

Leader Visits and UN Security Council Membership

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Abstract

Existing IR literature on the United Nations Security Council paints a picture where the US proactively lobbies other UNSC members using carrots and sticks whereas China is quiet, content with its veto power, and acts only to punish other members when its core interests are hurt. We add nuance to the picture and present a different perspective where China actively promotes its agenda amongst UNSC members. Using newly collected data from 2000 to 2018, we show that when Chinese leaders visit Africa, they are three times more likely to visit a sitting UNSC member country than a non-member country. We obtain similar results when we replicate our models on the seminal work by Dreher et al. (2018).

1 Introduction

The United Nations Security Council is the most important organ of the UN (Kuziemko and Werker, 2006; Vreeland and Dreher, 2014). Given the council's power to impose economic sanctions on sovereign nations and provide legal authority for military action, the council's votes are heavily coveted by powerful countries. The council consists of fifteen members: five of them are permanent - China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US; the other ten are elected to serve for a two-year term, with no immediate reelection. There is a large literature on the relationship of UNSC membership and bilateral foreign aid (Kuziemko and Werker, 2006; Alexander and Rooney, 2019), World Bank (Dreher et al., 2009), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Dreher et al., 2013). The US is widely known to proactively lobby other UNSC members for their votes and the same has been found for two other permanent members France and the UK as well as Germany and Japan, which are powerful countries yet do not have a permanent seat (Lim and Vreeland, 2013; Vreeland and Dreher, 2014).

China has a permanent seat on the Security Council. In contrast to the US, however, China is often considered as content with its veto power alone and uninterested in seeking others' votes. Indeed, studies have often found China on the receiving end of political lobbying (Eldar, 2008; Vreeland and Dreher, 2014). This is not surprising given that China is a developing country and that the most common favor for trading votes is foreign aid. More recently, Dreher et al. (2018) find that rather than proactively buy votes from African countries serving on the UNSC, China retroactively punish those temporary members for voting in line with Western donors by reducing its aid. Overall, this paints a picture of China refraining from competing directly with Western donors for UNSC votes while guarding its own interests in an economical manner.

This picture is arguably incomplete because China was not a major donor until recently (Bader, 2015; Hernandez, 2017), China commits to not using aid to seek political advantage (Bader, 2015; Dreher and Fuchs, 2016; Hernandez, 2017), and data on Chinese foreign aid is scarce (Vreeland and Dreher, 2014; Dreher et al., 2018). In this paper we present a new perspective in which China proactively courts African countries sitting on the council and we bypass the limitation of aid data by replacing it with leader visits as favor. Using data from 2000 to 2018, we show that when Chinese top leaders visit Africa, they are three times more likely to visit a sitting UNSC member than a non-member country. We are further able to get the same findings when we replicate on Dreher et al. (2018). The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a literature review on the political economy of UNSC and on leader visits' value to host countries. Section 3 introduces the data sets and model specifications. Section 4 presents our main results and two sets of robustness checks. Section 5 concludes.

2 Literature Review

Our paper builds on the intersection of UNSC and leader visits. Kuziemko and Werker (2006) are arguably the first to study the relationship of US foreign aid and UNSC membership. Kuziemko and Werker (2006) find that a country's US aid increases by 59 percent when it rotates onto the council and the increase is larger during years of key diplomatic events. This line of research is subsequently extended to international organizations: the World Bank (Dreher et al., 2009), the IMF (Dreher et al., 2013), the African Development Bank (Vreeland and Dreher, 2014) and the Asian Development Bank (Lim and Vreeland, 2013) as well as other wealthy countries such as France, Germany, Japan and the UK (Vreeland and Dreher, 2014).

China rarely shows up as the donor of interest in these studies. Most recently, however, a seminal work by Dreher et al. (2018) uses AidData’s *Chinese Official Finance to Africa dataset* (Strange et al., 2017), which is collected from media reports, and shows that Chinese aid to an African country drops after the country serves on the Security Council. The authors reason that since UNSC members only receive rewards for aligning with Western powers, it is expected that China will subsequently reduce its aid as a punishment.

Besides foreign aid, leader visits are another highly sought after favor. Leader visits can help stimulate bilateral trade (Nitsch, 2007; Lin et al., 2017) and foreign direct investment (Stone et al., 2016). At the same time, leader visits, especially by powerful countries, lend credentials to the smaller host country: they send a front stage signal to the world that these powerful countries support the host country (McManus and Yarhi-Milo, 2017; McManus, 2018) and to the domestic audience in the host country that they support the incumbent leader (Malis and Smith, 2019,0). Therefore, as a developing yet powerful country, China’s comparative advantage may well lie in its leader visits rather than foreign aid, and China could in theory proactively lobby UNSC members by paying these countries a state visit.

3 Data and Model Specifications

3.1 UNSC

UNSC Membership is the independent variable of interest. For UNSC data, we use the data set from Dreher et al. (2018). Dreher et al. (2018) cover 53 African countries for the period between 2000 to 2013 and use *UNSC* as an independent variable, lagged by one year so as to model retroactive punishing. we first revert the one year lag, as we are interested in studying China’s active lobbying efforts on sitting members. Then we update the *UNSC* variable to 2018 to match the time range of the dependent variable and the control variables.¹ We further update the *UNSC* variable to include South Sudan, which became independent from Sudan in 2011 and joined the United Nations in the same year. Following Dreher et al. (2018), we limit our analysis to African countries, because compared with other continents African membership on the UNSC is closest to being idiosyncratic (Vreeland and Dreher, 2014; Carnegie and Mikulaschek, 2020). Each year, there are three African countries on the Security Council. They each serve a two-year term.

¹We retrieve the Security Council’s membership information from UN’s official website: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/search/member>.

3.2 Leader Visits

We use leader visits as our dependent variable. The visits consist of goodwill visits, working visits, official visits and state visits by the Chinese president, working visits and official visits by the Chinese premier, which we collectively refer to as leader visits. Leader visits are designed to be public (Kastner and Saunders, 2012; McManus and Yarhi-Milo, 2017), which makes them easy to track down. Moreover, Chinese leaders usually visit a couple of countries when they visit the continent. This further boosts these visits' publicity. For example, between January and February in 2004 President Hu paid a state visit to Egypt, Gabon and Algeria.² In June 2006 Premier Wen paid official visits to Egypt, Ghana, the Republic of Congo, Angola, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda.³ We collect these visits from official websites and support each visit with an accompanying document for easy verification and replication. As no country has received both a presidential visit and a premier visit in the same year, we code *Leader Visit* as 1 if either leader visits the country and 0 otherwise.

3.3 Control Variables

First, we include a set of economic variables that characterize the host countries: these are *Log(GDP per capita)*, *Log(Population)*, *GDP Growth*, *Resources* from the World Bank and *Log(Imports to China)*, *Log(Exports from China)* from the IMF. Second, we include a set of political variables widely used in the literature: polity, which measures the level of democracy (Vreeland, 2008; Kerner and Lawrence, 2012; Dreher et al., 2018) and UN general assembly (UNGA) voting (Bailey et al., 2015).⁴ The UNGA data has been widely used as a measure of political alignment (Dreher et al., 2008; Carter and Stone, 2014). Dreher et al. (2018) use UNGA voting as an explanatory variable for Chinese state financing, Davis et al. (2017) for imports by Chinese state-owned enterprises, and Dreher and Fuchs (2016) for Chinese aid. In this paper, we use the percentage of voting agreement with China as a proxy for political alignment. Lastly, we include the one-year lag term of leader visit, *Visit(t-1)*, to control for diplomatic routine as leaders generally do not visit the same country in consecutive years (Lebovic and Saunders, 2016).

Several notable studies (Cheung et al., 2014; Stone et al., 2016; Dreher et al., 2018) have

²For details of the visits, please see <http://mu.china-embassy.org/eng/xwdt/t152507.htm>.

³For details of the visits, please see <http://za.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/06wen/t260020.htm>.

⁴The Polity score comes from the Center for Systemic Peace at <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html>. Sudan has two polity scores in 2011, one before South Sudan's independence and one after. We take the average to represent Sudan in 2011. The UNGA voting data is available at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=hdl:1902.1/12379>.

Table 1: African Countries that Broke Ties with Taiwan between 2000 and 2018.

Country	Breaking Ties with Taiwan
Burkina Faso	2018
São Tomé and Príncipe	2016
Gambia	2013
Malawi	2008
Chad	2006
Senegal	2005
Liberia	2003

analyzed the effects of recognizing Taiwan on Chinese aid and Chinese FDI. With regards to leader visits, we observe that neither the president nor the premier has ever visited a country that recognizes Taiwan (Kastner and Saunders, 2012). For this reason, we drop samples where the country recognizes Taiwan. The status of Taiwan is not a constant for all African countries, as quite a few of them have broken ties with Taiwan in the past two decades, including, for example, Liberia in 2003, Senegal in 2005, and Chad in 2006 (Table 1). We provide the descriptive statistics of the relevant variables in Table 2. All control variables are lagged by one year, but not the independent variable, *UNSC Membership*.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Min	Max	SD	Count
Leader Visit	0.054	0.000	1.000	0.226	931
UNSC Membership	0.059	0.000	1.000	0.236	931
Log(Population)	16.101	13.108	19.067	1.349	856
Log(GDP per capita)	6.977	4.631	10.041	1.092	841
GDP Growth	4.426	-62.076	123.140	7.461	820
Log(Imports to China)	4.078	-4.605	10.785	3.018	846
Log(Exports from China)	5.414	-1.238	9.731	2.039	862
Log(Distance)	9.251	8.929	9.446	0.149	931
Resources	14.094	0.001	84.240	13.440	837
Polity	1.678	-7.000	10.000	5.060	861
UNGA Voting	0.815	0.304	1.000	0.088	833
Visit(t-1)	0.052	0.000	1.000	0.221	931

3.4 Econometric Modeling

To test whether Chinese leaders are more likely to visit sitting UNSC members compared with non-members, we formulate the regression equation as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \Pr(\text{Leader Visit}_{i,t}) = & f(\alpha + \Theta \text{Economic Variables}_{i,t} + \Phi \text{Political Variables}_{i,t} \\ & + \psi \text{UNSC Membership}_{i,t} + \omega \text{Visit}_{i,(t-1)} + \gamma_i + \tau_t + \epsilon_{i,t}) \end{aligned}$$

where f is the logistic link function, $\text{Leader Visit}_{i,t}$ is a binary variable and represents a leader's visit (president or premier) to country i in year t . $\text{Economic Variables}$ represents the set of economic variables, including GDP per capita, Population, GDP Growth, and Resources. $\text{Political Variables}$ represents the set of political variables: Polity and UNGA voting. $\text{UNSC Membership}_{i,t}$ is binary and represents whether country i in year t serves on the Security Council. $\text{Visit}_{i,t-1}$ is a binary variable, coded 1 if country i receives a leader visit in year $t - 1$ and 0 otherwise. γ_i stands for country fixed effects, τ_t year fixed effects, and $\epsilon_{i,t}$ the error term. Our variable of interest is UNSC Membership . We expect its coefficient, ψ , to be positive.

4 Results

4.1 Main Result

Table 3 shows our main results. Column 1 and Column 2 do not control for country fixed effects. We observe that the coefficient on UNSC membership is positive and statistically significant. Substantively, the estimated probability of a UNSC member receiving a visit from an incoming Chinese leader stands at 13.2% and is 317.6% higher than that of an average African country that is not sitting on the council, which stands at 3.2%. We also note that including UNSC Membership improves the pseudo R^2 by 11% from 0.281 to 0.310. From a model selection point of view, Column 1 is nested in Column 2 and Column 3 in Column 4 (Clarke, 2001; Greene, 2017). Using Wald test on UNSC Membership , we are able to confirm that Columns 2 and 4 should be selected over Columns 1 and 3.

Column 3 and Column 4 control for country fixed effects and pose as a more stringent test. A few countries drop out of the samples as they have not received any leader visit during this observation period. Comparing Column 3 and Column 4, we continue to observe improved model fitting as the pseudo R^2 increases from 0.312 to 0.343. The coefficient on UNSC Membership in Column 4 is positive and significant at the 0.01 level. Substantively, we find that on average, when Chinese leaders visit Africa, the probability of visiting a

Table 3: Leader Visits and UNSC Membership

DV=Leader Visit	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Baseline	UNSC	Baseline	UNSC
Log(Population)	0.648** (0.316)	0.721** (0.327)	-2.088 (8.711)	-1.732 (9.990)
Log(GDP per capita)	0.775** (0.322)	0.812** (0.330)	1.918* (1.115)	1.978* (1.143)
GDP Growth	0.015 (0.016)	0.017 (0.016)	0.038* (0.023)	0.040* (0.021)
Log(Imports to China)	0.173 (0.113)	0.167 (0.112)	0.086 (0.410)	-0.068 (0.410)
Log(Exports from China)	0.079 (0.256)	0.037 (0.274)	-0.140 (0.884)	-0.248 (0.879)
Resources	-0.034* (0.020)	-0.036* (0.020)	-0.079 (0.063)	-0.070 (0.066)
Polity	0.021 (0.029)	0.027 (0.028)	-0.237 (0.252)	-0.229 (0.234)
UNGA Voting	-1.141 (2.197)	-0.820 (2.502)	-2.672 (4.962)	-5.048 (5.007)
Visit(t-1)	-3.072*** (0.802)	-3.982*** (0.842)	-4.544*** (1.087)	-5.617*** (1.167)
UNSC Membership		1.774*** (0.486)		2.019*** (0.647)
Year F.E.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country F.E.	No	No	Yes	Yes
Constant	-19.167*** (6.434)	-21.018*** (6.861)	21.118 (142.575)	17.497 (163.343)
Observations	447	447	268	268
Pseudo R^2	0.281	0.310	0.312	0.343
Chi2(1)	-	13.32	-	9.74

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

sitting UNSC member country stands at 22.3% and is roughly three times higher than that of visiting a country not serving on the council, which stands at 6.0%.

4.2 Robustness Checks

As our first robustness check, we run similar regressions using the data set from Dreher et al. (2018). The data set covers the period between 2000 and 2013 and employs a different

Table 4: Robustness check: Leader Visits and UNSC on Dreher et al. (2018) Data

DV=Leader Visit	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Baseline	UNSC	Baseline	UNSC
UN voting with China	2.042 (2.548)	3.054 (2.931)	-3.424 (7.199)	-6.280 (9.530)
Trade with China (log)	0.164 (0.242)	0.001 (0.231)	-0.061 (1.519)	-1.081 (1.272)
Oil dummy	0.201 (0.690)	0.084 (0.807)	-35.433 (37.555)	-34.061 (42.351)
Debt/GDP	0.007* (0.004)	0.009** (0.005)	0.006 (0.011)	0.012 (0.014)
Polity	-0.037 (0.047)	-0.035 (0.048)	-0.259 (0.394)	-0.236 (0.329)
Control of corruption	0.468 (0.404)	0.427 (0.420)	1.698 (2.166)	2.176 (2.270)
GDP per capita (log)	0.858** (0.357)	1.055*** (0.386)	0.464 (1.554)	0.981 (1.949)
Population (log)	0.821*** (0.302)	1.043*** (0.360)	27.007 (28.446)	27.247 (31.312)
Affected from disasters (log)	0.067 (0.043)	0.082* (0.045)	0.027 (0.090)	0.049 (0.108)
English language	1.059** (0.487)	0.975* (0.498)	-23.954 (24.654)	-24.721 (28.472)
DAC OF (log, residuals)	-0.012 (0.119)	-0.027 (0.122)	-0.105 (0.191)	-0.074 (0.168)
Visit(t-1)	-3.217** (1.268)	-4.369*** (1.371)	-4.121*** (1.555)	-5.329*** (1.634)
UNSC Membership		2.104*** (0.682)		2.826** (1.283)
Year F.E.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country F.E.	No	No	Yes	Yes
Constant	-28.749*** (7.250)	-31.713*** (8.440)	-417.818 (444.303)	-401.664 (485.991)
Observations	265	265	137	137
Pseudo R^2	0.312	0.349	0.294	0.349

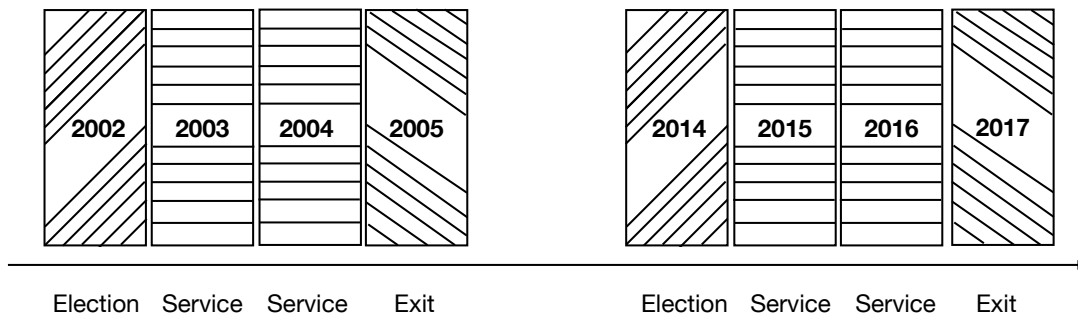
Standard errors, clustered by country, in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

set of independent variables. On the basis of Dreher et al. (2018), we first perform four operations: replace the dependent variable to be *Leader Visit*, revert the one year lag of *UNSC Membership*, and drop samples where *Taiwan Recognition* is 1, and add $Visit(t-1)$ as a control variable. Table 4 shows our results. *UNSC Membership*, again, has a positive and significant coefficient. *UNSC Membership* improves model fitting, increasing pseudo R^2 from 0.312 in Column 1 to 0.349 in Column 2 where we do not control for country fixed effects. Substantively, we find that when Chinese leaders visit Africa, the probability of visiting a sitting UNSC member country is 23.1% and is 554% higher than the probability of visiting a non-member country at 3.5%. *UNSC Membership* increases pseudo R^2 from 0.294 in Column 3 to 0.349 in Column 4 when we do control for country fixed effects. Substantively, once we control for country fixed effects (and drop countries that have never received a visit), the probability of visiting a sitting UNSC member country is 64.8% and is 558% higher than the probability of visiting a non-member country at 9.8%. Our robustness check results are consistent with our main findings and further confirm that Chinese leaders actively court UNSC members in Africa by paying them a visit.

As our second robustness check, we take advantage of the two-year term limit of the UNSC membership and test whether in the years immediately preceding and after their UNSC membership countries see a boost in Chinese leader visits (Figure 1). The independent variables of interest are *UNSC Election* and *UNSC Exit*. *UNSC Election* is 1 for year t if a country wins election to the Council in year t and 0 otherwise. *UNSC Exit* is 1 if a country just finished serving on the Security Council and 0 otherwise.

Figure 1: Angola served twice on the Security Council in the past two decades, in 2003, 2004 and in 2015, 2016. *UNSC Election* is coded 1 for Angola for 2002 and 2014, the years in which the country won election to the Security Council. *UNSC Exit* is coded 1 for Angola for 2005 and 2017, the immediate years following Angola’s UNSC membership.



Given that elections to Security Council are held in autumn (Vreeland and Dreher, 2014) and that leaders visits usually take months of preparation, we hypothesize that in the election year, China will not be more likely to visit the newly elected UNSC members. Similarly, with a country's power returning to normal immediately after its UNSC membership, we expect *UNSC Exit* not to be positively correlated with Chinese leader visits. We report our results in Table 5.

Table 5: Robustness Check: UNSC Election and Exit

DV=Leader Visit	(1) Election	(2) Exit	(3) Pooled	(4) Election	(5) Exit	(6) Pooled
Log(Population)	0.660** (0.315)	0.655** (0.320)	0.666** (0.318)	-2.341 (8.388)	-2.206 (8.683)	-2.479 (8.348)
Log(GDP per capita)	0.784** (0.320)	0.785** (0.328)	0.794** (0.326)	1.968* (1.108)	1.910* (1.109)	1.962* (1.105)
GDP Growth	0.014 (0.016)	0.015 (0.016)	0.014 (0.016)	0.037 (0.023)	0.038* (0.022)	0.036 (0.023)
Log(Imports to China)	0.176 (0.113)	0.176 (0.115)	0.177 (0.115)	0.075 (0.410)	0.081 (0.417)	0.070 (0.418)
Log(Exports from China)	0.072 (0.258)	0.077 (0.257)	0.077 (0.258)	-0.150 (0.891)	-0.126 (0.886)	-0.134 (0.896)
Resources	-0.033 (0.021)	-0.034* (0.021)	-0.034 (0.021)	-0.074 (0.062)	-0.079 (0.062)	-0.074 (0.061)
Polity	0.022 (0.029)	0.022 (0.029)	0.023 (0.029)	-0.248 (0.254)	-0.235 (0.250)	-0.246 (0.251)
UNGA Voting	-1.361 (2.289)	-1.327 (2.273)	-1.319 (2.280)	-2.590 (5.045)	-2.695 (4.928)	-2.621 (5.000)
Visit(t-1)	-3.098*** (0.829)	-3.093*** (0.802)	-3.127*** (0.832)	-4.660*** (1.141)	-4.550*** (1.077)	-4.670*** (1.124)
UNSC Election	-0.231 (0.781)		-0.269 (0.790)	-0.801 (1.002)		-0.837 (1.008)
UNSC Exit		-0.299 (0.818)	-0.324 (0.833)		-0.317 (1.147)	-0.378 (1.191)
Year F.E.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country F.E.	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	-19.247*** (6.430)	-19.217*** (6.522)	-19.475*** (6.528)	24.970 (137.327)	23.081 (142.217)	27.255 (136.767)
Observations	444	444	444	268	268	268
Pseudo R^2	0.281	0.281	0.281	0.315	0.313	0.316

Standard errors, clustered by country, in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Columns 1, 2 and 3 do not include country fixed effects; Columns 4, 5, and 6 do. Columns 1, 4 have *UNSC Election* as the variable of interest. Columns 2, 5 have *UNSC Exit* as the variable of interest. Columns 3 and 6 pool *UNSC Election* and *UNSC Exit*. Consistent with our hypotheses, we find that the coefficient on *UNSC Election* to be negative and not statistically significant across the specifications. This suggests that countries are not more likely to receive Chinese leader visits in the year they were elected to the Council. We also find the coefficient on *UNSC Exit* to be negative and not statistically significant. This indicates that the positive effects of UNSC membership in attracting Chinese leader visits immediately disappear after the conclusion of the two-year term. The interpretation of other independent variables remain mostly the same as in our main results (Table 3). With results on *UNSC Election* and *UNSC Exit*, we are able to better pinpoint the exact years in which UNSC membership attracts Chinese leader visits.

5 Conclusion

Existing literature on the UNSC has largely painted a quiet China content with its veto power and uninterested in actively lobbying other members. While this might indeed be the case, this could also be attributed to the fact that these studies have focused exclusively on foreign aid as the favor. Our paper approaches the problem from a new perspective and uses leader visits as the favor. We consistently find that Chinese leaders are substantially more likely to visit a UNSC member than a non-member when visiting Africa. We conclude that China, just like the major Western powers, actively promotes its agenda amongst UNSC members, albeit not necessarily using foreign aid.

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