Are Regional Organizations the ‘Parties’ in the United Nations General Assembly? Comments on a Misconception

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Abstract

In the field of international relations, regional organizations (ROs) are not only assumed to play an important role in the regional context, but also on the international level. A growing number of studies analyze ROs’ voting behavior in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in a similar way to the analyses of parties in national parliaments. In this paper, we reflect on the question whether ROs can be treated as ‘political party’-like entities. First, based on literature on political parties and legislative voting, we develop two criteria to evaluate ROs in the UNGA. Second, we analyze UNGA voting by using W-NOMINATE in order to check where ROs position themselves in the political space of the UNGA. Third, we analyze the voting unity of selected ROs using one inflated beta regression, focusing on the question whether ROs are able to maintain their level of voting unity in contested votes. The empirical analyses highlight that, if at all, only the EU can be perceived as a ‘party-like’ actor in the UNGA.


Draft version! Comments on this paper are very welcome!

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I. Introduction

In almost seventy years of vote analysis in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), regional organizations are often treated as party-like entities. Starting with Ball (1951), political scientists used regional organizations to deductively test the unity of specific groups of states in the UNGA in order to find evidence for a common political stance, ideological closeness, or the success of certain policies (as the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union). In these studies, the UNGA is implicitly treated as a ‘normal’ parliament with nation states substituting individual members of parliament (MPs) and regional organizations acting as ‘parties’. By not explicitly stating the assumption of comparability or similarity, the literature lacks a systematic debate on the main differences of the UNGA to national parliaments, MPs to states, and regional organizations to parties. Yet, we believe, such a discussion is fruitful and necessary as it provides us with theoretical expectations with which we can approach different groups in the UNGA and analyze their voting behavior.

In this contribution, we argue that the UNGA is a rather odd parliament. By looking at the literature on party unity, we identify several differences from national parliaments and argue that there is set of two conditions that groups in the UNGA have to fulfill in order to be treated as party-like entities. We develop the two conditions based on the theoretical distinction of cohesion and discipline invented by Ozbudun (1970; refined by several other authors in the field of legislative studies e.g. Bowler et al. 1999; Hazan 2006; Owens 2006) and the discussion of the theoretical model by Sieberer (2006). First, a group has to show a certain degree of cohesion, i.e. the members of the group have to form a distinct political position within the political space of the Assembly, in order to be treated as a party-like entity. Second, the group has to display discipline, i.e. the members of the group have to at least keep their unity in highly competed votes. Only if both conditions are met, we can treat the group as a party-like entity within the UNGA.

In our analyses, we look at regional organizations and UN regional groups. The empirical analysis shows that most regional organizations (African Union (AU), Arab League (AL), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), and Mercado Común del Sur (Mercosur)) and all regional groups fail to meet the two criteria. We analyze the cohesion criterion by looking at W-NOMINATE spatial maps and the discipline criterion by analyzing voting unity scores, based on a modified version of the Index of Voting Cohesion (IVC; originally developed by Lijphart 1963), in a one inflated beta (oib) regression. The analyses highlight that only the European Union (EU) displays a distinct political position within the UNGA and is, at the same time, able to increase its level of voting unity1 in close votes

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1 In the literature on UNGA voting, authors use term ‘voting cohesion’ instead of ‘(party) unity’. We decided to use the term ‘voting unity’ in order to separate this from (party) cohesion. Therefore, we also decided to rename ‘cohesion scores’ to ‘unity scores’ to keep the theoretical separation in our methods.
and therefore show some signs of discipline. All other regional organizations or regional groups fail at least one of the two criteria. We conclude that this means two things for voting analysis in the UNGA: First, the literate should move away from looking at regional organizations in comparative analyses as regional organizations seem to be incomparable within the UNGA. Most importantly and in contrast to many studies, UNGA voting unity scores cannot be taken as a simple indicator of foreign policy coordination. Second, there is a need to further deepen our knowledge on how the EU member states are able to make the EU work as a party-like entity within the UNGA. How do the mechanisms work to discipline the member states? What makes the EU political position such a distinct one within the UNGA?

Our contribution is organized as follows. First, we briefly outline our theoretical argument. We assess the literature on party unity and discuss the transferability to the UNGA. We then develop the above mentioned two criteria regarding our expectations for cohesion and discipline. Second, we briefly present our methods and research design. Third, we empirically analyze UNGA voting between 1990 and 2010. Here, we first analyze the political space of the UNGA using W-Nominate and then compare the voting unity scores of six regional organizations (EU, ASEAN, AU, CARICOM, Mercosur, Arab League) and the five regional groups. Finally, we conclude this paper with some remarks on research perspectives.

II. Party Unity and the UNGA

a. The Analysis of Voting Blocs in the UNGA

With the establishment of the UNGA, its voting structure and the voting behavior of states were of immediate interest to political scientists. Starting with Ball (1951), studies tried to establish insight in the specific conflicts and cleavages that structure the UNGA and to identify voting blocs with various methods such as the analysis of voting unity or factor analysis (e.g. Alker 1964; Alker & Russett 1965; Russett 1966; Newcombe et al. 1970; Marin-Bosch 1987; Holloway & Tomlinson 1995; Kim & Russett 1996). These studies followed an inductive logic, i.e. they refrained from predefining certain groups of interest, but identified these groups based on the voting behavior of UNGA member states. These studies essentially identified the East-West confrontation of the Cold War as the major cleavage and accordingly three voting groups: western, communist, and non-aligned countries.

Voeten (2000) used W-NOMINATE, a method originally developed to analyze voting patterns in the US Congress (Poole & Rosenthal 1985, 2007), to identify the number and nature of conflict dimensions that structure the UNGA. The UNGA is structured by two dimensions of conflict, similar to other parliaments analyzed with W-NOMINATE that also show mostly two or only one dominant conflict dimensions (e.g. Poole & Rosenthal 1997; Rosenthal & Voeten 2004; Hix et al. 2006; Poole & Rosenthal 2007; Hix & Jun
This proves that the UNGA as a parliament is quite comparable to national parliaments regarding the voting behavior of its members, although it is essentially different in several formal aspects to ‘normal’ legislatures. One crucial difference is the nonexistence of political parties in the UNGA. In this regard, Poole and Rosenthal summarize that “low dimensionality occurs even when there are no formal parties (the UN) […] These findings suggest that the need to form parliamentary majorities limits dimensionality” (2007: 295).

Besides the inductive analyzes of UNGA voting, the literature also contains a large strand of deductive approaches that focuses on the voting behavior of specific groups, e.g. regional organizations (ROs), in the UNGA, most prominently the European Union (e.g. Lijphart 1963; Hurwitz 1975, 1976; Stavridis & Pruett 1996; Strømvik 1998; Luif 2003; Johansson-Nogués 2004; Young & Rees 2005; Rasch 2008; Beauguette 2009; Birnberg 2009; Jakobsson 2009; Hosli et al. 2010; Burmester & Jankowski 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Ferdinand 2013; Jin & Hosli 2013; Panke 2013b). These analyses are not (primarily) interested in the dimensions of global conflict within the UNGA, but use voting similarities as an indicator for foreign policy preferences of states. Voeten states that “indicators based on UN votes have now become an almost obligatory ingredient in models that explain bilateral and multilateral lending, international conflict, and a host of other outcomes” (2013: 62). Therefore, these analyses assume that voting in the UNGA is not only about the approval or disapproval of a resolution, but that voting unity can be seen as an expression of states’ alignment. By using voting unity as the dependent variable, these studies assume that the level of unity can be used as an indicator for measuring the success of regional integration efforts, specific coordination mechanisms (like the CFSP of the EU), or for comparing different regional organizations with each other to determine their level of ‘actorness’ in the international system. It is important to stress that these studies do not use the voting unity of regional organizations solely as an indicator for policy convergence, but often draw far reaching conclusions from the level of voting unity regarding the coordination of foreign policy positions in general. Hence, high levels of voting unity are treated as an indication that a regional organization is a coherent actor not only in the UNGA but in international politics more generally.

Implicitly, the deductive studies already have to assume that regional organizations do indeed matter in the UNGA in order to study their voting behavior in the first place. This is mainly based on the assumption of the growing importance of regions sparked by the debates on new regionalism (e.g. Hettne & Söderbaum 2000) and emerging powers (e.g. Flemes 2010) in international politics. Regional organizations represent the interests of regions in international politics, as e.g. Hettne (2005: 555) argues, act within and beyond their region as balancing actors (e.g. Goh 2008), or interact with other regional organizations (e.g. Yeo 2009), international institutions (e.g. Hettne & Söderbaum 2006) or states (e.g. Thomas 2012). With regard to the UN, Hettne and Söderbaum state that “[r]egions, through their regional agencies, have transformed from objects into subjects, making their relationship to the UN much more complex than current policy and academic debates tend to recognize” (2006: 227-228).
In a way, regional organizations are perceived as entities that aggregate the political interest of a number of individual states that are located within a geographical region and act on behalf of those states in different fora. However, states still act on their own behalf in certain fora, as e.g. in the United Nations. Although a significant number of regional organizations already have observer status in the UN, the system is built on states as the decision makers. Yet, the deductive strand of UNGA voting unity literature treats regional organizations as predefined groups to compare the level of unity and to determine whether or not those regional organizations are able to ‘speak with one voice’ (European Commission 2004; Smith 2006). As the act of speaking with one voice is perceived as a precondition for influencing policy debates and spreading norms on the international level (Panke 2013b: 268), unity among member states is a necessary condition. This importance of unity is the same with parties in ‘regular’/national parliaments. Accordingly, the studies transfer methods developed for measuring party unity to evaluate the level of unity of regional organizations’ member states voting in the UNGA.

In conclusion, we believe that there is a consensus in the literature that (1) voting patterns in the UNGA can be methodically treated like voting in national parliaments, (2) that regional organizations are functional equivalent to parties, and that, therefore, (3) unity of regional organizations and party unity are somewhat identical.

b. Party Unity Equals Regional Organization Unity?

However, legislative studies extensively theorized on the explanation for party unity and its effects while there is only little, above mentioned, theoretical reflection why regional organizations should vote cohesively in the international sphere and which consequences (dis-)unity has. By sketching the theoretical debate on explanatory factors for party unity in national parliaments, we show in the following that the analogy (UNGA \( \triangleq \) parliament, state \( \triangleq \) MP, RO \( \triangleq \) party, RO unity \( \triangleq \) party unity) is not a solid foundation. Instead of assuming that regional organizations are party-like entities, we develop two criteria, deducted from the literature on party unity, to test whether regional organizations can actually be empirically described as party-like entities.

Party unity is not only perceived to be a functional requirement for parliaments, it is also a “hidden assumption” in political scientists’ understanding and theorizing on democracy and democratic governance (Hazan 2006: 1). In national parliaments, party unity guarantees that governments can reliably develop policies and that the electorate can hold political actors in government and opposition accountable for their decisions. Basically, party unity enables democratic governance. Only a party that “[…] can form (and keep together) a majority wins the legislative game, shaping policies and programs in order to keep on winning in the future” (Bowler et al. 1999: 3-4).
Fundamental for the theoretical understanding of party unity is the distinction by Ozbudun (1970) in party cohesion and party discipline. While cohesion is understood as “an objective condition of unity of action among party members”, discipline is defined as “either […] a special type of cohesion achieved by enforcing obedience or […] a system of sanctions by which such enforced cohesion is attained” (Ozbudun 1970: 305). Basically, cohesion refers to a common stance of party members based on shared ideas and norms that usually enables those MPs to act together, while discipline comes into play when cohesion is not strong enough to ensure party unity. In such cases, parties use punitive measures, sanctions, and pressure to get their MPs in line with the party (Hazan 2006: 3-5; Olson 2006: 165; Stecker 2013: 7).

There are several elaborate models on the explanation of party unity. As we will use the theoretical approaches only to delineate significant differences from the UNGA system to national parliaments and develop our minimum criteria from this discussion, we will focus on one of those models, developed by Sieberer (2006), and complement it with other contributions in the field. Sieberer distinguishes between three sets of variables that influence the MPs’ voting behavior and therefore party unity.

First, the selection of candidates provides parties with a mechanism to ensure loyalty to the party’s core ideas and political agenda. Depending on the system of candidate nomination, either locally or nationally, the process is presumed to have a disruptive or positive effect on party cohesion. Additionally, the question whether the (re-)election of a candidate depends on the allocation of personal votes or not influences the party unity as the dependence on personal votes provides incentives to act against party lines. These variables come into effect before the MPs enter parliament, but are nevertheless expected to influence the observed party (dis)unity (Carey & Shugart 1995; Bowler et al. 1999: 6-8; Sieberer 2006: 154-155; Stecker 2013: 7), however they play a subordinate role when we look at regional organizations in the UNGA.2

A second set of variables in Sieberer’s model accounts for the relationship of leadership and backbenchers in parliament. Sieberer argues that the control of MP’s personal motives that are contrary to the party’s agenda by the party leadership depends on four features of the institutional set-up: “(1) the central control of procedural, financial and organizational resources; (2) the potential for patronage; (3) available sanctions; and (4) the structure of the committee system” (Sieberer 2006: 155). As there are substantial differences between national parliaments and the UNGA, these variables are quite difficult to translate. Formally, all states are equally represented in the UN system, following the basic principle of ‘one state, one vote’ (Wesel 2012: 142-143). Yet, states have different power resources and positions within the hierarchy of the international system and, therefore, the within regional organizations as well. In some way, we can expect leadership, vote trading or buying, coercion, and sanctions as instruments to invoke unity within a regional organization. However, there is no need for re-election in the UNGA, the potential for individual (state) advancement are rather

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2 Although there is no candidate selection for regional organizations, we could assume that we have a similar effect for the accession of new members. Only states that agree with the normative goals of the regional organization will be accepted by the other member states.
limited, and the stakes of sanctions are quite high in the international system, with the potential of serious conflict inherently looming. The “structural dependence within parliament” (Sieberer 2006: 155) is rather complicated to grasp theoretically within the UNGA. For example, within national parliaments, it can be expected that the extent of possible sanctions imposed by the leadership enhances party unity by enforcing discipline (Sieberer 2006: 156). Within a regional organization, all states have a large tool box to offer positive and negative incentives. However, as the importance of the UNGA is limited, yet not negligible (Peterson 2006: 5), it seems rather unlikely that states employ massive pressure or incentives in order to get their fellow member states to vote along their line. Rather, nowadays, all regional organizations have some sort of vote coordination procedure in the UNGA (Panke 2013b) that enables member states of a regional organization to enforce some sort of discipline, in the absence of harmony (Keohane 1984: 51; Oye 1985: 7) or cohesion. Yet, if we assume that discipline comes into play when cohesion fails and if we presume that party cohesion is put under pressure when the overall level of conflict in a legislative body increases, we can conclude that party unity in instances of augmented conflict in a parliament is due to discipline. As Carey (2009: 128-129) puts it: “on votes that are consensual across an entire legislature, … [unity] scores will necessarily be high for all parties. As votes diverge from consensus, low party unity scores become possible. […] The more hotly votes are contested in the legislatures overall, the more ‘room’ there is, arithmetically, for disunity within parties”.

Therefore, we suggest that we are able to observe a group’s potential for discipline if we control for the overall level of conflict in a parliament. If a group is able to achieve party unity under such circumstances, we can see that as a sign for discipline.

In the third group, Sieberer summarizes situational variables that depend on the outcome of the last election. In detail, Sieberer reflects on the effect of four variables: “(1) government participation of a PPG [parliamentary party group]; (2) its size; (3) the margin of the government; (4) the position of a PPG in policy space” (Sieberer 2006: 157) – on party unity. First, as there is no clear government and opposition within the UNGA, it is hard to argue which regional organization takes part in the government bloc. Rather, although still depending on the issue and content of a resolution, one could identify whether a regional organization aims to solidify the status quo or tries to alter the existing rules. Accordingly to national parliaments, we would expect status quo regional organizations to be more unified than progressive or revisionist ones as the latter supposedly have divergent policy positions. Second, as with parties, one would expect a negative influence of the regional organization’s size on its unity. However, we did not find evidence for the expected effect of larger regional organizations performing worse than smaller ones (Burmester & Jankowski 2014a). Third, as it is the case with the ‘government participation’ of regional organizations, it is quite hard to determine a margin of pro status quo states within the UNGA. However, the theoretical expectation that the closer the margin, the higher party unity (Bowler et al. 1999: 17; Owens 2006: 27; Sieberer 2006: 158) is already reflected in our argument in regard to regional organizations’ discipline. We expect that unity increases when the level of conflict rises and therefore the margins shrink. Fourth, Sieberer expects parties to show higher unity if the
party has a distinctive position within the political space of the parliament. This is the case because “[t]he closer a PPG is to other parties in policy terms, the more likely it is that an MP dissatisfied with his/her party’s position will find alternatives more in line with his/her preferences in neighbouring PPGs” (Sieberer 2006: 158). We believe that this argument is also valid for the UNGA. The UNGA has a similar two dimensional political space as regular national parliaments (Voeten 2000, 2013). So, if we assume that regional organizations vary in their basic ideas and policy goals and if we assume that regional organizations have a basic level of cohesion, they should show distinguishable positions within the political space of the UNGA. To put this short, we expect that the cohesion of regional organizations reveals itself in the political space of the UNGA.

As our purpose is to test whether regional organizations can be perceived as party-like entities, we merely develop criteria to test this rather than systematically testing probable effects of variables on the unity of the regional organizations. Therefore, we argue that regional organizations need to show some form of (party) cohesion and (party) discipline in order to be treated as party-like entities. Based on the above outlined argument by Sieberer (2006), we suggest two minimum criteria: (1) if regional organizations show some form of cohesion, they should position themselves as an identifiable actor and take on a distinct ideological position within the political space of the UNGA; (2) the presence of discipline should reveal itself in contested votes so that regional organizations should be able to preserve (or even increase) unity under circumstances of increased conflict in the UNGA. As neither cohesion nor discipline is on its own sufficient to guarantee party unity, we would suggest that both criteria need to be fulfilled in order to treat a regional organization as a party-like entity.

In the UNGA, there are five regional groups that structure the UN membership along geographical characteristics: African Group, Asia-Pacific Group, Eastern European Group, Latin American and Caribbean Group, and Western European and Others Group. These regional groups are of specific importance for the functioning of the UN. For example, non-permanent members of the UN Security Council, the members of the ECOSOC and UN committees are elected according to a regional proportion (Peterson 2006: 44-47). However, vote coordination is in the UN is nowadays more dependent on (sub-)regional interests or specific national interests of the member states rather than their membership in a regional group (Peterson 2006: 48-50, 2007: 106-107). Although we do not expect regional groups to function as party-like entities, we include them in our analysis to control for their (at least theoretical) potential as regional collective interest groups.

Before testing the six regional organizations and the five regional groups in regard to these two criteria, we briefly outline our research design and methods. As we extensively presented the methods part of our research in other papers and articles, we will keep this section rather brief (c.f. an extensive discussion of our methods Burmester & Jankowski 2014b and an extensive derivation of the IVC formula in the appendix of Burmester & Jankowski 2014a).
III. Methods to approach ‘party unity’ in the UNGA

a. W-NOMINATE

W-NOMINATE is a scaling method developed by Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal to analyze voting behavior in the US Congress (Poole & Rosenthal 1985, 1997, 2001, 2007; Carroll et al. 2013). W-NOMINATE “seeks to discover unobserved dimensions of conflict that underlie the voting behavior” (Voeten 2000: 192) in parliaments. In principle, it can be compared to a factor analysis. However, W-NOMINATE has some methodological advantages to factor analysis regarding the analysis of voting behavior in parliaments (Voeten 2000: 191-192). W-NOMINATE produces spatial maps of voting in which legislators, i.e. in our case states, are plotted on political dimensions, which are derived from states’ voting behavior. The position of a state is called ideal point and reflects its ideological position in the Assembly.

Since its development in the 1980s, W-NOMINATE has become the standard ideal point estimation procedure for legislative voting and has been applied successfully to a wide range of different parliaments all over the world (amongst other the US Congress (Poole & Rosenthal 1997), the European Parliament (Hix 2001; Hix et al. 2006, 2007, 2009), and the Korean National Assembly (Hix & Jun 2009)). One key result of these analyses is that parliamentary voting behavior is commonly structured by very few dimensions, most often not more than one or two. The number of relevant dimensions can be derived from the APRE value which serves as a goodness of fit criteria. It is based on the fact that W-NOMINATE predicts the voting decision of each legislator for a specific vote. If this prediction is correct, the vote has been classified correctly and vice versa. The APRE value indicates whether and by how much this classification procedure produces a better estimation than the trivial classification assumption, i.e. all legislators vote the same way (Poole & Rosenthal 2007: 36). Since an extra dimension is likely to increase the number of correct classifications, the APRE value for the second dimension is higher than the APRE1. However, since APRE2 includes the percentage of APRE1, only the difference between APRE2 and APRE1 can tell us how much the explanatory power of our model increases due to a second dimension.

As with every other scaling method, W-NOMINATE requires the researcher to interpret the revealed dimensions. In ‘normal’ national parliaments and also the European Parliament, the first dimension is commonly referred to as ‘left-right’ or ‘government-opposition’. However, with regard to the UNGA and its comparatively quite different structure, this interpretation of the dimensions cannot be transferred that easily. Voeten (2000, 2013) showed that potential dimensions in the UNGA are ‘East vs. West’, ‘North vs. South’ or ‘rest vs. West’. The latter occurred more or less after the end of the Cold War, while the other two dimensions played a crucial role before the 1990s.
NOMINATE, thus, can reveal which groups have a unique position within the political space of the UNGA.

b. Indices of Voting Unity

In this section, we briefly outline and justify our use of the modified version of the Index of Voting Cohesion (IVC; originally developed by Lijphart 1963, renamed by Hurwitz 1975 and refined by Burmester & Jankowski 2014a) to measure voting unity in the UNGA.\(^3\) Besides the IVC, the Agreement Index is widely used in the study of voting unity. However, as we have argued elsewhere (Burmester & Jankowski 2014a, 2014b), the Agreement Index has substantial flaws in comparison to the IVC.\(^4\)

The Index of Voting Cohesion was developed by Lijphart (1963) and can be regarded as the standard measure of voting unity for a dyad of states. It is defined as:

\[
\text{Index of Voting Cohesion (IVC)} = \frac{a + 0.5 \times b}{t}
\]

Where ‘a’ is the number of times two states vote the same (identical vote), ‘b’ is the number of times one state positions itself clearly with ‘yes’ or ‘no’ while the other one abstains (solidarity vote) and ‘t’ is the total number of times both states casted their votes on the same ballot. Conceptualized like this, the index is only applicable to dyads and it is therefore quite complicated to compute ‘group cohesion’. However, scholars have done so by calculating the IVC for every possible dyad in a group of states and then computing the average of all these values (Jakobsson 2009). Yet, these studies are the exception and Hosli et al. note: “A drawback of the IVC approach, in spite of its elegance and parsimony, is that it is somewhat tedious to calculate for a large UN membership” (2010: 17; see also Ferdinand 2013: 9). In contrast to this view, we modify the above given IVC so that it can be applied to groups more conveniently. The original IVC by Lijphart can be re-written as the following:

\[
\text{IVC} = \frac{\text{identical votes} + 0.5 \times \text{solidarity votes}}{\text{identical + solidarity + divided votes}}
\]

\(^3\) We focus on indices which are designed to measure voting unity in parliaments with three voting options (‘yes’, ‘no’ and ‘abstention’). In parliaments where only ‘yes’ and ‘no’ votes can be casted, the Rice-Index (Rice 1928) is probably the most widely used index to measure voting unity.

\(^4\) We suggest that the Agreement Index is well suited to measure how contested a vote was overall in a legislative body with three voting options, because the Agreement Index measures how large the majority size in the UNGA is. Simply put, the smaller the majority size, the more contested a resolution. However, when analyzing voting unity of regional organizations, we think that it is too simple to merely focus on the size of the majority position. Along the line of Lijphart (1963), we suggest that abstentions can be interpreted as a weaker form of disapproval and should therefore be seen as a middle position between ‘yes’ and ‘no’. Hence, we use the Agreement Index as an independent variable in our regression analysis which measures the level of disagreement about a resolution in the UNGA.
Note that we replace ‘t’ with the sum of all voting constellation that occur between two states (divided vote = one state votes ‘yes’ while the other one votes ‘no’). So, more generally, the IVC can be described as dividing the number of all identical votes and half of the solidarity votes by the sum of all occurring voting constellations. Hence, for making the IVC applicable to a group of states, the question arises how many identical, solidarity and divided votes occur in a given group of states. The complete derivation for the formula can be given on request. However, the final formula we use is:

\[
IVC = \frac{2 \times \left((n_y - 1) \times n_y + (n_n - 1) \times n_n + (n_a - 1) \times n_a + n_a \times (n_y + n_n) - \frac{N^2}{2} + N\right)}{N^2}
\]

(3)

Where \(n_y\), \(n_n\) and \(n_a\) are the number of ‘yes’-, ‘no’-, and ‘abstain’-votes casted by a group and \(N\) is the sum of these voting options. Although the formula seems to be more complex than the original IVC, the information needed for computing is acquired easily: only the count of ‘yes’-votes, ‘no’-votes and ‘abstentions’ of a regional organization has to be known.

It should be noted that this formula can be seen as a more general form of the original IVC by Lijphart, as it is still applicable to dyads as well as to groups. Furthermore, the ‘logic’ of the IVC remains untouched. When one half of a group votes with ‘no’ and the other half votes with ‘yes’, the index becomes zero (divided vote) but when one half of the members abstains and the other half votes cohesively with ‘yes’ or ‘no’, the index is 0.5 (solidarity vote).^5

c. Regression Models for the Analysis of Voting Unity

Another often unaccounted aspect in the analyses of voting unity is, which regression model should be used to analyze unity scores. Usually, studies choose a simple OLS regression model. This decision seems feasible as unity scores are continuous. However, the distribution of unity scores and their truncation between zero and one are two important aspects that violate basic assumptions of the OLS regression model (Papke & Wooldridge 1996; Moeller 2013).

First, OLS regressions with unity scores as the dependent variable may predict values that are less than zero or greater than one. These values make no sense, as the dependent variable has a range between zero and one, but are likely to occur when using OLS regressions. Second, another basic assumption is often violated when using OLS for unity scores: the normal distribution of errors, which is unlikely if our dependent variable is a proportion. Third, if we use OLS regression to analyze voting unity scores, heteroscedasticity is a likely occurrence. All in all, the violation of these three assumptions potentially leads to wrong estimates and

^5 We treat abstentions as missing values. Again, we substantiated this decision elsewhere in detail as we believe that this is the most feasible approach when analyzing roll-call votes in the UNGA (Burmester and Jankowski 2014a, 2014b).
standard errors and, thus, can affect the interpretation of the reported effects as well as significance levels. Simply put, we are running at risk of overlooking specific relationships between the variables, due to the misfit of the OLS model.

Therefore, we use a one inflated beta regression (oib) model for analyzing voting unity in the UNGA. This model consists of two separate regression models. One model is calculated for the probability that the outcome is one (i.e. perfect unity), and a second for cases in which the outcome lies between zero and one. For estimating the probability of an outcome of one, the model uses logistic regression, while the proportion between one and zero is estimated with a beta regression (Ferrari & Cribari-Neto 2004). The beta distribution is quite flexible and allows us to work with skewed data as it is the case with voting unity scores in the UNGA.

The oib regression model is not only more accurate in methodological terms than an OLS, it also allows for a better interpretation of the observed effects. With other regression models\textsuperscript{6}, we might observe an increase in voting unity, but we cannot easily analyze whether this increase is due to a higher probability of perfect voting unity or due to a decrease in the level of disunity. By applying oib, we are able to account for these differences and, therefore, add significant value to the analysis of voting unity in the UNGA.

\textbf{IV. Analyzing the UNGA with W-NOMINATE}

As a first empirical step, we analyze the voting behavior in the UNGA with W-NOMINATE. According to the standard model of W-NOMINATE, votes with a minority size smaller than 2.5 have been excluded from the analysis. In line with the research design by Voeten (2000), abstentions have been coded as ‘no’. This is due to the fact that W-NOMINATE analyzes binary data, i.e. a state is in favor of a resolution or against it. However, since the UNGA is usually dominated by large majorities, abstaining and voting ‘no’ are two ways of expressing the unwillingness of a state to follow the majority position. Further, states that became member of a regional organization during one of the observed periods have been included two times in the model: once for the period in which they were not member of the regional organization and another time for the period when they were a member of the regional organization. Therefore, our model includes more than 192 states\textsuperscript{7}.

The results of our W-NOMINATE analysis are presented in Table 1 as well as Figure 1 and Figure 2. Table 1 shows that the UNGA is essentially structured by one conflict dimension after 1990. More than 90 percent of every single vote casted (‘yes’ or ‘no’) can be classified correctly by the placement of states on one single dimension. A second dimension adds only limited explanatory power to the model in the period 1990-1999 and became slightly more relevant in the period 2000-2012. This is represented by the APRE1 and

\textsuperscript{6} This includes all other regression models as for example a ‘fractional logit’ model (Papke and Wooldridge 1996) and normal beta regression which can also be considered for analyzing proportional data.

\textsuperscript{7} In June 2011, South Sudan joined as the 193\textsuperscript{rd} member state. Therefore, South Sudan is not included in our analysis.
APRE2 values which demonstrate that a unidimensional model of voting improves the explanatory value to over 60 percent compared to the trivial assumption that all legislators vote the same way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period of observation</th>
<th># RCV</th>
<th>Correct classifications</th>
<th>APRE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dim. 1</td>
<td>Dim. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1999</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
<td>93.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2012</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>92.8%</td>
<td>94.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Annotation: For our computations, we used the „wnominate“-package for R (Poole et al. 2011). RCV = roll-call vote, APRE = Aggregate Proportional Reduction in Error.

The spatial maps (Figure 1 and Figure 2) provide additional information to analyze and label the dimension(s) of conflict in the Assembly. During the Cold War (spatial maps not shown in the paper, but see Voeten 2000 for a detailed analysis), UNGA member states aligned themselves alongside a continuum of which the US and the Soviet Union constituted the endpoints. However, a second dimension was also relevant in some periods, which divided the global South from the global North. With the end of the Cold War, this picture slightly changed: now, the first dimension represents a conflict between the ‘West and the rest’ (Voeten 2000, 2013).

Yet, as we can also see from the spatial maps and the estimated dimensions, a clear shift to multipolarity cannot be witnessed in the UNGA. The so called ‘non-Western’ states form a rather large bloc. Yet within this bloc, we cannot clearly identify regional organizations or UN regional groups as ‘unique actors’. This holds especially true for the years 1990-1999 and to some extent for the period from 2000 to 2012. In both periods, the EU is the only clearly identifiable multistate actor. The EU member states are plotted on the right hand side, with France and the UK being the closest to the US, which is located on the right border of the spatial map. The other regional organizations are mostly part of the large group of ‘non-Western’ states. In general, some trends can be identified in this pattern. For example, CARICOM is placed at the top of the bloc, while ASEAN and Arab League are more at the bottom. Meanwhile, the African Union is scattered over the second dimension. One could argue that regional organizations’ member states are quite close within this bloc, this holds especially true for the Arab League in the period from 2000-2012, but they are hardly identifiable as ‘unique actors’ like the EU. Additionally, the plots that highlight the different UN regional groups do not help in identifying a clear voting pattern. The regional groups overlap and provide us, therefore, with limited evidence for the existence of some sort of cohesion. Overall, it can be stated that we can witness a clear first dimension of conflict within the UNGA, but not a clear regional dimension in UNGA voting. However, one can argue that most of these groups show a high level of cohesion as they are plotted in more or less close proximity to each other.
Figure 1
UNGA Ideal-Points for the Period 1990-1999 with Different Groups

W-NOMINATE 1990–1999

W-NOMINATE 1990–1999

First Dimension
Second Dimension

First Dimension
Second Dimension

Legend:
- Asia–Pacific
- Africa
- East Europe
- Latin America & Caribbean
- Western Europe & Others

Legend:
- EU
- AU
- AL
- CARICOM
- ASEAN
- Mercosur
- Other

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FIGURE 2
UNG A IDEAL-POINTS FOR THE PERIOD 2000-2012 WITH DIFFERENT GROUPS
V. Results from the Analysis of Voting Unity

In a second step, we analyze regional organizations’ voting unity by applying oib regression. We include all roll-call votes between 1990 and 2012, where more than three member states of the regional organization in question took part. According to the computation of the IVC, ‘yes’, ‘no’ and ‘abstention’ are incorporated in the analysis, absences are treated as missing values. The voting unity of the respective RO or UN regional group is used as the dependent variable in the models.

The regression model contains a wide range of independent variables, such as the topic of the resolution, some US related aspects and the number of RO member states. However, in line with our hypotheses we will focus only on the effect of the closeness of a vote in this section. The closeness of a vote is measured according to the Agreement Index (Hix et al. 2005). The index is 1 if all UNGA members cast the same vote and 0 if the UNGA is evenly split in three groups. We deduct these values from 1, with a value of 0 now denoting a unanimous vote and 1 a vote where the majority size is at its minimum. Further, we include a linear and a squared term in the analysis.

Figure 3 and 4 display the results of the closeness of a vote on the probability of a RO or UN regional group voting with perfect voting unity. We can witness for almost all groups a strong negative connection between these two variables. The only exception is the European Union, which shows a clear increase in voting unity (Figure 3). The figure clearly shows that the EU has a comparatively low probability to vote as a unitary actor on rather unanimous resolutions. In contrast, the probability to speak with one voice increases the more contested a resolution is and reaches almost the perfect score of one if the UNGA is evenly split alongside the three voting options. This is a singular quality of the EU as the opposite is the case for most other ROs and UN regional groups.8

The sharp decrease in the probability should not be surprising for very large groups. It is obvious that the probability of a large RO to not vote with perfect unity on contested resolutions is much smaller compared to ROs with less member states. However, since the EU is the second largest RO in our analysis, this finding is much more impressive as it displays that the EU, although consisting of more than 20 members, is able to find a common position in the UNGA more often than significantly smaller ROs like Mercosur in contested votes. Therefore, the EU is the only RO in the UNGA that shows discipline and fulfills our second criteria.

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8 We also controlled this, among others, for ECOWAS, SADC, the Andean Community, and the Pacific Islands Forum.
Figure 3
Predicted probability of perfect voting unity of a RO based on the closeness of a resolution in the UNGA

Figure 4
Predicted probability of perfect voting unity of a UN group based on the closeness of a resolution in the UNGA
### Table 2

**Results of One Inflated Beta Regression (DV: Voting Unity of Regional Organizations)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Arab League</th>
<th>ASEAN</th>
<th>African Union</th>
<th>CARICOM</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>Mercosur</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proportion</td>
<td>Logit</td>
<td>Proportion</td>
<td>Logit</td>
<td>Proportion</td>
<td>Logit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Session</td>
<td>-0.0781***</td>
<td>-0.0960***</td>
<td>-0.0108</td>
<td>-0.0599*</td>
<td>0.00830</td>
<td>-0.0409***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>-0.272</td>
<td>0.201***</td>
<td>0.469***</td>
<td>0.874**</td>
<td>0.235*</td>
<td>-1.446***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear Weapons</td>
<td>-0.0470</td>
<td>-0.352</td>
<td>0.447***</td>
<td>-0.167</td>
<td>0.387***</td>
<td>-0.207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arms Control</td>
<td>-0.329</td>
<td>-0.595*</td>
<td>0.420**</td>
<td>-0.845**</td>
<td>0.301**</td>
<td>0.0108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>-0.340</td>
<td>-0.381</td>
<td>-0.150</td>
<td>-0.297</td>
<td>-0.305**</td>
<td>0.437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonialism</td>
<td>0.111</td>
<td>0.835</td>
<td>-0.187</td>
<td>3.157**</td>
<td>0.375*</td>
<td>1.305***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ec. Development</td>
<td>0.467</td>
<td>0.216</td>
<td>0.0122</td>
<td>1.215**</td>
<td>0.341*</td>
<td>0.763*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA = ‘No’</td>
<td>0.436***</td>
<td>1.861***</td>
<td>0.173*</td>
<td>1.570***</td>
<td>0.427**</td>
<td>1.110***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>-0.496***</td>
<td>-1.551***</td>
<td>-0.0282</td>
<td>-1.579***</td>
<td>-0.512***</td>
<td>-1.157***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size RO</td>
<td>0.160***</td>
<td>0.250***</td>
<td>0.0774*</td>
<td>0.131</td>
<td>0.0261***</td>
<td>-0.00283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness</td>
<td>-2.391***</td>
<td>2.988***</td>
<td>0.827</td>
<td>4.656***</td>
<td>-0.574</td>
<td>-5.927***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness Sq.</td>
<td>2.295**</td>
<td>0.645</td>
<td>1.292*</td>
<td>0.227</td>
<td>0.795*</td>
<td>1.703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>2.766***</td>
<td>1.789*</td>
<td>0.372</td>
<td>4.646***</td>
<td>0.185</td>
<td>3.493***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** Standard errors are in parentheses. Proportion model displays regression coefficients for cases with voting unity < 1. Logit model displays regression coefficients from a logistic regression model for cases with voting unity = 1. Voting unity scores were only computed when more than three RO member states casted a vote. N = Number of observations, AIC = Akaike Information Criterion, BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion, LL = Log-Likelihood, PRE = Proportional Reduction of Error. Significance levels: * = p < 0.05, ** = p < 0.01, *** = p < 0.001.
| Table 3 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | Results of One Inflated Beta Regression (DV: Voting Unity of UN Regional Groups) |
| | Asia and Pacific | Africa | Latin & Caribbean | East Europe | West Europe |
| | Proportion | Logit | Proportion | Logit | Proportion | Logit | Proportion | Logit | Proportion | Logit |
| UN Session | -0.0299*** | -0.1022*** | 0.00653 | -0.0431*** | -0.00830 | 0.0234* | -0.0141* | 0.0994*** | -0.00106 | 0.0204 |
| Middle East | -0.0968 | -1.0211*** | 0.261** | -1.498*** | -0.0648 | -0.531* | 0.523*** | 0.352 | -0.139* | -3.486*** |
| Nuclear Weapons | -0.0470 | -1.837*** | 0.405*** | -0.165 | 0.521*** | 0.274 | 0.0358 | 0.299 | -0.181* | -0.937*** |
| Arms Control | -0.00947 | -0.412 | 0.224 | 0.0998 | 0.290** | 0.0537 | 0.188* | -0.287 | 0.146 | -0.594* |
| Human Rights | -0.281*** | -0.887 | -0.373** | 0.581** | 0.0685 | 1.041*** | -0.257** | 0.511 | 0.0438 | 0.278 |
| Colonialism | 0.386*** | 1.708*** | 0.470** | 0.943** | 0.364** | 1.195*** | 0.191 | -0.190 | -0.314*** | -3.311*** |
| Ec. Development | 0.236** | -0.887 | 0.272 | 0.691* | 0.409*** | 1.330** | 0.0135 | -0.265 | 0.114 | -1.742*** |
| USA = ‘No’ | 0.106* | 0.933*** | 0.415*** | 1.106*** | 0.157** | 0.947*** | -0.334*** | -1.114*** | -0.624*** | -2.022*** |
| Important | -0.306*** | 0.324 | -0.494*** | -1.174*** | -0.198*** | -1.353*** | -0.0226 | 0.515* | -0.196** | 0.916*** |
| Size RO | -0.0146** | -0.0507* | 0.0260*** | -0.00194 | 0.0314** | -0.0161 | 0.0739*** | -0.0351 | 0.0615* | 0.210* |
| Closeness Sq. | -0.502 | 42.377*** | -0.893 | 2.018 | -3.676*** | 6.464*** | 2.215*** | 14.82*** | 5.862*** | -2.822 |
| Intercept | 4.141*** | 8.810*** | 0.212 | 3.499*** | 1.206*** | 0.385 | 0.932*** | -1.799* | 0.0898 | -6.510*** |

N | 1578 | 1578 | 1578 | 1578 | 1578 |
AIC | -1521.2 | 240.9 | -27.22 | 169.4 | 1578 |
BIC | -1376.4 | 385.7 | 117.6 | 319.5 | -311.7 |
LL | 787.6 | -93.46 | 40.61 | -56.68 | 255.3 |
PRE | 75.48 | 55.12 | 62.84 | 62.56 | 39.21 |

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses. Proportion model displays regression coefficients for cases with voting unity < 1. Logit model displays regression coefficients from a logistic regression model for cases with voting unity = 1. Voting unity scores were only computed when more than three group member states casted a vote. N = Number of observations, AIC = Akaike Information Criterion, BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion, LL = Log-Likelihood, PRE = Proportional Reduction of Error. Significance levels: * = p < 0.05, ** = p < 0.01, *** = p < 0.001.
VI. Conclusion

In this paper, we applied techniques and theories usually used in the study of national parliaments to the UNGA. We did so, due to the observation that several studies analyze the voting behavior of specific groups in the UNGA in order to control for the success coordination efforts of these groups. We have argued that these analyses, at least implicitly, treat regional organizations as party-like actors within the UNGA.

As shown in our analysis, one should be cautious with this comparison between parties and ROs. Regional organizations or UN regional groups might show a high level of voting unity in the UNGA in general. However, they fail to act in unison in instances of major conflict within the UNGA and show, therefore, no sign of discipline. This also means that their high level of voting unity are mainly caused by cases in which there was a high degree of overall voting unity in the UNGA. Therefore, many states in the UNGA share a high level of cohesion, in the sense of “an objective condition of unity of action among party members” (Ozbudun 1970: 305). Yet, as “discipline [normally] starts where cohesion falters” (Hazan 2006: 3) with parties in national parliaments, this is not the case with our analyzed groups in the UNGA. However, the close proximity of many states of different groupings in the W-NOMINATE plots shows that there is at least cohesion in some cases.

From our perspective, these findings imply two aspects for future research. Firstly, future studies should be cautious about using voting unity scores as a simple indicator of the success of foreign policy coordination of two or more states. Voting unity scores are clearly the product of special parliamentary characteristics in the UNGA and the need to form parliamentary majorities. This results in such counter-intuitive findings that North and South Korea show a higher level of vote unity than South Korea and the US (Ferdinand 2013) or that Russia and the US voted more infrequently together after the end of the Cold War than during the Cold War (Bailey et al. 2013; Voeten 2013). Secondly, the European Union seems to be essentially different from other regional organizations, as the EU indeed shows signs of cohesion and discipline. Hence, the European Union appears to be the most promising case when researchers try to analyze the connection between regional integration processes and voting patterns within the UNGA. Here, we are currently still missing comprehensive studies on how the vote coordination of EU member states functions at the UNGA, also from a qualitative perspective (Birnberg 2009; Panke 2013a, 2013c, 2014 and Smith 2006 are exceptions).
References


