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

Sabrina B. Arias† Fiona Bare‡

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Abstract

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

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†Assistant Professor, Lehigh University, sarias@lehigh.edu.

‡Ph.D. Candidate, Princeton University, fiona.bare@princeton.edu.

Introduction

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

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

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

by an unexpectedly strong showing in a vote of 43-80 with 37 abstentions.[1]

While scholars of diplomatic studies take these personal relationships seriously in seeking to understand the dynamics of diplomatic engagement (e.g., Sending et al., 2015; Pouliot, 2016; Holmes & Wheeler, 2020; Chasek, 2021; Arias, 2026a; Manulak, 2024), little work has investigated the social relationships of diplomats as a *determinant* of their propensity to cooperate. Indeed, most research in international cooperation and international organizations (IOs) utilizes measures of state power and influence — for example, foreign aid flows, alliances, cultural affinity, and overlapping IO memberships (e.g., Voeten, 2000; Dreher et al., 2008, 2009) — to predict when states are likely to cooperate in IOs. Such studies largely omit the personal relationships between diplomats, despite the fact that these are the agents charged with the on-the-ground task of reaching cooperative outcomes between nation-states in meetings of IOs, instead focusing on state-level features. With increasing attention being paid to the importance of individuals in diplomacy (Weaver et al., 2026), an unanswered question thus remains: to what degree do social relationships between diplomatic negotiators affect state cooperation in IOs?

In this paper, we empirically assess whether social relationships between diplomats, not just state power and affinity, affect the likelihood of cooperation between delegations in IOs. We build on the literature on spatial proximity and voting behavior in legislatures, extending these applications to multilateral diplomacy (e.g., Masket, 2008; Rogowski & Sinclair, 2012; Saia, 2018; Harmon et al., 2019; Lowe & Jo, 2025). Diplomats in IOs, like legislators, need to collaborate with their peers to advance policy outputs, and therefore may be likely to collaborate with spatially proximate representatives in similar patterns. In several respects, however, physical arrangement within institutional spaces may matter in different ways for diplomats. First, unlike legislators, diplomats cannot rely on party identification as a heuristic for their votes. Second, diplomats potentially represent a more heterogeneous set of policy positions on issues. Third, while legislators are autonomous decision-makers, diplomats must navigate a balance of their personal evaluations with their instructions from their home government. Thus, there

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

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

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

To overcome these obstacles, we take advantage of the randomization process in which seating positions are assigned in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), mapping the spatial proximity of delegates. These procedures result in delegates sometimes sharing a desk, and sometimes being split apart across rows. We can accordingly examine the causal effect of seating proximity on affinity between delegations over time, as well as between delegations in the same year. Since bodily co-presence is crucial for developing trust and empathy between diplomats (Wheeler & Holmes, 2021; Arias, 2026a) and physical spaces shape the modalities of cooperation in international institutions (Touloumi, 2023, 57), we theorize that delegates who are physically seated together are more likely to cooperate. We proxy for the dependent variable of cooperation by using a measure of voting agreement between two countries (Fjelstul et al., 2025, 2023) and capture the *degree* of social relationship as proxied by spatial distance.

Because membership in the UNGA is large and heterogeneous, it serves as an appropriate and useful case for us to examine the effects of social ties on cooperation,

creating pairs of diplomats who would not normally be expected to cooperate. Further, as meetings of UN bodies can often be long and sometimes tedious, diplomats that sit immediately beside each other are likely to share informal conversations, to learn about each others' personal character, and to engage in other interactions that build affinity. To a lesser degree, these types of interactions are also expected to occur between diplomats in the immediate radius. The diverse agenda of the UNGA also allows us to measure these impacts across a variety of issue areas, capturing matters of both high-stakes political issues and more routine matters.

In line with our expectations, we find that individual social ties between diplomats are positively and significantly predictive of cooperation. In the aggregate, simply sharing seats does not predict voting alignment. However, once we account for the overlap of specific individuals across delegations, a clear pattern emerges: diplomats who are seated together and who have interacted repeatedly over time are more likely to vote together. This underscores that physical arrangement alone does not generate cooperation; rather, it is the accumulation of interpersonal relationships within that setting that matters.

Extending this finding, we also assess heterogeneous effects across dyad types and issue areas. The effect is strongest among dyads in the second quartile of similarity, cases in which states are neither ideologically opposed nor already closely aligned. In contrast, where foreign policy preferences are extremely disparate or already almost identical, personal diplomatic relationships have little additional effect on votes. Consistent with the proposed mechanism, these effects are also driven by lower-salience votes, where diplomats retain greater discretion. When issues are highly salient and subject to closer direction or scrutiny from capital, individual-level social ties are less likely to shape outcomes. Taken together, these results tell a nuanced story about how physical co-presences operates in multilateral diplomacy. Seating proximity does not uniformly shape voting behavior, nor would it be realistic to expect it to do so. Instead, it matters in contexts where repeated interaction allows social ties to form between individuals from somewhat similar state environments, creating opportunities for cooperation.

These findings build on existing theories that center state-level power in explaining

cooperation in IOs (e.g., Kim & Russett, 1996; Voeten, 2000; Dreher et al., 2008; Vreeland & Dreher, 2014) and contribute to a growing consensus that individual diplomats matter in explaining these outcomes. We further show that diplomatic social relationships are independent of state-level relationships, and that spatial proximity contributes to diplomats' likelihood of cooperation. This finding has practical implications for the practice of diplomacy in IOs, and suggests that the social lives of diplomats — which are often dismissed as trivialities or excesses — in fact serve an important role in advancing international cooperation. As calls for the digitalization of diplomatic interactions and attention to its implications increase (e.g., Burns & Thomas-Greenfield, 2020; Bjola & Coplen, 2022; Hedling & Bremberg, 2021), our findings raise questions about the likelihood that cooperative outcomes can be achieved without physical proximity.

Individuals and Social Relations in Diplomacy

Mainstream theories of IO politics tend to center state-level features to explain how representatives vote. Large powers have been shown to shape the behavior of smaller powers through inducements and threats to act in accordance with their preferences (e.g., Voeten, 2000). For example, a prominent explanation for vote choice in the UN is the receipt of foreign aid (Alesina & Dollar, 2000; Dreher et al., 2008; Carter & Stone, 2015; Dreher & Sturm, 2012; Vreeland & Dreher, 2014). Smaller states exchange their votes in exchange for material rewards from larger states, expressed through foreign aid flows. Other sources of political influence, including formal alliances, military aid, and regional and developmental groups (e.g., the Caribbean Community or the Group of 77) are also found to be predictors of voting similarity. In these predominant accounts, there is little room for individuals to affect political outcomes: it is only state-level power that matters in shaping negotiated outcomes between states—even in the context of IOs (e.g., Mearsheimer et al., 2001; Krasner, 1991; Keohane & Nye, 1977).

However, scholars are increasingly taking seriously the role of individuals in the process of achieving multilateral cooperation and in IO policymaking. While earlier works on individuals in IR focused on the importance of individual leader characteristics (e.g.,

Horowitz et al., 2015; Saunders, 2017; Nieman & Allamong, 2023; Goldfien et al., 2024) and relationships between leaders (Hall & Yarhi-Milo, 2012; Holmes & Yarhi-Milo, 2017; Wheeler, 2018), scholars increasingly take into account the importance of individuals at the more quotidian levels of policymaking—namely, diplomats and bureaucrats—who conduct the background work of diplomacy and regulation are often conducted.

For example, studies examine the differences between political appointees versus career diplomats (e.g., Haglund, 2015; Arias & Smith, 2018), experience in different types of prior postings (e.g., Clark & Zucker, 2023), and variation within the experiences of political appointees (e.g., MacDonald, 2021)—in explaining diplomatic effectiveness on a range of performance-based outcomes including militarized disputes (MacDonald, 2021) and trade (Malis, 2021). Other demographic features such as military background, gender, and the nature of previous work experience are shown to condition the effectiveness of diplomats (e.g., Lindley, 2007; MacDonald, 2021; Towns & Niklasson, 2017; Niklasson & Towns, 2023). In IOs, individual backgrounds are also important predictors of how diplomats and bureaucrats may influence policymaking (Clark & Dolan, 2022; Heinzel & Liese, 2021; Heinzel, 2022; Arias, 2026b; Forster, 2024; Manulak, 2024).

Individual diplomats are certainly not unconstrained actors. As Weaver et al. (2026) outline in the introduction to this special issue, individual agency is subject to context-dependent structural constraints. Diplomacy is a delegation of authority from a principal (the state) to an agent (the diplomat), who may more or less accurately represent the preferences of their state (e.g., Goldfien et al., 2024; Lindsey, 2023). When states have well-articulated or intense preferences on an issue and monitor the behavior of their diplomatic agent, they may expect the agent to act with little room for independent maneuvering. If a diplomat deviates from home-state instructions in such circumstances, they run the risk of being recalled. In other circumstances, a state may not have a preference over the issue under consideration (for example, a landlocked state may not have strongly articulated preferences over a resolution related to marine biodiversity) or may lack the incentives or capacity to monitor the behavior of their diplomat, and the

agent can have more room to develop and independent position on an issue.[2] Thus, while there is expected to be variation in the degree to which diplomats are actors that operate independently from their home governments, it appears clear that diplomats are not simply pass-throughs for foreign ministries.

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

Even accounting for personal characteristics, individuals do not conduct diplomacy in a vacuum, but rather through social processes (e.g., Sending et al., 2015; Keys & Yorke, 2019). Diplomacy is a practice of "socially meaningful patterns of action [that are] being performed more or less competently," (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, 6). Individual diplomats must interact with their counterparts to cultivate empathy (Wheeler, 2013; Holmes & Yarhi-Milo, 2017) and build trust (Holmes, 2018; Rathbun, 2011). Informal negotiations, which create opportunities for arguing and persuasion (Risse & Kleine, 2010), are particularly aided by social relations. Chasek (2021, 62) suggests, "[i]t is often these personal interactions that allow delegates to get to know each other, understand their positions and red lines, and build the trust necessary to forge agreements."

A dense social network is also necessary to build issue coalitions and develop consensus (Pouliot, 2016). Diplomats with a strong social position can act as brokers amongst others in the network (Sending et al., 2015, 94). Social relations between individuals develop trust that is crucial in diplomatic relations (Lindsey, 2023). For example, the personal friendship between American President Theodore Roosevelt and the German Ambassador to the US, Hermann Speck von Sternburg, "paid substantial diplomatic dividends: in 1907 Roosevelt wrote to Sternburg: 'In the history of America no foreign representative has ever held the trust of her people as you do and in the future no foreign representative ever can hold this trust,"' (Lindsey, 2023, 94). As Pouliot (2016) observes in the case of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Cooper & Shaw (2009) show in the

[2] Agent independence may be particularly likely for small state diplomats, who are serviced by a smaller foreign ministry that may lack the ability to cover as many issue areas (e.g., Panke, 2013; Arias, 2026b).

case of the World Trade Organization, and Manulak (2024) shows in the International Monetary Fund, a diplomat's social skills can make up for the weakness of their state's position. Developing informal ties based on common interests — for example, a shared love of the symphony — creates a relationship that can translate into greater cooperation in negotiations. These relationships are unique to individual diplomatic representatives, not a feature of their position (Arias, 2026b).[3]

Face-to-face, in-person interactions are integral to diplomats' work. The essential tasks of diplomats are to persuade and influence their counterparts (e.g., Wendt, 1999; Risse, 2000; Johnston, 2001). Interactions between individuals are also necessary to learn the positions and preferences of their counterparts. Engaging face-to-face regularly maximizes the opportunities to develop social relationships and standing (Pouliot, 2016; Holmes & Wheeler, 2020; Arias, 2026b,a). When leaders can meet in person, they can better communicate sincerity and develop empathy compared to virtual meetings (Hall & Yarhi-Milo, 2012; Holmes & Yarhi-Milo, 2017). Investing time in long, in-person meetings leads to greater mutual understanding and empathy. Engaging in formal settings also induces spillovers into informal contacts that occur outside of official meetings, for example, leading to shared coffee breaks or meals outside of meetings. A former US Ambassador described a formal signing ceremony that led to an informal meeting at which a major foreign policy breakthough occurred.[4] Though recent work argues that diplomats can use technological developments such as emojis to communicate online (Cornut, 2022), technology cannot substitute for in-person communication. As Wheeler & Holmes (2021) argue, bodily co-presence is required for diplomats to form strong social relationships. Indeed, nascent research on digital diplomacy shows that virtual meetings may diminish the sense of understanding and togetherness between diplomats (e.g., Wheeler, 2013; Bramsen & Hagemann, 2021). It is clear that the social relations between diplomats are important in IO policymaking. In the next section, we consider the role that spatial proximity may play in developing these social ties.

[3] Author interview with former US Ambassador, December 17, 2025.

[4] Author interview with former US Ambassador, December 17, 2025.

Spatial Proximity and Voting in Legislatures

In studies of domestic legislatures, a long tradition suggests that spatial proximity between legislators' offices or seats on the legislative floor contributes to their likelihood of working together by building social networks (e.g., Truman, 1956; Young, 1966; Caldeira & Patterson, 1987; Masket, 2008).[5] Such work recognizes the impact of spatial proximity on policymaking, with many scholars arguing that legislators who sit, live, or work near one another are more likely to vote together.[6] Social ties between legislators serve as a means of transferring information and facilitating the exchanging of votes (Battaglini & Patacchini, 2019), and are likely to facilitate the generation of connections that spillover outside of the formal meeting room. Related work also shows the importance of social ties and friendship on legislator behavior, illustrating that lawmakers are more likely to vote with members that they identify as their friends (e.g., Caldeira & Patterson, 1987; Arnold et al., 2000) or who are part of the same alumni network (Cohen & Malloy, 2014). In contexts outside the US, similar dynamics have been observed among members of the European Parliament (Harmon et al., 2019) and the Icelandic legislature (Saia, 2018; Lowe & Jo, 2025). Importantly, the role of affinity is theorized to operate via mechanisms such as cue-taking, information provision, goodwill, and horse-trading—which do not necessarily entail the changing of preferences.

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

In a legislature, individuals and the legislation that they propose can be identified by party, which can serve as an informative heuristic as to whether the measure

[5] See Battaglini & Patacchini (2019) for a review of this literature.

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

should be supported or not. In an IO, by contrast, country positions across a diverse array of issues under consideration cannot be neatly identified by party positioning.[7] Heterogeneity across diplomats representing countries is also likely to be greater than heterogeneity across legislators representing different regions of the same country. For these reasons, we may potentially expect the effects of spatial proximity on collaboration to be larger for multilateral diplomats than for domestic legislators. However, unlike legislators, diplomats are not necessarily autonomous agents. Nearly all diplomats must obtain authorization from home governments before taking a position on an issue, and therefore government-level policy positions may outweigh the effects of social affinity between individuals.

Theory of Spatial Proximity and IO Diplomacy

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

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

How—and why—does the social relationship created via proximity affect legislative behavior? Spatial proximity creates opportunities for social interaction and familiarity (Caldeira & Patterson, 1987, 964). As Figure 1 illustrates (left panel), physical proximity between diplomats can facilitate informal conversation and create opportunities for

[7] This is not to suggest that there are not heuristics for country affinity. For example, shared cultural norms or other overlapping institutional memberships. However, the availability of such heuristics in the multilateral space is less obvious and less binding than the signal of partisanship.

Figure 1: Spatial dynamics and diplomatic social relations

Figure 2: Note: American and Romanian delegates, 2023 (left panel); American and North Korean delegates, 2015 (right panel).

building relationships. Meetings of the UNGA are often quite lengthy, and there are frequent opportunities for diplomats to engage informally during and between speeches. These diplomats are also more likely to leave the Assembly Hall together and continue their informal discussions outside the formal meetings. When diplomats are seated less proximately, as in Figure 1 (right panel), physical space between seats makes it more difficult for diplomats to communicate informally and develop rapport. Increased social interaction may have cognitive effects through joint deliberations, generate greater tolerance of other viewpoints, and provide informational cues for low-salience or unfamiliar issues (Mutz, 2002).

Ambassador Samantha Power describes the utility of such social ties (Power, 2019). She was able to leverage affinity with her colleagues — or in other words, her friendships — to encourage their home governments to support the US position on the LGBT staff benefits vote. However, she was not necessarily working to reverse their existing positions. In some cases, strong social ties also result in vote-trading across issue areas when priorities might vary. As we discuss below, affinity is expected to be less likely to affect diplomatic behavior when *ex ante* issue positions are strong and divergent. A former US Ambassador similarly described how working through his social relationships allowed him to moderate but not reverse disadvantageous foreign policy developments with his counterparts.[8]

[8] Author interview with former US Ambassador, December 17, 2025.

Drawing on the studies of domestic policymaking, which we discuss in the previous section, we do not necessarily argue that affinity change diplomats' *ex ante* preferences.[9] UN diplomats vote on a large number of issues throughout the course of a session, which can provide an information burden for diplomats — particularly those from small states who lack the resources to attend every meeting, and whose governments are unlikely to prepare position briefs on every topic (Panke, 2013; Arias, 2026b). Friendly relations with other diplomats can provide an informational cue of how to vote in the absence of other sources of information.

We develop two theoretical expectations with respect to heterogeneous effects of proximity across different types of country dyads and across different issue areas. In the language of this special issue, these are situations in which structural constraints are more or less aligned permissive of diplomats' social relationships guiding their vote choices (Weaver et al., 2026). While in many cases interpersonal networks and the imperatives delegates face to represent their nations can exist orthogonally — satisfying one does not undermine the other — in other cases, they may be conflicting.

First, we consider how the effects of spatial proximity may be conditioned by pre-existing affinity (or lack thereof) between states' representatives. Individual diplomats that are already highly predisposed to collaborate because of shared national positions, such as diplomats representing the US and the United Kingdom, are highly likely to collaborate on resolutions and vote similarly whether they have close social ties or not, and thus, spatial proximity is unlikely to affect the behavior of such dyads. Similarly, the delegates of the US and North Korea are unlikely to behave similarly, even if spatial proximity cultivates a strong interpersonal relationship between diplomats. Just as Gray & Potter (2020) show that diplomacy increases the chances of positive outcomes only among states with moderate levels of affinity, we expect the effects of spatial proximity to be strongest for diplomats representing states with some pre-existing level of affinity. Thus, we theorize that the effects of spatial proximity are conditional on the prior affinity between the states that diplomats represent.

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

H_2: The effect of spatial proximity on collaboration in IOs is greatest for country-dyads moderate degrees of pre-existing affinity.

Second, in IOs that are multi-issue fora, we consider how the effects of spatial proximity may affect collaboration differently across issue areas. Just as the the distance between pairs of diplomats presents a constraining condition, the nature of the issue under consideration also presents a scope condition as to when spatial proximity can be expected to influence diplomat behavior. On highly salient matters that are deeply linked to national security or core national interests, there may be less room for social affinity to affect position-taking, given the likelihood of specific instructions from home governments on such matters. In such a scenario, a diplomat faces conflicting demands from their social network and from their capital, and the former is not expected to outweigh the latter. On less important and less publicized procedural matters, diplomats may have full autonomy to act as they like and to cooperate with individuals with whom they feel strong social affinity, though, the implications of such collaboration may have limited importance in shaping international policy. In a multi-issue forum that addresses a wide set of important (and procedural) matters — from nuclear weapons proliferation to development to normative principles — we can identify the bounds of the effects of physical proximity on collaboration across issue areas.

H_3: The effect of spatial proximity on collaboration in IOs is greatest on lower-salience issue areas.

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

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

Because the UNGA is a multi-issue forum of broad membership, we can observe the effects of spatial proximity averaged across a variety of issue areas and across heterogeneous country-dyads, allowing us to test all of our stated hypotheses.

Research Design and Data

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

voting similarity by leveraging the unique seating rules of the UNGA, which is built upon a truly randomized seating procedure.

Context on the UNGA Seating Arrangement

From its earliest days, the order of seating was viewed as an important matter for the UN. The architects and designers of the UN desired to create "physical interiors [which] aspired to teach convening bodies how to exist and work in the space of institutional multilateralism,", and to "create the image of an equitable institution that brought everybody at the table on equal footing," to inspire collaboration (Touloumi, 2023, 57, 46). While much through was devoted to these questions, there was not an obvious answer as to how delegations should be seated to accomplish these goals. In the League of Nations, delegations always sat in the same locations, which was considered unfair by some.[10] Despite such concern by some delegations, the question of seating arrangements ultimately was not addressed by the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations, which met in 1945 and, among other tasks, established the rules and procedures of the General Assembly. However, this question was addressed almost immediately upon the commencement of the first session of the General Assembly in January 1946, when the idea for seating rotation was established.[11] Countries, specialized agencies, and NGOs made frequent requests to the Protocol and Liaison Office for more seats and better seats in the Assembly Hall, attesting to the importance of being present and close by to key stakeholders.[12] The idea for rotation was proposed by Executive Secretary Gladwyn Jebb to mitigate the chaos of delegates choosing new seats each day, as well as the "hardship for those Delegates who are located in the more remote sections of the hall," (though Jebb's initial proposal called for rotation to take place each week rather than each session). Rotation would become enshrined as a routine part of UNGA procedures.

In the UNGA, the yearly session begins in September and typically runs until

[10] E.g., United Nations Archives, Communique from the German Delegation 6 September 1927.

[11] Memorandum by the Executive Secretary on seating arrangements for Committees of the General Assembly (A/BUR/3, 1946).

[12] E.g., UN Archives, S-0980 Box 6 File 9.

December, although delegates often return in January to complete work on outstanding agenda items. At least three months in advance of the opening session, the General Assembly elects a President. On the day of this election, the Secretary-General conducts a random draw to determine which country will occupy the first seat of the Assembly Hall (at the right end of the front row as seen from the podium, see Figure 3.). Subsequent seats are filled in English alphabetical order.[13] In 2023, for example, North Macedonia was selected to fill the first seat, while in 2022, Belize was drawn.[14] This procedure creates year-on-year random variation in the spatial distance between delegates, based on the configuration of seats. In some years, for example, delegations will occupy a single seat, while in others they will share desks as a dyad-pair. Sometimes these dyads will be split across two rows or across an aisle, while sometimes they will be contiguous. Figure 3 illustrates these patterns: in the 1955 session, Bolivia occupied a single seat (left panel), while in 1956, the delegation was seated next to Belgium (right panel).

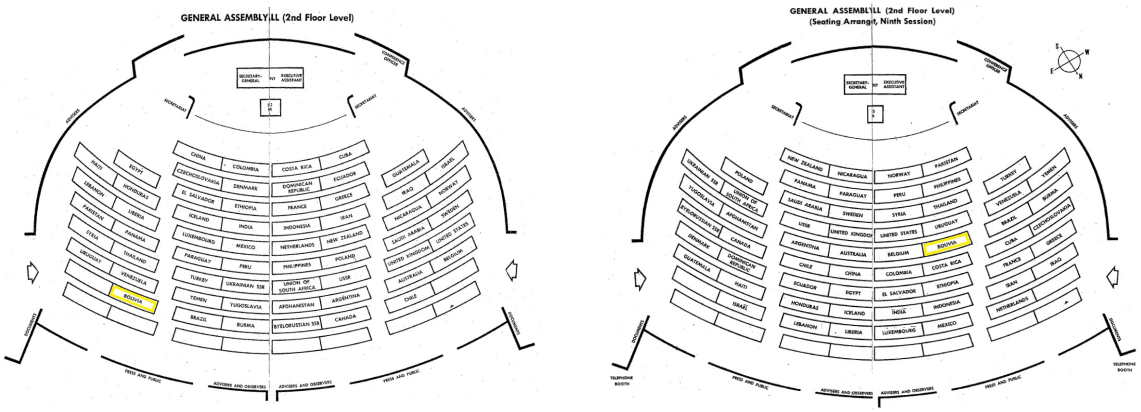
Further variation in seating arrangements is induced over time. First, when countries change their names: for example, the delegation of Ceylon was seated next to the delegate from Chad in 1971, but in 1972, the same individual—now as the representative of Sri Lanka—would have been seated next to Sudan. Secondly, as the number of UN members increased over the years, the seating arrangement of the Assembly Hall was altered several times, resulting in different pairing configurations. These new members fill into the alphabet, interjected between pairs of delegations that previously would have been alphabetically next to each other. For example, when Burundi joined the UN and was seated in the 1963 session, it was placed between Burma and the Byelorussian SSR, which had previously been seated next to each other. These disruptions in the seating arrangements were salient, as the Secretariat acknowledged: "The admission of Pakistan and Yemen will result in a radical change in seating for some of the members."[15] Finally, variation is induced in years in which accessibility accommodations are made for members of country delegations who need wheelchair access, and are thus placed near the

[13] E.g., A/RES/71/323.

[14] See here for the first country selected each year.

[15] Memo from the Protocol Liaison Office, September 18, 1947. UN Archives, S-0980 Box 6 File 9.

Figure 3: Spatial dynamics and diplomatic social relations



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

accessible exits. In 2022, for example, to accommodate members of the US delegation, the members were seated next to Marshall Islands.

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

proximity between country delegations.

Of course, formal meetings are not the only spaces in which UNGA diplomats interact. As part of their typical day, diplomats meet for coffee, drinks, or lunch, they attend cocktail parties, and they attend a number of informal side events. These events often take place during the breaks between the two daily three-hour meetings of the UNGA, or at the end of the day. While our measure of spatial proximity only captures relations in the formal portion of the diplomats' work, it represents a substantial amount of time that individuals would spend side-by-side. Further, we expect that affinity cultivated by sitting nearby in formal meetings spills over into informal contexts outside (for example, seat-mates often leave the Assembly Hall to share a meal at the lunch break). In this way, seat assignments have an even more substantial effect on diplomatic social relations.

Independent Variable: Seating Assignments

We collect the seating charts for all available sessions of the UNGA from the UN Digital Library. Seating charts were available for sessions 7-44 (1952-1989) and 72-78 (2017-2023). Seating charts for 1990-2016 were interpolated.[16] For each session, we record the country delegation assigned to each seat and create a spatial representation of seating relationships. This allows us to capture whether delegations were directly next to each other, in front or behind each other, to the left or right, or in a diagonal-dyadic pair. We also capture whether these relationships are contiguous or non-contiguous (i.e., whether there is a gap or aisle between the seats), as well as whether the seat is a singleton position. For example, in Figure 3, Bolivia and Belgium are recorded as a contiguous dyad, while Bolivia and Brazil are captured as filling non-contiguous left and right positions. Uruguay is captured as the front position of Bolivia, and the US occupies Bolivia's diagonal-front-dyadic position. These details allow us to capture variation in spatial proximity: contiguous dyads are expected to have the closest relationships, while non-contiguous surrounding delegations are one degree less proximate. We subsequently match each delegation listed in the seating chart with the delegation name recorded in the UN voting

[16] See Appendix for a detailed description of interpolation procedures.

data, which we describe in the following section.

For some years, countries became members of the UNGA after the session officially started, and were thus not included in the initial seating chart. While the country was not a member, their pending application would have been placed before the Credentials Committee before the session began. Therefore, in most such cases, the seating chart reflects a blank space where that new country member would be added according to English alphabetical order in anticipation of their being granted membership. As countries are typically voted into the UNGA at the opening session, we assume that the new members were seated immediately and code the data as such. For years in which countries were added towards the end of the session (e.g., Spain joined the UN on December 14, 1955 and voted on December 16, 1955) or in which there are no clear blank seats in the seating chart, we do not include such countries for that year.[17]

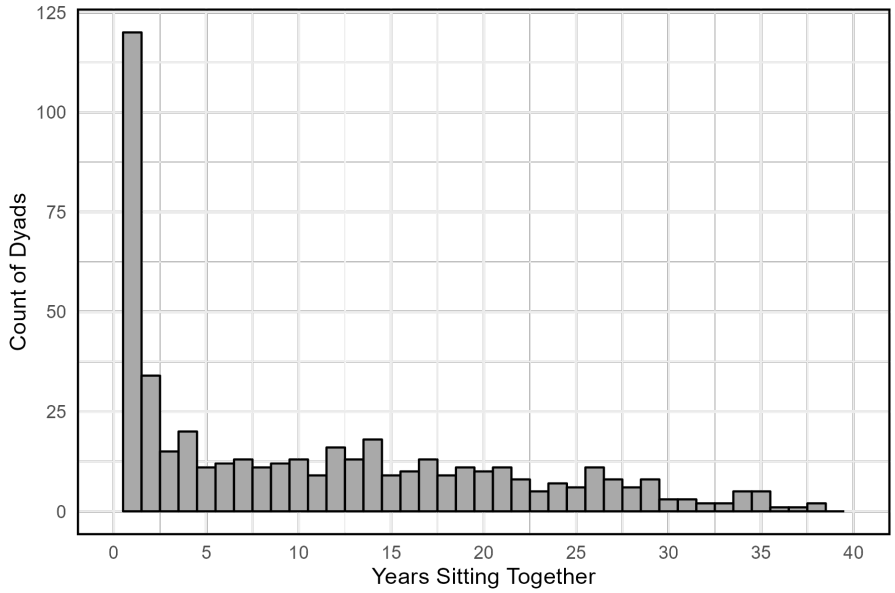
To build the measure of spatial proximity, we first list all the possible country dyad pairs for each year given the set of countries who were members of the UNGA, yielding a dyad-year dataset. Then, using the spatial representation of the seating relationship as described above, we create multiple binary dyad-year variables. "Seat Dyad" captures whether countries are a contiguous dyad, meaning that the variable takes on a value of 1 if delegates are seated directly next to each other and 0 if not.[18]

Out of the 19,544 unique country dyad combinations within our sample, 474 are direct dyads ("Seat Dyad" = 1) for at least one UNGA session (approximately 2.4% of all possible dyads). The vast majority of countries do not sit next to one another, which is unsurprising given the seating arrangement mechanism. Of those country pairs that sit next to each other at least once, the average number of sessions (i.e., years) that two countries sit next to one another is 11.07 sessions total. However, there is significant variation in the number of years that two countries are a seated dyad. As Figure 5 demonstrates, 200 dyads sit together for less than five years while just 25 sit together for more than thirty years. These descriptive patterns importantly reflect that the UNGA is not simply the same dyads seated together nearly every year.

[17] We validated these assumptions with staff from the UN Dag Hammarksjöld Library.

[18] Dyads are not coded as contiguous if they are seated in sequential seats but are separated by an aisle.

Figure 4: Distribution of Total Years that Dyads Sit Next to Each Other



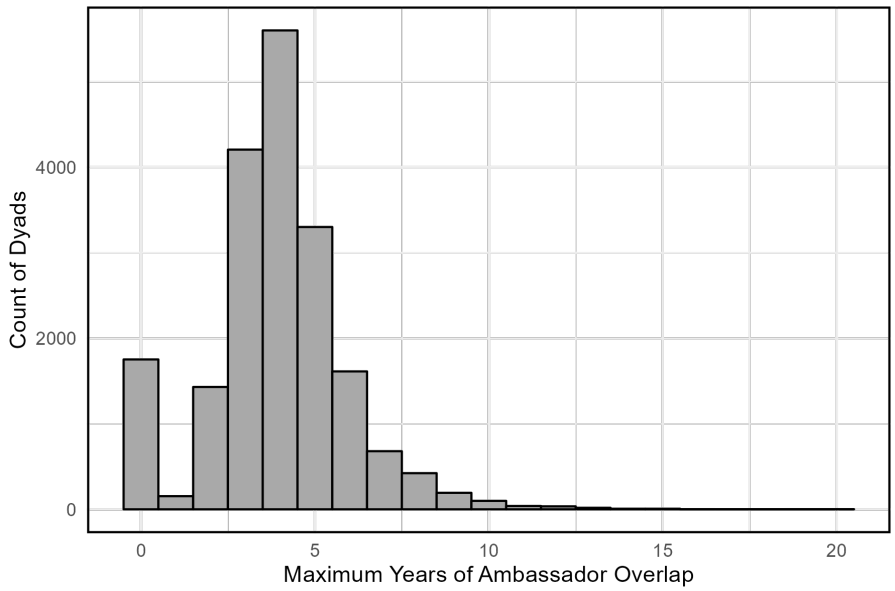
In addition, we can examine the pairs of individual ambassadors who occupy paired seats together. We draw on data from Arias (2026b) to match each country with their individual Permanent Representative for each year (more detail on additional individual-level measures is included below). This is a distinct quantity from the number of years countries sit in dyad-pairs. Given that our theory is based on the social relationships between diplomats, it is imperative to account for the turnover in individuals separately from the turnover in countries. Like the measure of country dyad length, this measure varies substantially. Ambassadors from Djibouti were most likely to be in longstanding (more than 10 years) pairs with other individual ambassadors, forming 29 such relationships.[19] Figure 5 illustrates this variation, showing that for most dyads, the longest overlap between individual ambassadors is 4 years.

Dependent Variable: Behavior in the UNGA

We are interested in understanding how spatial proximity affects collaboration between states in the UNGA. There are many different ways in which diplomats collaborate: sponsoring resolutions together (e.g., Dijkhuizen & Onderco, 2019; Seabra & Mesquita, 2022),

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

Figure 5: Distribution of Maximum Years of Ambassador Overlap Between Dyads



hosting side events, supporting each other's candidates for positions (e.g., Dreher et al., 2014), and even raising similar issues in their speeches (e.g., Baturo et al., 2017). Our primary interest is understanding how diplomats seek to influence each others' behavior through voting on resolutions. To pass a resolution, diplomats must obtain votes from their counterparts. Indeed, even in cases in which a resolution is certain to pass, diplomats may seek to collaborate and obtain more votes to illustrate a large show of support, or even a consensus across countries (Blake & Payton, 2015; Arias, 2025, 2026a), though many resolutions with broad support are adopted by consensus without a vote.

We operationalize our key dependent variable as whether states hold more similar positions after sitting next to one another. Votes provide the clearest record of the positions that a country is willing to take publicly (Mattes et al., 2015). UNGA voting data are commonly employed in research in international relations to capture state affinity—both as an independent measure, i.e., to show whether states share foreign policy preferences (e.g., Arias & Hulvey, 2025), and as a dependent measure, i.e., to show whether states can influence each others' voting outcomes (e.g., Carter & Stone, 2015). We utilize all roll-call resolution votes for sessions 7 through 77 in the UNGA decision-making dataset (Fjelstul et al., 2025, 2023). With this data, we calculate dyad-year agreement scores are using three category vote data (1 = "yes," 2 = "abstain," and 3 =

"no") where abstention is counted as half-agreement with a yes or no vote (Voeten, 2013). Scores are only calculated for roll-call votes, or those that do not pass unanimously. Higher scores are associated with greater voting agreement between two countries in a given UNGA session, so the spatial proximity hypothesis (Hypothesis 1) would predict a positive relationship between seat dyad and agreement.

We further explore collaboration between states through an additional dependent variable: co-sponsorship of resolutions, which we describe in greater detail below. We calculate a dyad-year count variable that captures whether each country pair or co-sponsored at all in a given year and the total number of co-sponsored resolutions. Importantly, this alternative dependent variable provides less temporal coverage than our key voting outcome.

We conceive of sponsoring resolutions as *more* costly, *more* visible, and *less* autonomous than voting on resolutions, and thus a harder test of our theoretical expectations. Sponsoring resolutions obliges a country to participate in drafting and negotiation sessions, to contract and consult with topical experts, and to expend social capital to cultivate support for the resolution amongst the membership, as the reputation of that state and that diplomat is indelibly linked to the content and outcome of the draft resolution. All of these actions are much more involved forms of cooperation than simply voting in favor of the resolution (Finke, 2021; Arias, 2025). Yet countries have an incentive to sponsor some non-zero number of resolutions in a given year to signal that they are contributing positively to the mission of the UN, which can be an important factor for achieving elected leadership positions and signaling to domestic audiences. Soliciting more co-sponsors also serves strategic purposes in UN politics, as it can signal wider agreement among the membership, which may pressure even non-sponsors to 'follow the herd' and vote in favor of the resolution (Mower Jr., 1962; Rai, 1977). Therefore, spatial proximity is expected to have *less* of an effect on sponsorship, as it requires a much higher bar of convincing a diplomat to go against their existing country preferences for such an involved, visible activity. Sponsorship data come from Arias (2025), who collect them from the UNGA Digital Library, which includes essentially all resolutions passed from

2000 onwards. In particular, for each resolution, we identify whether each country was listed as a sponsor of that resolution prior to that resolution's passage.

Additional Factors

We include a number of additional dyad-level factors in the model that are known to affect voting agreement between countries. We use the Global Indicators of Dyadic Engagement (GIDE) dataset (Moyer et al., 2024) for total trade flow data in USD millions (IMF, 2024; Conte et al., 2022), bilateral official development assistance (ODA), or ODA-like, commitments (USD millions) which is drawn from OECD and AidData (OECD, 2025; Asmus et al., 2021; Bluhm et al., 2025; Dreher et al., 2022), and a count of shared intergovernmental organization (IGO) membership.[20] We also utilize data on the total number of bilateral alliances from the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) dataset (Leeds et al., 2002).

As our argument focuses on the interpersonal relationships that country-level representatives form based on spatial proximity, we also include a number of variables capturing ambassador-level characteristics from Arias (2026b). This ambassador-level data was collected from the Blue Book listings of Permanent Missions to the United Nations, from which the name of every country's ambassador and first deputy was recorded, creating a database of 21,159 ambassador and deputy entries from 1946 to 2019.[21] In addition to the number of years of tenure of each ambassador in the dyads, as well as the number of years the dyad ambassadors served together, we also capture the gender of each ambassador. To do so, Arias (2026b) employs the `genderize` API to construct a "male" indicator based on the ambassador's name. This information is useful to account for since women diplomats may face additional challenges in a traditionally male-dominated role (Towns & Niklasson, 2017; Towns, 2020), and mixed-gender pairs may face greater challenges in developing affinity. Missing individual-level data was interpolated using

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

[21] We do not utilize the deputy-level data.

Amelia, averaging estimates over 5 imputations; results were robust to listwise deletion and missingness was not systematically correlated other key measures, see Arias (2026b) for details. We do not include a measure of diplomat-level language, as almost all UN diplomats have extremely high facility with English and other official UN languages.

Estimation

We are interested in the effect of spatial proximity in the UNGA on collaboration between states, particularly voting agreement. We analyze outcomes at the dyad-year level using the voting agreement score as a measure of similarity between two countries, such that an increase in our dependent variable represents two countries becoming more similar.[22] The main model we estimate is:

$$\begin{aligned} \textit{Agreement}_{ijt} = \alpha &+ \beta_1 \textit{Seat Neighbors}_{ijt} + \beta_2 \textit{Same Ambassador}_{ijt} \\ &+ \beta_3 \textit{Seat Neighbors}_{ijt} \times \textit{Same Ambassador}_{ijt} \\ &+ \gamma_1 \mathbf{X}_{ijt} + \gamma_2 \mathbf{X}_{it} + \gamma_3 \mathbf{X}_{jt} \\ &+ \delta_{ij} + \delta_t + \epsilon_{ijt} \end{aligned}$$

where $\textit{Seat Neighbors}_{ijt}$ is a binary variable representing whether country i and country j were seat neighbors in year t, $\textit{Same Ambassador}_{ijt}$ represents the number of years that country i and country j had overlapping ambassadors, $\textit{Seat Neighbors}_{ijt} \times \textit{Same Ambassador}_{ijt}$ is the interaction term, X_{ijt} represents a vector of dyad-year level covariates that might affect agreement, X_{it} represents country-level covariates, δ_{ij} represents fixed dyad effects, δ_t represents fixed year effects, and ϵ is the error term.

We estimate an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model in which β_1 captures the local average treatment effect (LATE) of two countries being seat neighbors on their voting agreement in the UNGA in a given year. We also estimate models including the interaction term to capture our main hypothesized mechanism. Our preferred specifica-

[22] The model would be identical for the alternative sponsorship DV, simply replacing the dependent variable with $\textit{Co-sponsoring}_{ijt}$.

tion includes both year and dyad fixed effects. Year fixed effects account for unobserved factors that vary across time but affect all dyads similarly such as the salience or content of the agenda items debated in a particular UNGA session. Dyad fixed effects absorb all time-invariant characteristics of a country pair that may systematically influence their voting patterns. Standard errors are clustered at the dyad level to account for serial correlation within dyads over time.

Results

Average Treatment Effects on Voting Agreement

First, we examine the average treatment effects of spatial proximity on cooperation. Tabular results are available in Appendix Section B. Figure 6 reports the estimated effects of seat proximity on dyadic voting alignment in the UN General Assembly. Model 1 presents the unconditional association between being immediate seat neighbors and voting similarity. Model 2 adds dyad-level covariates capturing bilateral aid, trade, alliances, and shared IGO membership. Model 3 introduces country-level controls related to ambassador characteristics, while Model 4 incorporates an interaction between seat proximity and the number of years the two countries have shared the same ambassador pairing at the UN, testing our key mechanism.

For Hypothesis 1, the baseline estimates reveal no unconditional effect of seat adjacency on voting similarity, even after including dyad- and country-level controls. However, the interaction term in Model 4 indicates a positive and statistically significant effect: when two countries are randomly assigned to sit next to each other and have a longer history of shared ambassadorial representation, their voting alignment increases. This is in line with our key expectation: that individually forged social ties between ambassadors can generate greater cooperation.

Figure 7 shows that the effect of seat proximity on dyad-year UNGA voting alignment is conditional on the continuity of individual ambassadors. When dyads have little or no overlap in ambassadorial tenure, the estimated marginal effect of sitting next to one

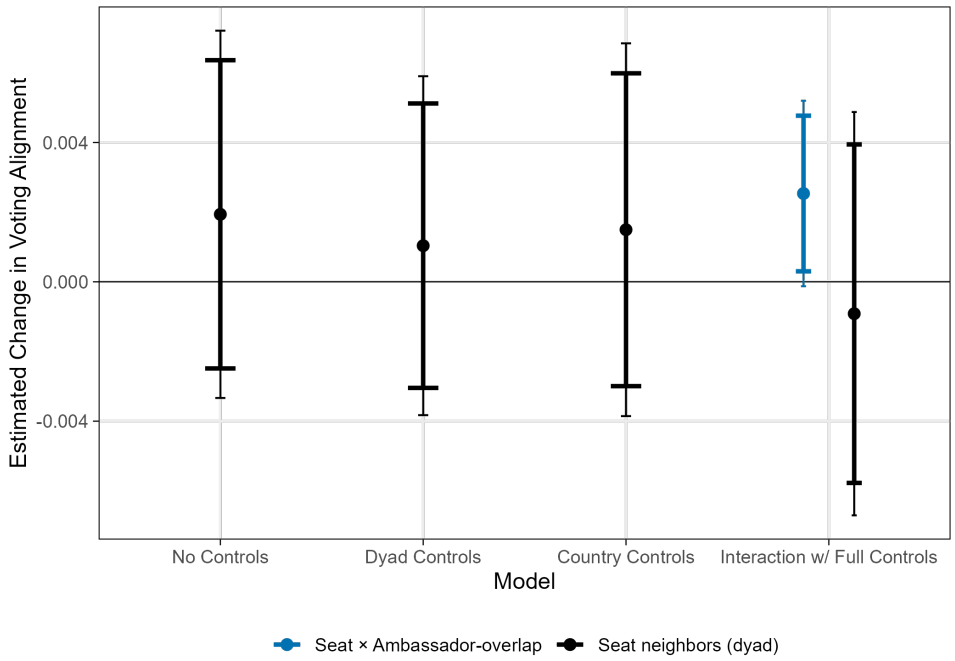


Figure 6: Estimated Effects of Seat Proximity on UNGA Voting Alignment

Note: Points show OLS coefficients for models from Table 2 using dyad and year fixed effects, standard errors clustered at the dyad level. Thick bars represent 90% CI and thin bars represent 95% CI.

another is essentially zero. However, the effect grows steadily with ambassador overlap and at 4 years of overlapping tenure, for example, the marginal effect increases to roughly 0.9 percentage points. In substantive terms, this effect is roughly one-seventh the size of the effect of an additional bilateral alliance and nearly twice as large as the effect of an additional shared IGO membership. Substantively, the estimated effect at moderate levels of ambassador overlap is comparable in magnitude to the observed difference in US–South Korea and US–Spain voting agreement in 2022 (from approximately 0.809 to 0.817).

Taken together, these results suggest that spatial proximity within the UNGA chamber can foster greater diplomatic alignment, but only under conditions where interpersonal or institutional familiarity is likely to reinforce such effects. In other words, it matters whether two *individuals* are spatially proximate in the UN, not just whether two *countries* are seated together. This supports the view that proximity facilitates coordination through established social or professional relationships.

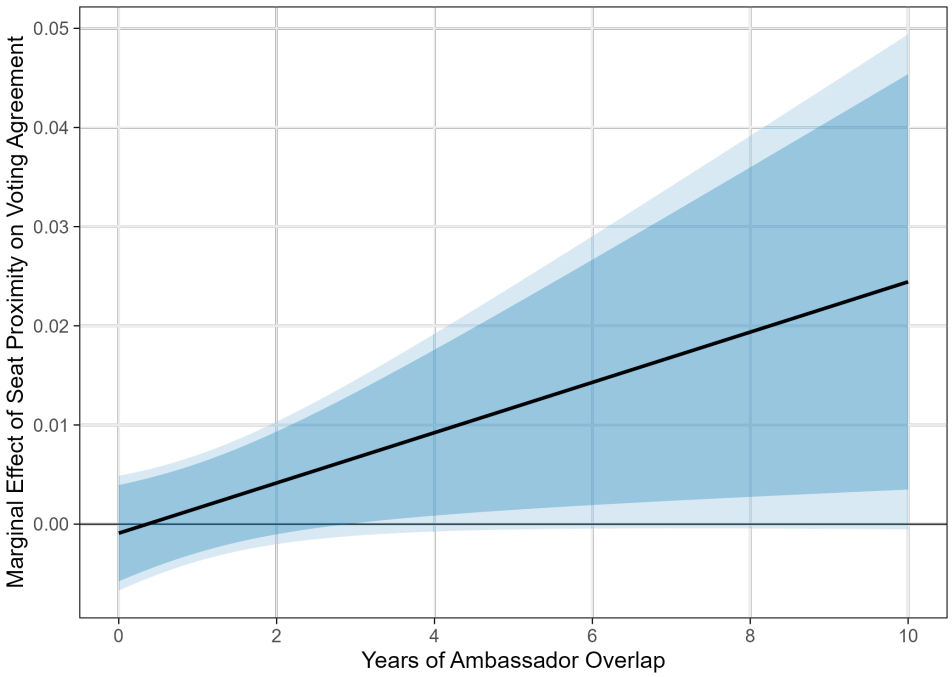


Figure 7: Marginal Effect of Seat Proximity on UNGA Voting Alignment by Ambassador Overlap

Note: The solid line shows the estimated marginal effect of becoming seat neighbors on voting alignment at different levels of ambassador overlap. Shaded regions indicate 90% (dark) and 95% (light) CIs. Estimates are based on Model 4, with dyad and year fixed effects and standard errors clustered by dyad.

Heterogeneous Effects on Voting

We examine heterogeneous effects across the two key dimensions we posited in our theory: preference divergence between states and issue salience. First, we assess whether spatial proximity affects cooperation differently depending on the nature of the dyadic pair. We examine whether dyads with varying levels of affinity are more likely to experience increased affinity as a result of spatial proximity to capture similarity in foreign policy preferences. As a secondary test of this expectation, we examine dyads in which one member is a great power to capture similarity in power positionality. Second, we assess whether the effects of spatial proximity vary by issue area, and specifically whether on lower-salience matters, diplomats may have more autonomy in taking voting decisions. In these types of issue spaces, we theorize that spatial affinity matters more.

Dyad Characteristics

Based on prior research on spatial proximity and our argument about how social ties develop, we theorized in Hypothesis 2 that being seat neighbors will only matter in certain types of dyad-pairs. Specifically, we expect that is unlikely that two very different countries that sit next to each other for one year will begin to vote more similarly. For example, even if the representatives from two countries like Iran and Israel developed close interpersonal relationships, their country preferences are so distant that we would not expect an effect of them being seated dyads. Similarly, for delegates from highly similar states, their preferences are already as aligned as they could be, so there is no room for proximate seating to bring their delegations closer together. However, for countries that are already only moderately similar — for example, Ecuador and Ethiopia or Mexico and Mongolia — we expect that spatial proximity should exert an independent effect.

Figure 8 presents results from models estimated separately for each quartile of one year lagged ideal-point distance, indicating the prior similarity between two countries. Each specification replicates Model 4 from Figure 6, including all covariates and the interaction between seat proximity and shared ambassador years.

The results reveal a clear pattern of heterogeneous effects. As in our aggregate analysis above, there is not a significant direct effect of countries seating together. However, we find a positive and statistically significant interaction between seat proximity and shared ambassador years for dyads in the second quartile of historical similarity. This suggests that spatial proximity strengthens alignment among countries that are already somewhat similar, or those with enough common ground for interpersonal ties to translate into coordinated behavior. By contrast, we observe no significant effects among the most similar dyads (first quartile), likely due to a ceiling effect, nor among the more dissimilar dyads (third and fourth quartiles), where deep political divides limit the potential for convergence. Somewhat intuitively, sharing space is not sufficient to induce similarity across large, likely long-standing differences. In some cases, proximity may even make differences more salient, which would explain the directionally negative (but not significant) interaction effect in dyads of the fourth quartile, those that are as different as states

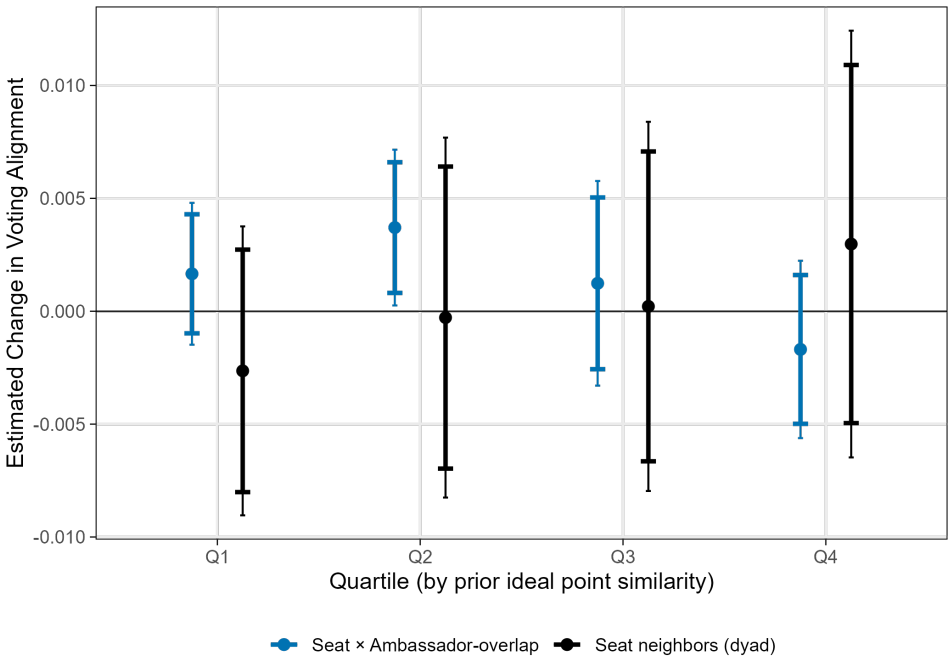


Figure 8: Estimated Effects of Seat Proximity on UNGA Voting Alignment by Pre-existing Affinity

Note: Points show OLS coefficients for models from Table 3 using dyad and year fixed effects, standard errors clustered at the dyad level. Thick bars represent 90% CI and thin bars represent 95% CI.

can be. Overall, these results provide strong evidence of heterogeneous effects consistent with our theoretical expectations: spatial proximity fosters greater alignment only where underlying affinities make social interaction politically consequential.

Extending this analysis, we also consider whether the power differential within the dyad, not just their level of affinity, affects the degree to which spatial proximity matters. We conceptualize large power differentials as another way in which members of the dyad could be very similar or very different, as power is particularly relevant in the institutional structure of the UN. Specifically, we expect that the effect of spatial proximity may vary based on whether one of the dyad members is the US or a P5 member. This is because diplomats from powerful states may have greater capacity to generate affinity. This could be due to the pull of their soft power (e.g., Nye, 1990) or because of their ability to offer inducements to their seatmate to vote for their preferred outcomes (e.g., Voeten, 2000; Dreher et al., 2008, 2009). We illustrate these results in Appendix Table 4 in which we first operationalize an interaction indicating whether one of the dyad members is the United States, and second whether one of the dyads is a member of the P5 (the United

States, United Kingdom, France, China, or Russia). While spatial proximity continues to foster collaboration through the ambassador overlap mechanism, we find directionally negative, but statistically insignificant, effects for interactions between seat proximity and whether the United States or any P5 member is part of the dyad. This suggests that powerful states and their representatives do not exhibit a special capacity to translate spatial proximity into political affinity, and if anything, may bring disagreement to the fore.

Issue Salience

Turning from dyadic-level heterogeneity to issue-level heterogeneity, we assess the expectations we laid out in Hypothesis 3 — namely, that on highly salient matters, there is less room for spatial proximity to affect positions compared to lower salience matters. Given that diplomats are more likely to have clear national instructions on highly salient issues, particularly those that are relevant for matters of national security, there is likely to be less room for them to deviate from pre-specified voting positions, and therefore less opportunity for them to be influenced by their seat-mates. For example, the US Department of State developed a list of resolutions that it deems as especially important every year, and specifically tracks how countries vote on these resolutions — but not on others. Accordingly, for these votes, a delegation's vote choice is likely to be more visible to other delegates and the international press corps, which can further limit the scope of autonomy for an individual diplomat. On the other hand, on issues of lower salience, diplomats may not have pre-specified instructions from capital about what position to take or concerns about the publicizing of their vote. For these questions, they may have more opportunity to allow for affinity with their seatmate to shape their voting decision.

We operationalize issue salience in two complementary ways. First, we distinguish between votes the United States classifies as "important" and those it does not, using the State Department's annual reporting on key resolutions. This captures the subset of issues that are most politically consequential for a powerful member state. Second, we differentiate between resolutions that failed to achieve a two-thirds majority and those that successfully passed by such a margin. This distinction identifies resolutions where

member states were more divided, and thus where the political stakes, attention, and uncertainty surrounding the outcome were higher. Together, these measures allow us to test whether the effects of seat proximity vary across high- and low-salience contexts. Figure 9 displays the results.

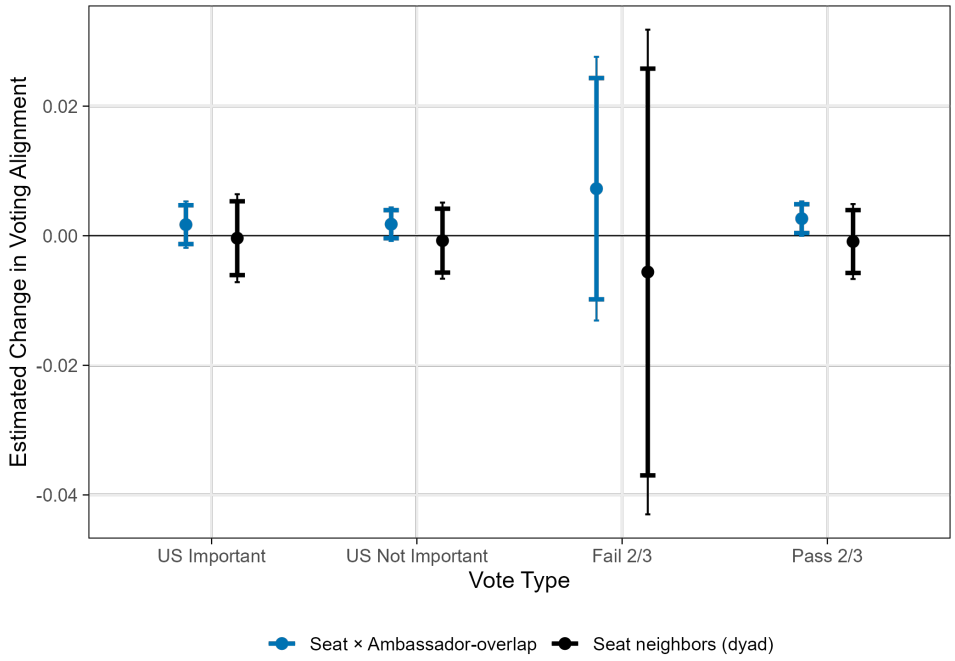


Figure 9: Estimated Effects of Seat Proximity on UNGA Voting Alignment by Vote Salience

Note: Points show OLS coefficients for models from Table 5 using dyad and year fixed effects, standard errors clustered at the dyad level. Thick bars represent 90% CI and thin bars represent 95% CI.

We find mixed evidence for Hypothesis 3. We do not observe differential effects of physical proximity on votes the United States designates as important versus unimportant, despite theoretical expectations that interpersonal influence should be stronger on lower-salience votes. This null result may reflect the fact that U.S. assessments of vote importance do not necessarily align with how other delegations perceive issue salience. As a result, a U.S. designation may not meaningfully alter delegate autonomy or behavior for many states, limiting its ability to capture the conditions under which social ties are most likely to matter. In contrast, when comparing resolutions by their voting margins, we observe a positive and statistically significant interaction between seat proximity and ambassador overlap for resolutions that passed with a two-thirds majority. Because these resolutions tend to be less contentious and lower in salience, this finding supports our

expectation that spatial proximity exerts greater influence when issues are less politically constrained. In line with this finding, for both US important votes and votes on resolutions that would fail a 2/3 majority, we observe null effects as we would expect. Taken together, our results suggest that interpersonal influence is better captured by measures tied directly to delegate discretion and issue-level salience rather than by a single state's assessment of importance.

Robustness

We conduct a series of robustness checks, presented in Appendix Table 6. Models 1 and 2 show that our main results are robust to alternative assumptions about inference and functional form. In particular, Model 1 implements two-way clustering by dyad and year, while Model 2 estimates a fractional logit specification that explicitly accounts for the bounded nature of dyad-year voting agreement scores. Across both specifications, the interaction between seating proximity and shared ambassador tenure remains positive and statistically significant, with a larger estimated effect in the fractional logit model and a larger and a more precisely estimated effect with two-way clustering. This pattern is consistent with the underlying vote-level data-generating process and suggests that linear models attenuate the interaction by failing to account for heteroskedasticity and variation in precision across dyad–years.

By contrast, the estimated interaction attenuates and becomes statistically insignificant in Models 3–7, which introduce progressively more demanding robustness tests. Models 3 and 4 replace the baseline agreement measure with voting agreement and ideal point distance from Voeten (2013), respectively. While the estimated effect remains similar in magnitude when using the alternative agreement measure, it is no longer statistically significant, consistent with the coarser coverage and reduced vote-level variation in the alternate dataset (Fjelstul et al., 2025). In Model 4, which uses ideal point distance, the estimated effect changes sign but remains statistically indistinguishable from zero, reflecting the fact that ideal points capture broader ideological alignment rather than resolution-specific coordination. Models 5 and 6 substitute alternative measures of prox-

imity—cumulative years as a seat dyad and Manhattan distance—that abstract from immediate physical adjacency and the micro-level interaction emphasized by our theoretical mechanism. Finally, Model (7) restricts the sample by excluding years with interpolated seating data, substantially reducing sample size and within-dyad variation. Across these specifications, coefficients are generally attenuated and imprecisely estimated, suggesting that the effect of seating proximity is most likely to operate through resolution-specific, low-cost coordination that depends on fine-grained spatial and relational measures.

To further test our expectations, we extend our analysis to the alternative dependent variable of resolution sponsorship, which we believe to be a difficult case for our theory. This is because sponsorship, in comparison to voting, is more visible and more costly. Delegates are therefore less likely to be able to formulate their own decisions about sponsorship without clearance from capital, and will be more difficult to sway via social relationships. Our empirical findings are in line with these caveats, and we observe null effects for seating proximity and for ambassador overlap. Results are presented in Appendix Table 7.

Conclusion

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

We leverage the unique seating mechanism of the UNGA to estimate the causal effect of spatial proximity on collaboration, measured as policy position similarity. As

hypothesized, we find that physical proximity is predictive of diplomats' likelihood of voting similarly throughout a UNGA session — but only when the same individual diplomats share physical spaces. We find no average effect of seating adjacency on voting alignment, but that proximity matters in a conditional and relational way: it shapes behavior when it facilitates repeated interaction between specific individuals who already share some common ground and retain discretion over their vote choices. When ambassadors from moderately aligned states are seated together over multiple years, voting alignment increases in substantively meaningful ways, comparable in magnitude to established predictors of cooperation such as shared institutional memberships. By contrast, proximity has little effect when preferences are either highly polarized or already aligned, when power asymmetries dominate the dyad, or when issues are highly salient and closely monitored by capitals. These patterns are consistent across a range of robustness checks and heterogeneous analyses and point to a micro-level mechanism in which interpersonal relationships combined with physical arrangement enable coordination. More broadly, our results suggest that informal social interaction within multilateral institutions can shape outcomes, but only under conditions that allow individual-level relationships to translate into political behavior.

While our empirical focus is the UNGA, our findings likely reflect dynamics in multilateral diplomacy across IOs. Similar seating rules appear to govern seating arrangements at the International Atomic Energy Agency and the GATT, for example,[23] whereas seating in the International Labor Organization is based on the French alphabet. Future work could leverage this variation to assess when and where physical co-presence matters most, including whether proximity exerts stronger effects in IOs that meet continuously versus episodically, or in settings where seating arrangements are more stable over time. More broadly, comparative work across institutional contexts could shed light on how seemingly technical design choices shape opportunities for interpersonal interaction and, in turn, patterns of cooperation.

Our findings challenge a prevailing emphasis in the literature on state-level power

[23] MIN(86)/INF/1, 3 September 1986.

as the primary determinant of cooperation in international organizations, showing instead that physical co-presence can exert an independent influence beyond factors such as aid, trade, and alliances. By highlighting the conditional role of interpersonal relationships among diplomats, we contribute to a growing body of work in international relations that foregrounds individuals and micro-level mechanisms within formal institutions. Methodologically, we introduce a novel research design that leverages quasi-random seating assignments to identify the causal effects of physical co-presence on diplomatic behavior. Substantively, as international organizations increasingly rely on virtual meetings and digital diplomacy (Arias, 2026a), these findings suggest that the erosion of shared physical spaces may hinder the formation of social ties that facilitate coordination and consensus-building.

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Appendix

A Summary Statistics

Table 1: Summary Statistics

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Agreement Score	0.753	0.144	0.000	1.000	873153
Seat Dyad Neighbor	0.006	0.076	0.000	1.000	900324
Log Total Trade (USD millions)	1.757	2.407	0.000	13.375	855103
Log Total Aid Commitments (USD millions)	0.258	0.924	0.000	10.159	900324
Number of Alliances	0.008	0.093	0.000	3.000	900324
Shared IGO Count	24.818	10.879	0.000	97.000	855103
Years with Same Ambassador Pair	0.874	1.278	0.000	20.000	808287
Years of Ambassador Service (country 1)	3.895	3.440	1.000	30.000	767779
Years of Ambassador Service (country 2)	3.987	3.339	1.000	30.000	763696
Ambassador Gender (country 1)	0.900	0.293	0.000	1.353	773998
Ambassador Gender (country 2)	0.874	0.316	0.000	1.353	777391

B Model Specifications

Table 2: Effect of Seat Proximity on UNGA Voting Agreement

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Seat Dyad	0.002	0.001	0.001	−0.001
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Log Trade Flow ($M USD)		−0.001*	0.000	0.000
		(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Log Aid Commitments ($M USD)		−0.003***	−0.002***	−0.002***
		(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Number of Alliances		0.055***	0.067***	0.067***
		(0.009)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Shared IGO Membership		0.005***	0.005***	0.005***
		(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair			0.001***	0.001***
			(0.000)	(0.000)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1)			0.001***	0.001***
			(0.000)	(0.000)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2)			0.000***	0.000***
			(0.000)	(0.000)
Ambassador Gender (country 1)			−0.001*	−0.001*
			(0.001)	(0.001)
Ambassador Gender (country 2)			0.000	0.000
			(0.001)	(0.001)
Seat Dyad x Yrs with Same Ambassadors				0.003*
				(0.001)
Num.Obs.	873 153	828 637	685 539	685 539
R2	0.605	0.634	0.636	0.636
R2 Adj.	0.596	0.625	0.626	0.626
R2 Within	0.000	0.026	0.026	0.026
R2 Within Adj.	0.000	0.026	0.026	0.026
Dyad FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01. Standard errors clustered by dyad.

Table 3: Effect of Seat Proximity on UNGA Voting Agreement by Pre-Existing Affinity

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Seat Dyad	−0.003	0.000	0.000	0.003
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)
Log Trade Flow ($M USD)	−0.001	−0.001	0.000	0.001**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Log Aid Commitments ($M USD)	−0.003***	−0.003***	−0.005***	0.001*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Number of Alliances	0.033***	0.017*	0.014	−0.004
	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.022)
Shared IGO Membership	0.003***	0.003***	0.002***	0.004***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair	0.001***	0.001***	0.001***	−0.001***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1)	0.001***	0.001***	0.000***	0.000*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2)	0.000	0.000***	0.000**	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Ambassador Gender (country 1)	−0.002**	−0.005***	−0.004***	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Ambassador Gender (country 2)	−0.001	−0.002*	−0.002**	0.003***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Seat Dyad x Yrs with Same Ambassadors	0.002	0.004**	0.001	−0.002
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Num.Obs.	168 398	170 326	169 318	166 246
R2	0.501	0.509	0.567	0.682
R2 Adj.	0.462	0.464	0.523	0.659
R2 Within	0.013	0.008	0.005	0.014
R2 Within Adj.	0.013	0.008	0.005	0.014
Dyad FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01. Standard errors clustered by dyad.

Table 4: Effect of Seat Proximity on UNGA Voting Agreement with Power Dynamics

	US	P5
Seat Dyad	−0.001	0.000
	(0.003)	(0.003)
Log Trade Flow ($M USD)	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Log Aid Commitments ($M USD)	−0.002***	−0.002***
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Number of Alliances	0.067***	0.067***
	(0.013)	(0.013)
Shared IGO Membership	0.005***	0.005***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair	0.001***	0.001***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1)	0.001***	0.001***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2)	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Ambassador Gender (country 1)	−0.001*	−0.001*
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Ambassador Gender (country 2)	0.000	0.000
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Seat Dyad × US Member of Dyad	−0.002	
	(0.063)	
Seat Dyad x P5 Member of Dyad		−0.014
		(0.020)
Seat Dyad x Yrs with Same Ambassadors	0.003*	0.003*
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Num.Obs.	685 539	685 539
R2	0.636	0.636
R2 Adj.	0.626	0.626
R2 Within	0.026	0.026
R2 Within Adj.	0.026	0.026
Dyad FE	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01. Standard errors clustered by dyad.

Table 5: Effect of Seat Proximity on UNGA Voting Agreement by Vote Salience

	US Important	US Not Important	Fail 2/3	Pass 2/3
Seat Dyad	0.000	−0.001	−0.006	−0.001
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.019)	(0.003)
Log Trade Flow ($M USD)	0.002***	−0.001*	0.001	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.000)
Log Aid Commitments ($M USD)	0.004***	0.000	0.002	−0.003***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.001)
Number of Alliances	0.075***	0.060***	0.103***	0.066***
	(0.017)	(0.010)	(0.034)	(0.013)
Shared IGO Membership	0.006***	0.003***	0.005***	0.005***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair	−0.001***	0.000***	0.000	0.001***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1)	0.001***	0.001***	0.000	0.001***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2)	0.001***	0.001***	−0.002***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)
Ambassador Gender (country 1)	−0.003***	−0.005***	0.015**	−0.001*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.006)	(0.001)
Ambassador Gender (country 2)	−0.004***	−0.001	−0.045***	0.000
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.006)	(0.001)
Seat Dyad x Yrs with Same Ambassadors	0.002	0.002	0.007	0.003*
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.010)	(0.001)
Num.Obs.	519 051	525 854	82 373	685 539
R2	0.535	0.667	0.522	0.635
R2 Adj.	0.519	0.655	0.391	0.625
R2 Within	0.017	0.008	0.005	0.027
R2 Within Adj.	0.017	0.008	0.004	0.027
Dyad FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01. Standard errors clustered by dyad.

C Robustness

C.1 Alternative Model Specifications

Table 6 presents a series of alternative model specifications to test the robustness of our results. All models estimated with dyad and year fixed effects. Model 1 clusters standard errors by dyad and year, and Models 2 - 7 cluster standard errors by dyad. Model 2 uses a fractional logit model, while Models 1 and 3 - 7 use OLS. Models 3 - 4 modify the dependent variable, using agreement scores and ideal point distance from the Voeten (2013) dataset (respectively). Models 5 - 6 modify the independent variable, using measures of cumulative years as seat neighbors and a measure of Manhattan distance (respectively). Model 7 drops years with interpolated seating data.

Table 6: Robustness Checks

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Seat Dyad	−0.001	−0.007	−0.001	0.004			0.000
	(0.003)	(0.018)	(0.003)	(0.017)			(0.004)
Cumulative Years as Dyad					0.000		
					(0.001)		
Manhattan Distance						0.000	
						(0.000)	
Log Trade Flow ($M USD)	0.000	0.001	−0.001**	−0.006**	0.000	0.000	−0.001**
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Log Aid Commitments ($M USD)	−0.002*	−0.021***	−0.004***	0.026***	−0.002***	−0.003***	−0.010***
	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.004)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Number of Alliances	0.067***	0.350***	0.069***	−0.638***	0.068***	0.067***	0.043***
	(0.014)	(0.079)	(0.014)	(0.099)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.015)
Shared IGO Membership	0.005***	0.031***	0.003***	−0.019***	0.004***	0.005***	0.003***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair	0.001	0.004***	0.001***	−0.001	0.001***	0.001***	0.002***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1)	0.001*	0.004***	0.000*	0.000	0.000***	0.000***	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2)	0.000	0.002***	0.000**	0.001**	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Ambassador Gender (country 1)	−0.001	−0.006*	0.003***	−0.021***	−0.001*	−0.001*	0.014***
	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.001)	(0.004)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Ambassador Gender (country 2)	0.000	−0.004	0.002**	0.002	−0.001	0.000	0.000
	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.001)	(0.004)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Seat Dyad x Yrs with Same Ambassadors	0.003**	0.015*	0.002	−0.008			0.002
	(0.001)	(0.008)	(0.002)	(0.009)			(0.002)
Cumulative Yrs Dyad x Yrs with Same Ambassadors					0.000		
					(0.000)		
Manhattan Distance x Yrs with Same Ambassadors						0.000	
						(0.000)	
Num.Obs.	685 539	685 539	692 367	687 096	680 190	683 063	274 736
R2	0.636		0.710	0.689	0.638	0.638	0.698
R2 Adj.	0.626		0.702	0.681	0.628	0.628	0.677
R2 Within	0.026		0.014	0.019	0.024	0.026	0.013
R2 Within Adj.	0.026		0.014	0.019	0.024	0.026	0.013
Dyad FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

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

C.2 Co-Sponsorship

Table 7 presents the results of the main model specifications when using a count of co-sponsored resolutions as the dependent variable instead of voting agreement.

Table 7: Effect of Seat Proximity on UNGA Resolution Co-Sponsorship

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Seat Dyad	0.155	0.167	0.159	0.092
	(0.131)	(0.119)	(0.130)	(0.157)
Log Trade Flow ($M USD)		0.126***	0.136***	0.136***
		(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Log Aid Commitments ($M USD)		0.024	0.020	0.020
		(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)
Number of Alliances		2.668***	2.983***	2.983***
		(0.653)	(1.132)	(1.132)
Shared IGO Membership		0.450***	0.494***	0.494***
		(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair			0.015*	0.015*
			(0.008)	(0.008)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1)			−0.012***	−0.012***
			(0.004)	(0.004)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2)			−0.018***	−0.018***
			(0.004)	(0.004)
Ambassador Gender (country 1)			−0.308***	−0.308***
			(0.037)	(0.037)
Ambassador Gender (country 2)			0.039	0.039
			(0.038)	(0.038)
Seat Dyad x Yrs with Same Ambassadors				0.062
				(0.079)
Num.Obs.	415 570	413 048	354 808	354 808
R2	0.810	0.825	0.830	0.830
R2 Adj.	0.801	0.816	0.821	0.821
R2 Within	0.000	0.046	0.052	0.052
R2 Within Adj.	0.000	0.046	0.052	0.052
Dyad FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

* p <0.1, ** p <0.05, *** p <0.01
* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

D Description of Imputation Procedures

Due to changes in archiving and filing procedures, seating chart data was unavailable between Session 45 (1990) and Session 71 (2016). However, we are able to impute the missing years following the procedure described below.

While the full seating charts for these years are unknown, data on the first country in each of the missing years is available. Further, we know that the first fourteen rows of the seating chart will not change at all during this time, as they are the same in Sessions 44 and Sessions 72, the years on either end of the missing period. We therefore have high confidence that seats 1-150 are imputed correctly across all the missing years.

We have less certainty for countries seated after 150 (i.e., in rows 14 and up), as the positions of new countries in these rows may vary. To impute these rows, we begin with the assumption (based on the patterns observed in other years from which data was available) that the new rows would fill in from the center out. We use the template seat arrangement from Session 72 to impute the missing years. When possible, we validated these assumptions by cross-checking with photographs. Because we have no information about accessibility accommodations during this period, we must assume that none were implemented.

To fill in new members and account for country name changes during the missing years, we we filled in delegations using the Blue Book country lists to check for name changes. We cross-checked with UN records of when new countries became members and when country names changed.