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Attitudes of diplomats at the United Nations: the effects of organizational participation on the evaluation of the organization

Manfred Ernst

Hypotheses

In the literature which focuses on the participation of individuals in an international organization, two hypotheses are stated. The first is that the longer a person serves an organization, the more favorable his attitude toward the organization becomes.¹ It is hypothesized that the duration of the diplomatic assignment constitutes a factor influencing the evaluation of the organization.

It might be well to note that the anticipated effects of personal involvement are likely to vary according to the nature of the affiliation with the organization. Service in the Secretariat or the civil service at the United Nations, for instance, has presumably a greater impact on the person than a national diplomatic assignment or a role of a national delegate to the sessions of the General Assembly. In cases where the affiliation is restricted to the role of an Assembly delegate, one would expect little, if any, effect on the person.²

The second hypothesis takes into account the degree of personal involvement in the operation of the organization. The hypothesis states that a person who has

¹Reference to that hypothesis can be found in Chadwick Alger, "United Nations Participation as a Learning Experience," *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Fall 1963): 425. Alger suggests that researchers control for the effects of long and short term service on personnel. See also, Harold Jacobson, "Deriving Data from Delegates to International Assemblies," *International Organization* (Summer 1967): 592-613; and Ingrid Galtung, "The Status of the Technical Assistance Expert: A Study of U.N. Experts in Latin America," *Journal of Peace Research* (1966): 367. Her own analysis did not confirm what she referred to as the "common sense assumption" about the time of service. Gary Best, "Diplomacy at the United Nations" (unpublished dissertation, Northwestern University, 1960), p. 63, comments on his failure to include a measure controlling for the duration of the diplomatic assignments, implying that it would have been a useful focus. In the context of the European institutions, Leon Lindberg and Stuart Scheingold, *Europe's Would-Be Polity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1970), p. 119 refer to it as "actor socialization."

²Alger attempted this type of analysis with pre- and post-Assembly interviews and got some inconclusive results; see, "United Nations Participation as a Learning Experience," pp. 411-26.

played a formal role in the operation of the organization is likely to have a more favorable attitude toward the organization than a person who has served only as a national diplomat.³ Behind the second hypothesis is the assumption that the norms and expectations associated with the non-national roles influence the attitudes of the individuals working under those constraints.

As most diplomats at the United Nations hold expectations of further national diplomatic assignments these aspirations presumably affect their commitments to the organization. Even so some people play a more active part in the organization than others. Chairmen of committees at the United Nations, for instance, are expected to represent the organization they are serving, rather than the national interests they are portraying. The performance of non national roles, as Chadwick Alger comments, "causes diplomats to behave much differently than they would if sitting at their country's seat in the body concerned."⁴

This note reexamines the general thesis that personal involvement in an international organization affects the participants' attitudes toward the organization by presenting evidence derived from a sample of diplomats in permanent missions at the United Nations.

The variables and data

Ideally, one would test the hypotheses by studying attitude change over time, but that was not possible in the research reported here.

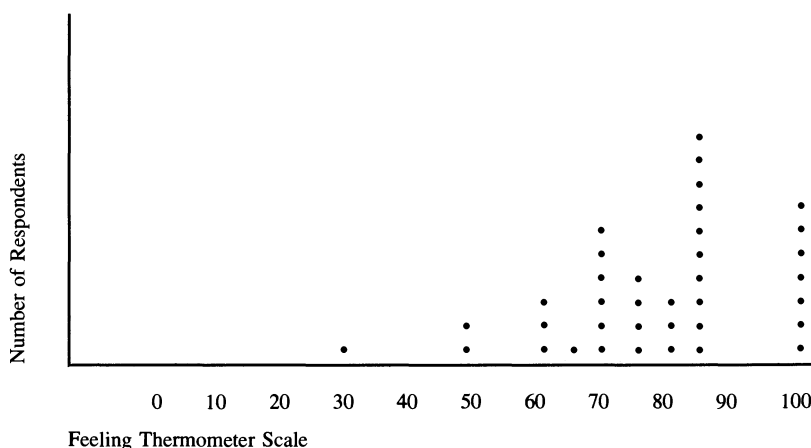
The dependent variables, attitudes toward the United Nations, have been measured by asking the respondents to indicate their evaluations of the organization on a feeling thermometer type scale modeled after the one used by the Michigan Survey Research Center.⁵ The distribution of the thirty-seven respondents' attitudes is given in Table 1. Against the maximum of 100 on the feeling thermometer scale, the mean

³The effects of non-national roles on attitudes are discussed by Chadwick Alger, "Personal Contact in Intergovernmental Organizations," in *International Behavior: A Social-Psychological Analysis*, ed., Herbert C. Kelman (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965). Also, Herbert C. Kelman, "Changing Attitudes through International Activities," *Journal of Social Issues* (1962): 67-87. Both analyses are discussed in Peter Wolf, "International Organization and Attitude Change: A Reexamination of the Functionalist Approach," *International Organization* (Summer 1974): 352-53.

⁴Alger, "Personal Contact," p. 535. Alger's thesis of the effects of nonnational roles was empirically tested by Randolph Siverson, "Role and Perception in International Crisis: The Cases of Israeli and Egyptian Decision-Makers in National Capitals and the United Nations," *International Organization* 28 (Summer 1973): 329-45. The statistical analysis, however, suggested that role playing had little or no impact on the decision-makers. The discrepancy can be attributed to the conceptualization of role playing in Siverson's study. His "role players" are not engaged in any formal role in the operation of the United Nations, but remain exclusively national representatives.

⁵The feeling thermometer represents a scale ranging from zero (very cold, unfavorable feelings), via 50 (neither cold nor warm, indifferent), to 100 (very warm, favorable feelings). Intermediate intervals for the unfavorable feelings below the 50 mark are: 15 (quite cold), 30 (fairly cold), and 40 (slightly cold). Above the 50 mark, the favorable feelings are arranged in intervals: 60 (slightly warm), 70 (fairly warm), and 85 (quite warm). For a presentation and application of the feeling thermometer, see Herbert F. Weisberg and Jerrold G. Rusk, "Dimensions of Candidate Evaluation," *American Political Science*

Table 1: Attitudes toward the United Nations for a sample of United Nations diplomats



Mean = 77.8

Standard Deviation = 15.8

attitude score of 78 indicates a generally positive evaluation of the United Nations. Moreover, if the squared standard deviation (variance) is measured against a mathematical maximum variance in the data, representing maximum disagreement among the respondents⁶ the actual variance represents only 10 percent of the maximum variance. Thus, our respondents not only value the United Nations positively, but are also fairly homogeneous in their evaluations.⁷

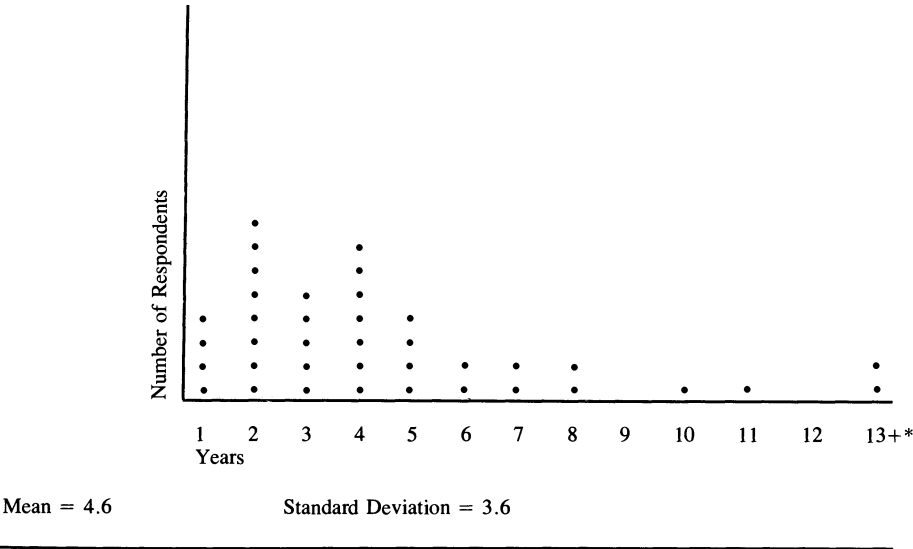
The independent variable describing the duration of the diplomatic assignment has been measured by the number of years the respondents have been working at the United Nations. The distribution of years of service of the thirty-seven participants can be seen in Table 2. The mean time of service of about four and one-half years indicates a slight increase over the average amount of experience of the diplomats in

Review 69 (December 1970): 1185; and Herbert F. Weisberg, and Jerrold G. Rusk, "Perceptions of Presidential Candidates: Implications for Electoral Change," in *Controversy in American Voting Behavior*, eds. Richard G. Niemi, and Herbert F. Weisberg (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Co., 1976). For our analysis, we said the following: I have something here that looks like a thermometer, which we call a feeling thermometer. This thermometer can be used to indicate a person's feelings toward a particular object or concept. Here's how it works: If you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward an object, then you place it at the 50 mark, the middle of the thermometer. If you have a warm feeling toward the object, or feel favorably toward it, you place it somewhere between 50 and 100 degrees, depending upon how warm your feeling is toward the object. On the other hand, if you don't feel very favorably toward it, that is, if you don't care too much for it, you would place it somewhere between 0 and 50 degrees. Our first object to be rated is the United Nations. Where would you place the United Nations on this thermometer?

*This maximum disagreement among the respondents occurs if 50 percent score zero and 50 percent score 100.

The reported level of homogeneity (the actual variance is not overwhelming) also implies that the tests of statistical significance later reported in this paper are not necessarily persuasive.

Table 2: Time of service for a sample of United Nations diplomats



*one respondent had 18 years of service

Gary Best’s study of 3.1 years.⁸ The difference could be attributed to the overall shorter length of membership of the countries included in Best’s study in 1960.⁹ The increase can be interpreted as a growth in personnel stability, an indicator which is relevant to the concept of institutionalization.¹⁰

The second independent variable, non-national role playing, considered formal roles in the operation of the United Nations.¹¹ In particular, we focused on chairmen, vice-chairmen and rapporteurs of the six main committees of the General Assembly during the last eight years.¹² Our study included five chairmen, seven vice-chairmen, and three rapporteurs.

A dummy variable, scoring zero for all respondents without office holding experience and one for those with such experience, was used for the format of the variable. We will refer to it in the remainder of the paper as non-national role I.

⁸Best, “Diplomacy at the United Nations,” p. 75.

⁹Of all nations included in Best’s study (70), twenty-one had been admitted to the UN after December 1955 or later. None of these delegates could have had much more than four years of experience.

¹⁰The relationship between personnel stability and institutionalization is mentioned by Robert O. Keohane, “Institutionalization of the United Nations General Assembly,” *International Organization* (Autumn 1969): 870–77. Also, Nelson Polsby, “The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives,” *American Political Science Review* (March 1968): 145.

¹¹Alger also considered informal roles in his conceptualization, such as intellectual leaders, facilitators of agreements, and leaders of a group of nations. See, “Personal Contact,” p. 535.

¹²For a listing of all office holders in the last eight years, see *Annotated Preliminary List of Items to be Included in the Provisional Agenda of the Twenty-Ninth Session of the General Assembly*, Annex 2; and *General Assembly of the United Nations XXIX Session* (Public Information Inquiries Unit, United Nations, September 1974).

The literature dealing with elected offices at the United Nations differentiates between their actual and potential significance.¹³ The office of the rapporteur, for example, is considered to be less significant than the office of a committee chairman. Consequently, the office of the rapporteur conceivably involves less strong role expectations than those attached to that of committee chairman. The latter is a more salient figure and has more responsibilities, and thus is also more vulnerable to criticism regarding his performance in office. One could assume a corresponding differential impact on attitudes, i.e., a more positive evaluation with higher level formal roles.

Several scales have been designed to ascertain the relative weights of the offices.¹⁴ Using Gregg's numerical scale as a guideline, we designed a variable with the following weights:

Chairman	= 3
Vice-Chairman	= 2
Rapporteur	= 1
No office	= 0

This second role variable will be referred to as non national role II.

In order to ascertain different degrees of expectations associated with various offices, we also raised the question of whether some offices might not belong in similar categories of associated expectations. In other words, rather than scaling each individual office as in non-national role II, we designed two additional dummy variables which group offices. The new variables, which we labeled D III and D IV are scored as follows:

D III	= 0 for all non-role respondents + rapporteurs
	= 1 for all vice-chairmen + chairmen
D IV	= 0 for all non-role respondents + rapporteurs + vice-chairmen
	= 1 for all chairmen

The respondents for the analysis were selected from the personnel in the permanent missions at the United Nations.¹⁵ The response rate was about 50 percent. A proportional stratified sample was designed in order to assure equitable geographical balance.¹⁶ Table 3 gives the geographical distribution of the respon-

¹³See, e.g., Thomas Volgy and Jon E. Quistgard, "Correlates of Organizational Rewards at the United Nations: An Analysis of Environmental and Legislative Variables," *International Organization* 28 (Spring 1974): 186.

¹⁴Marshall Singer and Barton Sensing III, "Elections Within the United Nations: An Experimental Study Utilizing Statistical Analysis," *International Organization* 17 (Autumn 1963): 906-907; they divide the office into two groups, important and other. Robert Gregg, "The Latin-American Bloc in United Nations Elections," *Social Science Quarterly* 46 (September 1965): 149-54, uses a numerical scale for eight offices he included in his study.

¹⁵United Nations, *Permanent Missions to the United Nations* (New York: August 1974).

¹⁶The rationale for geographical stratification was based on the assumption that a major source of sampling error would come from a neglect of "between" strata differences rather than from "within" strata differences.

Table 3: Respondents by geographical distribution

<i>Caucusing group</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Non-role</i>
Soviet	0	2
Africa	2	4
Commonwealth	2	1
Latin America	4	3
Asia	4	4
Western Europe	1	5
Arab	1	1
Non-Bloc	1	2
	15	22

dents. Random samples within strata were complemented by the universe of role players which could be identified.¹⁷ A statistical comparison of the geographical distribution of the respondents with that of the entire universe of UN diplomats indicated that the sample is representative.¹⁸

Personal interviews with the diplomats at their respective permanent missions secured the data for the analysis.

Results

Table 4 presents the independent effects of the respective participation variables. Contrary to the anticipated relationship, the coefficients for the variable measuring the length of service indicate that mere presence at the United Nations does not necessarily lead to an increased positive evaluation of it. It lends support to those arguments stressing the presence of the specific characteristics of social interaction other than mere face to face interaction which may influence attitudes.¹⁹

Of the variables representing the non-national roles of the respondents, only non-national Role II and D III show the anticipated effects in the evaluation of the United Nations. Although the correlation coefficients indicate that the strength of the relationship is not overwhelming, nevertheless they are generally supportive of the role-influence hypothesis. The data furthermore indicate that a crude either/or role conceptualization, as reflected in non-national role I, might be insufficient to account for the seemingly much more complex role structures.

Comparing the three variables which attempt to weigh the offices either individually (non-national role II) or in groups (D III and D IV), we find evidence that the offices of the vice-chairman and chairman might be the most important in influencing positive evaluations. This observation can be inferred from the fact that

¹⁷The universe of role players was identified through cross-reference of past office holding and present availability at the permanent missions.

¹⁸The chi-square test for the differences between the two groups indicated no significant difference at the .05 level of confidence ($X^2 = 9.16$, with 7 degrees of freedom).

¹⁹The absence of longitudinal data, however, should remind us that there is a possibility that only delegates who already have a highly positive attitude toward the organization get elected to the non-national roles.

Table 4: Correlations and regression coefficients of time of service and non-national role variables with United Nations attitudes

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Correlation coefficient</i>	<i>Regression coefficient</i>	<i>Standard error</i>
Time of Service	.14	.63	.72
Non-national Role I	.26	8.32	5.18
Non-national Role II	.36*	4.98*	2.15
D III	.42*	13.88*	5.12
D IV	.27	12.51	7.42

*statistically significant at the .05 level

the variable which combined both offices into one group maximizes the role effect on the evaluations of the United Nations. In practical terms, the regression coefficient of 15 for that variable implies the nature of the relationship: if a respondent can be identified as chairman or vice-chairman, he will generally have a score on the thermometer of 15 points higher than the non-role respondents. Thus, it confirms the role-influence hypothesis.

Since the role-influence is maximized through the exclusion of the rapporteurs from the formal offices considered, the argument that the office of the rapporteur involves less salient and prominent role expectations appears to be at least somewhat substantiated by the data, though the number of the rapporteur respondents suggests that all inferences regarding this role are highly speculative.

Furthermore, the lower and insignificant correlation and regression coefficients of D IV in comparison also indicate that the offices of the vice-chairman and chairman both share similar categories of role expectations. This interpretation, however, is also open to further investigation.

A final comment concerns the potential significance of the relationship between the independent variables in this analysis: time of service and non-national role. Although this analysis established that the duration of a diplomatic assignment does not increase the positive evaluation of the United Nations, the data indicate that the time of service makes a difference in who shall be selected for a formal role in the operation of the United Nations. The significant correlation of $r = .32$ between time of service and non-national role II suggests perhaps the rudiments of a seniority system within the organization, although seniority by no means automatically leads to office holding.²⁰

The research reported here is relevant to the concept of institutionalization. In the past, this concept has been linked to attitudinal data.²¹ If attitudinal data can be

²⁰In an earlier analysis, Keohane also found that length of service did not guarantee election to office. His observation, however, led him to conclude that "few signs of seniority are visible." In contrast, our comment about seniority not leading automatically to office holding implies only that seniority cannot be considered a sufficient condition. Since we do find an empirical relationship between length of service and office holding, we do not reject the idea that this might suggest the rudiments of a seniority system. For Keohane's findings, see "Institutionalization of the General Assembly," pp. 883-884.

²¹See, e.g., Keohane, "Institutionalization of the General Assembly," and Polsby "The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives." Also, Samuel Huntington, "Political Development and Political Decay," *World Politics* (April 1965): 386-430.

interpreted as indicators of institutionalization, the same interpretation would also be suitable for those factors affecting attitudes. The empirical evidence that personal involvement in an international organization might strengthen the diffuse support for the organization suggests that non-national roles can be considered as factors facilitating the institutionalization of the United Nations. By contrast, the lack of association between the respondents' time of service at the organization and their evaluation of it can be interpreted as suggesting that institutionalization via attitude change is not automatically a function of experience within the organization. Both observations indicate the applicability of the personal involvement focus in the analysis of factors contributing to the growth and development of international organizations.