

# What's in a vote\*?†

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## Abstract

Numerous studies have analyzed the voting behavior of member states in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and often used this information in secondary analyses. Few if any of these studies consider, however, that the largest share of decisions in the UNGA is reached either without a vote or a vote that is not recorded. This paper offers a systematic comparison of the recorded votes with all other decisions and shows that failing to consider the differences between these decisions is likely to give us biased inferences on voting behavior in the UNGA.

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\*recorded in the United Nations General Assembly

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# 1 Introduction

For more than half a century scholars have used recorded votes from the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to study a series of important questions. Starting from analyses covering a handful of votes to explore voting alignments (e.g., Ball, 1951) studies have evolved to cover the more or less full set of recorded votes in this assembly and offered important insights into the workings of this deliberative body. These studies have also started to address more specific questions and employ more sophisticated tools to analyze the empirical data at hand.

An important issue applying to most analyses employing recorded votes (or so-called roll call votes), however, has to my knowledge never been addressed head-on for the UNGA, namely how recorded votes relate to the full set of decisions in the assembly and whether this affects the inferences we wish to make.<sup>1</sup> As Saalfeld (1995), Hug (2010) and Crisp and Driscoll (2012) show, very few assemblies record the voting behavior of their members on all decisions. Ignoring, however, what leads to a recorded vote is likely to bias our inferences (see for instance Carrubba, Gabel, Murrah, Clough, Montgomery and Schambach, 2006; Roberts, 2007; Carrubba, Gabel and Hug, 2008; Thiem, 2009; Hug, 2010). As information derived from recorded votes is used increasingly in studies addressing broader research questions (e.g., Gartzke, 1998; Carter and Stone, 2011), it seems important to get a better sense about how recorded votes in the UNGA relate to the full set of decisions reached in this assembly, and how this relationship might affect inferences we might want to make.

In the present paper I offer such an analysis drawing on a dataset covering all final decisions on resolutions in the 1st to 64th sessions of the UNGA. Of these decisions only about a third over this time period are reached in recorded votes. For the 48th to 64th session I complement this dataset with all resolution-related decisions in the UNGA. A second dataset comprises all the recorded votes of member countries on decisions covered in the first dataset. Analyzing these two datasets suggests that recorded votes have quite distinct characteristics, and how they differ from non-recorded votes and other decisions changes over time. Consequently, taking recorded votes in the UNGA as a simple sample of the full set of decisions is a perilous affair.

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<sup>1</sup>Boockmann and Dreher (2011) discuss in their study that most human rights resolutions are adopted without a vote, but do not consider the consequences of this selectivity.

In the next section I first discuss in more detail the way in which the UNGA reaches decisions, and how scholars have used recorded votes to make inferences about this assembly and its members. Section three offers first largely descriptive analyses of what characterizes recorded votes (especially on resolutions) compared to the remainder of decisions on resolutions. In section four I offer a series of analyses demonstrating that recorded votes differ systematically from the remainder of the decisions reached in the UNGA. I then offer two illustrations of how neglecting this selection process may affect inferences we might want to make, before concluding in section five.

## 2 Voting in the United Nations General Assembly

When established in 1946 the UNGA was conceived as a “deliberative body” (Peterson, 2005, 2) in which (potentially) all states of the world were supposed to be represented and debate “world issues.” (see also Hurd, 2011, 97-132). Comparing it to the main deliberative body in national contexts, namely parliament, Hovet (1960, 10) notes, however, that

[t]he real difference in the case of the General Assembly is that, since there are no binding decisions, members agreeing to vote for a resolution of no primary concern in exchange for votes on an issue of primary concern can undertake such commitments with a realization that essentially they have nothing more than a moral obligation to vote for and implement resolutions they thus support.

Despite the deliberative character of the UNGA and the absence of binding decisions, the UNGA takes a considerable number of decisions during its main sessions. These decisions are reached in three different ways (see for instance Hovet (1960, 14f) and Peterson (2005, 54)). The United Nations describes them as follows (<http://www.un.org/Depts/dhl/resguide/gavote.htm>, accessed September 7, 2011):<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>The existence of non-recorded votes is often neglected, probably also due to the fact that since the 1980s they have become rare if not extinct.

The majority of General Assembly resolutions are adopted without a vote. If a vote is taken, it can be documented in two ways: either as a recorded vote or as a summary of the result. Only a recorded vote, which must be requested before the voting is conducted, will clearly identify the stand that a Member State took on the issue under discussion. If such a request is not put forth, only the voting summary (i. e., the number of countries which voted for or against a resolution as well as those who abstained) will be made available, without identification of how an individual Member State voted.

Quite soon after the first session of the UNGA scholars have started to analyze the voting behavior of UNGA delegates to learn more about the alignments present in this deliberative body. Ball (1951) presented an early study focusing on a handful of votes before Hovet (1960) and Alker and Russett (1965) covered a broader set of recorded (and in the case of Hovet (1960) even non-recorded votes). The main question addressed in these early studies was whether due to the potential for vote buying (see quote above by Hovet, 1960) blocs could be identified based on the voting decisions in the UNGA.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, the most sophisticated study in this area is Voeten's (2000) "Clash in the Assembly."

Following up on the early studies a series of scholars addressed the question whether specific groups, like the group of 77 (Iida, 1988), the European Union (Luif, 2003; Young and Rees, 2005; Hoesli, van Kampen, Meijerink and Tennis, 2010), African countries (Meyers, 1966) etc. vote together and thus behave in a cohesive way.<sup>4</sup> Based on these ideas of cohesiveness votes in the UNGA were also used to measure the affinity of particular countries, for instance, with the United States. Based on Gartzke's (1998) pioneering work such affinity measures have been used as explanatory variables in a series of studies.<sup>5</sup> Relatedly a series of studies, like for instance Carter and Stone's (2011) study, attempts to explain decisions of international organizations and other actors based on votes in the UNGA.

In a different vein scholars have also focused on explaining the voting behavior of delegates in the UNGA more specifically. Potrafke (2009) assesses whether the

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<sup>3</sup>Lijphart (1963) offers a critical discussion of these early studies.

<sup>4</sup>Strictly speaking already Hovet (1960) offered such analyses.

<sup>5</sup>Häge (2011) notes and demonstrates, however, that many of the similarity measures are problematic and confuse proper similarity in preferences with chance correspondence in votes.

ideological alignment of governments affects their voting behavior in the UNGA, while Dreher and Jensen (2009) focus on the voting behavior of delegates before and after changes in a country's leadership. At a more instrumental level Dreher, Thiele and Nunnenkamp (2008) and Sturm and Dreher (2012 forthcoming) study how US aid and lending decisions by IMF and World Bank affect voting in the UNGA. In a more specific perspective Boockmann and Dreher (2011) focus on votes on human rights and wish to assess whether human rights offenders vote more frequently against resolutions in this domain. Relatedly, Hillman and Potrafke (2011) analyze whether votes on Israel serve as decoy to deflect from other human rights problems elsewhere, while Smith (2006) studies the voting behavior of EU member states on human rights issues.

### **3 Votes on resolutions in the United Nations General Assembly**

While some of the studies mentioned above refer to the limitation linked to the fact that the analyses only cover recorded votes, whether this limitation leads to inferential problems is rarely discussed. Considering the literature on blocs and voting alignments, which has largely a descriptive aim, it is obvious that the description offered is only accurate if recorded votes are a random sample of the full set of decisions. The same applies to studies of cohesiveness of particular country groups. Here even more explicitly the description is almost by definition biased, as the largest share of decisions occur without votes.

In the same disadvantageous position are studies using similarity measures based on votes that are possibly more divisive than decisions reached otherwise (votes or adoptions without votes). A related problem appears for studies wishing to explain voting behavior more generally. For instance decisions on the Middle East and human rights are much more frequently reached in recorded votes than decisions on resolutions dealing with other topics (see below). Not all such decisions are, however, recorded. Hence, it is unlikely that one can gain unbiased insights on voting behavior on human rights or the Middle East while focusing exclusively on recorded UNGA votes and not consider the selection mechanism leading to recorded votes in this assembly.

To evaluate these various pitfalls I rely on two datasets. The first dataset

contains information on all decisions on adopted resolutions between the 1st and 64th session (1945-2010). This includes information on three different types of decisions:<sup>6</sup>

- resolutions adopted in a recorded vote,
- resolutions adopted in a non-recorded vote,
- resolutions adopted without a vote.

For the 48th to the 64th sessions<sup>7</sup> the data comprises all decisions reached in the General Assembly related to resolutions. These include the following types of decisions:

- Decisions on resolutions (whether voted upon or adopted without a vote)<sup>8</sup>
- All decisions on amendments (whether voted upon or adopted without a vote).<sup>9</sup>
- All motions of no action (and of divisions) if they relate to a part or the whole of a resolution.<sup>10</sup>
- All separate votes on parts of a resolution.<sup>11</sup>

The second dataset comprises all country-specific voting information on recorded votes on resolutions for the 1st to 64th session. For the 48th to 64th session the data also includes all recorded votes on resolution-related votes as discussed above.

Before proceeding it is worth comparing these two datasets and some of their characteristics with Voeten and Merdzanovic's (2009) data. The latter contains

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<sup>6</sup>This information stems from the <http://unbisnet.un.org> website and was checked against Voeten and Merdzanovic's (2009) data (and thus also against Alker and Russett's (1965) dataset, see below).

<sup>7</sup>This coverage is related to the fact that only for these sessions the Official Records are available as electronically readable files.

<sup>8</sup>All resolutions considered during the 48th to the 64th sessions have been adopted. These decisions were garnered automatically from the <http://unbisnet.un.org> website.

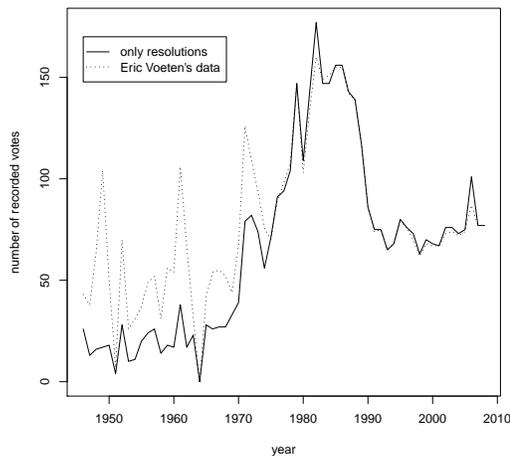
<sup>9</sup>Source: Official records obtained from the <http://undocs.org> website.

<sup>10</sup>Source: Official records obtained from the <http://undocs.org> website.

<sup>11</sup>Source: Official records obtained from the <http://undocs.org> website.

4943 votes for the period 1946-2008.<sup>12</sup> These 4943 votes relate to 4765 distinct resolutions, suggesting that the data contains very few votes apart from those on resolutions. This also transpires from figure 1 which simply depicts the number of recorded votes per year in my and Voeten and Merdzanovic’s (2009) data.

Figure 1: Recorded votes on resolutions and Erik Voeten’s data



The differences in the first half of the period covered is due to the fact that up to the 41st session Voeten and Merdzanovic’s (2009) data is largely identical with Alker and Russett’s (1965) dataset, which includes all recorded votes in the General Assembly and its main committees.<sup>13</sup> In the second part of the period

<sup>12</sup>Comparing carefully all recorded votes on resolutions in Voeten and Merdzanovic’s (2009) data and the data generated from the <http://unbisnet.un.org> website, I identified 43 votes that are missing in the former data. The resolution IDs of these recorded votes (all falling in the years 1946-1986) are the following: A/RES/62(I)[II], A/RES/62(I)[I], A/RES/8(I), A/RES/10(I), A/RES/106(S-1), A/RES/104(S-1), A/RES/189(S-2), A/RES/647(VII), A/RES/706(VII), A/RES/914(X), A/RES/982(X), A/RES/981(X), A/RES/980(X), A/RES/979(X), A/RES/978(X), A/RES/975(X), A/RES/974(X), A/RES/970(X), A/RES/969(X), A/RES/948(X), A/RES/947(X), A/RES/977(X), A/RES/976(X), A/RES/1122(XI), A/RES/1005(ES-II), A/RES/1007(ES-II), A/RES/1006(ES-II), A/RES/1002(ES-I), A/RES/1001(ES-I), A/RES/1000(ES-I), A/RES/999(ES-I), A/RES/998(ES-I), A/RES/1004(ES-II), A/RES/997(ES-I), A/RES/1474(ES-IV), A/RES/1622(S-III), A/RES/1598(XV), A/RES/1992(XVIII), A/RES/1889(XVIII), A/RES/1875(S-IV), A/RES/1876(S-IV), A/RES/1877(S-IV), A/RES/2189(XXI).

<sup>13</sup>Including recorded votes in the (currently) six main committees may be useful for certain research purposes as these committees are “committees of the whole,” i.e. have the same

covered there appear almost no differences, as both Gartzke's (1998) dataset, on which Voeten and Merdzanovic's (2009) data is partly based, and Voeten and Merdzanovic's (2009) data only cover recorded votes on resolutions.<sup>14</sup>

As for a large period covered in these datasets recorded votes on resolutions form the entirety of the data available and for most other sessions form the large majority of votes, it seems important to assess how frequent recorded votes on resolutions are. Figure 2 depicts for each year the proportion of final decisions on resolutions that were recorded. As the figure clearly shows only a minority of decisions on resolutions is reached in recorded votes. A sizeable share is adopted in non-recorded votes and others without votes. The figure also clearly shows that the proportion of recorded votes varies over time.<sup>15</sup> While in the first two and a half decades approximately every fifth resolution was adopted in a recorded vote, this share increased to around a third in the 1970s and 1980s. Starting with the 1990s this share dropped back again to almost one fifth as in the early years of the UNGA. This share is very close to the proportion (21.6 per cent) reported by Hovet (1960, 14).<sup>16</sup>

As I have information on all resolution-related votes for the 48th to 64th sessions I can assess the likelihood of recorded votes much more in detail for this period. Figure 3 first illustrates the respective shares of decisions on resolutions, decisions on amendments to resolutions, separate votes on parts of resolutions and motions related to resolutions over time. The figure nicely shows that an overwhelming share of all decisions in the UNGA are the adoptions (there are no negative final decisions on resolutions in the period covered) of resolutions. A much smaller and declining number of decisions concerns separate votes on parts of resolutions. Almost negligible is the number of decisions on amendments to resolutions and motions related to resolutions. Regarding this second to last category it is interesting to note that in the first 29 sessions of the UNGA the

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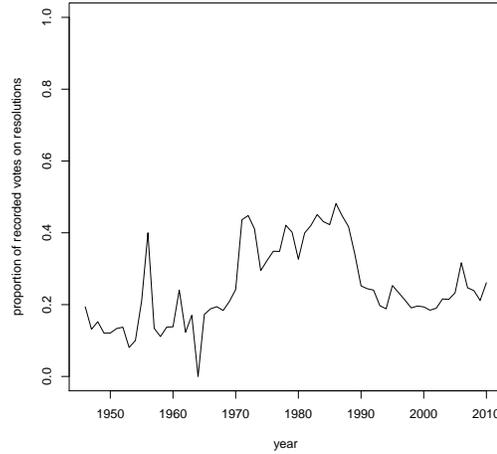
membership as the General Assembly (see for instance Peterson, 2005, 59).

<sup>14</sup>This suggests that using indiscriminately Voeten and Merdzanovic's (2009) data is quite problematic, as the rules for inclusion vary quite dramatically (Voeten and Merdzanovic's (2009) codebook), which is not the case for the data used here.

<sup>15</sup>The rather extraordinary drop in 1964 is due to the fact the 19th session was "voteless . . . [as] the superpowers argued out the question of whether peacekeeping expenses are part or not of the regular UN budget." (Peterson, 2005, 49).

<sup>16</sup>Hovet (1960, 14) notes that "... there were at least 8917 votes in the plenary or main committees through the thirteenth regular session. . . . [O]nly 1908, or 21.6 per cent, of the votes were roll-call votes." He also finds that ". . . at least 6184 votes were held in the main committees and 2733 votes in the plenary."

Figure 2: Proportion of recorded votes on resolutions in the UNGA over time



number of votes on amendments is much higher as is partly reflected in figure 1.<sup>17</sup>

Not surprisingly, the large majority of these decisions are adopted without votes as table 6 shows.<sup>18</sup> While as noted above only a fifth of final passage votes on resolutions are recorded this share is exactly half for decisions on amendments to resolutions. Separate votes on parts of resolutions and motions are systematically subject to a recorded vote in the 48th to 64th sessions of the UNGA.

Table 1: Recorded votes and adoptions without vote (48th-64th session)

	adoptions without votes	recorded votes
decisions on resolutions	4478	1254
amendments to resolutions	24	24
separate votes on parts of resolutions	0	240
motions of no action (or devisions)	0	16

<sup>17</sup>From 1945 to 1975, the period for which information on amendments to resolutions is available, about 17 percent of all recorded votes are on amendments (which also includes amendments adopted in the main committees). For the 1993-2010 period this share drops to less than 2 percent. This might be due to the fact that more and more informal discussions take place before decisions in the General Assembly. As Peterson (2005, 3) notes, the UNGA “. . . also speeded deliberations on particular items through a set of unwritten practices for circulating drafts, presenting amendments or rival proposals, and developing a single draft through informal consultations held outside the public meetings.” Peterson (2005, 3) links this to the expansion of UN membership.

<sup>18</sup>During the 48th to 64th sessions no non-recorded votes have occurred.

Figure 3: Decisions in the UNGA (48th-64th session)

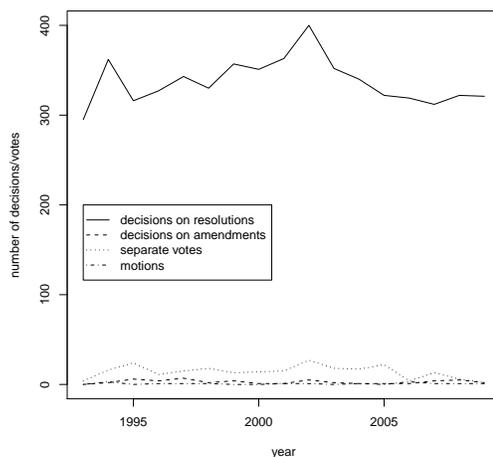


Figure 4 depicts the share of recorded votes by type of vote over time. This share remains rather stable during this period for votes on resolutions at around one fifth. Similarly, if separate votes on parts of a resolution are held these are in the 48th to 64th sessions systematically recorded votes.<sup>19</sup> Finally, figure 4 shows that whether amendments to resolutions are adopted in recorded votes or without votes varies dramatically over time. In some years all amendments are voted upon in recorded votes, while in others all are decided (i.e., adopted, in this case) without votes.

Before moving to a more analytical perspective figures 5 and 6 depict how recorded votes differ from non-recorded votes in terms of their relative vote margin.<sup>20</sup> Figure 5 gives a first illustration of the rather different nature of recorded and non-recorded votes. As the boxplots show more than half of the non-recorded votes are unanimous, while this is not the case for recorded votes. Second, among the recorded votes there are quite a few votes that are much more divisive than what one sees for the non-recorded ones.

<sup>19</sup>I do not report the share of recorded votes for motions, first of all given that they are quite rare and second because all of them are recorded votes.

<sup>20</sup>The vote margin here is simply the absolute value of the difference between the votes in favor and the votes against, divided by the sum of these values. It thus corresponds to the value of the Rice (1925) index (see also Rice, 1928) calculated on the whole voting body of the UNGA.

Figure 4: Proportion of recorded votes on resolution-related matters

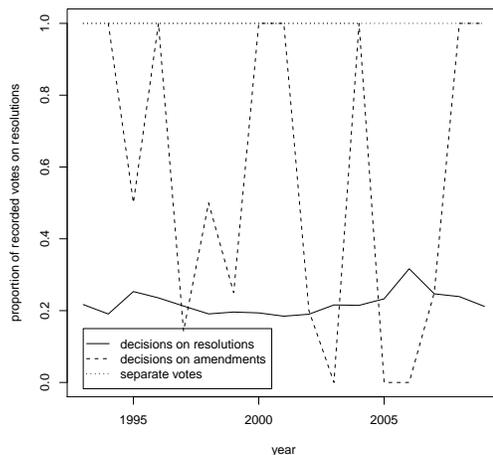


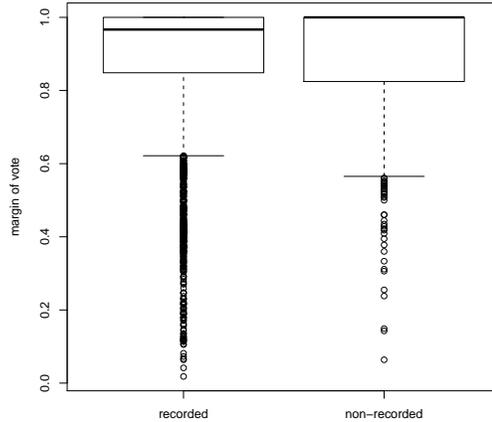
Figure 6 depicts this same information averaged per year over time.<sup>21</sup> What transpires from this figure is that until the beginning of the 1970s non-recorded votes had in general considerably higher vote margins than recorded votes, suggesting that the latter were much more divisive. Starting with the 1970s this appears no longer to be the case with the two types of votes having, on average, quite comparable vote margins.

## 4 Empirics

As discussed above almost without exceptions studies dealing with voting in the UNGA focus on recorded votes and barely consider how these votes relate to the overall set of decisions in this “deliberative body.” As is well known, inferences based on such a subset are unproblematic if what is to be explained on the basis of recorded votes is unrelated to the mechanism leading to recorded votes (e.g., Heckman, 1976; Maddala, 1983; Achen, 1986). As already illustrated above recorded votes (compared to non-recorded votes) appear, however, to be more conflictual. As many studies focus on conflicts in the assembly (or groups) this should already give us sufficient reasons to pause. This transpires also quite

<sup>21</sup>As non-recorded votes almost disappeared after 1984 to disappear completely after 1988, I depict the vote margins for these votes only until 1984).

Figure 5: Relative vote margins in recorded and non-recorded votes



clearly in table 2 which reports the results of a simple linear regression relating the vote margin to whether a vote was recorded or not and the year of the vote.<sup>22</sup> As this is a linear regression the estimated coefficient for the type of vote dummy suggests that, controlling for the years, recorded votes have much narrower vote margins, i.e. by 6 percent.

Table 2: Explaining the margin of votes in recorded and non-recorded votes

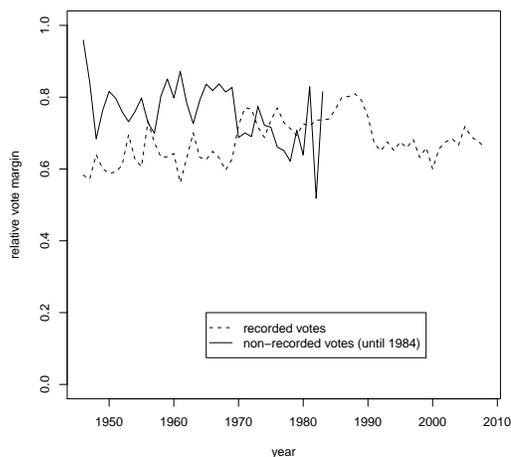
Model 1	
year	0.00* (0.00)
recorded vote	-0.06* (0.01)
(Intercept)	-1.24* (0.33)
<i>N</i>	5925
Resid. sd	0.17

Standard errors in parentheses  
\* indicates significance at  $p < 0.05$

Turning things around table 3 reports again the result of a linear regression model explaining the probability of a recorded vote as a function of the type of decision and the margin of vote. The first two columns, focusing on the first 64 sessions, suggest that when not taking into account the vote margin (first column) recorded votes on separate votes and motions are the most likely, while

<sup>22</sup>I employ here and for table the results depicted in table 3 linear regressions (despite the limited dependent variables) as the results are only shown for illustrative purposes and the coefficients are easier to interpret.

Figure 6: Relative vote margins over time in recorded and non-recorded votes



amendments (and especially resolutions) are quite rarely voted upon in recorded votes. When taking into account the vote margin (and hence only resolutions adopted in (recorded or non-recorded) votes are covered) it appears that the vote margin positively and significantly affects the likelihood of a recorded vote. Controlling for the vote margin suggests that it appears to be less the type of vote than the divisiveness that leads to a recorded vote (again an indication for treading carefully in relying exclusively on recorded votes). Contrary to what transpired above, however, the effect of the vote margin is slightly positive. This implies, as the UNGA votes more unanimously, that the likelihood of a recorded vote increase. As this result appears once I control for the vote type, it appears that non-resolution votes are on average more conflictual. The last column reproduces the analyses reported in the first column for the 48th to 64th session, as in these sessions non-recorded votes no longer occurred. A comparison with the first column suggests that these last 17 sessions barely differ from the larger set.

As the vote margin can only be used for analyses covering the earlier periods and is obviously also in part endogenous, I employ a dataset that makes available additional explanatory variables. More precisely Qvinth (2011b) has collected for every second UNGA session from the 53rd to the 63rd information on all res-

Table 3: Explaining the likelihood of a recorded vote in the UNGA

	1st-64th sessions		48th-64th sessions
	all decisions	recorded and non-recorded votes	all decisions
year	0.00*	0.01*	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
amendment	0.22*	-0.03	0.28*
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)
separate vote	0.72*	-0.07*	0.78*
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)
motion	0.72*	-0.06	0.78*
	(0.11)	(0.08)	(0.10)
relative vote margin		0.00*	
		(0.00)	
(Intercept)	-0.87*	-27.38*	-3.97
	(0.42)	(0.92)	(2.18)
<i>N</i>	15863	6209	6038
Resid. sd	0.44	0.33	0.41

Standard errors in parentheses

\* indicates significance at  $p < 0.05$ 

olutions, among others their topic and whether the European Union (EU) and its member states have made a statement before the adoption of the resolution.<sup>23</sup> By combining Qvinth’s (2011*b*) data with mine<sup>24</sup> I can explore more in detail what leads to recorded votes and how this affects analysis of voting behavior. Table 4 reports for the issue classification proposed by Qvinth (2011*b*) how frequent recorded votes are. As the table clearly shows, recorded votes are much more frequent for resolutions dealing with the Middle East, disarmament and international security and peace, democratization and decolonization and human rights.<sup>25</sup> In some other issue areas, no or almost no recorded votes ever occur.

Table 4: Issues and recorded votes (53rd, 55th, 57th, 59th, 61th, and 63rd session)

issue area	non-recorded vote		recorded vote	
	%	n	%	n
Disarmament and International Security and Peace	62.36	227	37.64	137
Economic development and Financial matters	91.30	126	8.70	12
Human Rights issues	68.36	188	31.64	87
Democratization and Decolonization issues	66.90	95	33.10	47
UN Administrative and Budgetary matters	98.25	394	1.75	7
International Legal matters	89.22	91	10.78	11
Middle East issues	20.89	33	79.11	125
Environment and Energy issues	90.70	117	9.30	12
Social, Cultural and Humanitarian matters	99.42	171	0.58	1
Institutional matters	94.16	129	5.84	8
Other questions	100.00	30	0.00	0
total		1601		447

<sup>23</sup>Qvinth (2011*a*) uses this information to assess more closely how the EU behaves in the UNGA without having to rely on the only partially available voting records. A similar approach, focusing on human rights votes, is adopted by Smith (2006)

<sup>24</sup>Qvinth (2011*b*), in some instances, only provides information on EU declarations for “umbrella resolutions” that appear in my dataset (and on <http://unbisnet.un.org>) as separate. I attributed Qvinth’s (2011*b*) information to all resolutions making up these “umbrella resolutions.”

<sup>25</sup>In a previous version of this paper I employed Hovet’s (1960, 26) classification which is based on the UN charter, and arrived at largely similar results. Note, however, that Hovet’s (1960, 26) classification does not have a category on Middle East issues.

Drawing on the additional information on EU declarations collected by Qvint (2011*b*) I assess how addressing the non-random selection of recorded votes might be addressed and how it affects our inferences. For this I focus on one particular issue area, namely human rights, and assess first whether EU declarations are related in one way or another with the likelihood of a recorded vote. Table 5 clearly shows that human rights resolutions on which the EU has offered a declaration are much more frequently subject to a recorded vote than those that are not. The share of recorded votes almost doubles when the EU makes a declaration.

Table 5: EU declarations on human rights and recorded votes (53rd, 55th, 57th, 59th, 61th, and 63rd session)

	no EU declaration	EU declaration	total
non-recorded vote	78.05 % (64)	64.25 % (124)	68.36 % (188)
recorded vote	21.95 % (18)	35.75 % (69)	31.64 % (87)
total	100 % (82)	100 % (193)	100 % (275)

I use this information to offer a partial replication of the analyses carried out by Boockmann and Dreher (2011) on the one hand and Smith (2006) and Hoesli, van Kampen, Meijerink and Tennis (2010) on the other. The first article studies how the human rights record influences the voting behavior on human rights resolutions. The second set of studies are interested (among others) in the cohesion of the EU in UNGA votes. To address the non-random selection of recorded votes on which these studies rely, I use a selection model that jointly estimates the effect of various variables on the likelihood of a recorded vote and the effect of another set of variables on the likelihood of a yes vote by a given country.

Starting with Boockmann and Dreher’s (2011) study it has to be noted that both dependent variables (recorded vote or not, respectively vote in favor or against) in this case are dichotomous. Thus, I rely on a Heckman (1976)-probit model.<sup>26</sup> To explain whether a vote on a resolution is recorded or not I use three variables and an interaction term. First, I employ a dichotomous variable

<sup>26</sup>In a previous version I used a Heckman (1976)-type two-step analysis, which is only an approximation. Using a selection model is only one way to deal with issues of sample selectivity and allows to correct for biases, even if the selection relates in part to unobservables. It is, however, quite heavily dependent on the correct specification of the selection equation (see for instance Brandt and Schneider, 2007). Matching would be another strategy (e.g., Ho, Imai, King and Stuart, 2007), requiring, however, that selection is based on observables, which seems rather unlikely in this particular case.

from Qvint (2011b) indicating whether the EU (either the EU or Commission president) have made a statement regarding a resolution. Second, I use from the same data-source the number of EU member states that have made statements as well, but divide it by the number of EU member states. This share of EU member states making a declaration is also interacted with the first dichotomous variable, based on the idea that national statements have a different meaning dependent on whether the EU has made a declaration or not. Finally, I also use the number of statements made by the EU.

To explain the voting of the UNGA member states I use only two variables, namely the physical integrity scale from Cingranelli and Richards (2010) as a measure for the respect of civil rights, and the democracy measure by Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland (2010).<sup>27</sup>

Assessing how the respect of human rights and democracy affects the voting behavior on human rights resolutions and controlling for possible selection problems raises an important additional complication. As I wish to estimate the effect of my explanatory variables on the voting behavior of UNGA members, the question arises whether resolution specific elements affect the dependent variable.<sup>28</sup> In a simple setup, the easiest way to address this issue is to rely on a conditional logit model, which conditions resolution specific effects out of the likelihood function.

Consequently, I present first in table 6 the results of such an estimation. As the variable CIRI physical integrity takes on 9 values (0-8), with higher values indicating improved respect of human rights, I introduce a series of dichotomous variables, omitting, however, the one corresponding to the highest value of the scale. Therefore, each estimated coefficient indicates how countries with a lesser human rights record differ in their voting behavior from countries with a perfect human rights record. Not surprisingly I find for each of the dichotomous variables a positive effect, implying that countries with poorer human rights records are

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<sup>27</sup>Both these variables are used in Boockmann and Dreher’s (2011) study. For simplicity’s sake I do not add additional variables from their study. I extracted these variables from Teorell, Holmberg and Rothstein’s (2008) “Quality of Government” data. It is useful to note, however, that Boockmann and Dreher (2011) use as only variable varying across resolutions the voting behavior of a country’s peer group.

<sup>28</sup>Following Boockmann and Dreher (2011) I considered as voting with the majority of the group formed by France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom as a vote for human rights. As in all resolutions considered here, safe one (where three of these countries abstained) were rejected by a majority of these four countries. I left the voting variable as is. Hence, a yes vote on any of these resolutions on human rights (coded 1) is a vote against human rights.

much more likely to support resolutions that have negative consequences for human rights. I also find that democratic countries vote with a higher probability against these resolutions.<sup>29</sup>

Table 6: Explaining votes on human rights

	(1) clogit	(2) probit RE	(3) probit	(4) heckprobit	(5) probit FE	(6) heckprobit FE
outcome: vote						
CIRI physical integrity 0	1.275*** (0.192)	0.703*** (0.107)	0.634*** (0.0950)	0.464*** (0.102)	0.700*** (0.106)	0.416*** (0.0729)
CIRI physical integrity 1	1.489*** (0.172)	0.804*** (0.0933)	0.732*** (0.0846)	0.566*** (0.0903)	0.817*** (0.0945)	0.505*** (0.0657)
CIRI physical integrity 2	1.211*** (0.146)	0.641*** (0.0810)	0.651*** (0.0735)	0.566*** (0.0776)	0.646*** (0.0814)	0.440*** (0.0568)
CIRI physical integrity 3	1.113*** (0.144)	0.628*** (0.0804)	0.602*** (0.0723)	0.510*** (0.0760)	0.630*** (0.0812)	0.387*** (0.0556)
CIRI physical integrity 4	1.233*** (0.117)	0.688*** (0.0660)	0.656*** (0.0596)	0.573*** (0.0621)	0.687*** (0.0667)	0.453*** (0.0448)
CIRI physical integrity 5	1.554*** (0.112)	0.903*** (0.0641)	0.796*** (0.0571)	0.728*** (0.0594)	0.907*** (0.0647)	0.583*** (0.0440)
CIRI physical integrity 6	0.997*** (0.103)	0.567*** (0.0597)	0.526*** (0.0534)	0.498*** (0.0550)	0.567*** (0.0601)	0.373*** (0.0391)
CIRI physical integrity 7	0.286** (0.0906)	0.175*** (0.0532)	0.147** (0.0477)	0.141** (0.0488)	0.169** (0.0539)	0.0991** (0.0317)
democracy	-1.113*** (0.0724)	-0.621*** (0.0406)	-0.526*** (0.0359)	-0.368*** (0.0365)	-0.637*** (0.0406)	-0.375*** (0.0276)
Intercept		0.842*** (0.0652)	0.824*** (0.0498)	0.632*** (0.0790)	1.676*** (0.158)	2.498*** (0.110)
$\log(\sigma_u^2)$		-0.405 (.)				
selection: recorded vote						
EU Statement				-0.281*** (0.0194)		-0.309*** (0.0188)
Share National Statements				-10.54*** (0.587)		-10.36*** (0.583)
EU Statement × Share National Statements				7.754*** (0.608)		7.670*** (0.604)
Number EU Statement				0.523*** (0.00720)		0.544*** (0.00708)
Intercept				-0.676*** (0.0134)		-0.684*** (0.0133)
$\text{ath}(\rho)$				0.0454 (0.0527)		-3.845*** (0.612)
$\rho$				0.045 (0.053)		-0.999*** (0.001)
$N$	10617	10617	10617	10805	10617	10805
$AIC$	7068.0	7737.5	9196.5	426.1	7559.2	560.6

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

As the selection model that I wish to estimate relies on a probit specification I present in the second column the results for the same model using a probit specification with random effects.<sup>30</sup> Not surprisingly the estimated coefficients in this model differ from those in the first model, but this is largely due to the different functional forms. At the substantive level the same insights result. Next, I present the results of a simple probit model not taking into account that resolution specific factors might influence the voting behavior in the UNGA.

<sup>29</sup>Comparing this conditional logit model with a simple logit model and using a Hausman-test suggests that resolution specific effects cannot be ignored ( $\chi^2_{df=9}=45.00$  ( $p=0.000$ )).

<sup>30</sup>Unfortunately there exists no possibility to condition the likelihood function of a probit model for fixed effects.

Again the estimated coefficients differ, suggesting that resolution specific factors are influencing the voting of UNGA members.

Ignoring this issue for the moment I present in the fourth column of table 6 the results of a Heckman selection model with probit specifications both for the selection and outcome equation.<sup>31</sup> Regarding the selection equation the results suggest that resolutions subject of a EU statement are considerably more likely to be decided upon in a recorded vote than those without such a statement. For the effect of the statements by EU member states I find a considerable negative effect if the EU has not made a declaration, while if the EU has made a statement, this negative effect is strongly reduced. Finally, if the number of EU statements increases it is also more likely that a recorded vote occurs.

The results for the outcome equation underline again that countries with poorer human rights records vote more heavily in favour of resolutions dealing with human rights. Democracies, on the other hand, vote more likely against these resolutions. While at the substantive level the conclusions are identical it is notable that the relative size of the estimated coefficient for democratic countries is considerably reduced.

The problem with this analysis is obviously that in the outcome equation I implicitly assume that resolution specific effects on the voting behavior can be ignored. Controlling for these resolution specific effects is, however, problematic. Introducing fixed effects in a probit specification, leads to the so-called incidental parameter problem (e.g., Greene, 2003, 697), namely that with an increasing sample size the number of parameters to be estimated increases as well, as additional observations can only be generated by gathering more data on resolutions. This has as a consequence that the asymptotic properties of maximum-likelihood estimates do no longer apply. Despite this problem, I report in the fifth column of table 6 the results of a probit model where I introduced for each resolution a dichotomous variable (omitted from the table). Comparing these estimates with those obtained from the random effects probit (column 2) shows that neither the estimated coefficients nor the standard errors differ significantly. With this

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<sup>31</sup>Strictly speaking this model is hierarchical, as the selection equation relies on information on resolutions, while the outcome equation deals with votes on these resolutions. To alleviate this problem, I weighted the observations corresponding to recorded votes with the inverse of UNGA members voting on a resolution, while resolutions that were adopted without a vote obtained the weight of 1. This insures that in the selection equation each resolution has exactly the same weight.

knowledge at hand I estimate in a similar way the selection model, the results of which appear in column 6. The relative magnitude of the various coefficients remains largely the same compared to the results reported in column 4, with one exception. The coefficient for democracy has gained again in strength, suggesting that its effect is similar to the one having a perfect human rights record (compared to poor or mediocre ones).<sup>32</sup>

Turning to the studies by Smith (2006) and Hoesli, van Kampen, Meijerink and Tennis (2010) it has to be noted that both of them use as unit of observation an UNGA vote on a resolution. Smith (2006), focusing again on human rights resolutions, assesses (among other things) how cohesive the EU is in such votes. Hoesli, van Kampen, Meijerink and Tennis (2010), on the other hand, study more generally the cohesiveness of EU member states in UNGA votes. I draw in part on these analyses and focus again on the same set of human rights resolutions as defined above. In order to measure cohesive voting I rely (as do in part Hoesli, van Kampen, Meijerink and Tennis, 2010) on Hix, Noury and Roland's (2005) Agreement Index (AI) which takes the following form:

$$AI = \frac{\max(Yes, No, Abst.) - \frac{1}{2}((Yes + No + Abst.) - \max(Yes, No, Abst.))}{Yes + No + Abst.}$$

where *Yes*, *No*, and *Abst.* correspond to the number of votes cast for each alternative.<sup>33</sup> In table 7 I report in the first column the results of a simple linear regression where the dependent variable is the agreement index. As explanatory variables I employ those stemming from Qvinth (2011*b*) as discussed above omit, however, the number of EU statements. The results suggest that national statements in the absence of an EU statement considerably reduce the agreement among EU member states. If, on the other hand, the EU has made a statement, than the declarations by individual member states does not affect the cohesion of the EU.

In the second column of table 7 appear the results of a probit model where the dependent variable is whether a human rights resolution was voted upon

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<sup>32</sup>The estimates for the selection equation, not surprisingly, are largely identical to the ones reported in column 4).

<sup>33</sup>For simplicity's sake I do not consider absences and in addition I calculate the agreement index only for the 15 EU members present at the beginning of my observation period. It also has to be noted that in the resolutions considered here, only one had the feature of seeing EU member states both among the proponents and the opponents. In all other cases where the agreement index is not at its maximum value this comes about by abstentions.

Table 7: Explaining the cohesion of EU countries in human rights votes

	linear	probit	heckman (two-step)	heckman (MLE)
<hr/>				
outcome: agreement index				
EU Statement	-0.038 (0.034)		-0.163 (0.139)	-0.210* (0.077)
Share National Statements	-8.750* (1.576)		-6.865* (2.681)	-6.866 (3.664)
EU Statement $\times$ Share National Statements	8.842* (1.582)		6.793* (2.834)	6.792 (3.676)
Intercept	1.000* (0.030)		1.770* (0.823)	1.652
<hr/>				
selection: recorded vote				
EU Statement		0.291* (0.083)	0.322* (0.138)	0.318 (0.151)
Share National Statements		0.811* (0.341)	-6.242 (4.403)	-6.242 (4.705)
EU Statement $\times$ Share National Statements		-0.823 (0.542)	6.837 (4.431)	6.837 (4.737)
Number of EU Statements		-0.051 (0.036)	0.059 (0.040)	0.057 (0.043)
Intercept		-0.922* (0.051)	-1.891* (0.104)	-1.899 (0.115)
inverse Mills Ratio			-0.338 (0.361)	
<hr/>				
$\rho$				-0.999 (0.001)
$N$	87	2048	87/2048	87/2048
Resid. sd	0.123			
$\log L$		-1051.709		-203.2035

Standard errors in parentheses

\* indicates significance at  $p < 0.05$

or adopted without a vote. I use as independent variables the same ones (see also above, table 6) but add in addition the number of EU statements. The results suggest that both EU statements and the number of statements by EU member states increases the likelihood of seeing a recorded vote. The latter effect disappears, however, when an EU statement has been made. The number of EU statements influences negatively the likelihood of a recorded vote.

As the dependent variable of the outcome equation is continuous<sup>34</sup> I use the classic Heckman (1976) model to address the selection problem. In the third column of table 7 I report the results from the Heckman (1976) two-step estimator while in the last column the model is estimated with maximum likelihood. Regarding the estimates for the selection equation (lower half of the table) we find again the importance of an EU declaration which increases the likelihood of a recorded vote. Similarly, it appears again that national statements increase the likelihood of a recorded vote, as long as an EU statement has not been made. Turning to the outcome equation, we find that contrary to the initial model (first column in table 7) an EU statement decreases the cohesiveness considerably and statistically significant (at least in the ML estimations). While the pattern for

<sup>34</sup>I ignore for simplicity's sake the fact that the agreement index has both an upper and a lower bound (which do, however, not correspond to 0 and 1 and vary according to the number of votes.

the other two slope coefficients remains the same, these are no longer statistically significant.

The results for these two partial replications suggest that the selection process leading to recorded votes in the UNGA should not be ignored. In both cases addressing the selection process leads to substantively, though only marginally, different conclusions. It has to be noted, however, that the selection models employed here are quite sensitive to the model specification (see for instance Brandt and Schneider, 2007). Hence, for instance the extremely high absolute value estimated for the correlation between the errors in the selection and outcome equation reported in table 7 is problematic. As the number of selected observations (recorded votes) is quite small and the dependent variable quite skewed (most often the EU votes cohesively on human rights resolutions) renders this analysis, however, quite difficult. Nevertheless there seems clear evidence for selection problems in the study of UNGA recorded votes.

## 5 Conclusion

Recorded votes in the UNGA offer an important glimpse at member states' behavior in a global assembly. As in many other representative bodies these glimpses are, however, only partial. Less than a third of all decisions on resolutions are recorded, and thus we must ask ourselves whether the available information allows us to have an unbiased glimpse.

In the present paper I assessed whether recorded votes in the UNGA differ in systematic ways from those unrecorded and decisions adopted without a vote. Focusing on only resolution related votes clearly showed that recorded votes are quite different from other decisions. They are on average much more divisive and occur more frequently on particular subjects compared to others.

Assessing whether there are differences, however, leads us only half the way to better inferences. Hence, I also presented two partial replications drawing on studies of UNGA voting to assess whether well-known ways to address selectivity issues might offer any help. In both of these explorations significant evidence appeared suggesting that pursuing this path is a fruitful endeavor. Clearly, however, these analyses are still limited and further work needs to assess whether tailor-made estimators might improve on the inferences we wish to make. Nevertheless the results presented here should alert scholars working with UNGA

recorded votes to possible problems in their studies.

## 6 Appendix

Table 8 reports the descriptive statistics of the variables employed in the analyses appearing in the main text.

Table 8: Descriptive statistics

Variable	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std.Dev</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Obs</i>
vote decision	0.819	0.385	0.000	1.000	10617
CIRI physical integrity 0	0.036	0.185	0.000	1.000	10617
CIRI physical integrity 1	0.054	0.226	0.000	1.000	10617
CIRI physical integrity 2	0.071	0.257	0.000	1.000	10617
CIRI physical integrity 3	0.080	0.271	0.000	1.000	10617
CIRI physical integrity 4	0.146	0.353	0.000	1.000	10617
CIRI physical integrity 5	0.152	0.359	0.000	1.000	10617
CIRI physical integrity 6	0.155	0.362	0.000	1.000	10617
CIRI physical integrity 7	0.197	0.398	0.000	1.000	10617
CIRI physical integrity 8	0.111	0.314	0.000	1.000	10617
democracy	0.594	0.491	0.000	1.000	10617
vote recorded	0.983	0.131	0.000	1.000	10805
EU Statement	0.798	0.402	0.000	1.000	10805
National Statements	0.638	1.732	0.000	17.000	10805
Share of National Statements	0.026	0.073	0.000	0.630	10805
Number of EU Statements	1.318464	1.157176	0	5	10805

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