

The only living *guerrillero* in New York: Cuba and the brokerage power of resilient rogue states

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Abstract

This paper explores how weak countries deflect systemic pressure towards change and even succeed in preserving old institutions and identities. By expanding Goddard's theory of embedded revisionism to smaller powers, the study identifies strategies these states deploy to improve access and brokerage. I use the UN General Assembly Sponsorship Dataset to locate multilateral brokers and, after detecting Cuba's centrality in this arena, I proceed to a heuristic case study. Havana's maneuvers to offset its vulnerability in the post-Cold War reveal a mix of institutional, compulsory, and structural strategies. Specifically, its renewal of the Non-Aligned Movement even after the end of bipolarity, its maintenance of autocracy amidst the pressures for democratization, and later support of radicalized Latin American leaders provide insight regarding unexpected sources of network power available to a resilient rogue state.

Keywords: UN General Assembly, network analysis, power, brokerage, Cuba.

Introduction

A 2002 *New York Times* article described the unexpected reason why decades-old computer pieces suddenly acquired strategic value: NASA was shopping for parts. Space shuttles were designs from 1970s, built to last decades. So when the time for repairing came around, the market was already years beyond the 1-megabyte machines that had taken men to the moon. Finding this vintage tech had become so hard that the star-faring agency had to look, of all recesses in the known universe, on eBay. Upgrading to modern gear might solve the shortage problem, but there were sensible reasons to stick to the old: though not fashionable, these were sturdy parts that had already proven they could keep ships from crashing in outer space.¹

NASA's scavenger hunt illustrates how items deemed antiques can suddenly become precious. The student of politics – interested in the nuts and bolts of a different vessel, the state – finds a similar quirk when investigating the inertia of global governance. Why do states hold on to past discourses and institutions? The perpetuation of institutions is not a puzzle *per se*: the standard definition already emphasizes that institutions are “relatively invariant in the face of turnover of individuals and relatively resilient to the idiosyncratic preferences and expectations of individuals and changing external circumstances” (March and Olsen, 2008: 1).² Intransigence becomes more surprising, however, when states decide to maintain old arrangements even though the world around them has “moved on”. Units adopt political and economic models that might be more universal or rare, and system-wide events can move all actors towards a

¹ “For parts, NASA goes boldly... in eBay” (NYT, Broad, 2002).

² But see Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2018).

standard, increasing the pressure to converge, and rendering conservative positions untenable. Value-laden discourses on which policy choices are the way of the future or things of the past put additional symbolic costs to insistence. If even strong actors have a hard time to reintroduce old policies – as De Gaulle learned in his attempt to revive the gold standard in 1965 –, weak countries should be the least likely candidates for eccentricity and the first to conform. In practice, however, we witness considerable variation. Reprimanded and isolated, lower-ranking powers at times desist from proscript policies – as South Africa and Indonesia did regarding territorial annexation – but at times they show unexpected resilience – as Morocco on Western Sahara.

This article is a theory-building exploration, employing a network perspective to understand weak states' resistance – and at times success – in preserving institutions that run counter to global trends. For that, the text is divided into four parts. First, the theoretical framework elaborates on how networks help expand our understanding of power. I also draw on Goddard's (2018) work about the network strategies states pursue to compensate their weakness and achieve counter-hegemonic aims. Second, I turn to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) to identify central actors from metrics derived from bargaining dynamics therein. This mapping singles out Cuba, a country that, small as it is, occupies a key brokering position in the nexus between its region and global arenas – not to mention notorious resistance to policy change. The third section offers a heuristic case study on Havana's multilateral and regional relations. The implications of the findings are summarized in the concluding section.

This inductive analysis of Cuba suggests two rationales behind small states' obduracy, conveying institutional and structural power strategies. On a broader scale, a country enjoying a central position is loath to see the settings that gave it prominence discarded. It will therefore strive to deflect exogenous pressures for institutional

replacement. This is demonstrated by Cuba's enthusiasm in upkeeping Third World blocs, such as the Non-Aligned Movement, after the Cold War was over. On a more limited scale, conserving policy choices that might be for the moment unfashionable can hold future leverage in store if demand for such instruments returns and the recalcitrant state remains the sole supplier. An example is provided by Cuba's resistance to liberalizing pressures during the wave of democratization in the 1990s and export of autocratic know-how to radical governments in Latin America in the next decades. Both goods – Third Worldism and autocracy –, albeit unfashionable in the days the End of History was announced, were of a sturdy kind that found a new clientele once democracy stopped seeming the only game in town and the lost art of coup-proofing became valuable again to help aspiring autocrats steady their journey towards one-party rule.

Theoretical framework

Beyond hubness: power, embedded revisionism, and brokerage

Social Network Analysis (SNA) is an increasingly popular framework in IR. Networks of interest normally include states as nodes and their varied types of connections as edges. According to a recent review of the literature, from the many network-related metrics, the one that has drawn most attention within the field is degree centrality, i.e., a node's total number of connections (Kim, 2020: 911–912). This emphasis is easy to understand, especially for research about power: governments abounding in connections – trade flows, arms exports or alliance partners – are likely candidates for the center of the world. Unsurprisingly, this often reveals that *big* powers are also *central* powers, placing yet another form of control on their hands – e.g. weaponizing their indispensability (Farrell and Newman, 2019).

This paper contends that, though in some contexts this familiar scenario is accurate, a fuller appreciation of network dynamics can broaden our understanding of power in IR. The focus on high degree centrality – or hubness – has led to at least three limitations. First, hubness is the high ground for hub-and-spokes settings. Because of the preferential attachment or rich-gets-richer property, such networks engender a winner-takes-all reward system. All roads lead to the actor with most links, so that it has universal reach and gatekeeping powers at once. In other layouts, however, these benefits are not fused. A hub-and-spokes typology might describe economic globalization, but other relevant networks – migration, energy, defense, and political values – differ in design (Akerman and Seim, 2014; Benedictis et al., 2013; Seabra and Mesquita, 2022). In such webs, influence might owe to positions other than hubness. Indeed, Beardsley et al. (2020) comparison of security and trade networks showed that the leverage gained from degree centrality varies according to domain, so that attention to other network features is warranted.

Second, hubness has been unequivocally associated with power in IR, but rarely with vulnerabilities. This neglect of costs is at odds with the literature on hegemony (e.g. Gilpin, 1981) and on SNA methods. Pastor-Satorras and Vespignani's (2001) classic work on the spread of internet viruses showed that the server with most links is also the most exposed to infection and reinfection. Because the most connected remains the most susceptible, such networks never eradicate contagion – which is why old worms like 2004 *MyDoom* continue to infect machines even today.³ In international

³ “The Top 10 Worst Computer Viruses in History” (Available at: <https://www.hp.com/us-en/shop/tech-takes/top-ten-worst-computer-viruses-in-history>, accessed 22-05-22).

politics, the hegemon is also more exposed; it is the focal point of undying attention by the rest of the system – a scrutiny from which weaker actors are blissfully spared (Holbraad, 1984: 14).

Third, SNA in IR has privileged structure over agency. This is perhaps a result of the elegance of preferential attachment models, which nicely demonstrate how rich-get-richer configurations emerge, e.g., why countries hosting many embassies are more likely to receive more embassies (Duque, 2018). In self-reinforcing scenarios, structure prevails. This biases our understanding of networks as being primarily constraints instead of resources. Seminal work on SNA in IR acknowledged that networks are also enabling (e.g. Hafner-Burton et al., 2009), but the aforementioned slant towards hubness places the bulk of benefits in the hands of the hegemon. Agency is also minimized because descriptive research has been more common. IR studies typically set out to map an interstate network of interest or, if causality is intended, to derive centrality scores to explain later outcomes – e.g. status and war (Renshon, 2016). We know more of how states are acted upon by networks than the other way around.

A broader understanding of power in IR requires a grasp of interstate networks beyond hub-and-spokes, hubness, and structural constraints. Goddard's (2009, 2018) work is noteworthy on that regard for its elaboration on brokerage and revisionist strategies. Her theory of "embedded revisionism" interprets different types of revisionism as a function of two positional assets: access and brokerage. Access is defined as "the extent to which a revisionist is integrated into the dominant network, measured by the density and frequency of its institutionalized relations" (Goddard, 2018: 769). It is synonymous with hubness and its owners accrue institutional participation, goods, and allies. Brokerage, in turn, is the capacity to bridge gaps and act as a conduit between groups in the system, who would otherwise remain disconnected.

Hence, there can only be brokers if there are structural holes in the network (see also Burt, 2004). For revisionist actors, having exclusive ties with other states grants leverage and outside options in the face of opposition from the core.

The combination of both features leads to four ideal-type revisionist states, of which we focus on two: “rogue” and “isolated revisionists”. The former is in the most precarious situation. It has low access, so that it is cut off from institutions and circuits of knowledge and goods. It also has little brokerage and therefore no special connections that could improve its strategic importance in the system or cushion its isolation. A more comfortable position is gained by increasing brokerage and hence becoming an “isolated revisionist”. Such states are still marginalized from the core, but at least they hold the keys to a subset of actors. Improving brokerage might come at the cost of “role strain”, as such countries are pulled by diverging expectations from the groups they bridge. Goddard’s main example of an isolated revisionist is the USSR. It pursued an exit strategy, shunning liberal post-WWII institutions and cementing instead an exclusive sphere of influence through the Sovietization of Eastern Europe countries and contacts with communist parties worldwide.

Though Goddard only applied her model to major powers, the pursuit of access and brokerage concerns minor states as well. In fact, as per SNA’s focus on relations over resources, there is no reason why states poor in capabilities but rich in connections might not entertain such strategies. Because her work is also more structural, attention to how states deliberately act upon their network is still wanting.

As this paper is exploratory, it has few *ex ante* expectations apart from immediate implications of the framework developed at the introduction to this Special Issue. Considering that access and brokerage yield net benefits, it can be assumed that states lacking either will try to obtain them – though, as the other contributions to this

Issue demonstrate, weak actors also entertain options unrelated to connectivity. Access relates to so-called compulsory forms of power and coalition-building, though for weak actors institutions often stand out as the surer and less taxing way to have a seat at the table. The conditions for brokerage, in turn, are more subtle than just belonging to a club. It is premised on the existence of gaps and heterogeneity across the system, as well as a timely willingness to act upon them, being therefore a type of connectivity strategy. If the country already enjoys access or brokerage, it has an interest in maintaining the institutional, economic, and political circumstances that give rise to this positional advantage. Hence, if exogenous shocks push the network towards a configuration unfavorable to the central state, the latter will try to uphold *status quo ante* by keeping existing connections in place. Furthermore, the changes introduced through these shocks can vary in coverage and durability. Except for fully universal and irreversible shifts, lingering policy options might remain on the market, presenting new options for the conservative state after the impetus for change recedes.

Operationalizing brokerage in multilateral arenas

As stated, brokerage relates to the ability to connect actors and to bridge structural holes. The network metrics of *betweenness centrality*, *transitivity* and *closeness centrality* are hence useful to infer brokerage and its context.

Betweenness centrality is defined by the proportion of shortest paths between node pairs in the network which must go through node *i*. Hence, the central node in a star-like network is the unavoidable intermediary between all node pairs and has maximum score, while a full graph or a clique, wherein all nodes are connected to each other, will ascribe zero betweenness for its nodes.

While betweenness centrality considers paths running across all possible pairs of nodes, other measures refer to the immediate neighborhood of each node and its structural holes. *Transitivity* or *clustering coefficient* inspects the proportion of closed triads among all triads. If applied to the full network, it provides a measure analogous to graph density. Its local version assesses if node i is the sole bridge connecting its neighbors or if the latter have recourse to alternative ties.

Lastly, *closeness* refers to how immediately a node can reach others in the network, as opposed to having to go through intermediaries. The closeness of node i is the inverse of the sum of the shortest paths between it and all other nodes. A node only one step away from all others has maximum closeness, whereas nodes placed more steps away have a larger total sum of distances in the denominator and hence smaller closeness. For directed graphs, this metric is broken down into incoming and outgoing closeness, which reflect the sum of shortest paths leading to and originating from a node.

All three measures are useful in sizing brokerage: betweenness verifies if node i occupies a bridging position for many node pairs, while closeness and transitivity detect if i 's neighbors are dependent on it.

Finding brokers through co-sponsorship networks at the UNGA

Norm-making as a directed weighted network

Given this paper's interest in how weak states respond to systemic pressures to change, the setting where tokens of brokerage will be surveyed should also be global. The UNGA is an appropriate choice due to its universal membership and mandate. Applications of SNA to the UNGA include the use of voting affinities (Carvalho and

Lopes, forthcoming; Macon et al., 2012) and sponsorship patterns (Seabra and Mesquita, 2022) to detect communities, though the phenomena of brokerage within this institution has not been surveyed quantitatively.⁴

From the available UNGA metrics, I focus on sponsorship of draft resolutions instead of the more popular roll-call votes. As argued by Seabra and Mesquita (2022), this avoids a sampling bias – only 1/3 of drafts are voted – and demarcates country roles in more detail. Static totals of votes “for” and “against” cannot indicate which countries championed a proposal and which joined later. Drafting, in turn, is a dynamic process. By monitoring it from start to finish, it is possible to locate when each sponsor joined a draft, differentiating entrepreneurs who proposed it at first, intermediaries who engrossed its roster, and followers coming in last. Though UNGA norm-making is not the focus of this study, this drafting routine offers a useful entry point for case selection, considering that: all states in the system participate, whether big or small⁵; it conveniently orders initiators, followers, and go-betweens; and its aggregate interactions closely mirror states actual bilateral and systemic affinities.

We employ what the mixed-methods literature terms sequential design (Creswell et al., 2003), i.e., starting with large-N data to obtain a broader picture and then zooming in on heuristically promising case studies (Eckstein, 2009). The first part finds “who” are the brokers, while the second explores “how” they acquired this role.

The *relative priority index* available at the *UN General Assembly Sponsorship Dataset* (Seabra and Mesquita, 2022) ascribes a score to each delegation sponsoring a

⁴ Qualitative studies, in turn, have mapped the bridging role of key countries in specific negotiations (e.g. Bellamy, 2020; Smith, 1998), also Michael Manulak (this volume).

⁵ But see Coggins and Mores (this volume) on UNGA absenteeism.

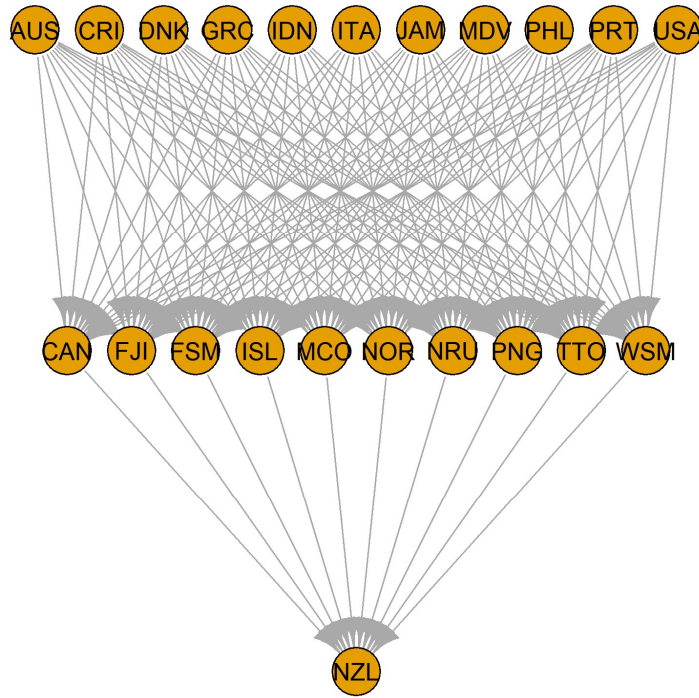
draft, depending on whether it joined first (high priority), last (low priority), or in-between. This information can be translated into network format: countries joining a draft later send an outgoing edge “giving support” to those who sponsored earlier (Fowler et al., 2007).⁶

Figure 1 illustrates the sponsorship network of draft resolution “Sustainable fisheries” (A/70/L.19 and its Add.1), chosen as a visual example due to its small network of sponsors (22 in total). New Zealand was the original sponsor (the “facilitator” or “coordinator” as some referred to it in floor speeches).⁷ Ten other states came after and, accordingly, were modelled as sending edges towards New Zealand. Eleven others sponsored at the last opportunity, through Add.1, and were considered as following the preceding ten.

Figure 1: Directed network for sample draft resolution A/70/L.19/Add.1

⁶ Original sponsors are considered to share reciprocal edges.

⁷ A/70/PV.69



Source: elaborated by the author.

The advantage of this layout is that centrality scores capture the distinct roles members play: entrepreneurs have fewer outgoing edges but many incoming ones, and expectedly rank first in measures of incoming centrality; late followers are more prominent in outgoing scores; while those entering mid-way assume a brokering position between original authors and late endorsers, and thus top the betweenness scores.

Naturally, the model assumptions sweep under the rug many complications of UNGA bargaining. For instance, though the first sponsor is customarily the norm entrepreneur, delegations at times initiate proposals, not because of original authorship, but per force of being the penholder or the year's chairperson in the case of political groupings. The model also imputes a brokering role to sponsors that join midway,

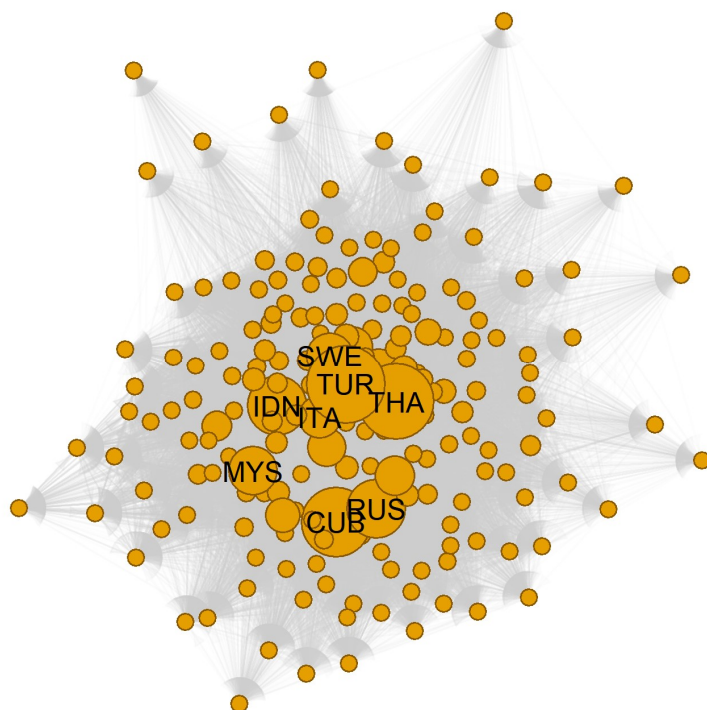
though in reality those entering last can choose sponsoring independently of the intermediates' presence. As in any model, I acknowledge these disturbances take place in reality, but that they should be cancelled out as I aggregate interactions across thousands of drafts and several sessions, so that resulting quantities have more signal than noise.⁸

Besides A/70/L.19/Add.1, the 70th session had another 262 drafts. As each draft is an adjacency matrix, the session is represented by the summation of all 263 matrices.⁹ Betweenness scores for this network indicate brokers during the session. Results are demonstrated in Figure 2, with node size representing betweenness centrality and labels for the top brokers for the session.

Figure 2: Betweenness scores for UNGA 70th session

⁸ I thank Michael Manulak for drawing my attention to these issues, with the benefit of his diplomatic experience.

⁹ The edge weights resulting from the summation can be interpreted as how often two countries shared an edge. As *igraph* interprets weights as distances for betweenness, a reverse measure was also calculated.



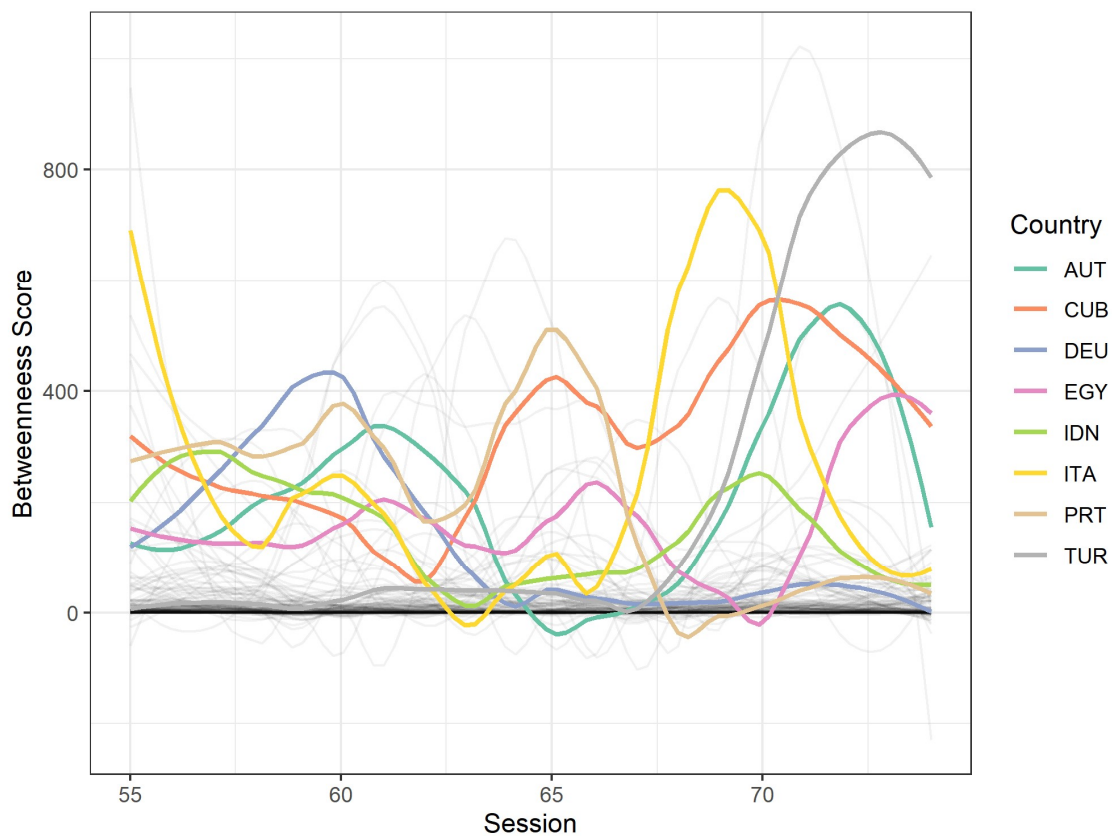
Source: elaborated by the author. Nodes with zero betweenness were enlarged for visualization.

Results for sessions 55 to 74

For our full analysis, we apply the same procedures to generate 20 networks for sessions 55 to 74 (2000 to 2020), which accumulated a total of 5,010 draft resolutions. For each session, a directed weighted network was built, and centrality scores were calculated for the nodes.

Figure 3 shows the betweenness centrality scores over the years.

Figure 3: Betweenness scores



Source: elaborated by the author. Smoothing applied to the lines. Countries that most often ranked top three scores are colored.

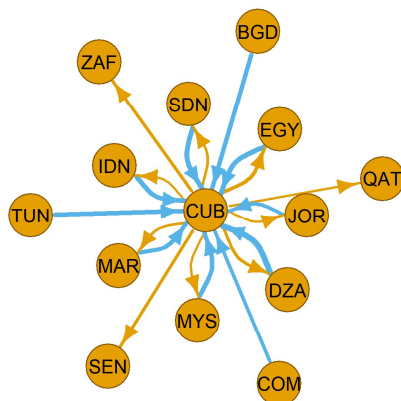
The range of betweenness scores varies abruptly from one session to the other, with countries catapulted in specific conjectures to a leading position. For some, however, this thrust is merely a consequence of their year chairing a large political group, such as the EU, G77 or the NAM. This is applicable to some cases, not highlighted in Figure 3, for example Thailand in session 71 and Ecuador in 72. These instances are therefore more informative on the importance of political groups in enabling majorities in the UNGA than on the skills of these particular states. To normalize this strong oscillation across sessions and bring into evidence countries with more consistent performance, I counted how often each state ranked among the top

three betweenness scores at each UNGA session. Cuba ranked among top three brokers on 9 out of 20 years – the highest mark of all. Second in line, Austria and Italy, were found on top for four years. Hence, Havana is at a considerable distance in terms of sustained brokerage capacity.

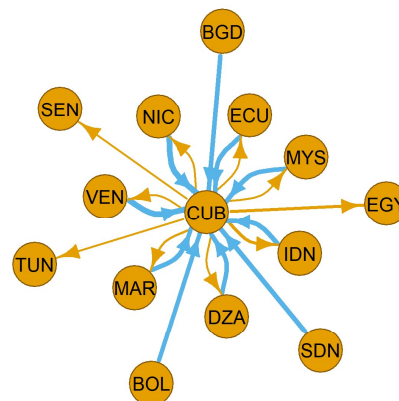
Figure 4 reproduces two Cuban ego-networks, one for each decade, representing the ten partners that most often followed the country (blue edges) and the ten initiators which Havana followed the most (orange).

Figure 4: Top ten followers and precursors for Cuba

Cuba, sessions 55 (2000) to 64 (2009)



Cuba, sessions 65 (2010) to 74 (2019)



Source: elaborated by the author.

In the first decade, Cuban partners were primarily African and Middle Eastern countries that, in common, animated large Third World coalitions, such as the G77 and the NAM. The novelty of the next decade is the appearance of Latin American countries

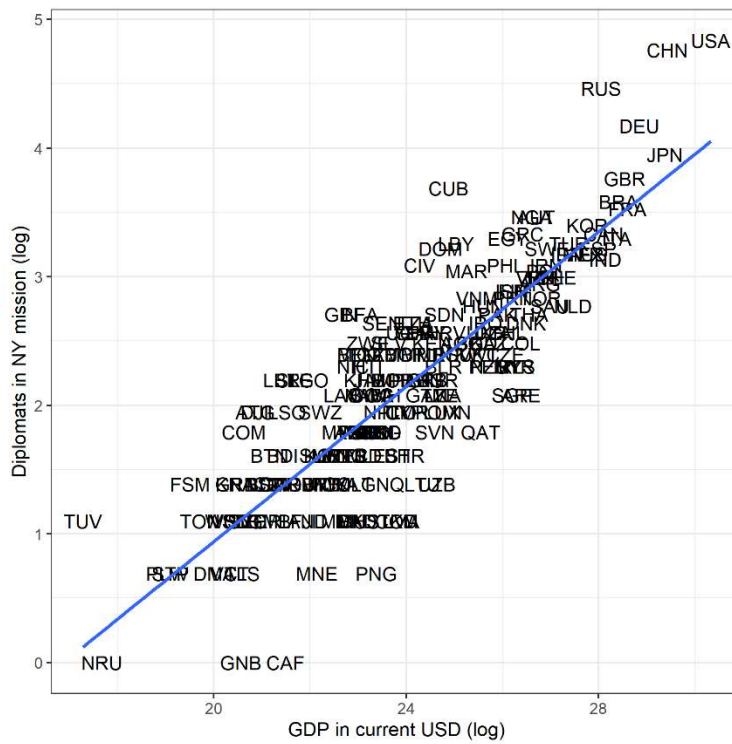
(Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Nicaragua) that, as represented by edge thickness, follow Cuban initiatives more often than the reverse. This suggests Cuba has come to occupy a type of global-regional intermediate position within the revisionist bloc of world politics. The next section follows this lead and unpacks Cuban foreign policy within and outside the UNGA. The case study is heuristic, as per Eckstein (2009), meaning it is not testing but generating hypotheses, which will later be interpreted in light of this Special Issue's typology of strategies of the weak.

Case study

Cuba offers a clear example of a small country harnessing the advantages of an inclusive multilateral setting in conjunction with adroit cultivation of serviceable ties. Weak countries are expected, in general, to prize the UNGA due to its equalizing features, and Cuba is the most enthusiastic from this group. Using GDP as a simple benchmark for national power, Figure 5 shows the island's overachievement among poor countries. Though in 2010 its economy was the size of the Dominican Republic's, it boasted a 40-strong delegation, the 7th largest in NY, slightly behind the United Kingdom. Diplomatic performance is solid also outside UN: with 114 embassies abroad, Cuba was on par with heavyweights Brazil and India in 2010 (Duque, 2018), and other forms of international projection have likewise been voluminous – e.g., troops in Africa during the Cold War and medical personnel worldwide contemporarily (Hoffmann, 2018).¹⁰

¹⁰ According to Terpstra (2019), poor countries compensate their incapacity to host embassies worldwide by concentrating more staff in New York. Cuba deviates from this

Figure 5: GDP x number of diplomats stationed in UN mission in NY in 2010



Source: elaborated by the author, based on World Bank data and the list of Permanent Missions published by the UN (UN Symbol ST/SG/SER.A/300).

Cuba's disproportionate global profile can be understood within the context of its *sui generis* circumstance. After seizing power in 1959 and repelling the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, Fidel Castro gained considerable prestige in the Third World, all the while constricted in the region. Expelled from the Organization of American States

lowermost rank as it has both a large New York mission and a vast network of embassies.

(OAS) in 1962 and placed under the US embargo in 1964, Cuba decided to go global to escape isolation.

Having at first tried to spark insurrection elsewhere in Latin America, in the 1970s Havana turned to Soviet patronage as a surer survival option. In 1972, it was the sole member of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CAME) in the Western hemisphere. For the rest of the bipolar conflict, Cuba labored to develop a high profile in Third World forums.

With the collapse of the USSR, Havana lost overnight its political and economic mainstay. By some estimates, its GDP shrunk by a third between 1989 and 1993 (Edwards, 1999), forcing an urgent review of its international insertion. Hence, the 1990s offer an important inflection point for our argument. Faced with a critical juncture, officially recognized as exceptional by decision makers¹¹, Cuban leadership was confronted with the choice of reviewing its place in the “New World Order” or defending its traditional worldview.

Several factors beyond the dissolution of the socialist camp and ensuing economic duress played against Cuba’s traditional identity. Hemispheric initiatives¹² conveyed renewed US interest in Latin America, the third wave of democratization was at its peak, and newly restored democracies in the region embarked on bold supranational commitments to democracy notwithstanding their zeal about non-

¹¹ The official designation was “special period in times of peace” (Edwards, 1999: 26).

¹² Summit of the Americas (1994), Free-Trade Agreement of the Americas (1998).

interference.¹³ The *coup de grâce* to the Castro model was the rejection by popular vote of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas in 1990 in favor of the US-backed candidate.

Though this host of changes forced the island to open part of its economy¹⁴, its political system remained closed. In fact, Cuba did more than reaffirming its authoritarian model¹⁵: it hardened repression, as exemplified by the adoption of *Leyes* 80/86 and 88/99 that criminalized actions interpreted as cooperation with Washington and dissemination of subversive material, respectively.

The durability of the Castro regime, weathering even such systemic upheavals, has attracted intensive theorizing. Accounts from comparative politics underscore both domestic and external causes: the cohesion of political-military elites forged out of violent revolution and foreign hostility (Lachapelle et al., 2020), or transnational cooperation between autocrats for “democracy prevention” (von Soest, 2015).

¹³ The OAS adopted the Inter-American Democratic Charter in 2001. Mercosur adopted the Ushuaia Protocol in 1998.

¹⁴ Economic concessions of the decade included accepting the dollar economy, expat remittances, foreign investment, and some forms of private enterprise (Hoffmann, 2018).

¹⁵ Castro’s rejection of democratization as a requisite for participating in regional and global mechanisms is well captured a Cuban scholar at the time: “for the Cuban government any space for concertation must be grounded in respect for self-determination, sovereignty and the norms of international law, as it conceives that any process of political concertation is essentially pluralistic and therefore cannot impose the adoption of a proposal of a political system as condition for participation in it” (Edwards, 1999: 68).

This paper's framework draws attention to external and relational factors. As expounded, a country enjoying access is driven to preserve this centrality. This is even more so for a weak state, which derives influence from this structural placement exceeding its national endowments. Freezing a positional advantage, however, is not a solitary enterprise: one must influence those around. Furthermore, the broker role requires a specific type of tinkering. The network must have structural holes, that is, if two groups are scantily interconnected apart from the broker's intermediation, the latter has an interest in preserving this segregation by preventing the appearance of bypasses (Burt, 2004).

Cuba has pursued access and brokerage by the twin strategies of, on the one hand, preserving arrangements that granted it degree centrality and, on the other hand, leveraging on the isolation of others. Both devices can be seen at play through Cuba's behavior within the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and regional relations, respectively.

The Non-Aligned Movement: steering the Third World from non-alignment to anti-imperialism

Castro participated at the founding summit of the NAM in 1961 and was later admitted to the G77 as well. According to Albuquerque (2017), though initially Cuba did not seek leadership in Third World coalitions, by the end of the 1960s its officials had articulated a clear design to become protagonists therein. By defeating Batista and US invaders, the guerrillas from Sierra Maestra had a "national liberation" account of their own, with which to approach African and Asian peers (Hoffmann, 2011). Castro's belonging to the socialist camp put him nonetheless in an awkward position within a *non-aligned* group. Untroubled, he tried to steer the NAM agenda away from neutrality

and towards Cuban preferences: pro-USSR, emphasis on political and revolutionary themes, and the promotion of “anti-imperialism” – a conceptual synthesis to further anti-Americanism (Alburquerque, 2017). Hosting the 1979 summit in Havana showcased this assertive intention. Nonetheless, Moscow’s interventions in Czechoslovakia (1968) and Afghanistan (1979), along with the continued anti-Soviet influence of Josip Tito, limited the effectiveness of this militancy until later years.

The end of the Cold War challenged the NAM’s *raison d’être*: non-alignment seemed anachronistic in world without competing blocs; the agenda on self-determination had been consummated; and, though economic underdevelopment united NAM members at first, differentiated growth rates had already pulled Asian and oil-producing members apart from the rest. Yet, the NAM was not aimless for long. Other issues of interest, such as economic development and disarmament, carried on into the 1990s. The language of the 1992 Jakarta declaration was hopeful about the possibilities opened by the New World Order. Western diplomats were “impressed by the tone” of the meeting and its goodwill.¹⁶ However, events soon after¹⁷ would dash these aspirations for redistribution, disarmament, and respect for sovereignty, pushing weaker countries to a defensive posture against unbridled Western dominance. Such displeasure was put on display, for instance, via their criticism of Western views of human rights in the 1993 UN Vienna Conference (Syatauw, 1993).

¹⁶ “Non-aligned movement decides it is still relevant” (NYT, Shenon, 1992)

¹⁷ The outcomes of the 1992 Uruguay Round, of the 1995 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, and more broadly the effects of unpopular structural adjustment programs, followed by financial crises in the developing world in the end of the decade (Davis, 2011).

Fearing again isolation in a US-led world and looking for new supporters, Cuba deemed it critical to rejuvenate this forum where it had conquered a central position. The value of the NAM was made palpable at the time, as Havana reaped the fruits of its labors in Africa¹⁸: Mandela's visit to the island in 1991 gave Castro a world-class legitimacy booster (Hoffmann, 2018). As Washington was the only remaining superpower and given that its actions came to be perceived with alarm in the underdeveloped world, Castro's original pitch on the anti-imperialist nature of the movement would now find a more welcoming crowd.

The literature underscores that a key explanation for the continuity of Cuba's international identity lies in the sameness of its enemy: though its communist friend was no more, its capitalist foe remained as threatening. Several episodes in the 1990s intensified tensions between Washington and Havana,¹⁹ most of all Cuba's shooting down of the *Brothers to the Rescue* civilian planes. The Cuban revolution had in Yankee hostility its founding nemesis and justification for siege mentality, so that the

¹⁸ Even before, the African policy had proved rewarding. Cuba was formally commended in the final document of the 1976 NAM summit for its assistance to Angola – even as two African members, Egypt and Somalia, had severe reservations about Cuba and its Soviet alignment (Riechers, 2012: 46–47)

¹⁹ Castro's suspicion of destabilization was renewed after the US invasion of Panama in 1989 and the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1990. The growing political weight of Cuban exiles, creation of Florida-based Radio Martí and TV Martí, the 1994 rafters crisis, and the shooting down of the planes in 1996 led to the adoption of stronger embargo legislation: the Torricelli Law of 1992 and the Helms-Burton Law in 1996 (Hoffmann, 2018; LeoGrande, 1998).

renewal of US hawkishness allowed the post-Cold War to be construed as merely another chapter of the same age-old struggle. Hence, the maintenance of the *alter* allowed a core trait of the Cuban *ego* to remain intact: if one could no longer be pro-Soviet, one could always be anti-American.

In a network perspective, this relates to the aforementioned risks of degree centrality. In the bipolar world, the superpowers had high indegree (Akerman and Seim, 2014). As such, both US and USSR were targets of criticisms and hostility from peripheral actors – as the emergence of non-alignment betrays. As the “lonely superpower”, the US received a windfall of both access across the system and of exposure to animosity from hitherto neutral actors (Voeten, 2004).

Institutional gestures from the period convey Havana’s push to render the NAM a more robust vehicle for opposing Washington: the proposal at the 1998 Durban conference to create a steering Troika with greater influence over the movement, Cuba’s hosting of the 2006 Summit, and ensuing chairmanship. According to Davis (2011), this agenda was favored by other authoritarian states (Iran and Zimbabwe) whose leadership was also in need of multilateral shielding. Group radicalization was enabled both by the passing of Tito and by the withdrawal of members seeking closer relations with Western powers. According to the author, evidence of this normative displacement can be found in the growth of anti-US language in summit declarations from the 1990s on. Given the NAM’s concern with voting cohesion at the UNGA, resolutions supportive of Cuba have been approved with growing majorities. While the condemnatory “Situation of Human Rights in Cuba” resolutions were only adopted from 1992 to 1997 by margin of approximately 40, Cuba’s resolution denouncing the US embargo have been adopted every year since 1992, with well above 180 votes. Lastly, the recurring resolutions on “Human rights and unilateral coercive measures” tabled on behalf of the NAM since

1994 also denounced extraterritorial sanctions as harmful to human rights and disrespectful of “the right of all peoples to self-determination, by virtue of which they freely determine their political status”.²⁰

The NAM scene matches what SNA literature terms a phase transition. In the so-called voter models, nodes are voters who can change between two opinions, depending on their interactions with neighbors. Zealots are inflexible nodes that influence others but are themselves unchanging. If there are zealots on both sides of the debate, the two opinions can co-exist. Even if one is on the minority side, it can be shielded if there is a segment of undecided voters. If there are zealots on just one side, however, the contrary opinion should in time succumb (Verma et al., 2014). In the NAM’s case, zealots for both parties coexisted in the group in the initial decades. Cuba’s anti-imperialism was minoritarian, but the island’s robust assistance to African liberation earned it sympathy. In later years, neutrality zealots had departed – Yugoslavia, for one, was convulsed in war – and new members whose leaders, like Castro, saw opposing the US as a matter of survival, not opinion, increased the party of anti-imperialist zealots.

Cuba in Latin America: revolution and structural holes

With the sun setting for communism in the East, the Latin American left was bereaved of a traditional point of reference – a sentiment well captured by the opening lines of Castañeda’s (1994), *Utopia Unarmed*, worth quoting at length:

The Cold War is over and Communism and the socialist bloc have collapsed. The United States and capitalism have won, and in few areas of the globe is that victory so

²⁰ A/C.3/51/L.65

clearcut and spectacular as in Latin America. Never before did representative democracy, free-market economy and effusions of pro-American sentiment, opportunistic or sincere, so persistently dotted the landscape of a region in which, not long before – starting from another victory, that of the Cuban Revolution –, men and women worldwide had deposited their revolutionary faith in another creed [...] Before Fidel entered Havana, the left in Latin America had been reformist, gradualist or resignedly pessimist before the odds of a revolutionary triumph. In the three next decades, revolution was the first item in the order of the day. [...]. After the fall of the Sandinistas and of the Berlin Wall, the revolution once again disappeared from the left's lexicon [...] The collapse of socialism meant the loss of a paradigm, the elimination of a point of reference with which the left had lived for over half a century. Even China carried out a drastic rejection of the past, an annihilating repudiation of socialism as it had existed until then. And, lastly, Cuba, due its own crisis and its increased isolation, had become quickly obsolete and/or unimportant (Castañeda, 1994: 19,69,208)

True to the zeitgeist, the author's saga since the "year zero" of the Cuban Revolution ends in a sober note, advising the left to move on to less grandiose agendas: dropping its taste for Leninist-style centralized command and embracing institutionalized democracy, working to reform the state instead of capturing it, and coming to terms with free markets.

This change of season meant twilight for Castro and the symbolic weight *el líder máximo* commanded in political and intellectual circles (Castañeda, 1994: 159). Yet, just as with the NAM, his reaction was continuity. Castro's mythical position in Latin American imaginary was one tied to revolution, even if these were outmoded. Accordingly, he sought to demonstrate anew his revolutionary credentials and disqualify heterodoxy within the left. As such, China, estranged since the Sino-Soviet

split, earned little praise from him since its economic rise conceded to market reforms (Hoffmann, 2018); and while moderate heads of state from Brazil, Chile, and elsewhere sat alongside Blair and Clinton at the Progressive Governance summits, Castro met with guerrilla commandos and hard-left parties at the *Foro de São Paulo*. By camping out with the unreformed left, he preserved untainted links that proved beneficial afterwards, as some of these cadres would either remain a security challenge that Latin American governments had to come to terms with (e.g. the FARC) or would be voted in office during the “Pink Tide” that followed the demise of the Washington Consensus (Kruijt, 2019: 292; Serbin, 2012: 197).

Beyond symbolism and interpersonal connections, Cuba’s regional approach has a persistent element of statecraft, by which we mean the disposition and servicing of tools necessary to statehood and political agency. There is a long-running debate in comparative politics on the *matériel* of political order (e.g. Huntington, 1977), and works incorporating external agents emphasize the US-USSR contest in furbishing client governments (Casey, 2020). Smaller actors do not play major league patronage, but this does not keep them from leveraging on the goods they do possess (e.g. oil, see Carvalho and Lopes, forthcoming). Cuban revolutionaries both conquered power and remained there for sixty years, so that the typical clients visiting the island have been those in need of services for gaining or preserving authority at home.

The first iteration of this statecraft element is found in Cuba’s support of armed guerrillas in Latin America. Assistance to these non-state actors conveyed a desire to become senior partner of soon-to-be new governments in the region. Prior to Soviet alignment, Castro accused Moscow’s policy towards the region as “pseudo-revolutionary” in contrast to his own “uncompromising” support to armed struggle, trying to make Havana instead of the Kremlin the central point of reference for the

region in the 1960s (Harmer, 2013). Havana's "Ministry of the Revolution", as the Department of the Americas was dubbed, would remain active even into the 1970s. As scholarship notes, by this decade the early fervor had waned: Cuba moved closer to the Kremlin's line, cut back aid to armed groups, and sought to normalize relations with the neighbors it tried to topple before. Even so, it did not shun connections altogether. Indeed, the merging of separate Latin American guerrilla groups during the decade took place inside Cuban embassies (Castañeda, 1994: 59–61; Kruijt, 2019).

In terms of Goddard's model, Castro, like other revolutionaries, began with neither access nor brokerage. Exporting revolution was an attempt to gain brokerage, weaving exclusive ties with armed movements. As Havana gained more access to the socialist camp (CAME accession in 1972) and guerrillas were defeated across the region, brokerage became less critical.

Though Cuba's first wager on non-state actors did not payoff, there is a new attempt in Nicaragua in the 1980s, when Havana lent its expertise to the beleaguered Sandinistas. "Without the Cubans, it would not have been possible to create the Sandinista army, the police, and the security apparatus of the State. Without these institutions, the Sandinistas would not have remained in power, for a decade, in the midst of such adverse circumstances" (Castañeda, 1994: 99). Though again Cuban hopes were foiled, next in line came Venezuela.

Castro's role in the radicalization of Hugo Chávez is a matter of debate, ranging from accounts placing greater weight in the latter's own authoritarian leanings (Gombata, 2020) to those seeing Bolivarianism as a Cuban export (Hoffmann, 2018). At any rate, Cuban-Venezuelan relations were responsive to the imperatives of political survival coming from Caracas.

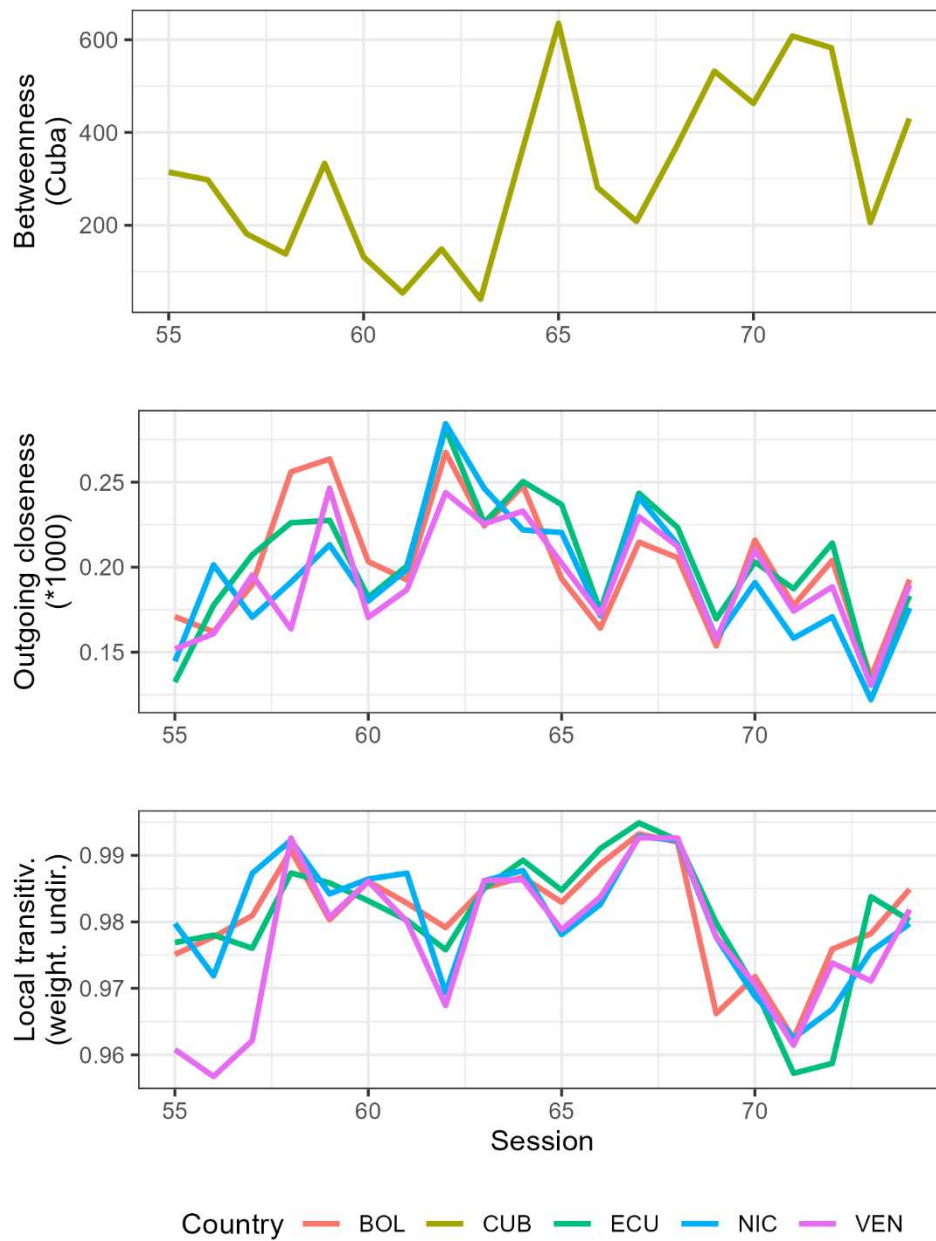
Some constitutional innovations passed by Chávez still in his first term, such as the institutions of Popular Power and the communes, resembled Cuban creations (Gombata, 2020). In 2000, the two leaders signed their first cooperation agreement. Two years later, an external shock triggered the process that would turn what was at first deference into dependence. The turning point was the 2002 coup against Chávez that made him intolerant of domestic opposition and aware that his grip on power was loose. According to Way (2005), authoritarian consolidation requires strong incumbent capacity, which he breaks down into state power, elite organization, and know-how. The opposition Chávez faced revealed his vulnerability in all three items and upgraded the value of Cuban statecraft. Shortly after, Cuban-Venezuelan relations were upgraded with the signing of the 2004 Strategic Agreement and the creation of the *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América* (ALBA). This set into motion the model that characterized the relation in the coming years: Venezuela provided oil at discount prices, and Cuba sent civilian personnel to help Chávez provide important public services less dependent on other agents of Venezuelan politics, while military and intelligence staff created the security apparatus to safeguard the presidency (Fonseca et al., 2020; Gombata, 2020). Data on the latter cooperation are opaque, though the focus on controlling the armed forces is well-known. In May 2008, shortly after Chávez's defeat in the December 2007 referendum on unlimited reelections, Cuban and Venezuelan defense ministries signed two agreements that allowed Havana to train and restructure the intelligence division of the Venezuelan army, converting it from an agency spying on foreign rivals into a barracks police surveilling Caracas' own soldiers and commanders to do diffuse "counterrevolutionary" elements (Berwick, 2019).

In SNA terms, Venezuela's turn from democracy would mean greater isolation for itself. The broker's position, in contrast, is enhanced if its adjacent partners have less diversity in ties. The evidence scattered across the literature on the Venezuelan crisis captures different facets of this segregation: Venezuela was the country that most lost commercial connectivity to Latin America in the last decades (Velosa, 2017), sanctions severed it from financial services (Uzcátegui and Mijares, 2020), and it was either suspended or withdrew from several organizations (Legler, 2020).

The literature adds that the Cuban-Venezuelan tandem formed an "authoritarian gravity center" that would irradiate to other countries, such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua, leading to the same effects of radicalization, reduction in link diversity, and bonding with the authoritarian core (Geoffray and Verlin, 2015; Kneuer, 2022).

If Cuba tried to capitalize on the isolation of radical followers, we should be able to see more structural holes in Havana's ego-network over the years, which can be captured by closeness and local transitivity. Figure 6 shows that, when Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Ecuador were in an upward trend for outgoing closeness, Cuba declined in betweenness. Accordingly, as they became less reachable in later years, Cuba's betweenness grew. The reversal for local transitivity is only apparent in the last years of the series.

Figure 6: Closeness and transitivity scores for Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Ecuador in contrast with Cuban betweenness score



Source: elaborated by the author. Outgoing closeness rescaled for visualization purposes. Edge weights are considered for transitivity in *igraph* through Barrat et al.'s (2004) formula.

Conclusion: institutional, compulsory, and structural strategies of a resistant revisionist state

This paper inquired why weak countries refuse systemic pressures for change. A network analysis of UNGA sponsorship data revealed the central position occupied by Cuba among small resisters and its case study unpacked some of its strategies. The latter fit the notions of institutional, compulsory, and structural power.

Cuba's initial investment in the NAM sought to break isolation and cultivate a high profile. It came under role strain due to its Soviet allegiance, but so forthcoming was the island towards the African majority and their liberation struggles that misgivings were abated. Though conditions seemed ripe in the 1990s for the NAM to fade, context and agency allowed its rejuvenation. Havana was able to radicalize the group due to the increased global exposure of the US and the departure of NAM neutrality proponents – a finding that underscores the interplay between structure and actorness in wielding network power. Further, the NAM's concern with UNGA cohesion allowed Cuba to retain centrality in what is today one of the largest multilateral caucuses in the Assembly. This access-maximizing policy showcases several components of institutional power at work. There are both within- and cross-institution strategies, as Cuba steered NAM functions from the inside and then transported the resulting clout onto a broader setting, the UNGA. The importance of the latter for Cuba is seen in its outsized delegation in New York.

In complement to pursuing access through institutional strategies, Havana invested in brokerage opportunities at the regional level. At first pursued with non-state armed actors, this maneuver would prove more rewarding in the 2000s with left-wing presidents. By then, Cuban know-how was serviceable to leaders desirous to consolidate power. The radicalization of the latter increased their isolation and this perforation of

structural holes augmented Havana's brokering power. In other words, though it is debatable to what extent the authoritarian drifts of countries like Venezuela or Nicaragua are attributable to Cuban influence, Havana was nonetheless well poised to reap the benefits of being a seasoned autocracy and the last link in the chain to these hard-to-reach countries. This reveals a combination of compulsory and structural strategies. Compulsory, for there were few other suppliers in Latin America offering the goods needed for revolution in the 1960s (guns and sanctuary) or coup-proofing in the 2000s (statecraft). Structural, for the isolation of novice rogues gave more leverage to Havana. This suggests that a process well-known to SNA, first-mover effects, also accounts for variation within the revisionist camp. Though Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Nicaragua for most of the last decade espoused stringent revisionist claims towards the US-led order, Havana's seniority this side of world politics meant it collected more assets – from know-how to *bone fides* in Third World coalitions – that gave it an edge even if compared to bigger powers within the bloc. Indeed, that oil-rich Venezuela, for long the fourth biggest economy in Latin America, would be so quickly spent in its anti-imperialist foray, while the small Caribbean island continues afloat, reveals that who is strong and who is weak in international politics is at times far from obvious.

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