

Manipulation and Coercion: Vote-Buying in the United Nations

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Abstract

Vote-buying within the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) presents a unique and significant challenge to the international community. This article delves into the complex dynamics behind vote-buying in the UNGA, with a specific focus on three prominent mechanisms: financial development aid, diplomatic political coercion, and military capabilities. Drawing on existing literature and empirical evidence, this research investigates how powerful nations strategically employ financial development aid to secure favorable voting outcomes in the UNGA. It further analyzes the subtle tactics of diplomatic coercion employed by influential states to sway the voting behaviors of other states. Additionally, this study sheds light on the often opaque realm of military arms deals, elucidating how the provision of arms and military assistance functions as a tool for securing votes in the UNGA. By comprehensively exploring these three causal mechanisms, this article aims to deepen our understanding of vote-buying in the UNGA. Furthermore, it highlights the challenges posed by vote-buying and explores the potential benefits of addressing these challenges to foster a more transparent and equitable decision-making process within the UN.

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Introduction

The United Nations was founded in 1945, just after the end of the Second World War. The purpose of this organization was to open a new platform of interstate communication that would support peace and prevent another world war (Nations, n.d.). Since those early days, the UN has expanded and codified its goals into the 17 sustainable Development goals that guide its role as the chief world governance body: no poverty; zero hunger; good health and well-being; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation and infrastructure; reduced inequality; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below water; life on land; peace and justice strong institutions; and partnerships to achieve these goals. These 17 goals highlight the UN's role as a unifying figure, addressing issues that affect the world uniformly and pursuing a future that benefits all of humankind. In support and pursuit of these goals, the UN is divided into several sub-organizations: the General Assembly (UNGA), the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice, and the UN Secretariat. This paper will focus on the UNGA.

While the UNGA has many tools at its disposal, its most powerful one is Resolutions. Resolutions in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) hold immense importance due to their ability to shape global discourse and influence policy decisions. Resolutions in the UNGA possess a non-binding nature, yet they wield significant political weight. As the principal deliberative body of the United Nations, the UNGA comprises representatives from all member states enabling expression of diverse perspectives. Therefore, Resolutions serve as a means for member states to convey their positions and viewpoints on any global or specific issue. These resolutions reflect a consensus among nations and play a crucial role in guiding international norms and narratives: informing actions and reactions in bodies throughout the international community. Resolutions in the UNGA offer a forum for countries to advocate for their interests and address their concerns by providing a platform of discourse: enabling interstate collaboration.

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Therefore, the impact of UNGA resolutions transcends their specific legal authority. They possess the power to influence the behavior of states and mobilize international support. Resolutions pave the way for the establishment of norms, principles, and guidelines. Despite not being legally binding, the political significance of Resolutions cannot be underestimated. They serve as an essential instrument for member states to express their opinions, address critical issues, and collaborate.

It should come as no shock, then, that the passage of resolutions is tumultuous; the UN faces a myriad of challenges in operationalizing its goals. In particular, resolutions are targets of vote-buying. Vote-buying in the UNGA refers to the practice of states attempting to influence the voting behavior of other member states through financial incentives, diplomatic favors, promises of military support, and other causal mechanisms. Summarily, vote buying involves offering benefits or inducements to secure votes in favor of a particular resolution, policy, or agenda item. Further, due to the importance of resolutions as tools to shape international norms and narratives, all states in the UNGA have an incentive to engage in vote-buying as a practice. Powerful states wish to buy votes to manipulate norms and pursue strategic interests, and less powerful states are interested in selling their votes for a variety of tangible benefits.

Why and how do members of the DAC+ practice vote-buying in the UNGA?

The currency of vote-buying is not uniform. Powerful states are willing to leverage any tools at their disposal to pursue their strategic interests in the UNGA. To this end, while some votes are certainly swayed by financial inducements, others are more nuanced. An unfortunate reality is that vote buying via political favors, military assurances, development assistance, trade agreements, diplomatic support, or other forms of bilateral or multilateral cooperation are often obscured by the nature of the back-room deals where they occur. These incentives are used as bargaining tools to sway the voting decisions of other member states, creating a system where votes are influenced by considerations beyond the issue's merit.

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Vote-buying in the UNGA can have significant implications for the formulation and adoption of international policies, resolutions, and decisions within the UN system. These implications also extend beyond the UN, affecting the international community. By manipulating the voting behavior of other member states, those engaged in vote-buying seek to shape the direction of international norms, practices, and priorities in line with their own strategic interests. Vote-buying in the UNGA undermines the principles of fairness, impartiality, and democratic decision-making, it remains a persistent challenge within the UNGA.

When considering the actors involved in vote-buying, it's important to consider the means and motivation of states. Which states have the capacity to leverage their innate power (economic strength, diplomatic positioning, or military capacity) to buy votes? Which states have the motive to engage in this practice?

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) offers a unique answer to these questions. The DAC is an international forum of 31 developed aid-delivering states: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These states represent the operational arm of the OECD. In 2021, the DAC was directly responsible for the delivery of \$357,773,600,000 USD of aid (*OECD Statistics*, n.d.). These states represent those most capable of delivering aid to foreign entities; therefore, these states are also the most likely suspects of vote-buying in the UNGA.

However, there are other states to consider in this scheme. Diplomatically and militarily, there are key international actors with the capacity to buy votes who are absent from the DAC. Such states were identified for their high GDP and access to nuclear weapons (*GDP Ranked by Country 2023*, n.d.; *Which Countries Have Nuclear Weapons?*, n.d.). We must expand this list to include: the Peoples Republic of

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China, the Russian Federation, India, Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Argentina, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea. Combining, we have compiled a list of the states with the highest capacity to buy votes in the UNGA. Henceforth, states identified as potential vote-buyers are signified by “DAC+”.

Regarding motivation, each of these states has a motivation to control the norms and narrative of the international community on a variety of issues. Though not all of their motivations are equal, some issue-specific interests nonetheless require us to consider each of these states as possible culprits of buying votes in the UNGA.

Understanding and predicting macro-level interactions in the UNGA increases our capacity to measure the UNGA’s capability to serve as an international governing body. Thus, developing a stronger understanding of where and how the DAC leverages aid for political support is essential to being more effectively prepared for state-to-state interactions in the future and answers questions about how votes in global institutions can be manipulated. Domestically, this research would enable policymakers to further prevent the backsliding of American international power, as well as offer mechanisms by which to detect the emergence of rival states in the UNGA. This model effectively portrays vote-buying as a key mechanism of resolution passage in the UNGA and provides valuable insights to the international community.

Literature Review and Theory

While the academic study on competition for votes is a relatively novel development, there exists a wide library of existing literature on vote buying mechanisms & strategy, case studies on competitive behaviors, and issue convergence that offer insights into this dynamic. By examining these existing works, this literature review seeks to build a foundation to understand existing methods of vote manipulation via direct aid disbursements, political alignment, and military incentives.

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The existing literature on the vote-buying strategies and practices of the United States offers a thorough lens on the strategies and mechanisms of vote buying in the UN. Aid payments, dispersed via the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), are clearly and intrinsically causally related to alignment to US foreign policy objectives in the UN (Alexander & Rooney, 2019). Highlighting the first and most obvious mechanism of vote-manipulation in the UN: votes-for-cash (Lockwood, 2013). Though USAID is independent from both the State department and other federal bodies like the CIA or branches of the military, it is still directed by the Secretary of State (*Department of State and USAID | Performance.Gov*, n.d.). USAID funds are clearly and intrinsically tied to the strategic objectives of the United States: used as tools to leverage and coerce foreign actors. In fact, this revelation had been codified into official departmental standards since legislation established under the Reagan administration “stipulated that the US State Department identify important [UN] votes and that aid disbursements reflect voting decisions” (Carter & Stone, 2015). Additionally, just as USAID funds can be offered as carrots to aligned states, they can just as swiftly be used as sticks to punish belligerents. Ronan Bennett offers one such example where, upon its declination to vote in support of the first Gulf War, Yemens’ £12m in annual aid was immediately withdrawn. Reportedly, the American ambassador told the Yemeni diplomat that “ambassador he'd just cast the most expensive vote of his career” (Bennett, 2008). Bennett offers additional insights through on-site interviews of high-ranking American diplomats including Trevor McDonald, who is recorded asking another UN diplomat: "what's the going rate for a vote on the security council these days?" (Bennett, 2008). The practice of vote-buying by American diplomats to both lubricate the passage of American interests and foil opposition in the UNGA is extremely well documented.

Beyond the United States, financial aid and development projects are a surefire way to build and buy favor. The Chinese belts and roads initiatives is an example of one such project. Merlevede, Schoors, and van Aarle explore the relationship between Chinese BRI initiatives and bilateral trade flows. The authors emphasizes that, despite the potential to improve trade practices, infrastructure development, and

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connectivity among participating nations, (among other significant implications for global trade and economic dynamics), the economic consequences of the BRI are more nuanced; BRI brings recipient states closer to the Chinese sphere of influence.

Richard Turcsanyi and Eva Kachlikova confirm this speculation, finding that Chinese narratives, which emphasized economic opportunities, connectivity, and win-win cooperation, resonated with certain European countries and were initially well-received for two main reasons (Turcsanyi & Kachlikova, 2020). First, European states were engaged by the prospect of economic benefits and potential access to Chinese markets. Second, China strategically utilized its soft power tools, such as cultural exchanges, media outreach, and public diplomacy to shape positive perceptions of the BRI. The authors concede that another factor in the initial success of BRI was due to the domestic agendas of European BRI recipients. Thus, it stands to reason that financial inducements, like those dispersed in BRI funds, could be levied to buy votes in the UNGA, offering credibility to the vote-buying theories presented here. This analysis will extend this research and uncover additional details about the relationship between development aid and voting patterns in the UNGA.

Further works, like that of Carter and Stone, identify historical trends in US foreign policy to both identify vulnerable states in need of USAID packages, and coerce such states to align their voting trends with the US (Carter & Stone, 2015). Similarly, Alexander and Rooney find a strong and direct correlation between states that join the UNSC on a temporary basis and increased receipt of foreign aid from the United States (Alexander & Rooney, 2019). While the focus of research in vote buying remains fixated on the United States, the research is broadening to other actors. For example, the work by Brazys and Dukalskis explores the expanding role of China in successfully coercing Uzbekistan, South Africa, Nicaragua, and Equatorial Guinea via aid packages.(Brazys & Dukalskis, 2017).

However, votes are not only bought with monetary currency. Yu Wang offers an alternative mechanism of vote manipulation through their novel examination of leveraging legitimacy, measured by visits by state leaders, for alignment in the UN (Wang, 2022). This novel examination highlights a causal

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relationship between leader proximity and alignment where Chinese state leaders are up to three times more likely to visit a foreign state during their tenure on the security council than otherwise (Wang, 2022). It's important to note that Wang's study focused exclusively on trends within the United Nations Security Council and, while it would be a gross oversimplification to argue that mechanisms of vote-buying in the UNSG and the UNGA are identical, the mechanism identified by Wang can be used as a proxy, and their research is extended to the UNGA by this study.

The leveraging of political capital is a field of research that has received much attention in the last century. Daniel Pascoe and Sangmin Bae apply the world of political capital specifically to vote buying through a case study on a UNGA resolution to outlaw the death penalty moratorium, highlighting the idiosyncratic nature of voting despite shared interstate values, goals, and affiliations (Pascoe & Bae, 2021). Among other explanations, the authors find that political alliances and affiliations influence voting behaviors in the UNGA. Countries aligned with ideological or political groups may tend to vote in line with their group's stance on the death penalty, regardless of their own national perspectives. This theory demonstrates that interstate political allegiances offer a voting incentive that is strong enough to even overrule the states' domestic preferences. Thus, political allegiances offer a novel means of understanding vote-buying incentives in the UNGA. This research extends Pascoe and Bae's theory to the DAC.

Thus, we must acknowledge the third theoretical mechanism of vote-buying: military capacity. By offering a vote-selling state access to weapons, both conventional and cutting-edge, a powerful state may induce voting a beneficial voting behavior. Arms deals have become an intrinsic aspect of the international political economy since its inception. Even the roots of the European Union can be found in the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), an organization founded (in 1951) to limit access to war-making materials and prevent the outbreak of another European War (*European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)* | *Britannica*, 2023). Geraldine O'Callaghan and Brian Wood contemporize this reality in their commentary on military inducements offered by the Soviet Union to states under the Iron Curtain during the Cold War (O'Callaghan & Wood, 1999). In short, the political economy of small arms and light

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weapons proliferation is both readily accessible and easily manipulated. Even Ronald Reagan, during the Iran Contra Affair, highlighted the importance of (secret) weapons transactions in buying political goodwill (*Iran-Contra Affair | Definition, History, Importance, & Facts | Britannica, 2023*).

And, while it's clear that the motivations behind Reagan's dealings in the 80s' were beneficial to American Allies, it's also important to note that vote-buying is not always a cooperative affair. For example, consider the French and British approaches to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. An article posted in the Wall Street Journal on February 26, 2003, demonstrates a competition for votes in the UN between the United States and France for the Angolan vote. It's reported that President Jose Eduardo dos Santos, at times, juggles calls between American President Bush and French President Jacques Chirac (Cummings & Block, 2003). This case study demonstrates several things. First, the United States buys votes with all three mechanisms: financial dispersion, political alignment, and military capabilities. Second, The United States, chief among vote-buying states, is willing to compete with its allies to secure votes in the UN (and its allies are willing to compete too). And third, vote-selling states such as Angola have the capacity to hold bidding wars. This case study therefore demonstrates the importance of a thorough study of the actors, mechanisms and implications of vote-buying in the UNGA. If the United States had lost further international support for their invasion of Iraq in 2003, the world today might be very different.

Having developed a theory of the mechanisms and strategies of vote buying in the UN, as well as a discrete example of competition for votes in the UNGA, it now becomes necessary to consider where states do not compete. Issue linkage and issue convergence offers such an opportunity. Simply put, if the United States is already buying votes to support an already popular goal in France, then why would France bother to compete? The United States, France, and the United Kingdom share an exceeding number of similarities in foreign policy objectives. These similarities in goals, bilateral linkages, and common domestic drivers of policy offer a wide range of issues in which there is simply no competition between otherwise allied states (Strüver, 2016). States choose not to compete because the United States already adequately represents their vested interest on the international stage (Mix, 2011). Summarily, this

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research offers a unique opportunity to extend this library of literature and develop an extended model of vote buying, competition and manipulation in the UN.

Theory and Hypotheses

Intrinsically, motions in the UNGA explicitly define international policies such as trade practices, human rights standards, access to military equipment and technology, and others. Implicitly, these motions also carry weight as legitimate signals, demonstrating the issue-specific intentions of the international community in support of or in opposition to specific states (Alexander & Rooney, 2019). Resolutions shape the norms and narratives of the international community. Thus, even to the states that lead the world, controlling the content and direction of measures in the UN is of intense strategic value.

To this end, states are often willing to disregard their domestic practices to buy political influence in the UN. The international institute for democracy and electoral assistance (IDEA), in a novel study in comparative politics conducted since 2003, overwhelmingly found that, of the 180 countries surveyed, 161 (91.7%) of them practice a ban on the purchasing of votes in domestic electoral campaigns (38. *Is There a Ban on Vote Buying?* | *International IDEA*, n.d.). However, this democratic tendency fails to translate into policy at the international level (38. *Is There a Ban on Vote Buying?* | *International IDEA*, n.d.). The United States, principally and regularly conducts vote-buying, leveraging its direct aid payments via the Agency for International Development, its participation in the OECD, the International Monetary Fund and the International Development Fund. American utilization of funding as carrot and stick incentives is extremely well documented, both empirically and qualitatively. For example, in the context of resolution 678, UN support for military action against Iraq in 1990, an American representative was recorded telling the ambassador of Yemen that “the most expensive vote you have ever cast” (Dreher et al., 2008). Upon voting against US interests, Yemen immediately lost hundreds of millions of dollars in aid packages. There are many such prominent examples of American leverage in the international community, and subtle ones too. This dynamic, empirically tested, demonstrates a pattern of political coercion in the UNGA.

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However, this dynamic is blurry when it comes to other developed states in the DAC+. If the benefits of controlling legislation in the UN are significant, then why is evidence of American vote-buying so much more prominent than that of the others? To China, a state of rising prominence, attempting to control voting behaviors in the UN seems to be a straightforward way of opening a new avenue of competition with the United States. While this is especially salient for China, similar implications might be made about the rising powers of the world (BRICS).

To investigate and hypothesize on this dynamic, we must make bold assumptions about the international community at large. Thus, this analysis builds upon the rational and realist theories of international relations; states and actors within those states make decisions based on their preferences, beliefs, and expectations, and consider the actions and reactions of other actors in their decision-making. Rational actors also consider which tools are at their disposal, recognizing norms and international institutions in their decision-making processes. Rational actors at the international level also understand that their community is anarchic. The UN lacks truly effective enforcement mechanisms. There is no world police force; states are their own ultimate authorities and, as such, are self-reliant for their pursuit of goals amidst competitors. Rational actors, within the context of anarchy, maximize their leverage to politically coerce other states.

Institutions, like the IMF and IDB, are beholden to their shareholders. States that encompass significant degrees of an IO's funding can leverage their budgets to expand control. This is why, when Yemen voted against the United States on resolution 678, the IMF cut Yemen's funding by the equivalent of 9.5% of their GDP (Choueiri et al., n.d.). Similarly, the Yemeni fiscal balance retracted by 13.1% over the same era: a reflection of other avenues of lost funding (Choueiri et al., n.d.). American control of decision-making in the IMF enabled it to punish opposition.

Hypothesis 1: DAC+ states leverage OECD aid to buy votes in the UNGA.

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Logically, this hypothesis is the easiest to test. By simply correlating aid dispersal of the DAC+ to voting records, we might quantify the relationship. Several studies have approached the relationship between aid and political alignment in this way and would serve as strong models to expand the academic literature on vote-buying (Lockwood, 2013; Solimini, 2022).

The United States has been buying votes since the 1970s, and there are considerations to be made about the market itself. Maybe votes are too expensive for any state besides America to consider buying, let alone competing for. Perhaps there is strong evidence of vote-buying behaviors, but the United States simply outbids its competitors. In a voting body of 193 states, it's also possible that there are no more votes left to buy. Pessimistically, there are many reasons to consider H1 to be false, leading us to consider other mechanisms of vote buying; if the DAC+, in addition to the United States, buy votes, then maybe money isn't the only currency that matters.

Hypothesis 2: DAC states offer vote-selling states domestic diplomatic support in return for their UNGA vote.

The work on state legitimacy exists in its own realm, separately from that of vote-buying and political coercion in the UN. Though this analysis does not seek to define nor expand on that library, we can utilize it as a way to expand how strong states might leverage small state's need for legitimacy in return for favors in the UN. The forum on this school of research has already been opened: a novel study on Chinese leadership and the political alignment of African states found that "when Chinese leaders visit Africa, they are three times more likely to visit a sitting UNSC member country than a nonmember country" (Wang, 2022). In return for the recognition that comes alongside the receipt of a foreign leader, Wang suggests that China actively promotes its agenda through 'payments' of legitimacy and diplomatic political support.

There are many avenues of generating legitimacy: establishing democratic processes, promoting human rights, demonstrating effective governance through public services and states security, international

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recognition, cultural practices, economic performance, and others. When examining the relationship between foreign actors working to increase a state's legitimacy as a coercive tool, these factors will also be accommodated for. But states can also provide more than legitimacy and funding.

Hypothesis 3: The DAC states buy votes by providing vote-selling states preferential treatment in arms sales.

Leveraging access to an increased quality or quantity of military weaponry is a very straightforward way that a foreign state can forcefully displace existing voting behaviors in a meaningful and beneficial way. As evidenced in the work on democratic and capitalist peace theories, states which enter into formal agreements with one another are more likely to work in concert- offering another mechanism by which the DAC+ might coerce foreign actors for votes in the UNGA.

Hypothesis 4: The P5 states choose not to buy votes due to effective representation.

This hypothesis serves as our null hypothesis and will not be empirically tested.

When considering where states choose to buy votes, it is equally important to consider where states might choose not to buy votes. For example, if the United States is actively buying votes and supporting policies that are also popular to Great Britain and France, then why would France or Great Britain waste resources supporting a motion that is already likely to pass? This hypothesis offers a unique approach to vote-buying as both a cooperative and a competitive practice that considers the DAC+'s relationships to one another.

Existing works do offer some explanation here, Georg Strüver finds that "high levels of foreign policy similarity correlate with shared regime characteristics and comparable patterns of political globalization" (Strüver, 2016). This lends credence to the theory that the P5 might coordinate and choose not to compete for votes to preserve efficiency. Altogether, this theory develops a novel examination of vote-buying and political coercion in the international community, revealing additional insights about the relationships between the P5 and the world at large.

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Research Design

Summarily, this research design is crafted to empirically answer the following research question: why and how do members of the DAC+ practice vote-buying in the UNGA? To empirically answer our research question, I adopt a novel research design that effectively introduces key variables, sources sound datasets and input information, describes a plan of analysis, and identifies potential challenges.

In review, the DAC+ states is a combined group of the original 31 DAC states, which promote development and cooperation through bilateral aid, and an additional 13 states, identified for their unique potential to conduct vote-buying, or access to nuclear weapons (*Development Assistance Committee (DAC) - OECD*, n.d.). Utilizing foreign aid as a coercive tool necessitates that a state maintains the high-functioning capacity to deliver aid in the first place. Therefore, focusing on the DAC+ as a panel of significant international donors highlights the prime suspects of vote-buying.

Additionally, before exploring this research empirically, we need to establish a baseline understanding of UNGA voting procedures; this is essential to further investigating where, when, and how votes are bought. The following represents a simplified version of the process by which a resolution is passed by the UNGA (*Research Guides*, n.d.). First, a member state submits a draft resolution to UNGA administration for consideration and circulation to the other state representatives. The resolution is then considered by the UNGA General Committee, who deliberate on its inclusion in the upcoming sessions' agenda. The resolutions' language is then negotiated, in committees and working groups. Amendments and alterations are generally identified and handled here. Then, the resolution is heard by the UNGA body, where voting occurs. Though a simple majority is required to pass most resolutions, some resolutions face higher standards for passage (2/3rds of the chamber) (*Research Guides*, n.d.). This complex process highlights the challenge of understanding where and how vote-buying occurs. Because a resolution is constantly negotiated and discussed by states, institutional actors, and committees, it's difficult to identify both where coercion might take place, and how it occurs. Additionally, the possibility of closed-door meetings and back-hall deals further complicates this discovery process. However, despite

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these challenges, researchers have identified multiple sound mechanisms to detect vote-buying. In this research design, I will elaborate on some of those methods, while introducing my own.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of this research is extremely straightforward: the end goal of vote-buying is the passage of resolutions in the UNGA. Thus, voting record data compiled by the United Nations Digital Library will provide the necessary support to quantify conclusions on vote buying in the UNGA (*United Nations Digital Library System*, n.d.). Instead of compiling a novel database, I will utilize a recent version (updated as of 2015) of an existing voting records compilation conducted by Erik Voeten, Anton Strezhnev, and Michael Bailey through Harvard's Dataverse archive (Voeten et al., 2022). This dataset provides the necessary resources to backstop an empirical analysis on voting trends in the UNGA.

Explicitly, a unit of analysis in this project will consist of the resolutions title, the resolutions' sponsor, the date voted, the associated agenda category (identified by the UNGA), the voting state, their vote (for, against, or abstain), and the voting states incentives (present, absent). Thus, for each resolution passed, there would be a line for each voting state. The incentive data consists of three categories, corresponding to the three independent variables (coded as 1 or 0). Voting data is not available when a resolution is adopted without a vote; but it is also unnecessary as such adoption requires unanimous consent from the UNGA body (*United Nations Digital Library System*, n.d.).

IV 1: Direct aid-for-votes relationships.

In both prior academic research on vote-buying in the UNGA, as well as previous iterations of this research, vote buying via foreign aid disbursement is the fundamental causal mechanism of vote buying. Work by Dreher et al. highlights this mechanism in their findings: "according to the estimated coefficient, a ten-percentage point increase in US program aid increases voting coincidence by 0.2" (Dreher et al., 2008). The variable I will employ to quantify the relationship between aid and voting trends is incredibly alike that employed by Dreher et al.: simply expanded to include the aid deployment

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rates of the other DAC+ states. To expand this variable, I will utilize the OECD dataset “Total receipts by country and region (ODA+OOF+private)” (*OECD Statistics*, n.d.). This dataset delineates aid disbursement data by donor, recipient state, and year: making it a useful tool in detecting trends among donor nations, to be correlated with the voting data provided in the DV. If a state’s aid from the vote-buying state increases or decreases by 15% or more, then it is recorded that a financial incentive is present. I code for increases or decreases in aid because incentives can take the form of either carrots or sticks, and both are effective tools of interstate manipulation. Together, these two datasets will offer a novel lens on aid disbursement as a causal mechanism in voting behavior in the UNGA.

IV 2: The DAC offer domestic diplomatic support in return for UNGA votes.

While the tools available to a coercive state are more limited when considering diplomatic favors as the causal mechanism, existing literature opens new doors on quantifying the relationship between diplomacy and coercive voting strategies. Several courses in existing literature effectively codify the number of leader visits as a primary mechanism of buying votes. Volkner Nitsch explores this alternative novel mechanism, and its generative effect on rates of bilateral trade, by generating a novel dataset that captures official external visits to 170 unique countries by the heads of state of France, Germany and the United States for the period from 1948 through 2003 (Nitsch, 2007). The findings of this article suggest that visits and meetings between heads of state may serve to improve dyadic relations quite significantly; to developing states, a visit from a prominent foreign leader increases the ruling regimes’ legitimacy and therefore stability. Capturing a similar hypothetical causal mechanism, this research design will focus on meeting between national leaders as the causal mechanism of vote-buying by expanding from Nitsch’s focus on France, Germany, and the United States to include leaders of the other DAC+ states. To codify this causal mechanism, for each state-dyad-year, if the leaders of two states share a private meeting (hosted by one of the two dyadic states, not a third party), I will code a one (and zero otherwise), signifying the existence of a political incentive for a state’s UNGA vote to be bought. In addition, I will confirm that a leaders’ visit actually generated an effect in the host state by requiring their polity score (an

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effective measure of a regimes' degree of democracy or autocracy) to increase year-over-year, confirming the effect of a visit by a foreign national leader (*Polity IV — PolityIV*, n.d.).

Compilation of this dataset will require an extensive degree of research. Thankfully, some states make the visit history of their national leaders publicly accessible. For example, the United States regularly updates this website: <http://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/travels/president>, which contains a catalogue of the presidents many travels. However, this information is not so easily accessible for the remainder of the DAC+ states. In some cases, there are pre-existing data, like compiled by Roseanne McManus on France, Britain, the United States, Russia, and China (McManus, 2018). Conducting this research will necessitate the completion of a thorough dataset that catalogues leader-leader meetings by year between the DAC+ state leaders and all other national leaders: a massive undertaking.

IV 3: The DAC states buy votes by providing vote-selling states preferential treatment in arms sales.

Like IV 2, IV 3 highlights another type of vote-buying currency. By including a developing state in an arms agreement, developed states can coerce developing states to align their political behavior in the UNGA with that of a larger donor state. This analysis will codify this relationship via the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) "Arms Transfers Database" (*SIPRI Arms Transfers Database* | SIPRI, n.d.). This database contains information on all transfers of major conventional weapons from 1950 to the most recent full calendar year. This dataset quantifies individual agreements' suppliers and recipients, the type and number of weapon systems ordered and delivered, the years of deliveries and the financial value of the deal (*SIPRI Arms Transfers Database* | SIPRI, n.d.). This dimension offers another alternative causal mechanism by which states may buy votes in the UNGA. If an arms deal is initiated or the financial volume of an existing arms deal increases in a given year, the incentive variable will be coded 1, 0 otherwise.

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In addition to the identified variables, we must also consider interactions between them. The interactions between direct foreign aid, diplomatic coercion, and arms deals highlight problems in issue linkage, regional gravitation, and conventional analytical means. To this end, I will employ a simple logit model, with the IVs as individual variables and interaction terms. As the dependent variable of this analysis is dichotomous (vote for or against), this model will offer the best possibility of empirical success.

Controls

To prevent extraneous variables from poisoning the data and rendering this analysis useless, this research will employ a variety of control variables. General control will affect the entire dataset, and consist of geography, agenda (cataloged by UNGA), and national crisis. By controlling for geography, this research breaks up groups of states which vote in blocs with their immediate neighbors, isolating the effect of the defined incentives on their voting behaviors. Similarly, some states are particularly passionate on specific issues, by controlling for agenda, we isolate the effect of incentives on voting behaviors from topical interest. Finally, states undergoing national crisis, natural or man-made, are often more likely to receive more international support, potentially poisoning the dataset. By omitting states suffering crisis, we isolate the treatment effect.

I also employ control variables for each of the causal mechanisms. When considering aid disbursement, I will control for bilateral trade volume per dyad. States will often vote alongside their trading partner, if the bilateral trade in a vote-buying dyad exceeds 10% of either state's GDP, that dyad will be omitted. Additionally, I control previous recipients of foreign aids by only examining percent increases or decreases in overall funding availability (15% +/-). I also employ political controls, by accounting for shared membership in prominent international organizations, and similar regime type. Militarily, I control for existing arms agreements by only considering initiation or value increases in arms deals. Similarly, I control for the effect of joint defense pact/alliances to prevent a state's existing

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relationships from clouding the effect of the treatment on their voting behavior. Finally, I control for states currently engaged in conflict, as issue-specific considerations would poison the dataset.

Despite these controls, this analysis still faces significant challenges. First, due to the abstract nature of resolution development in the UNGA, it's intrinsically difficult to identify where coercion takes place. Absence of clarity on when or where votes are bought makes predicting if and how they are bought far more complicated. This is a systemic complication to studying resolutions in the UNGA and cannot be adequately accommodated empirically here without further insider information.

Second, over 75% of UNGA votes pass without a vote. As mentioned previously, this statistic does indicate that states tend to vote cohesively; however, it limits the existing dataset from which I may draw conclusions to only one quarter of all resolutions passed in the UNGA. This omission may result in empirical limitations or omissions.

Finally, this study will fail to identify the direction of the described relationship between incentives and voting behaviors. While it's entirely logical for a donor state to entice developed states with aid payments, it's also quite logical for developing states to align themselves politically with large donor states in the hopes of a handout or preferential treatment. While some existing studies on vote-buying account for the direction of this relationship by controlling for time, the nature of this dataset makes such accommodation impossible. As this research extends many different works, the possibility exists that future works will extend this research and specifically accommodate for the problem of directionality.

Conclusions and Implications

Conduction of this research carries a number of implications. The UNGA serves a unique and essential role by shaping the norms and expectations that govern international behavior.

In an era where the dominant position of the United States is backsliding, and the emergence of China, as well as the other BRICS states support the advancing of new forums and international

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institutions, it will soon become necessary for policymakers to effectively predict tendencies in voting behaviors of member states prior to votes in the UNGA. This research would offer such an opportunity for the United States and its allies to predicate votes and manipulate the UNGA to its advantage. Continued maintenance of international norms and narratives benefits the existing world powers and provides a proven method of international dominance on the world stage. Subsequently, this research on UNGA vote buying will provide valuable insights and evidence to inform the policy and practices of domestic actors; informing the funding allocation decisions of Congress when allocating resources to the State Department.

In a more altruistic line of thought, this research will also serve to promote greater transparency and accountability of global governance organizations. By highlighting and quantifying the effects of numerous causal mechanisms in vote-buying, this research will inform the international community the degree to which the UNGA is a manipulated institution. Vote buying has the capability of undermining the validity of the world's leading governance forum. This research therefore serves as the first step towards preventing the collapse of this critical institution. Thus, the findings of this study will shed light on the complex dynamics of vote buying and provide valuable insights into how the UNGA and the broader international community can work to strengthen the integrity of their decision-making processes.

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