 2017](#))

o 1945-2018 (all years), manually collected

p 1945-2018 (all years), manually collected

Figure A-2: Correlation of Independent Variables

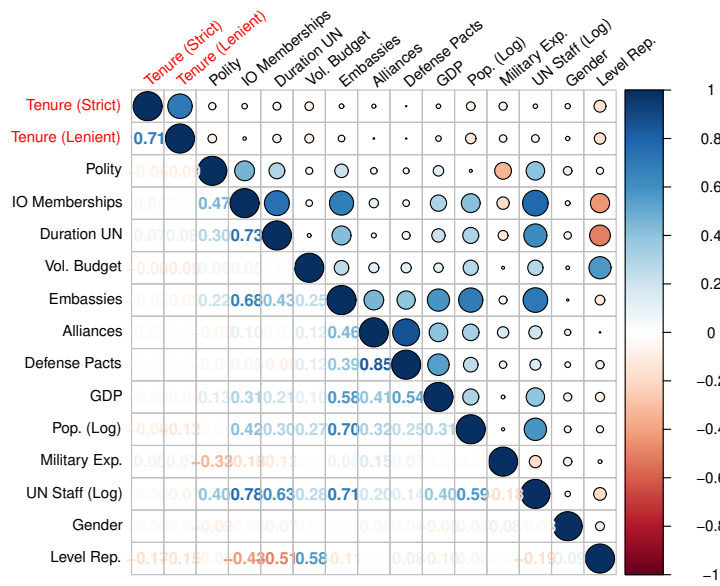


Figure A-3: Treatment Distribution Across Units and Time





**Table A-2:** Small Powers Well Represented Among Top Proposers

	Proposer	Total Num. Proposals	Proposer	Proposals Weighted by Membership Years
1	Russia/USSR	128	Russia/USSR	1.73
2	India	84	Yemen	1.72
3	Egypt	76	Ukraine	1.50
4	Iraq	68	Belarus	1.21
5	Cuba	65	India	1.17
6	Pakistan	63	Southern Yemen	1.04
7	Philippines	62	Egypt	1.03
8	USA	60	Iraq	0.92
9	Syria	56	Cuba	0.88
10	Costa Rica	54	Pakistan	0.88
11	Romania	52	Philippines	0.85
12	Nicaragua	51	Romania	0.81
13	Indonesia	50	USA	0.81
14	Sudan	50	Sudan	0.79
15	Yemen	50	Czechoslovakia	0.79
16	Guinea	47	Syria	0.79
17	Lebanon	45	Guinea	0.77
18	Libya	45	Senegal	0.76
19	Senegal	45	Algeria	0.74
20	Morocco	44	Costa Rica	0.73
21	Afghanistan	43	Indonesia	0.72
22	Iran	43	Mali	0.71
23	Algeria	42	Libya	0.70
24	Mali	42	Morocco	0.70
25	Saudi Arabia	42	Nicaragua	0.69

*Notes:* The total number of proposals by country is shown in the left column; the total number of proposals divided by the number of years of the country’s UN membership (until 2018) is shown in the right column.

**Table A-3:** Small Powers Have Some of the Longest Diplomatic Tenure

	Country	Strict Measure	Country	Lenient Measure
1	Turkmenistan	11.82	Monaco	18.00
2	Djibouti	11.24	Liechtenstein	16.30
3	Liechtenstein	8.13	Djibouti	14.98
4	Madagascar	7.43	Turkmenistan	13.96
5	Palestine	7.15	Palestine	12.46
6	Kuwait	7.11	Nicaragua	12.22
7	Southern Yemen	7.00	Antigua and Barbuda	12.14
8	Nauru	6.75	Madagascar	11.77
9	Angola	6.74	Dominica	11.53
10	Guyana	6.61	Azerbaijan	11.46
11	Samoa	5.98	Micronesia	11.10
12	Holy See	5.96	Kuwait	10.33
13	Botswana	5.91	Morocco	10.17
14	Micronesia	5.31	Samoa	10.12
15	Qatar	5.18	Guyana	9.87
16	Norway	5.05	Southern Yemen	9.78
17	Dominica	5.05	Saudi Arabia	9.69
18	Congo (PR)	4.92	Eritrea	9.62
19	Monaco	4.85	San Marino	9.57
20	Gabon	4.65	Liberia	9.42
21	Oman	4.49	Belize	9.39
22	Saint Kitts and Nevis	4.44	Nauru	9.35
23	Bahrain	4.39	Tanzania	9.10
24	Sao Tome and Principe	4.37	Congo (PR)	9.07
25	Tajikistan	4.36	Angola	9.05

*Notes:* The strict measure is the sum of consecutive years served by the ambassador. The lenient measure is the sum of the consecutive and non-consecutive years served by the ambassador and the deputy in either position.

### 1.3 Interview Data

**Table A-4:** Geographic Representation of Respondents

		GDP Tercile			
		1	2	3	
Region	Africa		7	6	<i>13</i>
	Americas	2	3	4	<i>9</i>
	Asia	5	2	3	<i>10</i>
	Europe	11	6	2	<i>19</i>
		<i>18</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>51</i>

**Table A-5:** Level of Representation of Respondents

Level	
Permanent Representative	17
Deputy Permanent Representative	14
Minister Counsellor / Counsellor	1
Counsellor	7
Secretary	11
Attache	1

## 2 Ambassador Biographies

To probe whether there are important demographic features that predict long tenures, I examine nine of the longest-serving ambassadors, focusing on the post-1980 period to maximize data availability.<sup>1</sup> The profiles of the ambassadors did not suggest major commonalities, with one exception: prior diplomatic experience. Seven of the ambassadors had previously served in other positions in their home Ministry of Foreign Affairs; two had served in other multilateral posts (including the EU, World Bank, and IMF); four had served in other positions at the Mission to the UN before becoming Permanent Representative; and five had served in bilateral posts. While this experience is noteworthy, diplomatic experience is not expected to be fungible across institutional contexts. This is because institutional rules and remits vary across IOs, as do the individuals who comprise the diplomatic corps and the Secretariat. Further, the norms and practices of multilateral permanent representation differ from those of bilateral representation. All this is to say that though other diplomatic experiences may be widely present among the ambassadors, it does not appear to be a prevalent omitted variable in predicting diplomatic experience. Aside from shared diplomatic experience, the ambassadors' professional backgrounds were varied, including business and finance, health, development, education, and legislature. About half were educated at universities in the US or Europe. While most of these individuals were career diplomats, other influential ambassadors—such as the Ambassador from Costa Rica—are political appointees.

These examples illustrate that long-serving UN ambassadors are qualified and diverse individuals. There do not appear to be systematic characteristics that might confound the effects of experience or suggest that particular types of individuals select into longer service.

<sup>1</sup>Full profiles are available upon request.

### 3 Main Results

**Table A-6:** Predicting Diplomatic Experience

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
Male Amb.	0.024 (0.066)										
Polity2		-0.520*** (0.066)									
IO Memberships			-0.029 (0.091)								
Years UN Member				0.223** (0.089)							
Vol. Budget Cont. (log)					-0.619*** (0.127)						
Embassies Hosted						0.170** (0.084)					
Alliances							0.234*** (0.052)				
Defense Pacts								0.434*** (0.062)			
English Lang.									-0.506*** (0.108)		
Level Rep.										-0.547*** (0.135)	
UN Staff (Log)											-0.502*** (0.077)
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	9,931	9,931	9,931	9,931	9,931	9,931	9,931	9,931	9,654	9,931	9,931
R <sup>2</sup>	0.072	0.083	0.072	0.073	0.073	0.072	0.074	0.078	0.075	0.073	0.075

*Notes:* \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. OLS model estimates, clustered (Country & Year) standard errors in parentheses. Missing data imputed using Amelia, averaged over 5 imputations. Coefficient estimates for size-based predictors (blue triangles) are averaged across all models.

**Table A-7:** Predicting Agenda-setting Frequency

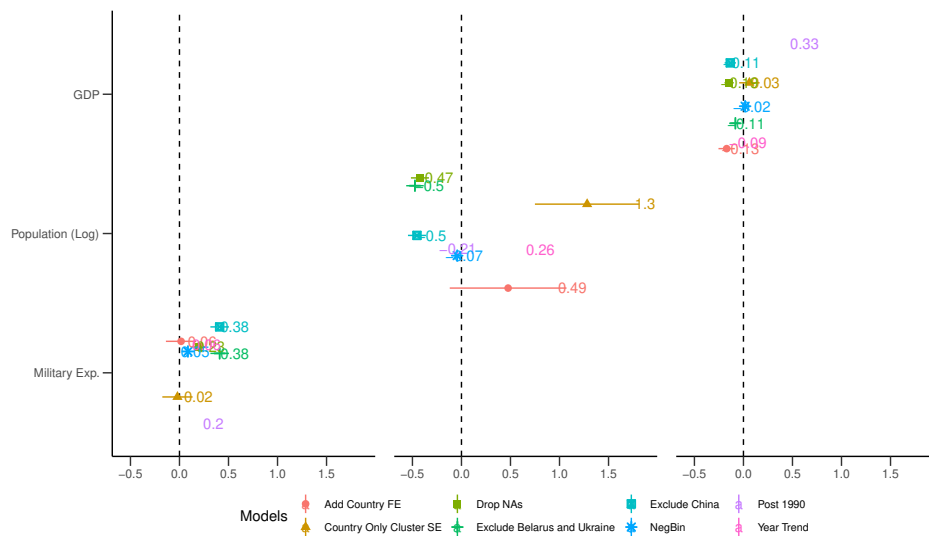
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
Experienced (3 Yrs.)	0.059** (0.025)										
Male Amb.		0.026*** (0.007)									
Polity2			-0.038 (0.023)								
IO Memberships				-0.054 (0.035)							
Years UN Member					-0.010 (0.024)						
Vol. Budget Cont. (log)						0.331*** (0.096)					
Embassies Hosted							0.028 (0.028)				
Alliances								0.133*** (0.017)			
Defense Pacts									0.145*** (0.021)		
English Lang.										0.007 (0.041)	
Level Rep.											0.121*** (0.028)
UN Staff (Log)											0.130*** (0.036)
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Power Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	9,931	10,167	10,167	10,167	10,167	10,167	10,167	10,167	10,167	9,885	10,167
R <sup>2</sup>	0.212	0.211	0.211	0.212	0.210	0.219	0.210	0.229	0.229	0.206	0.215

*Notes:* \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. OLS model estimates, clustered (Country & Year) standard errors in parentheses. Missing data imputed using Amelia, averaged over 5 imputations.

# 4 Robustness

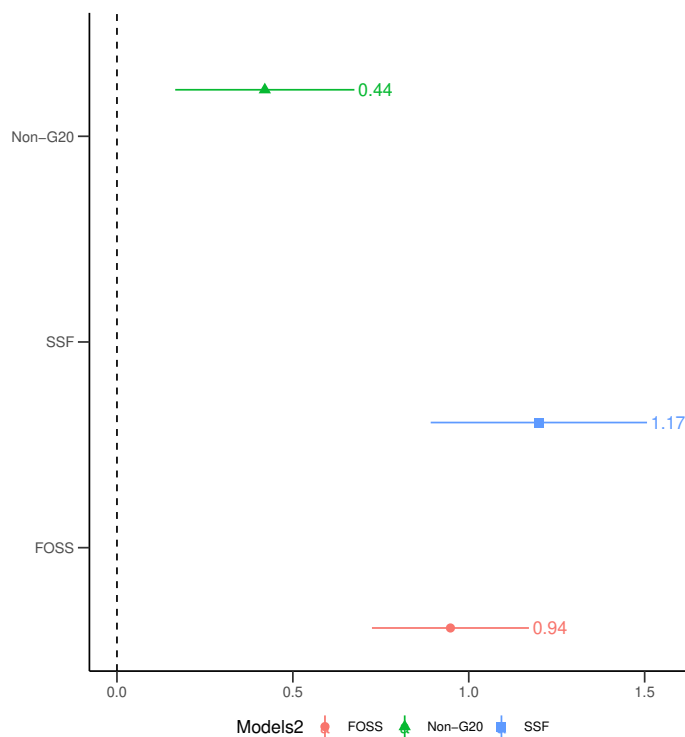
## 4.1 Main Robustness Results

**Figure A-4:** Robustness to Alternate Model Specifications: Tenure



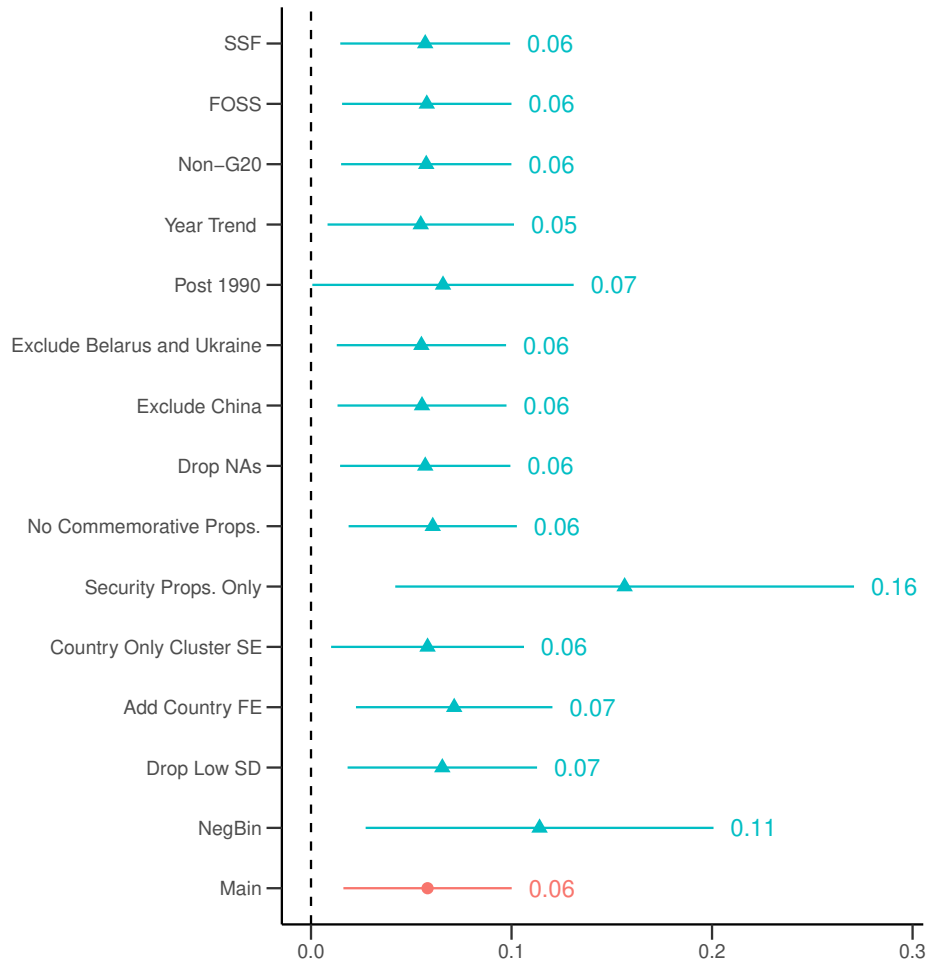
*Notes:* Estimated coefficients from OLS models (except for the “NegBin” model, which shows coefficients from a negative binomial model) with 95% confidence intervals.

**Figure A-5:** Robustness to Alternate Measures of Small Powers: Tenure



*Notes:* Estimated coefficients from OLS models with 95% confidence intervals.

**Figure A-6: Robustness to Alternate Model Specifications: Agenda-setting**



*Notes:* Estimated coefficients from OLS models (except for the “NegBin” model, which shows coefficients from a negative binomial model) with 95% confidence intervals.

## 4.2 Alternate Model Specifications

**Table A-8:** Predicting Tenure: Fully Saturated Model

	(1)
Male Amb.	-0.009 (0.065)
Polity2	-0.479*** (0.053)
IO Memberships	0.140 (0.169)
Years UN Member	0.481*** (0.096)
Vol. Budget Cont. (log)	-1.23*** (0.183)
Embassies Hosted	0.771*** (0.144)
Alliances	-0.506*** (0.089)
Defense Pacts	0.866*** (0.118)
English Lang.	-0.374** (0.162)
Level Rep.	-0.034 (0.138)
UN Staff (Log)	-0.772*** (0.131)
GDP (log)	-0.446*** (0.063)
Population (log)	-0.520*** (0.086)
Military Exp.	0.332*** (0.050)
Year FE	Yes
Observations	9,654
R <sup>2</sup>	0.106

*Notes:* \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. OLS model estimates, clustered (Country & Year) standard errors in parentheses. Missing data imputed using Amelia, averaged over 5 imputations.

**Table A-9:** Predicting Agenda Setting: Fully Saturated Model

	(1)
Experienced (3 Yrs.)	0.083*** (0.028)
Male Amb.	-0.002 (0.006)
Polity2	-0.064*** (0.018)
IO Memberships	-0.229*** (0.045)
Years UN Member	-0.026 (0.022)
Vol. Budget Cont. (log)	0.529*** (0.116)
Embassies Hosted	-0.047* (0.026)
Alliances	0.077*** (0.025)
Defense Pacts	0.074** (0.031)
English Lang.	-0.052 (0.038)
Level Rep.	0.148*** (0.028)
UN Staff (Log)	0.337*** (0.056)
GDP (log)	-0.069*** (0.014)
Population (log)	-0.131*** (0.028)
Military Exp.	-0.092*** (0.017)
Year FE	Yes
Observations	9,654
R <sup>2</sup>	0.271

*Notes:* \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. OLS model estimates, clustered (Country & Year) standard errors in parentheses. Missing data imputed using Amelia, averaged over 5 imputations.

**Table A-10:** Predicting Agenda Setting: Continuous IV

	(1)	(2)
Tenure (Lenient)	0.004 (0.010)	0.021** (0.010)
GDP (log)	0.015* (0.008)	0.015* (0.008)
Population (log)	0.044*** (0.014)	0.042*** (0.014)
Military Exp.	-0.016 (0.011)	-0.014 (0.013)
Year FE	Yes	Yes
Observations	9,931	9,247
R <sup>2</sup>	0.210	0.222

*Notes:* \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. OLS model estimates, clustered (Country & Year) standard errors in parentheses. Missing data imputed using Amelia, averaged over 5 imputations. Model 1 includes all observations, Model 2 excludes observations above the 95th percentile of tenure.

**Table A-11:** Interacting Tenure with Smallness

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Experienced (3 Yrs.)	0.169* (0.098)	0.058** (0.026)	0.058** (0.026)	0.058** (0.026)
Small State Ind.	0.028 (0.103)			
Experienced (3 Yrs.) × Small State Ind.	-0.123 (0.102)			
Experienced (3 Yrs.) × GDP (log)		0.016 (0.024)		
Experienced (3 Yrs.) × Population (log)			0.015 (0.025)	
Experienced (3 Yrs.) × Military Exp.				-0.010 (0.034)
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Power Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	9,931	9,931	9,931	9,931
R <sup>2</sup>	0.214	0.213	0.213	0.213

*Notes:* \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. OLS model estimates, clustered (Country & Year) standard errors in parentheses. Missing data imputed using Amelia, averaged over 5 imputations. Small indicator shows countries not in the G20. Results in Model 1 are robust to three indicators of smallness (non-G20, FOSS, SSF). G20 results are shown; others available upon request.



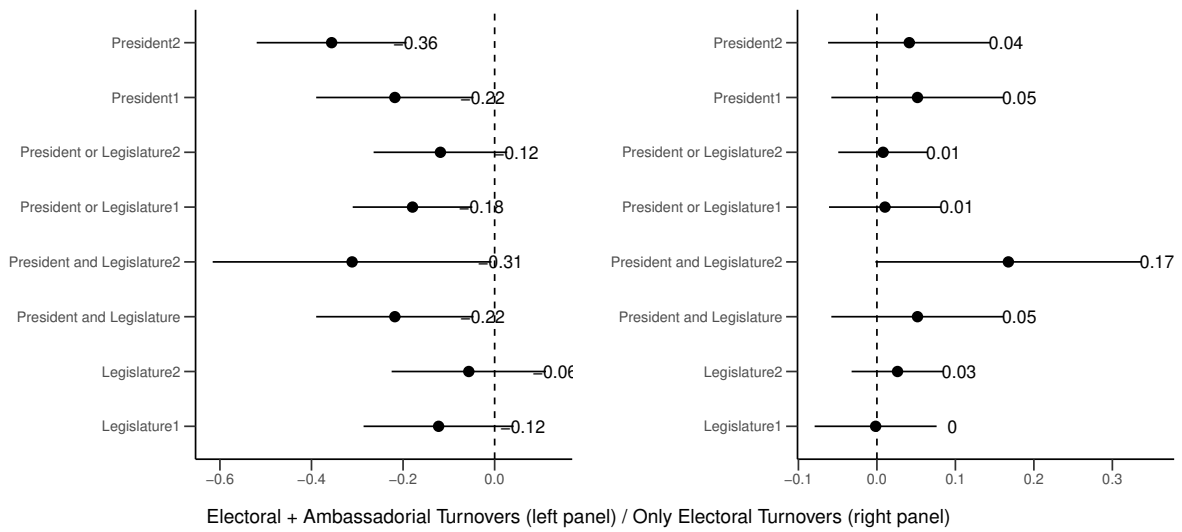
**Table A-12:** Predicting Agenda Setting: Selection

	(1)
Long-Serving Career	0.098 (0.062)
GDP (log)	0.034 (0.026)
Population (log)	0.030 (0.025)
Military Exp.	0.005 (0.033)
Year FE	Yes
Observations	1,232
R <sup>2</sup>	0.238

*Notes:* \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. OLS model estimates, clustered (Country & Year) standard errors in parentheses. Missing data imputed using Amelia, averaged over 5 imputations.

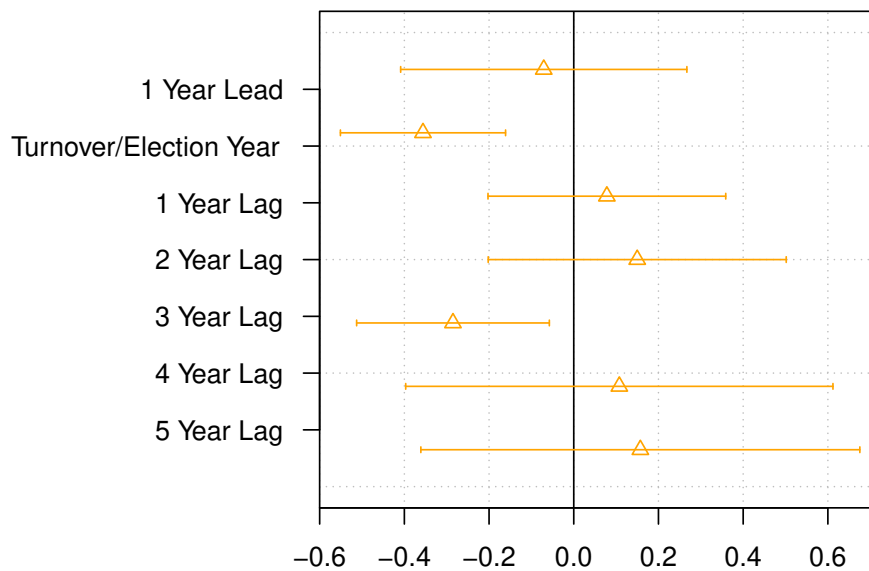
### 4.3 Elections Results

**Figure A-7: Electorally Induced Turnovers**



*Notes:* Estimated coefficients from OLS models with 95% confidence intervals. Variable suffixes of 1 show results for the incumbent being replaced, and suffixes of 2 show results for the incumbent’s party losing, both constructed from the NELDA dataset.

**Figure A-8: Electorally Induced Turnovers**



*Notes:* Estimated coefficients from OLS models with 95% confidence intervals.

**Table A-13:** Death Balance Table

	Var.	T-Test P val.	Ctrl. Mean	Treatment Mean
1	Polity	0.59	2.13	1.20
2	IO Memberships	0.16	59.87	51.14
3	Duration UN	0.02	41.40	30.27
4	Vol. Budget	0.47	9.64	11.15
5	Embassies	0.83	33.56	35.18
6	Alliances	0.95	2.42	2.44
7	Defense Pacts	0.39	1.48	1.63
8	GDP	0.06	43886549048.28	129021406765.13
9	Pop. (Log)	0.37	15.18	15.66
10	Military Exp.	0.48	3.57	2.83
11	UN Staff (Log)	0.30	2.77	2.37
12	Gender	0.00	1.00	0.89
13	Level Rep.	0.00	1.59	2.17

#### 4.4 Death Analysis Robustness

### 5 Research Ethics

This research draws on expert interviews with diplomats, which were executed in compliance with standards and obligations described in the APSA Principles and Guidance for Human Subject Research. The interview protocol went through an IRB review and approval process at the author’s university in the U.S. to ensure that the activities were in line with regulations regarding the protection of human subjects. I did not engage with vulnerable populations, and the questions did not cover sensitive topics. The subjects of the interviews were public figures. I did not gather identifying information unless explicitly given permission by the respondent. All interview data are stored in a password-protected folder accessible only to the author. Respondents were asked whether they were comfortable with the author note-taking and recording during the interview, and if they were not, no notes or recordings were taken.

Before conducting the interviews, respondents were provided documentation of the risks and details of the interview to obtain their consent to participate. All respondents were also informed beforehand that they always had the option to opt-out during any point in the interview (none chose to do so). No compensation was provided to respondents. I assessed that the potential contributions of this research project were substantial while risks were minimal, and further that there were no conflicts of interest. Before, during, and after interviews, I ensured that participants understood that no identifying information was collected or would be revealed without the explicit consent of respondents. No deception was used in the study. Interviews to reduce any possible harm and not raise sensitive subjects.

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