Conditional Agenda-Setting in the UN Security Council

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Abstract

From the prevalent, realist point of view, the UN Security Council (UNSC) is dominated by the five permanent members. However, case studies show how smaller, elected members can successfully exert their influence through skilful coalition-building and the use of their procedural rights when taking over the presidency. In this study, we ask under what conditions the UNSC presidency has agenda-setting power. Specifically, we argue that due to its short term in office, the influence of the presidency is limited to urgent UNSC resolutions.

To test our argument, we analyse all speeches held by member states in the UNSC between 1995 and 2020. We find that member states with rhetorical positions close to those of the incumbent presidency are more likely to support UNSC resolutions on acute security threats. By contrast, we find no such effect regarding less urgent resolutions that demand long-term planning. As a byproduct, our analysis describes how the rhetoric in the UNSC has become less procedural and more accusatory with an emphasis on acute security threats.

Under the UN Charter, the Security Council (UNSC) has the responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. It is the only UN body with the authority to make decisions binding on all UN member states, including imposing sanctions and authorising the use of force. Accordingly, decision-making in the UNSC has been increasingly in the focus of empirical research. Much of the existing empirical literature analyses voting behaviour with a focus on the five veto powers (Voeten 2001; von Einsiedel et al. 2015; Vreeland and Dreher 2014). Apart from their veto right, the five permanent members can use their economic and military resources to either bribe smaller members or influence resolutions by threatening outside action. From this perspective, elected members hold little means to influence decision-making in the UNSC. By contrast, qualitative studies find that even small states can effectively yield influence when elected to the UNSC, especially when holding the presidency (Haugevik et al. 2020; Boutellis 2022).

Here, we ask under what conditions the rotating presidency is able to influence UNSC decision-making. Theoretically, we argue that the presidency has conditional agenda-setting power. On the one hand, it has the right to set the preliminary agenda, to schedule meetings, and to choose between open and private meetings. On the other hand, each presidential term lasts only for one month. Therefore, we argue that the agenda-setting powers of the presidency are limited to urgent issues, such as acute security threats. We test our argument by analysing member states' rhetorical positions as revealed in their UNSC speeches between 1995 and 2020 (Schoenfeld et al. 2020). In fact, this is the first empirical analysis describing the changing topics and positions in UNSC speeches. Specifically, we show that member states that are rhetorically closer to the state holding the presidency are more likely to vote affirmative ("yes"). Importantly, this effect depends on the urgency of the resolution put to vote. The presidency has no agenda-setting power over UNSC resolutions that require long-term planning, such as peacekeeping or peacebuilding missions. In contrast, the presidency

has agenda-setting power for resolutions that formalise the UNSC's position on acute security crises.

The next section offers a short summary of relevant literature on UNSC decision-making, followed by a derivation of our theoretical argument. Subsequently, we describe the changing topic prevalence of UNSC speeches. Finally, we test our theoretical argument and discuss our findings.

State of Research

From the dominant realist perspective, UNSC decisions are determined by the interests of the five permanent members (P-5) because they have veto power and can pursue unilateral external options (O'Neill 1996; Bosco 2009; Hosli et al. 2011). From this perspective, the ten non-permanent members (E-10), elected for two-year terms, are irrelevant. Empirically, most important resolutions are indeed drafted by the P-5, especially France, England, and the USA, who act as so-called penholders (Allen and Yuen 2022: 61). Moreover, 80% of all rejected draft resolutions have been vetoed by one or several permanent members. Not only can the P-5 veto any draft resolution they dislike, but they can also use their economic resources to bribe smaller elected members (Kuziemko and Werker 2006; Dreher et al. 2009; Allen and Yuen 2017: 12) or force a decision in their favour by threatening to act outside the Council (Voeten 2001). According to Keating (2015: 146), the P-5 decide "what will be discussed and when. It is now commonplace for P-5 members…to control the Council and exclude discussion of items they find inconvenient."

By comparison, not only do elected members have no veto, but they are also structurally disadvantaged by the brevity of their terms. For many smaller states, sending qualified diplomatic delegations to New York is a significant economic and administrative burden,

which peaks when they have to chair UNSC meetings. In this context, it is relevant that the UNSC workload, measured in meetings and consultations, has significantly increased over the last thirty years (Martin 2020).

However, this does not mean that elected members yield zero influence on UNSC decision-making. Keating (2015: 152) shows that the E-10 nevertheless can "assert a leadership role in the Council" by focusing their technical expertise and diplomatic skills on the questions most important to them. Specifically, the literature identifies three possible means by which the E-10 can yield influence (Haugevik et al. 2021). First, over the last decades, smaller states were increasingly successful in building coalitions on issues of importance to their foreign policy (Boutellis 2022). The growing influence of small-state coalitions on the UNSC agenda has been explained by an overall climate of multilateralism and multipolarity at the start of the new millennium (Badache et al. 2022; Call and de Coning 2017). Second, small states can influence UNSC decision-making by organising special events, for example, by using so-called Arria formula meetings that give concerned individuals, organisations and other UN member states the possibility for a direct dialogue with UNSC members (Haugevik et al 2021).

Third, all member states can use their formal powers during their term as UNSC presidency. The presidency rotates every month according to the English alphabetical order of the names of the member states and has the power to convene meetings, set the provisional agenda and mediate between other UNSC members. Importantly, the presidency can choose the meeting format. The two most popular formats are closed informal consultations or open meetings. While much of the UNSC literature portrays the presidency as an impartial actor, other scholars argue that member states have used the presidency to advance their national foreign policy goals (Blavoukos and Bourantonis 2013; Tallberg 2010; Allan and Yuen 2022). In 2020, for example, the Belgian presidential statement successfully pushed for a better

"protection of children" in Myanmar and Syria, despite resistance from China and Russia to include this issue (Haugevik et al. 2021: 3). Similarly, the Polish presidency in 2018 scheduled two open meetings on international law and the protection of civilians that, eventually, led to UNSC resolution 2417[i]. During its 2019 presidency, Poland scheduled an open meeting on the situation in Georgia against Russian resistance (Security Council Report 2019).

According to Allen and Yuen (2022: 65), the Council presidency "can neither prevent an issue from ever being discussed nor ensure that an issue is handled in the way she most prefers" (…). However, "a strategic president can sway the discussion more toward her preference" by determining the agenda and the type of meeting. During public meetings, speeches and voting are on record and, consequently, observable for the rest of the world. By contrast, informal consultations are a very opaque and untransparent form of meeting to which no other UN members are invited and no official records are kept. Consequently, informal consultations have been criticized for contributing to the low transparency of UNSC decision-making (Keating et al. 2007). However, informal consultations allow for a more confidential setting in which diplomats can effectively engage in candid discussions of sensitive issues. Consequently, informal consultations can facilitate compromises and resolving conflicts without the pressure associated with public scrutiny (Stasavage 2004; Allan and Yuen 2022). Finally, closed informal meetings allow for a more flexible modification and refinement of draft resolutions based on real-time feedback and discussions. Allen and Yuen (2022) argue that informal consultations are consistent with cooperative strategies, i.e., attempt to reach compromise without invoking domestic and international "public costs".

Against this background, it is to be expected that the presidency will prefer informal meetings to particularly contentious issues. However, Lundgren and Klamberg (2023) find the opposite when they analyse UNSC debates over regional conflicts. Conflicts over which members

have divergent interests are more likely to enter the agenda of public meetings than other conflicts. "The historical record suggests that UNSC members do not shy away from placing issues on the agenda, even when they anticipate defeat. For example, in the 2010s and early 2020s, the P3 repeatedly sought to table resolutions on Syria, despite knowing full well that these deliberations would end in Russian and Chinese vetoes." (Lundgren and Klamberg 2023: 965). This suggests that UNSC members are not exclusively interested in achieving a UNSC decision that reflects their own position, but that signalling and blaming also motivate states' behaviour in the UNSC.

Allen and Yuen (2022) argue that, ultimately, the presidency's strategic use of "public costs" is a means to achieve a preferable UNSC resolution. Specifically, they argue that "the Council president is more likely to choose the type of meeting (consultation, public or none) that results in a proposal closest to the president's preferred resolution" (65).

Overall, the degree to which the rotating presidency can influence UNSC decisions remains an open question. Some authors argue that the presidency yields significant agenda-setting power, especially the right to draft the preliminary agenda and to choose between open and closed meetings. Others are more pessimistic, arguing that especially smaller, elected member states lack resources to use these rights effectively. Next, we argue that the presidency's agenda-setting power is conditional, depending on the urgency of the issue. Subsequently, we propose a new method to test our claim by jointly analysing UNSC speeches and voting records.

Conditional Agenda-Setting Power

The UNSC presidency schedules meetings to discuss an item on the agenda, and thus the presidency plays an important role in agenda setting (Allen and Yuen 2022: 10). As in any

other decision-making body, agenda-setting privileges in the UNSC imply influence over the policy outcomes, i.e., over UNSC resolutions. The literature distinguishes between positive agenda-setting power, i.e. the ability to put an issue on the agenda and make proposals, and gate-keeping power, i.e. the ability to keep an issue of the agenda (e.g. Sheplse and Weingast 1984; Crombez et al. 2006). Agenda-setting in the UNSC is a multi-stage process in which both the presidency and the so-called "penholders" play a prominent role. At the beginning of the process, an issue is formally brought to the attention of the UNSC. In principle, all UN member states have the right to bring an issue to the Council's attention. Moreover, acting by majority vote, the UN General Assembly and the Secretary General can bring an issue. In the next step of the process, the Council presidency decides whether the issue should be discussed in the UNSC. The presidency can also decide whether the issue should be addressed in public meetings or during informal consultations behind closed doors. Subsequently, so-called penholder states write a draft resolution. They are joined by co-penholders (i.e. co-sponsors). Finally, the president can call a public meeting in which the resolution is put to a vote.

In this process, the penholders yield influence on the content of a draft resolution. "When a Security Council member holds the pen on an agenda item, they have the benefit of shaping and leading related Council action" (Gregroy 2023: 2). In principle, any member of the UNSC may hold the pen and bring a draft resolution. However, over the last 20 years, France, the UK, and the US (the P-3) have played a prominent role in drafting Council outcomes. For this reason, the practice of assigning penholders to recurring security issues has been criticised, not least because it discriminates against the elected members of the Council (Gregory 2023)[ii].

Whereas the penholders yield powerful influence over the content of UNSC draft resolutions, the Council presidency has gate-keeping powers and yields indirect influence by selecting the

type of meeting. First, the presidency can unilaterally schedule an issue for discussion and, ultimately, voting or keep it off the agenda. A majority of UNSC members is necessary to overturn the presidency's decision and force an issue on the agenda. "Because plenary time (the time available for the Council to meet) is scarce, the Security Council cannot debate and respond to all international crises. Determining which issues will get attention is a critical first step in the process of Security Council action" (Allen and Yuen 2022: 72). Second, the presidency can choose whether an issue is discussed in open meetings or in closed, informal consultations. In other words, the presidency can choose whether decision-making is subjected to the pressure of public scrutiny. Following Allend and Yuen (2023), this choice may have a significant effect on the content of UNSC resolutions.

The UNSC presidency is motivated by three factors that are also discussed in the literature on other international institutions, in particular the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union (e.g. Thomson 2006, Haege 2017). *First,* it is assumed that the presidency wants to maximise its diplomatic success, "that is, agreements that come out of its stint in the presidency" (Allen and Yuen 2023, chap 3). Therefore, presidencies will not dedicate precious plenary time to discuss issues that are likely to end with a veto anyhow. Therefore, UNSC members consider it as "a success in itself" if they can successfully place an issue on the agenda (Wuthnow 2013). To make this first motivation work, the presidency must know beforehand whether a draft resolution will be adopted or vetoed. This assumption is justified by the extensive informal contacts among UNSC members (Sievers and Daws, 2014).

Second, the presidency follows its own foreign policy interests. Accordingly, issues are less likely to be scheduled for discussion if the drafted resolution violates the foreign policy interests of the member state holding the presidency. Moreover, issues are more likely to be scheduled if they are of importance to the member state holding the presidency. Again, we find the same assumption regarding the rotating presidency of the Council of the European

Union (Haege 2017). Hence, draft resolutions scheduled for voting should be beneficial to the presidency. Therefore, the outcome proposed in tabled draft resolutions will be reasonably close to the position of the member state holding the UNSC presidency.

Third, as all UNSC member states, the presidency is concerned about "public accountability costs" (Allen and Juen 2023:66). The UNSC is a uniquely powerful international institution because its decisions can legitimise the use of force. Around the globe, states and their populations expect that the UNSC will adopt decisions that contribute to solving acute and impending security threats that involve inter- and intra-state violence. Open sessions of the UNSC allow members to put their positions on the world stage and take binding decisions while the world watches. Resolutions can only be adopted in public meetings, therefore voting behaviour is always on the record. Allen and Juen (2023: 66) argue that public accountability costs "capture a specific, anticipated cost that states bear when an action reveals a state as one type or another." This definition is related to, yet broader than, the concept of audience costs used in the crisis bargaining literature (Fearon 1994). For example, in 2017, the US vetoed a resolution submitted by Egypt that called for reversal of the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital (a decision taken by the Trump administration weeks before). This veto underscored the isolation of the US position on the issue, thus causing public costs for the US among significant parts of the domestic audience but also among governments around the globe.

Two arguments follow from the presidency's motivation and prerogatives. *First,* the resolutions tabled will be close to the presidency's own preferences on the matter. At the very least, and given the gatekeeping powers of the presidency, the presidency will not strongly oppose resolutions tabled under its watch, otherwise it would keep them off the agenda. Assuming a simple utility loss function commonly used in spatial voting models (e.g. Hinich

1976), we therefore expect that UNSC members' *likelihood to vote "yes" decreases with their distance to the position of the UNSC presidency (H1).* Conversely, we argue that the tabled draft is close to the position of the presidency and, therefore, states with foreign policy positions that deviate from those of the presidency are more likely to vote either "no" or to abstain.

Second, the presidency's term only lasts one month, which is, compared to other international organizations, relatively short. UNSC resolutions differ by the extent to which they imply specific, long-term collective action or are merely giving an opinion on acute security threats. Some UNSC resolutions authorize the use of force by UN member states or grant specific mandates to UN bodies. This includes mandates for peacebuilding missions, peacekeeping missions, and expert commissions. Other votes are on the appointment and nomination of leading UN personnel such as International Criminal Tribunals or the Counter Terrorism Committee. For all these issues, member states have a joint understanding that collective action is necessary. Consequently, the conflict is over the design of missions, budgetary matters, or the identity and background of the nominees. Importantly, such necessary collective action is prepared in the extensive and oftentimes lengthy informal and formal consultations that outlast the planning horizon of individual presidencies by far (Sievers and Daws 2014). Furthermore, UN resolutions in this category reflect multinational compromises that often depend on the goodwill of non-member states for equipping a mission or nominating a high-level expert. By implication, individual presidencies have only limited influence on the content of those resolutions, thus undermining the causal mechanism implied by H1.

By contrast, other resolutions have the sole purpose that the UN's most powerful body is to give its authoritative opinion on an urgent security threat. These resolutions often contain

implicit condemnations of conflict participants and, consequently, tend to be controversial. In the order of UNSC work, such opinions on a security threat precede possible UNSC action at a later stage. Voting on these resolutions is about raw position taking, without any immediate and specific consequences or collective actions. Recently, UNSC Resolution 2712 on the situation in Gaza as well as all UNSC resolution adopted during the UNSC special session about the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine belong into this category. For UNSC resolutions on urgent security threats the preparatory period is shorter, thereby increasing the influence of individual Presidencies. Against this background, we expect that ***the explanatory power of H1 (distance to the presidency) is weaker for UNSC resolutions authorising collective action than for UNSC resolutions stating positions on acute security threats (H2).***

Based on the formal rights of the UNSC presidency, we derive two theoretical expectations for the observable voting behaviour in the UNSC. Our first hypothesis is based on the utility loss function commonly applied in spatial voting models. Given the presidency's agenda setting powers, we assume that resolutions put to a vote in the UNSC are not in violation of the presidency's own interests and, by implication, reasonably close to the position of the member state holding the presidency. Therefore, we expect that states close to the presidency are more likely to vote "yes". In our second hypothesis, we argue that the presidency's agenda setting power is conditional and depends on the nature of UNSC resolutions. UNSC resolutions authorizing specific collective action require a longer planning period and depend on the good will of non-members. By contrast, UNSC resolutions offering opinions on acute security threats have less time for planning and preparation. The presidency has more influence on the latter than on the former.

Empirical Analysis

UNSC Debates

In order to test our theoretical argument, we need to identify member states' positions on proposals put to a vote in the UNSC. Existing measures are inappropriate for this purpose for two reasons. First, existing estimates of positions are based on voting in the UN General Assembly, which debates a different, broader set of issues and where coalition building (Dijkhuizen and Onderco 2019; Seabra and Mesquita 2022) and subsequent voting (e.g. Voeten 2001; Bailey et al. 2017) follow a different dynamic than in the UNSC. The same arguments hold regarding existing measures that scale either UN General Debates (Baturo et al. 2017) or speeches held in the General Assembly (Author 2023). Second, applying standard scaling algorithms to voting in the UNSC does not offer a way out either. On the one hand, this would be an attempt to explain voting by scaled votes, which appears tautological. On the other hand, and more practically, we simply lack enough votes to estimate annual ideal positions. The UNSC votes on 60 to 80 draft proposal each year, but almost 97% of the individual votes are affirmative ("yes"), leaving little variation for scaling meaningful ideal points from observed voting behaviour.

As an alternative, we rely on speeches delivered by UNSC members in open meetings. The corpus containing "UN Security Council Debates" was created and published by Schoenfeld et al. (2019). In its current version, it contains a total of 82,165 speeches held in the UNSC between 1995 and 2020. Furthermore, Schoenfeld et al. (2019) provide information on the affiliation of the speaker and the role of the speaker. The dataset also includes meeting information, such as the official agenda item under which the speech was delivered.

In the present application, we extend the standard pre-processing of the documents, which includes English language stemming, the exclusion of numbers and rare terms, by four additional preparatory steps. First, we retain only speeches delivered by representatives of

permanent or elected member states of the UNSC, thus deleting guest speakers. This reduces the number of speeches to 59,844. Second, we delete all country names as well as corresponding adjectives. Third, we delete all speaker names and titles from the text. Fourth, we only keep terms that appear over a time span of minimum 10 years, which effectively deletes 20% of the terms. Importantly, our substantive results do not depend on any of these filters. However, interpretation of the resulting latent dimensions becomes much easier and is not blurred by the many context-specific terms that often come with very high discrimination parameters. The final corpus contains 59,840 speeches with 7,445 different terms. We estimate 15 UNSC member states' positions in 26 years, which results in n=390 observations.

To better understand the changing agenda of the UNSC, we model the prevalence of topics using the Structural Topic Modelling (STM) library in R (Roberts et al. 2014). There is no unique way to choose the optimal number of topics, but the choice must be justified by (i) the predictive accuracy of the model and (ii) the interpretability of the resulting potential topics. Optimising predictive accuracy and interpretability may result in a trade-off. When comparing human ratings of different topic models with their predictive accuracy, Chang et al. (2009) found that better performance on predictive accuracy often corresponds to less interpretable results. For the sake of interpretability, we limited our search for the optimal number of topics to a maximum of k = 20. In this range, we find two elbow effects regarding predictive accuracy and semantic coherence at k = 6 and k = 10 (see appendix A1).

To interpret the resulting latent topics, we look at the words that are both frequent within and exclusive to each topic. Bischof and Airoldi (2012) proposed a measure, the FREX score, which combines a term's exclusivity to topic j and its overall frequency of use in speeches on that topic. Thus, terms with a high FREX score are words that are both frequent and exclusive, thereby helping us to identify terms that distinguish topics (Roberts et al. 2014). Overall, the k=6 topic model returns four substantive topics and two topics characterised by

administrative and procedural language. The terms with high FREX scores for these topics are listed in Appendix 2.

Figure 1 shows the changing prevalence of topics over time. The first major topic is clearly debates on arms control and disarmament. The prevalence of this topic has risen steadily throughout the period of observation. We find a temporary peak in 2004/5, corresponding to former US Secretary of State Colin Powell's use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to legitimise the US intervention in Iraq and to the virulence of the debate over Iran's nuclear programme.
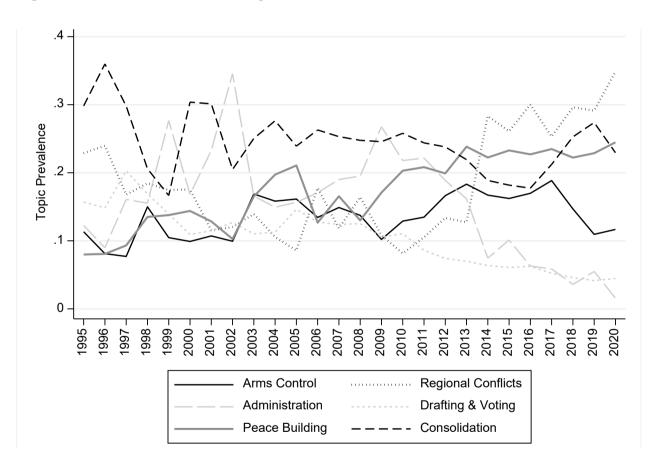
The second topic concerns debates on acute regional conflicts. Figure 1 shows three peaks for this topic. A first peak can be observed in the mid-1990s, when the UNSC was still dealing with the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, including the Bosnian War, the first Chechen War and, more indirectly, the Algerian Civil War. The second peak can be observed in 2005-2008, when the US was still actively involved in Afghanistan and Iraq, Russia intervened in Georgia, and violence escalated in the Gaza Strip. Finally, Figure 1 shows that after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the relevance of regional conflicts in UNSC speeches increased dramatically.

The third substantive topic reflects debates on peacebuilding and peacekeeping. Figure 1 reveals that the prevalence of peacekeeping and peacebuilding has been steadily increasing from approx. 10% in the mid-1990s to approx. 25% in 2020. The significant increase from 2010 onwards reflects major UN missions, such as MONUSCU (2010), UNMISS (2011), UNISFA (2011), MINUSMA (2013) and MINUSCA (2014). Around the same time, the topic became especially prevalent in Chinese speeches, devoting almost 30% of its speaking time to the topic. This increasing topic prevalence matches the increase in China's troops and police contributions to UN missions (Gowan 2020[iii]).

Relatedly, the fourth substantive topic captures UNSC debates on reconciliation in the aftermath of civil wars and intrastate conflicts. Figure 1 shows that the prevalence of the topic of reconciliation has been relatively constant, with a brief peak in the 1990s reflecting the aftermath of the Balkan wars.

Finally, the model returns two latent topics that do not reflect substantive debates, but rather capture administrative and procedural language. One captures the organisation of the debates themselves, while the other reflects the organisation of the drafting and voting phase. The prevalence of both topics initially declined steadily and then dramatically after 2014.

Figure 1. Prevalence of Six Latent Topics in the UNSC From 1995 to 2020.

The changing prevalence of topics in UNSC debates provides important background

knowledge for our analysis. However, to test our theoretical argument, we need a measure of

member states' positions on the proposals put to a vote in the UNSC. To this end, we scale

the UNSC speeches using the unsupervised Wordfish algorithm (Proksch and Slapin 2008).

In order to capture changes over time and to have a sufficient amount of text for a valid

estimation, we aggregate all speeches delivered by a UNSC member in one year. On the one

hand, estimating positions in a common space that spans our entire observation period is

complicated by the rotation of non-permanent members in the UNSC as well as the changes

on the agenda. On the other hand, estimating 26 separate, annual models do not allow for a

comparison of conflict intensity over time. We address this trade-off by using both

approaches. First, we use a common space estimator that is subsequently corrected for the

underlying time trend. Second, we estimate 26 separates annual Wordfish models.

Fortunately, we find that both approaches lead to the same substantive conclusion.

(i)   *Common Space*

Figure 2 shows member states' rhetorical positions that result from estimating a single

Wordfish model on the entire corpus covering 26 years of UNSC speeches. The figure clearly

shows an underlying time trend that accelerates with the turn of the millennium. Furthermore,

it shows that the USA and Russia held the most extreme positions on the underlying

dimension for many years. Below, we demonstrate that one end of the underlying dimension

is characterised by procedural and cooperative language, whereas the other end is

characterised by a language that openly addresses security threats and misconduct by other

member states. As described above, the focus of UNSC debates has shifted from an

administrative, technical focus to a more political, threat-focused one. However, in any given

year, Russian speeches have tended to emphasise procedural aspects, while US speeches have more openly addressed security threats and the resulting humanitarian crises.

Next, we decompose this common space estimator in a longitudinal and a cross-sectional component. To this end, we estimate a regression with year-level fixed effects. The predictions of this model capture the common time trend ($\hat{\theta}_t$), and the residuals capture members' rhetorical position in any given year ($v_i = \theta_i - \hat{\theta}_t$). To identify each term's relevance for either the common time trend or the interstate conflict, we estimate the following Poisson model for each of the 7,445 terms.

$$Y_{ij} \sim Poisson(\lambda_{ij}) \qquad\qquad (1.1)$$

$$\lambda_{ij} = exp\left(\alpha_j + \beta_{j0}\,\psi_i + \beta_{j1}\,\hat{\theta}_t + \beta_{j2}\,v_i\right) \qquad\qquad (1.2)$$
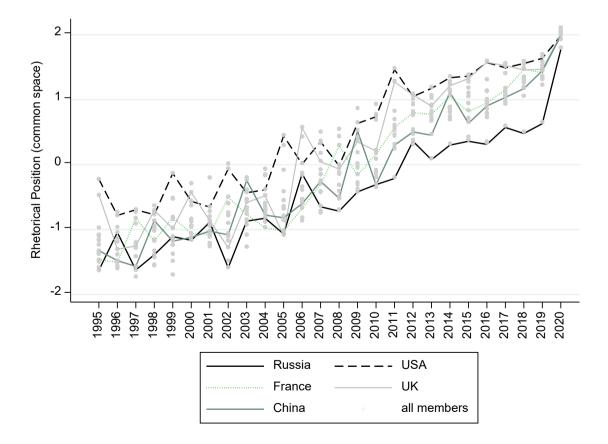
In this model, Y_{ij} is term j's frequency in text i, where each text includes all speeches given by a UNSC member state in any specific year t. The model includes an intercept for each term j (α_j) as well as for each text i (ψ_i). Importantly, β_{j1} indicates a terms relevance for discriminating between debates held in different years. By comparison, β_{j2} captures a term's relevance for discriminating between speeches held within the same year (see Figure 3).

We find that in any specific year, member states with lower rhetorical positions (such as Russia) are more frequently using procedural and diplomatic terms, e.g. "seat", "interpret", "consent", "consult", "vote", "meet" or "resolut". By contrast, member states with a higher rhetorical position (such as the USA) are more frequently using terms that directly address threats, crises and misconduct by other states, e.g. "violenc", "attack, "kill", "atroc", "bomb", "brutal" or "desper". Appendix 3 depicts the β_{j1}, i.e. terms' relevance for discriminating between the average position of speeches given in different years. The underlying latent
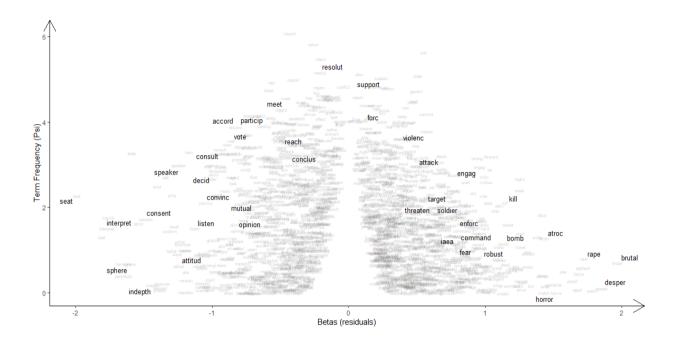
dimension is the same, but the relevant terms point at temporary trends in UNSC debates, such as "unmik", "hiv", or "disarmament" on one side and "alqaida", "twostat", "climat", or "terrorist" on the other side.

Overall, it can be argued that the underlying latent dimension pitches states that emphasise procedural and diplomatic language against states that emphasise acute crises and security threats and accuse other UN member states of violating international norms. To test our two hypotheses, we calculate the distance between the rhetorical positions of member states and the presidency. Given the monthly rotation of the presidency, we do not have to trend-adjust the position for this purpose, i.e. we can directly use θ_i.

Figure 2. Rhetorical Position of UNSC Member States. Note: Estimates based on a common Wordfish scaling model for the entire period of observation.
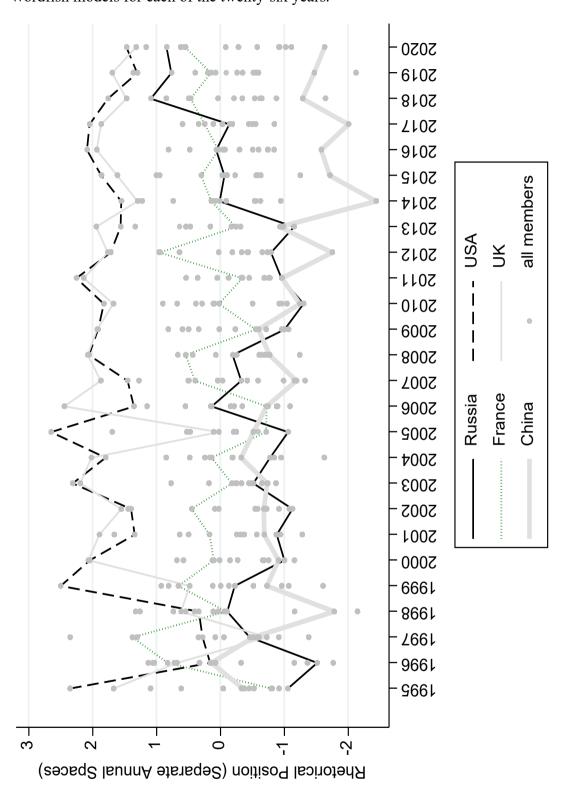
Figure 3. Terms' Relevance for Discriminating Between Member States' Position in any Specific Year (β_{j2} , *see eq*. 1.2). Note: Shows only β_{j2} that are significant at the 95% level.
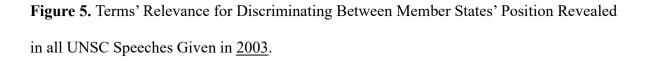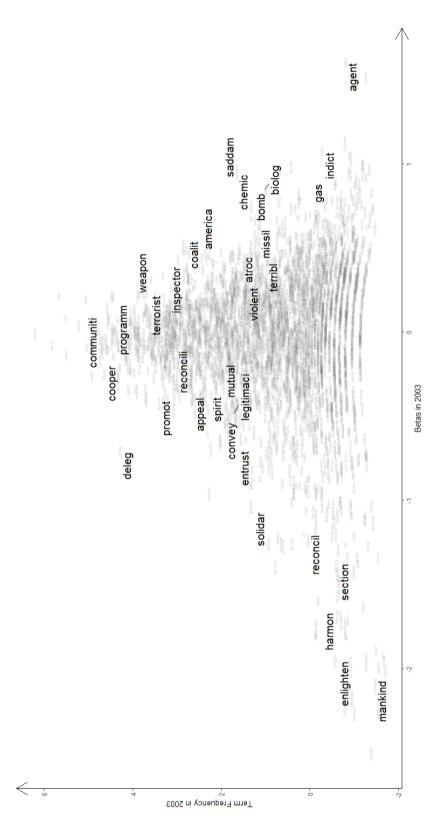

(ii)   *Separate Annual Spaces*

Although the common space approach is better able to handle changing conflict intensity over time, it has the disadvantage of forcing the same latent dimension on all debates from 1995 to 2020. To overcome this trade-off, we estimate separate Wordfish models for each of the 26 years in our dataset. Figure 4 plots the resulting rhetorical positions. We find that before 2014, the conflict has the USA and the UK at one extreme, with Russia and China at the other. However, from 2014 onwards, Russia's rhetoric increasingly resembles the one observed in British and US speeches. This is not the case for the Chinese rhetoric, which therefore from 2014 onwards distinctly differs from Russian speeches.

How has the rhetorical conflict space in the UNSC evolved over time? Appendix 4 shows that, from the year 2000, the annual item discrimination parameters are strongly correlated. This indicates a certain stability of the substantive conflict, which, however, was more

volatile from 1995 to 1999. During those early years, we also find more fluctuation in the relative rhetorical positions of the five permanent members (Figure 4). However, the correlations of beta parameters alone are insufficient to study stability and change of the rhetorical conflict in the UNSC. After all, the significance of regional conflicts and crises changes over time. To better understand the substantive rhetorical conflict, we therefore analyse the item discrimination parameters of each of the 26 Wordfish models. The upshot is that from 2000 onwards, we find by and large the same substantive conflict as in the common space estimation. However, the specific nature of the rhetorical conflict differs across years. To illustrate this specificity, we plot the item discrimination parameters for 2003 (Figure 5). The debate in 2003 took place against the US-led invasion of Iraq. The US-UK rhetoric emphasised words such as "biology", "chemic", "weapon", "programm", "terrorist", "atroc", "missil" or "bomb". By contrast, the Chinese and Russian rhetoric made more frequently use of words such as "harmon", "mankind", "solidar", "entrust", "reconcile", "cooper", "deleg" or "legitimaci". Another example are the debates in 2014, which took place against the background of the Russian annexation of Crimea and the shoot-down of Malaysian Airline flight MH17 by Russian separatists. In 2014, the Chinese rhetoric was still cooperative and procedural using words like "pragmat", "accomod", "mutual", "reconstruct", "humankind" or "talk". By contrast, the US-UK rhetoric has been characterised by terms such as "threat", "kill", "separatist", "horrif", "launcher", "rocket", "devast", "brutal" or "survivor" (Appendix 5).

Figure 4. Rhetorical Position of UNSC Member States. Note: Estimates based on separate Wordfish models for each of the twenty-six years.

Figure 5. Terms' Relevance for Discriminating Between Member States' Position Revealed in all UNSC Speeches Given in 2003.

To test our first hypothesis (H1), we calculate the absolute distance between each members' position to the position of the state holding the UNSC presidency at the time of the vote (*proximity to presidency*). To ensure the robustness of our substantive findings, we operationalise this variable using both the common space estimators and the position estimates from 26 separate, annual Wordfish models.

To operationalise our second hypothesis (H2), we need a proxy for the urgency of the matter put to vote. The theoretical argument suggests that UNSC presidency yields more influence over proposals on acute security threats than over proposals that deal with collective actions and that require long-term planning (e.g. UN missions, appointments). We encode proposals as dealing with acute security threats if they include one of the following words in the title: "situation" (230 resolutions), "conflict" (152 resolutions), "ceasefire" (51 resolutions), "incident" (6 resolutions) and "emergency" (6 resolutions).

Our dependent variable is dichotomous, with Y=1 indicating a "yes" vote and Y=0 indicating a "no" vote or abstention. UNSC voting data has been collected and published by Dreher et al. (2022). The dataset includes voting information on 1,602 tabled proposals between 1995 and 2020. As mentioned above, almost 97% of the votes are affirmative, leaving only 191 tabled proposals with contentious voting results. For those 191 contentious resolutions, we observe 81% "yes" votes. According to our coding, we find that 56 of the 191 contested votes have been on acute security threats.

To account for the nested structure of the data, we include either fixed or random effects for each tabled resolution. Moreover, we control for the time trend as described in equation 1.2 ($\hat{\theta}_t$). To control for unobservable member state characteristics, we include fixed effects. Alternatively, we cluster standard errors in member states, which leaves our substantive findings unchanged. Finally, we include member states' economic power (GDP, log.) and the

regime type. The latter is approximated by the Polyarchy measure encoded by the Vdem research group (Coppedge et al. 2022).

Results

The results of our regression analysis are presented in Table 2 as well as in Figure 6. We estimate a fixed and a random effects model with and without the state holding the UNSC presidency. We estimate that the time trend is negative, meaning that the probability of a "yes" vote has decreased over time. In other words, as the focus of UNSC debates has shifted from procedural topics to sensitive and contentious ones, the likelihood of a "no" vote has increased.

Overall, the results of all four models strongly support our theoretical argument. We find (i) a negative effect of member states' rhetorical distance from the presidency and (ii) this effect is significantly stronger for votes dealing with urgent proposals, i.e. draft resolutions addressing acute security threats. Both effects are consistently stronger for positions based on the common space estimator than for the positions based on twenty-six separates annual Wordfish models. For member states that are in full rhetorical agreement with the presidency, we estimate a probability for a "yes" vote of p=0.81, regardless of whether the proposal is urgent or not. For non-urgent proposals, this probability remains constant regardless of the rhetorical distance of the member state to the presidency. For urgent proposals, however, the probability for a "yes" vote decreases as the rhetorical distance to the presidency increases (Figure 6; Appendix 6). For member states whose rhetorical position is in complete opposition to the presidency, we find that a negative vote on urgent proposals is more likely than a positive vote.

Our substantive results are robust against different preprocessing of the UNSC corpus. Furthermore, they are robust against clustering standard errors in member states. In addition, our substantive findings are robust against including other, potentially relevant control variables such as GDP, GDPp.C, military capabilities (CINC) or regime type. Finally, our findings are robust against including all 1,602 resolutions and not just the 191 contested resolutions in the estimation of the random effects model.

Conclusion

According to the realist perspective, decision-making in the UNSC is dominated by the five resourceful permanent members (P-5). The P-5 can use their veto power to bloc unfavourable draft resolutions, they can use the economic resources to bribe smaller, elected member states, and they can credibly threaten outside options to influence UNSC resolutions in their favour (O'Neill 1996; Bosco 2009; Voeten 2001; Dreher et al. 2009). In contrast, a growing number of mainly qualitative studies argue that elected members can also have an impact, albeit limited, on UNSC resolutions (Haugevik 2021; Keating 2015). One way of exerting influence is through the presidency, which rotates among all member states on a monthly basis. The presidency enjoys institutional privileges, including the right to set the preliminary agenda and the right to choose between open and closed meetings. We argue here that these rights give the presidency conditional agenda-setting power.

An important condition for successful agenda-setting is the urgency of the proposals. We argue – and provide empirical evidence – that the presidency yields no influence over proposals that require long-term planning, such as UN missions. In contrast, the presidency does exert influence on proposals related to acute security threats, which are characterised by a certain degree of urgency. On the empirical side, this is the first analysis to estimate

rhetorical positions from UNSC speeches. The results of this textual analysis are more than just a means of testing our arguments but have their own value. We find that the rhetorical conflict in the UNSC is between members who emphasise a more procedural, diplomatic language and members who are more open about violations of international law and humanitarian crises. For most of our observation period, this rhetorical conflict has been between China/ Russia at one end and the US/UK at the other. Over time, the rhetoric in the UNSC has become less procedural and more political, with more explicit reference to security threats and violations of international law. This trend has been accompanied by more contentious and negative votes.

The two main lessons from our analysis are, first, that the UNSC presidency can influence the content of UNSC resolutions and, second, that rhetorical conflict in the UNSC matters because it is related to voting behaviour. Our findings thus support previous research on the presidency (Allen and Yuen 2022). Given our findings, the monthly rotation of the UNSC presidency seems a reasonable choice. A longer presidency could extend the president's agenda power to less urgent proposals. Next steps on this research agenda could be to analyse UNSC rhetoric on different topics, as well as the presidency's motivation for choosing either open meetings or closed consultations.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Model to Explain Voting in the UNSC.

Note: All models include resolution-level fixed effects, m=1414 resolutions dropped because they were adopted unanimously. Models 1 and 2 include fixed effects in member states, models 3 and 4 include random effects in member states. Robust standard errors in parentheses. ***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.1$.

M=188	M1a	M1b	M2a	M2b	M3a	M3b	M4a	M4b
	FE		FE w.o. presidency		RE		RE w.o. presidency	
Dist.Presidency (separate)	0.136		0.232**		0.158		0.246**	
	(0.101)		(0.114)		(0.0964)		(0.106)	
Dist.Presidency (common)		0.0656		0.295		0.0360		0.209
		(0.343)		(0.395)		(0.307)		(0.340)
Urgency					0.00527	0.259	0.210	0.437
					(0.278)	(0.283)	(0.300)	(0.304)
Dist.Presidency (separate)#Urgency	-0.553***		-0.755***		-0.571***		-0.724***	
	(0.166)		(0.180)		(0.157)		(0.170)	
Dist.Presidency (common)#Urgency		-2.876***		-3.351***		-2.634***		-3.011***
		(0.553)		(0.592)		(0.507)		(0.543)
Time Trend (see eq.1)					-0.293***	-0.342***	-0.347***	-0.300***
					(0.102)	(0.105)	(0.110)	(0.107)
Observations	2,812	2,812	2,596	2,596	2,433	2,433	2,233	2,233
LogLikelihood	-622.8	-610.8	-560.04	-549.4	-999.9	-989.1	-932.5	-923.0
AIC	1445.6	1421.7	1320.1	1298.8	2145.9	2124.2	2008.9	1990.1

Figure 6. Predicted Marginal Probability for a "Yes" Vote Comparing Non-Urgent (dashed line) to Urgent (solid line) UNSC Resolutions. Note: 95% confidence intervals, based on model 3b in table 2.

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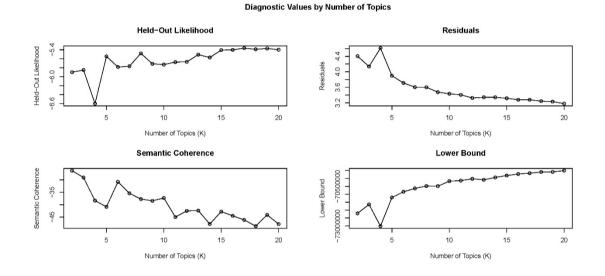
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The Conditional Agenda-Setting Power of the UNSC Presidency

Appendix

A1. Indicators for Choosing a Suitable and Useful Number of Topics.

Diagnostic Values by Number of Topics

A2. Terms with the Highest FREX Scores for a k=6 Solution.

Arms Control (WMD):
nuclear, tribun, sanction, nonprolif, ice, weapon, couritt, chemic, crimin, icti, prosecutor, expert, treati, trial, iaea, alqaida, mass, panel, prosecut, ictr, nonstat, prolif, investig, statut, terror, individu, residu, embargo, rome, atom, destruct, jurisdict, prohibit, entiti, arrest, method, mechan, fugit, export, counter, subsidiari, crime, justic, aviat, case, energi, convent, missil, npt, terrorist, regim, inspect, transfer, fighter, travel, genocid, impun, legal, ballist, suspect, accus, peninsula, indict, biolog, complet, oblig, pursuant, small, judici, monitor, materi, alleg, warrant, ombudsperson, transpar, complianc, technic, review, exempt, enforc, technolog, evid, inspector, interpol, bodi, alqadhafi, impo, outreach, acquir, team, stockpil, measur, disarma, denuclear, updat, sentenc, applic, enrich, programm, verifi, internet, illicit, procur, instrument, possess
Regional Conflicts:
palestinian, gaza, civilian, humanitarian, conflict, violenc, attack, parti, twostat, solut, million, palestin, crisi, peopl, jerusalem, regim, need, live, displac, popul, violat, ceasefir, refug, access, negoti, effort, suffer, situat, law, settlement, war, aid, middl, occupi, kill, intern, strip, east, medic, resolut, escal, children, action, hostil, recent, hama, terror, militari, rocKet, end, stop, govern, food,

commit, condemn, deescal, ensur, elap, area, human, blockad, occup, territori, thousand, polil, increa, separatist, principl, step, camp, ground, serious, alhudaydah, minsk, innoc, deterior, fight, bomb, risk, find, convoy, damascus, achiev, oblig, journalist, mean, sieg, weeK, world, face, urgent, terrorist, besieg, safe, hospit, infrastructur, border, secur, hope, indiscrimin

Deliberation:

floor, speaker, give, kind, repr, inscrib, word, now, next, spoke, minut, list, statement, tabl, ctte, affair, write, suspend, conden, excel, lengthi, minist, , version, ask, make, seat, thank, comment, teleconf, circul, via, concur, foreign, escort, resum, video, lunch, subject, clarif, speak, briefer, hour, nouvel, viceminist, take, afternoon, shall, ambassador, limit, deliv, head, breviti, prime, interpret, rede, flash, late, name, wish, apolog, intend, francophoni, observ, chamber, four, alchatou, abldjan, predecessor, configur, gavel, pleasur, tayebrook, vice, vicechair, deleg, respond, succinct, everybodi

Drafting& Voting:

vote, item, letter, draft, provis, prior, decid, document, rule, consult, procedur, agenda, contain, favour, accord, consent, text, understand, conform, object, consid, usual, begin, particip, ballot, council, took, hear, meet, draw, stage, thus, recelv, reserv, unanim, symbol, reach, transmit, proceed, behalf, unless, conclud, abstain, propo, paper, request, discuss, sprst, member, candid, resolut, extend, secur, present, submit, abstent, great, seiz, readi, daffair, provi, practic, show, videoteleconf, afor, attent, copi, feder, teller, enclo, adopt, put, agr, perman, inform, read, without, busi, oral, paragraph, relev, taken, invalid, absenc, receipt, skill, shall, nomin, unit, hand, matter
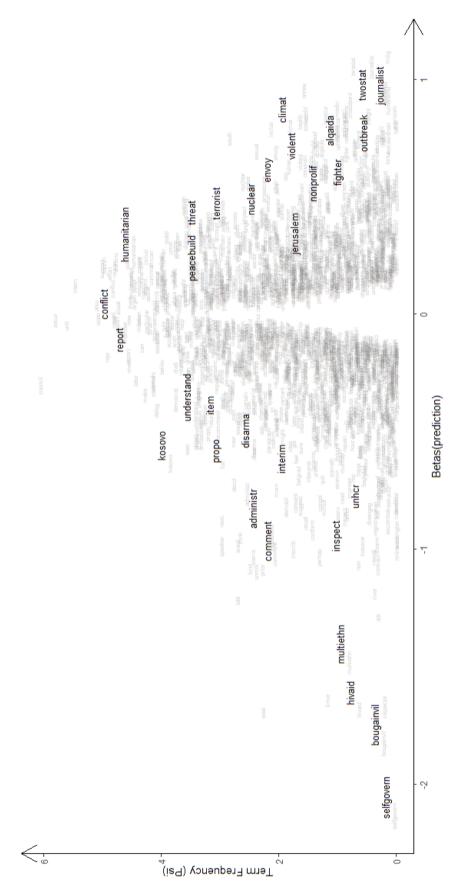
Peace Building & Keeping:

postconflict, women, sexual, peacekeep, peacebuild, conlin, drug, gender, traffick, subregion, partnership, african, youth, central, poverti, train, resourc, root, climat, multidimens, social, transnat, girl, prevent, empow, exploit, societi, conflict, crise, child, oper, coher, educ, hivaid, sector, fund, often, africa, manag, recruit, strategi, strateg, resili, mobil, host, tackl, troopcontribut, children, haram, organ, medical, sustain, vulner, capacitybuild, violent, gender, better, arm, decisionmak, region, erad, enhanc, synergi, asean, architectur, develop, coast, mainten, reintegr, strengthen, femal, holist, challeng, perspect, exampl, epidem, dimen, lesson, global, advantag, combat, factor, approach, complex, debat, mainstream, inequ, cultur, predict, relap, demobil, adapt, affect, ownership, financ, policecontribut, gulf, experti, invest, econom, peacemak,

Reconciliation:

reconcili, transit, stabil, agreement, belgrad, somali, process, progress, osc, govern, administr, stabl, timor, dialogu, pristina, leader, balkan, timorlest, polic, reconstruct, congol, unmik, lusaka, dayton, democrat, prosper, municip, mulliethn, democraci, consolid, sign, success, referendum, reform, presenc, toward, normal, confid, ethnic, futur, polit, hope, commend, momentum, encourag, provinc, return, phase, command, author, achiev, kosovar, igad, nato, restor, gradual, mission, trust, ahead, parliament, neighbour, construct, soon, benchmark, overcom, constitut, schedul, voter, selfgovern, forward, parliamentari, period, unili, upcom, support, appoint, smooth, path, satisfact, srpska, burundian, congratul, outstand, revit, mutual, high, condit, reconfigure.
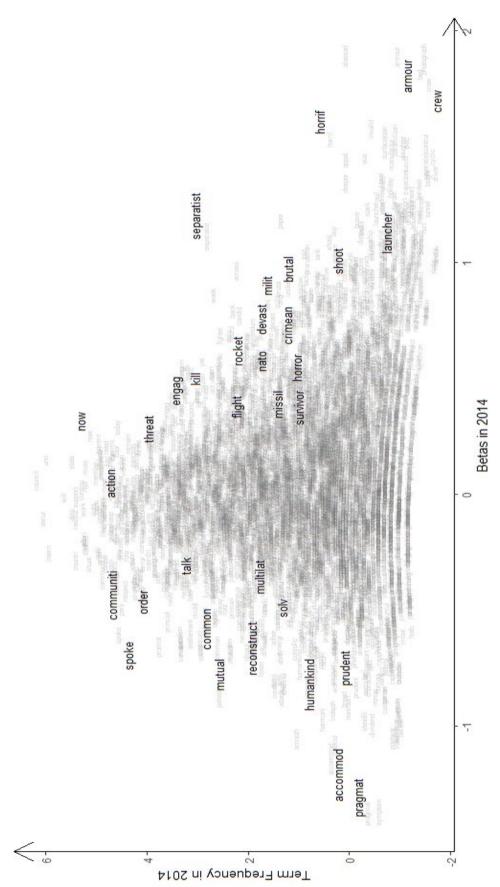
Note: Words with a high FREX score are words that are both frequent and exclusive, thus identifying words that distinguish topics (Roberts et al. 2014).
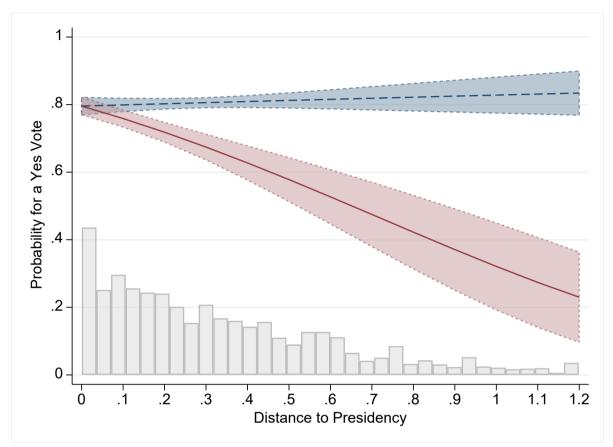
A3: Term Parameters discriminating between the average Position of Speeches held in different years (β_{j1} , see eq. 1.2)

A4: Pairwise Correlation of Term Discrimination Parameters from twenty-six separate annual Wordfish models.

	b1995	b1996	b1997	b1998	b1999	b2000	b2001	b2002	b2003	b2004	b2005	b2006	b2007	b2008	b2009	b2010	b2011	b2012	b2013	b2014	b2015	b2016	b2017	b2018	b2019	b2020
b1995	1.00																									
b1996	-0.08	1.00																								
b1997	0.11	0.04	1.00																							
b1998	-0.05	0.17	-0.18	1.00																						
b1999	0.27	-0.07	0.21	-0.13	1.00																					
b2000	0.26	0.13	0.01	0.14	0.26	1.00																				
b2001	0.20	0.13	-0.05	0.13	0.11	0.45	1.00																			
b2002	0.23	-0.01	-0.08	0.10	0.15	0.45	0.45	1.00																		
b2003	0.21	0.02	-0.10	0.14	0.14	0.43	0.37	0.41	1.00																	
b2004	0.18	0.07	-0.17	0.20	0.09	0.38	0.36	0.37	0.42	1.00																
b2005	0.30	-0.10	0.11	-0.05	0.24	0.16	0.05	0.16	0.12	0.10	1.00															
b2006	0.26	-0.10	-0.07	0.00	0.20	0.27	0.23	0.35	0.33	0.32	0.25	1.00														
b2007	0.16	0.06	-0.11	0.21	0.10	0.34	0.29	0.32	0.33	0.38	0.07	0.37	1.00													
b2008	0.19	0.07	-0.07	0.09	0.20	0.32	0.25	0.34	0.32	0.30	0.14	0.37	0.44	1.00												
b2009	0.26	-0.06	-0.12	0.11	0.18	0.37	0.31	0.43	0.37	0.38	0.16	0.38	0.39	0.42	1.00											
b2010	0.31	-0.05	-0.04	0.15	0.22	0.39	0.28	0.40	0.35	0.32	0.21	0.38	0.37	0.39	0.52	1.00										
b2011	0.36	-0.04	0.03	0.11	0.25	0.36	0.27	0.36	0.35	0.29	0.29	0.37	0.29	0.30	0.45	0.48	1.00									
b2012	0.23	0.06	-0.01	0.19	0.23	0.38	0.28	0.33	0.34	0.33	0.12	0.28	0.40	0.35	0.38	0.45	0.44	1.00								
b2013	0.23	0.01	-0.13	0.19	0.14	0.37	0.28	0.40	0.36	0.38	0.18	0.30	0.38	0.31	0.47	0.47	0.42	0.47	1.00							
b2014	0.18	0.07	-0.05	0.22	0.17	0.34	0.26	0.33	0.33	0.32	0.09	0.22	0.42	0.31	0.39	0.39	0.42	0.49	0.47	1.00						
b2015	0.21	0.07	-0.02	0.21	0.19	0.41	0.33	0.35	0.38	0.38	0.15	0.27	0.41	0.34	0.42	0.42	0.42	0.47	0.43	0.60	1.00					
b2016	0.26	0.02	0.04	0.13	0.22	0.40	0.32	0.37	0.40	0.34	0.19	0.30	0.38	0.32	0.40	0.43	0.43	0.46	0.36	0.54	0.63	1.00				
b2017	0.21	0.09	0.04	0.21	0.22	0.43	0.35	0.36	0.35	0.32	0.18	0.24	0.35	0.32	0.39	0.40	0.40	0.50	0.38	0.56	0.61	0.64	1.00			
b2018	0.18	0.08	0.03	0.14	0.19	0.40	0.34	0.30	0.36	0.28	0.08	0.22	0.26	0.31	0.30	0.39	0.33	0.39	0.27	0.48	0.51	0.55	0.60	1.00		
b2019	0.12	0.12	-0.07	0.13	0.10	0.38	0.33	0.36	0.36	0.35	0.04	0.31	0.31	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.29	0.38	0.28	0.48	0.47	0.49	0.50	0.66	1.00	
b2020	0.13	0.12	0.06	0.12	0.14	0.28	0.24	0.21	0.28	0.22	0.16	0.33	0.28	0.17	0.24	0.23	0.21	0.37	0.21	0.41	0.42	0.45	0.45	0.55	0.52	1.00

A5: Terms' Relevance for discriminating between Member States' Position revealed in all UNSC speeches held in 2003.

Appendix A6 Predicted Marginal Probability for a Yes Vote comparing non-urgent (dashed line) to urgent (solid line) UNSC Resolutions (Note: 90% Confidence Intervals, based on Table2, model 4b).