Aid, Arms or Autocrats: Explaining the Voting Preferences of Developing Countries at the United Nations

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Abstract

Despite their continued effort to bargain collectively on behalf of developing countries, the G77 group at the United Nations consistently fail to coordinate their voting positions. With 134 of the UN's 193 member states in the G77, it has the potential to dominate the UN General Assembly, but it has become so disparate that many now question the logic of the group's existence moving forward. Using ideal point estimates, I analyze the predictors of G77 countries' individual voting preferences in the UN General Assembly to understand the cause of growing division and disunity within the group. I find that voting preferences for individual countries within the G77 are determined mainly by variation in democracy and human rights. It provides new insights into both the dynamics of the UN General Assembly and the cooperation among developing countries.

Keywords: *United Nations General Assembly, Voting Preferences, G77, Democracy, Human Rights*

1. Introduction

From climate change to migration to terrorism, the world's most pressing issues over the coming decades will all require increasingly globalized responses. Even though some see the United Nations General Assembly as a largely symbolic body, the UNGA remains the only platform in the international system where all countries vote simultaneously on a wide range of issues relevant to the international community. Therefore, even if the UNGA itself isn't the solution to these pressing global problems, studying countries' voting preferences in the UNGA is still the best method we have for understanding the evolving dynamics of global cooperation between states (Voeten 2000).

Within the UN system, the G77 group acts as developing countries' principal negotiating coalition, seeking to advance their power and influence through collective bargaining (Vihma, Mulugetta, and Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen 2011). Given the G77's expansion to now include 134 of the UN's 193 member states, the group should be able to control the General Assembly with impressive reliability, if it were able to coordinate its members effectively, despite successes in the 1960s and 1970s to advance developing countries' interests through the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), in practice, the group is systematically failing to coordinate and align their voting positions, which has led to "a notable expansion of subgroups within the G77" (ibid.).

Scholars have argued that the group's expansion in both scope and size since its inception in 1964 (ibid.), and the increasingly divergent growth trajectories of the group's members (Toye 2014) are making the G77 less cohesive and much harder to coordinate. Some suggest that the logic for the G77's continued existence is not sufficiently understood (Williams 2005). However, academic literature has not yet provided conclusive evidence of how we should categorize the new voting dynamics among developing countries at the United Nations.

The G77's continued attempts to bargain collectively on behalf of developing countries, but consistent inability to coordinate raises an important puzzle for anyone seeking to understand voting patterns in the UN General Assembly and, by extension, the dynamics of global cooperation between states. What determines the voting preferences of individual members of the G77 in the UN General Assembly, and is therefore causing the group to split?

I seek to answer this question by analyzing the latest state ideal point estimates for the UN General Assembly developed by Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten in 2017. Taking these latest estimates as a dependent variable, I compare these measures with five independent vari-

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ables generated from the literature on the UN voting preferences. I focus on democracy and human rights, economic development, US foreign aid, choice of military supplier, and membership of specific intergovernmental organizations. The finding indicates that variation in levels of democracy and human rights is the best predictor of voting preferences among the G77 group. Through that, I provide updates to the existing literature on UN voting behavior, and extend this literature specifically to the puzzle of voting preferences among members of the G77 group.

After discussing the existing literature on the measurement of the UN voting preferences, changing dynamics of the G77 group, and predictors of how countries vote at the UN, I generate and explain my five main hypotheses. I then analyze the empirical results from these hypotheses, before discussing what these results can show us about how we categorize developing countries at the UN moving forward, and making suggestions for further research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Measurement of UN voting preferences

The most recent analysis of voting in the UN General Assembly is Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten's 2017 paper, "Estimating Dynamic State Preferences from United Nations Voting Data" (Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten 2017). This paper analyses UN voting patterns through its development of a model that accurately identifies substantive changes in state voting preferences at the UN. Relative to previous models that frequently falsely reported shifts in state preferences, when all that had changed was the content of votes, this paper significantly contributes to our understanding of the UN voting patterns.

Many previous models used in UN voting literature (Gartzke 1998; Signorino and Ritter 1999) have inferred state preferences or "affinity" between states by examining the percentage of UN General Assembly votes on which two states agree. However, when the agenda of UN votes changes, these "affinity" scores may also change even when states' preferences remain consistent. As Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten (2017) explain, there could be a situation in which two countries may agree on nine out of ten votes in year one, with one issue that they disagree on. Then, the following year, there may be an additional five votes taking place on the single issue which divide them due to exogenous changes in the agenda of the UN General Assembly beyond any state's control. When examined, the states' percentage of agreement in this case (as has been done previously in this literature) shows a noticeable reduction in agreement from 90% (9/10) in year one to 64% (9/14) in year two. This signals that the states' foreign policy preferences had shifted considerably and became much less compatible, even though there may still have been zero substantive change in-state preferences. Therefore, previously used models that solely look at affinity may falsely identify changes in state preferences, when all that has occurred is a change in the agenda of the UN General Assembly.

The model from Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten (ibid.) overcomes this challenge by moving away from using only dyadic comparisons to determine state preferences, and instead uses a dynamic, ordinal spatial model to assess voting preferences along a single dimension. Using item response theory (IRT) models with identical UN resolutions as a bridge for consistency over time, the model generates an ideal point estimate for each member state for each year on a scale from 2 to -2, with one pole occupied by countries such as the US and members of the EU, and the other by 'counter-hegemonic' states such as North Korea, Iran, and Syria (Voeten 2004).

The new model from Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten (2017) is valuable in terms of ability to understand voting preferences over time for two reasons. Firstly, this development allows us to see more clearly when countries are actually changing in their ideal point position, as opposed to acting consistently relative to a changed agenda. Secondly, we can now also distinguish which country is individually shifting to cause that change, which was previously not discernable when using dyadic measures and gives us far greater opportunities to investigate the causes of individual state voting preferences.

2.2. Voting Patterns among the G77 Group

The scarcity of the available literature on the voting trends of the G77 group is part of the motivation for this research. Toye's 2014 assessment of the G77 motivated by the 50 year anniversary of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) largely questions the G77 rather than provides insights. The paper discusses the "facade of unity for developing countries" which the group provides, and how it has become "so disparate that it cannot hold together" the way it had done previously (Toye 2014).

Other papers analyzing the G77 group and its actions in climate negotiations tell a similar story, with authors concluding that the G77's "increasingly conflicting interests" and "slowly eroding common identity" are causing existential challenges for the group (Vihma, Mulugetta, and Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen 2011), and that

the logic behind the G77's continued existence is not well understood (Williams 2005).

The 2011 paper brings insight into the new dynamics of the G77, by identifying a number of subgroups that have appeared during UN climate negotiations (Vihma, Mulugetta, and Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen 2011). Those subgroups have appeared within the G77 based on regional (African Union), economic (Least Developed Countries), ideological (Bolivarian Alliance), and special interest (OPEC) lines, across a range of UN bodies including the General Assembly. While these may be useful for developing hypotheses for this research, they also show that there is little conclusive evidence or consensus on a systematic way to make sense of the new voting dynamics of the G77 group.

2.3. Explaining UN voting patterns:

Scholars have frequently used voting preferences in the United Nations General Assembly both as a dependent and independent variable; either to explain state preferences within the international system, or to explain different aspects of relationships between states such as international trade or the likelihood of conflict. When examining General Assembly voting as a dependent variable (since the end of the cold war), different scholars have found a number of factors to have a significant effect on state preferences at the United Nations. While studies have varied in their methodologies, the five most common explanations scholars have presented centre around variation in countries' levels of:

- Democracy and Human Rights
- Economic Development
- Receipt of US Foreign Aid
- Choice of Military Supplier
- Membership of Other Inter-Governmental Organisations (IGOs).

2.4. Economic Development

Kim and Russett (1996) provides a well-cited explanation of the impact of development levels on the UN voting. It argues that following the end of the Cold War, the 1990s saw a shift in the split of the UN General Assembly from "East-West" to "North-South," with the richer Global North aligning differently to the less developed countries in the Global South.

The theory that levels of development drive voting preferences at the UN fits with Toye's insights about the challenges the G77 group is facing. Toye argues that the breakdown of cohesion among the G77 is caused by the group bifurcating into a range of "elite developed and emerging economies," alongside members who are now "recognised as least developed countries or even as failed states" (Toye 2014). As the result, the increased variation in development levels is driving increased variation in preferences among members of the G77 group.

2.5. Democracy and Human Rights

Oneal and Russet (1999), using a dyadic model of affinity between states, argue that democracy is a significant predictor of countries' voting similarities at the United Nations. Gartzke (2000) provides caveats to these conclusions, initially raised as a criticism of endogeneity from a previous paper (Gartzke 1998). Still, he concludes that democracy plays a significant role in voting preferences in the UN General Assembly.

Previously, when examining voting preferences in the UN Human Rights Council, scholars have found that "countries with poor human rights records vote systematically differently from those that do not engage in torture" (Hug and Lukács 2014). Given the number of resolutions in the General Assembly relating to human rights, this predictive effect could carry over as an indicator of state preferences in the General Assembly.

The effect of liberalism has been heavily emphasised by papers seeking to explain UN voting preferences. For example, Voeten (2000) argued against the conclusions of Kim and Russett (1996), stating that the East-West split was still apparent in United Nations voting and has not disappeared as Kim and Russett (ibid.) claimed. Voeten (2000) added that the General Assembly is better characterized by studying agreement with the US-led liberal order, with "higher GNP and greater degree of democracy both related to more "Western" voting behavior", rather than as divided North-South. While being a direct response to the conclusions of Kim and Russett (1996), inclusion of GNP as a major predictive factor in Voeten (2000) reiterates the potential for development levels to serve as a predictor of voting behaviour alongside democracy.

Extending this analysis, in 2004, Voeten finds that most states have shifted away from the US, but "states that have become more respectful of domestic civil and political liberties have shifted less" (Voeten 2004). These conclusions indicate that liberalism, democracy and civil liberties in some form may all play a role in predicting voting preferences at the UN.

2.6. Foreign Aid

Characterising countries in relation to the US liberal order, many scholars have studied the impact of US foreign aid on voting behaviour at the United Nations. Carter and Stone (2015) and Dreher, Nunnenkamp, and Thiele (2008) found strong evidence that US aid buys voting compliance in the General Assembly over an extended period.

Similarly, Dreher and Sturm (2012) found that countries receiving adjustment projects from the IMF and larger non-concessional loans from the World Bank are more likely to vote in line with the US at the United Nations. Finally, according to Hwang, Sanford, and Lee (2015) voting compliance with the US among elected members of the Security Council (linked to US aid, World Bank and IMF programs) also carries over into the General Assembly, showing the impact of US foreign aid on state preferences at the UN.

2.7. Choice of Military Supplier

Fearon and Hansen (2018) produce one of the first papers using the ideal point estimates from Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten (2017), and find strong correlations between these ideal point estimates and countries' primary weapons suppliers, both during and after the cold war.

Similarly, when looking at network analysis among countries' voting patterns in the UN General Assembly, Pauls and Cranmer (2017) find that the identified affinity communities are causally linked to defence cooperation.

This defence cooperation is consistent with Voeten's (year?) findings that the East-West split is still present in the General Assembly, and Fearon and Hansen's findings show that few countries buy weapons both from Western and non-Western suppliers, while very few have changed suppliers since the end of the cold war.

2.8. Membership of Other Inter-Governmental Organisations

As part of the wider literature on institutional socialisation, Bearce and Bondanella (2007) conclude that an increased number of inter-governmental organisation memberships for countries has an effect on the similarity of their voting preferences at the UN. When testing the hypothesis, they find this effect to hold both for regional and global organisations, but only in situations where the organisation has its own bureaucratic and executive organs.

Additionally, when examining the voting preferences of states on specific issues in the UN system, a number of scholars showed membership of other organisations to be crucial. For example, the African Union and Bolivarian Alliance were identified as key subgroups in UN climate negotiations (Vihma, Mulugetta, and Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen 2011) and members of the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation were seen to vote distinctly in the UN Human Rights Council (Hug and Lukács 2014).

The range of factors that have been proven to influence voting in the UN General Assembly demonstrates that the literature has yet to establish a parsimonious, consensus opinion on the predictors of voting in the UN General Assembly. Such analysis can extend the literature focus to a new group which despite their potential to dominate the UNGA, remains understudied.

3. Hypotheses

In terms of hypotheses, each of the aforementioned issues presents a cleavage among the G77 group which has the potential to be salient in terms of effects on Ideal Point Estimates. Therefore, based on the existing literature, I will test the following hypotheses:

H_1: More economically developed countries will have ideal points closer to the West.

Even though the G77 is designed to collectively represent developing countries, there remains significant variation in the levels of development within the group. For example, Argentina has a GDP per capita of over $13000, while Togo has a GDP per capita of roughly $500. Given this stark variation in levels of GDP that indicates development among the group, we could therefore expect that these countries would have different preferences related to the UN's agenda for economic development and trade, with more developed countries within the group having incentives more closely aligned with the richer western liberal democracies .

H_2: More democratic countries will have ideal points closer to the West

Freedom levels also have the potential to be highly salient for voting preferences at the UN, given the wide variation in levels of human rights and democracy among the G77 group. While some countries such as Ghana or Chile have strong human rights records, other countries such as Saudi Arabia show little regard for any type of human rights or individual freedom. Given the way some of the G77 countries seek to promote and prioritise human rights and democracy alongside western liberal democracies, while others actively seek

to impede any external imposition of human rights norms from bodies such as the UN, increased levels of freedom and democracy could have significant impacts on shifting countries' preferences closer to the western liberal democracies.

H_3: Countries who receive more US foreign aid as a percentage of GDP have ideal points closer to the West.

The concept of transactional aid is something which has appeared in literature around global development and aid flows for some time, especially as developing countries can offer voting compliance at the UN (in return for increased development assistance), without having to relinquish any material resources.

Given that US law requires the US Agency for International Development (USAID) to analyse countries' voting records at the UN as a criterion for disbursing aid, it would make sense that US aid would have an effect on voting preferences among developing countries, with the US gaining more leverage over developing countries as their aid money becomes a larger percentage of the recipient country's GDP.

H_4: Countries with primarily Western weapons imports will have ideal points closer to the West than countries with primarily Russian or "Other" imports.

If the East-West split present during the cold war still holds in the UN General Assembly, as some scholars have suggested, weapons imports can act as a concise proxy measure to see whether countries are generally Western or non-Western aligned. Given how few G77 countries buy weapons from both the West and Russia or China (who are overwhelmingly the world's biggest suppliers) or change weapons suppliers between these groups, weapons imports serve as a good measure for historical alignment either with or against the West, thereby influencing voting preferences in the General Assembly.

H_5: Members of the OIC or OPEC will have ideal points further away from the West.

Countries' membership of certain IGOs such as the OIC and OPEC are often very closely linked to their preferences on specific issues and some of these preferences may be in direct opposition to the positions taken by the US and other western liberal democracies. Given that the OIC is deeply opposed to the US on the issue of the Palestinian conflict (which is heavily discussed in the UN General Assembly), and both the OIC and OPEC have been mentioned in the literature as voting distinctly within different parts of the UN system, memberships of these IGOs may impact voting preferences at the United Nations if they are being used as counter-hegemonic balancing mechanisms.

4. Research Design

In order to test these hypotheses, I will need to find appropriate measures for each of my independent variables. Membership of groups like the OIC and OPEC are simple binary measures, so they are the least complicated. For weapons imports I shall use arms transfers data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, and categorise countries based on whether their primary weapons supplier is Western, Russian (East), or other (mostly China or other one-off cases). For levels of development I use GDP per capita from the World Bank, and US foreign aid levels are measured by calculating US foreign aid received as a percentage of total GDP. Finally, for levels of freedom and democracy I use multiple measures – polity scores and scores from Freedom House, which has measures for civil liberties and political rights, as well as an overall freedom status for each country with levels of *Free*, *Partially Free* and *Not Free*.

I then investigate if any of these variables correlate significantly with higher or lower ideal point estimates for countries in the G77 using the ideal point estimates Bailey, Strezhnev and Voeten develop in their 2017 paper, controlling for region and year fixed effects.

In terms of the time frame, I will investigate the voting preferences of the G77 starting from the end of the Cold War in 1989, up until 2015 when the latest ideal point estimates are calculated. Firstly, after 1989 we have much better data availability for my independent variables. Secondly, in terms of applicability to current and future UN voting behavior, going back further than 1989 significantly complicates findings, making it harder to use any results as a meaningful, generalizable predictor for the future.

5. Results

5.1. G77 Voting Patterns Since 1989

While there is a relatively distinct split between members and non-members of the G77 in terms of ideal point estimates, variations within the G77 group exist.

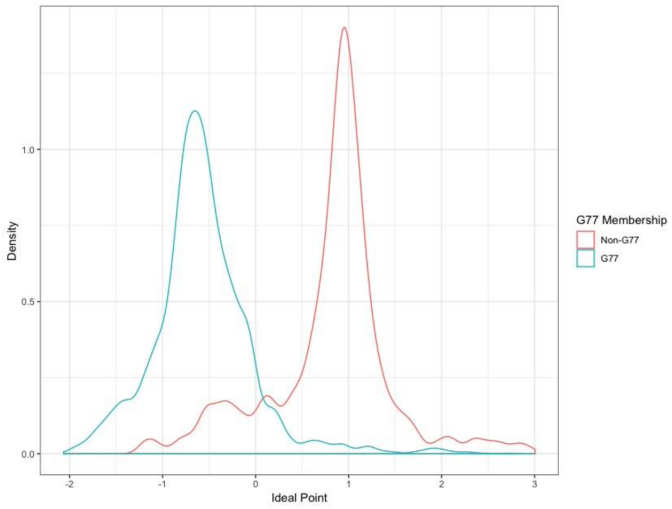

Figure 1: *Density plot showing distributions of ideal points for G77 and non-G77 countries.*

The ideal points of the G77 range from slightly above 0 (e.g Argentina, Panama) to -2 (e.g. North Korea, Iran), excluding the outliers of small Pacific island states which consistently vote in line with the U.S. at around 2 (Figure 1). Over the period from 1989 to 2015, the G77 group had a median ideal point estimate of -0.61, a mean of -0.57 (e.g Jamaica and the Philippines), and an interquartile range from -0.32 (e.g. Bahamas and Colombia) to -0.84 (e.g. Uganda and Togo), suggesting the importance of estimating ideal points both inside and outside the interquartile range. Both the mean and the median ideal point for the G77 group are remarkably consistent over the examined time period, with both measures between -0.65 and -0.50, apart from the median rising to -0.47 in 1995.

The variance within the G77 group (Figure 2), however, does differ significantly between years, with periods of higher variance from 2002-2004 and 2011-2013, and low variance from 2007-2009 and 2014-15. Given the way the difference in variance rises and falls, these changes would appear to be in response to specific events such as 9/11, the Iraq war, and the Arab Spring, rather than showing a consistent trend over time, suggesting that we can analyse the voting preferences similarly across the entire time period.

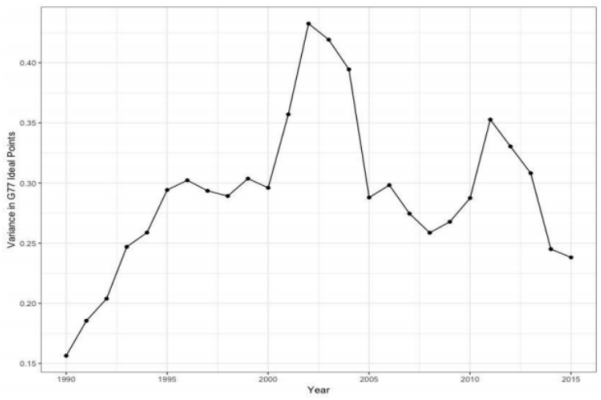

Figure 2: *Variance among G77 ideal points for the studied period, showing periods of high variance following the Iraq war and Arab Spring, but no clear overall trend.*

5.2. Predictors of Country Ideal Point Estimates

Controlling for the other independent variables with region and year fixed effects in a linear regression, Table 1 shows the impacts on ideal points.

Table 1: *Predictors of Country Ideal Point Estimates*

Dependent variable:	Ideal Point Estimate
Constant	-0.517***(0.044)
Partially Free	-0.056* (0.023)
Not Free	-0.237***(0.027)
Military Supplier - Russia	-0.134***(0.029)
Military Supplier - Other	-0.085***(0.022)
OPEC	-0.137***(0.038)
OIC	-0.201***(0.021)
US Foreign Aid as % GDP	0.006* (0.002)
GDP 1000-5000	0.062*** (0.022)
GDP 5000-10000	0.108** (0.037)
GDP 10000+	-0.024 (0.057)
Observations	1,387
R2	0.39
Adjusted R2	0.381
Residual Std.Error	0.313 (df=1359)
F Statistic	32.57*** (df = 27; 1359)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Using the measure of GDP per capita, we see very little link between economic development and the difference in voting preferences among G77 countries in the UN General Assembly. The results for countries with a GDP per capita above $10000 are the only results that are not statistically significant, which may be a consequence of the low number of observations. The significant results for the changes from a GDP per capita of below $1000 to $1000-$5000 and to $5000-$10000 are

in the direction we would expect from the hypothesis, but even a change in GDP per capita from below $1000 to between $5000-$10000 is associated with a very small change in ideal point of 0.108. Similarly, when testing the effect of GDP per capita as a continuous variable against ideal points we observe comparable results—an effect in the direction we would expect, albeit a very small one.

This lack of impact is also illustrated by the fact that a number of countries which experienced significant economic development between 1989 and 2015 saw relatively little change in their ideal points. For example, Vietnam's GDP per capita rose consistently every year from one of the lowest values of $137 in 1990, to well above the median value ($1612) for the group to $2065 in 2014. However, throughout this period, their ideal point stayed relatively still. Similarly, Malaysia saw equally consistent growth from $2652 in 1990 to $11183 in 2015, but their ideal points remained between -0.8 and -1.0 for the majority of this period, again indicating that economic growth does not necessarily change a country's voting preferences in the UN General Assembly.

All of the different measures for democracy and human rights seem to show a much stronger link to ideal point estimates than the measures for economic development. While we see a fairly minimal difference between *Free and Partially Free* countries in the regressions, the change from *Free* to *Not Free* is associated with a shift of -0.23 away from the Western end of the scale, controlling for other factors (Figure 3).

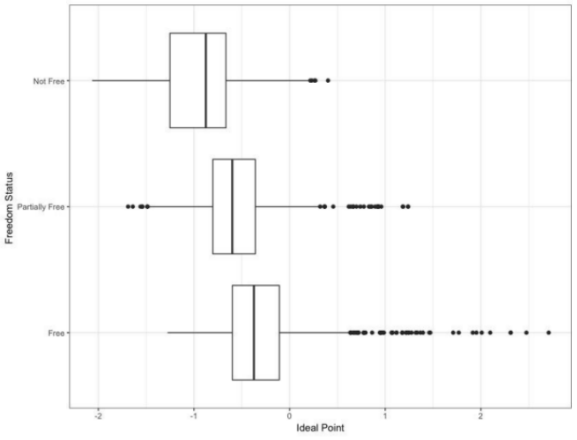

Figure 3: *Boxplots showing the distribution of ideal points for G77 countries which are classed as Free, Partially Free and Not Free.*

Each one-unit increase on the polity score (from -10 to 10) is associated with a positive shift of 0.014 when controlling for the other variables, meaning that across the whole scale, the shift from the most autocratic to the most democratic countries equates to a change of roughly 0.28 in ideal point (Figure 4). It suggests that the shift from the extremes of the polity score produces a result of very similar magnitude and direction as moving from *Free* to *Not Free* on the Freedom House classifications, supporting the validity of these results.

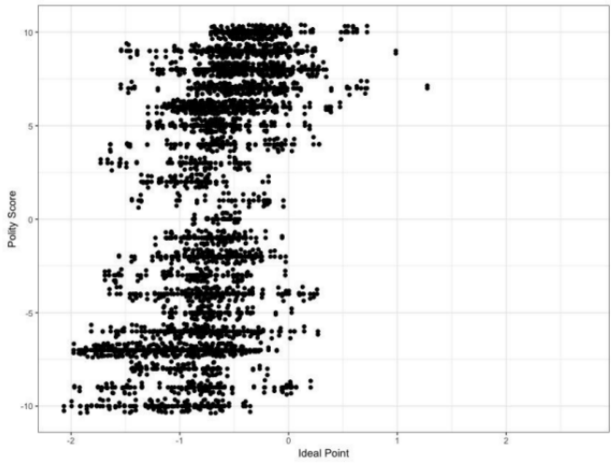

Figure 4: *Jittered scatterplot of polity scores and the ideal points of G77 countries.*

Looking at specific countries which illustrate this effect, we find that both Myanmar and Mongolia have similar levels of economic development, but Myanmar as a military dictatorship has a polity score that is always below -7, and Mongolia has a polity score of 9 or 10 for every year as a strong democracy. These differences are reflected in the states' ideal point estimates, with Myanmar having an average of -1.24, and Mongolia having an average of -0.29.

When breaking down the Freedom House scores into their constituent measures of political rights (electoral process, functioning of government, and political participation) and civil liberties (freedom of expression and association, rule of law, and individual rights) shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6, we also gain greater insights into the difference in ideal points associated with variation in levels of democracy and human rights.

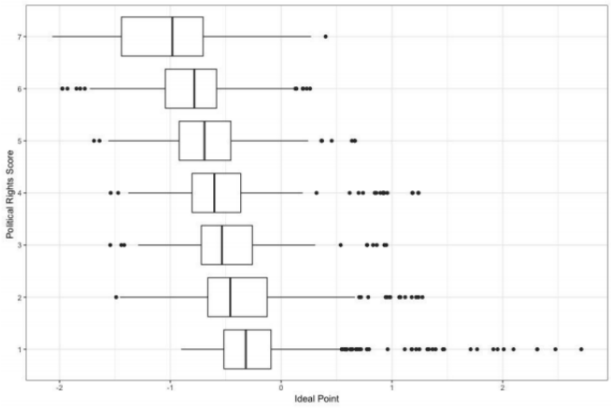

Figure 5: *Boxplots showing ideal point distributions for countries with different political rights scores, again supporting the democracy and human rights hypothesis, but also showing the increased effects for countries with the very worst political rights scores.*

Similar to the small shift between countries classified as *Free* and *Partially Free*, the differences between countries with scores of 1, 2 or 3 (the best scores on the 7 point scale) in terms of ideal points are minimal. However, when moving to the lower end of the scale with worse scores for political rights and civil liberties, the changes for each step become much more distinct.

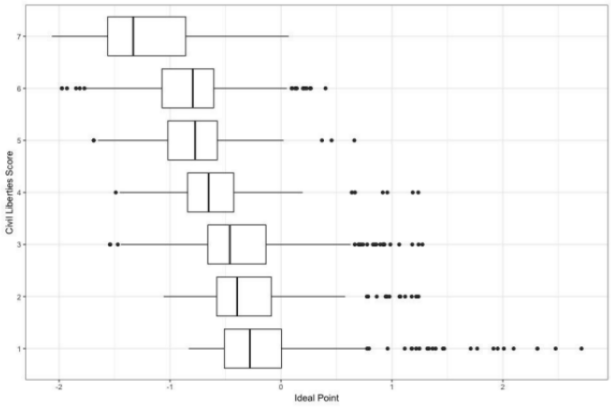

Figure 6: *Boxplots showing ideal point distributions for countries with different civil liberties scores, showing the large difference in in ideal points between countries with different levels of civil liberties, and particularly countries who score 7, whose ideal points are disproportionately far away from the West.*

A score of 6 for political rights is associated with a change of -0.17. For civil liberties, we observe a change of -0.21 in ideal point estimate compared to countries with a score of 1 on these measures. However, the changes for the very worst scoring countries are more drastic, with the countries scoring 7 for political rights and civil liberties showing shifts of -0.41 and -0.60 in ideal point estimates relative to those with the best political rights and civil liberties scores, controlling for other variables. Relative to an interquartile range of 0.52 and a standard deviation of 0.54 for the ideal point estimates, these figures individually show a significant change in ideal point for the most autocratic countries, with the larger shift for countries with scores of 7.

The results suggest that the link between freedom and democracy and ideal point estimate at the UN is not linear. Countries with good human rights and democracy records do vote slightly differently from those with average human rights and democracy records, but hardline autocracies with the worst records vote distinctly differently from all other countries. This is also illustrated by the fact that in the 200 ideal point measures furthest away from the west (country year combinations), the only countries not classified as *Not Free* were Bolivia, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, which are all known for their anti-U.S. agenda. When looking at these two measures without controls, we see a change from 1 to 7 is associated with a shift in ideal point of -0.84 for political rights and -1.11 for civil liberties (both statistically significant), showing a difference of over double the interquartile range for the G77 group.

The results suggest that there is very little link between the amount of U.S. foreign aid received as a percentage of GDP, and the ideal point estimates of developing countries. When controlling for the other variables, the impact of a 1% increase in U.S. foreign aid as a percentage of GDP is 0.006. While this is in the direction we would expect of moving countries closer to the U.S., it means that even if countries had 10% of their GDP from U.S. foreign aid (which generally only occurs for countries recovering from conflict or disasters such as Iraq or Liberia), this would still only have an effect size of 0.05 on their ideal point estimates.

The results for choice of military supplier is compatible with our hypothesis, in terms of a proxy that reflects the historical East-West ideology (Figure 7). Those buying predominantly western weapons have the closest ideal points to the U.S., while countries who have Russia as their main military supplier on average have an ideal point 0.13 points further away than those who buy U.S. weapons. Those who import weapons primarily from some source other than Russia or the West fall in between these two values, with a shift of -0.08 relative to western supplied countries. However, there is also a lot of overlap between these groups, signalling that while military suppliers can explain some of the variations in ideal points, it should not be interpreted in isolation.

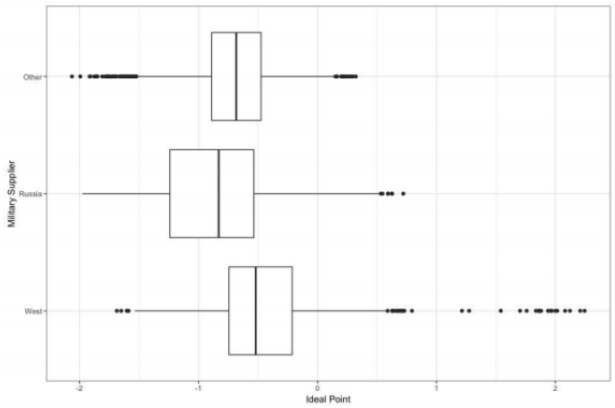

Figure 7: *Boxplots showing the ideal points for countries with different primary military suppliers, supporting our hypothesis that countries who buy from the West vote more in line with the West, but also showing a large overlap between groups.*

Membership of the OIC and OPEC both have a significant effect on ideal point estimates in the direction we expected, moving their members' ideal point estimates away from the Western end of the scale. Membership of the OPEC is associated with a -0.13 point shift, and membership of the OIC shows an even larger shift of -0.20 compared to non-members of these groups. These observations suggest that OIC membership may have a larger effect than military supplier, U.S. foreign aid, and significant economic development.

5.3. Discussion

Beginning with the economic development and U.S. Foreign Aid measures, which have limited links to ideal point estimates, there are logical reasons why these measures may not show a strong link specifically to voting in the G77 across all areas of the UN General Assembly.

Firstly, we can see that when it comes to levels of economic development when examining the whole membership of the General Assembly, there is still a reasonably distinct split, as shown by Figure 1 illustrating the ideal points of G77 and non-G77 countries. Therefore, this shows that economic development does play a role in UN voting preferences. However, the variation within the G77 group specifically is not salient enough to impact ideal point estimates, despite several countries having GDP per capita figures over 20 times higher than other members of the group.

Similarly, when looking at the limited impact of U.S. Foreign Aid receipt, an important caveat in many of the previous papers analyzing this subject is that they measure the impact only on "important votes" as determined by the U.S. State Department. Therefore, it would appear that when seeking voting compliance in the UN General Assembly, the US makes requests for support only on specific important votes, rather than across the whole range of issues the General Assembly votes on.

Then moving on to the military supplier and IGO membership measures, which have slightly more impact on voting preferences, there are reasons why these measures would independently impact ideal point estimates, but there could also be a case where the variation in ideal point associated with these variables is driven by differences in levels of democracy and human rights. The OIC and OPEC both have very specific issues on which they may vote distinctly, namely votes on Palestine and the Middle East and votes on climate change. Both of these feature heavily in the UN General Assembly's agenda, and could therefore lead members of the group to have ideal points further away from the West. The choice of military supplier may also affect ideal points either broadly through displaying historical West/East ideology, or through a similar mechanism to foreign aid. The effect takes place in the sense that it allows a larger more powerful actor (primarily Western, Russia, or China) to exert influence over the countries it sells weapons to.

The other explanation as to why these measures for OPEC and OIC membership and military suppliers may show a moderate level of impact on ideal point estimates is that a number of them are strongly correlated to measures of democracy and human rights. For example, being a member of the OIC or OPEC is associated with a reduction in polity score of roughly -6, and countries with "other" and Russian weapons have polity scores on average -2 and -4 points below those who buy Western weapons (figure 8).

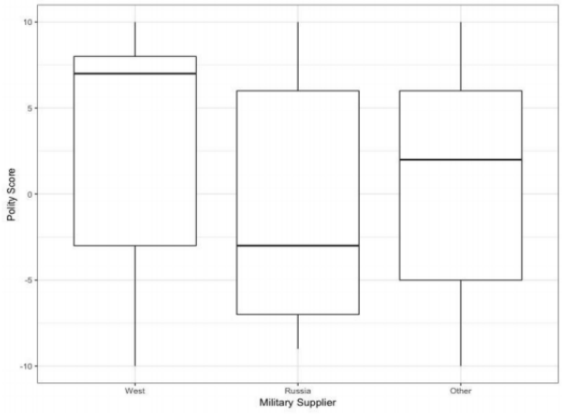

Figure 8: *Boxplot showing the polity score distributions for countries with different military suppliers, highlighting that countries who buy from the West tend to be much more democratic than countries who buy from Russia.*

This correlation with democracy and human rights may also explain the unexpectedly high impact of the regional control on ideal points, where countries in Africa and Latin America, and the Caribbean, were associated with a shift of 0.11 and 0.23 away from countries from Asia-Pacific. This correlation may be due to the effect of regional organizations, such as the African Union or the Organisation of American States. However, the fact that African and Latin American countries have polity scores that are on average 1.5 and 8 points above countries from the Asia-Pacific may also play a role in why their ideal points (particularly for Latin America) are closer to the West (figure 9).

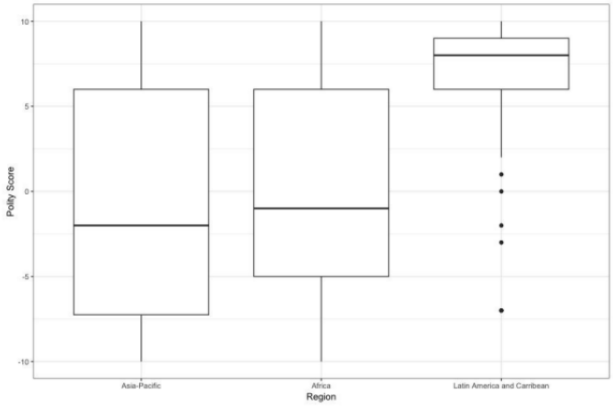

Figure 9: *Boxplot showing the polity score distributions for countries from different regions, shows that the countries from Latin America and the Caribbean have much higher levels of democracy than Asia-Pacific and Africa.*

The differences in polity score for military suppliers and region closely mirror the difference in ideal point estimates among these groups. This suggests that even though the military supplier and region variables are independently significant when controlling freedom house status and polity score, some of the variation these measures seem to show may still be driven by different levels of democracy and human rights. While this raises questions around multicollinearity, the fact that these measures are all independently statistically significant shows that they are all likely to have some effect. The interaction of these factors in the UN voting preferences could provide interesting further research.

This issue of isolating the effects of specific variables is highlighted by the examples of Uruguay and Oman. Uruguay has an average ideal point of -0.13, while Oman has an ideal point with an average of -1.03, putting these countries at almost opposing ends of the G77 group. Both countries have a relatively high and growing GDP per capita, western weapons imports, and low levels of US foreign aid. However, these countries have significantly different democracy and human rights scores, Uruguay with a polity score of 10, and Oman with a polity score below -8. Despite this stark difference in democracy and human rights scores, it is difficult to conclude whether the difference in ideal points here is actually driven by differences in democracy and human rights, or whether the ideal points are impacted directly by Oman's OIC membership, or by Uruguay being a part of Latin America.

Finally, the results around democracy and human rights demonstrate higher impact on ideal point compared to other variables. The impact on voting preferences is also non-linear and both these findings have plausible explanations. Compared to regional issues, which would split countries with different military suppliers, democracy, and human rights (as a broad issue) are discussed much more directly at the UN compared to the other issues. This means it is more likely to split countries based on their different preferences surrounding this issue.

Secondly, unlike issues such as economic development, which almost all countries see as a broadly good thing but disagree on the best pathway, some countries seek to intentionally promote democracy and human rights, while others actively seek to oppose and block its external influences, perceiving it as a threat to their domestic legitimacy and power. This also explains the non-linearity of the effect of democracy and human rights on voting preferences, as it is countries with the lowest scores who actively oppose the promotion of democracy and human rights. Comparing these to *Partially Free* countries, who may strive for the same democratic ideals as *Free* countries but have had limited success in implementing them, the non-linear impact of the democracy and human rights measures is under-

standable.

Despite these conclusions about the effect of democracy and human rights on ideal points, it is still unclear whether countries have consistent voting preferences across different thematic issues that appear on the UN agenda. For example, on issues relating to economic development, we may see different voting preferences (and therefore different splits among the G77) compared to issues relating to human rights, weapons proliferation, or the Palestinian conflict. Therefore, developing specific ideal point estimates for different thematic areas of the UN General Assembly's agenda, such as economic development, human rights, or climate change could provide new insights and potential for further extension of this research.

6. Conclusion

From our results, we can broadly split the tested variables into three levels of importance in terms of their impact on a country's ideal point estimate.

Firstly, analyzing levels of economic development and receipt of US Foreign Aid shows that neither of these measures has a strong influence on UN voting preferences among members of the G77 group. Secondly, analyzing the choice of military supplier, OPEC, and OIC membership and region, we found that both of these measures impact voting preference. However, these measures are also strongly correlated with measures of democracy and human rights. Finally, the strongest indicator of UN voting preferences among the G77 group is a country's level of democracy and human rights, which consistently showed a high impact on ideal point estimates across various measures, even when controlling for all other independent variables.

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