

Country or Leader?

Political Change and UN General Assembly Voting

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Abstract:

In this project we explore the relationship between leader change and relations between nation-states. Voting in the United Nation's General Assembly (UNGA) is often used as a measure of political proximity between countries. We use UN voting coincidence to examine how changes in leadership affect relations. Specifically, we examine how leadership change affects a country's voting with the United States. Using differences between "key" and "non-key" UN votes to the United States, we explore if political change is driven by preference change or by a changing external position. While political change has little impact on voting on non-key issues (reflecting state preferences) we find that after leadership change, countries are more likely to vote in line with the United States on key UN votes.

Keywords: United Nations General Assembly voting, key votes

JEL codes: F51, F53, D78

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1. Introduction

Recent advances in international relations scholarship have focused on the role of leaders in shaping state behavior. Scholars have built rich theoretical models and detailed empirical tests of both what affects leadership survival and the impact of leadership survival on international relations. These works have provided important insights into how political institutions and leader-specific characteristics affect international relations.

Many of these studies have focused on how domestic politics shape the incentives facing leaders, shifting the pendulum from the international system dominating leader choices to domestic politics having a substantial influence over foreign policy. A number of recent studies have integrated domestic and international factors that shape the policy choices of individual leaders. In this paper we complement this literature by evaluating how both domestic and international factors affect foreign policy. Specifically, we explore how leadership affects international relations by examining voting in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

While the UNGA is generally considered a weak institution, it is a relatively unique environment where we can easily observe the relative policy positions of essentially every nation in the world in the same institutional setting.¹ Debates in the UN General Assembly can be the center of high politics or can also be used for politicians grandstanding, such as Chavez's infamous speech calling President Bush the devil.²

These UN General Assembly activities are more than amusing stories for academic research papers. Recent research by Hillman and Potrafke (2011) shows that voting in the UNGA can facilitate autocratic repression. Numerous scholars have pointed out that countries that are allied with the United States consistently vote with the United States in the General Assembly, while non-allied countries consistently find themselves at odds with the United States during Assembly votes.³ As has been pointed out by the U.S. Department of State (1985), examining UNGA 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 report from the same department in 2000 states "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). A recent paper from the

¹ See Dixon (1981).

² "Chávez Calls Bush 'the Devil' in U.N. Speech." David Stout. *New York Times* Sept 20, 2006.

³ See Kilby (2008) for a critical discussion.

Heritage Foundation argues that “A country’s record in General Assembly non-consensus votes is a means of measuring its support for U.S. diplomatic priorities” and goes on to discuss strategies of influencing UNGA votes (Schaefer and Kim 2008). As we highlight in the next few sections, the United States often conditions foreign aid on UNGA voting.

Our key point is that while many of the patterns in UN voting are quite clear, such as the obvious East-West divide in UN voting during the Cold War, the value of this measure is that a country’s voting in the General Assembly is a comparable, cross-national measure of foreign policy alignment with the United States. In the data section of this paper we illustrate the utility of using this measure.

The UN General Assembly is an ideal environment for exploring how leadership change affects foreign policy positions. UN General Assembly voting consists of high profile votes and low profile votes. Numerous scholars have argued that the United States uses carrots (foreign aid) and sticks (threats) to influence key votes. While classifying key votes may seem subjective, we can utilize a classification from the U.S. government. Since 1983 the U.S. State Department has classified votes as “key” votes for the United States.⁴

Differentiating between these key and non-key votes allows for an identification of the impact of U.S. influence on a country’s foreign policy. One set of votes are not subject to U.S. influence (non-key votes) while another set of votes can lead to repercussions for not voting in line with the United States.⁵ Our expectation is that while non-key votes are sincere statements of preferences,⁶ key-votes are the votes where we would expect countries to deviate from their own preferences in order to obtain or maintain U.S. support. Comparing movements in key and non-key votes allows us to account for changes of foreign policy preferences in both the absence and presence of U.S. pressure.

Our results point to the importance of individual leaders in international relations. We find that nations become more “friendly” with the United States in the wake of leadership change. This result provides evidence of the importance of leadership change, and is consistent with existing models of individual leader punishment strategies by McGillivray and Smith (2004).

⁴ Note that the classification is published in a report after voting took place. However, key votes are defined as “votes on issues which directly affected United States interests and on which the United States lobbied extensively” (e.g., Department of State, 2008). Given extensive lobbying it seems straightforward that it is known to other countries’ representatives in advance which votes will be important to the United States.

⁵ Anderson, Harr and Tarp (2006) argue that the non-key votes in the General Assembly are a measure of a country’s “bliss point,” or a similarity in preferences with other countries.

⁶ Or at the very least, these are policy positions taken by politicians for domestic reasons, absent U.S. political pressure.

Obviously other powerful countries can influence UNGA voting. Yet we focus on the role of the United States both due to the hegemonic role of the United States in the post Cold War period and the clear specification of key UNGA votes by the U.S. State Department. Thus we have a clear research design on how the interests of the hegemonic state can influence the foreign policy positions of other countries. We outline our theory, data, and analysis in the following sections.

2. Leaders and International Relations

While much of international relations scholarship has focused on the nation-state as the level of analysis, there is a resurgent interest in the role of individual leaders in international relations. One rich area of research investigates how international conflict affects the ability of leaders “to survive in power.”⁷ For example, Chiozza and Goemans (2004) challenge the theory that war is inefficient for states.⁸ Chiozza and Goemans find that international conflict can actually increase leadership tenure under some conditions, making conflict a good option for leadership survival.⁹ Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003) provide a number of theoretical models of what affects leadership survival, and test how institutions that affect leadership survival affect policy decisions.¹⁰

Another area of research close to the topic of this paper is on the strategies used by leaders.¹¹ For example, McGillivray and Smith (2004) construct a model of leader-specific punishment, where the leader of a country imposes sanctions on another country.¹² McGillivray and Smith argue that this punishment, while targeting a country, can be imposed

⁷ See for example Gassebner et al. (2008, 2010). According to their results, international terrorism can substantially reduce governments’ probability to stay in power.

⁸ This theory claims that leaders in both states would have been better off with a negotiated agreement rather than a conflict.

⁹ They argue that political institutions mediate the impact of international conflict on leadership survival. Chiozza and Choi (2003) argue that leaders form reputations, and these reputations affect the probability of future conflict. Wolford (2007) builds a model showing that individual leaders have private information on their level of resolve and how these leader-leader interactions affect international conflict.

¹⁰ As one example, Smith and Vreeland (2003) find that IMF programs can help leaders stay in power.

¹¹ In this paper we do not focus on what individual attributes of leaders lead to differing behavior. See Horowitz et al. (2005) for a discussion of how leader age affects international conflict.

¹² McGillivray and Smith (2006) show that leader-specific punishment improves the credibility of threats. See also Guisinger and Smith (2002) for a model of individual reputations and international crisis.

until the leader is removed from power. Once a new leader emerges, sanctions are lifted. This leader-specific punishment gives citizens the incentives to replace leaders with tarnished international reputations, thus providing incentives for leaders to maintain good reputations in order to survive in office.¹³

Finally, a number of scholars have examined how leadership changes affect economic policy and macroeconomic outcomes. Using assassinations as a source of random leadership change, Jones and Olken (2009) find that leadership change can affect democratization and conflict. Jones and Olken (2005) estimate the impact of leader deaths on economic policy and outcomes. Leadership death is associated with shifts in growth rates and monetary policy. Jong-a-Pin and Yu (2010) find that leadership changes due to successful coup d'états increase economic growth rates in the least developed countries but decrease growth in other developing countries. McGillivray and Smith (2004) find that leadership change in authoritarian regimes leads to a major decline in trade while leadership change in democratic regimes has little impact on trade.

One reason for these major policy changes is that individual leaders matter for policy.¹⁴ Capabilities of leaders, such as their level of education, affect policy choices.¹⁵ In the literature on central banking and monetary policy, leader attributes such as education (Göhlmann and Vaubel 2007), career ambitions (Adolph 2004), and cognitive complexity (Thies 2004) have been linked to better performance. This can be expanded beyond technocratic roles to more general political leadership. For example, Besley et al. (2005), using household survey data from India, find that the education of politicians is systematically linked to performance, specifically in limiting individual opportunism. In another example, Dreher et al. (2009) find that the educational and professional background of a head of government matters for the implementation of market-liberalizing reforms. They show that former entrepreneurs are significantly more reform-oriented. Entrepreneurs belonging to a left-wing party are more successful in inducing reforms than a member of a right-wing party with the same previous profession. Former professional scientists also foster reforms, the more so, the longer they stay in office. Similarly, Mikosch and Somogyi (2008) find that

¹³ Even if citizens would prefer for the leader to renege on an international agreement, or violate an international law, there is no way for the citizens to credibly promise to keep the leader in power. Once the leader has tarnished his or her own reputation by renegeing on an agreement, citizens have the incentive to remove that leader.

¹⁴ This can also be due to different leaders representing different groups in society. For example, Pande (2003) shows that the reservation of political mandates for members of disadvantaged castes and tribes in India has increased targeted transfers to these groups.

¹⁵ Other attributes can also affect performance. Washington (2006) finds that congressmen with daughters are substantially more likely to vote in-line with feminist views.

political leaders with education in economics generate significantly lower budget deficits than those with education in other fields. A World Bank (2005: v) report concludes “that more educated politicians are better,” adding to “a growing appreciation among economists that education [of politicians] may be important because of its role in inculcating civic values.”

In this paper we explain how leaders alter relations between states, focusing on how U.S. influence affects a country’s foreign policy position and examining voting behavior in the United Nations General Assembly. UNGA voting is often utilized as a measure for a country’s proximity to the United States. Countries voting consistently with the United States in the General Assembly are considered strong allies, while countries voting against the United States are adversaries. In the next section we discuss using UNGA voting as a measure of political proximity, yet it is important to note that numerous influential studies have used UNGA voting before.

A number of scholars have examined the costs and benefits of voting in line with the United States in the General Assembly. Studies find that foreign aid flows influence UNGA voting (Kato 1969; Kegley and Hook 1991; Sexton and Decker 1992; Dreher, Nunnenkamp and Thiele 2008), where higher allocations of U.S. foreign aid lead to voting in line with the United States in the General Assembly.¹⁶ Another literature has explored how political relationships affect support by international organizations. Thacker (1999) was the first to test the hypothesis that conclusion of International Monetary Fund (IMF) programs depends on countries’ voting behavior in the UN General Assembly. He employs two variables – one indicating a country’s political agreement with the United States, the other reflecting movement in political alignment. According to his results for the period 1985-94, political proximity has no statistically significant impact when serial correlation is taken into account. However, a movement toward the United States position significantly increases the probability of receiving an IMF program. The results also show that the impact of a movement towards the United States on the probability of obtaining IMF programs does not depend on the initial position. Other scholars have found that UN General Assembly voting is a significant predictor of IMF support (Oatley and Yackee 2004; Stone 2004; Barro and Lee 2005; Dreher and Jensen 2007) and Asian Development Bank as well as World Bank funds (Andersen, Hansen and Markussen 2006, Kilby 2006, 2009, 2010).

¹⁶ For broader contributions on foreign aid and policy concessions see Bueno de Mesquita and Smith (2007, 2009). Note that another set of papers finds no relationship between UN Voting and aid (Bernstein and Alpert 1971; Rai 1972; Wittkopf 1973; Lundborg 1998; and Wang 1999).

3. Theory: Leadership Change and UNGA Voting

Building on the work of McGillivray and Smith (2004), our theoretical argument is that political leaders that have tarnished reputations (vote against the U.S. in the UNGA) with the United States are likely to be removed from power and replaced with leaders who are more likely to vote in line with the United States. While these leaders may eventually “defect” and vote against the United States, they also risk being removed from power and replaced with new leaders with untarnished reputations. We outline this logic below.

Our theory focuses on the incentives of a political leader to vote in line with the United States. The incentives to vote on specific UNGA votes are subject to changing domestic political conditions. For example, new policies can be enacted or old policies reversed through changing preferences of society on outcomes (for example, preferences on carbon emissions) or on the appropriate policies to achieve specific outcomes (how trade affects economic growth). Exogenous shocks, such as global financial crises, can lead to major reforms of regulatory policy. Partisan realignments can dramatically change the positions of legislators or how party effects shape policy. Decades of scholarship in political science have not only taken preferences seriously, but also the way institutions translate these preferences into policy.

Our project makes no attempt to address this vast literature on the domestic sources of policy change. We take policy change as a normal fact of political life. Our goal is to explore how international relations, specifically policies of primary importance to powerful states, change (or fail to change) with leadership change. We argue that this research question also provides important insights into the international constraints facing political leaders and the broad relationship between domestic and international policy.¹⁷

Our theory takes these constraints seriously by focusing on both the incentives of individual leaders and the interests of the most powerful actor in the international system, the United States. We argue that the United States actively influences the foreign policies of countries in key issue areas. The literature reviewed in the previous section clearly shows that a powerful state, such as the United States, can influence a government’s foreign policy position through bilateral foreign aid, or through the allocation of capital and conditions at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Yet states are faced with numerous policy choices, some of which conflict with the policy preferences of the United States. For example, despite offers of major flows of foreign aid and potential IMF financing, in 2003 the Turkish legislature voted down a bill allowing

¹⁷ See Gilpin (1981).

U.S. troops to use Turkey as a staging group for military operations in Iraq. This rejection wasn't generated by an opposition party, but by leaders within the ruling party (Grigoriadis 2010).

More generally, the incentives to enact policies that are against the interests of the United States can come from a number of sources – for our purposes we simply assume that states are subject to random shocks. These random shocks sometimes lead governments to enact policies against the interests of the United States. Given these random shocks it is difficult to identify the exact relationship between U.S. influence and a country's foreign policy position. Yet, we focus on the role of leadership turnover in allowing us to identify leader's incentives to support the United States. As outlined in the previous section, McGillivray and Smith (2004, 2008) argue that individual leaders develop reputations, where the United States (or other countries) can play leader-specific punishment strategies. Their theory posits that the United States will play a cooperative strategy with a leader until the leader defects. After defection, the United States will punish the leader until the leader is removed from power.

The work of McGillivray and Smith specifically focuses on the incentives of citizens to replace leaders with tarnished international reputation. Leaders can choose to defect from agreements, renege on contracts, or cast votes in the UNGA against the interests of powerful actors. McGillivray and Smith argue that the country can enact a strategy of punishing a reneging country until this leader is removed from office. Thus leaders will be wary of harming their reputations and those that harm their reputations are more likely to be removed from power.

The main insight from a leader-specific framework is that leaders who do not vote in line with the United States receive lower levels of aid and less favorable treatment in the international financial institutions, affecting the domestic economy. According to McGillivray and Smith (2004, 2008) the United States plays a leader-specific punishment strategy, where the country is punished until the leader is removed from office. While the mechanisms for removing leaders from office vary dramatically across countries and over time, citizens wanting new foreign aid have the incentive to replace leaders that have voted against the United States in the UNGA.

While McGillivray and Smith (2008) examine the determinants of leader survival, few works have examined the behavior of new leaders after leader removal. One observable implication of this theory, one that to the best of our knowledge has remained untested, is that the leaders with tarnished reputation should be replaced by leaders more closely aligned with

the United States. The logic is as follows. Leaders that are removed from office are likely to have voted against U.S. interests. Citizens have the incentive to select new leaders that will repair this tarnished reputation, and the leaders have the incentives to protect their own reputation to survive in office.

The main implication is with endogenous leadership change, existing leaders with poor reputations are more likely to be removed from power and replaced with new leaders with untarnished reputations. In the context of UNGA voting, we provide the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: New leaders will vote in line with the United States on key votes in the UN General Assembly more often than the leaders they replace.

We note that this cooperation with the United States should only be evident in the policies that are important for the United States. New leaders may swing to the right or to the left. They may enact in sweeping economic liberalization, or a rollback of neo-liberal policies. They may even vote on UN General Assembly measures that are consistent with the views of the new government, and not that of the previous administration. Yet on “key” UN General Assembly votes, votes important to the United States, new leaders have strong incentives to vote with the United States. Yet, we have no clear prediction on the direction of non-key votes and how they will be related to the preferred positions of the United States. As argued by Anderson, Harr and Tarp (2006), voting on non-key UNGA proposals is a statement of country preferences that are not influenced by the United States.

Hypothesis 2: Leadership change will not systematically change non-key UNGA voting coincidence with the United States.

A final implication of our theory relates to endogenous versus exogenous leadership change. Our theory predicts systematic patterns of UNGA voting for endogenous leadership selection based on the replacement of leaders with tarnished reputations with leaders with untarnished reputations. But, if leaders are replaced exogenously there should be no systematic impact on UNGA voting. For example, leaders that die in office from natural causes are not being removed because of tarnished reputations, and thus their replacements should have no better (or worse) record of voting in line with the United States. This leads to our final hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: Exogenous leader change will have no impact on voting in the UN General Assembly.

4. Data

In this paper we explore how leadership change affects voting in the United Nations General Assembly. In analyzing this question, we face several problems. First, we need to establish how to measure voting coincidence in the UNGA. There are several possibilities. Thacker (1999), among others, codes votes in agreement with the United States as 1, votes in disagreement as 0, and abstentions or absences as 0.5.¹⁸ Wittkopf (1973), Sexton and Decker (1992) and Barro and Lee (2005) employed the fraction of times a country votes the same as the country of interest (either both voting yes, both voting no, both voting abstentions, or both being absent); Kegley and Hook (1991) simply discarded abstentions or absences.¹⁹ In any case, the resulting numbers are then divided by the total number of votes in each year. We concentrate on the method proposed by Thacker (1999) for both theoretical and statistical reasons. The difference between the three approaches lies in the way they weigh abstentions or absences, giving it a weight of 0, 0.5 or 1. Of course, any of these weights is arbitrary, but we prefer not opting for a corner solution and hence stick to the definition of Thacker (1999) in which a weight of 0.5 is used. Furthermore, from a statistical point of view this produces a dependent variable with a nicely bell-shaped distribution (as opposed to the other two definitions where the tails of the distribution do become rather fat). Hence, it is less likely that our results will be driven by extreme observations.

What do patterns of UN voting look like across countries and over time? Rai (1972) and, more recently, Dreher and Sturm (2010) report of generally low coincidence between U.S. and African as well as Middle Eastern or South Asian votes; coincidence between U.S. and Latin American votes is much higher. Russett (1967), employing factor analysis, shows that regional clusters are most important for voting alignment. According to Kim and Russett

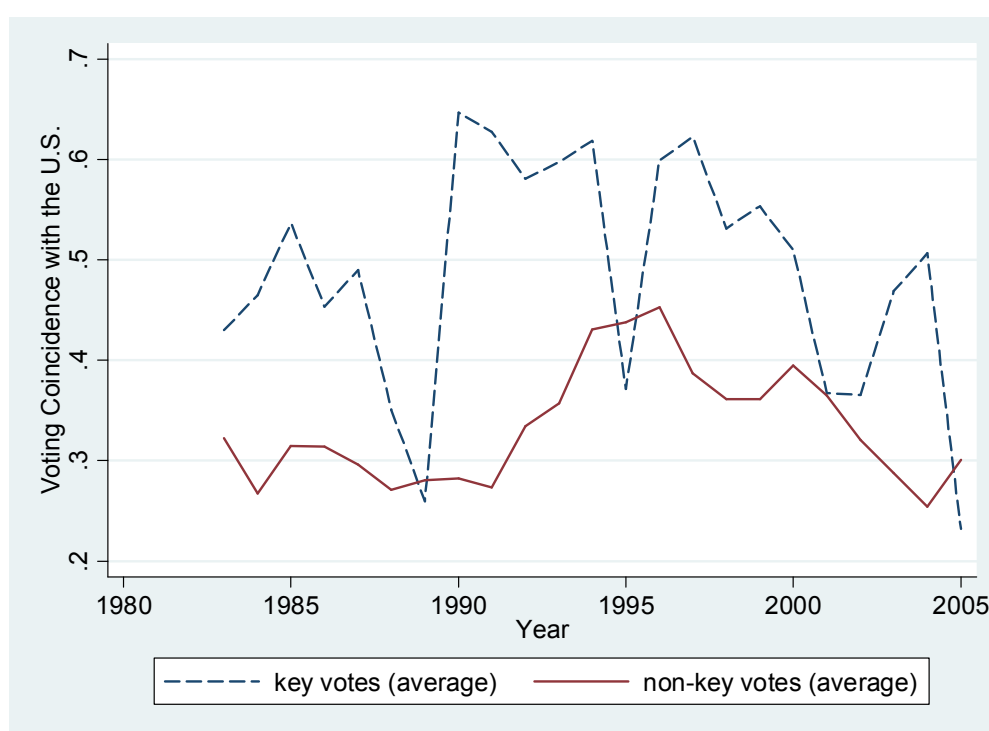
¹⁸ Similarly, Gartzke and Jo (2002) and Morey and Lai (2003) code voting coincidence between -1 and 1, with abstentions being in between compliance and non-compliance. Russett (1967) and Rai (1972) code each country either 2 (yes), 1 (abstain or absent), or 0 (negative). Focusing on abstentions might be important as donors might bribe governments not only to comply, but also to avoid non-compliance (Zimmermann 1993, Palmer et al. 2002).

¹⁹ Yet an alternative method has been suggested by Brams and O'Leary (1970) and employed, e.g., by Wittkopf (1973). They subtract the expected agreement from actual agreement and divide by the former. Expected agreement is based on the actual distribution of votes on each General Assembly roll call vote.

(1996), today the North-South divide explains a huge share of variation in voting behavior, while it had been the East-West divide during the Cold War.²⁰

These regional variations mask both important differences across countries, and more importantly, fail to capture the stability or change in UN voting over time.²¹ In the next set of figures we present data on UN voting for key and non-key votes and compare this to the average votes of the n-1 other countries. What is especially striking is that although our measure of voting with the United States varies within a country over time, most countries stay either consistently above or below the world average.

Figure 1: Average Voting with the U.S. on Key and Non-Key UNGA Votes



In Figure 1 we present world averages on voting with the United States on key votes and non-key votes. While there is considerable volatility over time, it is interesting to note that countries are on average more likely to vote with the United States on key votes than non-key votes. This could be evidence for coercion or simply that issues important to the United States are more likely to have shared positions across countries.

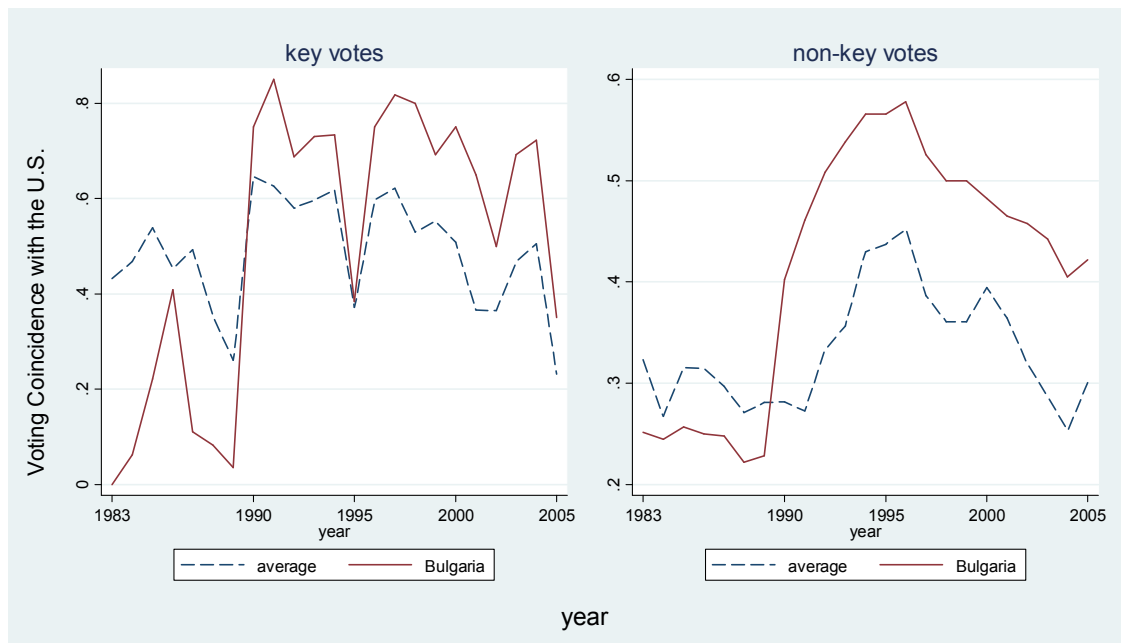
In the next set of figures we present a few representative countries to illustrate the usefulness of examining changes in UN voting. The first set of figures presents a

²⁰ To the contrary, Voeten (2000) finds that the position of countries still corresponds more closely to their Cold War East-West dimension than to the North-South dimension.

²¹ Voeten (2000) finds that post-1996 the United States became increasingly isolated in the UNGA over time.

representative former Warsaw Pact country, Bulgaria. The left panel of figure 2 presents the world average of UNGA voting coincidence on key votes with the United States (excluding Bulgaria), and Bulgaria's coincidence with the United States. As one might expect, Bulgaria consistently voted against the United States on key votes prior to the end of the Cold War, and then flipped into one of the strongest supporters of U.S. interests in the UNGA. This is the typical pattern for many of the countries in Eastern and Central Europe, while the countries of the Former Soviet Union display a much more complex pattern.

Figure 2: UNGA Voting with the U.S., Bulgaria vs. World Average

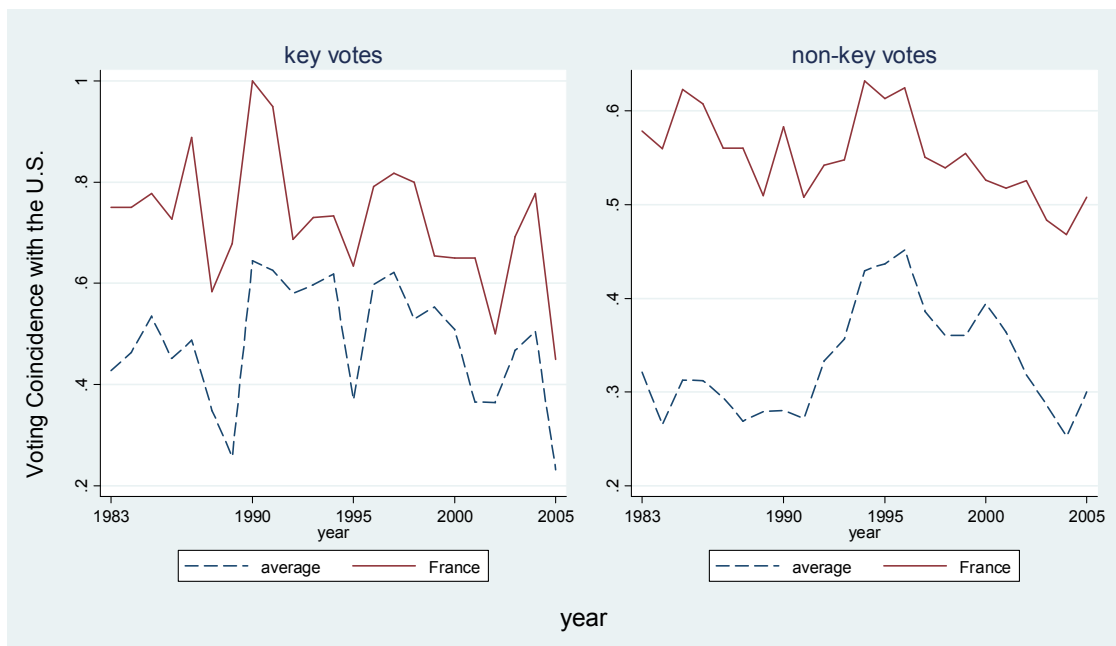


The right panel of Figure 2 presents a similar graph focusing on non-key votes. While Bulgaria has shifted in both key and non-key votes, it is clear that the difference between these positions has changed markedly since the Cold War. The main point is that the incentives for Bulgaria to vote with the United States since the Cold War have increased dramatically, but the shifting pattern of non-key votes suggests that much of this voting coincidence could be due to changing domestic circumstances, not necessarily pressure from the United States. The votes that are of low salience to the United States (non-key votes) exhibit a similar pattern to the key votes.

The countries that are less susceptible to U.S. influence, yet share many of the same preferences are the countries in Western Europe. One clear example is that of France. In

Figure 3 we present France’s UN voting pattern on key and, respectively, non-key issues relative to the world average.

Figure 3: UNGA Voting with the U.S., France vs. World Average

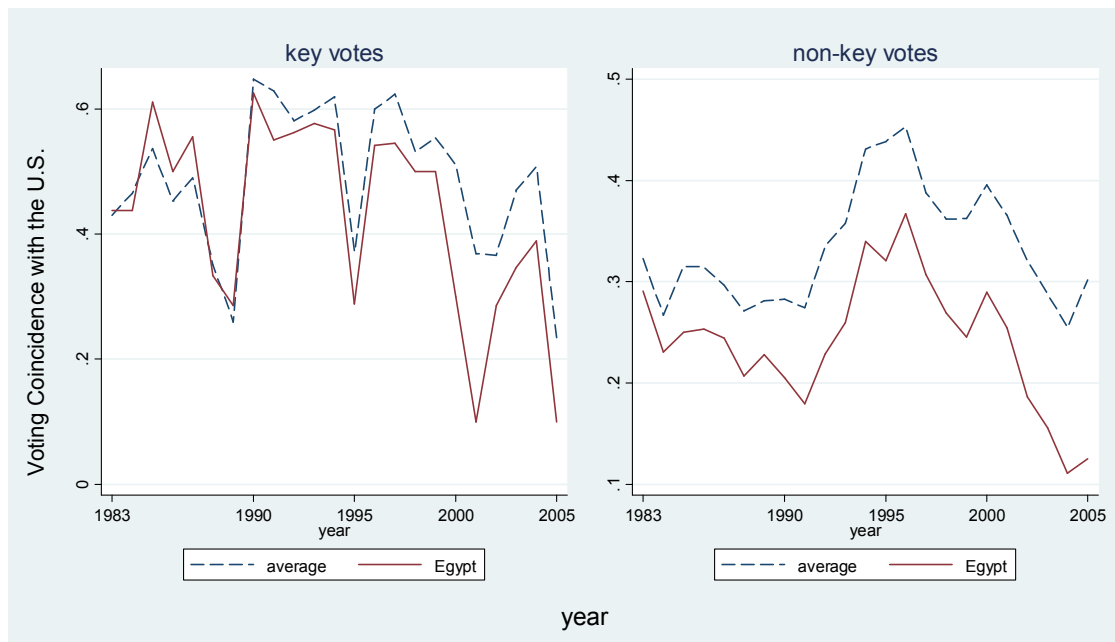


As evidenced in Figure 3, while voting coincidence with the United States has declined over time, France remains a close ally of the United States, consistently voting with the United States on key issues more than the world average. France’s position on non-key issues is also generally more supportive than the world average, although the levels of support are below that of voting on key issues. The main point is that France seems to share similar foreign policy preferences as the United States, as measured by key and non-key votes. Despite some high profile disagreements between the two countries, the United States and France are very likely to vote together in the UNGA.

In the final figure we present Egypt’s UNGA voting (Figure 4). Egypt is an interesting case because it has received significant amounts of U.S. foreign aid in exchange for foreign policy concessions, specifically relating to Israel, since the Camp David Accord. While Egypt is only slightly below the world average on UNGA voting coincidence with the United States on key votes, voting clearly differs from the United States on non-key votes. Thus, while the foreign policy preferences of Egypt, as measured by non-key votes, are very different from the United States, on key-votes (and those associated with lobbying and

pressure from the United States) Egypt votes with the United States. This is an illustrative example of how U.S. pressure can affect a country's foreign policy position.

Figure 4: UNGA Voting with the U.S., Egypt vs. World Average



These graphs illustrate how the UNGA tracks foreign policy positions of countries. The next section tests our hypotheses. Specifically, we address whether leadership change affects UNGA voting.

5. Analysis

One of the main challenges in empirical analysis when there is no established benchmark is coming up with a reliable model. We therefore opted to follow the robustness analysis in Dreher and Sturm (2010). Dreher and Sturm test for the influence of a substantial number of variables broadly related to four dimensions of influence on UNGA voting: (1) Cultural and political proximity between donor and recipient country,²² (2) dependence on foreign

²² Potrafke (2009a) provides an interesting analysis of the role of a government's ideology in UNGA voting. According to his results, left-wing governments systematically vote less in line with the United States. This effect is stronger when the U.S. President is Republican. The ideology index employed there (taken from Potrafke (2009b) cannot be used in our analysis as it is only available for OECD countries. The same holds for the index developed in Bjørnskov (2008).

support,²³ (3) trade flows and foreign direct investment (FDI), and (4) foreign aid. As they argue, cultural and political proximity increases the likelihood of voting coincidence, and countries depending on foreign support should be more likely to vote in line with the G7 countries. Trade flows and FDI might either increase or decrease the probability that a country votes in line with its partner country, as these flows might represent economic links, on the positive side, or be perceived as foreign intrusion, on the negative side. Bilateral foreign aid, or changes in aid, arguably increases the probability that a recipient country votes in line with the donor.

Dreher and Sturm (2010) test for the robustness of these variables employing various methods, including Extreme Bounds Analysis. According to their results, UN General Assembly voting in line with the United States is higher when the respective country's government has the same political color (i.e., both left or both right), at the one percent level of significance. Voting coincidence decreases with corruption, national capability, GDP per capita, GDP growth and higher imports from the United States to the respective country (in percent of recipient GDP), all at the one percent level of significance. We do omit the indicator of national capability, as it reduces our sample by more than two thirds.²⁴ All variables used here together with their sources are listed in Appendix A. Appendix B reports descriptive statistics.

The resulting regression is a pooled time-series cross-section analysis (with yearly data). The analysis covers the time period 1983-2004 and extends to a maximum of 132 countries, limited by the availability of data on key votes. Since some of the data are not available for all countries or years, the panel data are unbalanced and the number of observations depends on the choice of explanatory variables. The Hausman test clearly rejects a random effects specification, thus we include a dummy for each country. We estimated all models with standard errors clustered by country.

²³ Specifically, Dreher and Sturm test for the impact of total aid received (in percent of GNI), the change in total aid received, a composite indicator of national capability, total external debt (in percent of GDP), the change in total external debt, a variable measuring ethnic tensions, the rate of inflation, current account balance (in percent of GDP), overall budget balance (in percent of GDP), GDP per capita, and real GDP growth.

²⁴ We take GDP per capita and GDP growth from the World Bank's World Development Indicators (2007); political leaning data is from Beck et al. (2001); the index of corruption is provided by the International Country Risk Guide (ICRG); U.S. imports are derived from the OECD's Statistical Compendium. The composite indicator of national capability employed in Dreher and Sturm (2010) is a measure of power based upon six indicators (based on Singer et al. 1972): Military expenditure, military personnel, energy consumption, iron and steel production, urban population, and total population. Note that the indicator is not significant at conventional levels when included to our regressions.

Insert Table 1

Column 1 of Table 1 replicates the results of Dreher and Sturm (2010). As can be seen, UN General Assembly voting with the United States rises with the absence of corruption and lower GDP per capita, which is in line with Dreher and Sturm. However, the government's political color, GDP growth and U.S. imports have no significant effect on General Assembly voting. Since Dreher and Sturm focus on all votes rather than key votes, the difference in results is not surprising.

When including a dummy for leadership change in this regression,²⁵ positive and negative effects following those changes might cancel themselves out, leading to an insignificant effect. Even if one effect dominates, and the coefficient thus turns significant, the results can only give us the net effect. In what follows, we thus test our hypotheses focusing on the net effect of leader changes. Column 2 of Table 1 therefore adds a dummy variable for leadership change to the basic regression. Our findings suggest that leadership change is indeed associated with an increase in voting with the United States on key UN votes, at the five percent level. Quantitatively, the coefficient implies that a leader change increases voting coincidence with the United States by almost 0.02. The mean of voting with the United States is 0.5, so the effect amounts to a four percent increase in voting coincidence. This result is consistent with Hypothesis 1.

Column 3 tests for the robustness of this result to the exclusion of variables that are not significant at the ten percent level at least. While the number of observations increases by more than 200, the coefficient of leadership changes is still significant at the five percent level.

In Figure 2 we showed the changing pattern in Bulgaria's UNGA voting after the Cold War. In column 4 we add a dummy for the Cold War years and interact it with the leader change dummy to test if the change in the structure of the international system following the

²⁵ As Keefer (2002: 6) points out, "some decision rule is needed to deal with partial years." The Database of Political Institutions uses the following to count the number of years the leader has been in office: "years are counted in which the executive was in power as of January 1 or was elected but hadn't taken office as of January 1. Thus, a "1" is recorded in the year following his/her election. Example: Bush was president of the United States as of January 1, 1992, so although he lost the election in November 1992, this variable is recorded as a 4 in 1992, marking Bush's fourth year in office. Although Clinton was elected in November of 1992 and took office in January 1993, since he was president-elect on January 1 1993, this variable is recorded as "1" for 1993." We take values of one to be the years of leader changes.

Cold War affects the result. As can be seen, the impact of leader changes does not change with the end of the Cold War, at conventional levels of significance.

In column 5 we take account of potential simultaneity and employ the system GMM estimator as suggested by Arellano and Bond (1991), Arellano and Bover (1995) and Blundell and Bond (1998). The dynamic panel GMM estimator exploits an assumption about the initial conditions to obtain moment conditions that remain informative even for persistent data. Results are based on the two-step estimator implemented by Roodman (2005) in Stata, including Windmeijer's (2005) finite sample correction. We follow Roodman (2006) and include time dummies in the regression. In order to minimize the number of instruments we collapse the matrix of instruments as suggested by Roodman (2006).²⁶

Column 5 shows that the choice of estimator does not affect our results.²⁷ The coefficient of leader changes becomes significant even at the one percent level, while the quantitative effect is very similar compared to column 3. Surprisingly, voting coincidence becomes more, rather than less likely with higher per capita GDP, according to the GMM specification.

Insert Table 2

These empirical results are consistent with Hypothesis 1, claiming that new leaders will on average be more likely to vote in line with the United States on key votes. What accounts for this pattern in voting? We argue that the United States provides incentives for voting in line with U.S. interests, yet it is plausible that our empirical result is spurious, where domestic policy change is selecting leaders who have policy preferences in line with the United States. For this alternative theory to hold, we should observe a similar shift in the voting on non-key UNGA voting. Yet, we note that in Hypothesis 2, our theory predicts no systematic pattern in non-key UNGA votes.

In Table 2 we present the same set of regressions, yet this time we focus only on non-key votes. As outlined in the introduction, we expect UNGA voting on non-key votes to

²⁶ It is necessary to limit the number of instruments because the power of the Sargan-Hansen test is low when many instruments are used (see Bowsher 2002).

²⁷ We apply the Sargan-Hansen test on the validity of the instruments used (amounting to a test for the exogeneity of the covariates) and the Arellano-Bond test of second order autocorrelation, which must be absent from the data in order for the estimator to be consistent. While the Sargan-Hansen test clearly does not reject the specification at conventional levels of significance, the Arellano-Bond test does not reject the absence of second-order autocorrelation. We therefore replicate the regression including the lagged dependent variable. While the test accepts this specification, the impact of leader changes remains.

reflect domestic policy preferences. While these might arguably shift with leadership changes, such shifts are not related to the punishment mechanism outlined above. Column 2 addresses this question by adding the dummy for leadership changes to the base model of column 1.

As is evident from the table, while our models are good predictors of key votes, leadership change has no systematic impact on voting with the United States on non-key votes. This is consistent with Hypothesis 2. The table also shows that this holds according to any of the specifications replicating Table 1 above.

Insert Table 3

In our third set of regressions we examine the robustness of leadership change on UN voting on key-votes, and combine some of the elements of Tables 1 and 2, focusing on the consistent GMM estimator. In column 1 we include the average UN voting for the n-1 other countries. We exclude the dummies for years given that they are highly collinear with average UN voting.²⁸ While the average level of voting for the United States influences an individual country's UN voting at the one percent level of significance, leadership changes still increase a country's voting with the United States. Note, however, that the Sargan-Hansen test is borderline. When we replicate the regression including the lagged dependent variable, the results remain unchanged and the test accepts the specification.

In column 2 we include a country's voting on non-key issues as an independent variable to proxy for a country's preferences. The dummy for leadership change is significant at the five percent level according to these estimates. Thus, while voting on non-key UNGA votes is a significant predictor of voting on key votes, leadership change is still associated with a changing pattern of key votes. Note however that the Sargan-Hansen test is again borderline.

In columns 3 and 4 we test for changes in the partisanship and the level of democracy. Partisanship is coded from the World Bank's Database of Political Institutions where changes from right or center executives to leftist executives is coded as a 1, changes from left government to right or center government as -1, and all other changes (or lack of leader changes) as zero. Changes in democracy are measured with the one-year change in the Polity

²⁸ Note that the results are unchanged however when we include the year dummies.

regime score.²⁹ Liberal scholarship focuses on the role of domestic politics on international relations. One specific contribution is the democratic peace literature, which finds that the form of government, specifically democracy, can lead to higher levels of cooperation across governments through the absence of war or increased commerce.³⁰ Whether this is due to democracies having similar interests, or institutional features that affect state behavior, we hypothesize that democratic regimes are more likely to vote in line with the United States.

The results show, however, that neither leftist regimes nor changes in democracy are significantly associated with voting with the United States on key UN votes. In both cases, our overall measure of leadership change is again associated with increases in voting with the United States.

The final column of Table 3 replaces the dummy for leadership with the number of years a country's chief executive has been in power in a particular year, again taken from the World Bank's Database of Political Institutions. As we argue above, we expect new leaders with untarnished reputations will replace leaders with tarnished reputations. We expect that leaders that have already reneged (voted against the United States) have little incentive to vote in line with the United States, while new leaders have the incentive to vote in line with the United States. Thus while some "old" leaders may continue to cooperate with the United States, all new leaders have the incentive to protect their reputation. Our results show that UNGA voting coincidence decreases with the number of years a politician stays in office, at the one percent level of significance. For each additional year in office voting coincidence with the United States decreases by 0.005 (i.e., by one percent).

These empirical results point to not only the importance of leadership change in affecting UNGA voting, they also consistently find a positive relationship. New leaders are associated with an increase in voting in line with the United States on key votes. The fact that we do not observe a similar pattern in the non-key votes leads us to reject the idea that leadership change simply reflects policy change.

In the theory section we outlined our hypothesis, related to the work of McGillivray and Smith (2004, 2008) where individual leaders that consistently vote against the United States are replaced with new leaders. While a test of leadership survival is out of the scope of this paper, one direct test of this is that leaders that vote against the United States on key

²⁹ Alternatively, we coded a dummy variable for those countries that became a democracy according to a change in their Polity score from below seven to greater or equal than seven. Our results are unchanged.

³⁰ See Oneal and Russett (1999) for an examination of democracy and peace. See Gartzke (2000) for an overview and an alternative explanation for the democratic peace that focuses on shared preferences.

UNGA votes are more likely to be removed from office than other leaders. We leave this to future research.

Insert Table 4

Thus far our empirical analysis has shown that leadership change leads to increasing coincidence of voting with the United States in the UNGA. We interpret this as evidence for how endogenous leadership change causes leaders with lower levels of UNGA voting coincidence with the United States to be replaced with leaders that vote in line with the United States in the UNGA. One possible alternative theory also consistent with this result is that there is some other factor that leads “new” leaders to vote in line with the United States. Our final empirical test examines the impact of exogenous leadership changes on UNGA voting by exploiting data on accidental leadership deaths by Jones and Olken (2005).

As predicted by Hypothesis 3, accidental leadership deaths should be associated with a different pattern of UN Voting than endogenous leader selection. Leaders that are replaced are more likely to have tarnished reputations and they are replaced with leaders that have the incentive to vote in line with the United States. Exogenous changes in leaders, in our case through death, should have no systematic impact on UNGA voting.

The results are shown in Table 4, replicating the regressions shown in Table 1 above. Using accidental leader deaths as the variable for “leader change” we find no statistically significant relationship between exogenous leader change and UNGA voting. This provides further evidence for how endogenous leadership change affects relations with the United States.

6. Conclusion

In this paper we examine the relationship between leadership changes and voting in the UN General Assembly. Our empirical analysis focuses on how voting with the United States on key issues is influenced by changes in individual leaders. We find that a host of factors influence UN voting, yet we find that new leaders vote more consistently with the United States than existing leaders. These findings have important implications for how individual leaders affect relations between states.

Our results build on recent work on the role of leaders in international relations. Individual leaders, attempting to survive in office, have incentives to cater to domestic interest groups and to protect their own international reputations. While all leaders share these incentives, we argue that leadership change is likely to lead to closer alignment with the

United States. We use voting in the United Nations General Assembly on key votes as a proxy for this relationship, but we believe that these are generalizable to other arenas.

In future work we will address the mechanisms that influence UNGA voting, most prominently foreign aid. While the existing literature has found a strong relationship between UNGA voting coincidence with the United States and U.S. foreign aid, we believe that by bringing in leader-specific theories and empirics we can contribute to this literature. Specifically, we expect that U.S. foreign aid allocations will be conditioned on the reputation of the individual leaders. Thus leaders that deviate from the United States in the UNGA will be punished by the United States until the leader is replaced. New leaders then will receive generous allocations of foreign aid until the leader deviates from the United States UNGA position. Thus rather than U.S. aid being conditional on a *country's* voting record in the UNGA, we believe that U.S. aid should be conditional on a *leader's* voting record in the UNGA. We leave this for future research.

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Table 1: Leadership Change and UN Key Votes, 1984-2005

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Political color inline	0.012 (1.16)	0.012 (1.17)			
Absence of Corruption	0.013 (4.00)***	0.013 (4.01)***	0.018 (5.37)***	0.019 (5.68)***	-0.009 (1.51)
GDP p.c. (t-1)	-0.051 (1.81)*	-0.050 (1.74)*	-0.106 (3.08)***	-0.151 (2.88)***	0.067 (2.47)**
GDP growth	-0.001 (0.68)	-0.000 (0.62)			
U.S. imports	0.120 (0.88)	0.118 (0.87)			
Leader Change		0.019 (2.38)**	0.017 (2.09)**	0.034 (1.88)*	0.018 (3.51)***
Post Cold War dummy				0.058 (3.53)***	
Leader Change*Post Cold War dummy				-0.025 (1.22)	
Method	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	GMM
Number of countries	126	126	131	131	131
Number of observations	2293	2293	2548	2548	2548
R-squared	0.02	0.03	0.05	0.08	
Sargan-Hansen Test (p-level)					0.26

Note: Columns (1)-(4) include dummies for each country; column (5) includes dummies for each year; robust (clustered) t statistics in parentheses; * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Table 2: Leadership Change and UN Non-Key Votes, 1984-2005

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Political color inline	0.014 (2.11)**	0.014 (2.11)**			
Absence of Corruption	0.011 (5.21)***	0.011 (5.21)***	0.011 (5.36)***	0.011 (6.94)***	-0.005 (1.78)*
GDP p.c. (t-1)	-0.043 (2.58)**	-0.042 (2.59)**	-0.045 (3.44)***	-0.093 (6.15)***	0.087 (3.00)***
GDP growth	-0.000 (0.31)	-0.000 (0.28)			
U.S. imports	0.145 (2.88)***	0.145 (2.88)***			
Leader Change		0.005 (1.28)	0.003 (0.89)	0.003 (0.48)	0.004 (1.18)
Post Cold War dummy				0.058 (9.97)***	
Leader Change*Post Cold War dummy				-0.004 (0.61)	
Method	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	GMM
Number of countries	127	127	132	132	132
Number of observations	2300	2300	2556	2556	2556
R-squared	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.20	
Sargan-Hansen Test (p-level)					0.20

Note: Columns (1)-(4) include dummies for each country; column (5) includes dummies for each year; * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Table 3: Leadership Change and UN Key Votes, tests for robustness, 1984-2005, GMM

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Absence of Corruption	0.003 (0.60)	-0.006 (1.13)	-0.009 (1.49)	-0.013 (2.13)**	-0.014 (2.18)**
GDP p.c. (t-1)	0.010 (0.29)	0.038 (1.94)*	0.067 (2.45)**	0.061 (2.45)**	0.067 (2.50)**
Leader Change	0.011 (1.96)*	0.013 (2.61)**	0.017 (3.48)***	0.018 (3.33)***	
Years in Office					-0.005 (4.19)***
Average UN vote	1.042 (39.04)***				
Non-Key Voting		0.491 (3.36)***			
Change to left government			-0.009 (1.32)		
Polity Change				0.001 (0.69)	
Number of countries	131	131	131	123	130
Number of observations	2548	2548	2548	2358	2537
Sargan-Hansen Test (p-level)	0.08	0.07	0.28	0.39	0.14

Note: Dummy for each year included in columns (2)-(5); t statistics in parentheses; * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Table 4: Leadership Death and UN Non-Key Votes, 1984-2005

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Political color inline	0.012 (1.17)		
Absence of Corruption	0.013 (4.00)***	0.018 (5.37)***	0.001 (0.12)
GDP p.c. (t-1)	-0.051 (1.81)*	-0.107 (3.15)***	0.057 (0.68)
GDP growth	-0.000 (0.66)		
U.S. imports	0.121 (0.89)		
Leader Death	0.017 (0.55)	0.012 (0.40)	0.030 (0.64)
Method	OLS	OLS	GMM
Number of countries	126	131	131
Number of observations	2293	2548	2548
R-squared	0.02	0.05	
Sargan-Hansen Test (p-level)			0.87

Note: Columns (1)-(2) include dummies for each country; column (3) includes dummies for each year; * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Appendix A: Sources and Definitions

Variable	Definition	Source
UN key vote	Votes in agreement with the U.S. are coded as 1, votes in disagreement as 0, and abstentions or absences as 0.5. The resulting numbers are divided by the total number of votes in each year. Key votes are votes deemed to be important by the U.S. Department of State.	Voeten (2004), U.S. Department of State (various years)
UN non-key vote	Votes in agreement with the U.S. are coded as 1, votes in disagreement as 0, and abstentions or absences as 0.5. The resulting numbers are divided by the total number of votes in each year. Non-key votes are votes not deemed to be important by the U.S. Department of State.	Voeten (2004), U.S. Department of State (various years)
Leader Change	Dummy for years in which the head of government is replaced.	Beck et al. (2001)
Leader Death	Dummy for years in which leaders died accidentally.	Jones and Olken (2005)
Years in Office	Counts the number of years the head of government has been in office in a particular country and year.	Beck et al. (2001)
Political color inline	Dummy indicating that a particular country's government has the same political color as the U.S. government (i.e., both left or both right).	Beck et al. (2001)
Absence of Corruption	Measures corruption in the political system as a threat to foreign investment based on the analysis of a worldwide network of experts, on a scale of 0-14.	ICRG
GDP p.c.	GDP per capita in constant 2000 US\$.	World Bank (2007)
GDP growth	Yearly GDP growth rate in percent.	World Bank (2007)
US imports	Imports of U.S. (as % recipient GDP).	OECD Stat. Compendium
Average UN vote	Average of all other countries' UNGA voting in a particular year.	Voeten (2004)
Change to left government	Dummy indicating a shift in the chief government party to the left.	Beck et al. (2001)
Post Cold War dummy	Dummy for years after 1990.	
Polity Change	First difference in the Polity IV indicator of democracy.	Marshall and Jaggers (2003)

Appendix B: Descriptive Statistics (estimation sample, Table 1, column 2)

Variable	# obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
UN key vote	2293	0.50	0.19	0.00	1.00
UN non-key vote	2293	0.33	0.12	0.10	0.84
Leader Change	2293	0.16	0.37	0.00	1.00
Leader Death	2293	0.01	0.09	0.00	1.00
Years in Office	2293	7.30	7.94	1.00	46.00
Political color inline	2293	0.28	0.45	0.00	1.00
Absence of Corruption	2293	6.40	2.58	0.17	12.33
GDP p.c.	2293	7.63	1.58	4.03	10.83
GDP growth	2293	3.39	5.26	-42.45	106.28
US imports	2293	0.06	0.08	0.00	0.60
Average UN vote	2293	0.47	0.16	0.00	0.65
Change to left government	2293	0.00	0.22	-1.00	1.00
Polity Change	2141	0.23	1.81	-15.00	16.00