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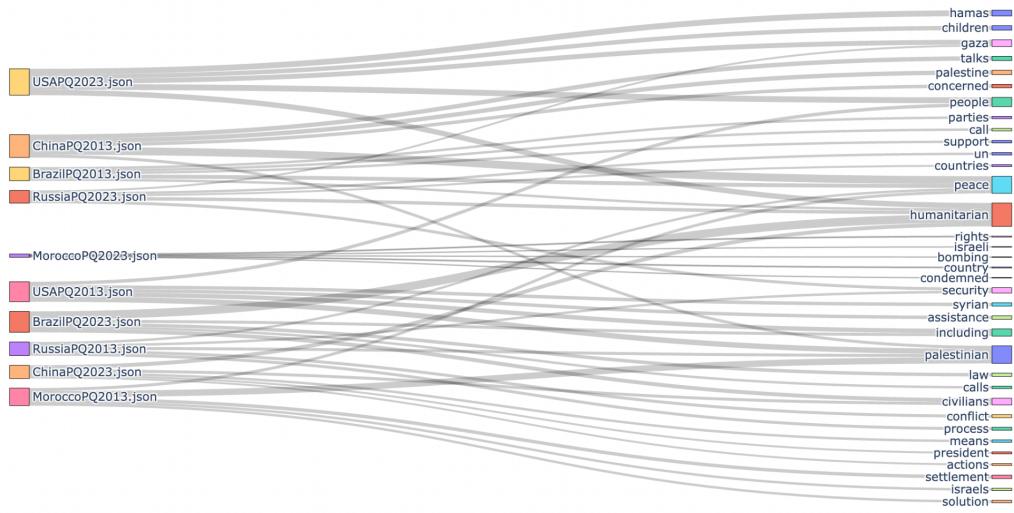
Prof. Rachlin

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Palestext.py: An Analysis of Country Opinion on the “Palestine Question”

For this project, I wanted to analyze country opinions on the situation in Palestine. This was prompted by discussions in other classes that I am taking as a part International Affairs major, as well as the recent events of October 7th and the ongoing crisis and debates that resulted. I wanted to see what kinds of things that large countries were saying on the situation and the stances that each country took as well as the opinions of smaller players with less influence on international law, and if these opinions had changed over the last decade or so. Most specifically, I was curious as to what statements countries were making at the sessions of the United Nations on the topic of the “Palestine Question”, as it is referred to in official UN meeting summaries.

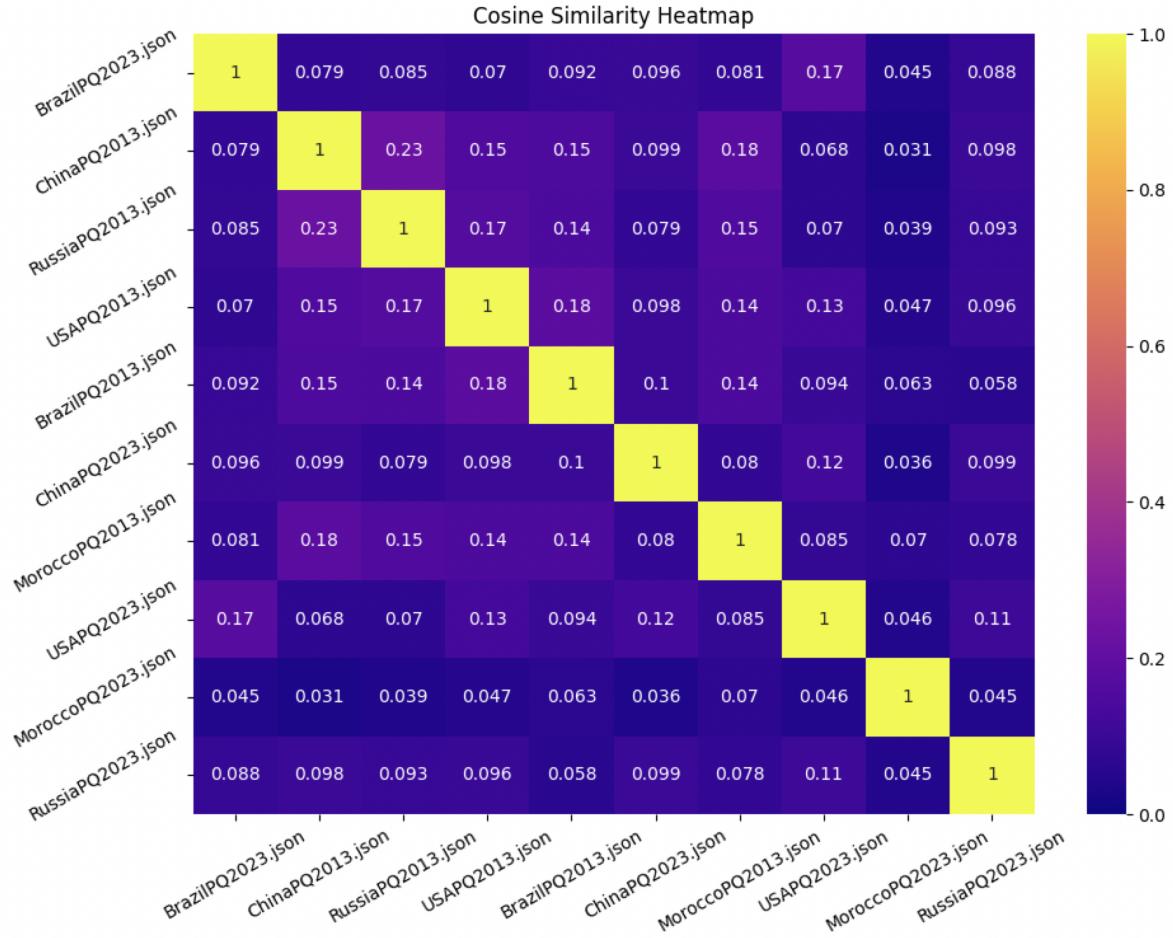
For the countries, I chose 5 separate countries and took statements addressed at the United Nations General Assembly sessions from the calendar year 2013 for adequate spacing between speeches, and another large statement in sessions that had occurred since October 7th, 2023. The countries that I chose were very purposeful. The United States, China, and Russia were deliberate choices for many reasons, the primary one being that they all reside on the UN Security Council as permanent members with abilities to veto any resolutions passed by the UN General Assembly. Thus, these nations have final decision making and ultimate power over the realization of any UN resolutions and resulting impacts. Also, these nations are some of the three largest poles in which power tends to congregate around today, meaning that their words have lots of influence on what the rest of the world follows. Therefore, they were critical to analyze in light of this situation. Brazil was chosen as an increasingly important representation of the global south at the United Nations, a political grouping that roughly includes the state of Palestine (due to the majority of its supporters at the international level being “Global South” states). Morocco was chosen as they are an involved member of the Arab world, in which Palestine and Israel exist within, and are a representation of smaller importance and influence at the UN, hopefully capturing a relative minority viewpoint (in the general context of International Law).



The first visualization used was a Sankey diagram. This took the top 5 most common words in each speech for the input data and the results were quite typical but relatively enlightening as well. The majority of statements tended to focus on the humanitarian and peace issues, seen in the largest two target values being “humanitarian” and “peace”, which is typical due to the UN’s function as a center for conflict resolution. The other most common terms referred to people and general calls to put people at the center of the conflict. Particularly interesting in this graph is the term “Hamas” is referenced in the top5 by one speech, which is the USA in 2023, meaning not many other countries focused as heavily on the subject of Hamas as the USA, a sign of allegiance to the Israeli position in the current conflict.



The next visualization used was a wordcloud to visualize in a different way the effects seen in the Sankey diagram. This used the entire speeches instead of just the top 5 words, therefore showing a much larger range of words to compare upon, showing further similarities between speeches. An interesting insight with this word cloud is high focus on Palestinians in every single speech except for the United States in 2023, which chose to reference Hamas the most, and theoretically in place of “Palestinians” at large, again showing the US’s current divergence in position and intentions of speech in comparison to most other nations.



The last visualization that was utilized was a Cosine Similarity Heatmap. This allowed for comparison of the speeches at large, giving insight into which countries had similar things to say. While the majority of scores were relatively low, there were a few interesting insights from the graph itself. First, Russia and China in 2013 had the highest Cosine similarity score at 0.23, meaning their statements were most alike at that point in time. However, in 2023 the score between both nations dropped to 0.099, which is due to China's refusal to take sides in the current conflict while Russia has joined the rest of the global south in outright demanding a ceasefire. Also interesting is the relative similarity of speech between Brazil and the United States in both 2013 and 2023, even though the United States has given full support to Israel and Brazil to Palestine/a ceasefire. This shows that while both nations have different conclusions, both nations cite similar reasons and raise similar questions, they have opposite lines of logic.

Overall, this project was very insightful. There is a lot that could be done to improve the analysis, such as a complex and tailored sentiment function that can differentiate each position

based on the ways that each country speaks and the specific resolutions they come to. Potential applications for an algorithm at the United Nations could be quite beneficial for quickly analyzing sets of statements to find continuities and break through the lines of bias, which could be very effective in speeding up resolution debates and save lives in conflicts all around the world.

The data was extracted and put into my own json files, which exist within the folder and GitHub repo. They were taken from various UN Security Council meetings and statements to the press, word for word.

Data Sources:

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Greenfield, L. T. (2023, November 15). *Explanation of vote by ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield on a Malta ... United States Mission to the United Nations.*
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