The Illiberal Challenge to the Liberal International Order: Evidence from the UN Human Rights Council

Valentin Lang[a]   Christoph Steinert[b]

This version: January 14, 2025

Abstract

How do powerful illiberal states affect the norms and institutions of the liberal international order (LIO)? We argue that they actively promote rival illiberal norms through the fora provided by liberal institutions and expect such illiberal norm promotion to be effective when supported by material tools of statecraft. To test this argument with respect to human rights norms, we introduce HR-RES, the most comprehensive dataset of decision-making on resolutions in the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC). HR-RES covers granular information on all HRC resolutions from 2006 to 2023, including sponsors, topics, full texts, and votes cast. Using natural language processing and panel regressions, we find that China stands out in actively promoting illiberal norms while consistently challenging human rights friendly resolutions. Receiving aid and bailouts from China predicts voting alignment with China on resolutions with illiberal content; non-material tools of statecraft such as diplomatic and cultural initiatives are ineffective. Topic modeling suggests a gradual shift in resolution content consistent with illiberal influence over the HRC. We discuss the implications of these results for understanding the global rise of illiberalism, the geopolitics of human rights, and the resilience of the LIO.

Keywords: Liberal International Order (LIO), human rights, United Nations (UN), Human Rights Council (HRC), China, foreign aid, bailouts

[a]University of Mannheim, lang@uni-mannheim.de

[b]University of Zurich, christoph.steinert@ipz.uzh.ch

1 Introduction

On October 6, 2022, the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC) voted against holding a debate on human rights abuses against ethnic Uyghurs and other Muslims in China's Xinjiang province. Of the 47 HRC members, 19 rejected the debate, 17 voted in favor, and 11 states abstained. The vote was held shortly after the Office of the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights had published a report that documented "serious human rights violations" (OHCHR, 2022, p. 43) and concluded that their extent "may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity" (ibid., p. 44). The outcome of the vote meant that the HRC took no further action on China's human rights violations, sparking an outcry in the international human rights community. Amnesty International's Secretary General Agnes Callamard stated that "the UN Human Rights Council has today failed the test to uphold its core mission, which is to protect the victims of human rights violations everywhere" (Amnesty International, 2022).

Beyond illustrating controversial decision-making in the HRC, this anecdote raises the broader question of whether and how powerful illiberal states succeed in challenging the international norms underlying the LIO. The recent series of geopolitical shifts toward illiberalism—most notably the rise of China, Russia's aggression against Ukraine, US President Trump's rejection of multilateralism, and the rise of authoritarianism and nationalism in countries such as Brazil, India, Hungary, Israel, Italy—have led scholars to question the resilience of the LIO against illiberal challengers (Cottiero et al., 2024; Ginsburg, 2020; Ikenberry, 2018; Lake et al., 2021). Legal scholars have noted that illiberal states could build an "authoritarian international law" that "extend[s] authoritarian rule across time and space" as it is formally agnostic towards regime type (Ginsburg, 2020, p. 221). Likewise, political scientists have highlighted that "[t]he real—both academic and political—question before us is, then, what will be the outcome of the multiple challenges to the LIO?" (Lake et al., 2021, p. 252). This paper seeks to contribute to answering this question with a new theory on illiberal norm entrepreneurs, the new HR-RES dataset on the HRC, and new empirical results on the effective promotion of illiberal human rights norms.

We set out to dissect the causal chain behind the claim that illiberal regimes transform the institutions of the LIO, theorizing and testing each step in the chain. Building on the literature on norm

dynamics in International Relations (IR) (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Keck & Sikkink, 1999), we argue that illiberal states can act as 'norm entrepreneurs' with the capacity to shape international norms. Rather than merely challenging, resisting, and eroding liberal norms, they proactively develop and spread rival illiberal norms (Wunderlich, 2020) that we argue are closely connected to their domestic norms and policies. Like liberal norm entrepreneurs, we expect illiberal governments to use the platforms that liberal international organizations (IOs) provide. However, unlike liberal norm entrepreneurs, we argue that illiberal actors are limited to material mechanisms to spread their normative agenda, because they largely lack the intangible resources required for successful norm promotion via non-material channels. Given that some rising illiberal regimes have considerable material resources at their disposal, we expect that they can exert sufficient influence on other member states in liberal IOs. As a result, they not only influence these states' decision-making in IOs but also shape the normative output of IOs.

While we expect this argument to hold for a whole range of international norms that illiberal actors aim to promote, we specifically apply it to international human rights norms as a core pillar of the LIO. We focus on decision-making on human rights resolutions in the HRC as the main global forum for the promotion and protection of human rights, providing a prism into the normative foundations of the international order (OHCHR, 2023). Unlike human rights treaty bodies or the UN Special Procedures, the HRC is an intergovernmental body, implying that the HRC reveals state preferences on international human rights norms.

The scope conditions of our theory imply that it only applies to illiberal actors with access to substantial material resources. In the geopolitical environment of the 21st century, we focus on China as the illiberal state with the most substantial access to material resources. Building on previous qualitative research, we argue that China has assumed the role of an illiberal norm entrepreneur seeking to "shift the center of gravity" in the international discourse on human rights (Zhang & Buzan, 2020, p. 170). Going beyond the mere attempt to shield itself from criticism, China has embraced an active role in the HRC, with the aim of transforming the meaning of international human rights norms. China seeks to establish a hierarchy of rights that favors economic rights over civil and political rights ("development first") (Foot, 2020; Inboden, 2021a; Piccone, 2018) and it stresses the principle of non-interference in internal affairs of sovereign states, including decisions

on how to advance human rights (Ahl, 2015; Chen, 2021; Dukalskis, 2023). More generally, China favors a communitarian and culturally relativist understanding of 'Asian values' as an alternative to liberal values with a universal claim of validity (Ayoub & Stoeckl, 2024; Bruun & Jacobsen, 2003; Lake et al., 2021).

To analyze whether China succeeds in promoting these norms in the HRC, we develop four inter-related hypotheses for each step in the causal chain linking illiberal states to international norm change. First, we hypothesize that there is systematic link between lacking domestic respect for liberal human rights and international support for illiberal human rights resolutions. Second, we expect to find evidence for proactive norm entrepreneurship by China in the HRC that is in diametric opposition to a liberal interpretation of human rights. Third, we expect that China's use of material tools of statecraft will influence other states' voting behavior on HRC resolutions and shape the content of these resolutions; conversely, we expect China's use of non-material tools of statecraft to be ineffective. Fourth, we hypothesize that China succeeds in transforming international human rights norms by shaping the output of the HRC.

To test these hypotheses, we construct *HR-RES*, the most comprehensive dataset on HRC decisions to date, and make it accessible to the research community. *HR-RES* is based on text-mined information from the Annual Reports of the HRC to the UN General Assembly and web-scraped resolution-specific information provided by the Universal Rights Group (2023), covering the first 51 sessions of the HRC from 2006 to 2023. Our dataset extends previous data collections along several dimensions (Hug & Lukács, 2014; Meyerrose & Nooruddin, 2023). It focuses not only on country-specific resolutions but also covers thematic and procedural HRC resolutions. It includes a rich set of resolution-level variables such as the resolution sponsors, the resolution type, the agenda item, the resolution topic, and the means of adoption. Moreover, *HR-RES* contains the full text of each HRC resolution, which we employ for quantitative text analysis. These data also allow us to construct measures of the 'human rights friendliness' of a HRC resolution based on a liberal conception on human rights, which we define as the degree to which a resolution aligns with the principles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and is supported by liberal

states that respect physical integrity rights domestically.[1] We construct these measures based on the average human rights score of the resolution sponsor(s) and the textual content of resolutions, which we assess with the help of natural language processing (NLP) and a large language model (LLM).

The empirical analysis of our hypotheses proceeds as follows. Initially, we build an empirical model of voting behavior in the HRC that explains a state's support for HRC resolutions with the interaction of its own human rights record (Fariss et al., 2020), and the 'human rights friendliness' of a resolution. According to the results, states that respect the core physical integrity rights of their citizens are much more likely to support 'human rights friendly' resolutions in the HRC, whereas states that tend to abuse human rights domestically favor 'human rights unfriendly' resolutions. This model not only explains substantial variation in HRC voting behavior but also allows us to compute a data-driven measure of the 'human rights friendliness' of each country's voting behavior in the HRC. The results unambiguously demonstrate that among the large states China is the state with the least 'human rights friendly' voting behavior in the HRC.

Subsequently, we connect voting behavior in the HRC to various material and non-material tools of statecraft that China uses to influence other states. We show that states receiving either foreign aid or financial bailouts from China are more likely to align their votes with China in the HRC. Non-material tools of Chinese statecraft like formal membership in the Belt and Road Initative (BRI), different types of high-level diplomatic visits, Confucius institutes, and sister cities are not linked to the degree of voting alignment to China. This suggests that China's material instruments of statecraft are the key lever for shaping the voting behavior of other states in the HRC.

In a final step, we demonstrate that China's influence on the HRC is reflected not only in voting patterns but also in the content of HRC resolutions. HRC resolutions increasingly mirror China's agenda to promote non-confrontational approaches to human rights. Based on structural topic models, we show that the topic most closely linked to the texts of China's single-sponsored HRC resolutions has become more prevalent in HRC resolutions over time. In contrast, topics linked to civil and political rights such as the death penalty became less relevant in HRC resolutions.

---

[1]Physical integrity rights are only a subset within the broader category of human rights. While we do not want to take a normative position on the hierarchy of first and second generation human rights, we seek to measure the dominant perspective on human rights promoted by liberal democracies that has shaped the institutions of the ILO.

Our study contributes to three strands of research. First, we add to the literature on the dynamics of international norm promotion with a focus on international human rights norms (Moravcsik, 2000; Terman, 2023; Terman & Byun, 2022). In particular, we shed light on the mechanisms of how illiberal norm entrepreneurs promote norms through intergovernmental organizations (Wunderlich, 2013; 2020) and thereby also speak to the literature on the challenges to the norms underlying the LIO (Cottiero et al., 2024; Lake et al., 2021; Weiss & Wallace, 2021).

Second, we contribute to research on the impact of China's economic levers on its ability to exert geopolitical influence (Dreher et al., 2018; 2022a; Hoeffler & Sterck, 2022). The effect of economic ties with China on foreign policy behavior has been investigated in the context of the UN General Assembly (Brazys & Dukalskis, 2017; Flores-Macías & Kreps, 2013) and with regard to support for China's positions on Taiwan and Tibet (Dreher & Fuchs, 2015; Fuchs & Klann, 2013; Kastner, 2016). We advance this literature with novel evidence on China's impact on the HRC as the most salient international forum dedicated to human rights norms (Pauselli et al., 2023).

Third, our evidence speaks to the broader literature on voting behavior in international organizations (Vreeland, 2019). To this literature, which has provided the field with comprehensive resolution-level data on the UN General Assembly (Bailey et al., 2017; Fjestul et al., 2022) and the UN Security Council (Dreher et al., 2022b), we add a similarly comprehensive dataset on the UN Human Rights Council. Our findings suggest that vote-buying is not only prevalent in the UNGA and the UNSC (Alexander & Rooney, 2019; Brazys & Dukalskis, 2017; Carter & Stone, 2015; Dreher et al., 2022b; 2009; Vreeland, 2019), but also observable in the HRC, and that China succeeds in advancing its human rights agenda in this forum.

2 Illiberal States as Norm Entrepreneus

Norms are collective, intersubjectively shared expectations of appropriate behavior and norm entrepreneurs are widely considered as catalytic for the emergence of new norms (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Katzenstein, 1996). The seminal IR literature on norm dynamics has largely focused on norm entrepreneurship by liberal non-state actors, such as transnational advocacy networks (TANs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) (Carpenter, 2007; Finnemore

& Sikkink, 1998; Keck & Sikkink, 1999). Subsequent studies have applied the concept of norm entrepreneurs to state governments, but have maintained the focus on *liberal* state actors, such as Scandinavian governments (Björkdahl, 2008; Ingebritsen, 2002). A common thread in this literature is the argument that norm entrepreneurs are motivated by ideational commitment, altruism, and empathy. Some scholars have criticized that there has long been a "tendency to view norm entrepreneurs as heroes" (Checkel, 2012, p. 3) or as "forces for the good spreading Western liberal norms internationally" (Wunderlich, 2020, p. 2).

However, there is nothing inherent in the concept of norm entrepreneurship that limits its applicability to liberal actors, nor are strong notions of appropriate or desirable behavior necessarily tied to liberal ideas. Liberal actors are only one type of actor involved in norm promotion and the liberal script coexists with several competing ones (Berger, 2023; Zürn & Gerschewski, 2021). More recent research addresses this gap in the literature by extending the concept of norm entrepreneurs to illiberal states such as Iran, China, or North Korea (Flonk, 2021; Höra, 2022; Wunderlich, 2020). A key insight of these studies is that authoritarian regimes are actively involved in norm promotion based on strong notions about appropriate behavior and a sense of mission to promote illiberal norms.

Although this emerging, mostly qualitative literature has documented the ambition and the activities of illiberal states in norm promotion, the extent to which illiberal states are able to shape international norms is highly contested. This controversy is linked to a major debate in the IR literature as the scale of the influence of illiberal norm entrepreneurs has profound implications for the future of the LIO. While some scholars expect the LIO to be resilient to illiberal challenges (Allan et al., 2018; Deudney & Ikenberry, 2018; Ikenberry, 2014), others argue that illiberal regimes such as China and Russia effectively change the institutions of the LIO (Mearsheimer, 2019; Weiss & Wallace, 2021). Hence, at least some scholars expect that the scale of influence of illiberal norm entrepreneurs is large enough to fundamentally transform the institutions of the LIO. Such claims presuppose a long causal chain, which so far remains largely untested. In particular, they require that illiberal states actively promote decidedly illiberal norms internationally (H_1), they use the platform of liberal international institutions for illiberal norm promotion (H_2), they have effective leverage over other states in these institutions (H_3), and this leverage is substantial enough to alter

the policy output of liberal international institutions (H_4). In this paper, we aim to examine this causal chain step by step (see Figure 1). We first elaborate on each of its steps to generate testable hypotheses for our setting and then subject them to empirical scrutiny.

Figure 1: Causal Chain: Illiberal States and International Norm Change
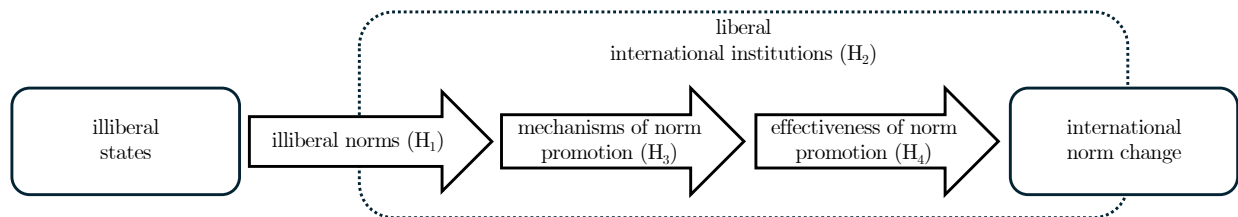
2.1   Types of Norms Promoted by Illiberal States

The first step in the causal chain presupposes that illiberal states seek to promote decidedly illiberal norms in the international arena. While illiberal states by definition have low levels of respect for civil liberties domestically, the question of whether and how domestic policies translate into foreign policy preferences is contested and goes back to a long-standing debate between realist and liberal IR theory. While liberals argue that domestic norms, ideas, and policies influence preferences expressed in international politics (Moravcsik, 1997), realists consider domestic policies as largely decoupled from foreign policy (Waltz, 1979). This theoretical controversy is reflected in inconsistent results in the empirical literature. For instance, whereas Potrafke (2009) finds that partisan government ideologies shape states' international preferences, Boockmann & Dreher (2011) provide evidence suggesting that state preferences expressed in international fora are decoupled from domestic politics.

Our study does not seek to resolve this debate at a general level, but we aim to analyze the link between domestic politics and international norm promotion in the specific context of human rights norms. We test how the national (absence of) respect for human rights affects expressed preferences for international human rights norms, and specifically, whether illiberal states are systematically committed to illiberal human rights norms in international fora. We consider illiberal human rights norms as those that are opposed to individual liberty rights. This includes the individual liberty

right to physical integrity, which is a basic precondition for all other individual liberty rights. Thus, we define illiberal human rights norms as those that seek to strip the concept of human rights of negative obligations on states to respect the physical integrity rights of their citizens.[2] To test whether illiberal states are committed to these norms in international settings, we derive the hypothesis that illiberal states seek to promote illiberal human rights norms internationally. In our setting, we therefore test whether the domestic respect for human rights is associated to observable foreign policy preferences on international human rights norms (H_1).

2.2 Organizational Platforms to Spread Illiberal Norms

As the second step in the causal chain, we focus on the question of which organizational platforms are used by illiberal norm entrepreneurs. Accoding to the dominant perspective on this question, illiberal norm entrepreneurs seek to establish an alternative institutional framework that aims to replace or duplicate the current institutions of the LIO (Doshi, 2021; Rodrigues Vieira, 2018). From this perspective, the challenge of illiberal norm entrepreneurs is *external* to the institutions of the LIO. Several instances highlight the efforts of illiberal actors to create alternative illiberal international institutions (De Jonge, 2017; Libman & Obydenkova, 2018). A prominent example is the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), founded by China as a direct rival to the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which are largely controlled by liberal governments (Hernandez, 2017; Qian et al., 2023). Similarly, Russia established the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), bringing together Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan into a single market. Russia and China have also jointly promoted the BRICS format and co-founded the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) (Kanet, 2018).

While establishing alternative international institutions is thus certainly part of the illiberal challenge, an alternative view holds that illiberal actors also co-opt the institutions of the LIO and leverage them to advance their illiberal normative agenda (Börzel & Zürn, 2021; Velasco, 2023). From this perspective, illiberal norm entrepreneurs also pose an *internal* challenge to the institutions of the LIO. This is a promising strategy for illiberal governments as liberal international institutions

---

[2]We use the concepts "illiberal human rights norms" and "human rights unfriendly norms" interchangably. To capture the degree to which HRC resolutions reflect liberal human rights norms, we use the term "human rights friendliness".

provide effective mechanisms for international norm promotion (Goodman & Jinks, 2013). They enable for regular and structured interaction among governments, thus, providing an important organizational platform for states acting as norm entrepreneurs. Illiberal norm entrepreneurs may use the mechanisms of these institutions and adopt their language but seek to strip them from their liberal content. As highlighted by Lake et al. (2021), liberal institutions may paradoxically lend themselves to illiberal co-optation. The principle of political equality that underlies liberal institutions implies that these institutions are open and inclusive, thus allowing illiberal states to participate in and shape these institutions. Research suggests that the identities of international organizations are not fixed, but that international organizations are 'norm consumers' socialized by states and non-state actors (Park, 2006; Tallberg et al., 2020).[3] Hence, we hypothesize that illiberal states leverage liberal international organizations—such as the HRC—to promote illiberal norms (H_2).

2.3 Mechanisms to Spread Illiberal Norms

The third step in the causal chain posits that illiberal norm entrepreneurs have leverage over other states, such that these states are persuaded or coerced to support and adopt illiberal norms. Previous research suggests that norm entrepreneurs can promote norms through a variety of mechanisms. On the one hand, there are mechanisms that are connected to the intangible resources of norm entrepreneurs: persuasion, emulation, learning. From a constructivist perspective, norm entrepreneurs highlight specific issues that are perceived as immoral or unjust and provide new cognitive frames for reconsidering them, persuading other actors to change practices by linking them to their legitimacy and self-esteem (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). If successful, target actors emulate the new norm because they perceive it to be more appropriate than an existing one (Checkel, 1998; 2001; Goodman & Jinks, 2013). The more rationalist variant of this argument is norm change through learning. Here, norm entrepreneurs spread information about norms with the objective of convincing other actors of their usefulness. The success of both emulation and learning largely depend on intangible resources of the norm entrepreneurs: emulation is more likely to be

---

[3]As norm entrepreneurs have been found to be more successful in IOs that rely on majoritarian decision-making (Hooghe et al., 2017; Tallberg et al., 2020), a forum like the HRC is a more likely case for successful norm promotion than other IOs like the IMF, the World Bank or the WTO, where decisions are typically made without formal majority votes.

successful if norm entrepreneurs have high morale stature and legitimacy (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Kelley, 2008). Learning is more likely to lead to norm change if the norm entrepreneur can provide credible, comprehensive, and high-quality information.

Other perspectives on norm dynamics focus on processes of norm change that are influenced by material resources: competition and coercion (Gilardi & Wasserfallen, 2019). In the former case, actors compete for external resources and adopt new norms to gain access to them. For instance, many liberal aid donors reward respect for liberal values and norms with larger aid flows. There is evidence suggesting that aid dependent states align their foreign policy behavior with donors in a competition for aid (Alexander & Rooney, 2019; Brazys & Panke, 2017; Carter & Stone, 2015; Dreher et al., 2022b; 2008; Flores-Macías & Kreps, 2013; Kastner, 2016). The mechanism of coercion is closely related. Here, an example is conditionality as implemented by liberal international organizations like the IMF and the World Bank. Target states change their norms and policies because they are confronted with the explicit choice between policy change and the withdrawal of resources. There is substantial evidence in the literature on IMF programs that such material coercion has led to norm and policy adjustment in many contexts (Dreher & Gassebner, 2012; Lang et al., 2024; Reinsberg et al., 2019; Rickard & Caraway, 2019).

Which of these mechanisms are available to illiberal norm entrepreneurs? We argue that illiberal norm entrepreneurs largely lack the intangible resources required for norm promotion through intagible channels, because their moral authority and credibility as well as their access to advocacy networks that support norm promotion is limited. First, moral authority is based on the perception that efforts to promote norms are genuinely aimed at the common good rather than driven by self-interest (Björkdahl, 2002; Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). However, the agenda of illiberal norm entrepreneurs remains closely tied to their own interests and is unlikely to give the impression of transcending them. Cross-national survey evidence shows widespread negative or indifferent perceptions of illiberal countries like China, Russia, and the Arab Gulf States across the globe (Chu, 2021; Voon & Xu, 2020; Xie & Jin, 2022), whereas liberal actors enjoy higher levels of global support (Allan et al., 2018).[4] Recent survey evidence demonstrates that about two thirds of the global respondents have positive attitudes of liberal actors such as the United States and European

---

[4]While these results come from population surveys, our argument refers to intergovernmental politics. They are thus informative only to the extent that perceptions in the population are related to the perceptions of governments.

Union, while only about one third has positive attitudes of illiberal regimes such as China (Pew Research Center, 2023). To the extent that illiberal actors have appeal in the international arena, it tends to be linked to their economic performance (e.g., Zhu, 2011). Second, illiberal states have only very limited access to international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and advocacy networks that support norm promotion. Illiberal INGOs are clearly in the minority compared to the dense network of liberal INGOs (Murdie, 2014; Murdie & Davis, 2012).[5] Hence, the non-governmental mobilization processes that play an important role in the promotion of liberal norms are largely absent in the case of illiberal norms (cf., Acharya, 2004; 2011; Keck & Sikkink, 1998).[6]

Illiberal norm entrepreneurs are thus unlikely to effectively persuade other states to adopt illiberal norms without exercising material leverage.[7] However, we expect that illiberal norm entrepreneurs are increasingly able to leverage material resources for norm promotion. While in the late 20th century liberal actors possessed and used substantially more resources for global norm entrepreneurship, in the early 21st century illiberal actors such as China or the Arab Gulf states have amassed the necessary resources and increasingly deployed them in the form of bilateral grants, loans, and financial bailouts. Today, many countries receive more such resources from illiberal states than from liberal ones (Dreher et al., 2022a). China is now the largest donor of bilateral aid, the country that accounts for the largest share of sovereign debt in the Global South, and its bilateral bailouts have become a serious alternative to IMF bailouts in many parts of the world (Dreher et al., 2022a; Horn et al., 2023; Lang et al., 2023). We therefore hypothesize that illiberal norm entrepreneurs shape the behavior of other states in liberal international organizations through material instruments of statecraft (H_3).

---

[5] According to the Transnational Social Movement Dataset, only 4.3% of INGOs are dedicated to illiberal norms such as nationalism or ethnic unity, whereas the majority of the INGOs promote liberal goals such as democracy, women's rights, or freedom of expression (Smith & Wiest, 2012).

[6] The inability of illiberal states to mobilize civil society from the bottom up is illustrated by the strategic use of government-organized NGOs (GONGOs) in international organizations (Chan et al., 2021; Dukalskis, 2023).

[7] Of course, it is possible that regimes actively decide to adopt illiberal norms and that they are influenced by the example of other illiberal regimes, as illustrated by democratic backlash processes around the globe (e.g., Mechkova et al., 2017; Waldner & Lust, 2023). However, we argue that illiberal norm entrepreneurs largely lack the intangible resources to *spread* illiberal norms, in the sense of actively persuading other actors to adopt these norms, who would not have adopted the norms on their own.

2.4 Effectiveness of Illiberal Norm Promotion

As a final step in the causal chain, we focus on the scale of the influence of illiberal norm entrepreneurs. To the extent that illiberal norm entrepreneurs can influence the international behavior of other states, this can have a profound impact on liberal international organizations. While we expect the influence of illiberal norm entrepreneurs to operate on a continuum, we can make a simplified distinction between a shallow and a profound impact. Illiberal norm entrepreneurs have a shallow impact if they succeed in influencing the international behavior of a subset of states, but the broader policy output of liberal IOs remains essentially liberal. In contrast, they have a profound impact if they succeed in transforming the policy output produced of liberal IOs in accordance with their preferences. To test the final step of the causal chain, we hypothesize that illiberal norm entrepreneurs transform the content of international norms produced by liberal international organizations (H_4).

3 Empirical Case: China and the UN Human Rights Council

Our empirical focus is on China, the most powerful illiberal actor in the early 21st century. We analyze whether and to what extent China has shaped the international human rights norms produced by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). We consider this a 'most likely case' for the claim that illiberal states transform the institutions of the LIO. The HRC is the leading intergovernmental organization responsible for the promotion of international human rights norms, and at least a subset of those norms (especially those focused on civil and political rights) are widely considered as antithetical to the autocratic rule of the Chinese regime (Johnston, 2019; Lake et al., 2021). Hence, it is plausible that the Chinese regime has a genuine interest to challenge the norms produced by the HRC. Moreover, the institutional features of the HRC may facilitate the promotion of illiberal norms. Evidence suggests that norm entrepreneurs are more likely to succeed in international organizations such as the HRC that provide for a high degree of pooling, i.e., majoritarian decision-making rather than unanimous decision-making (Hooghe et al., 2017; Tallberg et al., 2020). Previous research also shows that the HRC is highly politicized (Hug, 2016; Hug & Lukács, 2014;

Terman & Byun, 2022), which makes it plausible that geopolitical shifts such as the rise of China may play an important role in this setting.

China is a founding member of the HRC and has held a seat on the HRC for the maximum possible time (2006-2012, 2014-2019, and 2021-present)—members are elected for staggered three-year terms, which can be renewed once—since the HRC replaced the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) in 2006 (Dukalskis, 2023; Pauselli et al., 2023; Ramcharan, 2013).The HRC's 47 seats are distributed proportionately among the UN's regional groups to ensure broad representation and states are elected by a secret ballot vote in the UN General Assembly (OHCHR, 2023). While the election is supposed to "take into account the contribution of candidates to the promotion and protection of human rights and their voluntary pledges and commitments made thereto", there is no effective enforcement mechanism for this rule (UNGA, 2006).

It is widely established that China seeks to establish a hierarchy of human rights that favors economic rights over civil and political rights (Ahl, 2015; Chen, 2018; 2021). China promotes the positive obligations of states to provide for economic development (realizing collective rights), while negating their negative obligations to refrain from restricting civil liberties and political rights (protecting individual rights). Given that China considers states as primarily responsible for providing economic development, it promotes a wide latitude for governments in enabling development and advocates orthodox interpretations of state sovereignty (Foot, 2020; Piccone, 2018). As a corollary of this state-centered approach, China takes a culturally relativistic perspective to human rights, claiming that rights are contingent on local conditions (Bruun & Jacobsen, 2003; Chen, 2018).[8]

The questions arise to what extent the Chinese regime was able to achieve these objectives, to influence the decisions of other states in the HRC, and to transform the broader policy output of the HRC. We shed light to these questions in the following empirical analyses.

---

[8]A key document in this context is the Bangkok Declaration of 1993, signed by 34 Asian states. It emphasized "non-interference in the internal affairs of states, and the non-use of human rights as an instrument of political pressure" and recognizes that "while human rights are universal in nature, they must be considered in the context of a dynamic and evolving process of international norm-setting, bearing in mind the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds."

4   Data and Measurement

4.1   A New Dataset on Voting Behavior in the UN Human Rights Council: HR-RES

Quantitative research on the HRC has been systematically impeded by the lack of comprehensive data on the Council's decisions. As a consequence, scholars have focused almost exclusively on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which is a state-based peer review mechanism of the HRC (Kim, 2023; Lu, 2024; Terman, 2023; Terman & Byun, 2022; Terman & Voeten, 2018). While we concur with the assessment that the UPR is "one of the most significant innovations [of the HRC]" (Duggan-Larkin, 2010, p. 548), we believe that there is merit in focusing on HRC resolutions. First, voting records on resolutions are better suited to tracing temporal changes in state preferences on human rights norms as these votes take place at each HRC session, whereas states are reviewed in the UPR on a 4.5-year cycle (Charlesworth & Larking, 2014, p. 129). Second, unlike UPR recommendations, which are dyadic by design, voting decisions on resolutions reveal state preferences on broader thematic human rights issues. Third, sponsorship of resolutions can be considered as a form of agenda-setting in intergovernmental organizations (Seabra & Mesquita, 2022). By analyzing the sponsors and the content of HRC resolutions, we are able to trace which states are the agenda-setters in the international human rights discourse and how they seek to shape human rights norms. Fourth, voting data is uniquely suited to identify coalitions of states and to trace how their membership and cohesion has evolved over time (Hug & Lukács, 2014; Voeten, 2013).

We introduce *HR-RES*, the most comprehensive dataset on HRC resolutions to this date. For each HRC resolution it includes more than 20 resolution-level variables along with the vote of each state for the HRC's first 54 sessions in the period since its establishment in 2006 until 2023.[9] *HR-RES* covers over 1,500 resolutions, of which 485 resolutions have been voted on. We collected the data for *HR-RES* from two main sources. First, we extract text from the annual reports of the HRC to the UNGA (OHCHR, 2023), which include a complete list of HRC member states' decisions in addition to the respective resolution text that has been adopted. As these reports are structured consistently, we are able to automatically recognize text patterns, allowing us to extract data on the resolution titles and texts in their entirety, as well as the dates of adoption, meeting numbers,

---

[9]Note that the period of our empirical analyses ends in 2020 since other variables are only available up to this year. In the replication materials, we provide the scientific community with the HRC voting data until 2023.

session numbers, and respective voting decisions of member states. We complement this with resolution-specific data from a second data source, the Universal Rights Group (2023) (URG) to include additional characteristics on the resolution types and topics, means of adoption, vote counts, the respective agenda items, a list of main sponsors, program budget implications, and the new resource requirements estimated upon the adoption of the resolution. Table 1 provides an overview of the dataset. Overall, *HR-RES* constitutes a comprehensive dataset on every HRC resolution between 2006 and 2023, and we make this data source accessible to the research community.

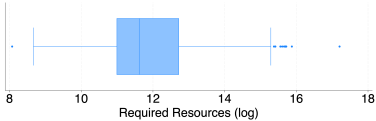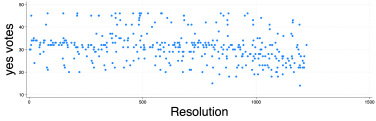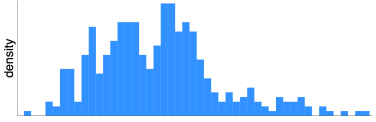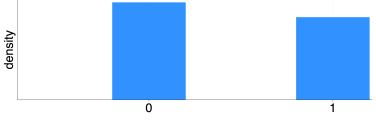## 4.2 Measuring 'Human Rights Friendly' HRC Resolutions

Building on *HR-RES*, we construct measures of the extent to which HRC resolutions can be classified as 'human rights friendly' according to a liberal conception of physical integrity rights. Our goal is to provide data-driven measures that are as objective as possible. To ensure the validity of our approach, we provide two measures that are based on two entirely different empirical strategies and then test whether they are correlated.

The first measure is based on the information we collected on resolutions sponsors. We assume that resolutions are more human rights friendly, if they are sponsored by governments with more respect for human rights. Conversely, resolutions are considered less human rights friendly if they are sponsored by governments that violate human rights. Combining our data on resolution sponsors with data on governments' respect for human rights (Fariss et al., 2020), we take the average human rights score of the sponsor countries as our first measure of a resolution's human rights friendliness.

Our second measure is based on analyzing the full texts of resolutions and their alignment with the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by means of natural language processing (NLP). To compute this measure, we feed the full text of the UDHR into the large language model GPT-4o, prompting it to extract the most important principles from this text as keywords. We then use an NLP algorithm based on keyword proximity analysis to count the number of times one of these keywords (or a synonym) appears in the context window of another keyword in the resolution texts. We adjust the measure by resolution length and z-standardize it.[10]

---

[10] A measure based on a simple count of the keywords and their synonyms is highly correlated with this measure ($r = 0.85$) (Figure A9).

Table 1: Overview of HR-RES

Variables	Description	Example/Illustration
Information	basic information on each resolution	*resolution number, session, title, date, etc.*
Members	all members of the HRC at the time the resolution was put to a vote	*countries, ISO codes*
Type	6 types of resolutions	*country-specific situations, civil/political rights, economic/social/cultural rights, groups in focus, . . .*
Topic	74 resolution topics (mutually exclusive)	*development, foreign debt, mercenaries, racism, . . .*
Target	the country targeted by country-specific resolutions	*countries, ISO codes*
Sponsors	full list of all resolution sponsors	*countries, ISO codes*
Resources	resources required to implement the resolution (OHCHR estimate)	
Text	full text of the resolution	
Votes	individual vote of each member country (yes, no, abstain)	
HR friendliness (sponsors)	a measure of the resolution's HR friendliness based on the HR scores of its sponsors	
HR friendliness (text)	a measure of the resolution's HR friendliness based on an a quantiative analysis of its text	
HR friendliness (votes)	a measure of the resolution's HR friendliness based on the vote of the most HR friendly member country	

As a third measure we use data on voting and code a binary variable indicating whether the most human rights-friendly HRC member state of the respective session voted in favor of the resolution. Figures A6, A8, and A7 in the Appendix visualizes the correlation of these measures of 'human

rights friendliness', pointing to substantial positive associations across all three of them. This suggest that the measures capture a similar underlying concept.

4.3 Respect for Human Rights

To measure the degree to which states are committed to liberal human rights norms, we use Fariss human rights scores (Fariss et al., 2020; Fariss, 2014).[11] This latent measure of domestic respect for human rights focuses on physical integrity rights, which are a subset within the broader category of human rights. Specifically, physical integrity rights cover the rights not to be tortured, disappeared, extrajudicially killed, or imprisoned for political reasons (Cingranelli & Richards, 2010). We expect that states' human rights preferences in IOs are closely linked to their domestic human rights records in terms of physical integrity rights protection. We chose Fariss human rights scores instead of Political Terror Scale scores as the former account for changing standards of accountability over time, which makes them suitable for analyzing temporal variation in respect for human rights.

4.4 Chinese Tools of Statecraft

In our empirical analyses, we examine the mechanisms through which China spreads illiberal norms in the HRC, analyzing both material and non-material tools of statecraft. Based on our theoretical framework, we expect that only China's material tools provide leverage to shape the voting behavior of other HRC members.

Our first measure of a material tool of statecraft is bilateral Chinese foreign aid. This choice follows a large literature on the political economy of aid, which treats such official bilateral flows as a key means of economically powerful states to politically influence less affluent states (Dreher et al., 2018; Hoeffler & Sterck, 2022). Primarily through its BRI, China has become one of the most active bilateral aid donor in the world. To measure annual aid flows from China, we use the logged amount of aid received from China (in constant USD 2021) provided by AidData's Global Chinese Development Finance Dataset (Custer et al., 2023; Dreher et al., 2022a). Our second measure of a material tool of statecraft is based on the conjecture that the pressure to accommodate the Chinese

---

[11]In the empirical section, we use the abbreviation 'HR score' when referring to Fariss human rights scores.

government may be even stronger for states that are dependent on bilateral bailout loans from China. In recent years, China has offered such bailout packages for BRI countries in financial and economic crises, thereby competing with IMF loans. States in debt distress have strong incentives to satisfy their lenders, who set interest rates and repayment conditions. Thus, we expect that states that receive bailouts from China are especially likely to vote with China in the HRC. To measure whether country i received a bailout from China in year t, we use a binary measure aggregated to the country-year level, taken from Horn et al. (2023).

To measure non-material mechanisms of Chinese statecraft, we rely on a range of political, diplomatic, and cultural tools. As a first measure, we use bilateral BRI membership agreements. By offering states membership in the BRI and signing high-profile bilateral agreements, China could aim to influence other states' policy decisions. An advantage of this measure is that it is the most obvious non-material equivalent of the material measures. It also involves the BRI but rather than capturing the material resources that flow through the BRI, it only measures the membership that does not directly translate into material flows. Specifically, we use a binary measure of membership in China's BRI taken from Steinert & Weyrauch (2024), which is coded as one from the first year onwards a state has signed a bilateral agreement with China within the framework of the BRI. As a second measure, we use diplomatic visits as an indicators for China's use of diplomatic statecraft from AidData's 2022 China's Global Public Diplomacy Dashboard Dataset (AidData, 2022). Leader visits constitute an important signal in international relations and China may use these visits strategically in exchange for allegiance in international fora. In the baseline analysis, we use all types of diplmatic visits. In robustness tests, we differentiate between visits at different diplomatic levels (political level, cadre level, CCP member). All visit measures are binary and indicate country-year observations in which a visit took place. As a third measure of non-material tools that are rooted in cultural and public diplomacy, we use a count of China's Confucius Institutes that are established in other countries to promote Chinese culture (ibid.). There are about 500 Confucius institutes and about 800 Confucius classrooms in the world. A fourth measure is the number of sister cities with China from the same source.

4.5 Control Variables

We further account for economonic, demographic, and political characteristics of states, which may confound our estimates. We use a measure of logged GDP derived from the Varieties of Democracies (V-Dem) dataset version 13, which provides a point estimate of GDP from a latent variable model based on a number of sources (Coppedge et al., 2023; Fariss et al., 2022). To account for regime type, we use the Polity democracy score from the Polity V dataset (Marshall & Jaggers, 2023). Finally, we use a measure of the logged population size derived from The World Bank (2022).

5 Empirical Analysis

5.1 Support for Liberal and Illiberal Human Rights Norms in the HRC

We begin our empirical analysis by constructing a simple empirical model to explain voting behavior in the HRC. We model support for a resolution as a function of the member government's domestic preferences on human rights and the content of the resolution being voted on. As a measure of the member's revealed preferences on human rights, we use its human rights score ($HRscore$). As a measure of resolution content, we use its expected 'HR friendliness' ($HRfriendly$), measured by the average HR scores of the sponsor countries in the baseline and by our text-based measure in robustness tests. Importantly, an interaction of the two variables allows the member's HR preferences to affect its voting behavior differently depending on the 'HR friendliness' of the resolution. Following hypothesis H_1, we expect that the member's HR score is positively associated with voting in favor of 'HR friendly resolutions' and vice versa. For 'HR unfriendly resolutions', we expect lower HR scores to predict voting for the resolution. This would indicate that governments with an illiberal domestic stance on human rights systematically support illiberal norms internationally.

$$support_{i,t,r} = \alpha HRscore_{i,t} + \beta HRfriendly_{r,t} + \delta(HRscore_{i,t} \times HRfriendly_{r,t})$$
$$+ \mathbf{X'_{i,t}}\eta + \gamma_i + \varepsilon_{i,t,r} \quad (1)$$

The outcome variable $support_{i,t,r}$ is binary and indicates whether member i voted in favor of resolution r at time t. The baseline sample covers 16,004 of these binary choices. As controls, we add

member-year specific covariates, $\mathbf{X}'_{\mathbf{i,t}}$ as well as member fixed effects, γ_i. In the most conservative regressions, we also add resolution fixed effects ρ_r and interact all controls with $HRfriendly$.

The main results of estimating this model is visualized in Figure 2. For members with high HR scores, the 'HR friendliness' of a resolution predicts support for the resolution. For members with low HR scores its 'HR friendliness' predicts lower support. As is visible in the full regression output reported in Table A1 in the Appendix, the underlying positive interaction coefficient is statistically significant with $p < 0.01$. It remains positive in specifications with and without member-year covariates and when resolution fixed effects are added and member-year covariates are interacted with the resolution's HR-friendliness. In Figures A1 and A2, we estimate this heterogeneity with a more flexbile functional form using *interflex* by Hainmueller et al. (2019) to avoid imposing a linear interaction. The result of this approach show marginal effects that are very similar suggesting that the linear functional form is a good approximation. In Tables A2 and A3 in the Appendix we replicate this analysis with our two alternative measures of a resolution's HR friendliness and find the same pattern.

Figure 2: *Domestic Respect for Human Rights Predicts Support for Liberal HR Resolutions*
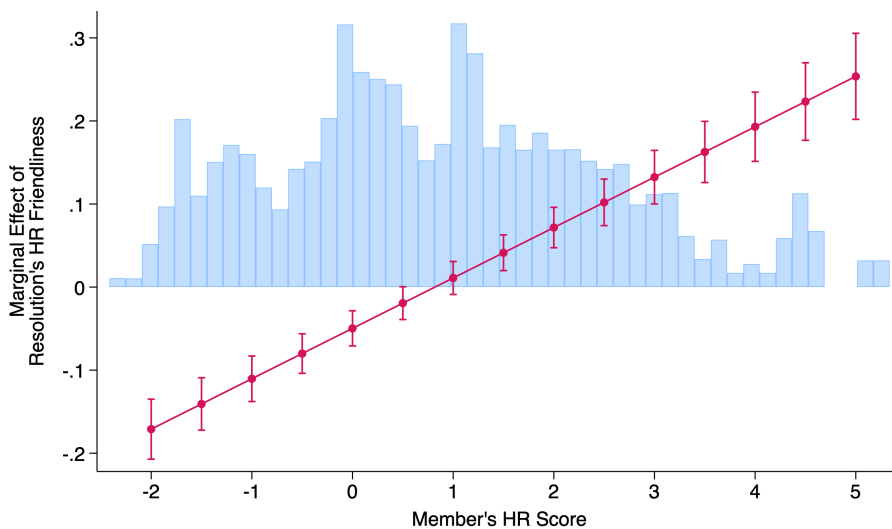
Note: Marginal effects of resolution's HR friendliness on member's support for a resolution depending on member's HR score, see Equation 1.

These results show that governments' domestic stance on human rights strongly predicts the human rights policy preferences they express in international fora. Governments' support for human rights

resolutions depends on the resolution's 'HR friendliness'. Countries with high domestic respect for HR vote for 'HR friendly' resolutions, while countries with low respect for domestic HR vote support 'HR unfriendly' resolutions. Support for illiberal human right norms originates in illiberal states, lending support to H_1 (cf., Boockmann & Dreher, 2011). Another result of this analyis is that this empirical model is well-suited to predict voting behavior in the HRC ($R^2 = 0.41$). By accounting for both resolution content and the policy preferences of the voting member this model serves as a basis for the subsequent analyses.

5.2 Who Promotes Illiberal Norms in the HRC?

Further developing this empirical approach allows us to infer the extent to which illiberal regimes vote against liberal human rights norms in the HRC. We modify the previous empirical model:

$$support_{i,t,r} = \beta HRfriendly_r + \sum_i \delta_i(\gamma_i \times HRfriendly_r) + X'_{i,t} + \gamma_i + \varepsilon_{i,t,r} \quad (2)$$

This specification differs from the previous specification (Equation 1) in that country fixed effects are now interacted with the resolution's 'HR friendliness'. Rather than estimating how the association between the resolution content and voting behavior depends on countries' HR scores, this specification estimates how this association differs for each different country. The δ_i in this specification indicates how the resolution's 'HR friendliness' affects support for the resolution for each country individually. A positive value indicates that the country becomes *more* likely to support a resolution if it is more HR friendly, while a negative value indicates that the country becomes *less* likely to support resolutions the more HR friendly they become. Countries with the most negative values on this scale are thus the ones that can be considered to undermine liberal human rights norms in the HRC. Our theoretical expectation is that China is among those.

Figure 3: Agreement with HR friendly Resolutions
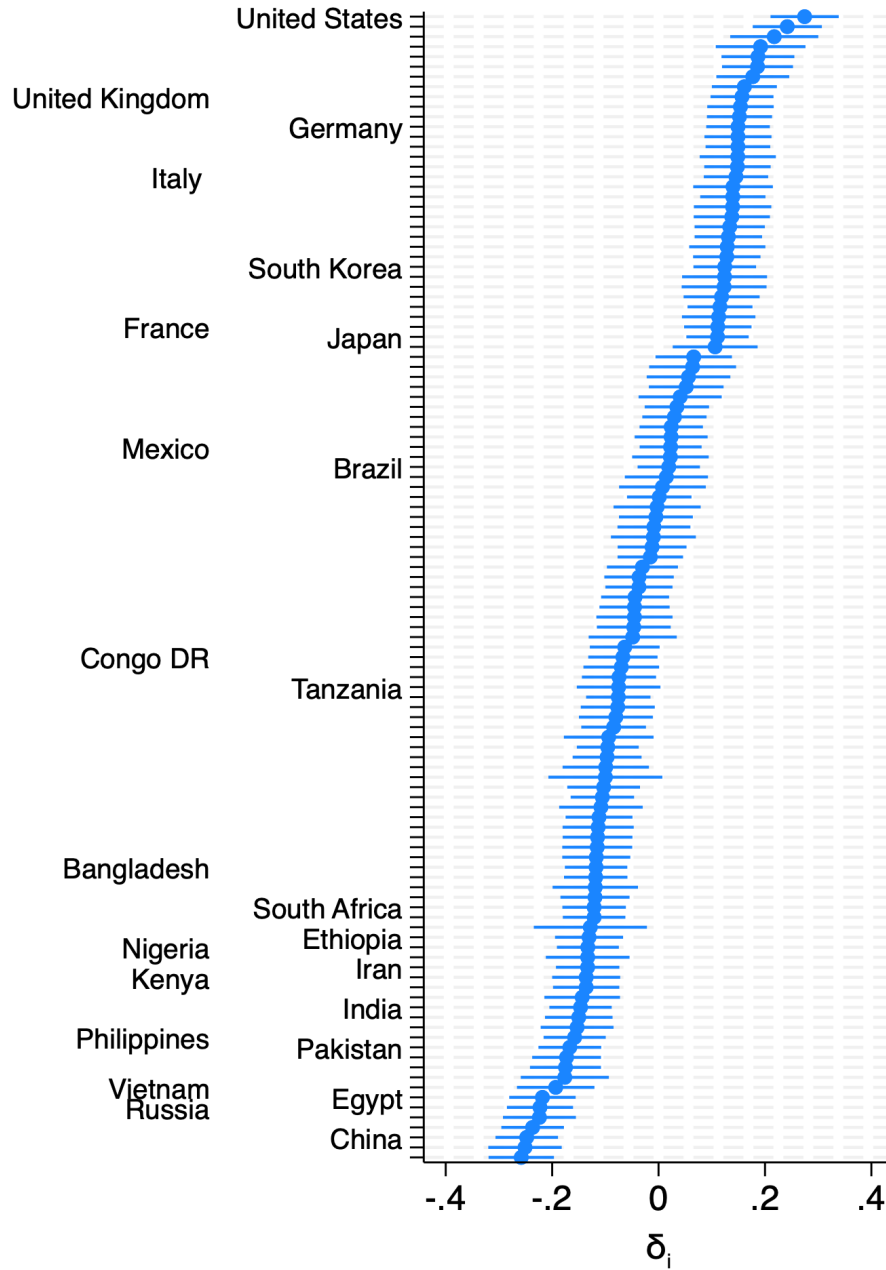
Notes: The graph shows the estimated coefficients δ_i of Equation 2. For readability, only countries with more than 50 million inhabitants are labeled; all countries are included in the regression.

Figure 3 plots the coeffiecients δ_i for each member country from this regression. Countries are ranked in descending order. China stands out as one of the countries that oppose liberal human rights the most. Among all large countries with more than 50 million inhabitants, China is the

country with the least 'HR friendly' voting behavior in the HRC. In fact, there are only two countries with a more 'HR unfriendly' HRC voting record (Burundi and Venezuela). This result supports our expectation that China is a decidedly *illiberal* norm entrepreneur in the area of human rights.[12]

A related notable observation from our data is that China voted against the United States on 187 of the 189 (or 99%) resolutions that both countries voted on (see Table 2). China presents itself as the exact antipode to the United States and its liberal stance on human rights. This evidence closely reflects the diverging preferences of China and the United States in international human rights law. China has ratified the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)* but is one of only six countries in the world that have not ratified the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)*. This places China in direct opposition to the United States, which has ratified the ICCPR but is one of only four countries that has not ratified the ICESCR.

Overall, the evidence presented thus far provides support for both H_1 and H_2. Illiberal states are committed to illiberal international human rights norms and they use liberal international institutions such as the HRC to promote these norms. Among the large and geopolitically important countries, China's illiberal approach to human rights in the HRC stands out.

Table 2: Comparing HRC Voting of China and the United States

| | | China | | | | |
		No	Yes	Abs	Total
	No	**2**	132	0	134
United States	Yes	41	**0**	6	47
	Abs	1	7	**0**	8
	Total	44	139	6	189

5.3 China's Tools to Spread Illiberal Human Rights Norms

Having shown that China's voting behavior in the HRC reflects a preference for illiberal resolutions, we turn to analyzing whether the evidence is also consistent with China influencing the

---

[12]In the Appendix, we employ two different approaches that yield similar orderings of countries. First, we repeat the analysis using our NLP-based measure of 'HR friendliness' (Figure A3). Second, we estimate the voting alignment of country i with the HRC member that shows the strongest support for human rights, as measured by its HR score, in the session t in which resolution r is discussed (Figure A4).

voting behavior of other HRC members, thereby testing H_3. As anticipated above, we differentiate between material and non-material tools of statecraft. The analysis builds on the baseline model of Equation 1, augmenting it with variables indicating different forms of Chinese statecraft. These specifications take the following form:

$$support_{i,t,r} = \lambda Tool_{i,t} + \gamma ChinaYes_{r,t} + \psi(Tool_{i,t} \times ChinaYes_{r,t})$$

$$+ \alpha HRscore_{i,t} + \beta HRfriendly_{r,t} + \delta(HRscore_{i,t} \times HRfriendly_{r,t})$$

$$+ \mathbf{X}'_{\mathbf{i,t}}\eta + \mathbf{W}'_{\mathbf{r,t}}\zeta + \gamma_i + \varepsilon_{i,t,r}, \quad (3)$$

The first line includes the added expressions compared to Equation 1: $Tool$ indicates member i's exposure to a Chinese tool of statecraft in year t. $ChinaYes$ is a binary variable indicating whether China voted in favor of resolution r. Our main interest is in the interaction of these two variables and its coefficient ψ. Our expectation is that a Chinese vote in favor of a resolution is associated with support for this resolution only for member countries that are exposed to the respective Chinese tool of statecraft. This amounts to expecting a positive interaction coefficient (ψ) and a positive marginal effect ($\gamma + \psi \times Tool$) for large values of $Tool$.

The additional variables included in this specification control for correlates of these variables at the member-year-level and the resolution-level. Since we control for $HRscore$, $HRfriendly$ and their interaction the estimated associations are conditioned on the member's HR preference and the resolution content. These are key covariates because they allow estimating how Chinese tools of statecraft are associated with variation in voting behavior that is not explained by the member's underlying HR preferences and the resolution's content. While we still do not claim causality, we argue that an important share of any potential endogeneity is netted out.[13] All regressions also control for country fixed effects and country-year-specific covariates. In the most conservative specifications, we add resolution fixed effects and interact all covariates with $ChinaYes$.[14]

---

[13] This includes, for instance, potential selection biases resulting from an endogenous allocation of Chinese aid to illiberal governments (absorbed by $HRscore$) or from an endogenous agenda-setting of illiberal resolutions in the HRC (absorbed by $HRfriendly$).

[14] This most conservative specification does not allow calculating the relevant marginal effects, but it serves to test whether estimates of ψ are robust to netting out all resolution-specific variation and to allowing covariates to interact with $ChinaYes$.

5.3.1 Material Tools

Figure 4 plots the results when material tools of statecraft are considered. The top panel focuses on Chinese aid. The results show that China's support for a resolution is positively associated with other members' support for the resolution only for those member countries that receive large amounts of Chinese aid. For countries that receive no or little Chinese aid, these is no empirical association. As is visible in the regression output reported in Table 3, the relevant interaction coefficient is statistically significant at the 1 percent level across different specifications.

Figure 4: Chinese aid, Chinese bailouts and voting with China in the HRC
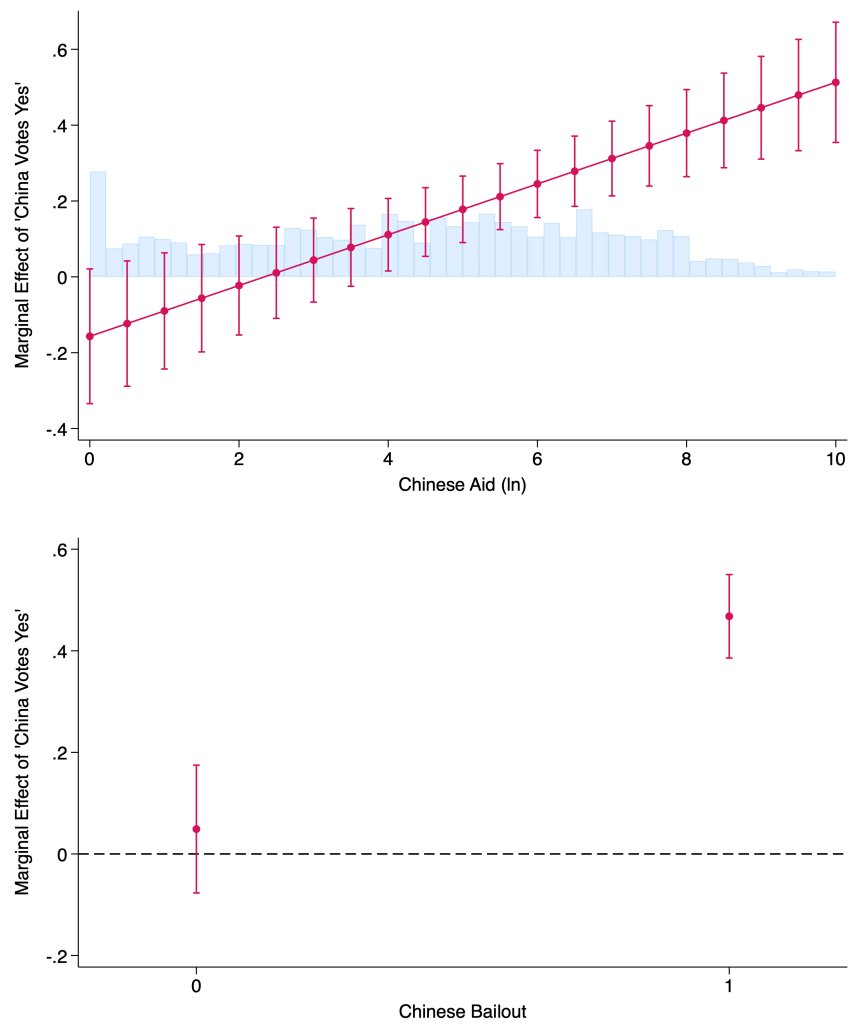
Notes: The figure at the top shows marginal effects of China votes "yes" on support for a resolution depending on the amount of Chinese aid the country received. The figure at the bottom shows the analogous result depending on whether the country has received a bilateral bailout from China. See Equation 3 and Table 3.

In the bottom panel we turn to Chinese bilateral bailouts, arguably a more profound type of economic dependency on China. We use the same model as before but replace the measure for Chinese aid with a binary measure of bailouts from China a member i received in year t. The corresponding marginal effects are plotted in the bottom panel of Figure 4 and the regression output is reported in columns 4 and 5 of Table 3. These results show that the association between a vote in favor by China and support for HRC resolutions is positive and statistically significant for the set of country-year observations that receive a bailout from China and insignificant for the others. This interaction is statically significant at the 1 percent level and it is robust to the inclusion of resolution fixed effects and interacted controls.

While we caution against a causal interpretation, we note that these regressions control for resolution content as well as for member countries' revealed preferences on human rights, thereby capturing important sources of potential endogeneity. Conditional on these measures, countries that receive either large amounts of Chinese aid or bilateral loans from China tend to vote highly similarly with China. This pattern is consistent with H_3, which posits that Chinese material tools of statecraft push voting behavior of other countries in the HRC into a more illiberal direction.

Table 3: Material Tools

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
China votes yes	0.059	-0.157*		0.049	
	(0.064)	(0.091)		(0.064)	
Chinese aid (ln)		-0.049***	-0.029***		
		(0.012)	(0.008)		
China votes yes × Chinese aid (ln)		0.067***	0.040***		
		(0.015)	(0.009)		
Chinese Bailout				-0.303***	-0.103**
				(0.044)	(0.043)
China votes yes × Chinese Bailout				0.419***	0.143***
				(0.060)	(0.052)
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Resolution FE			✓		✓
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Interacted Controls			✓		✓
R^2	0.299	0.354	0.570	0.304	0.556
Observations	14662	14662	14662	14662	14662

Notes: OLS regressions. The dependent variable is binary and indicates voting in favor of a resolution. Standard errors are clustered at the country-level and reported in parentheses. Significance levels *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

5.3.2 Non-Material Tools

We then repeat this analysis with measures of non-material tools of Chinese statecraft. First, we use a binary variable indicating whether a country officially joined the BRI. Second, we use a binary variable measuring whether the country was visited by a Chinese political leader in year t. Third and fourth, we test whether countries with Confucius Institutes or Chinese sister cities show different voting patterns. As is visible in Table 4, we do not find a positive interaction term in any of the models, suggesting that these tools of Chinese statecraft are not associated to an increase in support for a resolution if China votes in favor of it. In Table A4, we differentiate between different types of diplomatic visits and also find no significant results for any of these. Overall, these findings provide support for H_3 and are consistent with the perspective that material incentives—rather than symbolic acts—are needed in order to shift state behavior toward more illiberal international human rights norms.

Table 4: Non-Material Tools

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
BRI membership	0.015			
	(0.061)			
China votes yes × BRI membership	-0.023			
	(0.081)			
Diplomatic Visit		0.005		
		(0.027)		
China votes yes × Diplomatic Visit		-0.018		
		(0.036)		
Confucius Institutes			0.054	
			(0.064)	
China votes yes × Confucius Institutes			-0.092	
			(0.077)	
Sister Cities				-0.018
				(0.025)
China votes yes × Sister Cities				0.006
				(0.030)
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Resolution FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Controls × China votes Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓
R^2	0.555	0.526	0.547	0.555
Observations	14662	11971	14347	14662

Notes: OLS regressions. The dependent variable is binary and indicates voting in favor of a resolution. Standard errors are clustered at the country-level and reported in parentheses. Significance levels *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

5.4 Shifts in HRC Output Over Time

As a final step in the empirical analysis, we analyze hypothesis H_4 and explore the extent to which this illiberal challenge to the HRC is reflected in an illiberal shift in its output. We first look at aggregate voting outcomes and then turn to the content of adopted resolutions.

5.4.1 Aggregate Voting Outcomes

The Chinese government is a staunch opponent of country-specific resolutions in the HRC and considers them as illegitimate interference in a state's internal affairs (Dukalskis, 2023; Foot, 2020). Such resolutions target individual countries rather than addressing thematic human rights issues. In Figure 5 we thus look at aggregate support for country-specific resolutions in the HRC and find that it began to decline around the year 2013 and has been on a downward trend ever since. Notably, the start of the negative trend in 2013 coincides with China's establishment of the BRI and its more active role in geopolitics.[15] Taken together with the empirical estimates in the previous section, which established a link between Chinese tools of statecraft and voting behavior in the HRC, this pattern is consistent with Chinese influence on the HRC that is substantial enough to imply significant changes in aggregate voting outcomes. In light of this trend, the HRC's vote *against* a debate on human rights violations in Xinjiang in 2022 is less surprising than it might first appear.

5.4.2 Content of Adopted Resolutions

Next, we turn to the content of adopted HRC resolutions. Several China-sponsored HRC resolutions provide *prima facie* evidence that China actively seeks to shape the content of HRC resolutions. In 2017, Beijing introduced its first solo-sponsored HRC resolution entitled 'The Contribution of Development to the Enjoyment of All Human Rights' (HRC, 2017). The resolution's exclusive focus on the issue of development marked the beginning of a series of China-sponsored (and adopted) HRC resolutions aimed at promoting a statist and development-centered perspective on human

---

[15]In Figure A5 we estimate this trend with a fixed-effects regression. The results show that the negative trend since 2013 is statistically significant and that it is driven by changing voting behavior rather than by the changing composition of the HRC over time.

Figure 5: Support for Country-Specific Resolutions Over Time
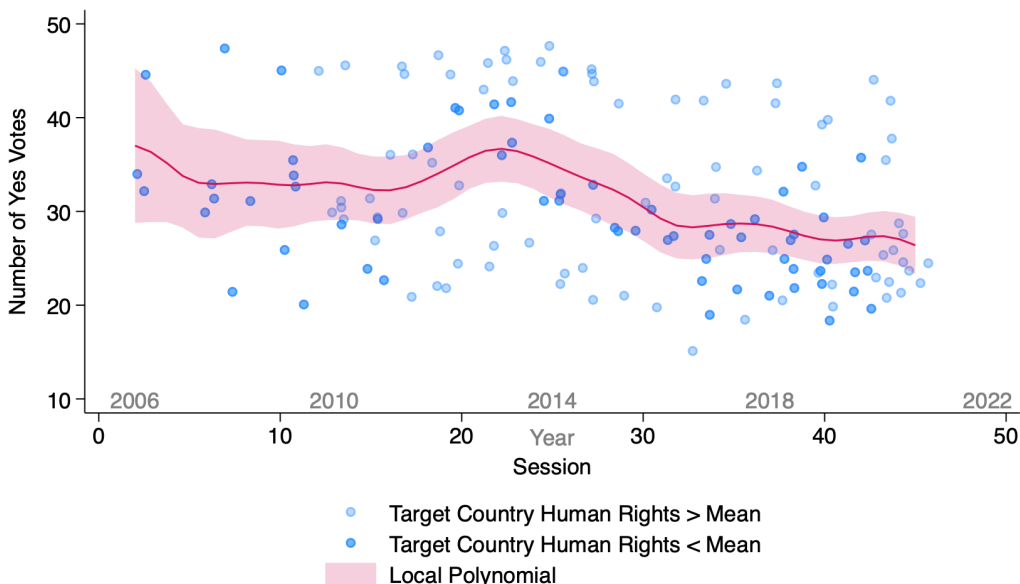
Note: The figure plots the number of votes in the UN HRC that are cast in favor of country-specific resolutions. Each dot represents one resolution. HRC resolutions are adopted by simple majority, abstentions are not counted. Authors' data.

rights (Ahl, 2015; Chen, 2018; Foot, 2020). In the following years, China introduced several single-sponsored HRC resolutions under the heading of 'Promoting Mutually Beneficial Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights', aiming to establish technical ability and capacity building as *a priori* requirements for human rights compliance (Hagström & Nordin, 2020).

However, the question arises whether China had an impact on the collective body of resolutions that are debated in the HRC beyond the specific resolution it has sponsored itself. We use structural topic models to systematically analyze temporal variation in the content of HRC resolutions, following approaches that use such models to analyze temporal patterns in textual data (Magaloni & Rodriguez, 2020).[16] We leverage our newly collected dataset *HR-RES*, which contains the full text of all HRC resolutions. We decided to divide the corpus of resolutions in 20 topics. This number allows us to obtain high scores on both semantic coherence and exclusivity (see Unkel,

---

[16]Structural topic models are a form of semi-supervised machine learning that, similar to traditional topic models like Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), aim to uncover latent thematic structures within a corpus of textual data represented as a bag-of-words, but with the added capability to model the relationships between topics and observed covariates or metadata (see Roberts et al., 2014). We use the *stm*-package in R to implement the topic model, building on the code suggested by Unkel (2023). We manually excluded all stopwords, numbers, urls, and symbols.

2023).[17] Drawing on these 20 topics, we then analyze whether there is a shift over time in the topics of HRC resolutions.

Which of these topics are salient to the Chinese regime? Our answer builds on analyzing the combined text of China's four single-sponsored HRC resolutions. Computing resemblance γ-scores with the 20 topics, we find topic 14 to be most closely related China's discourse in the HRC (see Figure A10). The keywords for this topic include 'cooperation', 'dialogue', and 'mutual', which reflect China's frequently used language to promote non-confrontational approaches to human rights and condemn any country-specific action (Chen, 2018; Piccone, 2018; Zhang & Buzan, 2020).[18] In contrast and for comparison, we expect that the death penalty is a topic that is strongly opposed by the Chinese regime. According to Amnesty International (2024), China is the world's leading executioner, and China is a strong opponent of the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, which aims to abolish the death penalty.

Figure 6 shows the topic propensities for these two topics in voted-on HRC resolutions over time with smoothed loess curves. The evidence suggests that the topic "cooperative dialogue" (see topic 14 in A.4) became more prominent over time with a steady increase since 2013. In 2020, the propensity of the topic "cooperative dialogue" was above 10% in all HRC resolutions that were subject to voting. In contrast, the propensity of the topic "death penalty" (see topic 11 in Figure A.4) peaked in 2015 and declined in subsequent HRC resolutions. The difference in the γ between these two topics is statistically significant since early 2017. In sum, this suggests that China's most favored topic became more prevalent in voted-on HRC resolutions compared to a topic opposed by the Chinese regime, lending support to H_4.[19] Overall, the empirical evidence suggests that there is a shift towards the topics favored by the Chinese regime in the international human rights discourse.

---

[17]Appendix A.4 shows the most important words of each of these 20 topics according to four different metrics. The keywords reflect broader substantive topics covered by HRC resolutions such as Israeli settlements (topic 1), racial and religious discrimination (topic 4), the death penalty (topic 11), or the right to food (topic 20).

[18]For instance, China introduced two unilaterally sponsored HRC resolutions (37/23 & 43/21) under the title "Promoting mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of human rights". Both resolution texts state that "dialogue among religions, cultures and civilizations in the field of human rights could contribute greatly to the enhancement of international cooperation in this field", reflecting a culturally relativist interpretation of human rights that is geared towards non-interventionism.

[19]In Appendix A.4 we show that other topics such as 'corruption' or 'mercenaries' also became less prevalent in HRC resolutions during this period. The time trends for all 20 topics can be found in our replication files.

Figure 6: Topic Propensities in HRC Resolutions over Time
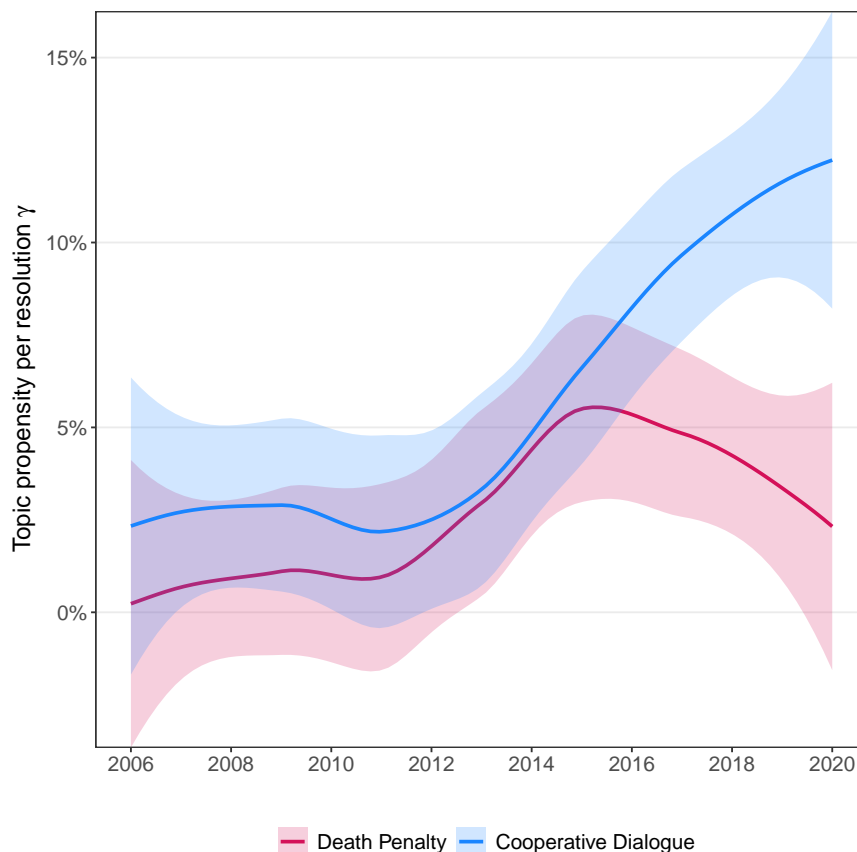
Note: This figure shows the temporal development of two topics in HRC resolutions classified by a structural topic model. The blue line shows a smoothed loess function for a topic related to death penalty (see topic 11 in A.4) and the red line shows a smoothed loess function for a topic related to cooperative dialogue (see topic 14 in A.4), both with 95% confidence intervals. γ indicates the topic propensity per document. The structural topic model is based on the subset of all HRC resolutions from 2006 to 2020 that were subject to voting.

6 Conclusion

This study provides new insights into the illiberal challenge to the LIO with new theory, new data, and new results. We have argued that powerful illiberal states may act as norm entrepreneurs in intergovernmental organizations and shape international norms in line with their illiberal preferences. To test the hypotheses following from our argument we have introduced *HR-RES*, the most comprehensive dataset on the human rights resolutions of the HRC to-date. Our empirical results demonstrate that illiberal states systematically promote illiberal norms in the leading intergovernmental human rights organization and that China stands out in exerting a profound influence. Consistent with our theoretical framework, we find evidence suggesting that China shapes the vot-

ing behavior of other states in the HRC through its material rather than through its non-material tools of statecraft. Moreover, the content of HRC resolutions increasingly reflects China's perspective on human rights. Overall, the evidence lends support to the claim that China succeeds in shaping the international human rights norms promoted through the HRC, thereby transforming an important institution of the LIO.

In light of this evidence, the notion of an 'authoritarian international law' (Ginsburg, 2020) seems less like a mere theoretical possibility than a characterization of some current dynamics in intergovernmental human rights institutions. By muddying the content of civil and political human rights and by tying human rights to a state-centered development paradigm, powerful illiberal HRC members may increasingly establish international human rights norms that are compatible with authoritarian forms of government. In this vein, the dynamics in the HRC are a case in point for the abuse of liberal institutions for anti-liberal purposes (Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2018; Guriev & Treisman, 2020). Given that the human rights norms prevailing in intergovernmental organizations influence the domestic human rights records of their member states (Greenhill, 2010; 2015), this gives reason for concern over the future of global respect for human rights.[20]

Nevertheless, there is evidence for a certain degree of resilience of the international human rights regime and of limits to what China can achieve through its economic levers (see Foot, 2024; Haug et al., 2024). While our analyses show that recipients of Chinese aid and bailouts accommodate to China's pressure, the large cross-national variation in the support of 'human rights friendly' resolutions demonstrates that the HRC remains highly polarized. Moreover, the top-down efforts by political elites to dilute international human rights norms may be countered by bottom-up demands for human rights (Dancy & Fariss, 2024). From this perspective, China's influence on the HRC may not weaken the importance of liberal human rights norms but rather undermines the role of the HRC in the international human rights regime. This could bolster the importance of non-state human rights mechanisms such as the UN Special Procedures or UN human rights treaty bodies.[21]

---

[20]In particular, the human rights of ethnic and religious minority groups that are not covered by China's state-centered human rights agenda may be under threat.

[21]There is evidence, however, that China's attempts to transform the UN system are not limited to the HRC. For example, China has joined the committee that selects human rights experts under the Special Procedures system, and it has significant influence in the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs, seeking to deny consultative status to NGOs that oppose the "One China policy" or advocate for minority rights (Inboden, 2021b).

What does our evidence imply for the future of the LIO? It shows that illiberal regimes can shape the policy output of IOs that were originally designed for liberal purposes, suggesting that the LIO is under threat. However, as the LIO is multi-dimensional—including multiple political, economic, and social principles and institutions (Börzel & Zürn, 2021; Deudney & Ikenberry, 2018; Ikenberry, 2011; 2014)—other elements may be more resistant to change. Arguably, the HRC is a 'most likely' case for an IO that is amenable for illiberal norm promotion because of its composition and its majoritarian decision-making (Tallberg et al., 2020). It remains an open empirical question whether other IOs likewise shift toward illiberal norms. We believe that this is an important area of future research.

References

Acharya, Amitav (2004). How ideas spread: Whose norms matter? Norm localization and institutional change in Asian regionalism. In: *International organization* 58.2, pp. 239–275.

— (2011). Norm subsidiarity and regional orders: sovereignty, regionalism, and rule-making in the third world. In: *International Studies Quarterly* 55.1, pp. 95–123.

Ahl, Bjorn (2015). The rise of China and international human rights law. In: *Human Rights Quarterly* 37, pp. 637–661.

AidData (2022). *China's Global Public Diplomacy Dashboard Dataset, Version 3.0.*

Alexander, Dan & Bryan Rooney (2019). Vote-buying by the United States in the United Nations. In: *International Studies Quarterly* 63.1, pp. 168–176.

Allan, Bentley B., Srdjan Vucetic, & Ted Hopf (2018). The distribution of identity and the future of international order: China's hegemonic prospects. In: *International Organization* 72.4, pp. 839–869.

Amnesty International (10/06/2022). *China: Xinjiang vote failure betrays core mission of UN Human Rights Council.*

— (2024). *Death Penalty.*

Ayoub, Phillip & Kristina Stoeckl (2024). The global resistance to LGBTIQ rights. In: *Journal of Democracy* 35.1, pp. 59–73.

Bailey, Michael A., Anton Strezhnev, & Erik Voeten (2017). Estimating Dynamic State Preferences from United Nations Voting Data. In: *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61.2, pp. 430–456.

Berger, Tobias (2023). Human Rights beyond the Liberal Script: A Morphological Approach. In: *International Studies Quarterly* 67.3.

Björkdahl, Annika (04/2002). Norms in International Relations: Some Conceptual and Methodological Reflections. In: *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 15.1, pp. 9–23.

— (01/2008). Norm advocacy: a small state strategy to influence the EU. In: *Journal of European Public Policy* 15.1, pp. 135–154.

Boockmann, Bernhard & Axel Dreher (2011). Do human rights offenders oppose human rights resolutions in the United Nations? In: *Public Choice* 146, pp. 443–467.

Börzel, Tanja A. & Michael Zürn (2021). Contestations of the liberal international order: From liberal multilateralism to postnational liberalism. In: *International Organization* 75.2, pp. 282–305.

Brazys, Samuel & Alexander Dukalskis (2017). Canary in the coal mine? China, the UNGA, and the changing world order. In: *Review of International Studies* 43.4, pp. 742–764.

Brazys, Samuel & Diana Panke (01/2017). Why do states change positions in the United Nations General Assembly? In: *International Political Science Review* 38.1, pp. 70–84.

Bruun, Ole & Michael Jacobsen (2003). *Human rights and Asian values: Contesting national identities and cultural representations in Asia.* London: Routledge.

Carpenter, R. Charli (2007). Setting the advocacy agenda: Theorizing issue emergence and none-mergence in transnational advocacy networks. In: *International Studies Quarterly* 51.1, pp. 99–120.

Carter, David B. & Randall W. Stone (2015). Democracy and multilateralism: the case of vote buying in the UN General Assembly. In: *International Organization* 69.1, pp. 1–33.

Chan, Steve, Huiyun Feng, Kai He, & Weixing Hu (2021). *Contesting revisionism: China, the United States, and the transformation of international order.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Charlesworth, Hilary & Emma Larking (2014). *Human rights and the universal periodic review.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Checkel, Jeffrey T. (1998). The constructive turn in international relations theory. In: *World Politics* 50.2, pp. 324–348.

— (2001). Why comply? Social learning and European identity change. In: *International organization* 55.3, pp. 553–588.

— (2012). *Norm entrepreneurship—Theoretical and methodological challenges. Memo prepared for a workshop on "The Evolution of International Norms and 'Norm Entrepreneurship": The Council of Europe in Comparative Perspective.*

Chen, Yu-Jie (2018). China's Challenge to the International Human Rights Regime. In: *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics* 51.4, pp. 1179–1222.

— (2021). Authoritarian International Law" in Action? Tribal Politics in the Human Rights Council. In: *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 54.5, pp. 1203–1256.

Chu, Jonathan A. (2021). Liberal ideology and foreign opinion on China. In: *International Studies Quarterly* 65.4, pp. 960–972.

Cingranelli, David L. & David L. Richards (2010). The Cingranelli and Richards (CIRI) human rights data project. In: *Hum. Rts. Q.* 32, p. 401.

Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Jan Teorell, David Altman, Michael Bernhard, Agnes Cornell, M. Steven Fish, Lisa Gastaldi, Haakon Gjer-løw, Adam Glynn, Allen Hicken, Anna Lührmann, Seraphine F. Maerz, Kyle L. Marquardt, Kelly McMann, Valeriya Mechkova, Pamela Paxton, Daniel Pemstein, Johannes von Römer, Brigitte Seim, Rachel Sigman, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jeffrey Staton, Aksel Sundström, Eitan Tzelgov, Luca Uberti, Yi-ting Wang, Tore Wig, & Daniel Ziblatt (2023). *V-Dem Dataset v13.* Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project.

Cottiero, Christina, Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, Stephan Haggard, Lauren Prather, & Christina J. Schneider (2024). Illiberal regimes and international organizations. In: *The Review of International Organizations*, pp. 1–29.

Custer, Samantha, Axel Dreher, Thai-Binh Elston, Brooke Escobar, Rory Fedorochko, Andreas Fuchs, Siddhartha Ghose, Joyce Jiahui Lin, Ammar Malik, Bradley Parks, Kyra Solomon, Austin Strange, Michael J. Tierney, Lydia Vlasto, Katherine Walsh, Fei Wang, Lincoln Za-leski, & Sheng Zhang (2023). *Tracking Chinese Development Finance: An Application of AidData's TUFF 3.0 Methodology.*

Dancy, Geoff & Christopher J. Fariss (2024). The global resonance of human rights: What Google trends can tell us. In: *American Political Science Review* 118.1, pp. 252–273.

De Jonge, Alice (2017). Perspectives on the emerging role of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. In: *International Affairs* 93.5, pp. 1061–1084.

Deudney, Daniel & G. John Ikenberry (2018). Liberal world: The resilient order. In: *Foreign Affairs* 97, pp. 16–24.

Doshi, Rush (2021). *The long game: China's grand strategy to displace American order.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dreher, Axel & Andreas Fuchs (2015). Rogue aid? An empirical analysis of China's aid allocation. In: *Canadian Journal of Economics/Revue canadienne d'économique* 48.3, pp. 988–1023.

Dreher, Axel, Andreas Fuchs, Brad Parks, Austin M. Strange, & Michael J. Tierney (2018). Apples and dragon fruits: The determinants of aid and other forms of state financing from China to Africa. In: *International Studies Quarterly* 62.1, pp. 182–194.

Dreher, Axel, Andreas Fuchs, Bradley Parks, Austin Strange, & Michael J. Tierney (2022a). *Banking on Beijing: The aims and impacts of China's overseas development program.* Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.

Dreher, Axel & Martin Gassebner (2012). Do IMF and World Bank Programs Induce Government Crises? An Empirical Analysis. In: *International Organization* 66.2, pp. 329–358.

Dreher, Axel, Valentin Lang, B. Peter Rosendorff, & James Raymond Vreeland (2022b). Bilateral or multilateral? International financial flows and the dirty-work hypothesis. In: *The Journal of Politics* 84.4, pp. 1932–1946.

Dreher, Axel, Peter Nunnenkamp, & Rainer Thiele (2008). Does US aid buy UN general assembly votes? A disaggregated analysis. In: *Public Choice* 136, pp. 139–164.

Dreher, Axel, Jan-Egbert Sturm, & James Raymond Vreeland (2009). Global horse trading: IMF loans for votes in the United Nations Security Council. In: *European Economic Review* 53.7, pp. 742–757.

Duggan-Larkin, Jessica (2010). Can an intergovernmental mechanism increase the protection of human rights? The potential of universal periodic review in relation to the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights. In: *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights* 28.4, pp. 548–581.

Dukalskis, Alexander (2023). A fox in the henhouse: China, normative change, and the UN Human Rights Council. In: *Journal of Human Rights*, pp. 1–17.

Dukalskis, Alexander & Johannes Gerschewski (2018). *Justifying Dictatorship.* London: Routledge.

Fariss, Christopher, Michael Kenwick, & Kevin Reuning (2020). *Latent Human Rights Scores Version 4.*

Fariss, Christopher J. (2014). Respect for human rights has improved over time: Modeling the changing standard of accountability. In: *American Political Science Review* 108.2, pp. 297–318.

Fariss, Christopher J., Therese Anders, Jonathan N. Markowitz, & Miriam Barnum (2022). New Estimates of Over 500 Years of Historic GDP and Population Data. In: *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 66.3, pp. 553–591.

Finnemore, Martha & Kathryn Sikkink (1998). International norm dynamics and political change. In: *International Organization* 52.4, pp. 887–917.

Fjestul, Joshua, Simon Hug, & Christopher Kilby (2022). Decision-Making in the United Nations General Assembly A Comprehensive Database of Resolutions, Decisions, and Votes. In: *Villanova School of Business Economics Working Paper* 56.

Flonk, Daniëlle (2021). Emerging illiberal norms: Russia and China as promoters of internet content control. In: *International Affairs* 97.6, pp. 1925–1944.

Flores-Macías, Gustavo A. & Sarah E. Kreps (2013). The foreign policy consequences of trade: China's commercial relations with Africa and Latin America, 1992–2006. In: *The Journal of Politics* 75.2, pp. 357–371.

Foot, Rosemary (2020). *China, the UN, and human protection: Beliefs, power, image.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

— (2024). Reining in a liberal UN: China, power shifts, and the UN's peace and security pillar. In: *Global Policy* 15 (S2), pp. 18–28.

Fuchs, Andreas & Nils-Hendrik Klann (2013). Paying a visit: The Dalai Lama effect on international trade. In: *Journal of International Economics* 91.1, pp. 164–177.

Gilardi, Fabrizio & Fabio Wasserfallen (2019). The politics of policy diffusion. In: *European Journal of Political Research* 58.4, pp. 1245–1256.

Ginsburg, Tom (2020). Authoritarian international law? In: *American Journal of International Law* 114.2, pp. 221–260.

Goodman, Ryan & Derek Jinks (2013). *Socializing states: Promoting human rights through international law.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Greenhill, Brian (2010). The company you keep: International socialization and the diffusion of human rights norms. In: *International Studies Quarterly* 54.1, pp. 127–145.

— (2015). *Transmitting rights: International organizations and the diffusion of human rights practices.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Guriev, Sergei & Daniel Treisman (2020). A theory of informational autocracy. In: *Journal of public economics* 186, p. 104158.

Hagström, Linus & Astrid HM Nordin (2020). China's "politics of harmony" and the quest for soft power in international politics. In: *International Studies Review* 22.3, pp. 507–525.

Hainmueller, Jens, Jonathan Mummolo, & Yiqing Xu (2019). How much should we trust estimates from multiplicative interaction models? Simple tools to improve empirical practice. In: *Political Analysis* 27.2, pp. 163–192.

Haug, Sebastian, Rosemary Foot, & Max-Otto Baumann (2024). Power shifts in international organisations: China at the United Nations. In: *Global Policy* 15, pp. 5–17.

Hernandez, Diego (2017). Are "New" Donors Challenging World Bank Conditionality? In: *World Development* 96.2007, pp. 529–549.

Hoeffler, Anke & Olivier Sterck (2022). Is Chinese aid different? In: *World Development* 156, p. 105908.

Hooghe, Liesbet, Gary Marks, Tobias Lenz, Jeanine Bezuijen, Besir Ceka, & Svet Derderyan (2017). *Measuring international authority: A Postfunctionalist theory of governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Höra, Etienne (2022). Norm entrepreneurship with Chinese characteristics? Constructing a 'Green BRI'. In: *European Review of International Studies* 9.3, pp. 458–482.

Horn, Sebastian, Bradley C. Parks, Carmen M. Reinhart, & Christoph Trebesch (2023). *China as an international lender of last resort*. Working Paper 124, AIDDATA. National Bureau of Economic Research.

HRC (07/07/2017). *Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 22 June 2017, A/HRC/RES/35/21*.

Hug, Simon (2016). Dealing with human rights in international organizations. In: *Journal of Human Rights* 15.1, pp. 21–39.

Hug, Simon & Richard Lukács (2014). Preferences or blocs? Voting in the United Nations human rights council. In: *The Review of International Organizations* 9, pp. 83–106.

Ikenberry, G. John (2011). *Liberal leviathan*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

— (2014). The illusion of geopolitics: The enduring power of the liberal order. In: *Foreign Affairs* 93, pp. 80–91.

— (2018). The end of liberal international order? In: *International Affairs* 94.1, pp. 7–23.

Inboden, Rana Siu (2021a). *China and the international human rights regime*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

— (2021b). China at the UN: Choking civil society. In: *Journal of Democracy* 32.3, pp. 124–135.

Ingebritsen, Christine (03/2002). Norm Entrepreneurs: Scandinavia's Role in World Politics. In: *Cooperation and Conflict* 37.1, pp. 11–23.

Johnston, Alastair Iain (2019). China in a world of orders: Rethinking compliance and challenge in Beijing's international relations. In: *International Security* 44.2, pp. 9–60.

Kanet, Roger E (2018). Russia and global governance: the challenge to the existing liberal order. In: *International Politics* 55.2, pp. 177–188.

Kastner, Scott L. (2016). Buying influence? Assessing the political effects of China's international trade. In: *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60.6, pp. 980–1007.

Katzenstein, Peter J. (1996). *The culture of national security: Norms and identity in world politics*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Keck, Margaret E. & Kathryn Sikkink (1998). *Activists beyond borders: Advocacy networks in international politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Keck, Margaret E. & Kathryn Sikkink (1999). Transnational advocacy networks in international and regional politics. In: *International Social Science Journal* 51.159, pp. 89–101.

Kelley, Judith (2008). Assessing the complex evolution of norms: the rise of international election monitoring. In: *International Organization* 62.2, pp. 221–255.

Kim, Yooneui (2023). A network analysis of naming and shaming in the universal periodic review. In: *International Interactions*, pp. 1–28.

Lake, David A., Lisa L. Martin, & Thomas Risse (2021). Challenges to the liberal order: Reflections on international organization. In: *International Organization* 75.2, pp. 225–257.

Lang, Valentin, David Mihalyi, & Andrea F. Presbitero (2023). Borrowing Costs after Sovereign Debt Relief. In: *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 15.2, pp. 331–358.

Lang, Valentin F., Lukas Wellner, & Alexnder E. Kentikelenis (2024). Biased Bureaucrats and the Policies of International Organizations. In: *American Journal of Political Science*, pp. 1–19.

Libman, Alexander & Anastassia V. Obydenkova (2018). Regional international organizations as a strategy of autocracy: The Eurasian Economic Union and Russian foreign policy. In: *International Affairs* 94.5, pp. 1037–1058.

Lu, Lucie (2024). Be My Friendly Reviewers: How China Shapes its UN Human Rights Reviews. In: *IGCC Working Paper No 6*.

Magaloni, Beatriz & Luis Rodriguez (2020). Institutionalized police brutality: Torture, the militarization of security, and the reform of inquisitorial criminal justice in Mexico. In: *American Political Science Review* 114.4, pp. 1013–1034.

Marshall, Monty G. & Keith Jaggers (2023). *Polity5 Project, Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2018*.

Mearsheimer, John J. (2019). Bound to fail: The rise and fall of the liberal international order. In: *International Security* 43.4, pp. 7–50.

Mechkova, Valeriya, Anna Lührmann, & Staffan I. Lindberg (2017). How much democratic backsliding? In: *Journal of Democracy* 28.4.

Meyerrose, Anna M. & Irfan Nooruddin (2023). Trojan Horses in Liberal International Organizations?: How Democratic Backsliders Undermine the UNHRC. In: *Review of International Organizations*.

Moravcsik, Andrew (1997). Taking preferences seriously: A liberal theory of international politics. In: *International Organization* 51.4, pp. 513–553.

— (2000). The Origins of Human Rights Regimes: Democratic Delegation in Postwar Europe. In: *International Organization* 54.2, pp. 217–252.

Murdie, Amanda (2014). The ties that bind: A network analysis of human rights international nongovernmental organizations. In: *British Journal of Political Science* 44.1, pp. 1–27.

Murdie, Amanda & David R. Davis (2012). Looking in the mirror: Comparing INGO networks across issue areas. In: *The Review of International Organizations* 7, pp. 177–202.

OHCHR (2022). *OHCHR Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China.*

— (2023). *United Nations Human Rights Council. Documents and Resolutions.*

Park, Susan (2006). Theorizing norm diffusion within international organizations. In: *International Politics* 43, pp. 342–361.

Pauselli, Gino, Francisco Urdinez, & Federico Merke (2023). Shaping the Liberal International Order from the Inside: A Natural Experiment on China's Influence in the UN Human Rights Council. In: *Research and Politics.*

Pew Research Center (2023). *Spring 2023 Global Attitudes Survey.*

Piccone, Ted (2018). China's long game on human rights at the United Nations. In: *Brookings Institution, September* 7, p. 2018.

Potrafke, Niklas (2009). Does government ideology influence political alignment with the US? An empirical analysis of voting in the UN General Assembly. In: *The Review of International Organizations* 4, pp. 245–268.

Qian, Jing, James Raymond Vreeland, & Jianzhi Zhao (2023). The Impact of China's AIIB on the World Bank. In: *International Organization* 77.1, pp. 217–237.

Ramcharan, Bertrand (2013). *The UN human rights council.* London: Routledge.

Reinsberg, Bernhard, Alexander Kentikelenis, Thomas H. Stubbs, & Lawrence King (2019). The world system and the hollowing-out of state capacity: How structural adjustment programs impact bureaucratic quality in developing countries. In: *American Journal of Sociology* 124.4, pp. 1222–1257.

Rickard, Stephanie & Teri Caraway (2019). International demands for austerity: Examining the impact of the IMF on the public sector. In: *Review of International Organizations* 14.1, pp. 35–57.

Roberts, Margaret E., Brandon M. Stewart, Dustin Tingley, Christopher Lucas, Jetson Leder-Luis, Shana Kushner Gadarian, Bethany Albertson, & David G. Rand (10/2014). Structural Topic Models for Open-Ended Survey Responses. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 58.4, pp. 1064–1082.

Rodrigues Vieira, Vinícius (04/2018). Who joins counter-hegemonic IGOs? Early and late members of the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. In: *Research & Politics* 5.2.

Seabra, Pedro & Rafael Mesquita (2022). Beyond Roll-Call Voting: Sponsorship Dynamics at the UN General Assembly. In: *International Studies Quarterly* 66.2.

Smith, Jackie & Dawn Wiest (2012). *Transnational Social Movement Organization Dataset, 1953-2003. Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research.*

Steinert, Christoph & David Weyrauch (2024). BRI membership and voting patterns in the United Nations General Assembly. In: *Research and Politics.*

Tallberg, Jonas, Magnus Lundgren, Thomas Sommerer, & Theresa Squatrito (2020). Why international organizations commit to liberal norms. In: *International Studies Quarterly* 64.3, pp. 626–640.

Terman, Rochelle (2023). *The Geopolitics of Shaming: When Human Rights Pressure Works—and When It Backfires.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Terman, Rochelle & Joshua Byun (2022). Punishment and politicization in the international human rights regime. In: *American Political Science Review* 116.2, pp. 385–402.

Terman, Rochelle & Erik Voeten (2018). The relational politics of shame: Evidence from the universal periodic review. In: *The Review of International Organizations* 13, pp. 1–23.

The World Bank (2022). *Population, total.*

UNGA (04/03/2006). *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, A/RES/60/251.*

Universal Rights Group (2023). *UN Human Rights Council Resolutions Portal.*

Unkel, Julian (2023). *Computational Methods in der politischen Kommunikationsforschung. Methodische Vertiefung: Computational Methods mit R und RStudio.*

Velasco, Kristopher (03/01/2023). Transnational Backlash and the Deinstitutionalization of Liberal Norms: LGBT+ Rights in a Contested World. In: *American Journal of Sociology* 128.5, pp. 1381–1429.

Voeten, Erik (2013). Data and analyses of voting in the United Nations: General Assembly. In: *Routledge handbook of international organization.* Routledge, pp. 54–66.

Voon, Jan P. & Xinpeng Xu (2020). Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on China's soft power: preliminary evidence. In: *Asia-Pacific Journal of Accounting & Economics* 27.1, pp. 120–131.

Vreeland, James Raymond (2019). Corrupting International Organizations. In: *Annual Review of Political Science* 22.1, pp. 205–222.

Waldner, David & Ellen Lust (2023). Unwelcome change: Coming to terms with democratic backsliding. In: *Annual Review of Political Science* 21.1.

Waltz, Kenneth (1979). *Theory of International Politics.* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Weiss, Jessica Chen & Jeremy L. Wallace (2021). Domestic politics, China's rise, and the future of the liberal international order. In: *International Organization* 75.2, pp. 635–664.

Wunderlich, Carmen (2013). Theoretical approaches in norm dynamics. In: *Norm dynamics in multilateral arms control: Interests, conflicts, and justice* 13.1, pp. 20–48.

— (2020). Against the Norms of International Society: Rogues, Outlaws, and Pariahs. In: *Rogue States as Norm Entrepreneurs.* Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 57–70.

Xie, Yu & Yongai Jin (2022). Global Attitudes toward China: Trends and Correlates. In: *Journal of Contemporary China* 31.133, pp. 1–16.

Zhang, Yongjin & Barry Buzan (2020). China and the global reach of human rights. In: *The China Quarterly* 241, pp. 169–190.

Zhu, Yuchao (2011). "Performance legitimacy" and China's political adaptation strategy. In: *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 16, pp. 123–140.

Zürn, Michael & Johannes Gerschewski (2021). *Sketching the liberal script. A target of contestations.*

A   Online Appendices

A.1 Additional Tables

Table A1: Explaining Voting Behavior in the HRC

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Member's HR score	0.057***	0.032*	0.032*	0.009
	(0.020)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.014)
Resolution's HR friendliness	-0.019	-0.050***	-0.047***	
	(0.014)	(0.011)	(0.011)	
Member's HR score × Resolution's HR friendliness		0.061***	0.060***	0.023**
		(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.010)
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Resolution FE				✓
Controls			✓	✓
Interacted Controls				✓
R^2	0.200	0.290	0.293	0.408
Observations	16004	16004	15972	15972

Notes: OLS regressions. The dependent variable is binary and indicates voting in favor of a resolution. Standard errors are clustered at the country-level and reported in parentheses. Significance levels *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

Table A1 shows the full regression output for the results plotted and discussed in subsection 5.1 in the main text. Figure 2 in this section is based on the baseline model in column 3. Column 1 shows that the resolution's 'human rights friendliness' alone does not predict support for it. Only when the interaction with the voting country's HR score is taken into account does the role of this variable become apparent. Column 2 shows that the baseline results holds when dropping country-level control variables. Column 4 shows that it also holds when these control variables are interacted with the resolutions 'HR friendliness'. Note that in Figure 2 in the paper, we plot marginal effects based on specification 3 rather than based on specification 4 because these are more difficult to interpret with resolution fixed effects and interacted controls. Column 4 mainly serves to show that the interaction remains statistically significant with a more conservative specification.

Table A2: Explaining Voting Behavior in the HRC: NLP-based measure

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Member's HR score	0.049**	0.050**	0.028*
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.017)
principle_alignment_length_z	-0.039***	-0.037***	
	(0.006)	(0.006)	
Member's HR score $\times$ principle_alignment_length_z	0.037***	0.036***	0.017***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.006)
Country FE	✓	✓	✓
Resolution FE			✓
Controls		✓	✓
Interacted Controls			✓
R^2	0.220	0.223	0.317
Observations	16050	16018	16018

Notes: OLS regressions. The dependent variable is binary and indicates voting in favor of a resolution. Standard errors are clustered at the country-level and reported in parentheses. Significance levels *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

Table A3: Explaining Voting Behavior in the HRC: Voting measure

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Member's HR score	-0.093***	-0.094***	-0.057***
	(0.017)	(0.014)	(0.019)
Resolution's HR friendliness (voting measure)	-0.055	-0.047	
	(0.034)	(0.034)	
Member's HR score $\times$ Resolution's HR friendliness (voting measure)	0.243***	0.242***	0.121***
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.030)
Country FE	✓	✓	✓
Resolution FE			✓
Controls		✓	✓
Interacted Controls			✓
R^2	0.430	0.435	0.573
Observations	16050	16018	16018

Notes: OLS regressions. The dependent variable is binary and indicates voting in favor of a resolution. Standard errors are clustered at the country-level and reported in parentheses. Significance levels *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

Table A2 and Table A3 show that the results in Table A1 are robust to using the two alternative measures of a resolution's HR friendliness. The NLP-based "UDHR measure" in Table A2 and the "voting based measure" in Table A3. See Table 1 for details on the measurement.

Table A4: Different Types of Diplomatic Visits

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Political Visits	-0.040		
	(0.028)		
China votes yes × Political Visits	0.042		
	(0.040)		
Cadre Visits		-0.011	
		(0.030)	
China votes yes × Cadre Visits		0.001	
		(0.041)	
CCP Visits			-0.011
			(0.030)
China votes yes × CCP Visits			0.001
			(0.041)
Member's HR Score × Resolution's HR friendliness	0.006	0.006	0.006
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Member's HR Score	-0.017	-0.019	-0.019
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Resolution's HR friendliness			
Country FE	✓	✓	✓
Resolution FE	✓	✓	✓
Controls	✓	✓	✓
R^2	0.526	0.526	0.526
Observations	11971	11971	11971

Notes: OLS regressions. The dependent variable is binary and indicates voting in favor of a resolution. Standard errors are clustered at the country-level and reported in parentheses. Significance levels *$p<0.1$, **$p<0.05$, ***$p<0.01$

The regression results reported Table A4 differentiate between different types of diplomatic visits. They complement the results reported in Table 4 column 2, which aggregate all types of visits. The results show that neither aggregated visits nor different types of visits are associated to voting behavior in the HRC.
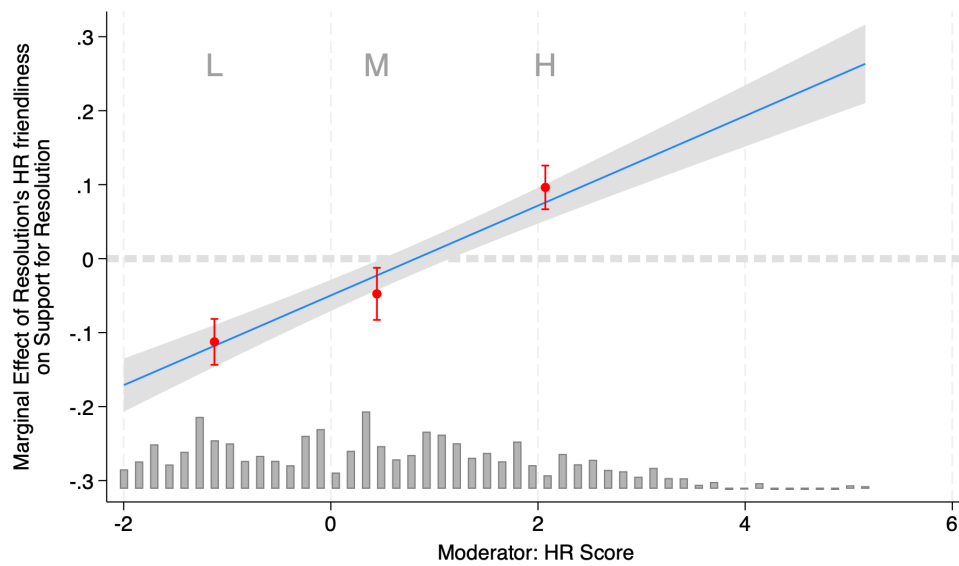
A.2 Additional Figures

Figure A1: Nonlinear Interaction Effect I: HR Score × HR friedliness
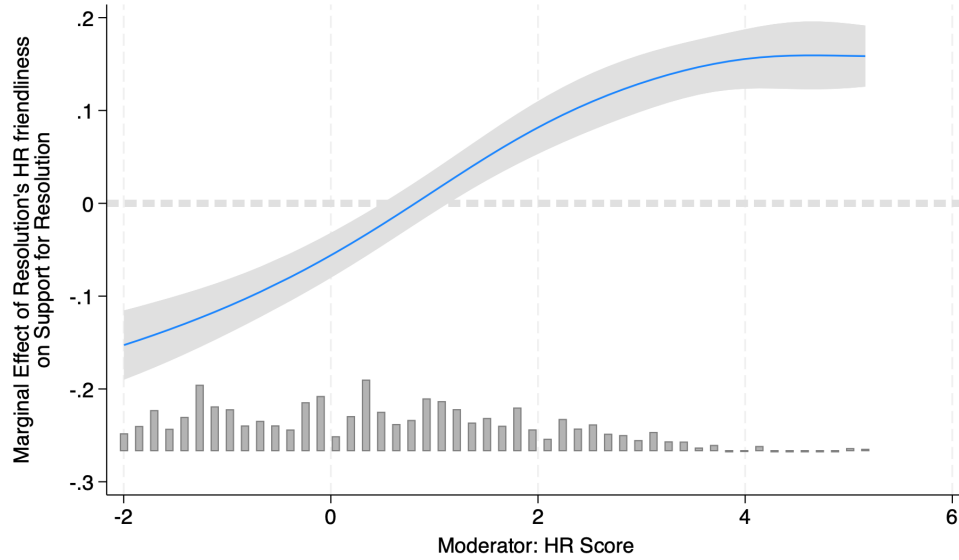

Notes: Marginal effects plot of the same model as in Figure 2 but as a non-linear interaction with a Gaussian kernel. Based on the *interflex* package by Hainmueller et al. (2019)

Figure A2: Nonlinear Interaction Effect II: HR Score × HR friedliness


Notes: Marginal effects plot of the same model as in Figure 2 but as a non-linear interaction with three bins. Based on the *interflex* package by Hainmueller et al. (2019).

Figure A3: Agreement with HR-friendly Resolution Texts
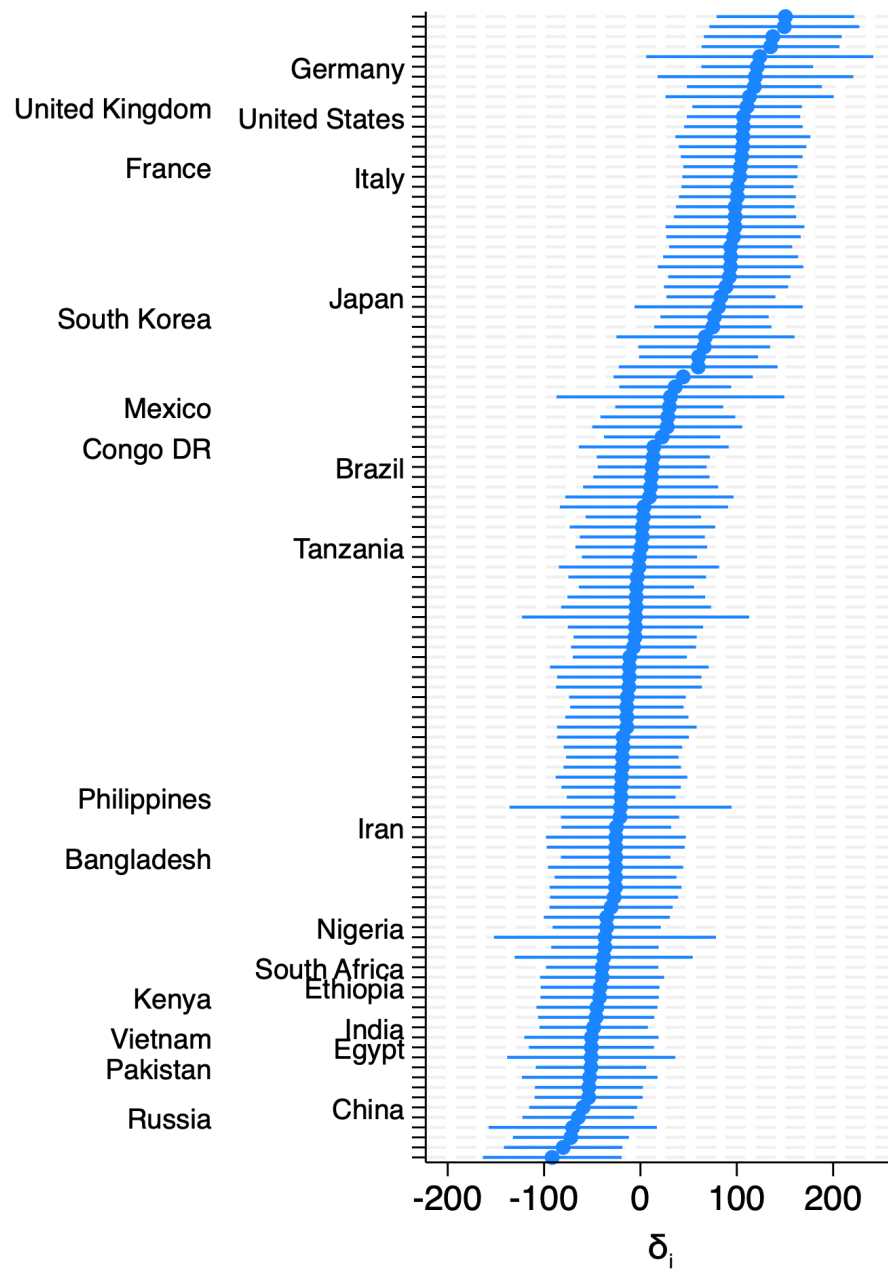
Notes: This graph replicates Figure 3 while using the NLP-based "UDHR measure" of a resolution's HR friendliness. Compared to the baseline, the ordering of countries is very similar. The main result that China is at the bottom of the list is not affected.

Figure A4: Agreement with the most HR-friendly member country
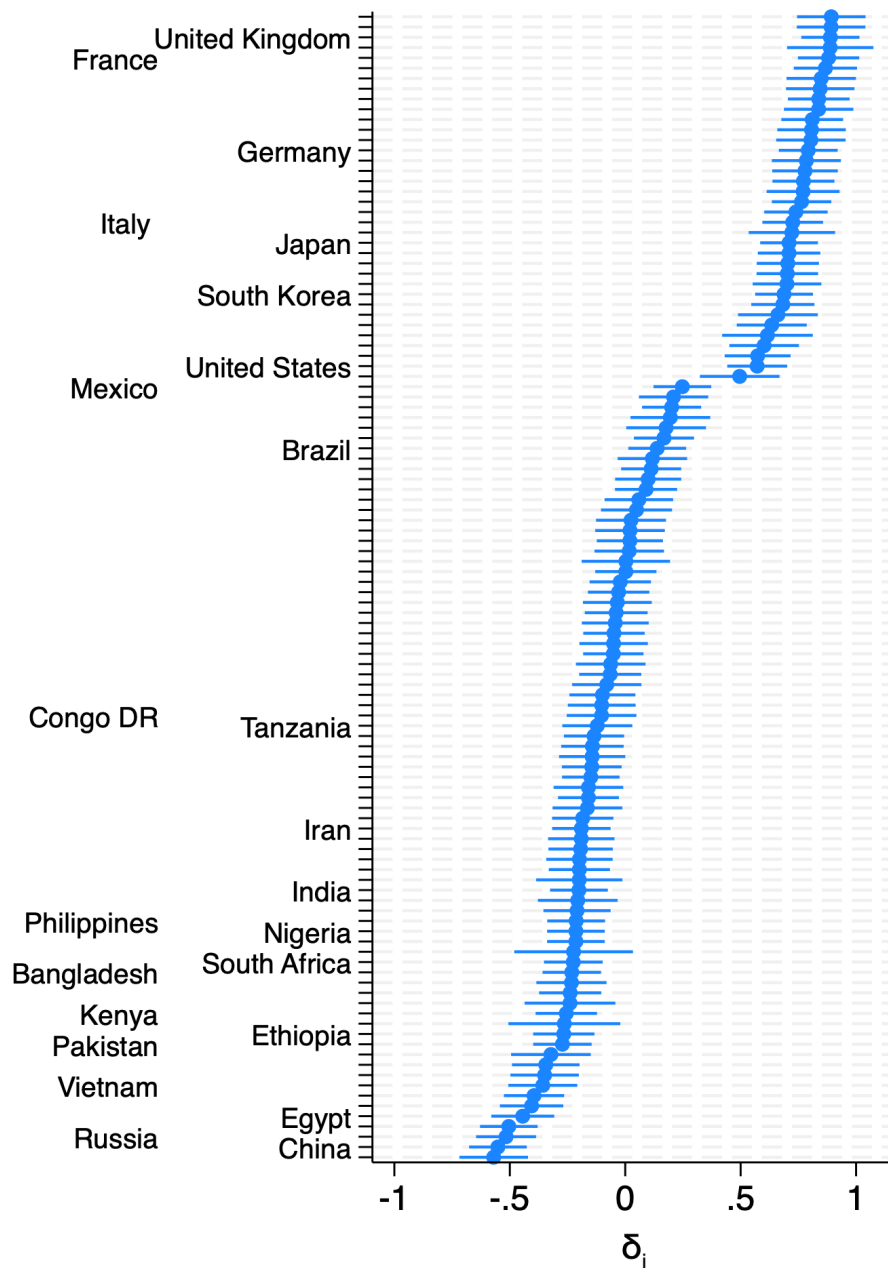
Notes: This graph replicates Figure 3 while using the voting-based measure of a resolution's HR friendliness. Compared to the baseline, the ordering of countries is very similar. A small difference is visible for the United States. This is mainly due to the fact that the United States typically does not vote for resolutions that target Israel while the most HR-friendly member country typically votes for such resolutions. The main result that China is at the bottom of the list is not affected.

Figure A5: Time Trends in Support for Country-Specific Resolutions (by Year)

Notes: This figure replicates the descriptive trend plotted in Figure 5 by estimating a regression of a binary variable indicating support for a resolution on a set of year fixed effects. The results show a significantly negative trend starting in 2013, when China established the BRI. The coefficients plotted in red show the results for a model that includes country fixed effects. This shows that this pattern is not driven by changes in the set of HRC member countries.
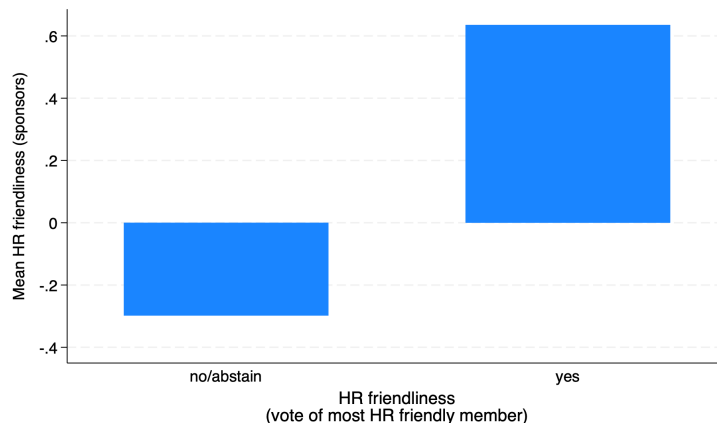
A.3 Validation of Measurement

Figure A6: Comparing the Sponsor-based Measure and the NLP-based Measure
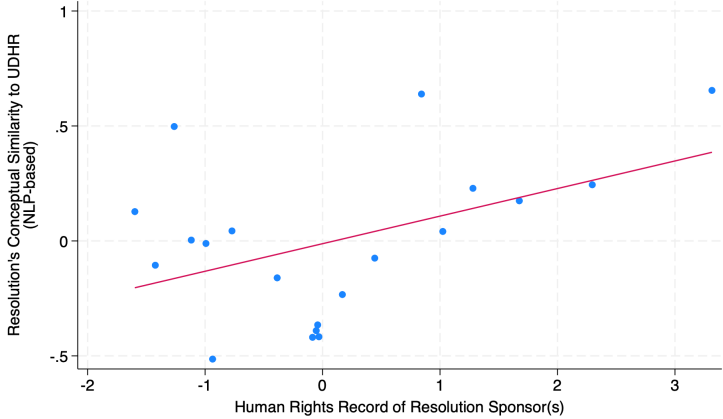
Note: The figure plots the correlation between the two measures of resolutions' 'HR-friendliness' by means of a binned scatterplot. The x-axis indicates the mean HR record of the resolutions' sponsor, based on Fariss et al. (2020). The y-axis indicates the NLP-based measure indicating the conceptual similarity between the resolutions' texts and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

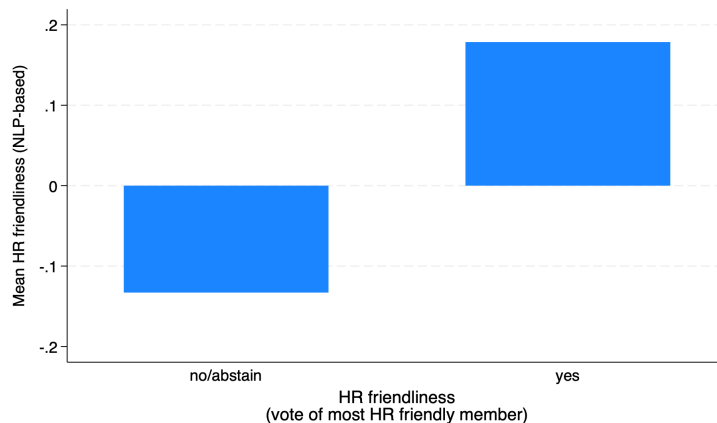*Figure A7:* Comparing the Sponsor-based Measure and the Vote-based Measure

Note: The figure plots the correlation between the two measures of resolutions' 'HR-friendliness' by means of a binned scatterplot. The x-axis indicates the mean HR record of the resolutions' sponsor, based on Fariss et al. (2020). The y-axis indicates the NLP-based measure indicating the conceptual similarity between the resolutions' texts and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

*Figure A8:* Comparing the NLP-based Measure and the Vote-based Measure

Note: The figure plots the correlation between the two measures of resolutions' 'HR-friendliness' by means of a binned scatterplot. The x-axis indicates the mean HR record of the resolutions' sponsor, based on Fariss et al. (2020). The y-axis indicates the NLP-based measure indicating the conceptual similarity between the resolutions' texts and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Figure A9: Robustness of the NLP-based measure
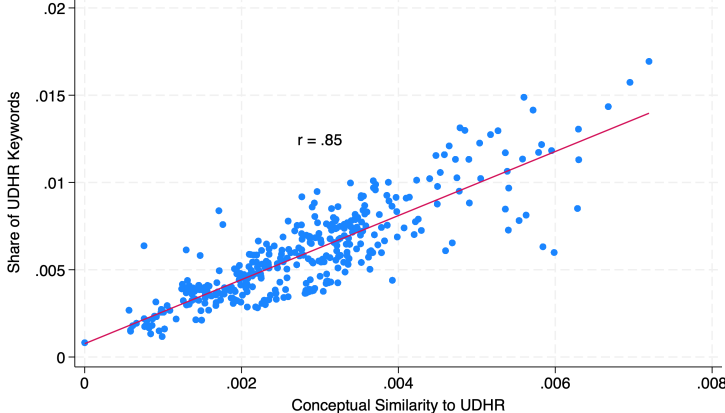
Notes: The graph shows that the NLP-based measures described in the text is highly correlated with a simpler measure that only counts the share of keywords in the resolution.

A.4 Topic Analyses

Subset of HRC resolutions that were subject to voting decisions:[22]

Topic 1 Top Words:

Highest Prob: palestinian, occupi, includ, territori, settlement, jerusalem, east

FREX: settlement, settler, expans, busi, jerusalem, two-stat, east

Lift: -tier, adam, adumim, afore-ment, archaeolog, articular, attach

Score: palestinian, occupi, jerusalem, east, isra, settlement, israel

Topic 2 Top Words:

Highest Prob: occupi, syrian, israel, golan, right, council, resolut

FREX: golan, desist, syrian, israel, administr, isra, occupi

Lift: mine-lay, motherland, quneitra, aggress, card, constant, jurisdicti

Score: golan, syrian, occupi, israel, isra, null, void

Topic 3 Top Words:

Highest Prob: right, peopl, peac, intern, palestinian, nation, unit

FREX: self-determin, peac, palestin, peopl, friend, self-, inalien

Lift: erga, ever-increas, fault, omn, cogen, jus, unqualifi

Score: palestinian, self-determin, occupi, israel, jerusalem, east, palestin

Topic 4 Top Words

Highest Prob: religion, discrimin, racial, intoler, durban, programm, right

FREX: durban, descent, religion, intoler, belief, racial, racism

Lift: action-orient, affront, afrophobia, aliv, anti-raci, anti-semit, apolog

Score: durban, racism, intoler, religion, xenophobia, racial, descent

Topic 5 Top Words

Highest Prob: right, human, council, resolut, special, mandat, assembl

FREX: mandat, korea, rapporteur, holder, special, s, iran

Lift: art, cooperatio, eritrea, frontier, invoc, ordr, short-term

Score: korea, republ, iran, rapporteur, democrat, islam, holder

Topic 6 Top Words

Highest Prob: right, human, govern, intern, myanmar, includ, law

FREX: myanmar, belarus, rakhin, rohingya, sri, lanka, bangladesh

Lift: bangladesh, chin, chosen, rakhin, rohingya, sri, stateless

Score: myanmar, belarus, rakhin, rohingya, sri, lanka, bangladesh

---

[22]We manually excluded the terms 'Ukraine' and 'Georgia', which appeared in several different topics, but their frequency was not sufficient to constitute a separate topic.

Topic 7 Top Words

Highest Prob: develop, right, intern, human, nation, unit, state

FREX: solidar, develop, goal, millennium, agenda, realiz, sustain

Lift: congruent, countless, enlighten, henc, kobe, man-mad, mindset

Score: solidar, develop, expert, realiz, generat, goal, agenda

Topic 8 Top Words

Highest Prob: high, commission, offic, staff, geograph, human, region

FREX: geograph, imbal, staff, composit, offic, distribut, balanc

Lift: imbal, abkhazia, conting, heart, nativ, ossetia, percentag

Score: geograph, imbal, staff, composit, unrepres, balanc, distribut

Topic 9 Top Words

Highest Prob: right, measur, human, unilater, state, coerciv, intern

FREX: unilater, coerciv, extraterritori, measur, negat, trade, impact

Lift: -align, -humanitarian, -year, adver, ate, biannual, bstacl

Score: coerciv, unilater, extraterritori, negat, coerc, subordin, trade

Topic 10 Top Words

Highest Prob: intern, law, right, human, includ, humanitarian, conflict

FREX: yemen, mission, fact-find, conflict, gaza, arm, inquiri

Lift: baha, bearer, gulf, switzerland, yemen, appris, arab-isra

Score: palestinian, yemen, gaza, occupi, jerusalem, fact-find, east

Topic 11 Top Words

Highest Prob: right, human, death, penalti, state, person, law

FREX: penalti, death, cruel, inhuman, punish, degrad, treatment

Lift: abolitionist, anyon, anywher, apostasi, appertain, archiv, bangalor

Score: penalti, death, inhuman, tortur, punish, cruel, crime

Topic 12 Top Words

Highest Prob: right, human, intern, promot, nation, develop, respect

FREX: terror, democraci, violent, equit, extrem, terrorist, base

Lift: -centr, -religi, -use, ation, bin, blishment, bridg

Score: equit, terror, democraci, violent, terrorist, democrat, equal

Topic 13 Top Words

Highest Prob: right, human, govern, nation, includ, burundi, republ

FREX: burundi, congo, venezuela, bolivarian, venezuelan, burundian, republ

Lift: venezuelan, abyei, accion, addenda, albania, america, anew

Score: burundi, republ, venezuela, bolivarian, congo, burundian, venezuelan

Topic 14 Top Words

Highest Prob: right, human, cooper, state, nation, promot, intern

FREX: field, repris, mutual, intimid, enhanc, societi, dialogu

Lift: check, espous, good-, non-leth, enrich, adequaci, adjud

Score: repris, enhanc, intimid, field, drug, dialogu, defend

Topic 15 Top Words

Highest Prob: work, right, mercenari, group, state, activ, human

FREX: mercenari, compani, train, privat, recruit, mercenary-rel, financ

Lift: mercenary-, -end, academi, asia, covert, denot, dismemb

Score: mercenari, compani, mercenary-rel, self-determin, financ, recruit, train

Topic 16 Top Words

Highest Prob: palestinian, includ, occupi, right, territori, intern, human

FREX: strip, gaza, ceas, closur, site, destruct, movement

Lift: assumpt, bangkok, beneath, crude, hebron, incurs, inhabit

Score: palestinian, occupi, israel, jerusalem, gaza, east, isra

Topic 17 Top Words

Highest Prob: debt, right, develop, countri, human, econom, intern

FREX: debt, indebt, adjust, relief, heavili, extern, foreign

Lift: heavili, predatori, andrew, bernard, bolivia, borrow, chile

Score: debt, indebt, heavili, adjust, countri, debtor, foreign

Topic 18 Top Words

Highest Prob: syrian, intern, arab, republ, humanitarian, human, law

FREX: chemic, iraq, weapon, arab, levant, syria, daesh

Lift: caesar, chlorin, cluster, daesh, stockpil, toxic, -led

Score: syrian, republ, arab, chemic, weapon, inquiri, civilian

Topic 19 Top Words

Highest Prob: right, state, illicit, corrupt, human, nation, fund

FREX: corrupt, illicit, asset, origin, repatri, recoveri, flow

Lift: anti-money-laund, exceed, lausann, multin, non-repatri, portion, quantiti

Score: illicit, corrupt, repatri, asset, recoveri, origin, stolen

Topic 20 Top Words

Highest Prob: right, food, human, famili, develop, nation, includ

FREX: food, sanit, famili, drink, water, older, hunger

Lift: furthest, guardian, menstruat, morbid, stigma, defec, menstrual

Score: food, sanit, water, drink, famili, agricultur, hygien
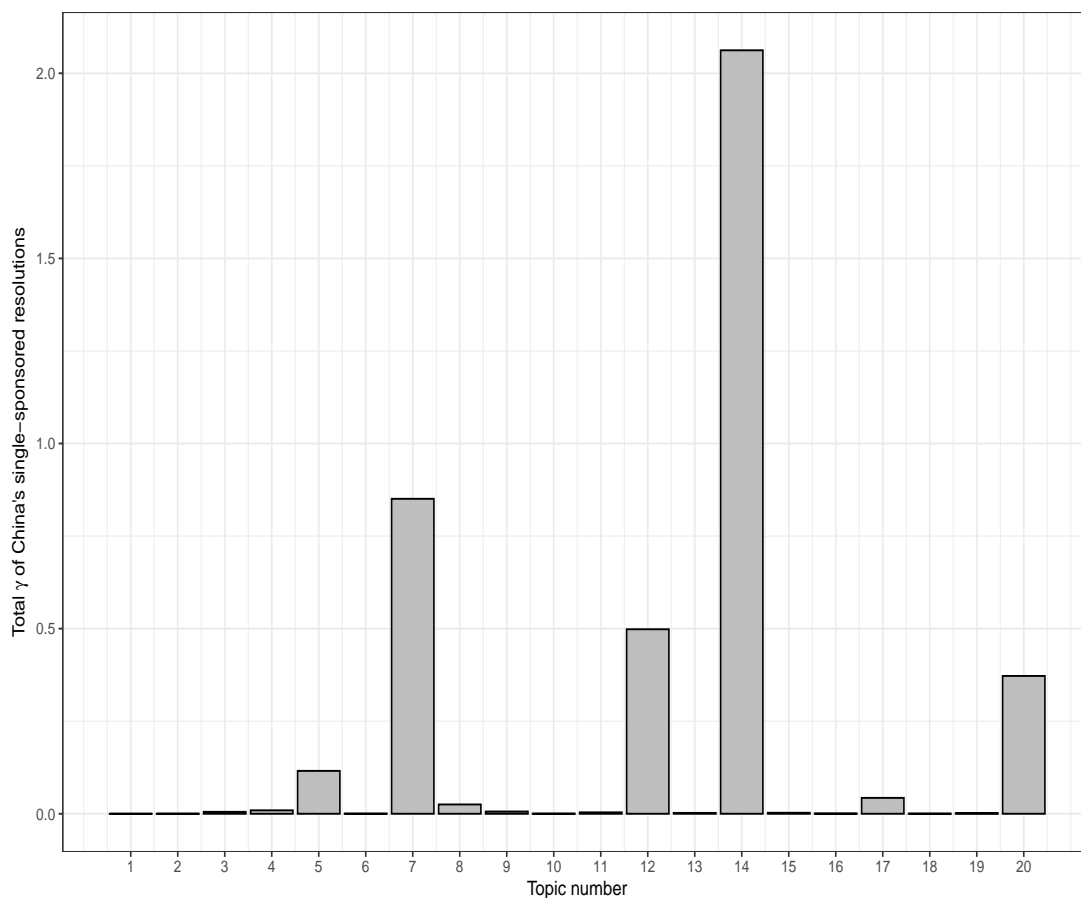
Figure A10: This figures shows the aggregated γ-score across the 20 topics for the combined text of China's four single-sponsored HRC resolutions (HRC/RES/35/21: "The contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights"; HRC/RES/37/23: "Promoting mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of human rights"; HRC/RES/41/19: "The contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights"; HRC/RES/43/21: "Promoting mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of human rights")

Figure A11: This figure shows the temporal development of two topics in HRC resolutions classified by a structural topic model. The blue line shows a smoothed loess function for a topic related to **corruption** (see topic 19 in A.4) and the red line shows a smoothed loess function for a topic related to **cooperative dialogue** (see topic 14 in A.4), both with 95% confidence intervals. γ indicates the topic propensity per document. The structural topic model is based on the subset of all HRC resolutions from 2006 to 2020 that were subject to voting.

Figure A12: This figure shows the temporal development of two topics in HRC resolutions classified by a structural topic model. The blue line shows a smoothed loess function for a topic related to **mercenaries** (see topic 15 in A.4) and the red line shows a smoothed loess function for a topic related to **cooperative dialogue** (see topic 14 in A.4), both with 95% confidence intervals. γ indicates the topic propensity per document. The structural topic model is based on the subset of all HRC resolutions from 2006 to 2020 that were subject to voting.

References Cited in the Appendix

Fariss, Christopher, Michael Kenwick, & Kevin Reuning (2020). *Latent Human Rights Scores Version 4*.

Hainmueller, Jens, Jonathan Mummolo, & Yiqing Xu (2019). How much should we trust estimates from multiplicative interaction models? Simple tools to improve empirical practice. In: *Political Analysis* 27.2, pp. 163–192.