Bloc Politics at the UN: How Other States Behave When the United States and China–Russia Disagree

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China and Russia have been progressively deepening their partnership in global governance to achieve common goals. However, do other states share their policy positions? Existing scholarship addresses the dyadic affinity among major powers and the growing importance of rising power groups, but it does not examine how the policy positions of other states align with those of the United States and its major rivals: China and Russia. To investigate how states align with the positions of these major powers, we examine voting patterns in the UN General Assembly over a 30-year period from 1991 to 2020. By utilizing simple t-tests and estimating both OLS and LOGIT models ($N = 219{,}625$), we find that the Sino–Russian positions enjoy much broader global support than those of the United States. Additionally, states that belong to the Group of 77 (G-77) and soft-balancing institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) are more likely to align with China and Russia than states that do not belong to these groups. Conversely, members of NATO are more likely to side with the United States than their non-NATO counterparts. Further, the findings suggest that the effect of states' membership in soft-balancing institutions on their propensity to align with China and Russia has steadily increased over time. Meanwhile, the effect of states' membership in NATO on their likelihood to align with the United States lacks a clear temporal trajectory.

La Chine et la Russie ont peu à peu renforcé leur partenariat en matière de gouvernance mondiale pour atteindre des objectifs communs. Néanmoins, les autres États partagent-ils leurs positions politiques ? Les travaux de recherche existants traitent de l'affinité dyadique chez les principales puissances et l'importance croissante des groupes de pouvoir émergents, mais ils ne s'intéressent pas à l'alignement des positions politiques des autres États avec celles des États-Unis et de ses principaux rivaux : la Chine et la Russie. Pour analyser l'alignement des États avec les positions de ces puissances majeures, nous examinons les schémas de vote lors des assemblées générales de l'ONU sur une période de 30 ans, de 1991 à 2020. En utilisant de simples tests t et des estimations à partir de modèles OLS et LOGIT (N = 219,625), nous observons que les positions sino-russes rencontrent un soutien bien plus important au niveau mondial que celles des États-Unis. De plus, les États appartenant au Groupe des 77 (G-77) et les institutions de ≪ soft balancing ≫ (rééquilibrage en douceur) comme l'Organisation de coopération de Shanghai et les BRICS (Brésil, Russie, Inde, Chine, Afrique du Sud) ont plus de chances de s'aligner sur la Chine et la Russie que les États qui n'appartiennent pas à ces groupes. À l'inverse, les membres de l'OTAN se positionneront plus probablement du côté des États-Unis que leurs homologues non-membres. En outre, les résultats indiquent que l'effet de l'appartenance d'un État à des institutions de soft balancing sur sa propension à s'aligner avec la Chine et la Russie ne cesse de s'accroître au fil du temps. Cependant, l'effet de l'appartenance d'un État à l'OTAN sur sa probabilité de s'aligner sur les États-Unis n'a pas de trajectoire temporelle claire.

China y Rusia han ido profundizando, de manera progresiva, su asociación dentro del marco de la gobernanza global con el fin de lograr objetivos comunes. Sin embargo, ¿existen otros Estados que comparten sus posiciones políticas? La bibliografía académica existente aborda la afinidad diádica entre las principales potencias, así como la creciente importancia de los grupos de poder que están en ascenso, pero no estudia cómo se alinean las posiciones políticas de otros Estados con las de los Estados Unidos y sus principales rivales: China y Rusia. Estudiamos, con el propósito de investigar cómo se alinean los Estados con las posiciones de estas grandes potencias, los patrones de votación en la Asamblea General de la ONU durante un período de 30 años, desde 1991 hasta 2020. Concluimos, a través del uso de pruebas t simples y de estimaciones mediante los modelos OLS (Modelo de mínimos cuadrados ordinarios) y LOGIT (N = 219.625), que las posiciones sino-rusas disfrutan de un apoyo global mucho más amplio que las de los Estados Unidos. Además, los Estados que pertenecen al Grupo de los 77 (G-77) y las instituciones de ≪equilibrio blando≫ *(soft balancing)* tales como la Organización de Cooperación de Shanghái y los BRICS (Brasil, Rusia, India, China, Sudáfrica) tienen más probabilidades de alinearse con China y Rusia que los Estados que no pertenecen a estos grupos. Por el contrario, resulta más probable que los miembros de la OTAN se pongan del lado de los Estados Unidos que sus homólogos no pertenecientes a la OTAN. Además, las conclusiones sugieren que el efecto que ejerce la pertenencia a instituciones de equilibrio blando por parte de los Estados con relación a su propensión a alinearse con

China y Rusia ha ido aumentando constantemente con el tiempo. Al mismo tiempo, el efecto que ejerce la membresía por parte de los Estados en la OTAN sobre la probabilidad de que estos se alineen con los Estados Unidos carece de una trayectoria temporal clara.

The sides reaffirmed their intention to strengthen foreign policy coordination, pursue true multilateralism, strengthen cooperation on multilateral platforms, defend common interests, support the international and regional balance of power, and improve global governance. (. . .) The sides support the deepened strategic partnership within BRICS.

Excerpt from the Joint Statement by China and Russia on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development (President of Russia 2022).

Introduction

The tensions between China, Russia, and the United States have been central to contemporary debates in the field of international relations (IR) (e.g., Yoder 2022). In 1997, China and Russia jointly declared they would "promote the multipolarization of the world and the establishment of a new international order," where "no country should seek hegemony" or "monopolize international affairs" (Yeltsin and Jiang 1997). Subsequently, they have intensified their cooperation by upgrading and expanding their partnership. Scholars have observed the dramatic deepening of China and Russia's political, economic, and military ties since the early 2000s (e.g., Blank 2020). In 2022, China and Russia decided to enhance their alignment in foreign and security policies and pursue a "no limits" relationship (NDTV 2022). Additionally, they have collaborated in various institutions such as Russia–India–China (RIC), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and Brazil–Russia–India–China–South Africa (BRICS), and jointly challenged US policy positions in global governance.[1]

As a result, the United States is facing a stronger Sino–Russian partnership that remains committed to creating a more multipolar and less US-centric system of global governance. Contemporary US foreign policy directly experienced the realities of a multipolar system while attempting to isolate Russia following its invasion of Ukraine. While the Biden administration mobilized Western allies to impose sanctions on Russia, major "new powers" such as China, India, and South Africa did not vote to condemn Russia in the UN and have continued to cooperate with Russia both bilaterally and through BRICS. As of June 2023, China has not engaged directly in the war in Ukraine, despite recent speculation of China's intention to provide lethal military equipment to Russia (Berry 2023).

Unlike the Trump administration, which pursued more isolationist "America First" policies, the current Biden administration promotes global leadership and democracy. US officials are explicit that their engagement in Ukraine is about saving the liberal world order (Kaonga 2022). The ongoing war highlighted the relevance of the NATO alliance. As President Biden (2022) observed, "Russia sought the Finlandization of NATO, but instead it has promoted the NATOization of Finland."

Unsurprisingly, with increasing bloc behavior among major powers, discussions of "great power competition," and the "new Cold War" have become common (e.g., Ashford 2021; Feng 2022). Yet, while the focus of these debates is predominantly on major powers and their activities in specific issue areas, such as finance and security, our understanding of the broader dynamic of the international community in this context remains underdeveloped. Beyond examining the China–Russia partnership with respect to the situation in Ukraine, recent literature has predominantly focused on these two states as dissatisfied actors in global economic governance (see page 4). Their discontent has driven them to participate in the formation of anti-hegemonic coalitions and engage in competitive institutional statecraft, aiming to challenge US hegemony. However, it is unclear whether disagreements between the United States and China and Russia represent a broader divergence of priorities/opinions within the international community and whether this, in turn, can lead to deeper cleavages in global governance.

This article addresses this gap by examining how states align with the policy positions of the United States, China, and Russia in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and asks: *When China and Russia share a policy position that is contrary to the United States', whose stance is favored by other states?* To answer this question, we analyze voting records of all UNGA members on resolutions that were voted upon between 1991 and 2020 and examine how their voting patterns and affinities change over time.

The UNGA as an institution is an important target for scholarly investigation for several reasons. First, it is a unique forum for multilateral discussions because it includes all member states and addresses a wide range of international issues. Second, examining UNGA voting patterns allows for analyzing many data points over a long period of time, which empirically focuses research on the tensions in the United States' relationship with China and Russia. Finally, although UNGA resolutions are non-binding, the developments in the UNGA are an indicator of trends in international relations because it is "where members are engaged in positioning—among one another, for leadership, and for ideas" (Laatikainen 2020).

Conceptually, this article places the academic debate on the China–Russia–United States dynamic within the institutional context of the UN. Although reforming the UN represents a major target of China and Russia's joint activities, extant literature has largely neglected the examination of bloc behavior within the UN. While existing scholarship addresses dyadic affinity among major powers and the growing importance of rising power groups, it does not measure the alignment of other states with the major powers. This article further develops the concept of affinity communities (Pauls and Cramers 2017) by examining the voting behavior of states in both formal alliances and informal intergovernmental groups, which are increasingly important mediators of power shifts (Vabulas and Snidal 2020).

We find that overall, China and Russia enjoy a significantly greater global alignment with their policy positions than the United States. States that belong to G-77, SCO, and

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[1] Global governance is often defined as "the sum of many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and co-operative action taken" (Commission on Global Governance 1995, 4).

BRICS are more likely to vote in line with the Sino–Russian position than those states that are not affiliated with such institutions. The same is true for the states that are a part of SCO and BRICS outreach—SCO Plus and BRICS Plus. Conversely, states that are members of NATO are more likely to align with the United States' position than those that are not.

From a temporal perspective, the affinity of G-77 as well as SCO, BRICS, and their outreach states toward China–Russia positions increases over time. However, the affinity of NATO countries toward US positions lacks a clear temporal trajectory. These findings suggest a growing level of fragmentation along bloc lines within the UNGA, with states belonging to formal alliances demonstrating less bloc-oriented behavior than those in informal intergovernmental groups. The remainder of the article is organized as follows. The next section provides an overview of contemporary US–China–Russia relations and the alignment dynamics of UNGA policymaking. The "Research Design" section introduces the propositions and research design, and the "Results and Discussion" section presents and discusses the results. The final section concludes and offers implications for future research.

Extant Scholarship

Conceptually, our research question is pertinent to two main fields of scholarship: (1) the great power competition between the United States and China–Russia and (2) the dynamics of bloc politics within the UN. First, we review existing works on the Sino–Russian partnership and the challenges it presents to the United States. Second, we examine the literature on states' voting patterns and alignments in the UNGA. Lastly, we identify the gap in current scholarship that this article seeks to fill.

The United States and China–Russia: Toward Greater Fragmentation of Global Governance?

The collapse of the Soviet Union precipitated a unipolar system, with the United States commanding most of the world's military and economic resources and wielding an unprecedented influence in the global order. However, over the past two decades, globalization and the economic success of emerging economies have shifted the balance so that power is distributed in a multipolar fashion (Nye 2004). In this context, China and Russia have systematically collaborated on curbing US hegemony since 1997 when they adopted the *Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Establishment of a new International Order*. In the declaration, the two states expressed their commitment to seeking a new order that respects sovereignty and the right of every country to independently choose its own development path (Yeltsin and Jiang 1997).

Following 25 years of extensive collaboration, China and Russia issued a bolstered Joint Statement in 2022 (President of Russia 2022). They declared that their friendship did not have any limits, explicitly criticized attempts at hegemony, unilateralism, and the imposition of democratic standards on other countries. The Joint Statement advocated for the advancement of international development as the core principle of the modern international system.

These endeavors toward multipolarity are a part of a larger debate on whether established powers can accommodate rising non-Western powers or if power shifts are leading to greater fragmentation of global governance.[2] Some schol-ars have argued that existing structures can assimilate rising powers—states that have material capabilities to wield influence and political will to do so (Kim 2020)—because these powers have benefited from the Western-centered liberal order, its institutions, rules, and practices. Thus, their relationship with the hegemon evolves into one of "co-existence"—rising powers engage in international policy coordination to ensure that the new global order is pluralistic with a more diverse leadership (De Coning et al. 2014). Over time, this accommodation and co-existence would lead to a growing convergence of interests between established and new powers (see also Bearce and Bondanella 2007).

Other scholars have been more skeptical about the implications of the rise of non-Western powers, foreseeing an increase in the fragmentation of global governance. In general, the majority of great power competition since the end of the Cold War has not occurred through military buildups and traditional alliances but through "soft balancing," with states leveraging international institutions, economic statecraft, and diplomatic arrangements (see also Datta 2009, 4–5; Pape 2005). Russia and China's soft balancing has been both bilateral through their strategic partnership with one another and multilateral via their engagement in soft-balancing institutions such as SCO and BRICS (Bratersky and Kutyrev 2019; Yoder 2022). It is widely argued that the primary motivations for closer cooperation between China and Russia in the twenty-first century stem from the United States' declining relative power and the perceived escalation of threats from the United States, particularly, between 2012 and 2017 (Radin et al. 2021).

Russia's systematic approach to anti-hegemonic coalition building post-Cold War has its roots in Yevgeny Primakov's foreign policy leadership in the 1990s. During this time, Russia started pursuing deeper cooperation with China to strengthen its Eurasian sphere of influence and launched strategic partnerships in Latin America and Africa (Ambrosio 2005). More recently, concerns have emerged about anti-hegemonic coalitions leading to fragmented global governance, with non-Western powers establishing their own unique rules, institutions, and currencies of power (Stuenkel 2020). China and Russia's dissatisfaction with the role of the United States in the global financial crisis, coupled with their frustration with the slow pace of international institutional reforms, have prompted these states to establish new financial governance arrangements in which they play leading roles (Roberts et al. 2018). The successful launch of the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the exercise of BRICS' collective financial statecraft have raised questions about the possible emergence of a parallel system of governance not only in the financial context but also more broadly.

The system-wide importance of the China–Russia partnership has led scholars to rethink the application of existing IR theories in explaining the interactions between these two powers (Yoder 2022). While some suggest that their partnership is alliance-like and that it offers a new development-centered form of cooperation, others question its robustness and future longevity (Moore 2022). Finally, scholars are asking if there is "a new Cold War" given the "US-China-Russia strategic triangle" and its contentious dynamics (Ali 2022; Feng 2022). While discussions about this triangular relation-

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[2]Fragmentation of global governance entails the emergence of a patchwork of international institutions that are different in their character, their constituencies, their spatial scope, and their subject matter (Biermann et al. 2009, 16). For accommodation-focused analysis, see Paul (2016). Due to its membership in rising power coalitions such as BRICS, Russia is often analyzed under the category of rising powers and their efforts to reform global governance.

ship spark debates regarding new bloc behavior, recent research suggests that international polarity has diminished in significance compared to the past two centuries. This shift is attributed to the diffusion of power and the capability of regional powers and small states to navigate rivalries and avoid being co-opted by the major powers (Græger et al. 2022).

Despite the proliferation of literature on the US–Russia–China triangle, extant scholarship does not empirically show whether these tensions contribute to broader realignments in the UN or their implications for other UN members. Yet, contemporary literature provides important insights about the cleavages in the UN, the rise of new powers and their voting behavior, as well as the relevance of affinity groups.

Bloc Politics at the UN: Alignments in the UNGA

Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, as Alker (1964, 654–5) argued, East–West cleavages "dominate(d) most issues before the United Nations, with the exception of budgetary concerns. Certain trade, foreign aid, and/or military relationships—that is, with either the United States or Soviet Union—serve as a bellwether of where states stand in relation to the two blocs." In the post-Cold War world, Kim and Russett (1996, 629) observed new alignments (with most of Eastern Europe now voting with rather than against West European positions), the increasing division between richer and poorer nations, and the new prominence of long-term North–South issues. Pauls and Cranmer (2017, 438) similarly argued that the divide between developed and undeveloped countries was a "persistent pattern in international position taking, one broken only occasionally when the rest of the world stands against the United States."

In his study "Resisting the Lonely Superpower" examining UNGA voting in the 1990s, Voeten (2004, 729) argued that the United States took a "unilateralist turn" and that "widespread foreign backing for the U.S. position on issues of global concern has become somewhat of a rarity over the course of the post-Cold War period." Binder and Payton's (2022) analysis of UNGA voting data between 1992 and 2011 supports this argument. It found that G7 states displayed a high level of voting cohesion, but that there was a widening gap between the United States, consistently voting alongside Canada, a few small island states, and Israel, and the remaining G7 members aligning with the majority of UN member states. Recent research examined voting alignment between the United States and the BRICS group during the period of 2010–2020. It found that prior to 2017, Russia demonstrated the highest frequency of voting alignment with the US (over 30 percent of the time), while the instances in which China voted with the United States reached a record low in 2010, dropping from 30 percent in 2018 to 19 percent in 2020 (Tan et al. 2021).

The strengthening of the Russia–China partnership aligns with the growing bloc behavior of the BRICS countries. Ferdinand (2014) demonstrated a significant and increasing level of cohesion among the BRICS countries when examining their UNGA voting behavior btween 1974 and 2011. Binder and Payton's (2022) analysis of rising powers' UNGA votes between 1992 and 2011 found notable convergence among rising powers across issues, suggesting the formation of a bloc in opposition to established powers. However, Hooijmaaijers and Keukeleire's (2016) study of the BRICS countries' voting behavior in the UNGA between 2006 and 2014 did not find any systematic increase in voting cohesion since the start of the group's consultations in 2006. Dijkhuizen and Onderco (2019) pointed out that not a single resolution within the UNGA had been sponsored

by every member of the BRICS. Scholars have attributed the growing convergence among the BRICS countries and their dissatisfaction with the US-led order to various factors. These include the rising powers' economic growth and quest for status, the United States' pursuit of unilateral security policies, regime change initiatives, and the promotion of democratic governance, which threatens the political survival of autocratic leaders (e.g., Feng 2022).

That said, Thompson et al. (2021) argued that UNGA voting between 1946 and 2015 exhibited a wide distribution of voting preferences, and did not indicate any special affinity toward either the United States or Russia. At the same time, China has leveraged its diplomatic and economic ties with the G-77 group to influence its members' voting decisions within the UNGA (Takahashi 2021). Finally, critics of UNGA voting-based scholarship highlight that UNGA resolutions are nonbinding and that major powers and strategic rivals provide financial aid to influence poor countries' votes and reshape norms (Brazys and Dukalskis 2017; Thompson et al. (2021).

Overall, while the growing China–Russia–US literature suggests the renewal of Cold War-like tensions, quantitative studies of group politics in the UNGA provide conflicting evidence as to which cleavages are the most salient. Moreover, they do not investigate the China–Russia–US triangle with respect to the policy preferences of other states. This, in turn, creates a lack of understanding of how most states behave when the United States finds itself in a policy disagreement with China and Russia.

Analytical Framework

Analyzing bloc politics, where some states consistently vote as a unit on all or particular kinds of issues, entails examining the major cleavages among states (Ball 1951). In the context of this study, it involves understanding the "affinity" between states—or the similarity of their inferred policy preferences (see also Signorino and Ritter 1999). We investigate the composition of the United States' and China–Russia's "affinity communities"—communities in which states articulate similar policy preferences to them through their voting behavior (Pauls and Cranmer 2017). Co-voting communities provide the basis for coalition building and higher levels of cooperation while also limiting states' interactions. They signal within-group cooperation and have reputation effects, and they not only reflect national positions but might drive important international outcomes (ibid.). In the China–Russia–US case, investigating states' affinities grounds current great power competition debates in empirical data and broadens the discussion to include the international community.

Previous studies have identified the United States as a relative outlier in the UNGA, referred to as a "lonely superpower" during the post-Cold War era (Voeten 2004, 47). It also belongs to a small cluster of co-voting states (Pauls and Cranmer 2017). Thus, we would not anticipate the United States to have a large affinity group, and we would anticipate that China and Russia share voting preferences with a greater number of UN members. China and Russia have been actively engaged in agenda-setting in the UNGA and mobilizing other states around their interests. China's growing policy entrepreneurship in the UNGA is a case in point (Oertel 2015). Between 2000 and 2020, China was the greatest sponsor of UNGA resolutions,[3] and most of the resolu-

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[3]Per authors' calculation, between the years 2000 and 2020, China sponsored or co-sponsored 27 percent of all UNGA resolutions. In contrast, Russia sponsored or co-sponsored 15 percent of all resolutions, while the United States spon-

tions it sponsored were passed uncontested (Taskinen 2020, 39). Russia has also been strategically building support for its positions in the UNGA. This includes its efforts to reengage and influence the critical voting bloc of forty-nine sub-Saharan states (van Uden 2020).

In terms of other factors that determine voting alignments in the UNGA, previous research suggests that economic development influences policy preferences and that poor countries have strongly held interests that clash with US objectives (Carter and Stone 2015). Within the UN system, the principal negotiating coalition of developing countries is the G-77, which has demonstrated solidarity but also increased internal tensions over the past decades (Vihma et al. 2012). Unlike the United States and Russia, China is listed on the G-77 (2022) website as a member. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (2021) does not consider China to be a G-77 member but supports the group's efforts to promote the establishment of a new international economic order and the socioeconomic development of developing countries (see also Takahashi 2021).

As previously discussed, China and Russia have been strengthening their cooperation within regional and transregional institutions, especially SCO and BRICS. They have embarked on extensive policy coordination spanning political, economic, and security issues and have used these institutions to promote their policy agendas and soft balance the United States (Bratersky and Kutyerev 2019). While Russia initially perceived the RIC triangle as the best counterbalance to the United States, RIC cooperation was slow to develop. Nonetheless, Russia and China have shaped the SCO, which was co-founded in 2001 with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. India and Pakistan joined in 2017. SCO has also created a larger community of observers and dialogue partners, which we call "SCO Plus."[4] In addition to increasing policy coordination within SCO, Russia and China launched the BRIC group with India and Brazil in 2009. South Africa joined in late 2010. In a follow-up to the 2022 BRICS Summit, the BRICS group engaged thirteen "BRICS Plus"[5] countries that seek to put development front and center on the international cooperation agenda.

Extant scholarship also identifies the existence of alliances as an important factor: it expects greater voting commonalities among allies. Whereas China has a tradition of not engaging in alliances (except for its relationship with North Korea), Russia has cultivated allied relations through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the United States has done so through NATO. As Istomin (2021, 31) argues, the CSTO member states are more likely than other countries to support Russia in international organizations, including the UNGA, and would not criticize Russia when their position on contentious issues differs from the Russian position. US allies have also been found to demonstrate a greater affinity toward the US position (Pauls and Cranmer 2017). However, during Donald Trump's presidency, the members of NATO voted in line with the United States less often, particularly on topics regarding the Middle East (Mosler and Potrafke 2020).

Given these arguments, we can hypothesize that states that have been a part of G-77, SCO, SCO Plus, BRICS, and BRICS Plus are more likely to vote in line with the positions of China and Russia and demonstrate less affinity with US positions over time. On the other hand, NATO states are more likely to vote with the United States, but this co-voting weakens over time.

Research Design

To test these hypotheses, we utilize data on all roll-call votes within the UNGA (Voeten et al. 2022) that covers all resolutions on which roll-call votes were taken. Using this panel-level data, we analyze resolutions that were voted upon between the years 1991 and 2020. This period was chosen because it captures the post-Cold War era and provides three decades of data. To investigate the temporal changes within voting patterns, we also organize the data into six distinct 5-year periods: (1) 1991–1995; (2) 1996–2000; (3) 2001–2005; (4) 2006–2010; (5) 2011–2015; and (6) 2016–2020. Since we are interested in looking only at resolutions where the US position differed from that of China and Russia, a subset of resolutions was excluded from the analysis. We exclude all resolutions where: (1) the United States did not vote or abstained from voting; and (2) either China's vote or Russia's vote was identical to the vote cast by the United States. The resulting panel-level data consists of 219,625 individual observations and 1,513 unique resolutions.

Dependent Variable: Measure of Agreement with United States Versus China–Russia (AgreeUS)

The dependent variable, AgreeUS, measures states' alignment between policy positions of the United States on the one hand and the positions of China and Russia on the other. It is operationalized to capture the alignment of individual states on individual UNGA resolutions. Specifically, this dummy variable is coded as "0" if the state voted in line with the China–Russia position or "1" if the state voted in line with the position of the United States.

Independent Variables

To investigate the states' heterogeneity of agreement with the United States versus China–Russia, we define several county-level variables. These dichotomous variables indicate individual states' membership in specific formal and informal alliances.[6] These variables are defined as follows: (1) G-77, (2) SCO, (3) SCO Plus, (4) BRICS, (5) BRICS Plus, and (5) NATO. They are coded either as "0" if the state does not belong to the respective group or "1" if the state belongs to the group.

Important Resolutions

Our dataset also includes a subset of "important" resolutions. Namely, these are the resolutions that the US Department of State includes in its annual report to Congress as important to the national interests of the United States. Thus, we categorize all UNGA resolutions as either (a) marked as important by the Department of State or (b) resolutions that did not receive such designation. Of the 1,513 resolutions

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sored or co-sponsored 14 percent of all resolutions. China and Russia shared (co)sponsorship in 7 percent of resolutions, China and the United States shared (co)sponsorship in 3 percent of all resolutions, and the United States and Russia shared (co)sponsorship in 4 percent of all resolutions. Finally, 2 percent of all resolutions included all three states as sponsors or co-sponsors.

[4]SCO Plus countries include Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, and Mongolia and dialogue partners Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey, and Sri Lanka.

[5]BRICS Plus countries that participated in the China-hosted High-level Dialogue on Global Development on June 24, 2022 are Algeria, Argentina, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Senegal, Uzbekistan, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Malaysia, and Thailand.

[6]Note that for the sake of simplicity and accessibility, we do not code these dichotomous variables as time-variant.
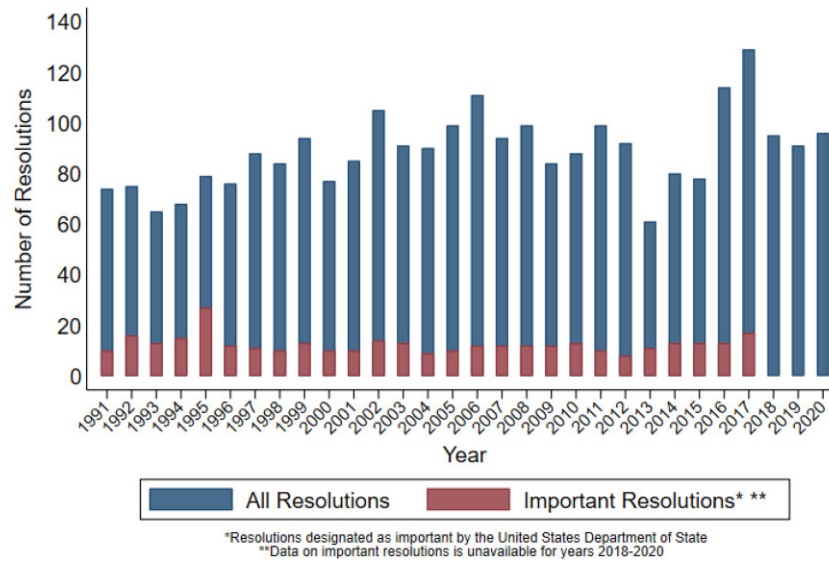
Figure 1. Distribution of all vs. important resolutions over time.

that we investigate, 211 (14 percent) are designated as important. Since the categorization of important resolutions is unavailable between 2018 and 2020, we have coded it as "missing" for those years. The distribution of important resolutions versus all remaining resolutions over time is illustrated in Figure 1.

Results and Discussion

Globally, there is a significantly greater level of alignment with the China–Russia positions than with the positions of the United States. On average, other states have sided with the US position only 14 percent of the time over the 30-year period (1991–2020). The US positions fare even less favorably among the G-77, SCO, SCO Plus, BRICS, and BRICS Plus states.

Utilizing simple *t*-tests, Table 1 reports the mean alignment of various country groups with the United States. Since the analysis is limited to resolutions where the United States took an opposing position from China and Russia, the mean alignment is measured as a scale between complete alignment with the United States (1) and complete alignment with China and Russia (0). On average, G-77 countries aligned with the US positions on 6 percent of resolutions. Other non-G-77 countries aligned with the US positions on 33 percent of resolutions. When limiting the analysis to "important" resolutions, G-77 countries aligned with the United States 14 percent of the time, while non-G-77 countries aligned with the US position 50 percent of the time. In both instances, the differences between the means are statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The SCO countries demonstrate a slightly weaker alignment with the United States than the G-77 group. On average, they align with the United States in about 5 percent of the cases. Non-SCO countries aligned with the US position 15 percent of the time. When limiting the analysis to "important" resolutions, SCO countries aligned with the United States 8 percent of the time, while non-SCO countries aligned with the US position 26 percent of the time. The differences between the means are statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

The BRICS countries aligned with the United States in about 5 percent of the cases, and other countries aligned with the US position 14 percent of the time. When limiting the analysis to "important" resolutions, BRICS countries aligned with the United States 8 percent of the time, while non-BRICS countries aligned with the US position 25 percent of the time. In both instances, the differences between the means are statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Table 1 also illustrates the alignment of BRICS Plus and SCO Plus countries, and these percentages closely resemble the already discussed percentages of BRICS and SCO countries.

The most significant alignment with the United States was observed, unsurprisingly, among the states that belong to NATO. On average, NATO members aligned with the United States on about 37 percent of the resolutions. In contrast, non-NATO countries aligned with the US position just 10 percent of the time. While NATO members were more strongly aligned with the US compared to non-NATO members, it is noteworthy that NATO members still voted more frequently in line with the Sino–Russian position than with the US position. When limiting the analysis to "important" resolutions, NATO states aligned with the United States 54 percent of the time, while non-NATO countries aligned with the US position 19 percent of the time. Once again, the mean differences are statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

While these univariate analyses allow us to easily compare the alignments of various groupings of countries, they do not capture the simultaneous effects of our variables of interest. We estimate both ordinary least squares regression (OLS) and Logistic regression (LOGIT) models to investigate how various groups of states align on issues of disagreement between the United States and China and Russia. Table 1 shows how strongly aligned G-77, SCO, SCO Plus, BRICS, BRICS Plus, and NATO countries were with the US position and the China/Russia position. These differences are further broken down by looking at all resolutions separately from resolutions that the United States deems to be important. The models can be represented by the following equation:

$$\text{AgreeUS}_{r,c} = \alpha + \sum_{t=1}^{6} \beta_t T_t + G77_c + \sum_{t=1}^{6} \beta_t T_t \times G77_c$$

Table 1. Mean agreement comparison using simple *t*-tests

Country groups	Mean agreement w/United States (all resolutions)			Mean agreement w/United States (important resolutions only)		
	Within group	Outside group	Difference	Within group	Outside group	Difference
G77	0.061	0.334	− 0.273***	0.141	0.499	− 0.358***
SCO	0.037	0.142	0.105***	0.074	0.247	− 0.174***
SCO Plus	0.047	0.148	− 0.100***	0.081	0.258	− 0.177***
BRICS	0.053	0.140	0.087***	0.081	0.245	− 0.163***
BRICS Plus	0.044	0.148	− 0.104***	0.097	0.257	− 0.160***
NATO	0.369	0.100	0.269***	0.540	0.193	0.347***

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

$$+ \text{SCO}_c + \sum_{t=1}^{6} \beta_t T_t \times \text{SCO}_c + \text{SCOPlus}_c$$

$$+ \sum_{t=1}^{6} \beta_t T_t \times \text{SCOPlus}_c + \text{BRICS}_c$$

$$+ \sum_{t=1}^{6} \beta_t T_t \times \text{BRICS}_c + \text{BRICSPlus}_c$$

$$+ \sum_{t=1}^{6} \beta_t T_t \times \text{BRICSPlus}_c + \text{NATO}_c$$

$$+ \sum_{t=1}^{6} \beta_t T_t \times \text{NATO}_c + \varepsilon_{r,c},$$

where AgreeUS is a dummy variable taking the value of 1 if the vote of country c aligns with that of the United States on resolution r. Variable T_t is an indicator corresponding to one of the six 5-year periods covered by our sample size, accounting for changes in the mean level of agreement with the United States over time. Variable $G77_c$ is a binary indicator of country's belonging to G-77. We also interact the $G77$ variable with the 5-year period indicators to allow for the relationship between this country grouping and agreement with the United States to vary over time. We then continue adding indicator variables for SCO, SCO Plus, BRICS, BRICS Plus, and NATO to investigate their relative agreement with the United States. We also add the interaction terms that allow for their relative agreement to vary over time.

Regression results of equation (1) are reported in Table 2 and the predicted margins plots are illustrated in Figure 2. While global agreement with the United States was low over the entire 30-year period, the results suggest that compared to the first 5-year period (1991–1995), average global alignment with the United States has increased slightly over the following time periods. This is indicated by the positive and statistically significant coefficients, which increase in magnitude as time passes. However, the effects of G-77 and soft-balancing institutions on the states' likelihood to side with China and Russia over the United States have also increased.

The G-77 variable is negative and statistically significant at −0.138 suggesting the average agreement with the United States in the 1991–1995 period is 13.8 percent lower than that of the non-G77 countries. The interaction variables between the G-77 and 5-year period dummies suggest that, compared to the initial 5-year period, agreement with the United States has decreased by 9 percent in 1996–2000, 7.3

percent in 2001–2005, 14 percent in 2006–2010, 17 percent in 2011–2015, and 21 percent in 2016–2020.

The results suggest that on average SCO countries agreed with the United States 1 percent less frequently than those that are not part of SCO during the initial period of 1991–1995. There was no statistically significant change in 1996–2000. However, the gap widened by an additional 2.6 percent during the 2001–2005 period, 6 percent during the 2006–2010 period, 8 percent during the 2011–2015 period, and 8.4 percent during the last 5-year period. States that belonged to SCO Plus agreed with the United States 2.9 percent less often than the non-SCO Plus countries during the initial period. The gap widened by 3.8 percent during the 1996–2000, 4.9 percent during the 2001–2005 period, 6.5 percent during the 2006–2010 period, 7.8 percent during the 2011–2015 period, and 8.5 percent during the last 5 years of our sample.

The BRICS variable is not statistically significant during the first 2 periods: 1991–1995 and 1996–2000. However, there is a steady and statistically significant decrease in the BRICS members' alignment with the United States starting with the 2001–2005 time period. In the 2001–2005 period, the average number of instances in which the BRICS states supported the United States' position decreased by 4.5 percent. The average number of instances in which the BRICS countries supported the Sino–Russian position increased by 6.6 percent in the 2006–2010 period, by 5.5 percent between 2011 and 2015, and by 7.3 percent in the final period of observation, the results are similar for BRICS Plus. The results are not statistically significant in the initial two time periods, but the states move away from the United States' position and toward China–Russia starting with the 2001–2005 time period.

Member states of NATO are more likely to vote in line with the US position than states that do not belong to the NATO alliance. On average, during the initial period of 1991–1995, NATO members voted with the United States 8 percent more frequently than countries outside of the alliance. The difference is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. In the following periods, there is no clear temporal trajectory in the alignment of NATO states. In addition to Table 2, Figure 2 utilizes predicted margins plots and offers a visual illustration of temporal trajectories for all six groups.

For all groups, compared to the original analysis, alignment with the United States is greater when the analysis is limited to important resolutions. This is an interesting and somewhat surprising finding. Several factors could be contributing to this differentiation: (1) These are resolutions that the United States deems to be important, and we lack information about the significance of these resolutions to

Table 2. Estimating effect of country groups on alignment across 5-year periods

Covariate	OLS model		LOGIT model	
	All resolutions	Important resolutions	All resolutions	Important resolutions
1996–2000	0.111***	0.239***	2.024***	3.141***
2001–2005	0.102***	0.192***	1.958***	2.952***
2006–2010	0.179***	0.446***	2.908***	8.894***
2011–2015	0.235***	0.440***	3.734***	8.094***
2016–2020	0.255***	0.484***	3.833***	8.733***
G77 = 1	− 0.138***	− 0.159***	0.083***	0.137***
G77 = 1 # 1996–2000	− 0.090***	− 0.096***	1.117	1.970***
G77 = 1 # 2001–2005	− 0.073***	− 0.165***	1.356***	0.558***
G77 = 1 # 2006–2010	− 0.142***	− 0.315***	1.071	0.595***
G77 = 1 # 2011–2015	− 0.173***	− 0.235***	1.293***	1.085
G77 = 1 # 2016–2020	− 0.121***	− 0.117***	2.798***	2.218***
SCO = 1	− 0.009	0.001	0.649	1.057
SCO = 1 # 1996–2000	− 0.003	0.002	1.424	0.998
SCO = 1 # 2001–2005	− 0.026	− 0.027	1.423	2.525
SCO = 1 # 2006–2010	− 0.060***	− 0.117**	0.901	0.428
SCO = 1 # 2011–2015	− 0.080***	− 0.106*	0.583	0.450
SCO = 1 # 2016–2020	− 0.084***	− 0.087	0.732	0.604
SCOPlus = 1	− 0.029***	− 0.038	0.458***	0.468**
SCOPlus = 1 # 1996–2000	− 0.038***	− 0.067*	0.690*	1.056
SCOPlus = 1 # 2001–2005	− 0.049***	− 0.105***	0.449***	0.101***
SCOPlus = 1 # 2006–2010	− 0.065***	− 0.188***	0.467***	0.261***
SCOPlus = 1 # 2011–2015	− 0.078***	− 0.205***	0.525***	0.313***
SCOPlus = 1 # 2016–2020	− 0.085***	− 0.205***	0.839	0.621
BRICS = 1	0.010	0.001	0.934	0.763
BRICS = 1 # 1996–2000	0.016	− 0.002	1.335	1.225
BRICS = 1 # 2001–2005	− 0.045**	0.071	2.954**	3.999
BRICS = 1 # 2006–2010	− 0.066***	0.099*	2.688**	1.490
BRICS = 1 # 2011–2015	− 0.055**	0.055	1.291	1.038
BRICS = 1 # 2016–2020	− 0.073***	− 0.013	1.688	1.007
BRICSPlus = 1	0.004	0.001	1.374*	1.102
BRICSPlus = 1 # 1996–2000	− 0.005	0.013	0.775	1.022
BRICSPlus = 1 # 2001–2005	− 0.029***	− 0.038	0.339***	0.305**
BRICSPlus = 1 # 2006–2010	− 0.040***	− 0.078***	0.340***	0.512*
BRICSPlus = 1 # 2011–2015	− 0.050***	− 0.094***	0.385***	0.528*
BRICSPlus = 1 # 2016–2020	− 0.043***	− 0.085**	0.552***	0.632
NATO = 1	0.085***	− 0.001	1.663***	0.968
NATO = 1 # 1996–2000	− 0.017	0.055*	0.786***	1.258
NATO = 1 # 2001–2005	− 0.059***	0.059**	0.637***	1.166
NATO = 1 # 2006–2010	− 0.048***	0.077***	0.645***	1.241
NATO = 1 # 2011–2015	− 0.022**	0.079***	0.707***	1.320
NATO = 1 # 2016–2020	− 0.028***	0.046	0.717***	1.240
Constant	0.155***	0.193***		
Observations	219,625	27,199	219,625	27,199
(Pseudo) R^2	0.164	0.255	0.194	0.236

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

China and Russia. The United States is likely to lobby for resolutions it considers important, while China and Russia may not exert equal effort in rallying support for their own positions on the same resolutions. (2) The United States is most likely to designate a resolution to be important if it deals with the issue of human rights and China and Russia have moved toward greater authoritarianism.

Conclusion and Implications

Prior literature has made a compelling case for studying the China–Russia partnership and the US–China–Russia triangle as important features of contemporary international relations. Additionally, existing works address dyadic affinity among major powers and the growing importance of rising power groups, but they do not assess the extent to which other states align themselves with these major powers. This study asked: when China and Russia share a policy position that is contrary to that of the United States, whose stance is favored by other states?

Our analysis of UNGA voting records demonstrates that the vast majority of states aligned more frequently with the Sino–Russian positions over those of the United States between 1991 and 2020. While this finding confirms trends identified in prior research on the relative "loneliness" of the United States in the UNGA, our study also reveals cleavages between US and China–Russia's affinity communities.
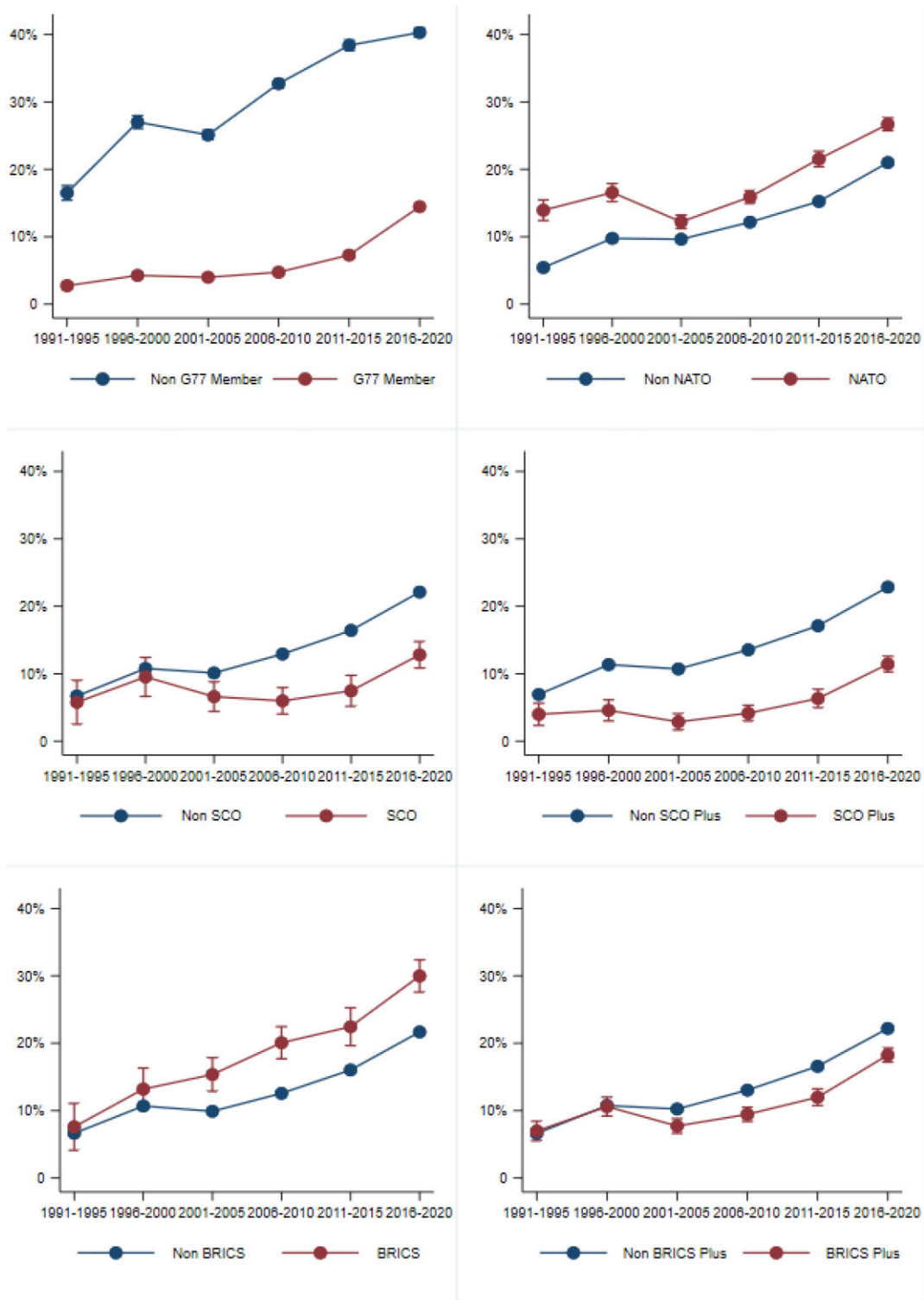
Figure 2. Predicted margins plots over 5-year periods.

Conceptually, prior scholarship argued that the cleavages in the UNGA were between the US and Soviet blocs during the Cold War and then between the Global North and South. Recent literature demonstrates the importance of rising powers as an anti-hegemonic coalition in global economic governance and has been divided on their bloc behavior in the UNGA context. It is common to discuss the current situation as a new Cold War, but without empirical

evidence of what post-Cold War disagreements mean in the universal context of the UNGA. This article sought to detect the US- and China–Russia-friendly affinity communities that formed when disagreements happened. We found that states that belong to the G-77, SCO, and BRICS are more likely to vote in line with the Sino–Russian position than those states that are not affiliated with such groups. The same is true for the states that are a part of SCO and BRICS

outreach—SCO Plus and BRICS Plus. Conversely, NATO members are more likely to vote in line with the United States than their non-NATO counterparts.

From a temporal perspective, the affinity of G-77, SCO, SCO Plus, BRICS, or BRICS Plus countries toward Sino–Russian positions increased over time. However, the affinity of NATO countries toward US positions lacked a clear temporal trajectory. These findings suggest a greater fragmentation along bloc lines in the UNGA. Bloc behavior—where voting blocs consolidate on the United States or China–Russia side—is more likely to be exercised and reinforced through informal intergovernmental groups than alliances. This highlights the debate on how alliances like NATO can benefit the United States and how the United States can strengthen relations with its close allies beyond the narrow security/military realm, or systematically develop informal intergovernmental groups like G7 into UNGA affinity communities. For China and Russia, these findings suggest that there is a correlation between launching and cultivating various informal intergovernmental groups that operate across issues and these countries' support in the UNGA. Yet it also raises a question whether informal governance is over time reinforcing bloc behavior rather than preserving states' flexibility, which was its original intention.

While this study has identified important patterns in post-Cold War UNGA voting, there are three areas to consider for its further development: causality, the UNGA agenda content, and the recent Ukraine-related trends. First, this study has detected affinity communities on the US side and on the China–Russia side and broadly linked them to other states' participation in various alignments. However, this approach does not address the extent to which diplomatic strategies of the United States, China, and Russia, as well as intra-group dynamics (such as within G-77 or BRICS) or intra-organizational strategies (e.g., within SCO), contribute to the formation of an affinity community. For now, each affinity community is socially constructed based on voting, but states in some of the investigated alignments, such as the G-77 or BRICS, frequently engage in coordination meetings at the UN. Getting specific data on states' diplomatic strategies to coordinate their UNGA votes would enable us to specify the causal direction of the observed effects. Similarly, analyzing states' trade and aid relationships and social networks can help better capture the ties among states voting with the United States or with China and Russia.

Second, developing an analytical approach to characterize the content of the agenda and state preferences over specific issues would further deepen the analysis. This could enable us to identify states that are outliers on specific issues and address concerns with reporting changes in state preferences when the changes that occurred are in the content of the UNGA agenda (e.g., Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten 2017). This would require developing a measurement model that accurately identifies substantive changes in state voting preferences at the UN.

Finally, the research period of this study is from 1991 to 2020, and the war in Ukraine in 2022 has significantly impacted the China–Russia–United States relationship. While the United States has been mobilizing the West and NATO, the affinities toward Russia have changed. China has introduced major global initiatives on development and security, and together with Russia, it has been strengthening BRICS' and SCO's outreach. Since China and Russia are determined to accelerate UN reform, as their tensions with the United States increase, the main UN organs and agencies are becoming important fronts in contemporary power competition. These developments are likely to impact group politics within the UN and present a fruitful area for future research.

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