Dealing with human rights in international organizations*

Simon Hug†
Département de science politique et relations internationales,
Université de Genève

Paper prepared for presentation at the ECPR General Conference (Bordeaux September 4-7, 2013)

First version: September 2012, this version: August 23, 2013

Abstract
Over time human rights have gained prominence in international organizations. At the same time, dealing with them has proved difficult and contentious. The present paper focuses on the way in which the United Nations have addressed human rights issues, especially through the Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) and its successor the Human Rights Council (UNHRC). By analyzing in detail and in a comparative fashion the votes in these two bodies, the paper shows that despite the high hopes expressed with the creation of the UNHRC this latter institutional innovation faces some of the same challenges as its predecessor.

*An earlier version was prepared for presentation at the 6th Conference on“The Political Economy of International Organizations” (Universities of Mannheim and Heidelberg, February 7-8, 2013) and the ISA Annual Convention 2013 (San Francisco, California, USA, April 3-6, 2013). Helpful comments by Eunbin Chung, Axel Dreher, and participants at these events, as well as research assistance by Simone Wegmann and partial financial support by the Swiss National Science Foundation (Grant-No 100012-129737) are gratefully acknowledged.
† Département de science politique et relations internationales, Faculté des sciences économiques et sociales; Université de Genève; 40 Bd du Pont d’Arve; 1211 Genève 4; Switzerland; phone ++41 22 379 89 47; email: simon.hug@unige.ch
1 Introduction

The international arena has experienced a considerable development in the area of human rights, expanding in terms of issues covered by treaties, but also regarding institutions. Specific courts have been set up, and within the United Nations (UN) system the major development these last ten years was certainly the creation of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in 2006, replacing the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). The latter had attracted considerable criticism regarding its functioning, but several reform efforts came to nil (see for instance Chetail, 2010). The newly formed UNHRC was supposed to address these shortcomings and lead to an improvement of the UN’s involvement in human rights issues (for a discussion of these changes from a legal perspective, see Burci, 2005). The first assessments paint, however, a rather disappointing picture (see for instance Chetail, 2007; Rajagopal, 2007; Besant and Malo, 2009; Chetail, 2010; Cox, 2010; Seligman, 2011; Hug and Lukács, 2013 (forthcoming); Voss, 2013). The politicization of the UNHRC appears to be as extensive as it was in the UNCHR. Chetail (2010, 234) to conclude that

\[ \text{[t]he Human Rights Council is not significantly different from the preceding Commission. Like the Commission, it remains a political body because of its intergovernmental composition.} \]

Most assessments are based, however, either on casual observation or an indirect comparison drawing on systematic studies of the UNHRC. The only exception I am aware of is Seligman’s (2011) study assessing whether voting on resolutions targeting specific countries has changed from the UNCHR to the UNHRC. Systematic studies looking more broadly at the decisions reached in these two organs of the UN are, however, missing.

This is what I propose to do in this paper. Drawing on data on resolutions debated and (largely) adopted in the UNCHR and the UNHRC in the last 17 years (1996-2005 for the UNCHR, 2006-2012 for the UNHRC) I offer a comparison of the voting record in these two periods and find that the conflict lines have largely remained the same in these two organs. I also show that if something has changed in terms of polarization from the UNCHR to the UNHRC, it has

\[ ^1 \text{Both Cox (2010) and Voss (2013) compare the targeting of specific countries in the two bodies, as does Seligman (2011) as well.} \]
been an increase. In the next section I discuss the literature which is relevant for
the study presented here. It thus focuses on the broader human rights literature
before moving to studies more specifically on international organizations and their
bodies dealing with human rights issues. In section three I offer a description
of the data employed in this study. Section four presents the results of the
empirical analyses, for which I provide a robustness check in section five. Section
six concludes.

2 Human rights and international organizations

The literature on human rights, and how they are dealt with in international
organizations has developed considerably over the last decades (for an excellent
introductory survey, see Carey, Gibney and Poe, 2010). As Hafner-Burton and
Ron (2009) nicely and convincingly argue the literature has split in two quite
distinct traditions, one following a more constructivist approach, the other draw-
ing on a rational choice perspective. The former, relying heavily on case stud-
ies (largely on Latin American countries, e.g., Sikkink, 1993; Risse, Ropp and
Sikkink, 1999), paint a largely positive picture of human rights norms diffusing
with the help of international institutions and non-governmental organizations
(NGOs). A more sanguine view appears in the literature drawing on rational
choice explanations and using quantitative approaches. Hathaway (2002), for
instance, alerted scholars that signing human rights treaties did not necessarily
improve a country’s human rights record (see also Vreeland, 2008; Hollyer and
Rosendorff, 2011; Hug and Wegmann, 2012). Relatedly Hafner-Burton and Ron
(2009) show that despite an increasing number of treaties and signatories, the
overall human rights record has hardly if at all improved over time around the
globe (see also Simmons, 2009; Hill, 2010).

2 In a recent volume edited by the latter set of authors (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink, 2013) the
contributors come to a rather similar assessment.

3 Simmons (2013), in her review of the quantitative literature on human rights, begs to
differ from Hafner-Burton and Ron’s (2009) assessment and argues that both quantitative and
qualitative studies offer more nuanced assessments. Curiously, however, she passes over the
Henderson (1991) and Poe and Tate (1994), as do (Risse and Ropp, 2013, 4): “Human rights
research of the 1990s was characterized by comparative case studies as dominant approach. .
. This has changed in that researchers using quantitative methods have begun to investigate
the processes and mechanisms by which international human rights norms spread (Hafner-
Burton, 2008; Simmons, 2009).”
As both Simmons (2009) and Carey, Gibney and Poe (2010) demonstrate, international organizations have assumed an ever increasing role in human rights. Organs of the UN played in this context a considerable role, most notably the UNCHR and the UNHRC, but also the General Assembly (UNGA) that debates frequently human rights issues (see for instance Boockmann and Dreher, 2011). Studies of these organs paint a rather pessimistic picture. For instance work by Donnelly (1988) and Wheeler (1999) highlights how resolutions targeting particular countries appear to show political biases. Similar results are found by Lebovic and Voeten (2006) in their study on the UNCHR.

Relatedly, Edwards, Scott, Allen and Irvin (2008) show that human rights offending countries found easily access to the UNCHR. Studies on the UNGA also focued on human rights issues (see, for instance the policy specific analyses in Hovet, 1960). Most recently, Boockmann and Dreher (2011) offer an analysis of recorded votes in the UNGA on human rights resolutions. They suggest that it is less a country’s human rights record that influences its voting behavior, but the voting behavior of the countries belonging to the same peer group (as defined by the World Bank).

Similarly, Hillman and Potrafke (2011) propose a model suggesting that countries use scapegoats to deflect attention from their own, mostly poor, human rights record and engage in vote trading.

With the replacement of the UNCHR by the UNHRC a series of studies have tried to assess the latter’s performance. More general studies have highlighted some minor changes and some continuities (see for instance Chetail, 2007; Müller, 2012).

4In a related study Lebovic and Voeten (2009) show that condemnations in the UNCHR affect multilateral aid decisions but not bilateral ones. Smith (2006) studies the voting of European Union (EU) member countries in various UN organs, among them also the UNCHR (see also Smith, 2010), while Senger (2004) focuses on the latter. Garský and Spolander (2012) ask the broader question why the EU was successful in the negotiations leading to the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) but often fails in the UNGA’s third committee. They argue that these differences are difficult to explain based on norms, but seem more related to more or less successful coalition building.

5Incidentally it was the non-election of the US in 2001, the election of Libya to the presidency in 2003 and the election to the Commission of Sudan in 2004 that precipitated the replacement of the UNCHR with the UNHRC (Chetail, 2010, 205f).

6In a related study, trying to account for the incomplete nature of the data (i.e., only a quarter of all votes on resolutions is recorded votes) Hug (2012) finds considerable effects of a country’s human rights record.

7While most studies focus the discussion on general observations McMahon (2012) offers a systematic study of the so-called periodic review, to which UNHRC member countries have to submit.
2007; Besant and Malo, 2009; Reber, 2009; Chetail, 2010). Cox (2010) after highlighting the process leading up to the creation of the UNHRC shows that there were only marginal improvements in the respect for human rights among members of the UNHRC (compared to the UNCHR) and that the main target of resolutions (and more broadly, documents) is Israel. A related analysis is presented by Voss (2013b) who also studies closely the composition of the UNHRC and the states targeted by resolutions[^8]. Hug and Lukács (2013 forthcoming), based on Lukács’s (2010, 2011) work, assess the voting patterns in the UNHRC in the first 13 sessions and find that human rights records influence considerably these patterns. In addition, they can demonstrate that the identity of a resolution’s author affects these patterns as well, with, for instance, resolutions introduced by Pakistan or Cuba being much more divisive[^9].

As the EU, certainly since the adoption of the Lisbon treaty, aims at occupying a more forceful position especially in the area of human rights, several studies have focused on the EU’s action in the UNCHR and the UNHRC (e.g., Smith, 2006; Wouters, Basu and Bernaz, 2008; Macaj and Koops, 2010; Smith, 2010; Macaj and Koops, 2012; Macaj, 2012). Thus, Smith (2006), reminding that the EU aims at appearing united in the UNCHR (and the UNGA’s third committee, dedicated to human rights issues), shows that the member states of this regional bloc are often quite divided. In a later article focusing on the UNHRC (Smith, 2010) she finds quite some unity among EU member states but at the same time a rather reduced impact on outcomes (for a similar finding, see Hug and Wegmann, 2013).

These studies on the voting behavior in the various UN organs offer, however, no comparisons, especially between the UNCHR and its successor the UNHRC. The only study I am aware of that engages in such a comparison is Seligman’s (2011) study that focuses on resolutions adopted in these two bodies that target specific countries. His assessment, based on voting information, suggests that only few things have changed between the two institutions[^10].

[^8]: Voss (2013b) also assess bloc voting mostly by focusing on resolutions dealing with Israel (Voss, 2013a) for a more detailed analyses of resolutions targeting countries and their relationship with the “responsibility to protect” and the International criminal court, see.

[^9]: Hug and Lukács (2013 forthcoming) use a broader database on the first 20 UNHRC sessions and ten years of voting in the UNGA to compare Switzerland’s position with those of other countries. Senger (2011) proceeds similarly by assessing Switzerland’s position in the UNHRC, compared to China and some EU countries.

[^10]: Cox (2010) also offers some explicit comparisons, (as does Voss, 2013b) but these focus exclusively on the composition of the two bodies and the documents and resolutions dealing...
3 Votes in the UNCHR and the UNHRC

Consequently, the present paper wishes to contribute to fill this gap, but also to highlight a problem that is often eschewed in studies based on voting in UN bodies. Namely, as and Hug (2012) Hug and Lukács (2013 (forthcoming)) demonstrate for the UNGA, respectively the UNHRC, only around a quarter of all votes on resolution related matters are roll call votes.\footnote{Most resolution-related matter is adopted without a vote, while in the UNGA until the 1980s recorded votes also took place without them being roll calls. Blake and Lockwood Payton (2009) and Lockwood Payton (2010) offer innovative studies of what explains the adoption of particular decisions rules in international organizations, respectively what type of consensus rules are present (see also Cassan, 1977). Häge and Hug (2013) provide an illustration how neglecting these consensus decisions affects similarities measures frequently used in the international relations literature.}

To fill this gap and highlight this potential selection bias problem I rely on newly collected data on voting in the UNCHR and the UNHRC.\footnote{For both organs the minutes were downloaded and automatically parsed to extract all roll call votes (UNCHR: \url{http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/annual_reports.htm}, UNHRC: \url{http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/}) In addition, I created, based on the information on the websites, a list of all resolutions and decisions subject to a decision in the UNCHR and the UNHRC.} This data covers the last ten sessions of the UNCHR (last ten years: 1996-2005) and the first 20 sessions of the UNHRC (first seven years (as the UNHRC meets at least three times a year): 2006-2012). In its last 10 sessions the UNCHR adopted 1217 resolutions and took decisions in 446 recorded votes. But only 272 of the latter concerned final votes on resolutions. In the first 20 sessions of the UNHRC 188 recorded votes took place and 114 were final votes on resolutions. Overall 426 resolutions were adopted in these 20 sessions.

While these aggregate numbers suggest that in both organs roll call votes were about equally frequent, looking at the time trends suggests otherwise. Figure \[1\] depicts the share of recorded votes per session for the UNCHR and the UNHRC. As figure \[1\] shows, recorded votes were much less frequent at the beginning of the last ten years of the UNCHR’s existence. The share increased, however, systematically and considerably to reach approximately two-fifths. One might take this as an indication for an increased politization. The trend for the UNHRC is much less clear. While the first few sessions saw on average almost equally high shares of recorded votes, after a blip to zero in the fifth session this share started to oscillate around the value of one fifth.
As recorded votes occur if a member state requests such a vote, knowing the identity of the requester might give additional evidence of a possible politization. Unfortunately, only the minutes of the UNCHR provide for almost all recorded votes the information who requested it. For the UNHRC this information is missing for a large share of the recorded votes, hence the comparison has to be taken with large grain of salt. In addition, not all countries were member of the UNCHR, resp. UNHRC, for equal periods of time and thus had different number of occasions to request a recorded votes.\footnote{As this information is only provided for illustrative purposes, I refrain from taking into account these complications.}

Figure 2 (left panel) shows, however that among the 440 recorded votes for which the requester could be identified, almost a quarter of all cases, namely 104, were requested by the United States.\footnote{Impressionistically this seems mostly related to a heavy increase of such roll call votes requests in the last sessions of the UNCHR.} Almost as frequent are recorded vote requests by Cuba, namely 73. With much lower numbers follow the Russian Federation, Pakistan etc.\footnote{For simplicity’s sake I do not separate out requests for recorded votes by several countries.}

Figure 2 (right panel) depicts the same information for the few recorded votes for which it was possible to identify the requester in the UNHRC. As the figure shows, the US is again in a league of its own, followed, however, by several
European countries having requested recorded votes on behalf of the EU. If these were taken together the EU would appear at the top of the list, underlining its wishes to be more active and unified in the human rights area. Instead of being followed by Cuba and Russia, however, another country, namely Canada, inserts itself at the top of the list. Hence, this figure, based on very sparse data, suggests at least a small change in terms of who requests recorded votes in the UNHRC.\[16\]

\[16\]Hug and Lukács (2013 (forthcoming)) find, however, that in terms of authorship of resolutions in the UNHRC during the first thirteen sessions, countries like Cuba, Egypt and Pakistan are very active. It has to be noted that the United States was not a member of the UNHRC at its beginning (see below for more information on this point).
4 Opposing views in the UN bodies for human rights

To assess whether the UNCHR and the UNHRC differ I assume that the way in which their respective members voted on resolution-related matters relates to ideal-points in a policy space. In addition, I assume that countries cast their vote based on how far (or close) a proposal lies (compared to its alternative, most often the status quo) compared to their ideal point. Based on these assumptions, several estimation strategies have been devised to uncover the latent ideal-points and information on the alternatives voted upon (for excellent summaries, see Poole, 2005; Clinton, 2012; Carroll and Poole, 2013 (forthcoming)).

I employ, as suggested by Clinton, Jackman and Rivers (2004) (see also Martin and Quinn, 2002) an item-response theory (IRT) model. This model is specified in the following equation:

\[
\pi_{ij} = Pr(y_{ij} | \theta_i, \beta_j, \alpha_j) = F(\theta_i \beta_j - \alpha_j)
\]

\(\pi_{ij}\) corresponds to the probability of a yes-vote \((y_{ij})\) by individual \(i\) on proposal \(j\). \(\theta_i\) corresponds to individual \(i\)'s ideal-point, while \(\beta_j\) and \(\alpha_j\) reflect the discrimination and difficulty of proposal \(j\). With adequate additional assumptions all these parameters can be estimated in a Bayesian framework.

Adopting this approach to compare votes in the two bodies under consideration causes, however, two problems. First, the model as specified in equation requires binary observable voting data. In the two UN bodies that I propose to study, abstentions are, however, quite numerous. In the context of their study on voting in the UNGA Voeten (2004) and Boockmann and Dreher (2011) argue that abstentions are largely reflecting indifference between the two options on the table. Thus, in their empirical analysis they consider abstentions as an interme-

\[17\] Here, I omit to discuss and address a third problem, namely that a small share of all decisions in both the UNCHR and the UNHRC are made in roll call votes. In section five I present results that are based on an analysis, following Hug and Lukács (2013 (forthcoming)), that at least partially addresses this problem. As the authorship of resolutions voted upon in the UNCHR is not systematically reported upon in the minutes, I offer this analysis as a robustness check.
In their framework, this results in an ordered probit model. I follow this suggestion and complement equation \[1\] with a second one, which models the distinction between abstention and a yes vote (for a related approach, see Voeten, 2004):

\[
\pi_{ij} = \Pr(y_{ij} | \theta_i, \beta_j, \alpha_j, \gamma_j) \\
= F(\theta_i \beta_j - \alpha_j + \gamma_j)
\] (2)

\(+\gamma_j\) reflects the shift parameter from the first to the second logit-curve\(18\). If \(\gamma_j\) is zero then abstentions do not form a distinct category\(20\). I implemented this model and estimated it with Plummer’s (2010) JAGS-program\(21\).

The second problem relates to the comparison I wish to carry out. The ideal-point estimates provided by an IRT-model are identified among others by the assumption that they are normally distributed. Consequently, if I were to estimate these ideal points for the two separate chambers I would generate two separate sets of positions that have the same distribution. Therefore, I would not be able to derive insights on changes by comparing the two generated distributions, as they are assumed to be identical. This problem has been addressed in the IRT-framework by using so-called bridging observations (see for instance Bailey and Chang, 2001; Bailey, 2007; Treier, 2011), i.e., either votes that are assumed to have an identical content, or voting members who are assumed to occupy the same position in different voting bodies. In the current context, the

---

18 Rosas and Shomer (2008) argue and demonstrate, that abstentions may have different causes, and empirical analyses should take this into account. In order to keep things simple, I refrain from addressing this issue more directly, especially since in both bodies abstentions rarely if ever affect the outcome of a vote (i.e., almost all decisions are reached by simple majorities (see [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/rules.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/rules.htm) respectively [http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/resolutions/A_HRC_RES_5_1.doc](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/resolutions/A_HRC_RES_5_1.doc)).

19 For simplicity’s sake I adopted a logit functional form. As this functional form is very closely related to a probit, the differences are rather minute.

20 In the estimates (not reported in this paper) it appears that only for a very small number of votes \(\gamma\) cannot be distinguished from zero. It has to be noted, however, that this setup presumes an ordered choice. If an abstention takes on another significance, tests on the value of \(+\gamma_j\) will not be appropriate. See Rosas and Shomer (2008) for detailed discussion of this problem and another way to deal with abstentions.

21 Note that this estimation requires that all yes- and no-votes have the same relationship with the underlying policy space. To ensure this I inverted the values of the voting variables for those cases where this is not the case. I identified these cases on the basis of China’s and the US’ voting record.
second alternative is hardly appropriate, as I wish to assess the changes in the estimated positions of countries in the two UN bodies. Consequently, and following Bailey, Strezhnev and Voeten’s (2013) work on the UNGA, I identify two pairs of votes from the UNCHR and the UNHRC that deal with very similar matters and display similar voting patterns.

I identified these pairs of votes first by choosing an issue area where a large number of votes have occurred in both bodies, namely resolutions related to the middle east (see for confirming evidence Cox, 2010; Seligman, 2011; Voss, 2013b). Second, I checked for each possible pair of votes stemming from the two bodies how large the agreement in these two votes among members in both bodies were. I discarded all pairs of votes where at least one member state voted differently (including abstentions) and then selected those pairs where the agreement was highest. The two resulting pairs of votes are the following:

- E/CN.4/RES/2001/8 Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab territories (57th session UNCHR)
  A/HRC/RES/13/7 Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan (13th session UNHRC)

- E/CN.4/RES/2003/7 Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab territories (59th session UNCHR)
  A/HRC/RES/16/31 Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan (16th session UNHRC)

Before presenting the results based on this joint estimation it is useful to have a look at the separately estimated ideal-points depicted in Figure 3. The

As all these resolutions condemn Israel’s action, yes- and no-votes have the same significance in each pair of votes.

Using such behavioral bridging observations circumvents some of the problems highlighted by Jessee (2010) and Lewis and Tausanovitch (2013). Nevertheless, I offer implicitly, by comparing the two sets of estimated ideal-points, a test of whether this joint estimation is defensible or not.

Note that for computational reasons, I refrained from standardizing the estimated ideal-points for the ordered logit IRT-model, while they are standardized for the binary IRT models reported upon below. Results reported upon here were obtained after 50000 burnins from 5000 additional iterations thinned by a factor of 5.
similarities between these two figures are considerable. In both cases the countries with the extreme ideal points are very similar. On the left-hand side one finds China and Cuba, and on the right-hand side the USA and Canada. In the case of the UNCHR, the former are joined by Libya and the latter by Australia. In the UNHRC, the most extreme countries on the left are joined by Russia, while on the right it is the Netherlands that appears close to the positions of the USA and Canada.

Figure 3: Ideal-points in the UNCHR (left panel) and the UNHRC (right panel) based on ordered logit

As the results depicted in figure rely on a strong assumption regarding abstentions, I also estimated an IRT-model while considering abstentions as missing data. Figure depicts the estimated ideal-points. In terms of the most extreme estimated positions there are some minor changes, as in the UNCHR the relative positions at the extremes are permuted with Cuba and China trading places. The same occurs for the UNHRC, where Cuba, Russia and China all trade places, while at the other end the Netherlands replaces Slovaia. As in figure the ex-

---

I resort to a one/dimensional analysis as APREs derived from \textit{wnominate} suggest that a second dimension hardly adds to the reduction in errors: 0.832, respectively 0.898.

I resort to a one/dimensional analysis as APREs derived from \textit{wnominate} suggest that a second dimension hardly adds to the reduction in errors: 0.915, respectively 0.962.

This is a more conservative assumption, and to estimate the model I relied on Clinton, Jackman and Rivers’s (2004) approach, using as functional form in equation a probit-link.
treme positions are not as isolated as in figure 3, these changes in terms of the opposition reflected in the estimated ideal-points are only marginal.

Figure 4: Ideal-points in the UNCHR (left panel) and the UNHRC (right panel) based on binary probit

What changes, however, depending on whether or not abstentions are considered as missing data, is the distribution of ideal points. If they are considered as missing data (figure 4), the estimated ideal-points in both bodies are clustered around the two polar positions (with the USA quite isolated to the right). This is most clearly visible for the UNHRC, where the “middle ground” between the two camps is simply empty, while it is sparsely populated for the UNCHR. When considering abstentions as a middle category between a yes- and a no-vote (figure 3) then the “middle ground” between the two extremes is occupied by a considerable number of the members of the two bodies. Consequently, under the assumption that abstentions are a middle category, the ideal-points estimated based on the voting records suggest a less polarized distribution in both bodies. For this reason I will use this assumption in what follows.

These preliminary analyses suggest that in terms of conflict lines barely anything has changed between the UNCHR and the UNHRC. Conflicts still seem to focus on the same underlying dimension, anchored by the positions of Libya,

28Obviously, strictly speaking the two scales that were estimated with the IRT-models are not directly comparable.
Cuba and China on the one hand and the US on the other. In order to allow for comparisons of the two sets of estimated ideal-points I rely on the bridging observations discussed above, which allows for estimating distinct positions for all countries depending on whether they voted in the UNCHR or the UNHRC.

Figure 5: Ideal-points in the UNCHR (left panel) and the UNHRC (right panel) based on ordered logit in common space

Figure 5 depicts in two separate graphs the estimated ideal-points for the members of the two bodies under the assumption that the bridging votes link the two bodies to form a common space. Not surprisingly the overall distribution of the ideal-points is very similar as the one depicted in figure 3. The extreme positions are largely occupied by the same countries, namely Libya (joined by Liberia in the UNCHR) and China on the one hand and the US on the other. Also, the shape of the distribution of ideal-points is quite similar as the ones appearing in figure 3. When considering the scales in the two panels of figure 5 (which are comparable, given the joint estimation), a striking difference appears, however. It appears that the extreme positions estimated for the UNHRC are more extreme than the ones estimated for the UNCHR (see scales in the two panels in figure 5).

This difference becomes even more transparent in figure 6 where I depict on

---

29 Some convergence diagnostics reported in the appendix suggest that this model encounters some difficulties.
the same scale the kernel densities for both sets of estimated ideal points. While both distributions are bimodal, the one stemming from the estimated ideal-points in the UNCHR is more concentrated at the middle of the scale. The density of the estimated ideal-points for the UNHRC is also bimodal, but much less pronounced so. In addition, as already seen in figure 5, the distribution covers a wider spectrum. This suggests that if there is any evidence for change, it is that the UNHRC has become more polarized than was the UNCHR.

5 Robustness check

In the analyses presented so far I ignored the fact that only a small share of all decisions on resolutions are reached in recorded votes both in the UNCHR and the UNHRC. This may obviously lead to biases, as those resolutions adopted without a vote are likely to differ from those that I analyzed here (for evidence regarding these differences in resolutions discussed in the UNGA, see Hug, 2012; Skougarevskiy, 2012). One way to alleviate at least in part this problem is by considering the authorship of the resolution submitted for adoption. As Hug and
Lukács (2013 (forthcoming)) show for the first thirteen sessions of the UNHRC, resolutions adopted in recorded votes are proposed very frequently by countries considered as having a poor human rights record, like Cuba, Egypt, and Pakistan. Adding this information to the estimation under the assumption that the authorship affects the extent to which a resolution discriminates among voting members, Hug and Lukács (2013 (forthcoming)) find considerable effects. Consequently in what follow I proceed like these authors and assume that the $\beta$ in equation 2 varies depending on the author of the resolution in the following way:

$$\beta_j = x_j\beta + \epsilon$$

(3)

As most of the resolutions in the two bodies stem from a small set of countries, I only consider how those proposed by Cuba, Egypt, EU member countries, Pakistan and the United States differ from those submitted by other countries (or set of countries).

In figure 7 I depict the estimated proposer effects on the discrimination parameter. The interpretation of these effects is slightly complicated as the omitted category are resolutions submitted by other (or several) countries in either the UNCHR or the UNHRC. Compared to these votes it appears that those on resolutions proposed by the five countries or set of countries (i.e., the EU) discriminated less strongly in the UNCHR. This effect, however, is only “statistically significant” (if we follow the interpretation of credible intervals of Jackman, 2004) for Cuba. If we consider the same proposer effects for the UNHRC we find that all of them are positive. Thus, compared to the baseline (resolutions proposed by other or several countries in either the UNCHR or the UNHRC) those proposed by the actors appearing in the second panel of figure 7 discriminated more.

---

30 As sometimes several countries propose a resolution, I did not code them as a function of the individual countries but assigned them to the residual category. This also, because the information on authorship is far from complete. Thus the estimates are likely to be biased towards zero.

31 In order for this estimate to be meaningful I recoded systematically all voting decision to reflect whether they supported the position of the US against China. The convergence diagnostics reported in the appendix suggest that the estimates have converged despite the rather short chains.

32 During the first twenty sessions of the UNHRC the United States never submitted a proposal that was voted upon in a recorded vote. For this reason this country fails to appear in the second panel of figure 7.
strongly. With the marginal exception of the coefficient for Egypt, all these effects are “statistically significant.” Interestingly, the strongest effect appears for proposals by the EU followed by Pakistan, Egypt and Cuba.33

Figure 7: Estimated proposer effects in the UNCHR and UNHRC

The question obviously arises whether taking into account the proposers in one way or another affects the conclusions reached about the differences between the UNCHR and the UNHRC. A quick way to assess this is to reproduce figure 6 based on the new estimates. Thus, figure 8 depicts again the density of the ideal-points in the two bodies. Again, the figure shows that the distribution of ideal-points is slightly more dispersed in the case of the UNHRC than in the UNCHR. This provides renewed evidence that if anything has changed from the UNCHR to the UNHRC it is probably a change towards more controversy and politisation.

33Hug and Lukács (2013 (forthcoming)), for a smaller set of sessions (i.e., the first thirteen), and only considering votes in the UNHRC only find an effect for proposals by Cuba.
Figure 8: Densityplots of ideal-points in UNCHR and UNHRC based on ordered logit with proposer effects

6 Conclusion

Human rights, as well as the scholarly attention that this topic attracts, have experienced a considerable development. More and more treaties deal explicitly with the protection of rights of citizens from their government. Similarly, more and more organs have been set up to deal with this important topic, and existing ones strengthened. Thus, considerable hope was put into the newly created UNHRC in 2006 that replaced the UNCHR. The latter had fallen in disrepute because of its strong politization and several unfortunate elections of members.

So far, apart some casual observations, we know very little about how the new Council performs compared to the old Commission. Two studies have so far highlighted striking similarities when it comes to voting behavior on resolutions targeting specific countries (Cox, 2010; Seligman, 2011). In this paper I demonstrate similarly strong similarities between the two UN organs regarding the ideal-points that were estimated based on the voting behavior of its members. Strikingly, similar sets of countries define the endpoints of the one-dimensional policy space, namely Libya, China and Cuba on one side and the US with partners
on the other.

These results were confirmed in an analysis that allows to compare the distribution of ideal-points across the two bodies. This analysis suggested also, however, that in the UNHRC the positions adopted are more extreme than in the UNCHR. Similarly, the distribution for the UNHRC is much less concentrated at the middle compared to the UNCHR. These results were confirmed in a robustness check, in which the identity of a resolution’s author was considered as influencing the divisiveness.
Appendix

Figures 9 and 10 report summaries of a WNominate (Poole and Rosenthal, 1985; Poole, 2005) analysis of the UNCHR, respectively UNHRC data. In both cases two dimensions were estimated and in addition to the information provided in the main text, the large share of vertical dividing lines suggests that a one-dimensional policy space reflects well voting in these two UN bodies. Figures 11 and 12 depict as some summary information on the convergence of the Bayesian estimation the distribution of the Geweke-diagnostics of all estimated parameters for the joint ordered logit estimates with and without proposer effects. Despite the longer chains used for the first model, much more values are outside the $-2, 2$ interval in figure 11 than in 12 (with much shorter chains).

Figure 9: WNominate summary UNCHR

![Figure 9: WNominate summary UNCHR](image-url)
Figure 10: WNominate summary UNHRC

Figure 11: Densityplot of Geweke-statistics of parameters estimated for joint ordered logit model
Figure 12: Densityplot of Geweke-statistics of parameters estimated for joint ordered logit model with proposer effects
References


