United Nations General Assembly Voting Data

Michael Bailey, Anton Strezhnev, and Erik Voeten

Table of Contents

Description

There are four data sets:

- **The raw UNGA voting data**. Unit of analysis is the country-resolution. This file records each vote issued on a contested roll-call.
- **Descriptions.** Unit of analysis is the resolution. This file contains descriptions of each resolutions including some issue codes. (Can be merged with the raw voting data).
- **Ideal point data.** Unit of analysis is the country-session (which corresponds closely but not perfectly, to country-year). This contains country-specific ideal point estimates.
- **Dyadid affinity and ideal point data.** Unit of analysis is the dyad-session (year). This file contains distances between country ideal points as well as Affinity scores (although we recommend against using these).

Citation

When using the raw UN data, please cite:

Erik Voeten "Data and Analyses of Voting in the UN General Assembly" *Routledge Handbook of International Organization*, edited by Bob Reinalda (published May 27, 2013). Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=2111149

When using the ideal point data, please cite:

Michael Bailey, Anton Strezhnev and Erik Voeten "Estimating Dynamic State Preferences from UN Voting Data" Forthcoming *Journal of Conflict Resolution* DOI: 10.1177/0022002715595700

Raw UNGA dataset

This file can be merged with the resolution description data. Warning: the file gets very big especially when you add the string descriptions.

rcid – roll call vote id RCID, can be matched with ICPSR id until 1985. Ids>9000 are the emergency special sessions not in the original ICPSR dataset.

session – UNGA session (1-69)

vote – Vote choice
1 – Yes
2 – Abstain
3 – No
8 – Absent
9 – Not a member

ccode –COW country codes.

Specific differences:
East Timor – 855 → 860
Kiribati – 970 → 946
Nauru – 971 → 970
Tonga – 972 → 955
Tuvalu – 973 → 947

Vote Description Data

rcid – roll call vote id RCID. Can be used to match resolution characteristics with the raw voting data. RCID can also be matched with ICPSR id until 1985. Ids>9000 are the emergency special sessions not in the original ICPSR dataset.

session – UNGA session

date – date of vote

unres – resolution code

amend- whether the vote was on an amendment (coded only until 1985)

para- whether the vote was on a paragraph rather than an entire resolution (coded only until 1985)

short- short description

descr – longer description

important- Vote identified as important by U.S. State Department report Voting Practices in the United Nations. These reports began being issued in session 39.

Issue codes (non-exclusive):

ME: Votes relating to the Palestinian conflict
NU: Votes relating to nuclear weapons and nuclear material
DI: Votes relating to arms control and disarmament
CO: Votes relating to colonialism
HR: Votes relating to human rights
EC: Votes relating to (economic) development

Ideal Point Data

Year - Year of estimate (corresponds to session number - session 1 = 1946)

Ccode - COW country codes and should be used for the purpose of merging with other datasets.

CountryAbb - Abbreviation of country name

Session - UNGA Session number

CountryName - Name of Country

CountrySession - Unique identifier for each country-session row

Idealpoint is the mean estimate of a country ideal point. **Theta95thpct**, **Theta5thpct, ...** can be used to construct credible intervals around the point estimate. **Theta50th** percent is the median estimate (Idealpoint is the mean estimate).

PcAgreeUS (and others). This is Lijphart's index of agreement between the state and the U.S.. This equals 1 if a state always agrees with the U.S. 0 if it always votes the other way. If one state votes yes and the other abstains, the vote is coded as .5.

yObs[1-3] number of yes, abstain, no votes for the country-session.

IdealpointImportant: ideal point estimate just based on votes identified as important by the U.S. state department. Since this is usually just about 7-12 votes a year, be cautious with these estimates.

Codebook Dyadic Data

NOTE THAT YEARS RESPOND TO SESSIONS RATHER THAN CALENDAR YEARS. OCCASIONALLY SOME VOTES TAKE PLACE THAT RUN INTO JANUARY OF THE NEXT CALENDAR YEAR. MOST VOTES OCCUR IN THE FALL OF A CALENDAR YEAR.

ccode1 – Country code for country 1

abb1 - Abbreviated name for country 1

name1 - Full name for country 1

ccode2 – Country code for country 2.

abb2 - Abbreviated name for country 2

name2 - Full name for country 2

year – Year corresponding to the dyadic observation Note that sessions do not necessarily fall completely in a single year. For the purposes of these values, we group votes by sessions and assign years based on the year in which most votes took place (session 1 = 1946)

ideal1 - Ideal point estimate (posterior mean) for country 1

ideal2 - Ideal point estimate (posterior mean) for country 2

absidealdiff: absolute distance between country 1 and country 2 posterior mean ideal point estimates.

s2un - Dyadic affinity score using 2 category vote data (1 = "yes" or approval for an issue; 2 = "no" or disapproval for an issue.) Values for the Affinity data range from –1 (least similar interests) to 1 (most similar interests). The Affinity data are coded with the "S" indicator ("S" is calculated as 1 – 2*(d)/dmax, where d is the sum of metric distances between votes by dyad members in a given year and dmax is the largest possible metric distance for those votes, see Signorino and Ritter 1999)

s3un – Values for the Affinity index using 3 category vote data (1 = "yes" or approval for an issue; 2 = abstain, 3 = "no" or disapproval for an issue.)

agree2un – Voting similarity index (0-1) equal to (total # of votes where both states agree)/(total # of joint votes) – computed using 2 category vote data (1 = "yes" or approval for an issue; 2 = "no" or disapproval for an issue.)

agree3un – Voting similarity index (0-1) – computed using 3 category vote data (1 = "yes" or approval for an issue; 2 = abstain, 3 = "no" or disapproval for an issue.) - Abstention is counted as half-agreement with a yes or no vote

s2jointvotes – The number of votes used to compute the s2un and agree2un indices for the dyad-year

s3jointvotes – The number of votes used to compute the s3un and agree3un indices for the dyad-year

interpolated - Indicator for whether estimates are interpolated for that year (1 for 1964 due to lack of votes in 19th session).

The next set of variables repeats those above but only for the sample of votes deemed “important” by the U.S. state Department. Please exercise caution as this is generally a very small sample of votes.

Sources

This dataset builds on various datasets assembled by other scholars. I thankfully acknowledge Erik Gartzke, Dong-Joon Jo, Soo Yeon Kim, Adis Merdzanovic, and Bruce Russett for graciously making their data available. Erik Gartzke has also performed valuable checks on possible discrepancies between this and previously released data. E-mail correspondence with Dong-Joon Jo has also been most valuable. Of course, none of these individuals bear responsibility for any errors that remain. Please contact me for any inaccuracies you may encounter. What follows is a list of sources used to assemble the dataset.

- Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR*). United Nations Roll Call Data, 1946-1985* [Computer file]. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [producer and distributor], 1982.
- Gartzke, Erik and Dong-Joon Jo. *UN General Assembly Voting* V3.0 January 2002. http://dss.ucsd.edu/~egartzke/
- Jo, Dong-Joon. *Dundas Dataset.* Used in: Jo, Dong-Joon. 2000. "Power Resources and Influence at the UN General Assembly." *Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Northeastern Political Science Association.*
- Schopen, Lynn; Newcombe, Hanna; Young, Chris; Wert, James, *Nations on Record: United Nations General Assembly Roll-Call Votes (1946-1973).* Oakville-Dundas, ON: Canadian Peace Research Institute, 1975. (and subsequent supplements).
- Kim, Soo Yeon; Russett, Bruce, "The new politics of voting alignments in the United Nations General Assembly." *International Organization.* Aut 1996, 50, (4), 629 - 652.
- Various UN Resources including the *Official Records to the Proceedings of the United Nations General Assembly, UNBISNET*: http://unbisnet.un.org/, and UN documentation on-line: http://www.un.org/documents/resga.htm.

Notes on Comparability with Previous DataSets

- *Sessions 1-26 (1946-1971):* All resolutions from the plenary sessions ICPSR dataset as cleaned up by Gartzke and Jo were used. In addition to this, 56 votes from emergency special plenary sessions were added (from the ICPSR). Most of these relate to important international events, in particular the formation of the state of Israel (1947/48), the Suez crisis (1956), Hungary (1956), the Congo (1960) and the Six-Day war (1967). In other years, votes from special sessions are already in the Gartzke and Jo data. The codebooks from the ICPSR formed the basis for the roll-call descriptions and resolution numbers. In case of missing information, UNGA official records were consulted. Several resolution numbers, especially in sessions 20 and 21, are still missing.
- *Sessions 27-29 (1972-1974):* In comparison to the Gartzke and Jo and ICPSR data, I have eliminated all the committee votes, that were included in these years, but not in other years of the dataset (meaning amongst others that the number of votes in these years was much larger than in other years in the ICPSR data). The codebooks from the ICPSR formed the basis for the roll-call descriptions and resolution numbers.
- *Sessions 30-39 (1975-1984):* Same votes as in Gartzke and Jo and ICPSR.
- *Sessions 40-51 (1985-1996):* I used *UNBIS* to add the votes that were missing from the Gartzke-Jo dataset, but were in their codebook. I deleted all the votes that were adopted unanimously. This creates some notable differences as in the Gartzke-Jo data all UN members were coded as voting in favor of unanimous resolutions, even if these states were not present at any vote during a UNGA session (this applies to 26 country-years where this dataset records no valid vote choices during a session and the Gartzke-Jo data has valid choices only on unanimous votes). The votes were compared to those assembled by Kim and Russet. The Gartzke-Jo codebook was used as the basis for vote descriptions/resolutions. In addition, we used the original text of resolutions (see hyperlinks in dataset). In general, the long descriptions in this period are perhaps somewhat less extensive than in previous years, but the text of the resolutions is easily accessible through the hyperlinks.
- *Votes on Amendments, Paragraphs, and Unsuccessful Resolutions.* The ICPSR (and Gartzke/Jo) data miss votes on amendments since 1975, votes on paragraphs since 1978 and votes on unsuccessful resolutions since 1985. We are working to correct this. I should observe that in the years 1988-1992 there were no resolutions that failed (there were 2 in 1987) and cursory checking of recent years confirms that resolutions rarely fail in the plenary session. Amendment and paragraph votes are more numerous: we identified 93 between 1987 and 1989. In a future version of this dataset, we will add these. We do add dichotomous variables that identify votes on paragraphs (627) and amendments (287) in the earlier years. Please note that these are identified through searches of the descriptions and thus may contain errors. [note it is efforts to amend this part of the dataset that have delayed publication. It is my intention to keep improving this part, but I cannot give guarantees].

- *Sessions and years.* Sessions do not always fall in one year. In the Gartzke/Jo dataset, the variable year really measures session. A researcher who wants to aggregate by year thus has to make a choice. The database provides exact dates for each vote.

Acknowledgements

We thank the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, the department of political science at the George Washington University and the University Facilitating Fund at the George Washington University for valuable research support. Erin Sielaff, Hailie Lee and Zachary Wynne provided most valuable research assistance. We thankfully acknowledge Erik Gartzke, Dong-Joon Jo, Soo Yeon Kim, Adis Merdzanovic, and Bruce Russett for graciously making their data available. Erik Gartzke has also performed valuable checks on possible discrepancies between this and previously released data. E-mail correspondence with Dong-Joon Jo has also been most valuable. Of course, none of these individuals bear responsibility for any errors that remain.