Proximity Matters: Exploring the Impact of Physical Arrangement on Diplomatic Interactions*

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Abstract

Multilateral diplomacy is a deeply social activity, in which interpersonal interactions allow diplomats to negotiate compromises across heterogeneous preferences. Deeper social ties enable diplomats to develop trust, exchange information, and reduce miscommunication, which are instrumental in successful negotiations. Can physical proximity between diplomats facilitate social relationships, thus fostering increased multilateral cooperation? We leverage the randomized seating arrangement of the UN General Assembly to investigate this question, probing whether spatially proximate diplomats are more likely to collaborate and vote similarly compared to spatially disparate diplomats. We find support for our expectation that diplomats seated next to each other are more likely to vote similarly, even after controlling for measures of state influence and affinity, and that the mechanism behind this effect is individual-level social relations between diplomats. Our results speak to the importance of face-to-face diplomacy conducted through international organizations (IOs), as well as the role of individual bureaucrats in shaping international political outcomes.

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Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that personal relationships between international leaders have played an important role in fostering international cooperation. The strong ties between US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev "fundamentally changed the relationship between Russia and the United States," establishing a friendly atmosphere and making possible subsequent arms control agreements (Hall & Yarhi-Milo, 2012; Bramsen, 2023). While the importance of friendly relations at the leader level is generally well-established (e.g., Holmes & Yarhi-Milo, 2017; Wheeler, 2018; Cooper, 2022; Lindsey, 2023), less attention is paid to the importance of social relationships in the more routine conduct of diplomacy: how do social relations between *diplomats* affect the development of multilateral cooperation?

As a deeply social endeavor, it is no surprise that there are countless anecdotal stories of diplomatic 'odd couples': diplomats from countries with tense relationships who nonetheless forged close social ties, and in many cases, translated these personal relationships into intrastate cooperation. Positive social relationships between multilateral diplomats seem to play an important part in building coalitions around international policymaking.

For example, in 2014, US Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power sought to block a Russian proposal to prevent spouses of UN employees in same-sex marriages from receiving benefits. In her efforts to obtain enough votes to block the proposal, Power focused on personal relationships with other diplomats. Power describes these personal friendships—forged informally through activities such as playing soccer with Latin American ambassadors and singing in a UN band with the Korean ambassadors—as integral in building trust, gaining the benefit of the doubt, and creating spaces for her counterparts to advocate on her behalf with their home governments to support key US proposals. Through informal personal relations, Power established mutual respect and social capital with colleagues. When it came to the issue of the LGBT staff benefits, this inspired them to go back to their capitals and argue in favor of taking a difficult position (Power, 2019, 422-426), ultimately resulting in enough votes to block the Russian proposal by an

unexpectedly strong showing in a vote of 43-80 with 37 abstentions.[1]

While scholars of diplomatic studies take these personal relationships seriously in seeking to understand the dynamics of diplomatic engagement (e.g., Sending et al., 2015; Pouliot, 2016; Holmes & Wheeler, 2020; Chasek, 2021; Arias, 2024; Manulak, 2024), little work has investigated the social relationships of diplomats as a *determinant* of their propensity to cooperate. Indeed, most research in international cooperation and international organizations (IOs) utilizes measures of state power and influence—for example, foreign aid flows, alliances, cultural affinity, and overlapping IO memberships (e.g., Voeten, 2000; Dreher et al., 2008, 2009)—to predict when states are likely to cooperate in IOs. Such studies largely omit the personal relationships between diplomats—the agents charged with the on-the-ground task of reaching cooperative outcomes between nation-states in meetings of IOs—in order to focus on state-level features. With increasing attention being paid to the importance of individuals in diplomacy (e.g., Gertz, 2018; Clark & Zucker, 2023; Malis, 2021; Heinzel, 2022; Forster, 2024; Arias, 2022), an unanswered question thus remains: to what degree do social relationships between diplomatic negotiators affect state cooperation in IOs?

In this paper, we empirically assess whether social relationships between diplomats—not just state power and affinity—affect the likelihood of cooperation between delegations in IOs. We build on the literature on spatial proximity and voting behavior in legislatures, extending these applications to multilateral diplomacy (e.g., Masket, 2008; Rogowski & Sinclair, 2012; Saia, 2018; Harmon et al., 2019). Diplomats in IOs—like legislators—need to collaborate with their peers to advance policy outputs, and therefore may be likely to collaborate with spatially proximate representatives in similar patterns. In several respects, however, spatial proximity may matter in different ways for diplomats. First, unlike legislators, diplomats cannot rely on party identification as a heuristic for their votes. Second, diplomats potentially represent a more heterogeneous set of policy positions on issues. Third, while legislators are autonomous decision-makers, diplomats must navigate a balance of their personal evaluations with their instructions from their

[1]See also Power's interview on BBC, January 17, 2021.

home government. Thus, there are reasons to expect that the effects of spatial proximity on social relationships—and subsequently on political behavior—vary in the context of multilateral diplomacy compared to domestic policymaking. We therefore extend the empirical approaches of such legislative studies to an important new theoretical domain.

Researchers have long asserted that spatial proximity induces legislators to collaborate more frequently, but problems of network selection complicate empirical assessment of such claims (Battaglini & Patacchini, 2019). Rigorous examination of the impact of social relationships on collaboration between diplomats faces severe obstacles of endogeneity. In most situations, when legislators or diplomats take seats in a parliamentary body, these decisions are driven by homophily—individuals with similar backgrounds or interests would select to sit together (McPherson et al., 2001)—or a strategic selection process implemented by a ranking member (Masket, 2008). In a diplomatic context, states that have strong interests in working together and have had successful collaborations in the past will certainly have diplomats with established relationships, confounding the estimation of an unbiased association.

To overcome these obstacles, we take advantage of the randomization process in which seating positions are assigned in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), mapping the spatial proximity of delegates. These procedures result in delegates sometimes sharing a desk, and sometimes being split apart across rows. We can accordingly examine the causal effect of seating proximity on affinity between delegations over time, as well as between delegations in the same year. Since bodily co-presence is crucial for developing trust and empathy between diplomats (Wheeler & Holmes, 2021; Arias, 2024), we theorize that delegates who are physically seated together are more likely to cooperate. We proxy for the dependent variable of cooperation, or affinity, by using a measure of ideal point distance between two countries (Bailey et al., 2017) and capture the *degree* of social relationship as proxied by spatial distance.

Because membership in the UNGA is large and heterogeneous, it serves as an appropriate and useful case for us to examine the effects of social ties on cooperation, creating pairs of diplomats who would not normally be expected to cooperate. Further,

as meetings of UN bodies can often be long and sometimes tedious, diplomats that sit immediately beside each other are likely to share informal conversations, to learn about each others' personal character, and to engage in other interactions that build affinity. To a lesser degree, these types of interactions are also expected to occur between diplomats in the immediate radius. The diverse agenda of the UNGA also allows us to measure these impacts across a variety of issue areas, capturing matters of high politics and more mundane questions.

In line with our expectations, we find that, even controlling for measures of state power and influence, physical proximity is predictive of diplomats' likelihood of voting similarly on UN resolutions. Being randomly assigned as seat neighbors has a positive and statistically significant effect on the foreign policy ideal point similarity between two countries as estimated by UNGA voting patterns. However, the effect is not sufficiently strong to overcome long-standing historical and cultural factors. Exploration of mechanisms yields suggestive evidence that the effect of spatial proximity indeed operates through interpersonal relationships between individual ambassadors: we find that when the individual diplomats representing their states share desks for long periods of time, this also significantly contributes to their countries' likelihoods of voting similarly. We further examine heterogeneous effects across different types of dyads and issues. We find that spatial affinity may be more likely to matter when dyads have high levels of prior affinity based on country-level features, but does not appear to matter differently when one of the dyad members is a powerful state. We also conduct a preliminary analysis of heterogeneity across issue areas, as we expect that spatial proximity should induce more similar voting on issues of lower-salience.

These findings build on existing theories that center state-level power in explaining cooperation in IOs (e.g., Kim & Russett, 1996; Voeten, 2000; Dreher et al., 2008; Vreeland & Dreher, 2014) and contribute to a growing consensus that individual diplomats matter in explaining these outcomes. We further show that diplomatic social relationships are independent of state-level relationships, and that spatial proximity contributes to diplomats' likelihood of cooperation. This finding has practical implications for the practice

of diplomacy in IOs, and suggests that the social lives of diplomats—which are often dismissed as trivialities or excesses—in fact serve an important role in advancing international cooperation. As calls for the digitalization of diplomatic interactions and attention to its implications increase (e.g., Burns & Thomas-Greenfield, 2020; Bjola & Coplen, 2022; Hedling & Bremberg, 2021), our findings raise questions about the likelihood that cooperative outcomes can be achieved without physical proximity.

Individuals and Social Relations in Diplomacy

Mainstream theories of IO politics tend to center state-level features to explain how representatives vote. Large powers have been shown to shape the behavior of smaller powers through inducements and threats to act in accordance with their preferences (e.g., Voeten, 2000). For example, a prominent explanation for vote choice in the UN is the receipt of foreign aid (Alesina & Dollar, 2000; Dreher et al., 2008; Carter & Stone, 2015; Dreher & Sturm, 2012; Vreeland & Dreher, 2014). Smaller states exchange their votes in exchange for material rewards from larger states, expressed through foreign aid flows. Other sources of political influence, including formal alliances, military aid, and regional, and developmental groups are also found to be predictors of voting similarity. In these predominant accounts, there is little room for individuals to affect political outcomes: it is only state-level power that matters in shaping negotiated outcomes between states—even in the context of IOs (e.g., Mearsheimer et al., 2001; Krasner, 1991; Keohane & Nye, 1977).

However, scholars are increasingly taking seriously the role of individuals in the process of achieving multilateral cooperation and in IO policymaking. While earlier works on individuals in IR focused on the importance of individual leader characteristics (e.g., Horowitz et al., 2015; Saunders, 2017; Nieman & Allamong, 2023; Goldfien et al., 2023) and relationships between leaders (Hall & Yarhi-Milo, 2012; Holmes & Yarhi-Milo, 2017; Wheeler, 2018), scholars increasingly take into account the importance of individuals at the more quotidian levels of policymaking—namely, diplomats and bureaucrats—who conduct the background work of diplomacy and regulation are often conducted.

For example, studies examine the differences between political appointees versus career diplomats (e.g., Haglund, 2015; Arias & Smith, 2018), experience in different types of prior postings (e.g., Clark & Zucker, 2023), and variation within the experiences of political appointees (e.g., MacDonald, 2021)—in explaining diplomatic and effectiveness on a range of performance-based outcomes including militarized disputes (MacDonald, 2021) and trade (Malis, 2021). Other demographic features such as military background, gender, and the nature of previous work experience are shown to condition the effectiveness of diplomats (e.g., Lindley, 2007; MacDonald, 2021; Towns & Niklasson, 2017; Niklasson & Towns, 2023). In IOs, individual backgrounds are also important predictors of how diplomats and bureaucrats may influence policymaking (Clark & Dolan, 2022; Heinzel & Liese, 2021; Heinzel, 2022; Arias, 2022; Forster, 2024; Manulak, 2024).

Individual diplomats are certainly not unconstrained actors. Diplomacy is a delegation of authority from a principal (the state) to an agent (the diplomat), who may more or less accurately represent the preferences of their state (e.g., Goldfien et al., 2023; Lindsey, 2023). When states have well-articulated or intense preferences on an issue, they may expect their agent to act with little room for independent maneuvering. If a diplomat deviates from home-state instructions in such circumstances, they run the risk of being recalled. In other circumstances, a state may not have a preference over the issue under consideration (for example, a landlocked state may not have strongly articulated preferences over a resolution related to marine biodiversity), and the agent can have more room to develop and independent position on an issue.[2] Thus, while there is expected to be variation in the degree to which diplomats are actors that operate independently from their home governments, it appears clear that diplomats are not simply pass-throughs for foreign ministries.

We build on two key facts from existing work on the role of individuals in the conduct of diplomacy: first, that social relations between diplomats are crucial for constructing policy outcomes in multilateral negotiation, and second, that physical proximity contributes to the development of these diplomatic social relationships.

[2] Agent independence may be particularly likely for small state diplomats, who are serviced by a smaller foreign ministry that may lack the ability to cover as many issue areas (e.g., Panke, 2013; Arias, 2022).

Even accounting for personal characteristics, individuals do not conduct diplomacy in a vacuum, but rather through social processes (e.g., Sending et al., 2015; Keys & Yorke, 2019). Diplomacy is a practice of "socially meaningful patterns of action [that are] being performed more or less competently," (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, 6). Individual diplomats must interact with their counterparts to cultivate empathy (Wheeler, 2013; Holmes & Yarhi-Milo, 2017) and build trust (Holmes, 2018; Rathbun, 2011). Informal negotiations, which create opportunities for arguing and persuasion (Risse & Kleine, 2010), are particularly aided by social relations. Chasek (2021, 62) suggests:

> It is often these personal interactions that allow delegates to get to know each other, understand their positions and red lines, and build the trust necessary to forge agreements.

A dense social network is also necessary to build issue coalitions and develop consensus (Pouliot, 2016). Diplomats with a strong social position can act as brokers amongst others in the network (Sending et al., 2015, 94). Social relations between individuals develop trust that is crucial in diplomatic relations (Lindsey, 2023). For example, the personal friendship between American President Theodore Roosevelt and the German Ambassador to the US, Hermann Speck von Sternburg, "paid substantial diplomatic dividends: in 1907 Roosevelt wrote to Sternburg: 'In the history of America no foreign representative has ever held the trust of her people as you do and in the future no foreign representative ever can hold this trust,"' (Lindsey, 2023, 94). As Pouliot (2016) observes in the case of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Cooper & Shaw (2009) show in the case of the World Trade Organization, and Manulak (2024) shows in the International Monetary Fund, a diplomat's social skills can make up for the weakness of their state's position.

Face-to-face, in-person interactions are integral to diplomats' work. The essential tasks of diplomats are to persuade and influence their counterparts (e.g., Wendt, 1999; Risse, 2000; Johnston, 2001). Interactions between individuals are also necessary to learn the positions and preferences of their counterparts. Engaging face-to-face regularly maximizes the opportunities to develop social relationships and standing (Pouliot,

2016; Holmes & Wheeler, 2020; Arias, 2022). When leaders can meet in person, they can better communicate sincerity and develop empathy compared to virtual meetings (Hall & Yarhi-Milo, 2012; Holmes & Yarhi-Milo, 2017). Engaging in formal settings would also be likely to induce spillovers into informal contacts that occur outside of official meetings, for example, leading to shared coffee breaks or meals outside of meetings. Though recent work argues that diplomats can use technological developments such as emojis to communicate online (Cornut, 2022), technology cannot substitute for in-person communication. As Wheeler & Holmes (2021) argue, bodily co-presence is required for diplomats to form strong social relationships. Indeed, nascent research on digital diplomacy shows that virtual meetings may diminish the sense of understanding and togetherness between diplomats (e.g., Wheeler, 2013; Bramsen & Hagemann, 2021).

Spatial Proximity and Voting in Legislatures

In studies of domestic legislatures, a long tradition suggests that spatial proximity between legislators' offices or seats on the legislative floor contributes to their likelihood of working together by building social networks (e.g., Truman, 1956; Young, 1966; Caldeira & Patterson, 1987; Masket, 2008).[3] Such work recognizes the impact of spatial proximity on policymaking, with many scholars arguing that legislators who sit, live, or work near one another are more likely to vote together.[4] Social ties between legislators serve as a means of transferring information and facilitating the exchanging of votes (Battaglini & Patacchini, 2019), and are likely to facilitate the generation of connections that spillover outside of the formal meeting room. Related work also shows the importance of social ties and friendship on legislator behavior, illustrating that lawmakers are more likely to vote with members that they identify as their friends (e.g., Caldeira & Patterson, 1987; Arnold et al., 2000) or who are part of the same alumni network (Cohen & Malloy, 2014). In contexts outside the US, similar dynamics have been observed among members

[3] See Battaglini & Patacchini (2019) for a review of this literature.

[4] On the other hand, see also Rogowski & Sinclair (2012), who show that members of the US Congress with offices near each other do not vote together or cosponsor legislation more frequently.

of the European Parliament (Harmon et al., 2019) and the Icelandic legislature (Saia, 2018). Importantly, the role of affinity is theorized to operate via mechanisms such as cue-taking, information provision, goodwill, and horse-trading—which do not necessarily entail the changing of preferences.

How does our context of interest—multilateral diplomacy—compare to existing findings on spatial proximity and legislative behavior, which for the most part focuses on domestic legislatures and parliaments? Diplomats in IOs—like legislators in a Congress or parliament—need to collaborate with their peers to advance policy outputs, and therefore may be likely to collaborate with spatially proximity representatives in similar patterns. Unlike in a domestic legislature, however, diplomats in IOs face potentially greater challenges in collaborating that could moderate the effects of spatial proximity.

In a legislature, individuals and the legislation that they propose can be identified by party, which can serve as an informative heuristic as to whether the measure should be supported or not. In an IO, by contrast, country positions across a diverse array of issues under consideration cannot be neatly identified by party positioning.[5] Heterogeneity across diplomats representing countries is also likely to be greater than heterogeneity across legislators representing different regions of the same country. For these reasons, we may potentially expect the effects of spatial proximity on collaboration to be larger for multilateral diplomats than for domestic legislators. However, unlike legislators, diplomats are not necessarily autonomous agents. Nearly all diplomats must obtain authorization from home governments before taking a position on an issue, and therefore government-level policy positions may outweigh the effects of social affinity between individuals.

[5]This is not to suggest that there are not heuristics for country affinity—for example, shared cultural norms or other overlapping institutional memberships—but rather that the availability of such heuristics is less obvious than the signal of partisanship.

Theory of Spatial Proximity and IO Diplomacy

We draw on these bodies of research to understand how spatial proximity affects diplomats' propensity to collaborate. Social relationships between diplomats in IOs are essential to accomplish collective goals in developing policy outputs in a social conceptualization of diplomacy (Sending et al., 2015; Pouliot, 2016). Physical proximity between diplomats is an important factor in developing these social relationships, allowing for the formation of trust, empathy, and friendship (Wheeler & Holmes, 2021). We therefore argue that physical, spatial proximity between diplomats leads to greater cooperation between diplomats in multilateral institutions.

> **H_1: Diplomats with more spatially proximate seats are more likely to collaborate in IOs than diplomats that are seated further apart.**

How—and why—does the social relationship created via proximity affect legislative behavior? Spatial proximity creates opportunities for social interaction and familiarity (Caldeira & Patterson, 1987, 964). As Figure 1 illustrates (left panel), physical proximity between diplomats can facilitate informal conversation and create opportunities for building relationships. Meetings of the UNGA are often quite lengthy, and there are frequent opportunities for diplomats to engage informally during and between speeches. When diplomats are seated less proximately, as in Figure 1 (right panel), physical space between seats makes it more difficult for diplomats to communicate informally. Increased social interaction may have cognitive effects through joint deliberations, generate greater

Figure 1: Spatial dynamics and diplomatic social relations

Note: American and Romanian delegates, 2023 (left panel); American and North Korean delegates, 2015 (right panel).

tolerance of other viewpoints, and provide informational cues for low-salience or unfamiliar issues (Mutz, 2002).

As Ambassador Samantha Power described, she was able to leverage affinity with her colleagues—or in other words, her friendships—to encourage their home governments to support the US position on the LGBT staff benefits vote. However, she was not necessarily working to reverse their existing positions. In some cases, strong social ties also result in vote-trading across issue areas when priorities might vary. As we discuss below, affinity is expected to be less likely to affect diplomatic behavior when *ex ante* issue positions are strong and divergent. Drawing on the studies of domestic policymaking, which we discuss in the previous section, we do not necessarily argue that affinity change diplomats' *ex ante* preferences.[6] UN diplomats vote on a large number of issues throughout the course of a session, which can provide an information burden for diplomats—particularly those from small states who lack the resources to attend every meeting, and whose governments are unlikely to prepare position briefs on every topic (Panke, 2013; Arias, 2022). Friendly relations with other diplomats can provide an informational cue of how to vote in the absence of other sources of information.

We specifically test our hypothesis in the case of the UNGA. In an international organization like the UNGA in particular, where the membership comprises a large number of states with heterogeneous membership, social ties can be particularly important in bridging divides. In a regional or affinity-based IO, the effects of spatial proximity could be less impactful on patterns of collaboration, given that diplomats are already highly inclined to share policy positions and thus are already highly likely to collaborate. The UNGA is also a likely case to observe strong interpersonal relations because it is characterized by standing representation that remains in New York for large parts of the year, as opposed to other IOs in which delegates only meet for brief conferences one or more times during the year (Pouliot, 2016). As Maurer & Wright (2020, 561) argue:

> Diplomats and officials who attend meetings regularly develop a detailed un-

[6] Exploring these mechanisms is beyond the scope of this study, but poses a potentially fruitful avenue for future work.

derstanding of their peers' positions and needs on a given issue; moreover, repeated interactions over an extended period make it feasible to anticipate likely demands and problems, itself a core task of Permanent Representations.

Finally, because the UNGA is a multi-issue forum, we can observe the effects of spatial proximity averaged across a variety of issue areas—but we can also theorize and examine how the effects of spatial proximity may affect collaboration differently across issue areas. On highly salient matters that are deeply linked to national security, there may be less room for social affinity to affect position-taking, given the likelihood of specific instructions from home governments on such matters. On unimportant procedural matters, diplomats may have full autonomy to act as they like and to cooperate with individuals with whom they feel strong social affinity, however, the implications of such collaboration have limited importance in shaping international policy. In a multi-issue forum that addresses a wide set of important (and procedural) matters—from nuclear weapons proliferation to development to normative principles—we can identify the bounds of the effects of physical proximity on collaboration across issue areas.

Just as the nature of the issue under consideration presents a scope condition as to when spatial proximity can or cannot be expected to influence diplomat behavior, the distance between pairs of diplomats also presents a constraining condition. Individual diplomats that are already highly predisposed to collaborate because of shared national positions—for example, diplomats representing the United States and the United Kingdom—are highly likely to collaborate on resolutions and vote similarly whether they have close social ties or not, and thus, spatial proximity is unlikely to affect the behavior of such dyads. Similarly, the delegates of the United States and North Korea are unlikely to behave similarly, even if spatial proximity cultivates a strong interpersonal relationship between diplomats. Just as Gray & Potter (2020) show that diplomacy increases the chances of positive outcomes only among states with moderate levels of affinity, we expect the effects of spatial proximity to be strongest for diplomats representing states with some pre-existing level of affinity. Thus, we develop two theoretical expectations with respect to heterogeneous effects of proximity across different types of country dyads,

and across different issue areas.

> **H_2: The effect of spatial proximity on collaboration in IOs is greatest for country-dyads with pre-existing affinity.**

> **H_3: The effect of spatial proximity on collaboration in IOs is greatest on lower-salience issue areas.**

Research Design and Data

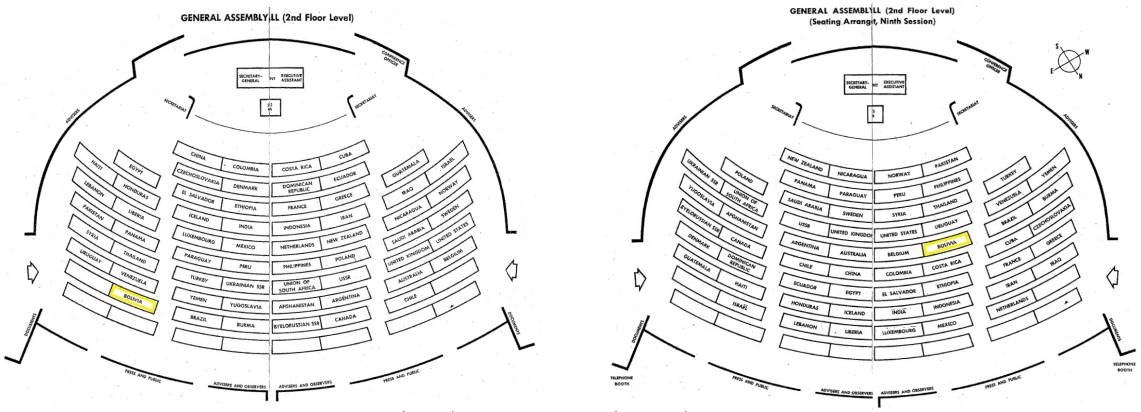
Testing such hypotheses about the importance of spatial proximity requires creative research design. Scholarship—particularly in American politics—has long asserted that spatial proximity induces legislators to collaborate, but network selection problems have made the empirical assessment of such claims difficult (Battaglini & Patacchini, 2019). More recently, scholars have leveraged examples of random seating or office assignment to evaluate the role of spatial proximity and social relationships. For example, Rogowski & Sinclair (2012) assess the importance of spatial proximity of legislators' offices, exploiting randomization in the office selection mechanism in the US Congress, under which members select offices in an order determined by lottery. In other work, Cohen & Malloy (2014) assert the seating of freshman Senators is as-if random because Senators select their seats based on seniority, employing this mechanism in their research design. Similarly, Caldeira & Patterson (1987) argue that although Iowa state legislators selected their seats in the 1965 session because so many legislators were newly elected, sitting together created an as-if random relationship as legislators had no prior information about their potential seatmates. However, such lotteries induce a constrained choice process rather than a fully randomized procedure, so the authors are unable to identify the full effect of spatial proximity. Masket (2008) partially avoids these concerns by exploiting a mechanism in the California state legislature under which the Speaker assigned delegates to shared desks, though it is impossible to know whether the Speaker employed an underlying strategic rationale for assignments. We improve upon these prior efforts to understand the effects of spatial proximity on voting similarity by leveraging the unique seating rules of the UNGA, which is built upon a truly randomized seating procedure.

Context on the UNGA Seating Arrangement

In the UNGA, the yearly session begins in September and typically runs until December, although delegates often return in January to complete work on outstanding agenda items. At least three months in advance of the opening session, the General Assembly elects a President. On the day of this election, the Secretary-General conducts a random draw to determine which country will occupy the first seat of the Assembly Hall (at the right end of the front row as seen from the podium). Subsequent seats are filled in English alphabetical order. In 2023, for example, North Macedonia was selected to fill the first seat, while in 2022, Belize was drawn.[7] This procedure creates year-on-year random variation in the spatial distance between delegates, based on the configuration of seats. In some years, for example, delegations will occupy a single seat, while in others they will share desks as a dyad-pair. Sometimes these dyads will be split across two rows or across an aisle, while sometimes they will be contiguous. Figure 2 illustrates these patterns: in the 1955 session, Bolivia occupied a single seat (left panel), while in 1956, the delegation was seated next to Belgium (right panel).

Further variation in seating arrangements is induced over time. First, when countries change their names: for example, the delegation of Ceylon was seated next to the delegate from Chad in 1971, but in 1972, the same individual—now as the representative

Figure 2: Spatial dynamics and diplomatic social relations



Note: Seating charts for 1955 (left) and 1956 (right). The seat of the Bolivian delegate is highlighted in yellow for illustration.

[7] See here for the first country selected each year.

of Sri Lanka—would have been seated next to Sudan. Secondly, as the number of UN members increased over the years, the seating arrangement of the Assembly Hall was altered several times, resulting in different pairing configurations. These new members fill into the alphabet, interjected between pairs of delegations that previously would have been alphabetically next to each other. For example, when Burundi joined the UN and was seated in the 1963 session, it was placed between Burma and the Byelorussian SSR, which had previously been seated next to each other. Finally, variation is induced in years in which accessibility accommodations are made for members of country delegations who need wheelchair access, and are thus placed near the accessible exits. In 2022, for example, to accommodate members of the US delegation, the members were seated next to Marshall Islands.

The randomization of seating is essential to identify the effect of socialization. Without a random procedure assigning delegates to sit near each other, such decisions would likely be driven by homophily: individuals with similar backgrounds or interests would select to sit together (McPherson et al., 2001). The randomization process employed to assign seats in the UNGA has unique features that improve upon prior research designs, but are in other ways limiting. Unlike other procedures, there are no concerns about strategic processes influencing the spatial arrangement (either by the legislators themselves or the individual assigning them to positions): delegates in the UNGA have no agency to *decide* where they sit. This approach mirrors that employed by Harmon et al. (2019), who similarly leverage breaks in physical proximity caused by changes in the arrangement of members of the European Parliament. In this case, MPs are seated in alphabetical order but alternate sessions between venues with different seating layouts. However, the alphabetical procedure is not fully randomized, as in the Icelandic parliament (see e.g, Saia, 2018; Darmofal et al., 2023; Jo & Lowe, 2023), which limits the number of potential combinations. Thus, while not offering the full ideal, the UNGA seating arrangement mechanism still creates a quasi-experimental setting to explore the "treatment effect" of spatial proximity between country delegations.

Of course, formal meetings are not the only spaces in which UNGA diplomats inter-

act. As part of their typical day, diplomats meet for coffee, drinks, or lunch, they attend cocktail parties, and they attend a number of informal side events. These events often take place during the breaks between the two daily three-hour meetings of the UNGA, or at the end of the day. While our measure of spatial proximity only captures relations in the formal portion of the diplomats' work, it represents a substantial amount of time that individuals would spend side-by-side. Further, we expect that affinity cultivated by sitting nearby in formal meetings spills over into informal contexts outside (for example, seat-mates often leave the Assembly Hall to share a meal at the lunch break). In this way, seat assignments have an even more substantial effect on diplomatic social relations.

Independent Variable: Seating Assignments

We collect the seating charts for all available sessions of the UNGA from the UN Digital Library. Seating charts were available for sessions 7-44 (1952-1989) and 72-78 (2017-2023). Seating charts for 1990-2016 were interpolated.[8] For each session, we record the country delegation assigned to each seat and create a spatial representation of seating relationships. This allows us to capture whether delegations were directly next to each other, in front or behind each other, to the left or right, or in a diagonal-dyadic pair. We also capture whether these relationships are contiguous or non-contiguous (i.e., whether there is a gap or aisle between the seats), as well as whether the seat is a singleton position. For example, in Figure 2, Bolivia and Belgium are recorded as a contiguous dyad, while Bolivia and Brazil are captured as filling non-contiguous left and right positions. Uruguay is captured as the front position of Bolivia, and the US occupies Bolivia's diagonal-front-dyadic position. These details allow us to capture variation in spatial proximity: contiguous dyads are expected to have the closest relationships, while non-contiguous surrounding delegations are one degree less proximate. We subsequently match each delegation listed in the seating chart with the delegation name recorded in the UN voting data, which we describe in the following section.

For some years, countries became members of the UNGA after the session officially

[8] See Appendix for a detailed description of interpolation procedures.

started, and were thus not included in the initial seating chart. While the country was not a member, their pending application would have been placed before the Credentials Committee before the session began. Therefore, in most such cases, the seating chart reflects a blank space where that new country member would be added according to English alphabetical order in anticipation of their being granted membership. As countries are typically voted into the UNGA at the opening session, we assume that the new members were seated immediately and code the data as such. For years in which countries were added towards the end of the session (e.g., Spain joined the UN on December 14, 1955 and voted on December 16, 1955) or in which there are no clear blank seats in the seating chart, we do not include such countries for that year.[9]

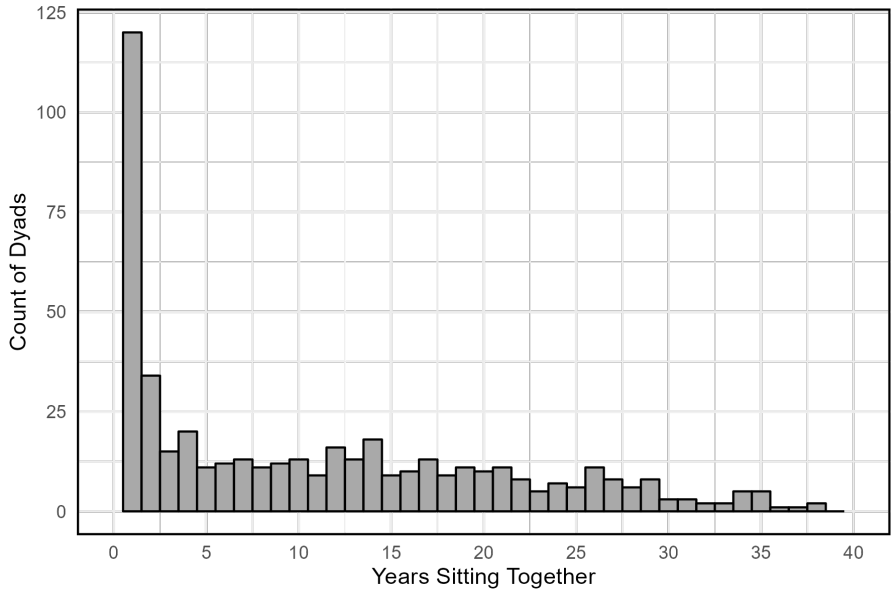
To build the measure of spatial proximity, we first list all the possible country dyad pairs for each year given the set of countries who were members of the UNGA, yielding a dyad-year dataset. Then, using the spatial representation of the seating relationship as described above, we create multiple binary dyad-year variables. First, "Seat Dyad" captures whether countries are a contiguous dyad, meaning that the variable takes on a value of 1 if delegates are seated directly next to each other and 0 if not. Second, we create similar binary variables for "Left-Right," "Back-Front," "Neighbor," and "Back-Front Dyad."[10]

Out of the 19,544 unique country dyad combinations within our sample, 474 are direct dyads ("Seat Dyad" = 1) for at least one UNGA session (approximately 2.4% of all possible dyads). The vast majority of countries do not sit next to one another, which is unsurprising given the seating arrangement mechanism. Of those country pairs that sit next to each other at least once, the average number of sessions (i.e., years) that two countries sit next to one another is 11.07 sessions total. However, there is significant variation in the number of years that two countries are a seated dyad. As Figure 4 demonstrates, 200 dyads sit together for less than five years while just 25 sit together for more than thirty years.

[9] We validated this approach with staff from the UN Dag Hammarksjöld Library.

[10] While our current variable construction is binary, the structure of the data allows us to create continuous measures representing distance between countries for future analysis.

Figure 3: Distribution of Total Years that Dyads Sit Next to Each Other



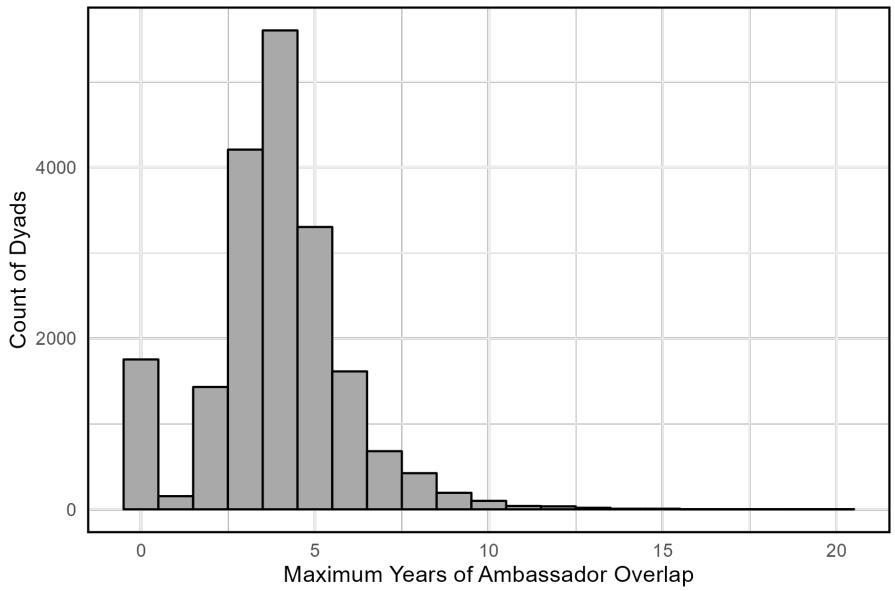
In addition, we can examine the pairs of individual ambassadors who occupy paired seats together. We draw on data from Arias (2022) to match each country with their individual Permanent Representative for each year (more detail on additional individual-level measures is included below). This is a distinct quantity from the number of years countries sit in dyad-pairs. Given that our theory is based on the social relationships between diplomats, it is imperative to account for the turnover in individuals separately from the turnover in countries. Like the measure of country dyad length, this measure varies substantially. Ambassadors from Djibouti were most likely to be in longstanding (more than 10 years) pairs with other individual ambassadors, forming 29 such relationships.[11]

Dependent Variable: Behavior in the UNGA

We are interested in understanding how spatial proximity affects collaboration between states in the UNGA. There are many different ways in which diplomats collaborate: sponsoring resolutions together (Dijkhuizen & Onderco, 2019; Seabra & Mesquita, 2022), hosting side events, supporting each others candidates for positions (Dreher et al., 2014), and even raising similar issues in their speeches (Baturo et al., 2017). We hone in on

[11] Ambassadors from Madagascar, Turkmenistan, and Trinidad and Tobago had the next highest numbers of longstanding ambassador-level dyads. Ambassadors from 16 individual countries formed 10 or more longstanding ambassador-level dyad pairs.

Figure 4: Distribution of Maximum Years of Ambassador Overlap Between Dyads



one specific and crucial way in which diplomats seek to influence each others' behavior—voting on resolutions. To pass a resolution, diplomats must obtain votes from their counterparts. Indeed, even in cases in which a resolution is certain to pass, diplomats may seek to collaborate and obtain more votes to illustrate a large show of support, or even a consensus across countries (Blake & Payton, 2015; Arias, 2025, 2024).[12]

We operationalize this by examining voting behavior as our key dependent variable, looking to see whether states hold more similar positions after sitting next to one another. While there are multiple ways that states interact in the assembly (including through speeches, side discussions, and resolution sponsorship), votes provide the clearest record of the positions that a country is willing to take publicly (Mattes et al., 2015). UNGA voting data are commonly employed in research in international relations to capture state affinity—both as an independent measure, i.e., to show whether states share foreign policy preferences (e.g., Arias & Hulvey, 2023), and as a dependent measure, i.e., to show whether states can influence each others' voting outcomes (e.g., Carter & Stone, 2015).

[12] We plan to expand our analysis to examine co-hosting side events as another way to measure the effect of spatial proximity on diplomats' proximity to collaborate.

Additional Factors

We include a number of additional dyad-level factors in the model that are known to determine affinity between countries. We utilize the Centre d'Études Prospectives et d'Informations Internationales (CEPII) Gravity dataset for many of these covariates as it assembles data spanning 1948 to 2020 from various sources Conte et al. (2022). We employ data on geographic contiguity (neighbors) and common official language from CEPII, religious similarity from La Porta et al. (2008). Both variables are binary, with the former taking the value of 1 if countries are neighbors and the latter taking the value of 1 if countries have the same common official language. Data on colonial history comes from Head et al. (2010), again a binary variable that takes the value of 1 if countries have ever been in a colonizer-colony relationship. We use the Global Indicators of Dyadic Engagement (GIDE) dataset Moyer et al. (2024) for total trade flow data in USD millions IMF (2024); Conte et al. (2022) and bilateral official development assistance (ODA), or ODA-like, commitments (USD millions) which is drawn from OECD and AidData noa (2025); Asmus et al. (2021); Bluhm et al. (2025); Dreher et al. (2022).[13] Finally, we utilize data on the total number of bilateral alliances from the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) dataset (Leeds et al., 2002).

As our argument focuses on the interpersonal relationships that country-level representatives form based on spatial proximity, we also include a number of variables capturing ambassador-level characteristics from Arias (2022). This ambassador-level data was collected from the Blue Book listings of Permanent Missions to the United Nations, from which the name of every country's ambassador and first deputy was recorded, creating a database of 21,159 ambassador and deputy entries from 1946 to 2019.[14] In addition to the number of years of tenure of each ambassador in the dyads, as well as the number of years the dyad ambassadors served together, we also capture the gender of each ambassador. To do so, Arias (2022) employs the `genderize` API to construct a "male" indicator

[13] We use net, or total flows, for both trade and aid. This is preferred to directional because we are interested in socialization rather than coercion. Furthermore, our theory does not specify which member of a dyad is expected to change the preferences or voting behavior of the other, therefore, net aid flows are a more appropriate way to capture these non-directional expectations.

[14] We do not utilize the deputy-level data.

based on the ambassador's name. This information is useful to account for since women diplomats may face additional challenges in a traditionally male-dominated role (Towns & Niklasson, 2017; Towns, 2020), and mixed-gender pairs may face greater challenges in developing affinity. Missing individual-level data was interpolated using Amelia, averaging estimates over 5 imputations; results were robust to listwise deletion and missingness was not systematically correlated other key measures, see Arias (2022) for details. We do not include a measure of diplomat-level language, as almost all UN diplomats have extremely high facility with English and other official UN languages.

Estimation

We are interested in the effect of spatial proximity in the UNGA on voting behavior. We analyze voting behavior at the dyad-year level using the inversion of ideal point distance as a measure of similarity between two countries, such that an increase in our dependent variable represents two countries becoming more similar. We estimate a set of models that can be described as follows:

$$\textit{Ideal Point Distance}_{ijt} = \alpha + \beta_1 \textit{Seat Neighbors}_{ijt} + \gamma_1 \mathbf{X}_{ijt} + \gamma_2 \mathbf{X}_{it} + \gamma_3 \mathbf{X}_{jt} + \delta_t + \epsilon$$

where $\textit{Seat Neighbors}_{ijt}$ is a binary variable representing whether country i and country j were seat neighbors in year t, $\mathbf{X}_{ijt}$ represents a vector of dyad-year level covariates that might affect ideal point distance, $\mathbf{X}_{it}$ and $\mathbf{X}_{jt}$ represent a vector of country-year level covariates, and δ_t represented fixed year effects.

We estimate an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model where β_1 can be interpreted as the local average treatment effect (LATE) of two countries being seat neighbors on their ideal point distance in the UNGA in a given year. We include year fixed effects in our main specification, as they absorb any unobserved variation that affects a large number of units similarly at a given point in time, such as the agenda items up for debate in a given UNGA session. We also cluster standard errors at the year-level to capture uncertainty within years.

Results

In Table 1, we assess the effects of being a direct neighbor dyad on the ideal point distance between two countries. Column 1 displays the main effect of this measure, which can also be interpreted as the positive partial correlation which holds with the inclusion of key economic and political variables, which we add to the model in Column 2.

Table 1: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Ideal Point Similarity

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Seat Dyad	0.023***	0.016**	−0.006
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Trade Flow ($M USD)		0.000***	0.000***
		(0.000)	(0.000)
Aid Commitments ($M USD)		−0.001***	−0.001***
		(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Alliances		0.229***	0.267***
		(0.015)	(0.013)
Common Official Language			0.206***
			(0.006)
Common Religion			0.365***
			(0.016)
Colonial History			−0.834***
			(0.031)
Num.Obs.	893 874	849 305	690 427
R2	0.033	0.028	0.062
R2 Adj.	0.033	0.028	0.062
R2 Within	0.000	0.009	0.043
R2 Within Adj.	0.000	0.009	0.043
AIC	2 199 495.6	2 031 843.9	1 613 464.3
BIC	2 200 408.4	2 032 624.6	1 614 242.5
RMSE	0.83	0.80	0.78
Std.Errors	by: year	by: year	by: year
FE: year	X	X	X

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Notes: The table presents the results of the main specification for UNGA ideal point similarity. Standard errors are clustered by year. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

As expected by Hypothesis 1, sitting together in a dyad-pair has a positive and statistically significant effect on the dyad's ideal point distance. When countries go from not sitting next to one another to sitting next to one another, their ideal points become more similar by 0.023, or about 3% of a standard deviation. This holds to the same

degree when key measures of economic and political ties—trade, ODA, and alliances—are included. And, while this effect may sound small, it is a tenth as large as the effect of an additional bilateral alliance—something that countries enter into after much planning and negotiation. Substantively for 2023, it amounts to Romania becoming as aligned with the US as Australia (a move from 1.188 to 1.159) or Jordan becoming as aligned with the US as Malaysia (a move from 3.235 to 3.206).

However, we find that with the inclusion of cultural and historical variables in Column 3, the effect of being seat neighbors is no longer statistically significant at even the 10% level. Covariates such as the number of bilateral alliances, common official language, and common religion are all significantly and highly positively associated with ideal point similarity—indicating that those with more similar cultural factors are more aligned in voting. In contrast, aid commitments and colonial history are all associated with less voting similarity while trade has essentially zero effect.

Overall, these results indicate that spatial proximity between two countries has an effect on voting similarity in the UNGA even when accounting for important geopolitical factors. However, the effect of spatial proximity is heterogeneous based on dyad factors like common language, religion, or colonial history. This is not surprising, as countries may only be seated next to each other for six months and even if ambassadors develop bonds during this time, they are unlikely to be sufficiently strong to overcome long-standing historical factors such as prior colonial dependencies.

Mechanisms

To better understand what is driving these results, in Table 2, we introduce a number of covariates at the ambassador level. This approach draws on our theoretical framework, which posits that the social ties between individuals—fostered by spatial proximity—increase the likelihood of collaboration on voting. Column 1 includes a variable that captures the number of years of ambassadorial overlap between countries, i.e., the number of years that the ambassadors of both states serve together. We subsequently introduce variables for the total years of ambassador service and the ambassador gender

for both countries within a dyad in Column 2.

Table 2: Importance of Individual Ambassadors in the UNGA on Ideal Point Similarity

	(1)	(2)
Seat Dyad	−0.008	−0.018*
	(0.009)	(0.009)
Trade Flow ($M USD)	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Aid Commitments ($M USD)	−0.001***	−0.001***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Alliances	0.267***	0.272***
	(0.013)	(0.013)
Common Official Language	0.206***	0.217***
	(0.007)	(0.007)
Common Religion	0.372***	0.394***
	(0.016)	(0.017)
Colonial History	−0.835***	−0.828***
	(0.033)	(0.031)
Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair	0.014***	−0.004
	(0.004)	(0.004)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1)		0.013***
		(0.002)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2)		0.005***
		(0.001)
Ambassador Gender (country 1)		0.068***
		(0.024)
Ambassador Gender (country 2)		−0.054***
		(0.016)
Num.Obs.	646 492	595 135
R2	0.062	0.070
R2 Adj.	0.062	0.070
R2 Within	0.044	0.051
R2 Within Adj.	0.044	0.051
AIC	1 517 113.0	1 396 463.0
BIC	1 517 864.0	1 397 253.8
RMSE	0.78	0.78
Std.Errors	by: year	by: year
FE: year	X	X

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: The table presents the results of the specification for UNGA ideal point similarity with ambassador-level variables. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

We find that the introduction of these ambassador-level variables, especially the number of years with the same ambassador pair between two countries, reduce the impor-

tance of the seat dyad variable and even flip the relationship. Given that the mechanism by which sitting together operates is theorized to be via the social relationships between the individual ambassadors, this result is in line with our theoretical expectations. The positive and statistically significant association of the ambassador-dyad variable indicates that the more years a country-dyad has overlapping ambassadors, the more similar their ideal points. This aligns with the idea that spatial proximity operates through relationship development between two ambassadors, and that the longer they work together, the closer they become. However, the results in Model 2 suggest that ambassador experience and gender are important factors explaining whether diplomats can convince or lead their seat-mate.

Heterogeneous Effects

We examine heterogeneous effects across several relevant dimensions. First, we assess whether spatial proximity affects cooperation differently depending on the nature of the dyadic pair. We examine whether dyads with more affinity and those in which one member is a great power are more likely to experience increased affinity as a result of spatial proximity. Second, we asses whether these effects vary by issue area, and specifically whether on lower-salience matters, diplomats may have more autonomy in taking voting decisions. In these types of issue spaces, we theorize that spatial affinity matters more.

Based on prior research on spatial proximity and our argument about how social ties develop, we theorized in Hypothesis 2 that being seat neighbors will only matter in certain types of dyad-pairs. Specifically, we expect that is unlikely that two very different countries that sit next to each other for one year will begin to vote more similarly. For example, even if the representatives from two countries like Iran and Israel developed close interpersonal relationships, their country preferences are so distant that we would not expect an effect of them being seated dyads. However, for countries that are already relatively similar, we expect that spatial proximity should exert an independent effect.

Table 3 presents the results of our models estimated only for each quartile of the

Table 3: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Ideal Point Similarity by Quartiles of Prior Similarity

	(1a)	(1b)	(2a)	(2b)	(3a)	(3b)	(4a)	(4b)
Seat Dyad	0.012*	0.016**	0.001	−0.004	−0.025**	−0.022*	−0.032*	−0.060***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.016)	(0.018)
Trade Flow ($M USD)	0.000***	0.000***	0.000	0.000	0.000**	0.000*	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Aid Commitments ($M USD)	0.000	0.000	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Alliances	0.087***	0.075***	0.007	0.012	0.040**	0.054***	−0.165***	−0.051**
	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.011)	(0.009)	(0.020)	(0.018)	(0.026)	(0.025)
Common Official Language		0.018***		0.047***		0.082***		−0.110***
		(0.004)		(0.007)		(0.008)		(0.026)
Common Religion		0.041***		0.045***		0.028*		0.273***
		(0.008)		(0.009)		(0.015)		(0.036)
Colonial History		0.028**		−0.096***		−0.137***		−0.135***
		(0.011)		(0.026)		(0.022)		(0.023)
Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair		0.004***		0.003		0.004**		0.003
		(0.001)		(0.002)		(0.002)		(0.005)
Num.Obs.	211 883	162 171	210 485	164 348	209 276	158 789	200 843	147 910
R2	0.058	0.065	0.019	0.025	0.032	0.037	0.035	0.041
R2 Adj.	0.058	0.065	0.018	0.025	0.031	0.037	0.035	0.040
R2 Within	0.003	0.008	0.000	0.006	0.001	0.007	0.007	0.018
R2 Within Adj.	0.003	0.008	0.000	0.006	0.001	0.007	0.007	0.018
AIC	−29 402.7	−18 056.1	95 677.2	78 275.3	181 298.7	140 485.4	374 666.3	279 750.5
BIC	−28 715.1	−17 396.3	96 364.4	78 936.0	181 985.5	141 143.7	375 350.4	280 404.2
RMSE	0.23	0.23	0.30	0.31	0.37	0.38	0.61	0.62
Std.Errors	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year
FE: year	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: The table presents the results of the main specification for UNGA ideal point similarity for dyad-years. Models 1a-1b summarize the results for the first quartile (lowest ideal point difference in prior year), with subsequent columns capturing other quartiles. Standard errors are clustered at the year level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

lagged point distance, indicating the similarity of two countries in the prior year. Columns 1a, 2a, 3a, and 4a replicate the models from Table 1 while Columns 1b, 2b, 3b, and 4b replicate those from Table 2. We find a consistent positive and statistically significant effect of seat dyad on ideal point distance within the first quartile, even with the inclusion of cultural-historical dyad variables and ambassador-level variables. This indicates that there is likely something unique about how the spatial proximity mechanism operates on countries that are more similar rather than those that are more different.The first quartile sample also includes states that are highly similar, and therefore have little room to move their ideal points closer to each other, thus introducing cases in which there is a ceiling effect on the ability of sitting together to affect political behavior. Even including such cases, we observe that among the set of states with high affinity, sitting together has significant effects on inducing cooperation in terms of voting behavior. However, we find negative and statistically significant effects for dyads in the highest quartiles of prior ideal point distance, meaning those that hold quite different policy positions. Somewhat intuitively, sharing space is not sufficient to induce similarity across large, likely long-standing differences. These results indicate that spatial proximity might also bring areas of disagreement to the forefront. Overall, we argue that this is quite strong evidence in favor of our expectations of heterogeneous effects.

Extending this analysis, we also consider whether the power differential within the dyad—not just their level of affinity—affects the degree to which spatial proximity matters. Specifically, we expect that the effect of spatial proximity may vary based on whether one of the dyad members is the US or a P5 member. This is because diplomats from powerful states may have greater capacity to generate affinity. This could be due to the pull of their soft power (e.g., Nye, 1990) or because of their ability to offer inducements to their seatmate to vote for their preferred outcomes (e.g., Voeten, 2000; Dreher et al., 2008, 2009). We illustrate these results in Tables 15 - 16 in the Appendix in which we first operationalize in interaction indicating whether one of the dyad members is the United States, and second whether one of the dyads is a member of the P5 (the United States, United Kingdom, France, China, or Russia). While we find suggestive evidence

that spatial proximity continues to increase collaboration between states, we have null results which indicates that powerful states may not have a greater capacity to use spatial proximity to generate affinity. We also examine whether the effect of spatial proximity is conditional on whether both countries are of the same regime type using Polity scores. We find early indications that this may be the case, as the interaction between spatial proximity and both countries being a democracy is positive but negative when both are autocracies. Results are null for mixed dyad pairs. We capture these preliminary findings in Table 12.

Turning from dyadic-level heterogeneity to issue-level heterogeneity, we assess the expectations we laid out in Hypothesis 3. Given that diplomats are more likely to have clear national instructions on highly salient issues— particularly those that are relevant for matters of national security—there is likely to be less room for them to deviate from pre-specified voting positions, and therefore less opportunity for them to be influenced by their seat-mates. For example, the US Department of State developed a list of resolutions that it deems as especially important every year, and specifically tracks how countries vote on these resolutions—but not on others. On the other hand, on issues of lower salience, diplomats may not have pre-specified instructions from capital about what position to take. For these questions, they may have more opportunity to allow for affinity with their seatmate to shape their voting decision. We anticipate that on procedural matters and issues related to economic development, the effects of spatial proximity should be greater.

To begin our assessment of issue heterogeneity, we utilize two different sets of resolution issue codes. First, we employ the issue coding by Bailey et al. (2017), who categorize resolution votes on several issue topics: colonialism, Palestine, human rights, arms control and disarmament, nuclear issues, and economic development.[15] Second, we use more granular issue codes constructed via inductive topic modeling by Arias (2025). We select several topics expected to represent low-salience issues (e.g., protocol, science, and audits) and several expected. Agreement scores for each issue area are calculated using three category vote data (1 = "yes," 2 = "abstain," and 3 = "no") where abstention

[15]Not all votes are categorized by issue area, and resolutions can be categorized into multiple issues.

is counted as half-agreement with a yes or no vote (Voeten, 2013). Scores are only calculated for roll-call votes, or those that do not pass unanimously. Higher scores are associated with greater agreement, so the spatial proximity hypothesis would predict a positive relationship between seat dyad and agreement on low-salience issues.

Table 4: Effect of Being Seating Dyads on Agreement Score Across Issue Areas

	(US Imp)	(Mid East)	(Nuclear)	(Arms)	(Human rts)	(Econ)
Seat Dyad	−0.004*	0.004**	0.000	0.000	−0.004	0.000
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Trade Flow ($M USD)	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
ODA Commitments ($M USD)	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Alliances	0.046***	0.027***	0.001	0.004	0.057***	0.003
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Common Official Language	0.027***	−0.029***	0.049***	0.041***	0.036***	0.035***
	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.004)
Common Religion	0.102***	0.078***	0.059***	0.050***	0.094***	0.055***
	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.006)	(0.003)
Colonial History	−0.085***	−0.030***	−0.270***	−0.209***	−0.155***	−0.182***
	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.012)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.012)
Num.Obs.	464 960	657 152	651 969	658 062	672 101	675 982
R2	0.087	0.113	0.082	0.089	0.099	0.150
R2 Adj.	0.087	0.113	0.082	0.089	0.098	0.150
R2 Within	0.040	0.018	0.043	0.040	0.032	0.034
R2 Within Adj.	0.040	0.018	0.043	0.040	0.032	0.034
AIC	−395 907.0	−292 202.8	−304 732.4	−530 487.2	−252 932.1	−407 690.6
BIC	−395 442.9	−291 450.7	−303 958.1	−529 712.2	−252 167.0	−406 925.2
RMSE	0.16	0.19	0.19	0.16	0.20	0.18
Std.Errors	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year
FE: year	X	X	X	X	X	X

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: Agreement scores as dependent variable. Standard errors are clustered at the year level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

As the closest cut to test our expectations, we focus on votes on US important votes, nuclear, and disarmament matters as issues where spatial proximity should matter less—these questions concern highly salient matters related to national security, and therefore diplomats are likely to have clear instructions—compared to votes on economic development, UN operations, or human rights matters, where diplomats may have more latitude on voting decisions, and therefore affinity generated through spatial proximity is more likely to matter. We find that spatial proximity is associated with less voting agreement on votes denoted as important to the US and greater agreement on votes pertaining to the Middle East and Palestine. We are unable to reject the null hypothesis

for the remaining issue areas. In examining the more granular topic coding a more granular coding of UN resolutions by issue area (Arias, 2025), we find similarly mixed results across high and low salience issue areas (see Table 17 in the Appendix).

How can we explain these mixed effects? While more analysis is needed, one explanation could be the nature of the resolution votes included in the observations. Specifically, we expect that affinity should induce more similar behavior specifically on lower-stakes, lower-salience decisions. These types of resolutions are more likely to be adopted by a consensus decision rather than a voted outcome. Indeed, more than two-thirds of decisions adopted by the UNGA are taken without a vote (Arias, 2024). The resolutions on which votes are taken are by construction those on which there is more disagreement and higher stakes, and therefore our sample would be biased against detecting movement on lower-salience decisions. In future work, we will take additional steps to examine these dynamics, including looking at voting behavior specifically on resolutions for which votes were overwhelmingly in favor—such scenarios approximate a consensus decision where one individual vote was unlikely to sway the overall outcome, and therefore individual diplomats may have had more leeway to make their own determinations of how to vote.

Robustness

To further probe the robustness of our results, we conduct several additional analyses. First, Tables 8 - 9 in the Appendix replicate our main results using agreement scores, representing the degree of voting agreement between two countries in the UNGA as the dependent variable. We find confirmation of our hypotheses that predict that two countries will have a higher agreement score in a year in which they are seat dyads, except with the inclusion of the ambassador variables which represent the mechanism at play.

Second, we test the robustness of our results to alternative model specifications, with clustering of standard errors by dyad and year and on the sample subset with variation in the seat dyad variable (i.e., dyads that switch between 0/1s). These results can be found in Tables 10 - 11 in the Appendix. The direction of effect is robust across these specifications, but the results are not always significant. This indicates areas for future

analysis, given that the inclusion of dyad clustered SEs is likely the ideal specification. We also hope to implement dyad FE in future versions to more precisely estimate the causal effect of proximity.

Third, we examine alternative definitions of the independent variable. In Table 14, we estimate the effect of the proportion of prior years as a seat dyad on ideal point distance and surprisingly find a negative relationship. This indicates that the more prior years two countries are dyads, the more likely that they hold different positions on an issue. This runs counter to what we would expect, as does the interaction term between seat dyad and proportion, so warrants additional future attention. We also calculate the manhattan distance between all country dyads based on their assigned row and column, but find null effects (see Table 13). Alternative conceptualizations of distance between countries is an additional area for future analysis.

Conclusion & Next Steps

This paper asks whether social relations between diplomats affect multilateral cooperation in IOs. We argue that diplomacy is a deeply social endeavor, and that positive relationships between individual ambassadors play an important role in determining who works together and the types of outcomes that result. We focus on spatial proximity as a key determinant of social interaction, as people who are physically closer to one another have higher levels of contact, and are thus more likely to develop affinity and subsequently to collaborate. In constructing our argument, we build on the literature on spatial proximity and voting behavior in legislatures in conversation with diplomacy studies, asking how findings translate to a setting with greater diversity of policy positions and without partisan factors.

We leverage the unique seating mechanism of the UNGA to estimate the causal effect of spatial proximity on collaboration, measured as policy position similarity. As hypothesized, we find that physical proximity is predictive of diplomats' likelihood of voting similarly throughout a UNGA session. The random assignment of being seat neighbors has a positive and statistically significant effect on the ideal point distance

between two states. However, the impact is not strong enough to overcome historical and cultural factors—except for countries that already hold similar positions (i.e., those in the lowest quartile of ideal point distance). Examining the importance of ambassador-level variables yields early evidence that this effect is likely due to relationship development between ambassadors who serve and sit near each other for repeated years. Further interrogating these results, we conduct several analyses of heterogeneous effects. We find suggestive evidence that spatial affinity matters in specific contexts: when dyads have moderate levels of prior affinity based on country-level features. We continue to explore issue heterogeneity, as we expect that spatial proximity should induce more similar voting on issues of lower-salience.

Our findings challenge a consensus in the literature that state-level power determines patterns of cooperation in IOs, as spatial proximity exerts an independent effect from factors such as aid, trade, and alliances. We contribute to a growing literature on the importance of individuals in IR, employing a unique research design that allows us to estimate the causal effects of spatial proximity.

We have a number of next steps for this project. First, we plan to develop the empirics further exploring alternative DVs (e.g., co-hosting events, co-sponsorship, speech similarity) and examining other conceptualizations of spatial proximity. We will also probe the temporal dynamics of proximity: how does dosage/decay affect this social affinity? Secondly, we intend to build out the theory further by thinking through the most likely mechanisms behind the importance of spatial proximity in the UNGA. To do so, we will incorporate qualitative data such as interviews with diplomats and observation of UNGA sessions. Finally, we plan to continue our examination heterogeneity in the effects of spatial proximity across issue areas, as we theorize that social affinity is less likely to override country-level policies on matters of high politics.

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Appendix

A Summary Statistics

Table 5: Summary Statistics for Dyad-Year Independent Variables

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Seat Dyad Neighbor	0.006	0.076	0.000	1.000	900324
Seat Dyad Front/Back	0.011	0.104	0.000	1.000	900324
Cumulative Yrs of Seat Dyad Neighbor	0.173	1.564	0.000	40.000	880754
Consecutive Yrs of Seat Dyad Neighbor	0.009	0.137	0.000	11.000	900324
Proportion of Yrs as Seat Dyad Neighbor	0.006	0.048	0.000	0.857	880754
Manhattan Distance	10.544	5.293	0.000	29.000	863158

Table 6: Summary Statistics for Dyad-Year Dependent Variables

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Ideal Point Distance	1.025	0.842	0.000	5.933	893874
Agreement Score	0.813	0.157	0.000	1.000	900324

Table 7: Summary Statistics for Dyad-Year Control Variables

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Total Trade (USD millions)	527.408	6760.322	0.000	643 493.462	855103
Total Aid Commitments (USD millions)	6.438	92.523	0.000	25 823.916	900324
Number of Alliances	0.008	0.093	0.000	3.000	900324
Common Official Language	0.162	0.369	0.000	1.000	771447
Shared Border	0.018	0.134	0.000	1.000	782270
Common Religion	0.179	0.255	0.000	0.997	734456
Colonial History	0.011	0.104	0.000	1.000	782270
Shared IGO Count	24.818	10.879	0.000	97.000	855103

B Alternative Model Specifications

Table 8: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Agreement Scores

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Seat Dyad	0.005***	0.004***	0.000
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Trade Flow ($M USD)		0.000***	0.000***
		(0.000)	(0.000)
ODA Commitments ($M USD)		0.000***	0.000***
		(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Alliances		0.024***	0.023***
		(0.003)	(0.002)
Common Official Language			0.026***
			(0.001)
Common Religion			0.065***
			(0.003)
Colonial History			−0.158***
			(0.006)
Num.Obs.	900 324	855 103	695 798
R2	0.098	0.078	0.116
R2 Adj.	0.097	0.078	0.116
R2 Within	0.000	0.011	0.042
R2 Within Adj.	0.000	0.011	0.042
AIC	−874 094.7	−858 600.1	−757 991.4
BIC	−873 169.6	−857 807.3	−757 201.2
RMSE	0.15	0.15	0.14
Std.Errors	by: year	by: year	by: year
FE: year	X	X	X

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Notes: The table re-estimates Table 1 using agreement score as the dependent variable. Standard errors are clustered at the year level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 9: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Agreement Scores, with Ambassador Variables

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Seat Dyad	−0.004	−0.006**	−0.002
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Trade Flow ($M USD)	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
ODA Commitments ($M USD)	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Alliances	0.024***	0.026***	0.024***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Common Official Language	0.027***	0.028***	0.028***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Common Religion	0.064***	0.067***	0.068***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.004)
Colonial History	−0.162***	−0.160***	−0.156***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.006)
Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair	0.007***	0.003***	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1)		0.002***	0.003***
		(0.000)	(0.000)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2)		0.002***	0.002***
		(0.000)	(0.000)
Ambassador Gender (country 1)		0.012***	0.016***
		(0.001)	(0.005)
Ambassador Gender (country 2)		−0.013***	−0.007**
		(0.001)	(0.003)
Num.Obs.	651 863	600 100	600 100
R2	0.043	0.050	0.135
R2 Adj.	0.043	0.050	0.134
R2 Within			0.054
R2 Within Adj.			0.054
AIC	−663 750.1	−626 568.4	−682 239.9
BIC	−663 636.2	−626 410.1	−681 437.2
Log.Lik.	331 885.037	313 298.196	
RMSE	0.15	0.14	0.14
Std.Errors			by: year
FE: year			X

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: The table re-estimates Table 2 using agreement score as the dependent variable. Standard errors are clustered at the year level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 10: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Ideal Point Similarity, SEs Clustered by Dyad and Year

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Seat Dyad	0.023	0.016	−0.006
	(0.042)	(0.043)	(0.044)
Trade Flow ($M USD)		0.000*	0.000***
		(0.000)	(0.000)
Aid Commitments ($M USD)		−0.001***	−0.001***
		(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Alliances		0.229***	0.267***
		(0.051)	(0.050)
Common Official Language			0.206***
			(0.017)
Common Religion			0.365***
			(0.024)
Colonial History			−0.834***
			(0.065)
Num.Obs.	893 874	849 305	690 427
R2	0.033	0.028	0.062
R2 Adj.	0.033	0.028	0.062
R2 Within	0.000	0.009	0.043
R2 Within Adj.	0.000	0.009	0.043
AIC	2 199 495.6	2 031 843.9	1 613 464.3
BIC	2 200 408.4	2 032 624.6	1 614 242.5
RMSE	0.83	0.80	0.78
Std.Errors	by: pair1 & year	by: pair1 & year	by: pair1 & year
FE: year	X	X	X

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: The table presents the results of the main specification for UNGA ideal point similarity with standard errors clustered at the year and dyad level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 11: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Ideal Point Similarity for Dyads with Variation

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Seat Dyad	0.022***	0.010	0.002	−0.006
	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.011)
Trade Flow ($M USD)		0.000***	0.000***	0.000
		(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
ODA Commitments ($M USD)		−0.004***	−0.003***	−0.003***
		(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Alliances		−0.064	0.182*	0.192**
		(0.063)	(0.092)	(0.091)
Common Official Language			0.219***	0.193***
			(0.015)	(0.017)
Common Religion			0.363***	0.418***
			(0.018)	(0.019)
Colonial History			−1.081***	−1.071***
			(0.059)	(0.061)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1)				0.013***
				(0.003)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2)				0.002
				(0.002)
Ambassador Gender (country 1)				0.103***
				(0.036)
Ambassador Gender (country 2)				−0.103***
				(0.020)
Num.Obs.	24 765	22 920	19 303	17 163
R2	0.038	0.064	0.106	0.113
R2 Adj.	0.035	0.061	0.103	0.109
R2 Within	0.000	0.042	0.087	0.093
R2 Within Adj.	0.000	0.042	0.087	0.093
AIC	63 337.6	54 550.0	44 651.0	40 092.9
BIC	63 970.8	55 088.7	45 186.0	40 627.7
RMSE	0.87	0.79	0.77	0.77
Std.Errors	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year
FE: year	X	X	X	X

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: The table presents the results of the main specification for UNGA ideal point similarity with standard errors clustered at the year level for dyads with variation. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 12: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Ideal Point Distance, Polity

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Seat Dyad	0.009	0.013	0.019*	−0.008	−0.007	0.002	−0.041***	0.019*	−0.011
	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.019)
Trade Flow ($M USD)	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Aid Commitments ($M USD)	−0.001***	−0.001***	−0.001***	−0.001***	−0.001***	−0.001***	−0.001***	−0.001***	−0.001***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Alliances	0.270***	0.209***	0.218***	0.277***	0.268***	0.253***	0.277***	0.268***	0.253***
	(0.011)	(0.017)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.012)
Common Official Language				0.222***	0.178***	0.206***	0.222***	0.178***	0.206***
				(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.007)
Common Religion				0.404***	0.353***	0.373***	0.404***	0.353***	0.373***
				(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.017)
Colonial History				−0.823***	−0.747***	−0.795***	−0.823***	−0.747***	−0.795***
				(0.031)	(0.027)	(0.032)	(0.031)	(0.027)	(0.032)
Both Democracies	0.034**			0.020			0.019		
	(0.016)			(0.015)			(0.015)		
Both Autocracies		0.406***			0.347***			0.348***	
		(0.024)			(0.024)			(0.024)	
Democracy and Autocracy Pair			−0.244***			−0.218***			−0.218***
			(0.019)			(0.017)			(0.017)
Seat Dyad x Both Democracy							0.120***		
							(0.021)		
Seat Dyad x Both Autocracy								−0.127***	
								(0.031)	
Seat Dyad x Dem/Auto Pair									0.026
									(0.026)
Num.Obs.	631 992	670 897	564 840	562 074	586 025	512 478	562 074	586 025	512 478
R2	0.032	0.062	0.052	0.067	0.088	0.083	0.067	0.088	0.083
R2 Adj.	0.031	0.062	0.052	0.067	0.088	0.083	0.067	0.088	0.083
R2 Within	0.011	0.042	0.033	0.048	0.070	0.066	0.048	0.070	0.066
R2 Within Adj.	0.011	0.042	0.033	0.048	0.070	0.066	0.048	0.070	0.066
AIC	1 535 863.5	1 605 339.6	1 366 531.6	1 331 796.0	1 373 218.2	1 216 011.3	1 331 782.2	1 373 205.3	1 216 012.4
BIC	1 536 578.9	1 606 081.6	1 367 240.0	1 332 537.8	1 373 985.3	1 216 747.0	1 332 535.2	1 373 983.7	1 216 759.3
RMSE	0.82	0.80	0.81	0.79	0.78	0.79	0.79	0.78	0.79
Std.Errors	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year
FE: year	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes:Standard errors are clustered at the year level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 13: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Ideal Point Distance, Manhattan Distance

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Manhattan Distance	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Trade Flow ($M USD)		0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
		(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Aid Commitments ($M USD)		−0.001***	−0.001***	−0.001***
		(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Alliances		0.230***	0.268***	0.272***
		(0.015)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Common Official Language			0.206***	0.217***
			(0.006)	(0.007)
Common Religion			0.366***	0.393***
			(0.016)	(0.017)
Colonial History			−0.835***	−0.828***
			(0.032)	(0.031)
Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair				−0.004
				(0.004)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1)				0.013***
				(0.002)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2)				0.005***
				(0.001)
Ambassador Gender (country 1)				0.068***
				(0.024)
Ambassador Gender (country 2)				−0.055***
				(0.016)
Num.Obs.	856 926	827 091	673 150	593 265
R2	0.032	0.028	0.062	0.070
R2 Adj.	0.032	0.028	0.062	0.070
R2 Within	0.000	0.009	0.043	0.051
R2 Within Adj.	0.000	0.009	0.043	0.051
AIC	2 102 050.0	1 982 520.4	1 575 629.5	1 392 042.8
BIC	2 102 878.0	1 983 287.7	1 576 394.7	1 392 833.3
RMSE	0.82	0.80	0.78	0.78
Std.Errors	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year
FE: year	X	X	X	X

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes:Standard errors are clustered at the year level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 14: Effect of Being Seat Dyads in the UNGA on Ideal Point Distance, Proportion

	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Seat Dyad	0.017*	0.007	−0.003	0.038	0.021	−0.002
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.032)
Proportion of Years as Dyad	0.001	−0.034***	−0.039**	0.007	−0.031**	−0.039***
	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.015)
Trade Flow ($M USD)	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Aid Commitments ($M USD)	−0.001***	−0.001***	−0.001***	−0.001***	−0.001***	−0.001***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Alliances	0.228***	0.266***	0.271***	0.228***	0.266***	0.271***
	(0.016)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.016)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Common Official Language		0.206***	0.217***		0.206***	0.217***
		(0.006)	(0.007)		(0.006)	(0.007)
Common Religion		0.367***	0.394***		0.367***	0.394***
		(0.016)	(0.017)		(0.016)	(0.017)
Colonial History		−0.835***	−0.829***		−0.835***	−0.829***
		(0.032)	(0.032)		(0.032)	(0.032)
Number of Yrs with Same Ambassador Pair			−0.004			−0.004
			(0.003)			(0.003)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 1)			0.013***			0.013***
			(0.002)			(0.002)
Yrs of Ambassador Service (country 2)			0.005***			0.005***
			(0.001)			(0.001)
Ambassador Gender (country 1)			0.069***			0.069***
			(0.024)			(0.024)
Ambassador Gender (country 2)			−0.055***			−0.055***
			(0.016)			(0.016)
Seat Dyad x Proportion of Yrs as Dyad				−0.061	−0.041	−0.003
				(0.075)	(0.078)	(0.082)
Num.Obs.	838 609	682 731	590 686	838 609	682 731	590 686
R2	0.028	0.062	0.070	0.028	0.062	0.070
R2 Adj.	0.028	0.062	0.070	0.028	0.062	0.070
R2 Within	0.009	0.044	0.051	0.009	0.044	0.051
R2 Within Adj.	0.009	0.044	0.051	0.009	0.044	0.051
AIC	2 006 762.2	1 595 887.6	1 386 010.4	2 006 763.6	1 595 889.4	1 386 012.4
BIC	2 007 553.7	1 596 676.6	1 386 811.9	2 007 566.8	1 596 689.8	1 386 825.2
RMSE	0.80	0.78	0.78	0.80	0.78	0.78
Std.Errors	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year
FE: year	X	X	X	X	X	X

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes:Standard errors are clustered at the year level. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 15: Effect of Being Seating Dyads on Ideal Point Similarity, US binary

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Seat Dyad	0.023***	0.022***	0.017**	−0.002
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Trade Flow ($M USD)			0.000***	0.000***
			(0.000)	(0.000)
Aid Commitments ($M USD)			0.000***	0.000***
			(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Alliances			0.287***	0.336***
			(0.014)	(0.013)
Common Official Language				0.226***
				(0.006)
Common Religion				0.352***
				(0.016)
Colonial History				−0.861***
				(0.032)
US Member of Dyad	−1.544***	−1.545***	−1.665***	−1.725***
	(0.066)	(0.066)	(0.054)	(0.060)
Seat Dyad × US Member of Dyad		0.014	−0.064	−0.155*
		(0.102)	(0.088)	(0.089)
Num.Obs.	893 874	893 874	849 305	690 427
R2	0.074	0.074	0.075	0.118
R2 Adj.	0.074	0.074	0.075	0.118
R2 Within	0.043	0.043	0.056	0.100
R2 Within Adj.	0.043	0.043	0.056	0.100
AIC	2 160 347.4	2 160 349.4	1 989 967.2	1 571 237.5
BIC	2 161 271.9	2 161 285.6	1 990 771.2	1 572 038.7
RMSE	0.81	0.81	0.78	0.75
Std.Errors	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year
FE: year	X	X	X	X

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: The table presents the results of the main specification for UNGA ideal point similarity with the addition of a binary variable for whether one member of the dyad is the US * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 16: Effect of Being Seating Dyads on Ideal Point Similarity, P5 binary

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Seat Dyad	0.023***	0.019***	0.018***	−0.004
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Trade Flow ($M USD)			0.000***	0.000***
			(0.000)	(0.000)
Aid Commitments ($M USD)			−0.001***	0.000***
			(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Alliances			0.459***	0.432***
			(0.015)	(0.015)
Common Official Language				0.200***
				(0.006)
Common Religion				0.319***
				(0.016)
Colonial History				−0.456***
				(0.021)
P5 Member of Dyad	−0.743***	−0.743***	−0.763***	−0.706***
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.023)	(0.027)
Seat Dyad x P5 Member of Dyad		0.059	−0.054	−0.023
		(0.042)	(0.040)	(0.038)
Num.Obs.	893 874	893 874	849 305	690 427
R2	0.076	0.076	0.074	0.099
R2 Adj.	0.076	0.076	0.073	0.099
R2 Within	0.045	0.045	0.055	0.081
R2 Within Adj.	0.045	0.045	0.055	0.081
AIC	2 158 548.9	2 158 549.3	1 991 359.3	1 585 729.9
BIC	2 159 473.5	2 159 485.6	1 992 163.3	1 586 531.1
RMSE	0.81	0.81	0.78	0.76
Std.Errors	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year
FE: year	X	X	X	X

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: The table presents the results of the main specification for UNGA ideal point similarity with the addition of a binary variable for whether one member of the dyad is a P5 country * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 17: Effect of Being Seating Dyads on Agreement by Issue

	(Nuclear)	(Territory)	(Protocols)	(Youth)	(Science)
Seat Dyad	−0.002	−0.002	−0.006	0.004	0.005
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Trade Flow ($M USD)	0.000***	0.000***	0.000*	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
ODA Commitments ($M USD)	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Number of Alliances	0.023	0.013	0.097**	−0.002	−0.007
	(0.015)	(0.010)	(0.040)	(0.016)	(0.024)
Common Official Language	0.030***	0.016***	0.052***	0.037***	0.008
	(0.008)	(0.005)	(0.013)	(0.007)	(0.009)
Common Religion	0.040***	0.028***	0.042***	0.042***	0.046***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.012)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Colonial History	−0.210***	−0.247***	−0.216***	−0.218***	−0.136***
	(0.033)	(0.024)	(0.041)	(0.032)	(0.044)
Num.Obs.	285 386	300 021	169 308	254 372	172 015
R2	0.175	0.146	0.197	0.137	0.130
R2 Adj.	0.175	0.146	0.197	0.137	0.130
R2 Within	0.022	0.025	0.016	0.024	0.019
R2 Within Adj.	0.022	0.025	0.016	0.024	0.019
AIC	−92 961.1	−81 506.7	61 731.0	−22 928.3	−42 982.8
BIC	−92 570.4	−81 082.3	61 971.9	−22 583.6	−42 731.4
RMSE	0.21	0.21	0.29	0.23	0.21
Std.Errors	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year	by: year
FE: year	X	X	X	X	X

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Notes: The table presents the results of the main specification for UNGA vote agreement across more granulare issue areas * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

C Description of Imputation Procedures

Due to changes in archiving and filing procedures, seating chart data was unavailable between Session 45 (1990) and Session 71 (2016). However, we are able to impute the missing years following the procedure described below.

While the full seating charts for these years are unknown, data on the first country in each of the missing years is available. Further, we know that the first fourteen rows of the seating chart will not change at all during this time, as they are the same in Sessions 44 and Sessions 72, the years on either end of the missing period. We therefore have high confidence that seats 1-150 are imputed correctly across all the missing years.

We have less certainty for countries seated after 150 (i.e., in rows 14 and up), as the positions of new countries in these rows may vary. To impute these rows, we begin with the assumption (based on the patterns observed in other years from which data was available) that the new rows would fill in from the center out. We use the template seat arrangement from Session 72 to impute the missing years. When possible, we validated these assumptions by cross-checking with photographs. Because we have no information about accessibility accommodations during this period, we must assume that none were implemented.

To fill in new members and account for country name changes during the missing years, we we filled in delegations using the Blue Book country lists to check for name changes. We cross-checked with UN records of when new countries became members and when country names changed.