Who Sets the Agenda? Diplomatic Capital and Small State Influence in the United Nations

Sabrina B. Arias*

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Abstract

Why are some small states—such as Ireland, Costa Rica, and Liechtenstein—effective in shaping the United Nations (UN) agenda, even in the face of powerful states' opposition? I argue that while material power is important in explaining some international organization (IO) politics, individual diplomats play a crucial role as well. States can influence the early stages of policymaking—when agendas are set—with *diplomatic capital*, a form of social power developed through skilled representation. By focusing on the late stages of policymaking—particularly voting on final resolutions, when it is easier to leverage economic and military resources—I argue that previous studies have overestimated the influence of powerful states. To test these claims, I assemble a dataset of proposed UN General Assembly agenda items and the tenure of all states' ambassadors from 1946-2019, and conduct interviews with diplomats from 49 states. Supporting these expectations, I find that states with greater diplomatic capital—measured by ambassador experience—are more successful at agenda-setting, even after accounting for material power. Consistent with my argument, I find that random shocks to ambassadorial tenure—ambassador deaths—have negative effects on diplomatic capital. These insights challenge our understanding of the relative importance of power and diplomacy in IOs, and more generally the extent to which small states influence international politics.

*Ph.D. Candidate, Political Science, University of Pennsylvania, sarias@sas.upenn.edu

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1 Introduction

In 1959, Ambassador Frank Aiken of Ireland proposed that the question of nuclear weapons proliferation be included for debate in the United Nations General Assembly (GA). Despite objections from the Soviet Union, the proposal was approved and nuclear proliferation was debated. Aiken subsequently led the GA to adopt resolutions that called for states to create an agreement on weapons dissemination.[1] Shortly thereafter, the Partial Test-Ban Treaty and Non-Proliferation Treaty were signed, which largely succeeded in preventing further nuclear proliferation. More recently, an initiative led by Ambassador Christian Wenaweser of Liechtenstein added a recurring item to the GA's agenda that directed the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (United States, China, United Kingdom, France, Russia) to justify their use of the veto in the GA—a potential check on the most powerful member states (Miliband, 2022).[2] How did these relatively weak states accomplish their foreign policy objectives in the face of opposition from major powers? I argue that the answer is the expertise of these states' ambassadors. In these examples, Ireland and Liechtenstein were both represented by experienced ambassadors—7 and 23 years at the United Nations (UN), respectively—who were able to shepherd these proposals through, even in the face of opposition by more powerful states.

Conventional explanations of international politics cannot account for these diplomatic successes in which small states shaped the UN agenda. Why are small states such as Costa Rica, Singapore, and Jordan frequently pointed to by diplomats as among the most influential actors at the UN—even while countries such as the US are known to use foreign aid and military threats to obtain favorable policy outcomes (Mearsheimer, 1994; Alesina & Dollar, 2000)? If these material sources of power explained which states have influence over institutional priorities, we would expect the agenda to be more reflective of American or Soviet interests. Instead, small states frequently use the UN's agenda to criticize the actions of powerful states and their respective allies and to advance ini-

[1] A/RES/1380 (XIV) and A/RES/1576 (XV)

[2] A/RES/76/262

tiatives contra the preferences of powerful states. Although several important studies in international relations (IR) examine agenda control in international institutions (e.g., Keck et al., 1998; Tallberg, 2003; Schneider, 2019), we have yet to understand how small states succeed in influencing institutional agendas. At the same time, other studies have shown that the effectiveness of individual legislators affects policymaking in domestic legislatures (Volden & Wiseman, 2014), yet we lack theories about how individual expertise matters in international organizations (IOs), which are central sites for international politics (e.g., Keohane, 1984; Axelrod & Keohane, 1985; Fearon, 1998).

To address this puzzle, I account for *diplomacy* in explaining states' influence on agenda control and other activities in the early stages of the IO policymaking process. As we see with the examples of Ireland and Liechtenstein, diplomatic skill affects how likely states are to achieve these ends, and particularly for small states (e.g., Thorhallsson, 2012; Panke, 2013; Long, 2017b). While IR research has tended to focus on system-level variables rather than the role of individuals,[3] I argue that the characteristics and expertise of individual diplomats are critical in explaining the political outcomes of IOs, which are deeply social environments (e.g., Sending et al., 2015; Pouliot, 2016; Holmes, 2018). This expertise allows weak states to obtain better results than they would otherwise be expected to.

First, I argue that investment in *diplomatic capital* explains why some small states find unexpected success in accomplishing their foreign policy goals in IOs. As in the case in domestic legislatures, as individual ambassadors gain experience in their work at the UN, they cultivate social networks, substantive expertise, and mastery of the institutional rules that allow them to more effectively advance policy initiatives. Diplomatic capital is not a direct function of a state's material power. While conventional IR theories would suggest that individual effectiveness would not matter in IOs because of the substantial power asymmetries, I contend that—as in Congress—individual effectiveness is crucial. Second, I specify that diplomatic capital is particularly important in understanding influence in the early-stage activities of the policymaking process. In these settings, it is

[3] But see Byman & Pollack (2001); Horowitz et al. (2015); Saunders (2011).

more difficult for large states to monitor activities, which creates space for small states to operate. Early-stage activities are critical parts of the policymaking process, since this is where the agenda is set, issues are framed, and coalitions are developed. Combining these theoretical insights, I argue that while large states may be able to deploy material power to dominate late-stage activities, small and medium-sized states can outperform in early-stage activities, where the application of coercive power is less effective.

To test the expectations generated by my theory, I develop datasets of 1,476 proposed General Assembly agenda items from 1946 to 2018 and the tenure of all UN member states' ambassadors during that period and examine which states are the most active in early-stage legislative activity. I find that experienced ambassadors, strong bilateral representation, and investment in UN programming are important predictors of agenda-setting activity, even after controlling for power-based predictors. Turnover from experienced to inexperienced ambassadors is *negatively* associated with agenda-setting, including in cases in which this turnover is exogenously determined by an ambassador's death. These analyses are buttressed by 49 in-depth interviews with UN diplomats.

Taking these findings together, I challenge existing theories about the nature of power in IOs. Previous studies (e.g., Kim & Russett, 1996; Alesina & Dollar, 2000; Voeten, 2000; Dreher et al., 2008) have focused on later-stage activities such as resolution sponsorship and voting patterns, and have subsequently overestimated the degree to which material resources matter in IO politics. I show that late-stage activities do not accurately reflect the full institutional agenda, and we have underestimated the degree to which small and medium states can obtain favorable outcomes. Not only can we better understand the scope of UN activities and the influence of small states in these settings, we can also understand why some small states are better at navigating these activities than others: diplomatic capital. Thus, our conventional understanding of multilateral politics has been biased against detecting the activities and successes of smaller states by focusing only on late-stage activities. Material power is important in explaining some IO politics, but the role of individual diplomats matters as well.

2 Setting the IO Agenda

Agenda control, including *negative* agenda control—blocking things from being added to the agenda—is critical for understanding political outcomes (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Kingdon, 1984). Following Cobb & Elder (1972), I define the institutional agenda as the set of specific problems that policymakers in a particular institutional decision-making body are actively considering. In the context of the UN, the agenda is the set of topics that are considered by member states at a given time. Agenda control is important in many legislative settings, including in American politics and the European Union, yet only in recent years have scholars begun attending to agenda control in other IOs.[4]

Agenda control is crucial in IOs. For example, agenda control was integral for a small state such as Ireland to advance nonproliferation on the international agenda. Furthermore, only by considering agenda politics can we observe the topics that are actively being blocked from being discussed—such as the representation of Taiwan in the UN—compared with those that are simply not being raised. IOs allow states to achieve policy outcomes that would otherwise be impossible by reducing the uncertainty between states in forging agreements, providing information about compliance, and facilitating issue bundling and logrolling (e.g., Axelrod & Keohane, 1985; Fearon, 1998; Martin & Simmons, 1998). Yet for these cooperative outcomes to be achieved, an issue must first be placed on the institutional agenda. Understanding which countries are influential in setting the agendas of IOs, therefore, informs who shapes the set of policy outcomes produced by those institutions.

Proposing and blocking proposals for new policies are not the only means by which actors can seek to control topics on the institutional agenda, or how these topics are addressed. I conceive of legislative strategies as a broad set of activities by which actors seek to shape the institutional agenda (Hall & Deardorff, 2006). States can choose from a menu of tactics to cultivate support and stymie potential opposition, including proposing

[4]In American politics, see Cox & Jacobson (1973); Shepsle & Weingast (1987); Baumgartner & Jones (1993); Krehbiel (1998); Cox & McCubbins (2005); in European Union studies, see Garrett & Weingast (1993); Pollack (1997); Tallberg (2003); Schneider (2019); and in other IOs, see Keck et al. (1998); Johnstone (2003); Joachim (2007); Carpenter (2010, 2014); Tallberg (2010); Koremenos (2015); Hooghe et al. (2017).

new items for consideration, providing information and issue frames to shape the debate, developing coalitions to generate support, and seeking positions of institutional leadership to control the structure and prioritization of the agenda.

While previous work provides invaluable insights into some of the key features of agenda setting and legislative politics, this literature does not help to inform expectations about which states may be more likely to engage in such agenda setting and which are more likely to be successful. The best attempts to account for power distributions are in the studies of agenda setting in the UN Security Council, where studies find that the interests of the Permanent 5 (P5) members, as well as their allies, predict whether the Council will address an issue (e.g., Allen & Yuen, 2020), but that these interests are constrained by concerns about perceived legitimacy (Binder & Golub, 2020). However, the case of the Security Council leaves us unable to make inferences about the effects of power in institutions with universal membership and multi-topic mandates, or to understand the impact of diplomacy relative to material power. What *type* of power is relevant to these outcomes?

Material conceptualizations of power as the possession of military capability (e.g., Claude, 1962; Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer et al., 2001) or economic resources (e.g., Keohane & Nye, 1977) suggest that large states use side payments or pressure to obtain their desired outcome. While material power may matter in the end stages of the policymaking process—which are the highly visible and politicized matters of resolution politics[5]—we lack evidence of its influence on the legislative activities at the *early* stage of the policymaking process. Materialists might argue that the same logic should hold, and that we would expect large states with greater military and economic leverage to control IO agendas (Mearsheimer, 1994). Powerful states would use this leverage to dominate agenda setting and coalition building in the same ways that they dominate resolution politics. The large power asymmetries in IOs would make individual skill unlikely to be important in predicting influence—unlike the case of legislators in a domestic context, in

[5]E.g., Mower Jr. (1962); Jacobsen (1969); Rai (1977); Smith (2006b); Dijkhuizen & Onderco (2019); Finke (2021) on resolution sponsorship; Keohane (1967); Kim & Russett (1996); Alesina & Dollar (2000); Voeten (2000, 2001); Dreher et al. (2008); Bailey et al. (2017) on resolution voting; and Steinberg (2002); Stone (2011) for similar studies in other Bretton Woods institutions.

which power distributions are relatively flatter (Volden & Wiseman, 2014).

However, in practice, small states accomplish policy goals in IOs (e.g., Panke, 2010a; Jensen, 2016; Corbett et al., 2019; Long, 2022)[6] and can successfully navigate the agenda-setting process (see Section 1). As an analytical category, there is continuing debate over the definition of small states, including material, perceptual, and relational approaches (Long, 2017a, 2022). I follow a material approach and utilize objective indicators of size. This strategy allows for straightforward comparison across countries and over time and is also the most widely employed approach in the literature. For simplicity in the discussion, I refer to large states as members of the G7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK, and US) plus China and Russia. I refer to medium states as the other members of the G20 (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, South Africa, and Turkey) plus Spain and the Netherlands. This categorization generally captures the largest states in terms of GDP, population, and military capacity. I refer to all other states as small states. However, these cutoffs are somewhat arbitrary, so in the empirical analysis I operationalize continuous measures of state size.

Since small states have fewer material capabilities, how do we still observe them succeeding in such activities in international institutions? What is the mechanism that allows small states to obtain these outcomes in the absence of material power? I suggest that accounting for diplomacy can provide the answer. I lay out the theory in two steps: First, I argue that diplomatic capital cannot be ignored in explaining influence on the IO agenda. Second, I contend that diplomatic capital should be a particularly relevant predictor of agenda setting in the early stages of the policymaking process.

3 Theory of Diplomatic Capital and Legislative Politics

3.1 Diplomatic Capital

I argue that by cultivating diplomatic expertise, states are more effective at accomplishing their goals in international institutions, and that this can help us to understand

[6] See also Gray & Potter (2020) on middle power diplomacy.

why materially weak states can succeed in their legislative strategies. I define diplomatic capital as a pool of influence a state can call upon to change the behavior of other actors within a diplomatic context. Diplomatic capital is a base of power, and legislative activities are the means through which the power is exercised (Dahl, 1957).[7] States can cultivate diplomatic capital by exhibiting commitment to the formal institution through good-standing membership and to the institution's values—in the case of the UN, values such as democratic governance, the maintenance of international peace and security, and respect for human rights. In addition to these state-level characteristics, which have previously been examined by the literature, I argue that *individual diplomatic skill* is a critical element of a state's diplomatic capital. Diplomatic capital aggregates from the individual level to pool at the level of a state's representation in a given institution. That is, multiple diplomats in a state's mission to the UN can contribute to its diplomatic capital there, but they do not contribute to its diplomatic capital in other institutions.[8] Individual diplomats cultivate diplomatic capital through experience as they develop social relationships, knowledge of institutional rules, and substantive expertise.

My theory builds on the claim that the characteristics of individual diplomats matter in explaining the political outcomes of IOs (e.g., Jacobson, 1979; Holmes, 2018; Keys & Yorke, 2019).[9] In these fundamentally social environments, individuals can persuade and influence their counterparts (e.g., Wendt, 1999; Risse, 2000; Johnston, 2001; Gray & Baturo, 2021). Even in IOs governed by the principles of sovereign equality, some diplomats are more influential than others and accumulate "standing" through the display of practical know-how within the corps of permanent representatives (Pouliot, 2011, 2016). Schneider (2019) also argues that competent individual diplomats may be much more influential than a baseline expectation based on state power would portend. These dynamics are especially important in the contexts of permanent representation, where diplomats interact repeatedly within their community. A Deputy Permanent Represen-

[7] Related concepts are suggested by Fox (1977, 202) and Nicholson (1988, 40).

[8] I discuss the empirical operationalization of diplomatic capital in Section 5.1.

[9] See also the literature on the importance of leader characteristics (e.g., Horowitz et al., 2015; Saunders, 2011; Lupton, 2022) and legislator effectiveness (Volden & Wiseman, 2014).

tative from a Latin American state observed:

> When you're trying to move forward a particular initiative, you go for those colleagues that are most well spoken and best connected regardless of the country that they represented...countries that you would not naturally think of are those that you reach out to because their ambassador or their delegate is particularly well-versed, particularly well connected, or particularly influential on the basis of...experience, charisma, so on and so forth.[10]

Individual diplomatic skill is acquired through experience. It takes time for new diplomats in an institution to "learn the ropes," and develop relationships with other key actors (Sending et al., 2015). As one diplomat from a small Middle Eastern state observed, "the most important thing in the UN is to have a good social network....In order to have the full picture of everything [that] is happening, you need a good social network of all colleagues, so this is the most important thing in order to be...well aware of everything."[11] Diplomats must learn the local rules of the game and the distinct social dynamics, to craft compromises across diverse positions, to take initiative, and to shepherd other representatives toward agreement (Pouliot, 2016). In the UN, new diplomats must gain a sense of place as they are "socialized into a UN culture" that provides the framework within which they will need to negotiate with other members (Karns & Mingst, 2013, 150). Particularly for small states, experience helps diplomats obtain favorable outcomes in confrontations with larger states (Fox, 1977, 185).[12]

As an ambassador gains experience, I posit that they accumulate diplomatic capital through three mechanisms: building their social network, developing substantive expertise in issue areas, and mastering institutional procedures.[13] When a skillful ambassador is

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[10] Interview 12.

[11] Interview 27.

[12] These dynamics have been observed in other IOs as well (Falzon, 2021; Cooper & Shaw, 2009) and in bilateral settings (Gertz, 2018; Malis, 2021).

[13] The importance of these mechanisms for developing diplomatic capital is supported by evidence from interviews with diplomats, which I explore in detail in other parts of my dissertation. Preliminary evidence suggests that social networking is the principal mechanism by which diplomatic capital is acquired.

replaced by a novice, diplomatic capital is lost.[14] Ambassador Christian Wenaweser of Liechtenstein, for example, was specifically identified by 8 out of 49 interviewees as an example of a diplomat whose long experience has translated into substantial influence:

> I mean, that enables him to participate at a level that mid-sized states do. If you look at Liechtenstein on a map, Lichtenstein is not a mid-sized state, so I think he manages to compensate [for] that simply by the fact that he's been here for a very long time, he knows exactly how everything works.[15]

> They're very...well versed when it comes to procedures, you know. They know how to go about the UN system. You know, this is something that you only acquire through...the years and through knowledge of the human system. And the guy is just really, really, really good. He's of course clever. But you know it's because he has been here for all this time, that he punches well beyond, above his weight.[16]

> He has been here for like decades, and it's such an advantage...they know the history. For example...if we get into the negotiation, those are the people who understand the history and provide the information, and usually we rely on them. So what what happened, like five years ago? [That] kind of institutional memory is pretty critical.[17]

To be sure, the translation of experience to influence is not automatic. Not just any diplomat who "hangs around" in New York becomes more effective, and some exceptional novices are able to exert influence from the start. Further, individual characteristics—charisma, language skills, etc.—help some ambassadors cultivate diplomatic capital more quickly than others. Finally, the scope for diplomatic skill to influence outcomes is not unlimited: in issue areas where powerful states have critical foreign policy interests or strong ex ante positions, there is likely to be less opportunity for diplomatic capital to

[14] The concept of diplomatic capital is related to notions of "standing" and "reputation" that have previously been suggested. Panke and Gray both discuss a notion of reputational power that states develop in their representation in IOs (Panke, 2010b; Gray, 2013), and Pouliot develops the concept of standing in the pecking order of international organizations (Pouliot, 2011, 2016). I add additional evidence that draws on the experience of individual diplomats, which aggregate up to contribute to state-level influence.

[15] Interview 2.

[16] Interview 10.

[17] Interview 43.

sway positions (Stone, 2011). However, interviews with diplomatic practitioners indicate that on average, a more experienced ambassador is a more effective ambassador.[18]

Diplomatic capital is *not* a deterministic function of material power. While states with more material resources may be more able to invest in recruiting and training skilled diplomats, smaller states have historically made such investments as well (e.g., Thorhallsson, 2012). Because small states do not have the same outside options as large states, and must rely to a greater extent on IOs such as the UN to conduct their foreign policy (e.g., Voeten, 2001; Sending et al., 2015; Lipscy, 2017), they have greater incentives to invest in any tool that can enhance their effectiveness—including ambassadorial experience. Smaller states may also have greater diplomatic capital as an *unintended consequence* of their resource constraints or differences in norms. Small states tend to have smaller diplomatic corps, which results in fewer skilled diplomats who can rotate into key posts such as the UN (e.g., Panke, 2010b). Smaller states, then, may keep diplomats in place out of necessity, which nevertheless creates an opportunity to develop expertise. Because their Ministries of Foreign Affairs are also smaller, smaller countries may also be more likely to have institutionalized norms about rotation schedules than larger states such as the US (Gertz, 2018; Malis, 2021). A Permanent Representative from a small Caribbean island state observed this dynamic:

> [F]or our small state, the PR stays longer for all the obvious reasons: we have smaller permanent mission, we are still developing foreign service, so we don't have as many people to choose from. We stay longer, and what we lack in career training, we make up for [with] tenure on the ground, with understanding the space, and therefore being better able to navigate that space....Small states benefit from longer tenures, because the longer we stay, the better...we might perform.[19]

It is beyond the scope of this study to demonstrate *how* small states ultimately have more experienced representation in the UN. Instead, I focus on the *effects* of experience on policymaking. Regardless of how it is cultivated, I suggest that diplomatic capital can

[18] These results are discussed more fully elsewhere in my dissertation.

[19] Interview 46.

help to explain when states are more likely to succeed conditional on their engagement in legislative politics. However, I do not expect that diplomatic capital is equally important across all contexts. In the following section I explore the scope conditions of diplomatic capital's expected effectiveness, and in particular its importance in the early stages of the policymaking process.

3.2 Power, Monitoring, and Legislative Strategies

We know that large states can exert influence in the late stages of the policymaking process (e.g., Mearsheimer, 1994; Alesina & Dollar, 2000; Voeten, 2000), but I argue they are less able to do so in the early stages of policymaking. Why is this the case? I suggest that this difference arises from variation in states' ability to *monitor* these activities. In the early stages of the policymaking process, legislative activities are more difficult to observe. In the later stages of the policymaking process, legislative activities are much more observable, salient, and subject to monitoring.

Figure 1: Selected Legislative Activities in the Policymaking Process

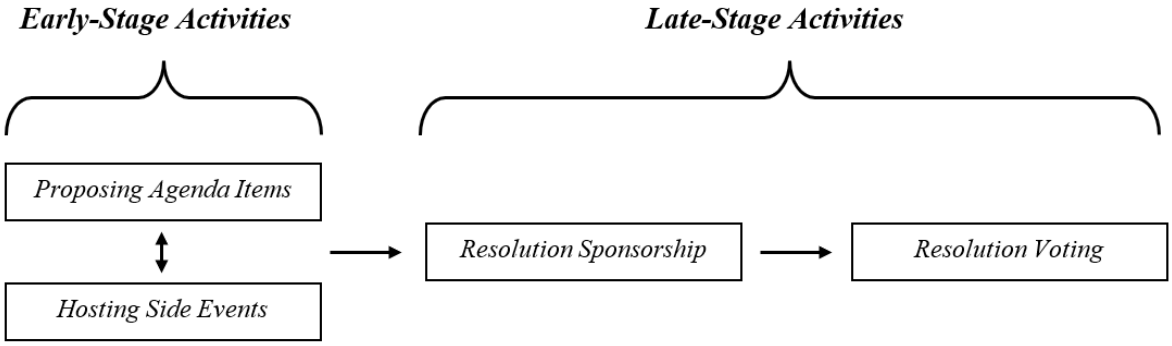


Figure 1 summarizes where some key legislative activities fall on the timeline of the policymaking process. Early-stage activities include hosting and attending side events, drafting concept notes and policy papers, coordinating with other actors such as civil society groups and the Secretariat, and proposing agenda items. These activities tend to occur with high frequency, are temporally removed from policy outputs, and can be highly technical. Thus, they tend to receive less media attention and are more difficult to monitor. On the other hand, later-stage activities including resolution politics, prominent candidatures (candidacies), and high-level conferences are relatively more rare and occur

temporally proximate to policy outcomes, which results in greater attention in the media and renders them easier to monitor. Beyond these differences in visibility, early- and late-stage activities *do not* differ consistently in the amount of resources or effort required to conduct, according to interviews with diplomats.

Assuming that actors have limited attention (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993), late-stage activities should receive more scrutiny, since it is easier for states to observe and monitor whether other states act in line with their preferences. For example, in voting on a resolution, it is quite easy to observe whether a state complies with the desires of powerful states. This enables large states to effectively leverage material power in obtaining favorable outcomes: They can promise foreign aid or levy sanctions on others, and can monitor whether their efforts have been successful in the highly observable outcome of the target state's vote (e.g., Keohane, 1984). As an ambassador from a small Pacific island state noted, to get votes from other states, large states can

> [L]everage power, they have resources. But for small island countries like us, you know we—it's extremely difficult to to do—rich countries, they can buy your votes. That's not what the small island countries, least developed countries in the UN can do. We don't have the luxury to do that.[20]

Instead, these states turn to early-stage activities to accomplish their goals.

Early-stage activities are less conspicuous, and are therefore more difficult to influence via material power. If the target state's behaviors are not subject to monitoring, the powerful state cannot apply material power to influence its behavior.[21] Large states do not ignore early-stage activities, but rather are unable to prevent small states from pursuing such activities, and small states take advantage of this structural opportunity. Powerful states have other means by which they can influence IO policymaking—for example, by earmarking funds for specific programs (Graham & Serdaru, 2020)—but small states lack the resources to pursue these strategies and must focus on more cost-effective

[20] Interview 40.

[21] See also findings on monitoring and compliance in bureaucracies; e.g., McCubbins et al. (1989); Epstein & O'Halloran (1994).

means such as agenda-setting. I expect that by accounting for these early-stage activities, we will observe that material power is less influential in shaping the politics of international organizations than previous work has argued.[22]

Powerful states' ability to monitor behavior circumscribes the contexts in which diplomatic capital can be used to influence outcomes. In late-stage activities in which monitoring is efficient, power can be deployed to obtain favorable outcomes, and even a state with high diplomatic capital has little chance of altering the outcome. However, in early-stage activities, where observing target states' behaviors is more difficult and thus material power cannot be applied as effectively, states with high diplomatic capital *do* have an opportunity to shape the agenda toward their preferred outcome. It is in these early-stage contexts—which make up the bulk of the day-to-day work conducted by multilateral diplomats—where the social dynamics of diplomatic capital have the most room to influence outcomes.

> **H_1: States with higher diplomatic capital are more likely to engage in early-stage activities than states with lower diplomatic capital.**

While late-stage legislative activities—resolution sponsorship and voting—have been examined in previous research, early-stage activities represent a new empirical domain. To be clear, early-stage activities are not understudied because they are of lesser importance. The everyday work of diplomacy must lay the groundwork before these activities can take place. New policy issues must be added to the institutional agenda before they can even be formally considered. States must convene side events to assess others positions, disseminate information on novel issues, present compelling issue frames, and assemble supportive coalitions. These are prerequisites before resolutions can be put on the table. This work is what keeps the diplomatic engine of the UN running.

This theory implies that smalls states have much larger potential to influence IO politics than has previously been assumed. Structural features—that is, the fact that

[22] While civil society and secretariat members are certainly important actors in IOs such as the UN, I follow functionalist assumptions and focus on states as the most important policy actors (Koremenos et al., 2001). I further assume that state preferences—the issues states care the most about—are heterogeneous and exogenous.

early-stage activities are more difficult to monitor—give small states the *opportunity* to influence the agenda of international organizations, while investing in diplomatic capital allows them to take advantage of this opportunity in advancing their policy goals. In the remainder of the paper, I show empirically that small states with diplomatic capital are indeed able to influence UN policymaking to advance their issue priorities.

4 Agenda Control

In my empirical analysis, I focus on agenda proposals in the UN General Assembly.[23] Placing an issue on the institutional agenda of the UN is a necessary but not sufficient condition for action to be taken—that is, if an issue is not on the agenda, no formal debate will be held on the matter and no resolutions can be passed. I measure the frequency with which states propose agenda items over time and whether diplomatic capital predicts this activity.[24] Finally, I gather data on exogenous shocks to ambassadorial tenure—i.e., ambassador deaths—to identify the effect of experience.

Attention on the UN agenda is constrained. Since the GA session is time-limited, there are a finite number of items that can be included in a given session, which is necessarily less than the full universe of items that are worthy of attention. Because the institutional agenda is now so overburdened, states must carefully consider the utility of proposing new items, work to cultivate support for these proposals, and ensure that their proposals are of high quality. States also have heterogeneous preferences about what items to include on the agenda: 44% of all agenda items proposed by countries are contested (that is, not adopted unanimously). On contested items, an average of 10 states participate in the debate on the proposals' inclusion.

[23] Elsewhere in my dissertation, I also examine side events as another early-stage activity that states employ. Side events provide states an opportunity to gather and disseminate information, frame issues, assess the preferences of others, and build coalitions. I construct a database of 8,899 side meetings held between 2003-2017 and find that the results of the agenda-proposals analysis are largely replicated in this space, though large and medium states are more active in hosting meetings than proposing agenda items. These results are available upon request.

[24] Other studies of diplomacy and legislative activity (e.g., Panke, 2010b,a, 2011) employ self-reported survey measures of activity frequency. While such measures provide a great deal of granularity, they are potentially subject to reporting biases. By employing observational measures, I can examine patterns and make descriptive inferences to understand the patterns of activity.

The GA is also a substantively important case to understand. First, the UN's high status in international media and public opinion arguably renders it the most prominent of any IO. If an issue is of importance to the international community, states are most likely to advance it in this premier IO; thus the UN is a crucial case to test for validity. Second, the GA is a highly institutionalized forum. This implies that legislative politics are important in the policymaking process—i.e., states must advance issues through formal procedures. Furthermore, there are rich data available to track legislative behaviors across states and over time. It is therefore a likely case for detecting patterns in legislative politics. Third, the substantive importance of the UN makes its attention a normatively important outcome to study. The regular UN budget for 2020 was more than $3 billion, which financed a variety of programs around the world. Funds cannot be allocated in the budget unless a resolution is passed on an issue, and thus the inclusion of items has enormous financial implications. While resolutions passed by the GA are non-binding, the examples highlighted at the beginning of this paper show that influence in agenda-setting at the GA can translate to policy outputs with substantial legal, economic, normative, and political ramifications. Because the stakes are quite tangible, legislative politics will be taken seriously.

Agenda-setting in the GA is also likely to generate insights that are generalizable to other IOs. Testing this generalizability is beyond the scope of this paper, but is likely for several reasons. The UN, as one of the oldest and largest IOs, is likely to be a source of diffusion for other IOs through socialization, emulation, and learning (e.g., Simmons & Elkins, 2004; Lenz & Burilkov, 2017) and thus its institutional rules and norms may be similar. Further, the UN is highly interconnected with other IOs, through both formal channels (Sommerer & Tallberg, 2019) and networks of bureaucrats (Johnson, 2013), which both increase the likelihood that institutional structures in the GA serve as models for other IOs.

4.1 Patterns in Proposing

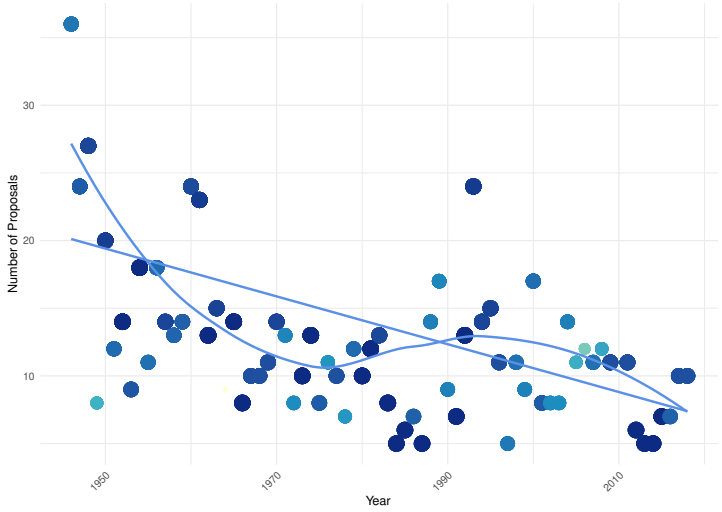
I examine all proposed agenda items submitted to the General Committee—the body that decides what agenda proposals will be included on the GA's agenda—from 1946 to 2018.[25] Each year, these items are contained in the Preliminary List of Items, the Provisional Agenda, the Supplementary List of Items, and all of the General Committee reports. I download all of these records from the UN Digital Library, as well as any addendums or corrections, and extract 1,500 unique proposals for submitted agenda item.[26] For each proposal, I collect meta-data that include the co-sponsors of the proposal, topic, countries and regions involved, and whether the topic involved an interstate conflict. I also note whether the item is included on the agenda, the committee to which it was allocated, the item's number on the agenda, the number of countries that speak on the item, whether the debate was contested, the vote tally (if one was recorded), and which countries spoke in favor or against. I also code each item according to its qualitative content, which allows for examination of the substantive nature of the agenda. I employ two coding schemes for qualitative coding: the UN coding scheme used in the UN Yearbook, and the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) scheme (Baumgartner & Jones, 2002).

Ultimately, most proposed items are included on the agenda (87%). Because of this high rate of success, I focus on proposing as the outcome of interest rather than proposal success. Agenda items at the UN are sticky—they tend to remain on the agenda for debate year after year—and are rarely removed once they are added. The inclusion of an agenda item for debate—independent of whether any subsequent material action is taken on the matter—is of great importance to states (Hurd, 2008). The median number

[25] The process of agenda setting follows a formal procedure laid out in the UN Charter and the General Assembly's Rules and Procedures, which specifically delegates this responsibility to the General Committee. Importantly, every state has an equal right and opportunity to submit new agenda proposals. Countries may—and often do—co-sponsor proposals. The General Committee then considers all proposed agenda items and determines whether they will be included on the GA's agenda, and to what committee they will be allocated. Many agenda items are adopted by consensus. Votes can be requested on the inclusion of new items and decided by a simple majority rule (Alker, 1964; Kaufmann, 1980; Smith, 2006a).

[26] While most items are proposed by states, some are also submitted by 15 institutional proposers (President of the General Assembly, the Trusteeship Council, etc). Of this type, a prior resolution was the most common source (381 instances), followed by the Secretary-General (140). I remove these observations since my research questions focus on country behavior.

Figure 2: Number of Proposals Decreasing Over Time



Notes: As the UN agenda stabilized and countries increasingly called to reduce the burden of the GA's schedule, the number of proposals each year declined (trend lines are linear and Loess fits). Larger and darker circles indicate a higher rate of proposal success, smaller and lighter circles indicate a lower rate of proposal success. Proposals are no more or less likely to be accepted over time. 2010 is excluded as an outlier.

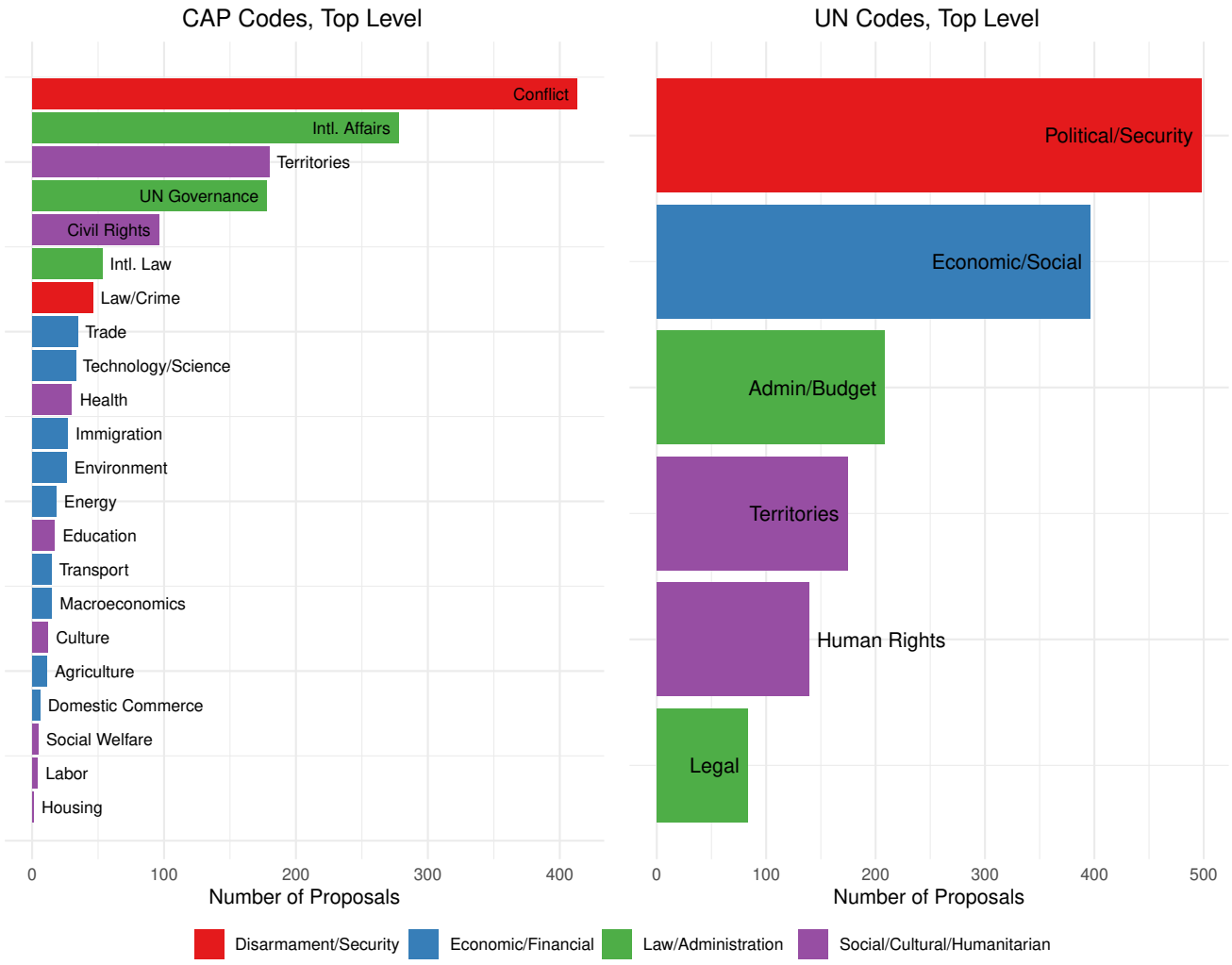
of proposals by a country is 21, with a maximum of 128.[27] The average number of submissions by a country in a given year is 2 and the maximum is 8. The yearly number of proposals is decreasing over time (Figure 2).[28] Co-sponsorship practices at the proposal level also exhibit a substantial amount of variation, ranging from 1 to 62 co-sponsors, with a median of 17 co-sponsors per proposal. These statistics are conditional on a country's submitting at least one proposal; that is, they do not reflect member states that do not submit any proposals, which would result in the central tendency skewing lower. There is substantial variation in the frequency with which different topics are introduced. Defense and peace, public lands (in this case, colonial territorial disputes), international affairs, and UN governance are the most frequent topics (Figure 3, left). Based on the UN coding, political and security questions are similarly the most prevalent, followed by economic and social questions (Figure 3, right).

Overall, proposals are not dominated by powerful states (Table 1, left column). For example, the US and Russia/USSR combined represent only 4% of total proposal

[27] There is no theoretical upper limit to the number of country proposal sponsorships.

[28] Based on evidence from interviews, this seems to be a reaction to the large size of the agenda, and an attempt to "rationalize" the GA's work by constraining the addition of new agenda items.

Figure 3: Topics of Agenda Proposals



Notes: Total number of proposals according to the two major qualitative coding schemes, the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) and UN internal codes. Colors indicate thematic topic groupings. Proposals address a variety of topics, though the majority involve economic/financial and social/cultural/humanitarian issues.

sponsorships. Only 20% of the top 25 proposers (Russia, India, the US, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia) are medium or large states, and of these, only 8% are large states (Russia and the US). However, the raw results will be skewed toward countries that have been UN members for longer—and thus have had greater opportunities over time to submit proposals—which is likely to bias against smaller and post-colonial states. For example, while the US has been a member of the UN since its inception, Kiribati did not join until 2014, and therefore had many fewer year-opportunities to submit proposals. This is especially likely given that the agenda was more fluid early on. As Figure 2 shows, during the early period of the UN, when the institutional agenda was still largely undefined, member states had much more opportunity to shape the agenda by proposing new items. To address this, I rescale the number of proposals by the total number of years a state has been a UN member (to 2018), which is shown in the right column of Table 1. After scaling, the proportions of medium and large proposers decreases to 16% of the top 25 (Russia, India, USA, and Indonesia), and again, 8% are large states. Reflecting this, the overall correlation between GDP and the number of proposals submitted by a country is just 0.11, and .27 with population. While large and medium states propose an average of 0.59 items per year of UN membership, small countries propose 0.41 items: a difference that, while statistically significantly different ($p = .03$), is substantively quite small.

Large states do not propose substantially more agenda items than small states do, which demonstrates that the opportunity to influence the agenda does exist for small states. Beyond comparing patterns of agenda-setting between large and small states, what should we make of variation *within* small states? Why are some small states, such as Costa Rica, active in these activities, while others, such as Greece, are not? I argue that while structural features of the agenda (i.e., the existence of early-stage activities in which it is harder for large states to effectively leverage power) give small states the opportunity to influence the agenda, it is only by investing in diplomatic capital that they—and other states—can *take advantage* of this opportunity (Hypothesis 1). In the following sections, I test the role of diplomatic capital in predicting states' early-stage policymaking.

Table 1: Small Countries Well Represented Among Top Proposers

	Proposer	Total Num. Proposals	Proposer	Proposals Weighted by Membership Years
1	Russia/USSR	128	Russia/USSR	1.73
2	India	84	Yemen	1.72
3	Egypt	76	Ukraine	1.50
4	Iraq	68	Belarus	1.21
5	Cuba	65	India	1.17
6	Pakistan	63	Southern Yemen	1.04
7	Philippines	62	Egypt	1.03
8	USA	60	Iraq	0.92
9	Syria	56	Cuba	0.88
10	Costa Rica	54	Pakistan	0.88
11	Romania	52	Philippines	0.85
12	Nicaragua	51	Romania	0.81
13	Indonesia	50	USA	0.81
14	Sudan	50	Sudan	0.79
15	Yemen	50	Czechoslovakia	0.79
16	Guinea	47	Syria	0.79
17	Lebanon	45	Guinea	0.77
18	Libya	45	Senegal	0.76
19	Senegal	45	Algeria	0.74
20	Morocco	44	Costa Rica	0.73
21	Afghanistan	43	Indonesia	0.72
22	Iran	43	Mali	0.71
23	Algeria	42	Libya	0.70
24	Mali	42	Morocco	0.70
25	Saudi Arabia	42	Nicaragua	0.69

Notes: Large and medium countries (by GDP) shaded in gray. Total number of proposals by country shown in the left column; total number of proposals divided by number of years of country's UN membership (until 2018) shown in the right column.

5 Diplomatic Capital and Agenda Control

5.1 Measuring Diplomatic Capital

As discussed in Section 3.1, diplomatic capital can be cultivated through a variety of channels. One novel source that I propose is based on the experience of a country's diplomats: I expect that increased diplomatic tenure is associated with higher levels of diplomatic capital. Tenure is certainly a simplified way to think about diplomatic capital, but it is a reasonable proxy to capture the importance of experience. In interviews, diplomats emphasized experience as one of the most important attributes of effective diplomats. Following this logic, I use the annual Blue Book listings of Permanent Missions to the United Nations to capture the name of every country's ambassador and first deputy, which creates a database of 21,159 ambassador and deputy entries from 1946 to 2019.[29]

To construct the tenure measure, I sum the total number of years each ambassador and deputy have been serving in either position. This measure is preferable to a strict count of consecutive ambassador years, because it allows for gaps before a diplomat is reposted to New York, which occurs frequently.[30] For example, as one southern African diplomat noted:

> My Ambassador...he was here in the 80s or 90s, and then comes back again for a second tour, so that makes him a reference. Diplomacy is a traditional profession where rank, integrity, and so on counts, so people defer to you...if you [have] accumulated experience, have been there, done that, so to speak.[31]

All of the 25 countries with the longest diplomatic tenure are small countries (Table 2). The average tenure is 6.57 years with a maximum of 37 and mode of 4. Intuitively, the measure of tenure is increasing over time: because more countries have been UN members

[29] Blue Books for some periods were available digitally, while other periods required examination of the physical archival materials and cross-validation with other data sources, including the US Department of State record of Permanent Missions to the United Nations. In cases in which the ambassador position is vacant, I record the two highest ranking officials in the Mission. I exclude country-years when neither an ambassador nor a deputy is appointed, which is quite rare.

[30] Table 2 and Figure 6 report both measures.

[31] Interview 48.

for longer, there are increased opportunities for ambassadors to have been in New York for longer periods. Ambassadorial tenure is only weakly correlated with other measures of power and diplomatic capital (see Figure 6 in the Appendix), which suggests that this measure captures distinct dynamics. Tenure is also only weakly correlated with country Polity score, which suggests that longer tenure is not simply a feature of authoritarianism.

Table 2: Small Countries Have Some of the Longest Diplomatic Tenure

	Country	Strict Measure	Country	Lenient Measure
1	Turkmenistan	11.82	Monaco	18.00
2	Djibouti	11.24	Liechtenstein	16.30
3	Liechtenstein	8.13	Djibouti	14.98
4	Madagascar	7.43	Turkmenistan	13.96
5	Palestine	7.15	Palestine	12.46
6	Kuwait	7.11	Nicaragua	12.22
7	Southern Yemen	7.00	Antigua and Barbuda	12.14
8	Nauru	6.75	Madagascar	11.77
9	Angola	6.74	Dominica	11.53
10	Guyana	6.61	Azerbaijan	11.46
11	Samoa	5.98	Micronesia	11.10
12	Holy See	5.96	Kuwait	10.33
13	Botswana	5.91	Morocco	10.17
14	Micronesia	5.31	Samoa	10.12
15	Qatar	5.18	Guyana	9.87
16	Norway	5.05	Southern Yemen	9.78
17	Dominica	5.05	Saudi Arabia	9.69
18	Congo (PR)	4.92	Eritrea	9.62
19	Monaco	4.85	San Marino	9.57
20	Gabon	4.65	Liberia	9.42
21	Oman	4.49	Belize	9.39
22	Saint Kitts and Nevis	4.44	Nauru	9.35
23	Bahrain	4.39	Tanzania	9.10
24	Sao Tome and Principe	4.37	Congo (PR)	9.07
25	Tajikistan	4.36	Angola	9.05

Notes: The strict measure is the sum of consecutive years served by the ambassador. The lenient measure is the sum of the non-consecutive years served by the ambassador and the deputy in either position.

This measurement approach entails a tradeoff. One advantage is that I can compare tenure for *all* UN members in *all* years of membership, which means that there are no concerns about missingness resulting in bias. A disadvantage, however, is that I cannot observe other demographic features—such as education or military experience—that may be relevant for understanding ambassadorial effectiveness (Horowitz et al., 2015; Saunders, 2011; Lupton, 2022). Such data were not feasible to collect at scale, and attempts to do so would have resulted in missing data that could bias results (e.g., the educational background of the German ambassador is more likely to be available than that of the ambassador from Nauru). Nonetheless, a detailed smaller-scale analysis can

shed some light on who these long-serving ambassadors are. I examine nine of the longest-serving ambassadors, focusing on the post-1980 period to maximize data availability.[32]

The profiles of the ambassadors did not suggest major commonalities, with one exception: prior diplomatic experience. seven of the ambassadors had previously served in other positions in their home Ministry of Foreign Affairs; two had served in other multilateral posts (including the EU, World Bank, and IMF); four had served in other positions at the Mission to the UN prior to becoming permanent representative; and five had served in bilateral posts. While this experience is noteworthy, diplomatic capital is not fungible across institutional contexts. Institutional rules and remits vary across IOs, as do the individuals who comprise the diplomatic corps and the Secretariat. Further, the norms and practices of multilateral permanent representation are quite different from those of bilateral representation. All this is to say that though other diplomatic experience may be widely present among the ambassadors, I do not have substantial concerns about its influence as a possible omitted variable in predicting diplomatic capital. Aside from shared diplomatic experience, the ambassadors' professional backgrounds were varied: two had a background in business and finance; two in health, development, and education; and one in legislature. About half were educated at universities in the US or Europe.

These examples illustrate that long-serving UN ambassadors are qualified and diverse individuals. There do not appear to be systematic characteristics that might confound the effects of experience. Even so, while most of these individuals were career diplomats, other influential ambassadors—such as the Ambassador from Costa Rica—are political appointees. With this in mind, I proceed with a quantitative analysis to examine whether and how diplomatic capital contributes to effectiveness in agenda-setting.

5.2 Explaining Early Activities: Diplomatic Capital

For ease of interpretation, I simplify the measure of tenure to a binary variable that indicates whether the ambassador's and deputy's combined experience is 3 years or greater. Based on interviews with diplomats at the UN, this was the most commonly

[32] Full profiles are available upon request.

mentioned period of time required for diplomats to "get their feet under them" after arriving in post, make substantial contacts with their counterparts, and develop substantive expertise. The results are also robust to specifications with the strict count of ambassador years, as well as other specifications; these include binary measures of service 5 years or longer and a nonlinear spline term on tenure.

I expect that ambassadorial tenure should be key in explaining the variation in early-stage activities. I also expect that turnover—i.e., changes from experienced to inexperienced ambassadors—should be *negatively* related to the country's success in agenda-setting. I also use the `genderize` API to construct a "male" indicator estimated based on the ambassador's name, since women diplomats may face additional challenges in a traditionally male-dominated role (Towns, 2020).

In addition, I include explanatory variables that have previously been identified in the literature as potentially related to a state's diplomatic capital, which capture different dimensions of a state's investments in multilateralism and the programmatic goals of the UN. I include the number of international governmental organizations in which a country is a full member, associate member, or observer in a given year, covering 1816-2014 (Pevehouse et al., 2020). I also construct an indicator for whether a country was a UN member in a given year and manually extend this variable to 2018 as well as an indicator of whether English is the principal language of the Mission (as of 2022). I include a count of the number of alliances a country is a member of per year, covering 1816-2012 (Gibler, 2009). For a stricter measure of alliances, I also include the number of defense pacts, which are expected to be deeper, and therefore potentially more likely to influence diplomatic behavior toward other states. I include a measure of peacekeepers a country contributes to UN peacekeeping missions, summing across all missions and personnel types in a given year and covering 1990-2017 (Kathman, 2013).

I collect data on voluntary contributions to UN agencies from 2009 to 2019, summing voluntary core (un-earmarked) and voluntary non-core (earmarked) contributions and taking the log of this total (UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination,

2019).[33] From the Polity V Project, I obtain the Polity2 measures of regime type, which covers 1800-2018. This is a measure of most autocratic (-10) to most democratic (10), and I also construct a categorical measure whereby countries lower than -6 are coded as autocracies, between -6 and 6 as mixed regimes, and higher than 6 as democracies (Center for Systemic Peace, 2018). Finally, I include a measure of the number of diplomatic contacts a state has, summing the number of embassies hosted by that country (i.e., the number of other countries that maintain an embassy in that state) from 1970-2010 (Rhamey et al., 2013)[34]

In addition to these variables of interest, I include control variables to account for country size and power. From the World Bank Development Indicators, I obtain measures of population (logged), GDP, GDP per capita (logged), and military expenditure as a share of GDP (World Bank, 2019). These measures cover 1960-2018. I present results from a linear regression model to predict the count of agenda-proposals, though results are robust in a negative binomial estimation which accounts for overdispersion (see Table 4 in the Appendix). To avoid autocorrelation, I estimate a separate model with each predictor. To account for unobserved heterogeneity *between* years, I include year fixed effects[35] To measure uncertainty *within* countries and years, I estimate bootstrap standard errors clustered at the country and year level. I standardize all independent variables to mean 0 and standard deviation 1 to ease interpretation of results.

Per Hypothesis 1, I expect that states with higher levels of diplomatic capital are more likely to engage in early-stage activities; in this case, proposing agenda items. In line with these expectations, Table 3 and Figure 4 show that for all of the predictors of diplomatic capital that are statistically significantly related to agenda-proposing, the relationship is positive.[36] Countries with experienced ambassadors are 5.8 percentage

[33] The UN agencies included in this data are WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, UNDP, WHO, UNRWA, FAO, UN, IAEA, UNODC, UNAIDS, ILO, UNFPA, IFAD, PAHO, UNEP, UNHABITAT, UNWOMEN, WMO, ICAO, UNIDO, WTO, IARC, OPCW, UNITAR, ITC, UNCDF, UNESCO, IMO, CTBTO, WIPO, UNU, UNSSC, UNFCCC, ITU, UNITAID, ICC, UNWTO, UNRISD, DPKO, and UNOPS.

[34] These data are measured at 3- and 5-year increments; missing years are interpolated using Amelia, averaging estimates over 5 imputations.

[35] Results were robust when country fixed effects were also included.

[36] I report results from models estimated on the full dataset. Results were substantively similar on models

points more likely to propose an agenda item than those with novice ambassadors. Male ambassadors are also 2.6 percentage points more likely to propose agenda items; English as a first language is not significantly related. Voluntary contributions to the UN budget, number of embassies hosted, and number of defense pacts are statistically significantly related to positive increases in the numbers of agenda items proposed by a country, while Polity, IO memberships, years of UN membership, and peacekeeping contributions are not systematically related to agenda proposing. To test whether tenure matters differently for democratic and autocratic states—whose ambassadors may stay in their post longer because of corruption rather than skill—I estimate a model that interacts tenure and Polity and find no significant interaction effect. I further test the relationship between tenure and agenda-proposing with a panel matching approach (Imai et al., 2021) in the Appendix.

Table 3: Predicting Agenda-setting Frequency: Diplomatic Capital

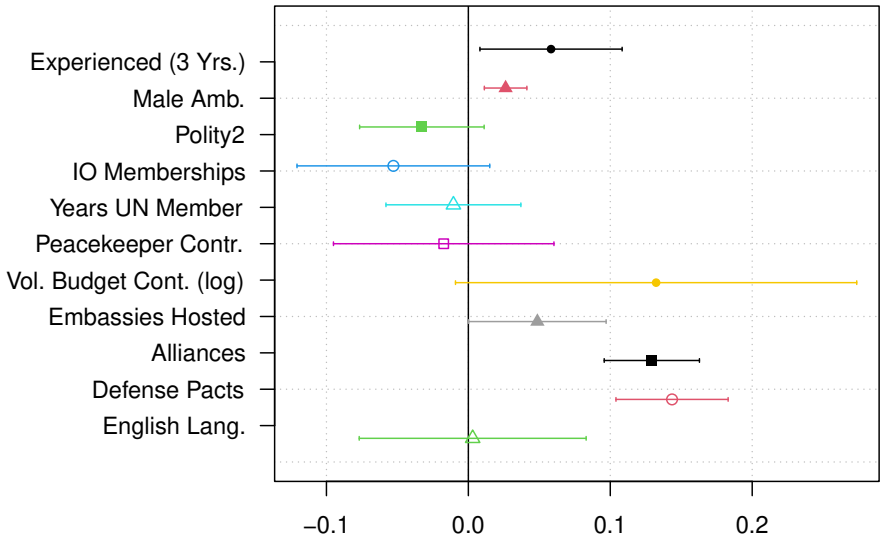
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Experienced (3 Yrs.)	0.058**											
	(0.026)											
Male Amb.		0.026***										
		(0.008)										
Polity2			-0.033									
			(0.022)									
IO Memberships				-0.053								
				(0.035)								
Years UN Member					-0.010							
					(0.024)							
Peacekeeper Contr.						-0.017						
						(0.040)						
Vol. Budget Cont. (log)							0.132*					
							(0.072)					
Embassies Hosted								0.049*				
								(0.025)				
Alliances									0.129***			
									(0.017)			
Defense Pacts										0.144***		
										(0.020)		
English Lang.											0.003	
											(0.041)	
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Power Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Observations	9,931	10,167	10,167	10,167	10,167	10,167	10,167	10,167	10,167	10,167	9,885	
R^2	0.213	0.211	0.212	0.212	0.211	0.211	0.212	0.212	0.228	0.228	0.206	

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. OLS model estimates, clustered (Country & Year) standard errors in parentheses. Missing data imputed using Amelia, averaged over 5 imputations.

Materially based power is clearly not the only factor that impacts agenda-setting influence. Even after controlling for measures of power—population size, GDP, and military

estimated on only post-1990 data, with China excluded from the dataset as a potential outlier, as well as the side-events data.

Figure 4: Diplomatic Capital Significantly Predicts Agenda-setting Frequency



Notes: Estimated coefficients from OLS models with 95% confidence intervals.

expenditure—these measures of diplomatic capital are significant predictors of agenda-setting. The logs of GDP and population are generally positive and significantly related to agenda-setting across models, while the relationship with military expenditure is negative and, for the most part, is not statistically significant. In all cases, the magnitude of the effect of power is modest: A 10% increase in GDP or population results in an expected increase in agenda-setting of less than 1%. Though material power matters, its effects are smaller than those of tenure and most other measures of diplomatic capital.

Small states are not necessarily uniquely positioned to maximize investments in diplomatic capital. I estimate alternative models, subsetting to only small states, and observe the same pattern of results as in the whole sample. In the Appendix, I also estimate models that interact ambassadorial tenure with an indicator for small states and with each of the measures of state size and do not observe a significant effect of this interaction (Table 5). The independent effect of tenure remains significant in all of the models, but the interaction effects do not achieve statistical significance. While small states may invest more in their diplomatic capital (see Table 2), these results suggest that any state that invests in diplomatic capital can expect to obtain a similar payoff in its ability to engage in early-stage activities. Nevertheless, the positive effects of ambas-

sadorial expertise may still be particularly relevant for small states. Some investments in multilateral diplomacy—such as establishing new alliances or contributing additional funds to the UN—may be costly and out of reach for some small states. The magnitude of the effect of ambassadorial experience is nearly as large as these other sources of diplomatic capital—and is in fact larger than the magnitude of the effect of the number of embassies hosted (Figure 4).

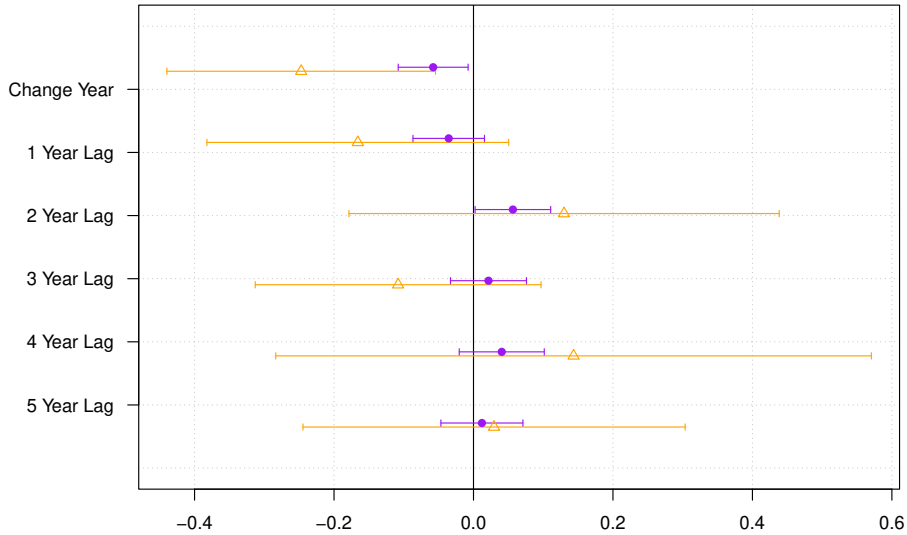
However, ambassadorial tenure is not randomly determined. As discussed previously, longer tenure may be an unintended consequence of resource constraints or a strategic decision by a state seeking to develop its diplomatic expertise. States characterized by longer tenure may simply care more about multilateral diplomacy. So far, I have shown a strong *association* between tenure and agenda-setting, but not necessarily a causal relationship. I isolate this relationship by specifically examining cases of turnover, and to gain insight into the *effects* of tenure, I leverage an exogenous source of variation in ambassadorial turnover: deaths. Turnovers would be expected to serve as a shock to the Mission's institutional knowledge and social positionality, and would be expected to negatively affect its ability to engage in agenda-setting. However, in the years following turnover, as the new ambassador gains experience on the ground, their diplomatic capital increases and the country should start to regain its effectiveness for agenda-setting.

To examine these dynamics, I first analyze all cases of turnover when experienced ambassadors/deputies are replaced by pairs with no experience. While not exogenously determined, this replacement would still constitute a shock to diplomatic capital. This measure is an indicator for country-years when the summed experience is reduced from 3 or more years to 0.[37] I use this indicator to predict agenda-setting in the turnover year as well as the following 5 years, and find that the immediate shock of turnover has a statistically significant 5.9 percentage point *decrease* in agenda-proposals (Figure 5). As I expected, this effect is attenuated over time as the new team gains diplomatic capital.[38]

[37] Results are robust to alternate specifications of experience, including 5 years.

[38] The null effects in years $t+3$ to $t+5$ may be a result of additional turnovers that occur during this time period. To account for this, I repeat this test only in cases in which there is no second turnover in years t through $t+5$. However, because this severely restricts the sample size, the results are not statistically significantly different from 0 in any of the time periods.

Figure 5: Ambassador Turnover and Deaths Negatively Affect Agenda-setting Initially, Attenuated Over Time



Notes: Estimated coefficients from OLS models with 95% confidence intervals. Estimates from turnover models shown in purple/filled circles; estimates from death models shown in orange/open triangles.

Second, I examine cases in which turnover is exogenously determined by ambassadorial death. While regular turnovers may be anticipated and planned for to reduce shocks to diplomatic capital, the unexpected event of an ambassador's death cannot be foreseen. For example, after the unexpected death of US Ambassador Adlai Stevenson in 1965, his replacement, Arthur Goldberg, took up the post in just 2 weeks, lacking relationships or expertise in pressing issues such as the Cyprus problem (Urquhart, 1998). To measure this phenomenon, I use UN meeting records, which announce when an ambassador has died in post.[39] I extract these records and create the death indicator following the same procedure as for the turnover indicator described above. Although extremely rare, I find that the same pattern of results holds for deaths as for turnovers—and in fact, the substantive magnitude of the effect is greater: a 24.5 percentage point decrease in agenda proposals in the year following the death, compared with the 5.9 percentage point decrease in the year following any turnover (while both results are statistically significant, the uncertainty is larger in the analysis of deaths because of the smaller number of positive cases). This is in line with my expectation that an unexpected death would

[39] See here for an example. These data are currently being cross-referenced with other sources such as news archives.

serve as a larger shock to diplomatic capital than a regular turnover—which could be anticipated—but even in the case of death, diplomatic capital recovers over time.

Across these statistical tests, I show that even after accounting for power, diplomatic capital *matters* in understanding how active states are in advancing their foreign policy priorities in early-stage legislative activities. These features may matter only on the margins—but in practice, a great deal of diplomacy occurs at the margins.

6 Conclusion

I challenge existing theories about the nature of power in IOs, which contend that materially powerful states should dominate IO politics. I theorize that while large states may be able to deploy material power to dominate late-stage activities, small and medium states can do better in early-stage activities such as agenda-setting, in which large states cannot monitor or apply material power effectively. It is *diplomatic capital*—not material power, measured in GDP, population, or military capacity—that small states are able to deploy in these contexts, even contravening the preferences of powerful states. Diplomacy matters in international politics: By accounting for diplomatic capital, I obtain a very different picture of which states have power over the international agenda. Small states *do* have the opportunity to influence the IO agenda, and with skilled diplomacy, they can take advantage of this opportunity. Despite power asymmetries between states, individual effectiveness matters in IOs, just as it does in the domestic legislative context. I show that diplomatic capital—particularly in the form of ambassadorial experience—is an important predictor of a state's ability to influence the IO agenda. This relationship holds even in cases of exogenous shocks—ambassadorial deaths—to diplomatic capital.

I shine the first light on the early stages of IO policymaking, which, though they comprise the majority of the everyday work of diplomats, have have previously been unexamined. In doing so, I contribute two new datasets on agenda proposals and ambassadorial tenure that can be fruitfully applied by scholars to examine questions relating to influence (Voeten, 2014); issue evolution (Carmines & Stimson, 1986); and policy entrepreneurship (Baumgartner & Jones, 2002; Corbett et al., 2019) in IOs. These data

represent the first attempt to quantitatively measure diplomatic skill at scale, yet are nevertheless somewhat coarse measures; future work should strive to measure diplomatic capital with greater nuance to probe the sources of variation in ambassadorial tenure across different states. Examining additional demographic information on diplomats—for example, their previous postings—was beyond the scope of this study, but may also provide insight into the social dynamics of IO diplomacy.

The logic of my theory of diplomatic capital is also not specific to the context of the UN: As I suggest, because the diffusion of institutional structures from the UN to other IOs is likely, these insights are likely to be generalizable to other IOs. In fact, we should observe that in any legislative institution with permanent representation—including other IOs, as well as domestic legislatures—actors can cultivate capital through experience as they develop social networks and expertise. Long (2022, 31) suggests that this may be particularly likely in institutions with multi-issue remits, open processes for agenda-setting, and egalitarian voting rules. We may expect, then, that when material power varies across actors in such institutions—for example, in the EU, AU, or even the US Congress—weaker actors with more experience should have greater opportunities to influence early-stage policymaking. This expectation would build on previous work that has shown the effectiveness of small states in EU policymaking (e.g., Panke, 2011).

I contribute a more accurate understanding of IO politics—which, by accounting for the whole of the legislative process, shows that small states are more influential than previous work has credited. The diplomats of small states can be effective agents in IOs, and their influence should not be ignored, by either diplomatic practitioners or scholars of international politics.

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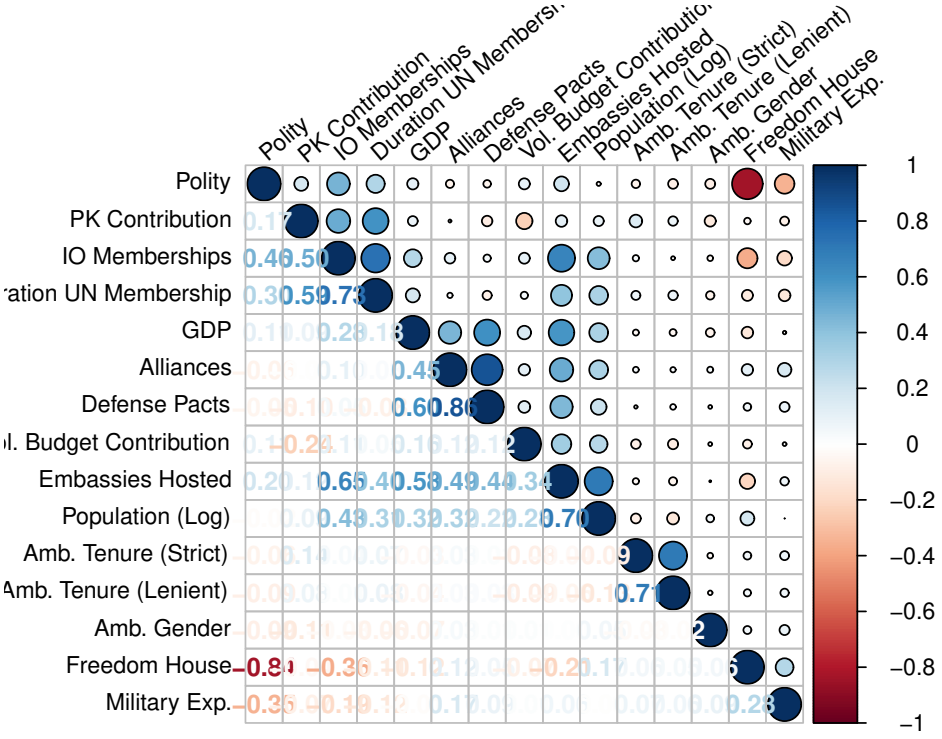
A Correlation of Independent Variables

Figure 6: Correlation of Independent Variables



B Alternate Model Specifications

Table 4: Negative Binomial Predictions of Agenda-setting Frequency

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Experienced (3 Yrs.)	0.115**											
	(0.053)											
Male Amb.		0.084***										
		(0.023)										
Polity2			-0.068									
			(0.046)									
IO Memberships				-0.095								
				(0.074)								
Years UN Member					0.0005							
					(0.072)							
Peacekeeper Contr.						-0.078						
						(0.118)						
Vol. Budget Cont. (log)							0.342**					
							(0.165)					
Embassies Hosted								0.129**				
								(0.056)				
Alliances									0.212***			
									(0.022)			
Defense Pacts										0.219***		
										(0.030)		
English Lang.											-0.020	
											(0.088)	
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Power Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Observations	9,931	10,123	10,123	10,123	10,123	10,123	10,123	10,123	10,123	10,123	9,841	
Pseudo R^2	0.129	0.127	0.127	0.127	0.127	0.127	0.128	0.127	0.135	0.134	0.125	
BIC	16,238.1	16,511.7	16,515.6	16,514.9	16,529.3	16,528.8	16,508.2	16,511.5	16,369.0	16,386.1	16,051.7	

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Negative binomial model estimates, clustered (Country & Year) standard errors in parentheses. Missing data imputed using Amelia, averaged over 5 imputations.

Table 5: Interacting Tenure with Smallness

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Experienced (3 Yrs.)	0.169*	0.058**	0.058**	0.058**
	(0.098)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)
Small State Ind.	0.028			
	(0.103)			
Experienced (3 Yrs.) × Small State Ind.	-0.123			
	(0.102)			
Experienced (3 Yrs.) × GDP (log)		0.016		
		(0.024)		
Experienced (3 Yrs.) × Population (log)			0.015	
			(0.025)	
Experienced (3 Yrs.) × Military Exp.				-0.010
				(0.034)
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Power Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	9,931	9,931	9,931	9,931
R^2	0.214	0.213	0.213	0.213

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. OLS model estimates, clustered (Country & Year) standard errors in parentheses. Missing data imputed using Amelia, averaged over 5 imputations.

C Panel Matching

To improve my ability to understand the causal effects of ambassadorial tenure in an observational context, I employ a matching technique following Imai et al. (2021). I conceptualize the 'treatment' as the 3-year indicator (i.e., whether either the ambassador or deputy has served 3 years, consecutively or non-consecutively). In other words, "treated" units are country-years when the tenure indicator is positive. Figure 7 shows that this treatment is roughly equally distributed across time and countries. I match each treated year with control observations from other countries in the same time period. I assess several matching methods: propensity score weighting, Mahalanobis distance, propensity score matching, and covariate balancing propensity scores (Imai & Ratkovic, 2014) to maximize the similarity of treated and control units on covariate values. Specifically, I match on the relevant power-based covariates: GDP, population, and military expenditure (all scaled) and the same pattern of treatment over the previous 5 years (i.e., five lags). I select the model using covariate balancing propensity scores as the matching method, because this model maximized the improvement in balance (Figure 8), though substantively the improvement is modest.

I estimate the average treatment effects over four lead periods (i.e., the effects of treatment up to 4 years into the future) with bootstrapped standard errors from 1,000 iterations. I find that in the year of treatment, there is a positive but not statistically significant effect of tenure (Figure 9), though this effect is not persistent over time. These results were robust across the different matching methods shown in Figure 8, as well as the number of bootstrap iterations. However, results were sensitive to the number of lags, since the estimated effect was negative for models with three or four lags, and positive in models with five, six, and seven lags (though the results were not significant in any model). This is likely due to the relatively small number of data points, which constrained the model's ability to generate a large number of matches.

Figure 7: Treatment Distribution Across Units and Time

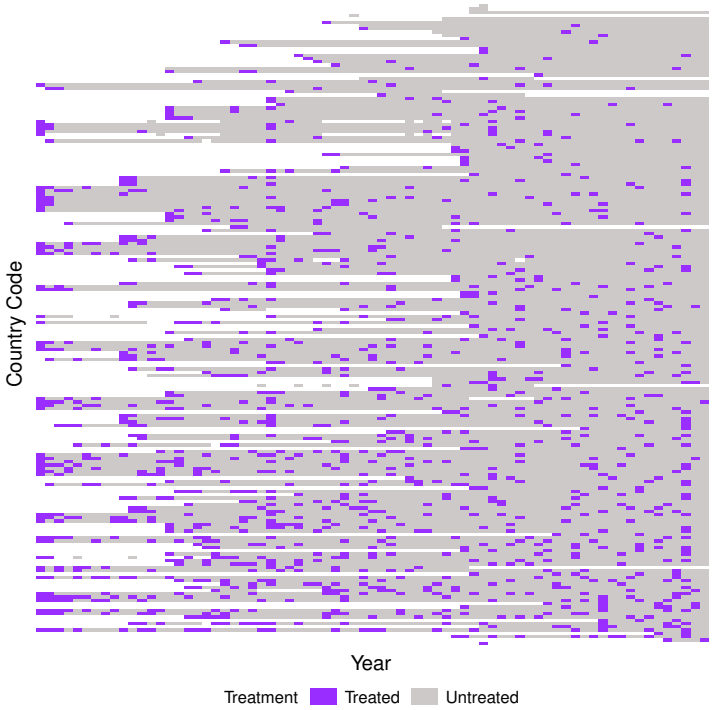
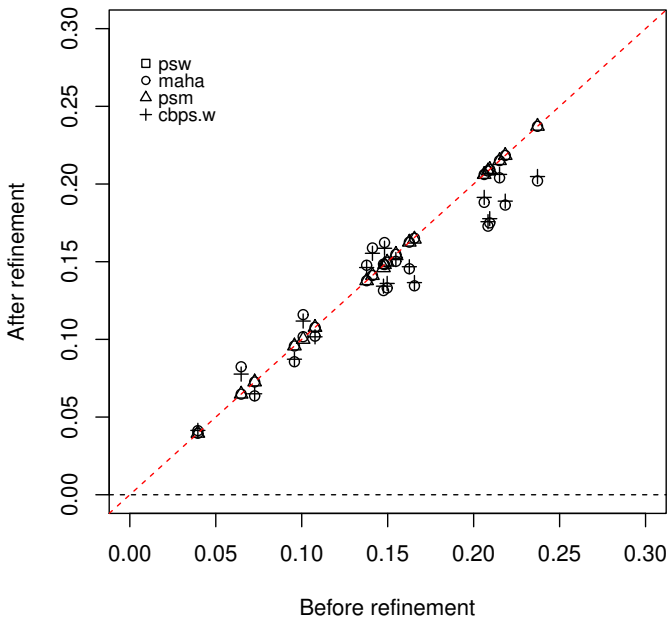
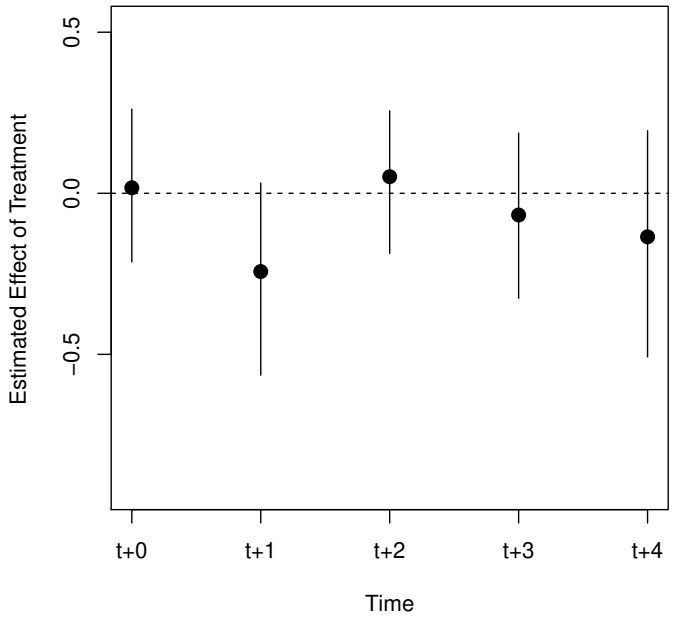


Figure 8: Standardized Mean Difference of Covariates



Note: The matching techniques employed are propensity score weighting, Mahalanobis distance, propensity score matching, and covariate balancing propensity scores. Point estimates further below the 45 degree line indicate greater improvements in covariate balance.

Figure 9: Estimated Effects of Treatment over Time



Note: Results are shown for a model with 5 lag periods and covariate balancing propensity scores, matched on GDP, population, and military expenditures. Bars indicate 95% confidence intervals estimated with boostrapped standard errors from 1,000 iterations.