

Dreher, Axel; Boockmann, Bernhard

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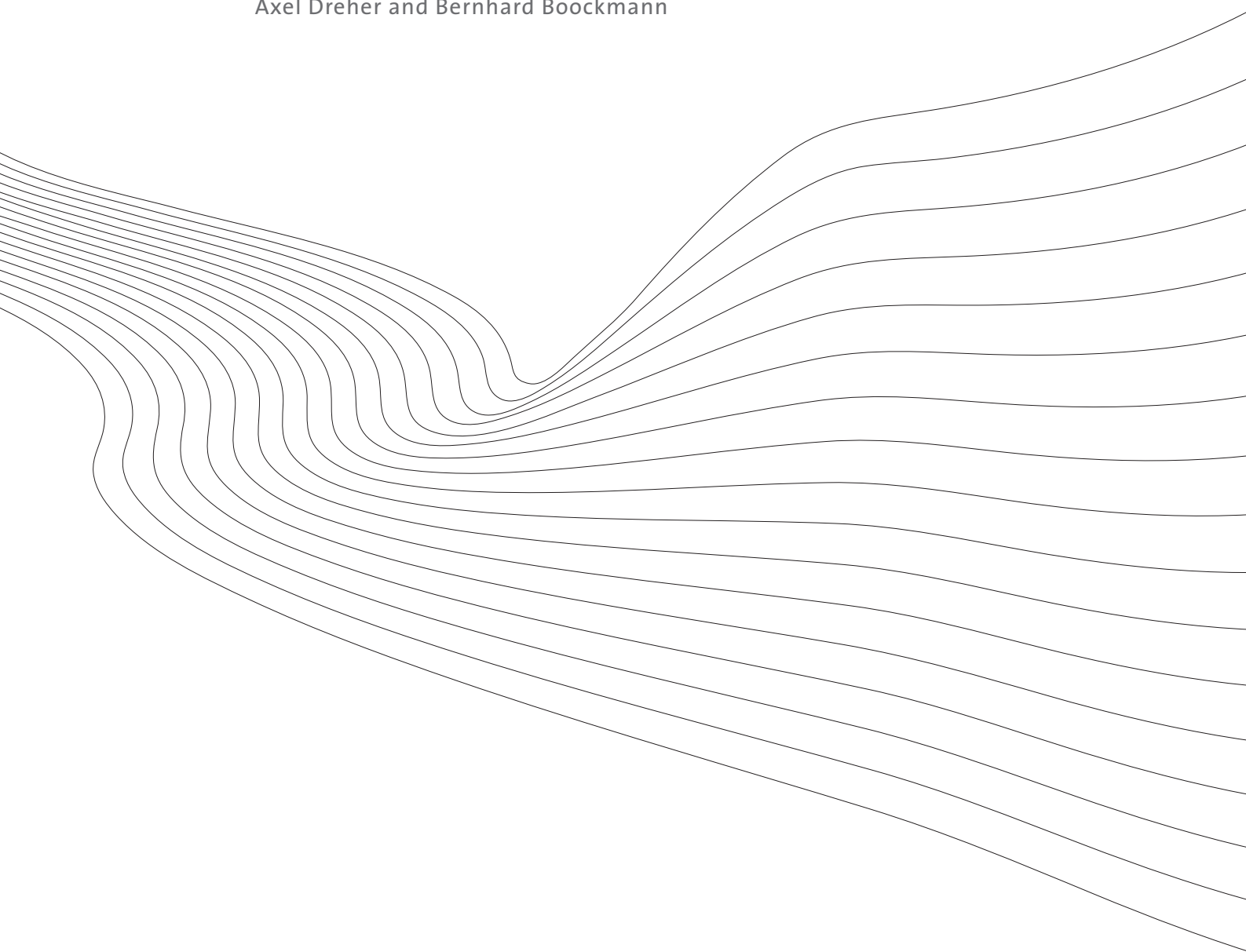
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KOF Working Papers

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Axel Dreher and Bernhard Boockmann



KOF

ETH Zurich
KOF Swiss Economic Institute
WEH D 4
Weinbergstrasse 35
8092 Zurich
Switzerland

Phone +41 44 632 42 39
Fax +41 44 632 12 18
www.kof.ethz.ch
kof@kof.ethz.ch

Do Human Rights Offenders Oppose Human Rights Resolutions in the United Nations?

Bernhard Boockmann[‡]
Axel Dreher[§]

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Abstract

We investigate voting behavior on human rights in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Our central question is whether countries with a low human rights record systematically oppose human rights resolutions. An instrumental account of voting would suggest that these countries aim to weaken UN human rights resolutions since they could be future targets of these policies. If reputation aspects and other non-instrumental motives dominate, the influence can go in either direction. We estimate determinants of voting on the basis of 13,000 individual voting decisions from 1980 to 2002. Our results from ordered probit estimation show that a country's human rights situation is irrelevant to voting behavior if regional dependence of voting is controlled for. This suggests that countries' voting decisions are not made independently from each other. The results also show that simple rules for aggregating voting choices can lead to misleading results.

Keywords: Voting, Human Rights, United Nations, Instrumental Voting

JEL-Codes: D78

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[‡] Centre for European Economic Research (ZEW), P.O. Box 10 34 43, D-68034 Mannheim, Germany, E-mail: boockmann@zew.de

[§] KOF Swiss Economic Institute, ETH Zurich, Weinbergstrasse 35, CH-8092 Zürich, Switzerland and CESifo, Germany, E-mail: mail@axel-dreher.de

1 Introduction

Although there have been a number of papers on voting in international bodies over the last couple of years, voting in international organizations, and in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in particular, is still not fully understood. In particular, the logic behind voting decisions remains largely unexplored: do countries vote to achieve a particular outcome, or is voting best explained by other motives, such as voting blocks, ethical values, or reputation among allies and potential donors?

In this paper, we look at voting on resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The resolutions of the General Assembly concern many different policy areas, such as human rights, the situation in particular countries or regions (Israel and West Bank, South Africa), peace and security, and technical issues (budget, admission to committees, etc.). We focus our discussion on a relatively homogenous group of resolutions – those dealing with human rights. For many actors, such as European Union governments, this subject area is among their main priorities within the United Nations (Luif 2003).

The central question of our paper is whether a bad human rights record induces countries to oppose UN human rights resolutions. A reason for this would be that successful proposals for resolutions make further resolutions more likely, and countries with bad human rights could be the targets of future resolutions. Therefore, if these countries dislike resolutions directed against them, there is an instrumental motive for voting against resolutions directed against other countries. While it is often taken for granted that a link between policies adopted domestically and internationally exists, the question whether and to which degree this explains UN decision-making has not been addressed systematically.

In the previous literature, competing accounts of the motives for voting in the UNGA dominate. First, the issue of voting blocks and persistent lines of conflict has been frequently analyzed. Newcombe and Allett (1981) and Holcombe and Sobel (1996) identify voting blocs and their stability. Kim and Russett (1996), and Voeten (2000) analyze voting decisions using techniques such as factor analysis and Poole and Rosenthal's (1991, 1997) NOMINATE methodology. This approach uncovers both the underlying issue-dimensions and the voting preferences among UN member states. A second well-researched question is whether voting is influenced by development aid. Stone (2002, 2004) shows that governments receiving more UN foreign aid receive lighter punishments for non-compliance with policy conditions under IMF programs. Dreher, Thiele and Nunnenkamp (2006) use disaggregated aid data to account for the fact that various forms of aid may differ in their ability to induce political support by

recipients. They obtain strong evidence that US general budget support and untied grants buy voting compliance in the Assembly. Dreher and Sturm (2006) analyze voting coincidence with major countries, in particular with countries influential for multilateral aid and credits. Thacker (1999) shows that governments voting along the lines of the US on key issues in the UNGA are more likely to participate in IMF programs – presumably as the IMF loan acts as a reward.

In comparison with the numerous studies for other voting bodies (in particular, the US Congress), these studies provide only selective evidence. At the national level, the relative importance of voting motives has been investigated in a number of studies. Levitt (1996), Rothenberg and Sanders (2000), Snyder and Groseclose (2000), and Broz and Hawes (2006) focus on the determinants of the individual voting decision. Using discrete choice techniques, a distinction can be made between different motives of voting, such as constituent interest, party affiliation, or personal ideology. Buying votes is also a theme in research on national elections (Levitt and Snyder 1997, Dahlberg and Johansson 2000, Stratmann 1991, 1998). Concerning international organizations, Boockmann (2003) for the ILO and Hix, Noury and Roland (2006) as well as Hosli (2007) for the European Parliament have tried to disentangle the different motives of voting.¹

Precisely because the role of different motives and the voting act is treated as a black box, existing studies have to rely on ad-hoc procedures in coding the different voting alternatives. In particular, is voting against a particular issue a close substitute for abstention, such that both choices can be merged into one? Or does abstention signify indifference? Since we analyze voting decision at the level of the individual vote, evidence on these questions is provided as a by-product of our study.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. We first introduce human rights decisions as the object of the voting decisions studied. In section three, we develop some hypotheses as to how voting behaviour can be explained. Next, we explain how these hypotheses can be tested, introducing the data and the approach used for estimation. In section 5, we present the results. Conclusions and the relation of our results to previous findings are contained in a final section.

¹ For a general discussion of motives for voting see Tullock (2006).

2 Voting on human rights in the UN General Assembly

From the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the issue of human rights has been one of the most important policy areas of the organization. There are a number of different UN bodies in which human rights are addressed, such as the Human Rights Council (HRC), the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), the Sub-Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (SCHR), human rights treaty bodies such as the Human Rights Committee (HRC), the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), and many others. We focus on the human rights resolutions of the main deliberative organ of the UNGA. Voting in the UNGA is frequent and often conducted as a roll-call, such that voting behavior of UNGA members is documented. Therefore, UNGA decision-making is particularly apt to statistical analysis.

It is not obvious how to define what constitutes an UNGA human rights resolution. A straightforward procedure is to use the title of the resolution as an indication. Recent resolutions with the phrase “human rights” in their title include texts on general problems such as the impact of globalization on the employment of human rights, but also the human rights situations in specific countries. In 2005, for example, resolutions criticizing the human rights situations in North Korea, Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Congo, and Myanmar have been approved. Some topics, such as resolutions concerning the rights of the child or practices in particular countries, can easily be identified as human rights issues. Classifying human rights votes is more difficult for topics such as “the right to development” or “economic rights.” Rather than propagating liberal human rights, these resolutions may formulate demands for financial aid and express political goals different from, and sometimes opposed to, liberal human rights.

However, since the borderline is unclear, we chose to include into our sample of resolutions all resolutions having the words “right” or “rights” in their title, except for those that relate to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which are regarded as belonging to a different subject area. Our analysis rests on the universe of recorded votes held from 1980 to 2002 on resolutions in the group just defined.² Resolutions are either adopted by consensus or, if requested by at least one member, by a recorded vote (or roll-call vote). As table 1 shows,

² Choice of observation period is driven by data availability. While UN voting records are available for a substantially longer period, some of our control variables are not.

only a minority of resolutions are voted on. These resolutions are unlikely to be representative for all resolutions brought before the Assembly. Therefore, any conclusions drawn from UNGA voting data cannot be extended to statements on the distribution of voting intentions or preference in the UNGA in general.³ This is particularly true for the situation after 1990, where decisions have less often been made by roll-call voting. Table 1 also shows that voting on resolutions on human rights represents only a small share of all voting on UNGA resolutions: roughly one out of ten votes concerns human rights issues.

Each member of the UN General Assembly has one vote. Human rights resolutions are adopted by simple majority, i.e., for a resolution to be adopted, a majority of votes cast as yes or no must be found. Abstentions do not count in the determination of the outcome. No decisions may be taken unless a quorum of a majority of UN members are present. However, the possibility of a quorum not being reached does not appear to be an issue, as it is never even mentioned in the verbatim reports of the UNGA sessions.

Data on voting behavior of each country on every roll call vote in the UN General Assembly since 1946 has been collected by Voeten (2004). These data have been assembled from the records of resolutions passed. Hence, information on votes on unsuccessful resolutions is missing. However, these gaps in the data are minor. For instance, in the years 1988-1992, no resolution failed in the UNGA. Except for conventions on taking hostages and hijacking, all major resolutions have been adopted since the late 1980s (Gstöhl 2006). Therefore, selectivity is not an issue here and omitting failed resolutions is in line with the previous literature.⁴

It is not straightforward to classify voting decisions as for or against a strengthening of human rights. Voting behavior must be recoded, since nominal voting behavior (such as yes and no) is not informative without knowing the subject of the vote. In the case of human rights, we need to code voting as for or against more strongly worded resolutions. For instance, some human rights resolutions may actually weaken human rights (such as the Resolution on Coercive Measures against Human Rights), some may be deflecting attention (e.g. by stressing self-determination of countries rather than individual liberties, such as

³ Thiem (2006) has addressed the incentive to call a roll-call with respect to the European Parliament. However, this issue would require a different data base and is, therefore, left to further research.

Resolution 32/130 on Human Rights, Future Approaches). Coding each individually would bring about the danger of arbitrary judgments.

Instead, we proceed by selecting benchmark countries. A benchmark country is a country which is very likely to pick the alternative favorable to the propagation of liberal human rights. We use the voting outcome chosen by the majority of the following countries: France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. These countries have the highest degree of voting for ten recent human rights resolutions, according to Human Rights Watch, one of the most important NGOs in the human rights field.⁵ If at least two of these countries choose yes or no, this is the outcome selected as a benchmark. Otherwise, the benchmark is abstention. In 150 of all 173 votes on human rights resolutions, the four benchmark countries were unanimous. In 6 cases, one benchmark country abstained and in 17 cases, two countries abstained. Almost all of these cases of disagreement concern resolutions in the early 1980s.

The dependent variable is coded according to the following rules: if the benchmark countries voted in favor of the resolution, nominal voting decisions are used directly as a measure of human rights voting. If the benchmark countries opposed a resolution, the reverse applies: a vote in favor is interpreted as a vote against human rights. If the benchmark countries abstained, which is true in 20 per cent of all votes, all votes other than abstention are interpreted as votes against human rights. This is consistent with our finding that abstentions and votes against should be treated as different alternatives. An alternative specification implying that abstention means resistance against a resolution did not yield qualitatively different conclusions.

The upper part of table 2 shows that most votes that have been cast are approvals of draft resolutions. This is particularly true for the period before 1990, where more than three quarters of all votes on human rights resolutions are votes in favor, and only five per cent are votes against. However, the lower half of the table shows that this does not imply universal approval of human rights. In particular, prior to 1980, 40 per cent of the votes were cast against the position of human rights proponents. After 1990, relatively more abstentions occur, but the support for resolutions in favor of human rights has increased only slightly. Hence, even if variation in voting appears to be limited at first sight, the actual variation in

⁴ See, for instance, Marin-Bosch (1998) and Dreher and Jensen (2007).

voting, and hence the amount of conflict over human rights, remains high at the United Nations.

3 Explaining UNGA voting

Our main question is the degree to which voting behavior in the UNGA is motivated by countries' (or national politicians', or their constituents') interests in the outcome of the vote. In the public choice literature, this motive is called the instrumental benefit of voting. The benefit of voting for the preferred alternative stems from the enhanced chances that this alternative will be chosen as a voting outcome (Riker and Ordeshook 1968, Ledyard 1984). A well-known alternative is expressive voting (see Brennan and Hamlin 1998).

It might be argued that the instrumental benefit in UNGA voting is zero, since resolutions are almost always adopted with sizeable majorities, such that the impact of any individual country's vote is negligible. On average, the difference between the number of votes in favour and votes against is 94 in our sample of human rights decisions, with a standard deviation of 36. However, even in cases of certain adoption, the size of the majority may be a highly relevant outcome. International norms that have been adopted by consensus or near-consensus have a high degree of moral dignity. Therefore, member states may find it costly to act against UNGA resolutions having found wide acceptance. By contrast, if a resolution had received only a slight majority, it may lack moral force and be easily disrespected. In this sense, there is an instrumental benefit from voting, arising because resolutions may be strengthened or weakened by individual voting acts. Countries aiming at an improved protection of human rights have an instrumental motive for voting in favor, because a stronger resolution is beneficial for the realization of their policy objective. Conversely, countries that oppose the role of the United Nations in the protection of human rights have an instrumental motive to vote against or abstain. It is likely that the instrumental motive differs across subjects. For instance, technical issues (such as technical standards or administrative procedures) are simply settled by the vote. The size of the majority is unlikely to be important. In other issues, the size of the majority matters if general obligations are formulated.

⁵ See <http://www.hrw.org/un/elections/index.htm>.

Opposition to human rights policies may originate for different reasons, but a leading reason is that these policies directly impact on countries' interests. As a result of UN resolutions, countries condemned for their human rights practices may face direct and indirect sanctions. For instance, as Lebovic and Voeten (2006) show, the adoption of a UNCHR resolution condemning a country's human rights record results in a sizeable reduction in multilateral – and especially World Bank – aid. Hence, there is a strong reason for countries to oppose UN resolutions directed against them. Similarly, if a country is not a target of the present resolution but, due to its human rights practices, could become a target of future UN resolutions, it also has an instrumental motive for voting. By voting against, it may discourage other states from bringing forward future draft resolutions, and ultimately decrease the chances of future public condemnation. For these reasons, we use countries' human rights situation as a proxy variable for the instrumental benefit of voting in our estimations.

There is a number of reasons why countries may not vote according to their instrumental benefit. A prominent reason stems from the fact that voting is public. Governments may judge each others' policies and intentions by their voting behavior. There is ample evidence that G7 governments place some weight on voting behavior in the UN General Assembly. This is particularly true for the US. As has been pointed out by the US Department of State (1985), examining UN votes makes it possible “to make judgments about whose values and views are harmonious with our own, whose policies are consistently opposed to ours, and whose practices fall in between.” A 2000 report from the U.S. State Department states that “a country's behavior at the United Nations is always relevant to its bilateral relationship with the United States, a point the Secretary of State regularly makes in letters of instruction to new U.S. ambassadors” (quoted in Andersen, Harr and Tarp 2006). As a consequence of the G7's monitoring of voting behavior, countries may wish to be observed voting for or against a particular resolution in order to signal a friendly or unfriendly attitude to one another, or because they want to be seen as partisan in particular policy areas. As opposed to the prediction from instrumental voting, countries with bad human rights records may have an incentive to improve their public standing by voting for human rights resolutions. Following Volgy, Frazier and Ingersoll (2003), we label votes that have been modified in response to pressure as “modified preferences.” According to Volgy et al., the fact that surprisingly many states with different cultural, political and geographic background vote the same on a wide range of issues indicates such modified preferences.

A mechanism that has often been addressed in this context is the relation between voting and development aid. It has been argued that the “State Department ... places high value on the employment of foreign aid to ... swing critical votes in international bodies” (Black 1968: 19). Thacker (1999: 54) cites a memo to the director of the Food for Peace Program noting that “at critical moments in the world’s recent history, the U.S. ‘bought’ votes subtly and indirectly to support its stand in the General Assembly.” Bennis (1997) claims that “U.S. influence in (and often control of) the UN comes in the form of coercing the organization to take one or another position, or to reject some other position, or pressuring a country or countries to vote a certain way in the General Assembly.” As a specific example of US pressure on the Assembly, Bennis describes the US effort to overturning the 1975 resolution identifying political Zionism as a form of racism and racial discrimination. According to Bennis, “U.S. diplomats took off, criss-crossing the globe using Gulf War-tested methods of bribing and threatening other nations to win support for the repeal effort.”

The nexus between aid and UN voting has been examined empirically in a number of studies. Alesina and Dollar (2000), Alesina and Weder (2002) as well as Gates and Höffler (2004) all consider UN voting behavior of recipients as political determinants of bilateral aid. Alesina and Weder (2002) show that the United States rewards recipients’ voting compliance by granting more aid; Alesina and Dollar (2000) as well as Gates and Höffler (2004) find the same pattern also for the other G7 countries. The reverse relationship, aid as a determinant of voting, has been investigated by a sizeable literature summarized in Dreher and Sturm (2006). According to their survey, empirical findings have remained inconclusive. Some studies, including Kato (1969), Kegley and Hook (1991), Sexton and Decker (1992) as well as Morey and Lai (2003), conclude that aid is ineffective in influencing the voting behavior of recipients. By contrast, Bernstein and Alpert (1971), Rai (1972, 1980), Wittkopf (1973), Lundborg (1998) and Wang (1999) find the expected positive relation between bilateral aid and voting similarity. According to Rai (1980), there is a stronger coincidence of votes cast by the United States and Latin American countries, compared with votes cast by UN members from Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. Considering votes (by 65 countries in 1984-1993) that were classified by the US State Department as being important, Wang (1999) finds that changes in the level of US aid significantly increase voting coincidence, while the coefficient of the level itself is insignificant. Lundborg (1998) focuses on relative support for the United States and the Soviet Union in 1948-1979. His simultaneous regressions reveal that

(i) both donors employed aid to stimulate international political support, and (ii) aid recipients allocated their support to stimulate aid.

Donors other than the United States have hardly been investigated in this strand of the literature. An early exception is Wittkopf (1973), who covers all member countries of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and the Soviet Bloc for the years 1962 and 1967. His correlation analysis shows, however, that only US aid is significantly associated with voting patterns. Dreher and Sturm (2006) analyze whether G7 donors employ financial assistance provided by the IMF and the World Bank to change the UN voting behavior of developing countries. They use panel data for 188 recipient countries over the period 1970-2002. Applying Extreme Bounds Analysis to test for the robustness of results, they find that countries receiving financial support from the IMF and the World Bank tend to vote more frequently in line with G7 countries. By contrast, bilateral aid by G7 donors is not robustly related to UN voting behavior. Dreher, Thiele and Nunnenkamp (2006) use disaggregated aid data to account for the fact that various forms of aid may differ in their ability to induce political support by recipients. They obtain strong evidence that US general budget support and untied grants buy voting compliance in the Assembly.

In accordance with previous literature, the amount of aid received by a country is included in our empirical analysis as a determinant of voting. In addition, countries less dependent on aid are less likely to be bribed. High income, access to natural resources or military strength are among the factors that decide whether countries can afford to vote according to their own preferences.

In the UNGA, the same actors vote repeatedly over a large number of issues. Votes may be traded between members which gives rise to coalitions or voting blocs stable over time. As an example, coordination at the UN is regarded as part of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (see Luif, 2003). EU member states are called on to adopt common positions – when there is disagreement among EU members, the casting of opposing votes should be avoided. This gives room for trading of votes: members opposing a particular position abstain from the vote to present a common EU position in the Assembly and expect other members to do the same in votes on other areas where consensus is lacking. Even where formal coordination does not take place, countries may form voting coalitions informally if the promise that insincere voting behavior will be rewarded is credible.

A number of papers, such as Newcombe and Allett (1981) and Holcombe and Sobel (1996), have investigated the emergence and stability of voting blocks in the UNGA.

According to Hurwitz (1975), voting cohesion is clearly above average on human rights issues. The differences among EU countries are marginal for these questions (Luif 2003: Graph 2 and Table 5). Previous EU candidates have also quickly adjusted to the EU position (Luif 2003). Clearly, the higher the stability and the smaller the number of dissenters, the more tenuous is the relation between issue interests and voting behavior. Statistically, the fact that voting may be correlated between countries and issues can introduce bias if it is not controlled for. If unobserved factors that are common within a particular voting bloc correlate with variables relating to the country, the impact of the latter on voting behavior may be spurious. We deal with this problem in the next section.

4 The empirical model

In this section, we develop the empirical model for explaining voting behavior in the UNGA. As the dependent variable, we use voting behavior recoded in the way described in the second section and displayed in table 2. The dependent variable can, therefore, take three outcomes: a vote in favor of the protection of human rights, a vote against, and abstention. We exclude non-participation. As table 2 shows, the percentage of non-participations is relatively low. Hence, the potential bias introduced by self-selection into the pool of voters is small. Moreover, self-selection is likely to be exogenous to the particular issue voted on. In almost all cases, non-participations are not absences at particular votes, but relate to an entire session of the UNGA. Hence, it is reasonable to disregard any possible selectivity problems.⁶

Since the outcome variable has an ordered structure, we use the ordered probit model as an estimator. Abstentions are thus regarded as an option in between “Yes” and “No.” This is consistent with the idea that abstentions arise due to indifference between the alternatives voted on. Alternatively, voting “No” and abstaining may be very close substitutes. This would be true if they both signify rejection of a resolution. In the empirical literature on the UNGA, there is substantial disagreement on how to treat abstentions. For instance, Volgy, Frazier, and Ingersoll (2003) and Voeten (2000) take abstentions to be a softer form of voting “No” and merge these alternatives. By contrast, Wittkopf (1973), Sexton and Decker (1992) and Barro and Lee (2005) treat all alternatives as separate, such that two countries are taken as voting

⁶ Boockmann (2006) uses a correction for selectivity in an ordered probit analysis of voting data for ILO committees where selectivity is more of a problem.

together if both vote “Yes,” both vote “No,” both abstain or both do not participate. Russett (1967), Rai (1972), Thacker (1999) and Luif (2003), among others, use cardinal measures of voting, such that, for instance, a vote in favor is assigned the number 1, a vote against is coded as 0, and an abstention as 0.5.

These coding procedures are chosen ad hoc and their empirical validity remains untested. The reason is that the studies mentioned either aggregate across votes or require a dependent variable coded in a particular way, such as a cardinal variable, and subsequent empirical procedures do not allow to nest the coding procedure chosen within a more general framework. By using the ordered probit model, we avoid ad hoc cardinalization and are able to test whether “No” and abstention are different categories by a likelihood ratio test. This consists in testing the restriction that the thresholds between “Yes” and “Abstention” and “Abstention” and “No” can be collapsed, so that a bivariate probit is appropriate.

We estimate models with and without country fixed effects (i.e., including country dummies).⁷ The independent variables can be grouped into several categories. First, we include measures relating to the countries’ human rights situation to proxy for the instrumental interest in the vote. Second, several political variables, such as political freedoms, democracy and interest groups, are included. These variables relate less to the instrumental motive since resolutions typically refer to individual human rights as opposed to political participation rights. Third, aid and resources are the main variables to check whether countries bend or resist to pressure to vote for UNGA resolutions. Fourth, we introduce a peer group variable to capture the dependence of voting across countries. Summary statistics of all independent variables are contained in the Appendix.

As our main measure of human rights, we follow the definition of citizens’ human rights in Cingranelli and Richards (1999). Their Human Rights Dataset (CIRI, Cingranelli and Richards 2006) provides quantitative information on government respect for 13 internationally recognized human rights, on an annual basis and for almost all countries of the world. Cingranelli and Richards focus on actual human rights-related actions of governments, including all government agents such as police and military. Their database draws from two sources, the U.S. Department of State’s Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, and

⁷ Note that the incidental parameters problem is not an issue here, because the number of countries is fixed while the asymptotics is for the number of votes tending to infinity.

from Amnesty International's Amnesty International Report, offering detailed descriptions of human rights practices.

The relevant composite index refers to physical integrity rights – it is the additive of torture, extrajudicial killings, political imprisonments, and disappearance, on a scale from 0-8 (so-called “negative rights”). In particular, the CIRI data refer to extrajudicial killings, people who have disappeared for political reasons, torture, political imprisonment, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, freedom of assembly and association, political participation, worker's rights, women's political rights, women's economic rights, and women's social rights. Each variable is coded on an ordinal scale, ranging between 0-2 and, depending on the variable considered, 0-4, where higher values reflect better ratings in the respective human rights dimension.

The upper line in Figure 1 shows the time path of the unweighted average of the physical integrity index for the OECD countries over the years 1981-2004. The lower line represents the average for developing countries, while the unweighted world average is shown in the middle. The number of countries covered rises from 125 in 1981 to 179 in 2004. The figure shows that the mean of the World index was fairly constant over time at a value of around 5 with, however, a substantial drop around 1990. The average for the OECD countries is also rather constant over time – at a higher level of around 7. Figure 1 also shows that there is some variation in physical integrity for developing countries, with a substantial negative trend. The level of physical integrity peaked in 1981 at 5, fell to a low point of 3.2 in 1990, rose to 4 in 1995, and after declining again until 2000 is slightly below 4 in 2004. To avoid an excess of parameters, we aggregate the 0-8 CIRI scale to a four-point scale in estimation. The implied restrictions were accepted using a Wald test.

As a second measure of human rights practices, we employ the Political Terror Scale (PTS) to capture domestic political terror, including issues such as: imprisonments, tortures, rule of law, security, disappearances and executions. The PTS index was codified by Cornett and Gibney (2003), measuring states' human rights record on a yearly basis. The PTS is based on a 5 point interval scale, with higher values implying greater political terror. One problem with these data is that they do not necessarily relate to states' human rights practices but are also influenced by actions of non-state actors. Figure 2 shows the development of the PTS over time. By comparison with figure 1, we observe some striking differences. For instance, the democratization and ensuing improvement of human rights in Eastern Europe shows in a

huge increase in the CIRI series, but is hardly noticeable in the PTS data. Hence, these two data sources can be used as complementary measures.

Apart from physical integrity rights, participation (empowerment) rights may influence voting on human rights, but for a different reason. Participation rights are less frequently included as an object in UNGA resolutions. They are, therefore, less valuable as proxies for the instrumental motive. However, participation rights may allow groups in society, such as minorities, to articulate political demands and urge government to change their human rights practices. It is well known that more democratic countries are more likely to enter human rights agreements (e.g. Hathaway 2002, Landman 2005).⁸ Since this channel of influence differs from the instrumental motive, we include measures of participation and physical integrity rights into the same specification. Participation rights are measured by another composite indicator proposed in Cingranelli and Richards (1999) and Richards, Gelleny and Sacko (2001). It refers to empowerment rights and comprises the freedom of movements, freedom of speech, workers' rights, political participation, and freedom of religion indicators, ranging from 0-10. The scale is again aggregated to four categories for estimation. An alternative measure is a dummy variable for democracies, taken from the Polity IV measure.

In addition, human rights NGOs and other interest groups may increase pressure on governments to change the human rights situation. Following Neumayer (2005), we use the number of NGOs being represented in a country to measure interest groups pressure. As we are specifically interested in issues related to human rights, we extract the number of NGOs working in this particular area from Union of International Associations (2000).

The development aid variable comprises official development aid per capita of the recipient country and is taken from the World Bank Development Indicators (WDI 2006). We use a composite indicator of national capability that is a measure of power based upon six indicators: military expenditure, military personnel, energy consumption, iron and steel production, urban population, and total population (Singer et al. 1972). According to the analysis in Dreher and Sturm (2006), countries which score high on this composite indicator and thus depend less on foreign relationships vote in a more autonomous manner in the

⁸ However, not all dictatorships act alike. As Vreeland (2006) shows, dictatorships that practice torture are more likely to accede to the UN convention against torture.

UNGA. As a second proxy for a country's ability to resist pressure, we employ its GDP per capita, taken from the Penn World Tables (Summers and Heston, 1991). In addition, we use the number of military conflicts as a determinant of human rights voting. As a consequence of military conflicts, governments may expect to be condemned for bad human rights practices in the future, giving these governments a reason to vote against human rights resolutions.

Finally, several sets of dummy variables are included to control for legal, political, cultural or religious impacts on UN voting which are not captured otherwise. They indicate region, main religious affiliation of the population, legal origin, and OECD and Warsaw Pact membership and are included in the specifications not containing country fixed effects. Some other plausible explanatory variables were tried but not included in the final specifications. The general-to-specific approach and robustness tests employing Extreme Bounds Analysis in Dreher, Gassebner and Siemers (2006) suggest a number of further variables as robust predictors of a country's level of physical integrity rights, such as the age of a country's democracy or its population. Dreher, Gassebner and Siemers (2007) show that the number of terror events significantly reduces the level of human rights in a country. We also included membership in the UN Commission on Human Rights as a further explanatory variable to test for possible links between the UNCHR and the UNGA. These variables, however, were always found to be completely insignificant and, hence, they were excluded from estimation.

A difficult problem is the presence of voting coalitions. This means that voting is not conditionally independent, i.e. the error terms of our regressions are not independently and identically distributed. We correct for this by including a variable indicating voting in a "peer group" of similar countries. Peer group variables have been used in a number of other studies on international organizations, such as the IMF (Simmons 2000) or the ILO (Chau and Kanbur 2002). Peer groups are taken to be countries within the same world region, as defined by the World Bank. The variable is constructed as the proportion of countries voting in favor of human rights (using the same recoding as for the dependent variable) minus the proportion voting against. The peer group variables capture both the mutual dependence of voting due to regional coalitions, as well as the influence of common unobserved factors within the peer group. Their coefficients should, therefore, not be interpreted as a measure of mutual causal influence. As we are interested in the amount of bias that may arise due to the neglect of dependence in voting, we estimate all specifications with and without the peer group variable. There is a potential problem that endogeneity due to unobserved factors may bias not only the estimate of the peer group variable itself, but also of the other coefficients. While we cannot

rule this out, including the peer groups variable still helps to prove (or reject) the sensitivity of the coefficients with respect to the assumption of cross-sectional independence of the error terms.

The data used for estimation consists of the 173 roll-call votes between 1980 and 2002 displayed in table 1. Due to the lack of information on independent variables, there remain only 13,201 observations of the 28,569 voting decisions in the data. In 5,348 cases, this is due to the lack of human rights information – the other losses occur due to missing information in GDP, development aid and other variables. All in all, the loss of observations and, hence, the degree of selectivity is not larger than in comparable cross-country-time-series studies.

5 Estimation results

Table 3 displays estimation results using the CIRI measure of human rights. Table 4 uses the PTS data. In the latter case, the random effects model ran into numerical difficulties and we display pooled estimation results (with standard errors adjusted for repeated observations by country) instead. The random effects specification is preferred to a simple pooled specification but is rejected by a Hausman test. Hence, we will discuss only results from the fixed effects model here. However, the results from both models do not differ much qualitatively and quantitatively – the main effect being higher standard errors in the fixed effects case. The outcome variable is coded such that a vote in favor of human rights takes the lowest and a vote against the highest value. Hence, positive coefficients mean that the independent variable induces countries to take a negative stance towards human rights resolutions.

Columns 1 and 2 of Table 3 contain coefficient estimates for the random and fixed effects models without the peer group variables. The coefficients of the physical integrity and empowerment rights dummies are estimates for the difference in voting behavior relative to a reference category, the countries with most extensive rights. Both random and fixed effect estimations suggest a clear relation between the human rights situation and voting: Governments granting less physical integrity rights are significantly more likely to oppose UNGA human rights resolutions than countries in the category with the highest level of rights (the omitted group). The impact is monotonic and differs significantly between countries in the highest and the two lowest categories; the group of dummies is jointly significant at the one per cent level. Based on the coefficient estimates, marginal effects of the independent

variables on the probability of choosing a particular alternative may be calculated. The effect of being in the worst rather than the best human rights category on the probability of voting for human rights is -13.1 per cent according to the fixed effects model, while the effect of voting against is 10.9 per cent. Thus, the model predicts that if the worst human rights offenders moved to the best human rights category, this would change their voting behavior in one out of eight or nine voting decisions.

Empowerment rights exert a less clear influence on voting decisions, and the marginal effects are far smaller and not monotonic in fixed effects estimation. Countries engaged in two or three military conflicts in the year of voting tend to vote against human rights standards as compared to the reference group. The effect becomes insignificant for countries with even more conflicts. However, the number of countries in this group is small. The effect of the number of human rights interest groups operating in the country has the expected negative sign (more NGOs reduce the propensity to vote against human rights), but becomes insignificant once fixed effects are included. Therefore, we conclude that the random effects estimator of this coefficient is biased due to the correlation between interest groups and country-specific unobservables. The same appears to be true for development aid. Countries' capacity as measured by the Singer et al. (1972) index has a positive impact, which remains significant throughout the different estimations. The interpretation is that countries scoring higher on this index have more leeway in their foreign policies and are less forced to adopt positions shared mainly by Western industrialized democracies. By contrast, richer countries (as measured by real GDP per capita) vote more in favor of human rights. This is likely to be due to (time-) variation in development and wealth not captured by the region and OECD dummies.

A dummy variable indicating years after 1990 shows that voting against human rights has become less frequent in the second half of our observation period. The marginal effects are 14.2 per cent for voting in favour and -11.1 per cent for voting against. In a further specification, we split the data into two time intervals and performed separate estimations. However, little evidence was found for a change in the coefficients of the determinants of voting.⁹

⁹ These results are available on request.

A likelihood ratio test of the binary versus the ordered probit model rejects the former at very high levels of significance. Therefore, we conclude that countries do make a difference between the alternative of voting against and abstaining, and aggregating both choices into one should be avoided.

In the third and fourth columns, we present identical results but with the peer group variable included. The variable is highly significant and results in a huge improvement in the likelihood function. Thus, including this variable represents a massive change in the specification. Nevertheless, many coefficients prove to be stable if compared to the results without peer groups. In the fixed effects specification, the size of the coefficients generally increases and the number of interest groups becomes (marginally) significant. The empowerment rights dummies also increase in magnitude and are now statistically significant. A most notable change, however, affects the impact of physical integrity rights. These variables are now much reduced in magnitude and cease to be statistically significant.

The change for the human rights variable suggests that the effects estimated under the assumption of conditional independence of the errors are biased. The coefficients are all insignificant, and the implied marginal effects are in the range of zero to five per cent. Substantively, this suggests that countries' individual human rights situations do not induce them to support or oppose human rights resolutions. Rather, regional groups of countries with different average levels of human rights are voting together in such a way that regions with better human rights generally adopt pro-human rights voting policies. In other words, while the results do not exclude an impact of human rights on voting, the effect does not take place at the country level. Human rights resolutions are not evaluated by each individual country against the background of its own human rights policies.

Next, we consider alternative measures for physical integrity and democratic participation rights (see Table 4). Using again the fixed effects estimation results as the preferred ones, we observe little changes as compared to Table 3. In particular, the human rights variables, here taken from the PTS data, are jointly significant and indicate the expected direction of the influence in the estimations without peer groups, but become insignificant once peer group voting is included. We also find that the democracy dummy increases in magnitude and significance, similar to the empowerment dummies in Table 3. The similarity of the estimates from Tables 3 and 4 show that the results are not an artefact of the measurement of human rights and democratic political participation and reinforces our confidence in our conclusions.

6 Conclusions

In this paper, we have addressed whether countries' human rights situations influence voting on human rights resolutions at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Our main finding is that individual countries' human rights are not influential for voting. If voting behavior inside a regional peer group of countries is controlled for, human rights variables become insignificant, unlike any other of our control variables. While it first appears that there is a relation between human rights and voting, this is not confirmed by estimations which take the dependence of voting across regions into account. This suggests that countries do not vote against human rights because their own human rights practices may be criticized. Rather, they vote against them because they belong to a particular group of countries with a particular average level of human rights. A human rights offender in a region in which human rights are respected tends to vote in favor of UN human rights resolutions, while a country respecting human rights in a region in which they are violated tends to vote against them.

Substantially, this finding implies that there is limited evidence for instrumental voting at the UNGA. Cohesion within regional groups is clearly important. Nevertheless, there are a number of country-specific determinants of voting. In particular, democratic participation rights matter. Furthermore, wealth, the capacity for conducting an independent foreign policy and (with less robustness) the amount of military conflict and the presence of human rights NGOs all significantly affect voting behavior.

A third conclusion from the paper concerns the nature of the different voting alternatives. There is much disagreement in the literature whether and how choices such as abstention and votes against may be aggregated. Our results show that these alternatives are regarded as different by UNGA members. It clearly emerges that voting against is a stronger form of opposition than abstention, rendering abstention due to indifference a reasonable hypothesis for many of the countries participating in the vote.

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Figure 1: Human rights, CIRI

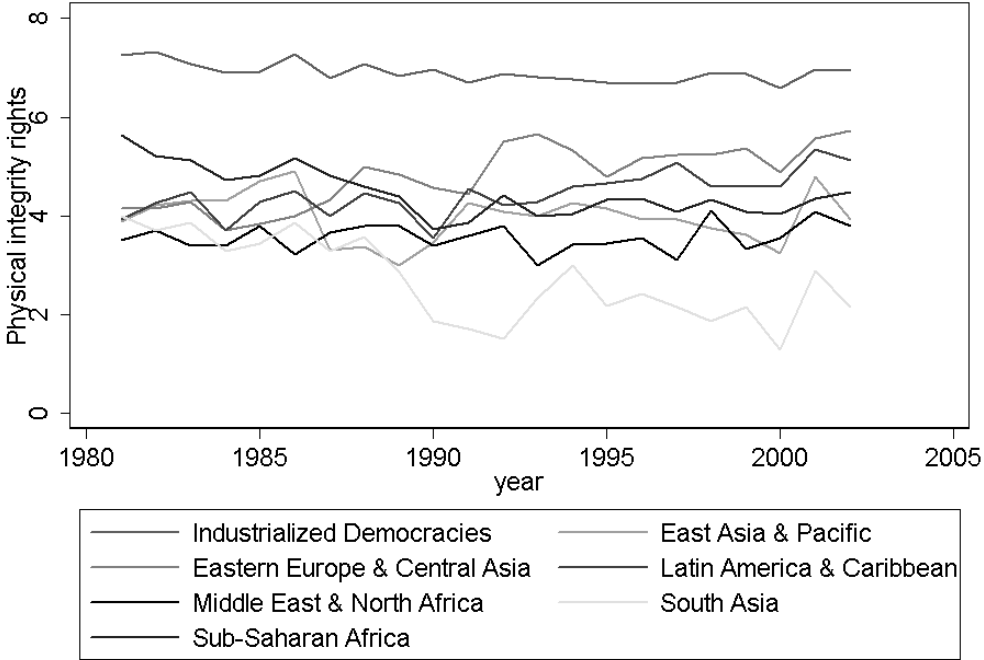


Figure 2: Human rights, PTSS

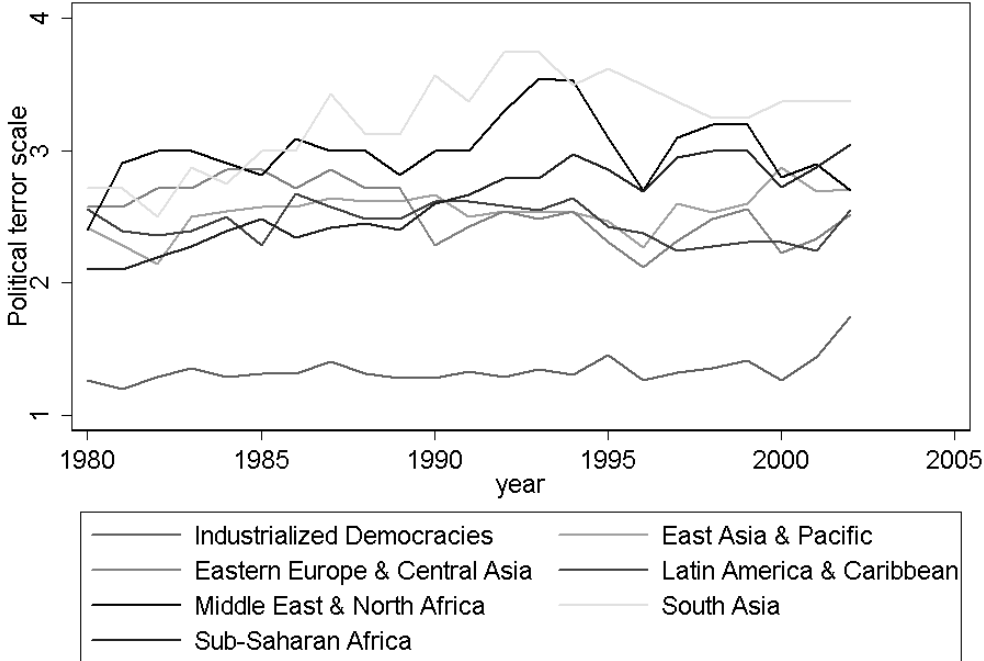


Table 1: Statistics on UNGA voting, 1980-2002

	Number of cases
UNGA resolutions adopted	
1980-1989	2990
1990-2002	4568
Recorded votes on UNGA resolutions	
1980-1989	1405
1990-2002	931
Recorded votes on UNGA human rights resolutions (our definition)	
1980-1989	82
1990-2002	91

Table 2: Statistics for voting behavior on human rights resolutions

	1980-1989	1990-2002
Nominal voting behavior		
Yes	9,135 (76.69)	9,484 (64.06)
Abstention	2,174 (18.25)	3,651 (24.66)
No	603 (5.06)	1,671 (11.29)
Human rights position		
In favor	5,552 (46.61)	7,499 (50.65)
Abstention	1,594 (13.38)	3,122 (21.09)
Against	4,766 (40.01)	4,185 (28.27)
All votes	11,912 (100.00)	14,806 (100.00)
Non-participation	749	1,102

Table 3: Ordered Probit Estimation using CIRI data

	Coefficient	t-Stat.	Coefficient	t-Stat.	Coefficient	t-Stat.	Coefficient	t-Stat.
Physical Integrity Rights								
2	0.193	3.49	0.323	3.46	0.056	0.74	0.128	1.13
3	0.091	1.82	0.200	2.44	-0.020	-0.28	0.051	0.53
4	0.026	0.57	0.074	1.02	-0.026	-0.43	-0.011	-0.16
Empowerment Rights								
2	0.119	2.17	0.083	0.71	0.412	5.26	0.456	3.22
3	0.056	1.13	0.035	0.38	0.317	4.60	0.320	2.73
4	0.055	1.30	0.061	0.88	0.093	1.57	0.103	1.19
Military Conflicts								
1	-0.009	-0.30	-0.019	-0.48	0.022	0.54	-0.009	-0.16
2 or 3	0.096	2.28	0.105	1.71	0.222	3.95	0.215	2.13
more than 3	0.102	1.23	0.036	0.33	0.321	3.11	0.279	1.10
Real GDP p.c.	-0.043	-7.31	-0.077	-2.94	-0.083	-10.14	-0.086	-2.29
Capacity	0.095	6.90	0.440	1.75	0.212	10.46	0.951	2.72
Interest Groups	-0.003	-3.47	0.001	0.17	-0.008	-4.99	-0.015	-1.81
Aid p.c.	-0.007	-3.59	-0.003	-1.30	-0.007	-2.34	-0.001	-0.25
Peergroup Voting					-2.696	-80.82	-2.727	-15.89
Number of obs.		13239		13239		13239		13239
Log Likelihood at start		-12027.131		-12027.131		-12027.131		-12027.131
Log Likelihood final		-11475.113		-11395.632		-5675.293		-5446.141
Fixed or Random Effects		Random		Fixed		Random		Fixed
Test of rho=0		0.001		0.001		0.001		0.001
Test of No = Abst.		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000
Hausman Test		0.005		0.005		0.005		0.138
Joint Sign. of HR		0.000		0.002		0.866		0.514

Note: Period, region, religion, legal tradition, OECD and Warsaw Pact membership dummies included.

Table 4: Ordered Probit Estimation using PTS data

	Coefficient	t-Stat.	Coefficient	t-Stat.	Coefficient	t-Stat.	Coefficient	t-Stat.
Political Terror scales (baseline: 1=lowest)								
2	0.032	0.55	0.059	0.75	0.073	0.87	0.043	0.45
3	0.117	1.72	0.196	2.23	0.080	0.77	0.101	0.86
4	0.195	2.39	0.214	1.95	0.225	1.91	0.141	1.04
5 (highest)	0.138	1.55	0.137	1.12	0.278	1.45	0.187	1.02
Democracy (1=yes)	-0.025	-3.50	-0.041	-3.15	-0.066	-6.10	-0.090	-5.28
Number of Military Conflicts								
1	0.005	0.15	-0.014	-0.36	0.026	0.50	-0.011	-0.21
2 or 3	0.081	1.69	0.078	1.30	0.161	2.18	0.163	1.66
more than 3	0.188	1.87	0.041	0.40	0.409	2.11	0.275	1.06
Real GDP p.c.	-0.033	-4.10	-0.071	-2.78	-0.059	-4.64	-0.091	-2.36
Capacity	0.084	6.05	0.628	3.04	0.157	5.64	1.034	2.56
Interest Groups	-0.004	-3.63	0.004	0.84	-0.008	-3.80	-0.010	-1.18
Aid p.c.	-0.009	-3.93	-0.002	-0.78	-0.017	-4.71	-0.001	-0.22
Peergroup Voting					-2.605	-15.94	-2.705	-14.94
Number of obs.		12403		12403		12403		12403
Log Likelihood at start		-12484.552		-12484.552		-12484.552		-12484.552
Log Likelihood final		-10671.105		-10566.705		-5303.806		-5077.517
Fixed Effects		None		Fixed		None		Fixed
Test of No = Abst.		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000
Joint Sign. of HR		0.045		0.035		0.227		0.791

Note: Period, region, religion, legal tradition, OECD and Warsaw Pact membership dummies included.

Appendix: Summary statistics of the independent variables (estimation sample)

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Region Dummies				
East Asia & Pacific	0.242	0.428	0	1
Eastern Europe & Central Asia	0.235	0.424	0	1
Latin America & Caribbean	0.084	0.277	0	1
Middle East & North Africa	0.054	0.226	0	1
South Asia	0.254	0.435	0	1
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.019	0.137	0	1
Religion Dummies				
Christian	0.517	0.500	0	1
Muslim	0.209	0.406	0	1
Hindu	0.032	0.177	0	1
Buddhist	0.011	0.104	0	1
Legal heritage dummies				
British	0.327	0.469	0	1
German	0.020	0.140	0	1
Scandinavian	0.049	0.217	0	1
Socialist	0.072	0.258	0	1
OECD Member	0.228	0.420	0	1
Warsaw Pact Member	0.019	0.136	0	1
Physical Integrity Rights				
2	0.246	0.430	0	1
3	0.270	0.444	0	1
4	0.287	0.452	0	1
Empowerment Rights				
2	0.238	0.426	0	1
3	0.249	0.433	0	1
4	0.295	0.456	0	1
Political Terror Scales				
2	0.315	0.464	0	1
3	0.247	0.431	0	1
4	0.118	0.322	0	1
5	0.037	0.189	0	1
Democracy	5.273	4.187	0	10
Military Conflicts				
1	0.207	0.405	0	1
2 or 3	0.119	0.324	0	1
more than 3	0.037	0.189	0	1
Real GDP p.c.	7.232	6.955	0.424	41.354
Capacity	0.759	1.955	0.001	15.671
Interest Groups	62.396	26.107	10.000	148.000
Aid p.c.	4.832	8.473	-0.570	95.560
Peergroup Voting	0.166	0.704	-1	1