

Data Science in Action

The Illiberal Challenge: Big-data and text-as-data evidence from the UN Human Rights Council



Structure

- Motivation: The Illiberal Challenge to the Liberal International Order
- Theory: Vote Buying in International Organizations
- Case Selection: The UN Human Rights Council
- Data: Resolutions, Voting, Human Rights norms
- Analysis: Vote Buying, Changing Resolution Content
- Conclusions

This lecture is based on a joint project with Christoph Steinert, University of Zurich.

Motivation



“allegations of patterns of torture, or ill-treatment, including forced medical treatment and adverse conditions of detention, are credible, as are allegations of individual incidents of sexual and gender-based violence.”



“serious human rights violations” against the Uyghur and “other predominantly Muslim communities”

Motivation

UN Human Rights Council voted against debate on human rights violations in China's Xinjiang region

06/10/2022 STATEMENT China ES FR
| Human Rights Council |



Source: International Federation for Human Rights (2022)

- 47 HRC members
- 19 rejected the debate, 17 voted in favor, 11 states abstained
- The UN HRC did not discuss these human rights violations

Motivation: The Illiberal Challenge to the „Liberal International Order“

- Powerful illiberal states challenge the norms underlying the liberal international order (LIO).
 - The geopolitical rise of China
 - Russia’s aggression against Ukraine,
 - US President Trump’s rejection of multilateralism
 - the rise of authoritarianism and nationalism in countries such as Brazil, India, Hungary, Israel, and Italy...
- Scholars have noted that illiberal states could build an “authoritarian international law” that “extend[s] authoritarian rule across time and space” (Ginsburg 2020)

Theory: Illiberal States as „Norm Entrepreneurs“

- Rather than merely challenging, resisting, and eroding liberal norms, illiberal states proactively develop and spread rival norms that are in line with their own views and interests (Wunderlich, 2020).
- Like liberal norm entrepreneurs, they use the platforms that international organizations provide.
- Unlike liberal norm entrepreneurs, who rely on both material and intangible mechanisms to spread norms, illiberal actors are more limited to material mechanisms.
- They lack the intangible resources required for norm promotion via intangible channels:
 - No support of transnational advocacy network to spread illiberal norms
 - Moral credibility of illiberal norm entrepreneurs in the international arena is limited

Hypotheses

		Tool of Norm Promotion	
		Material	Intangible
Norm Entrepreneur	Liberal	+	+
	Illiberal	+	–

Table 1: Types of norm entrepreneurs and effective tools of norm promotion

- **Illiberal states** will use **material tools** to promote **illiberal norms** in **international organizations**
- **China** will use **financial aid** to promote **illiberal human right norms** in the **UN Human Rights Council**

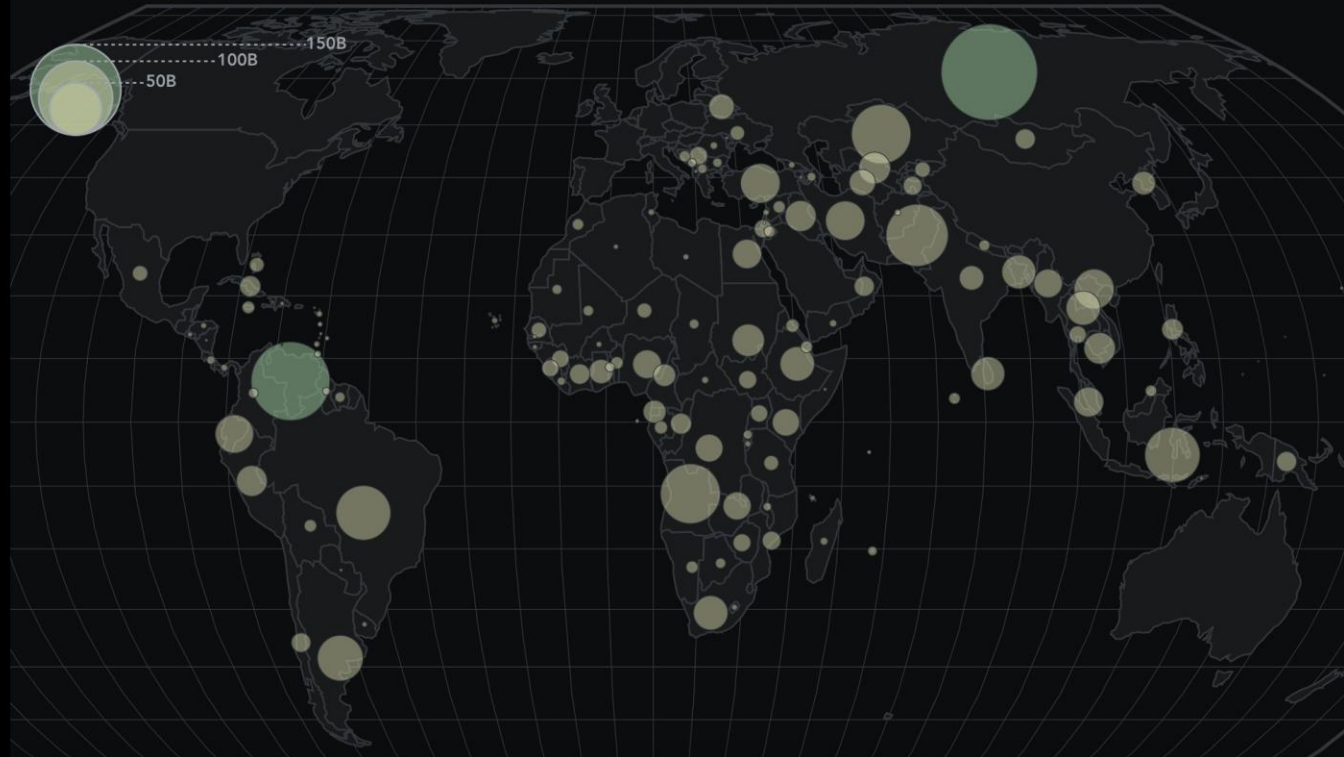
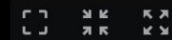
Data: Chinese Aid



AIDDATA
A Research Lab at William & Mary

Global Chinese Development Finance

Total per Recipient | Commitments (USD)



Data:

Top 10 Recipients

Commitments (USD)



Total per Year Commitments (USD)

What are rollover loans ?

..... Including Rollover Loans — Excluding Rollover Loans



Sectors

Top ten are displayed, and the rest are shown in the "Other" category.

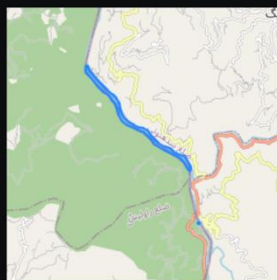


Project-level data with geocodes

PROJECT ID: 92637

[CPEC, IPP] BOC contributes to \$1.54 billion syndicated loan for 700.7 MW Azad Pattan Hydropower Plant Construction Project (Linked to Project ID#54233, 92635, 92636, 54234)

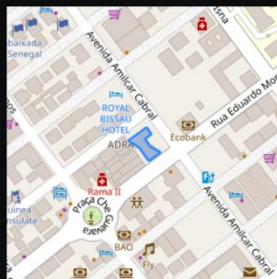
Commitment Year: 2021 Recipient: Pakistan USD: \$385,000,000



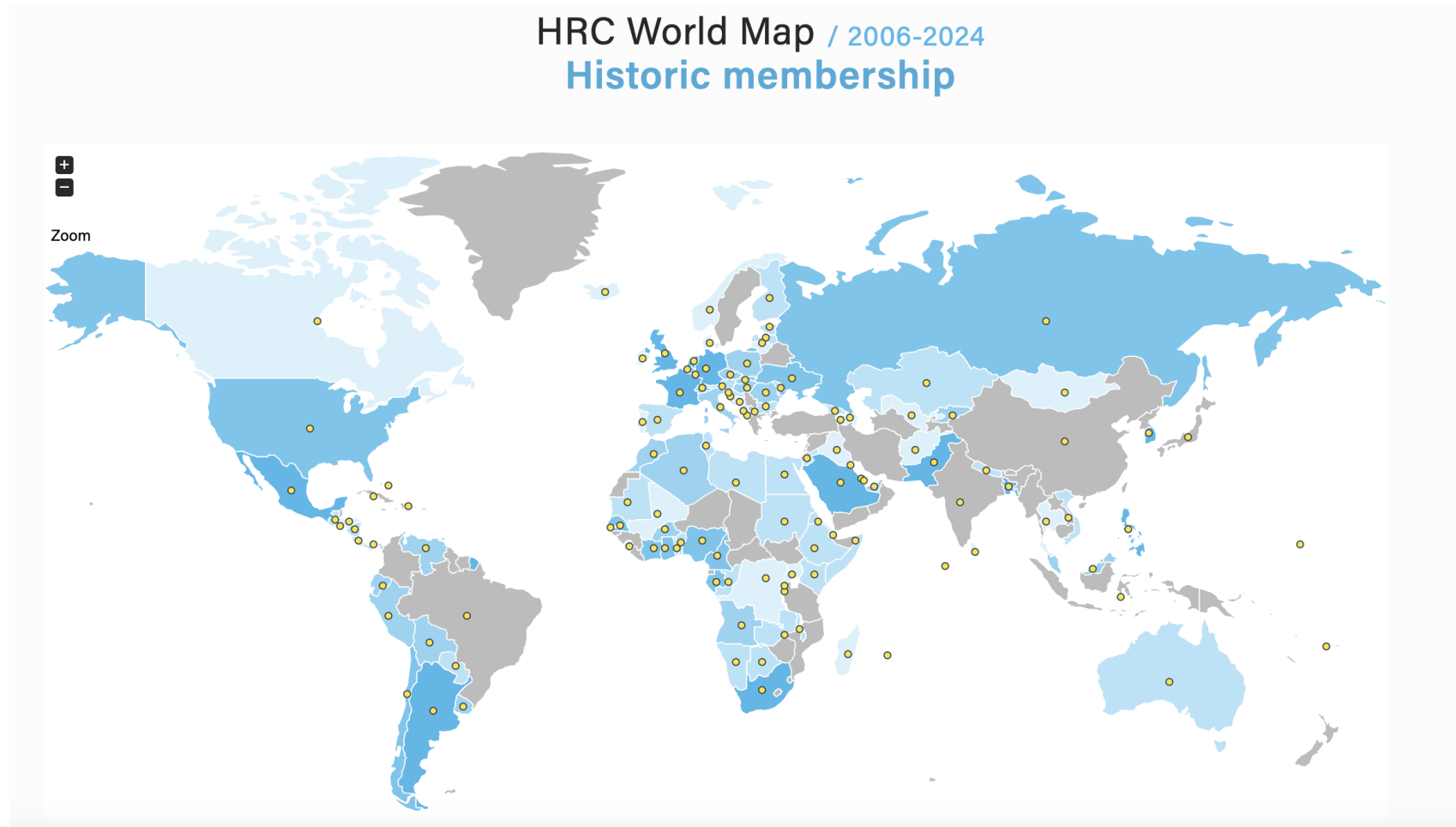
PROJECT ID: 93271

Chinese Government provides office materials to the Ministry of Fisheries in Guinea-Bissau in December 2021

Commitment Year: 2021 Recipient: Guinea-Bissau USD: N/A



Data: UN Human Rights Council



Data: Web-Scraping UN Human Rights Council Resolutions

Year	Month	Session number	Text type	Text number	Text title	Agenda item	Type	Topic	Main sponsors	Means of adoption	PBI	New Resource Requirements
2024	JUN	HRC-56 📅	Resolution	56/1	Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar	Item 2	Country - Situations		Pakistan (on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation)	Consensus	Yes	\$ 566'800
2024	JUN	HRC-56 📅	Resolution	56/2	Enhancement of international cooperation in the field of human rights	Item 3	Thematic - Cross-Cutting/Other		Uganda (on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries)	Vote 31-2-14 Full vote results	Yes	\$ 75'500
2024	JUN	HRC-56 📅	Resolution	56/3	Independence and impartiality of the judiciary, jurors and assessors, and the independence of lawyers	Item 3	Thematic - Civil and Political Rights		Hungary, Australia, Botswana, Maldives, Mexico, Thailand	Consensus	No	-
2024	JUN	HRC-56 📅	Resolution	56/4	Human rights and international solidarity	Item 3	Thematic - Economic, Social and Cultural Rights		Cuba	Consensus	No	-

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2024	JUN	HRC-56 📅	Resolution	56/4	Human rights and international solidarity	Item 3	Thematic - Economic, Social and Cultural Rights		Cuba	Consensus	No	-

Resolution Sponsors and their Respect for Human Rights

Assumption:

Human rights friendly countries sponsor more human-rights friendly resolutions.

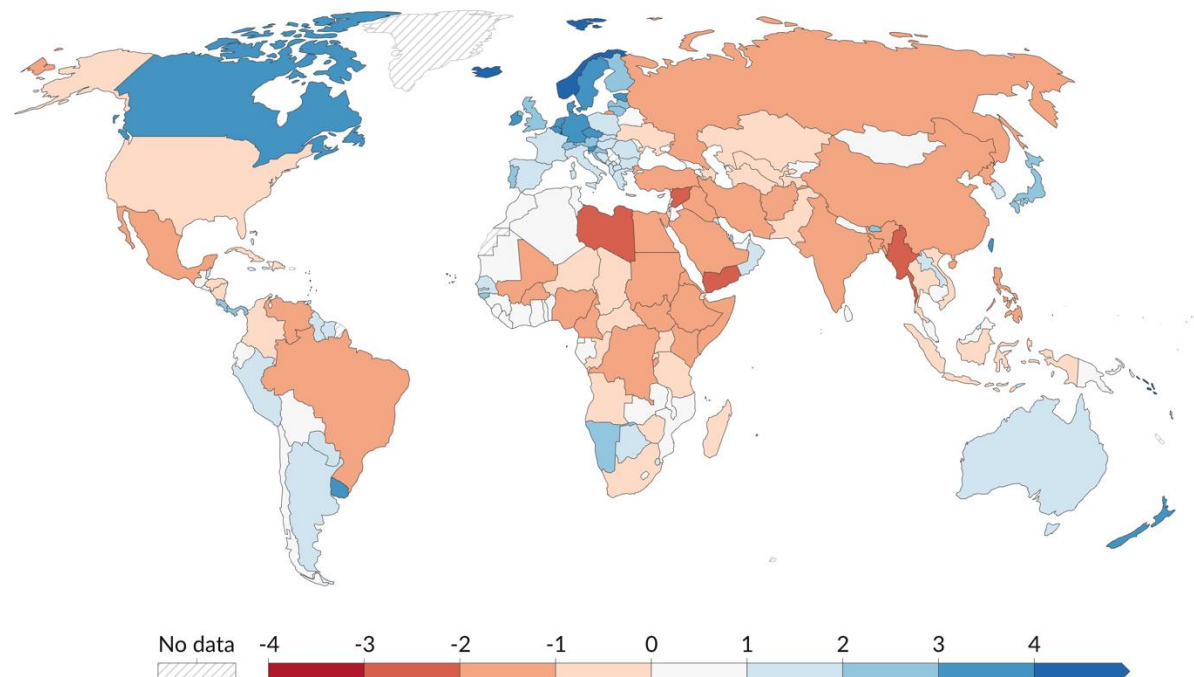
Approach:

We use the average HR score of sponsors as a measure of the resolution's human-rights friendliness

Physical integrity rights score, 2019

The score captures the extent to which citizens are protected from government killings, torture, political imprisonments, extrajudicial executions, mass killings and disappearances. Large positive scores mean abuses are rare relative to other countries and years, large negative scores that abuses are relatively widespread.

Our World
in Data



Data source: Fariss et al. (2020)

OurWorldinData.org/human-rights | CC BY

Note: The scores are based on a statistical model that combines measures from several other sources.

The Resolutions

United Nations

A/HRC/RES/56/2



General Assembly

Distr.: General
11 July 2024

Original: English

Human Rights Council

Fifty-sixth session

18 June–12 July 2024

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 10 July 2024

56/2. Enhancement of international cooperation in the field of human rights

The Human Rights Council,

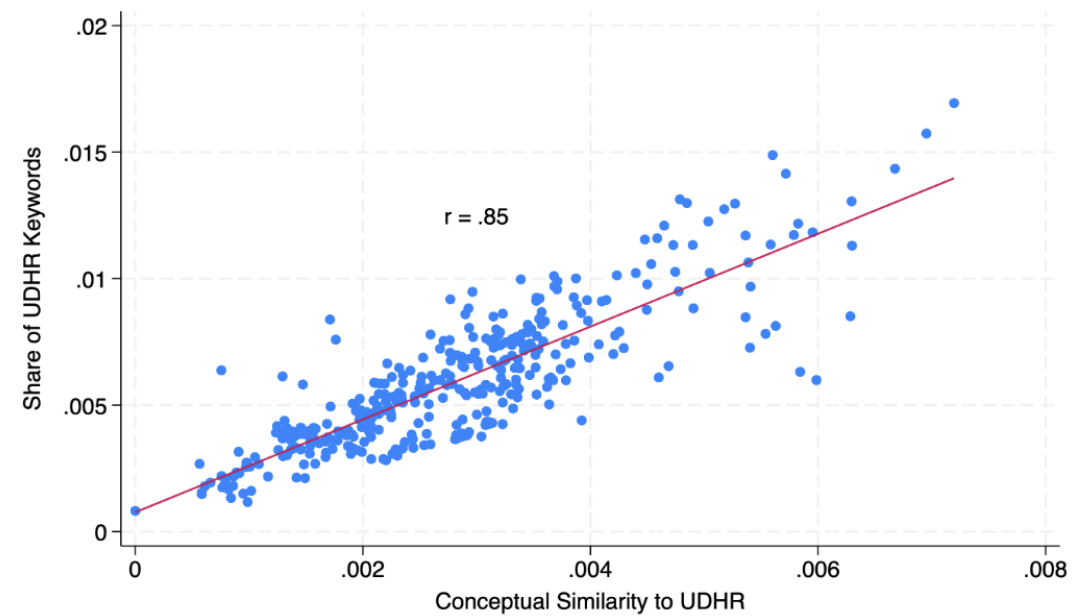
Reaffirming its commitment to promoting international cooperation, as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, in particular Article 1, paragraph 3 thereof, and relevant provisions of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights on 25 June 1993, for enhancing genuine cooperation among States Members of the United Nations in the field of human rights,

Recalling General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, in which the Assembly adopted a comprehensive, far-reaching set of universal and transformative Sustainable Development Goals,

Natural Language Processing of UN Human Rights Council Resolutions

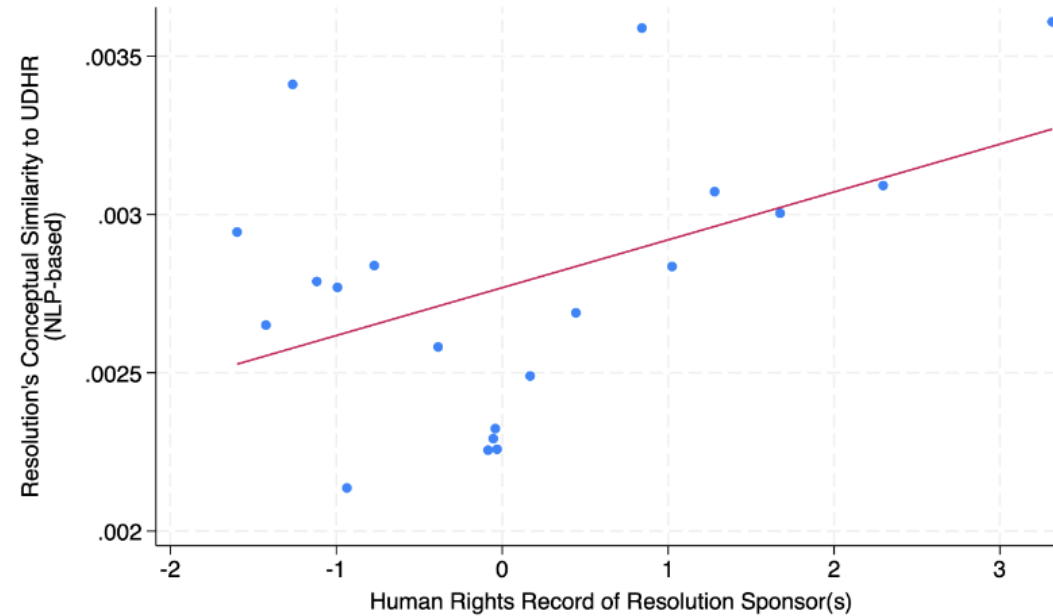
1. Feed the **universal declaration of human rights (UDHR)** to GPT-4.0
2. Prompt GPT-4.0 to extract the most important human rights principles from the UDHR
3. Compile a list of synonyms of these principles
4. Run a text analysis of UN HRC Resolutions by looking for UDHR principles in the full texts.
 1. Compute simple share of keywords
 2. Compute conceptual similarity (based on co-occurrence in the same context window)
5. Assess human rights-friendliness of resolutions based on these measures.

Figure A8: Robustness of the NLP-based measures



Notes: The graph shows the correlation of the two NLP-based measures described in the text.

Compare to sponsor-based measure



Note: The figure plots the correlation between the two measures of resolutions' 'HR-friendliness' by means of a binned scatterplot. The x-axis indicates the mean HR record of the resolutions' sponsor, based on [Fariss et al. \(2020\)](#). The y-axis indicates the NLP-based measure indicating the conceptual similarity between the resolutions' texts and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

*43rd meeting
8 October 2021*

[Adopted by a recorded vote of 43 to 0, with 4 abstentions. The voting was as follows:

In favour:




















Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Czechia, Denmark, Eritrea, Fiji, France, Gabon, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Libya, Malawi, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mexico, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Republic of Korea, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uruguay, Uzbekistan and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

Abstaining:

China, India, Japan and Russian Federation]

Data: Vote results for each resolution

Voted for:

 Algeria	 Bangladesh	 Bangladesh	 Benin
 Cameroon	 Chile	 China	 Costa Rica
 Costa Rica	 Côte d'Ivoire	 Cuba	 Eritrea
 Gambia	 Ghana	 Honduras	 India
 Indonesia	 Kazakhstan	 Kuwait	 Kyrgyzstan
 Malawi	 Malaysia	 Maldives	 Morocco
 Paraguay	 Qatar	 Somalia	 South Africa
 Sudan	 United Arab Emirates	 Vietnam	

Voted against:

 Albania	 Belgium	 Burundi	 Finland
 France	 Georgia	 Germany	 Japan
 Lithuania	 Luxembourg	 Montenegro	 Netherlands
 Romania	 United States of America		

Abstention:

 Argentina	 Dominican Republic
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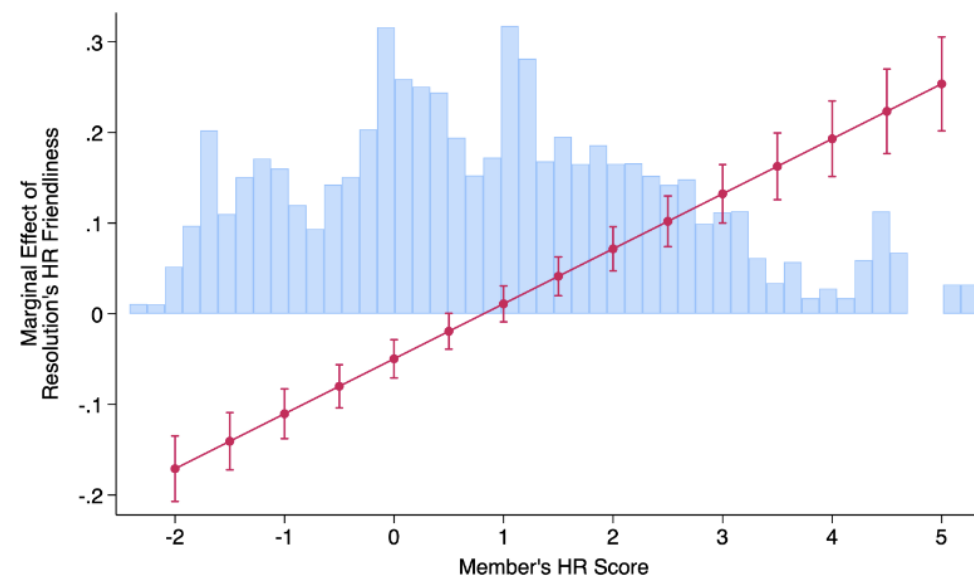
Analysis: What explains support for human rights friendly resolutions?

$$\begin{aligned} support_{i,t,r} = & \alpha HRscore_{i,t} + \beta HRfriendly_{r,t} + \delta(HRscore_{i,t} \times HRfriendly_{r,t}) \\ & + \mathbf{X}'_{i,t}\eta + \gamma_i + \varepsilon_{i,t,r} \end{aligned}$$

Results

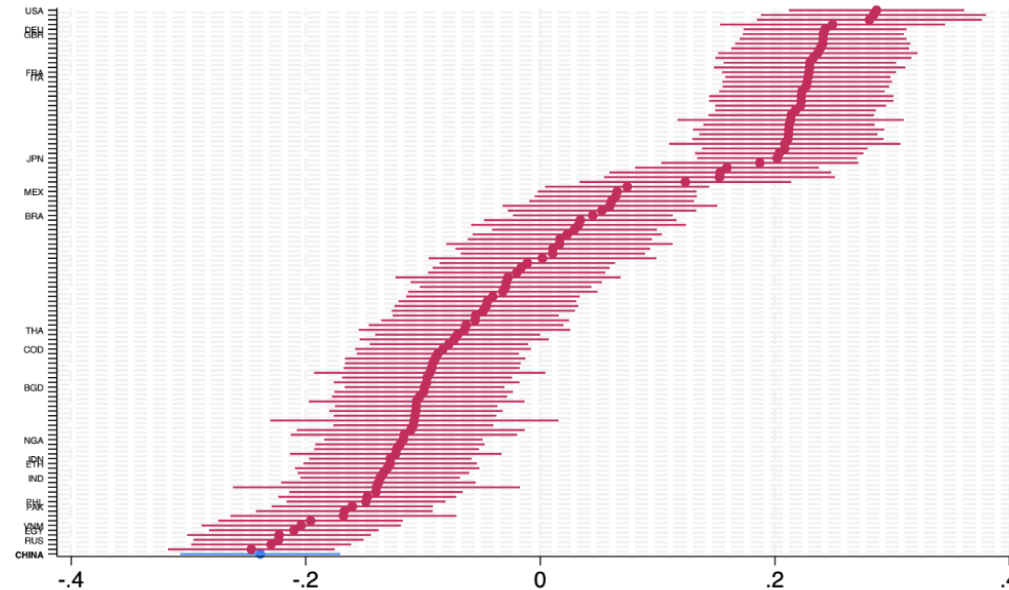
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Member's HR score	0.057*** (0.020)	0.032* (0.018)	0.032* (0.017)	0.009 (0.014)
Resolution's HR friendliness	-0.019 (0.014)	-0.050*** (0.011)	-0.047*** (0.011)	
Member's HR score × Resolution's HR friendliness		0.061*** (0.006)	0.060*** (0.006)	0.023** (0.010)
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Resolution FE				✓
Controls			✓	✓
Interacted Controls				✓
R^2	0.200	0.290	0.293	0.408
Observations	16004	16004	15972	15972

Notes: Dependent Variable is Voting for a Resolution



Analysis: Who supports human rights friendly resolutions?

$$support_{i,t,r} = \beta HRfriendly_r + \sum_i \delta_i (\gamma_i \times HRfriendly_r) + X'_{i,t} + \gamma_i + \varepsilon_{i,t,r}$$



Notes: The graph shows the coefficients δ_i . To reduce clutter, we only show the labels of countries with more than 50 million inhabitants; all countries are, however, included in the regression.



Does China buy votes in the UN Human Rights Council?

$$\begin{aligned} support_{i,t,r} = & \lambda Tool_{i,t} + \gamma ChinaYes_{r,t} + \psi(Tool_{i,t} \times ChinaYes_{r,t}) \\ & + \alpha HRscore_{i,t} + \beta HRfriendly_{r,t} + \delta(HRscore_{i,t} \times HRfriendly_{r,t}) \\ & + \mathbf{X}'_{i,t}\eta + \mathbf{W}'_{r,t}\zeta + \gamma_i + \varepsilon_{i,t,r}, \end{aligned}$$

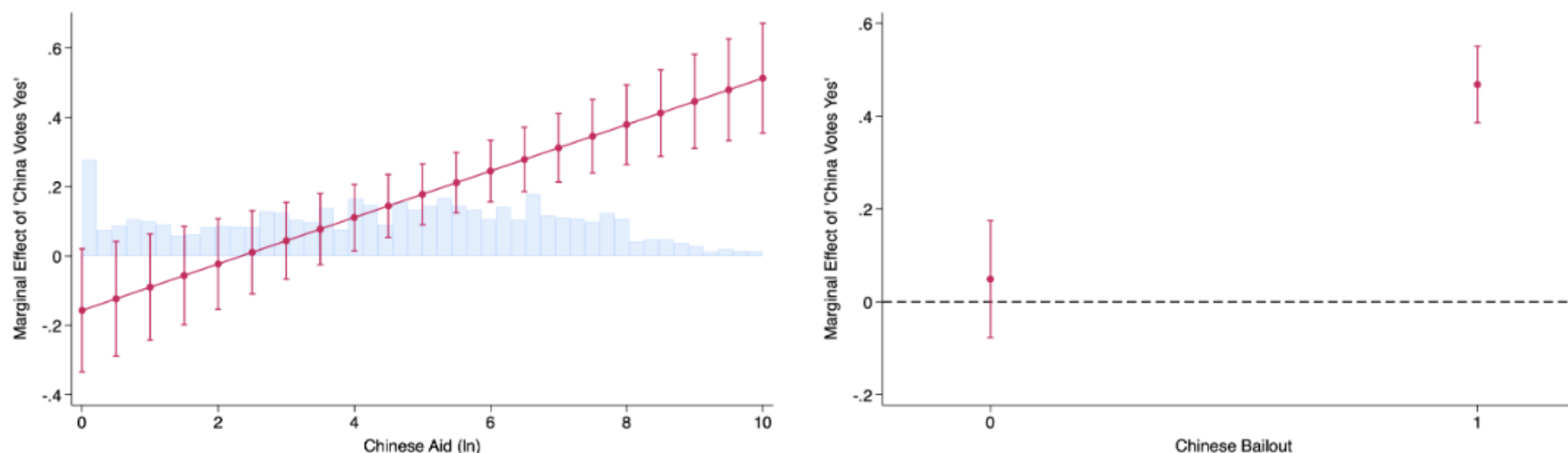
Does China buy votes in the UN Human Rights Council?

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
China votes yes	0.059 (0.064)	-0.157* (0.091)		0.049 (0.064)	
Chinese aid (ln)		-0.049*** (0.012)	-0.029*** (0.008)		
China votes yes × Chinese aid (ln)		0.067*** (0.015)	0.040*** (0.009)		
Chinese Bailout				-0.303*** (0.044)	-0.103** (0.043)
China votes yes × Chinese Bailout				0.419*** (0.060)	0.143*** (0.052)
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Resolution FE			✓		✓
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Interacted Controls			✓		✓
R^2	0.299	0.354	0.570	0.304	0.556
Observations	14662	14662	14662	14662	14662

Notes: Dependent Variable is Voting Yes for a Resolution.

Does China buy votes in the UN Human Rights Council?

Figure 4: Chinese aid, Chinese bailouts and voting with China in the HRC



Notes: Left panel shows marginal effects based on column 2, right panel shows marginal effects based on column 4 of Table 3.

Can China also use intangible resources to influence votes? Politics, Diplomacy, Culture?

Table 4: Intangible Resources

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
China votes yes	0.050 (0.070)		0.076 (0.059)		0.273*** (0.048)		0.061 (0.067)	
BRI membership	-0.025 (0.055)	0.015 (0.061)						
China votes yes × BRI membership	0.033 (0.073)	-0.023 (0.081)						
Diplomatic Visit			0.052 (0.034)	0.005 (0.027)				
China votes yes × Diplomatic Visit			-0.085* (0.046)	-0.018 (0.036)				
Confucius Institutes					0.237*** (0.058)	0.054 (0.064)		
China votes yes × Confucius Institutes					-0.281*** (0.068)	-0.092 (0.077)		
Sister Cities							-0.003 (0.040)	-0.018 (0.025)
China votes yes × Sister Cities							-0.006 (0.048)	0.006 (0.030)
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Resolution FE		✓		✓		✓		✓
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Controls × China votes Yes		✓		✓		✓		✓
R ²	0.300	0.555	0.267	0.526	0.310	0.547	0.299	0.555
Observations	14662	14662	11971	11971	14347	14347	14662	14662

Notes: Dependent Variable is Voting Yes for a Resolution.

Different Types of Diplomatic Visits

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
China votes yes	0.049 (0.057)		0.032 (0.063)		0.032 (0.063)	
Political Visits	0.031 (0.052)	0.028 (0.052)				
China votes yes × Political Visits	-0.061 (0.075)	-0.061 (0.075)				
Cadre Visits			-0.015 (0.039)	-0.018 (0.040)		
China votes yes × Cadre Visits			0.009 (0.055)	0.010 (0.057)		
CCP Visits					-0.015 (0.039)	-0.018 (0.040)
China votes yes × CCP Visits					0.009 (0.055)	0.010 (0.057)
HR of Voting Country × HR of Resolution Sponsors	0.059*** (0.006)	0.060*** (0.006)	0.060*** (0.006)	0.060*** (0.006)	0.060*** (0.006)	0.060*** (0.006)
HR of Voting Country	-0.010 (0.013)	-0.017 (0.013)	-0.009 (0.013)	-0.017 (0.013)	-0.009 (0.013)	-0.017 (0.013)
HR of Resolution Sponsors	-0.039*** (0.012)		-0.039*** (0.012)		-0.039*** (0.012)	
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Resolution FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Controls		✓		✓		✓
R ²	0.265	0.352	0.264	0.351	0.264	0.351
Observations	11971	11971	11971	11971	11971	11971

Notes: Dependent Variable is Voting Yes for a Resolution.

Analysing the content of resolutions with text-as-data

- We use structural topic models to systematically analyze cross-temporal variation in the content of HRC resolutions, following approaches that use such models to analyze temporal patterns in textual data (Magaloni & Rodriguez, 2020).
- To identify the optimal number of topics to classify the resolution texts, we tested different thresholds and evaluated them against the indicators of semantic coherence and exclusivity (Unkel, 2023).

Topic Models: 20 topics

Topic 1 Top Words:

Highest Prob: palestinian, occupi, includ, territori, settlement, jerusalem, east

FREX: settlement, settler, expans, busi, jerusalem, two-stat, east

Lift: -tier, adam, adumim, afore-ment, archaeolog, articular, attach

Score: palestinian, occupi, jerusalem, east, isra, settlement, israel

Topic 2 Top Words:

Highest Prob: occupi, syrian, israel, golan, right, council, resolut

FREX: golan, desist, syrian, israel, administr, isra, occupi

Lift: mine-lay, motherland, quneitra, aggress, card, constant, jurisdicti

Score: golan, syrian, occupi, israel, isra, null, void

Topic 3 Top Words:

Highest Prob: right, peopl, peac, intern, palestinian, nation, unit

FREX: self-determin, peac, palestin, peopl, friend, self-, inalien

Lift: erga, ever-increas, fault, omn, cogen, jus, unqualifi

Score: palestinian, self-determin, occupi, israel, jerusalem, east, palestin

Topic 4 Top Words

Highest Prob: religion, discrimin, racial, intoler, durban, programm, right

FREX: durban, descent, religion, intoler, belief, racial, racism

Lift: action-orient, affront, afrophobia, aliv, anti-raci, anti-semit, apolog

Score: durban, racism, intoler, religion, xenophobia, racial, descent

Topic 17 Top Words

Highest Prob: debt, right, develop, countri, human, econom, intern

FREX: debt, indebt, adjust, relief, heavili, extern, foreign

Lift: heavili, predatori, andrew, bernard, bolivia, borrow, chile

Score: debt, indebt, heavili, adjust, countri, debtor, foreign

Topic 18 Top Words

Highest Prob: syrian, intern, arab, republ, humanitarian, human, law

FREX: chemic, iraq, weapon, arab, levant, syria, daesh

Lift: caesar, chlorin, cluster, daesh, stockpil, toxic, -led

Score: syrian, republ, arab, chemic, weapon, inquiri, civilian

Topic 19 Top Words

Highest Prob: right, state, illicit, corrupt, human, nation, fund

FREX: corrupt, illicit, asset, origin, repatri, recoveri, flow

Lift: anti-money-laund, exceed, lausann, multin, non-repatri, portion, quantiti

Score: illicit, corrupt, repatri, asset, recoveri, origin, stolen

Topic 20 Top Words

Highest Prob: right, food, human, famili, develop, nation, includ

FREX: food, sanit, famili, drink, water, older, hunger

Lift: furthest, guardian, menstruat, morbid, stigma, defec, menstrual

Score: food, sanit, water, drink, famili, agricultur, hygien

The keywords reflect broader substantive topics covered by HRC resolutions such as Israeli settlements (topic 1) ..., racial and religious discrimination (topic 4), ... the death penalty (topic 11), ... corruption (topic 19), or the right to food (topic 20).

Topics of resolutions sponsored by China

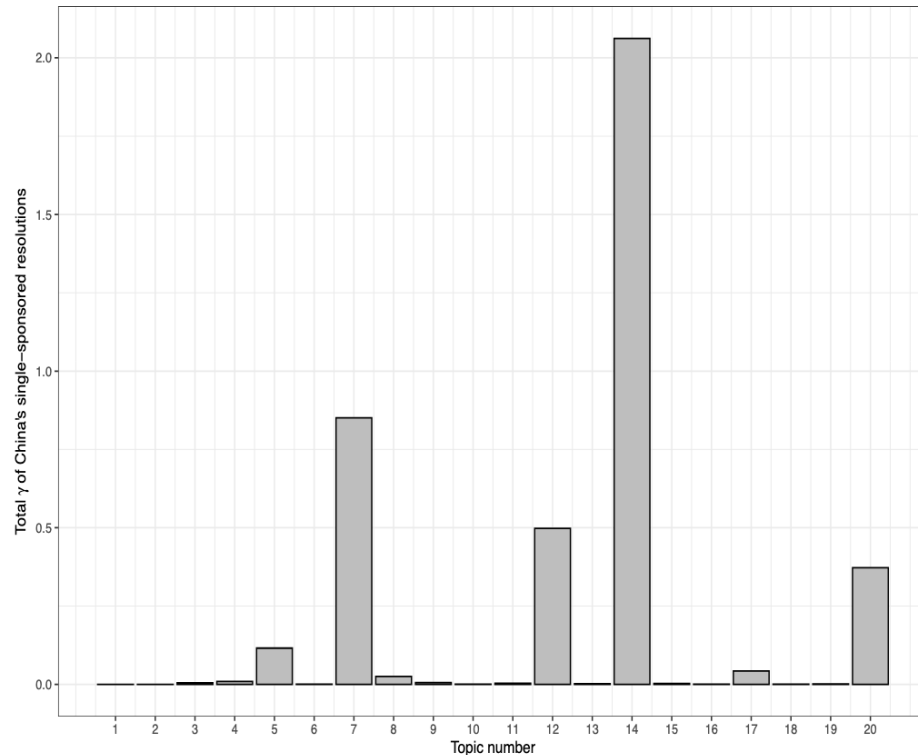


Figure A10: This figure shows the aggregated γ -score across the 20 topics for the combined text of China's four single-sponsored HRC resolutions (HRC/RES/35/21: "The contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights"; HRC/RES/37/23: "Promoting mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of human rights"; HRC/RES/41/19: "The contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights"; HRC/RES/43/21: "Promoting mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of human rights")

Topic 14 Top Words

Highest Prob: right, human, cooper, state, nation, promot, intern

FREX: field, repris, mutual, intimid, enhanc, societi, dialogu

Lift: check, espous, good-, non-leth, enrich, adequaci, adjud

Score: repris, enhanc, intimid, field, drug, dialogu, defend

Cooperative Dialogue vs. Death Penalty

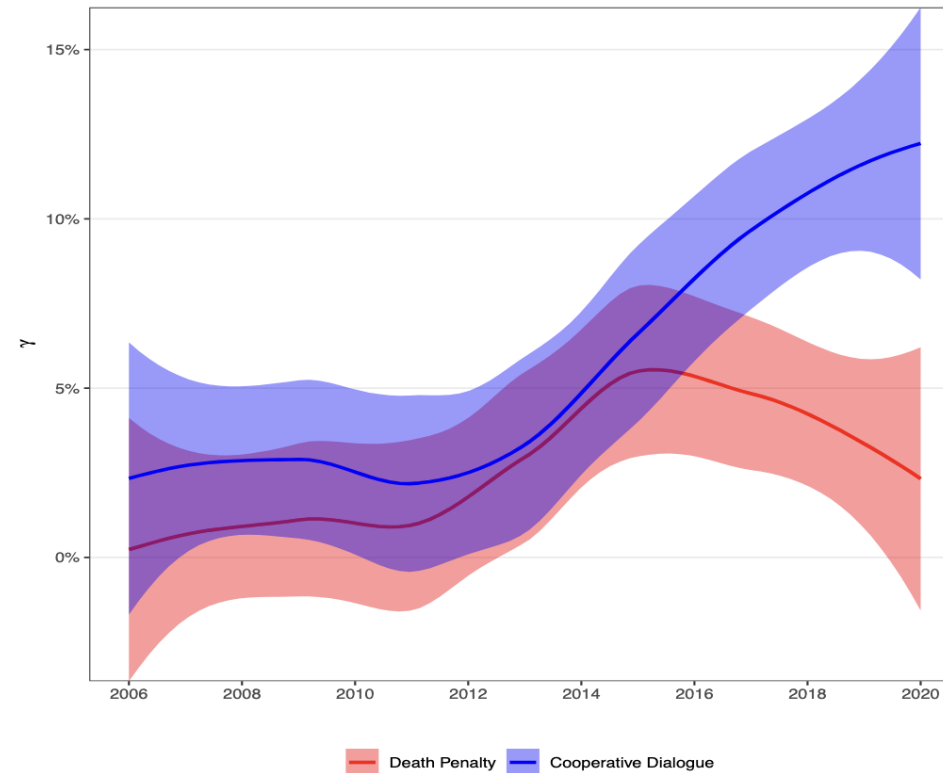
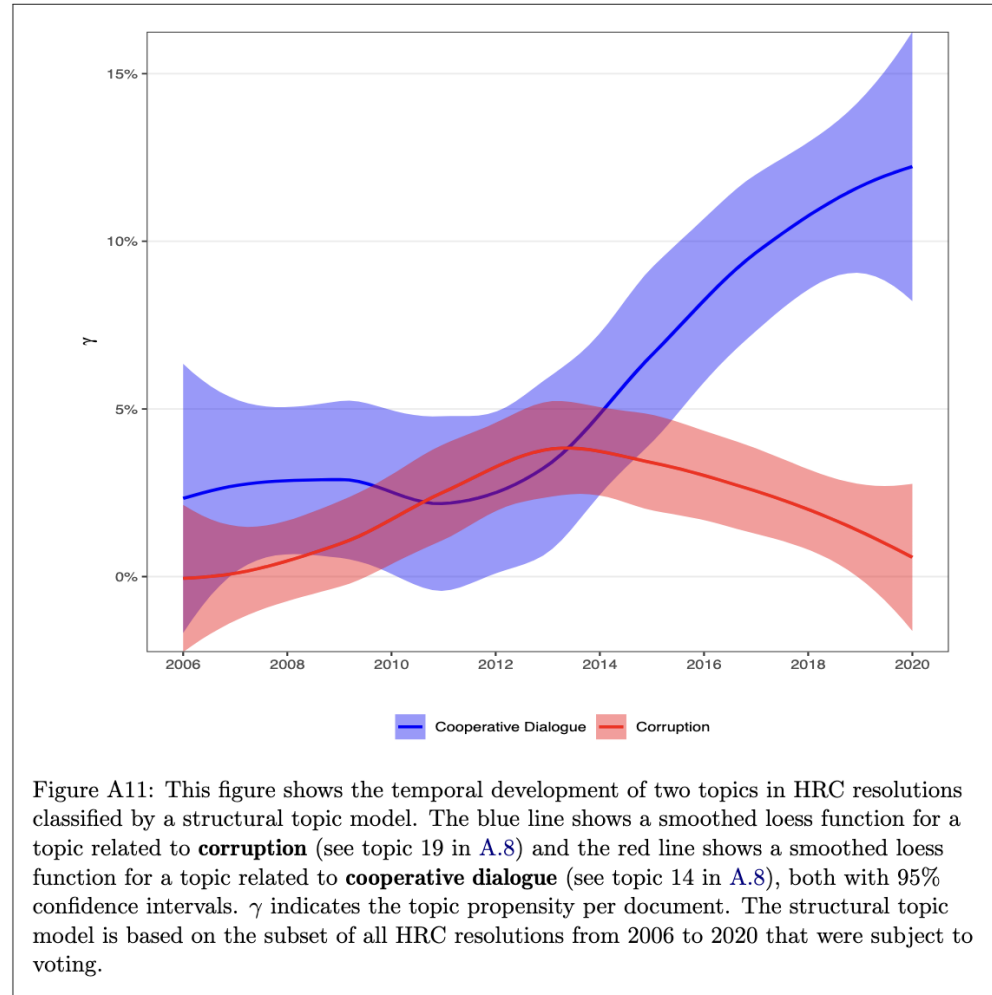
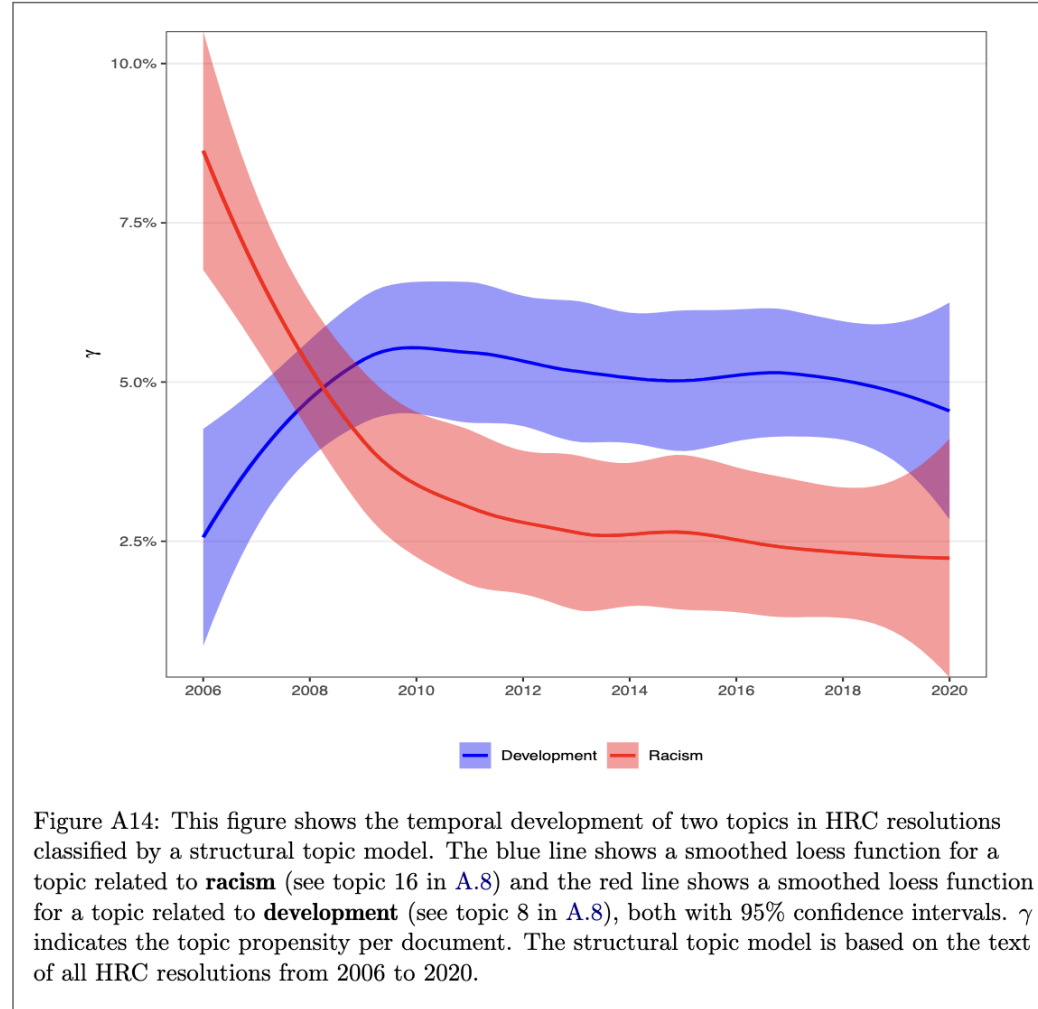


Figure 5: This figure shows the temporal development of two topics in HRC resolutions classified by a structural topic model. The blue line shows a smoothed loess function for a topic related to death penalty (see topic 11 in A.8) and the red line shows a smoothed loess function for a topic related to cooperative dialogue (see topic 14 in A.8), both with 95% confidence intervals. γ indicates the topic propensity per document. The structural topic model is based on the subset of all HRC resolutions from 2006 to 2020 that were subject to voting.

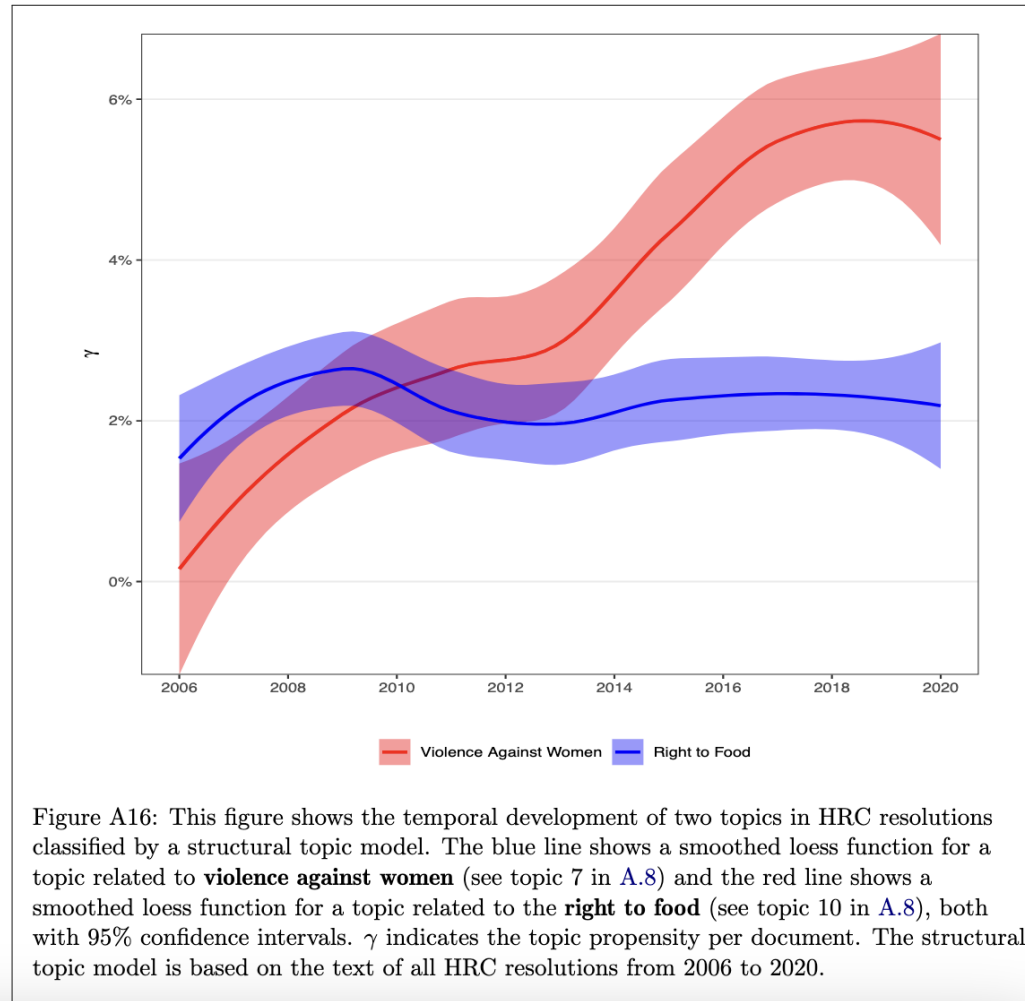
Corruption vs Cooperative Dialogue



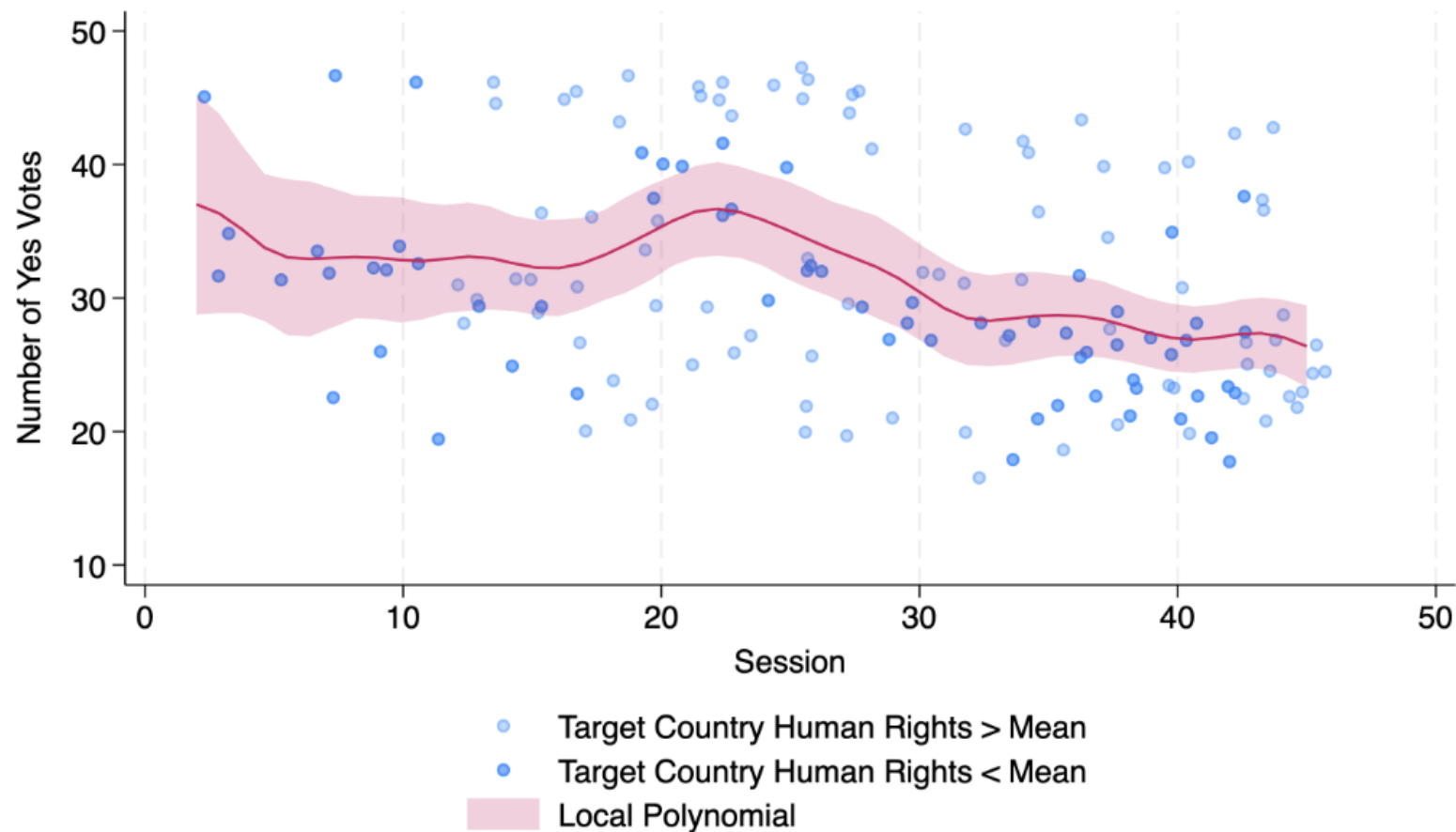
Racism vs. Development



Violence Against Women vs Right to Food



Support for Country-Specific Resolutions



Conclusions

- **Theory:**
 - Illiberal states promote illiberal norms through international organizations by means of material incentives
- **Data:** New dataset on decisions of the UN Human Rights Council
 - All votes, all resolution texts, all sponsors
 - Other resolution-specific information
 - Various measures of resolutions' „human rights friendliness“
- **Methods:**
 - Big data to explain voting behavior in international organizations
 - LLMs to measure human rights friendliness of resolutions
 - Topic modelling to analyze content of resolutions over time
- **Results:**
 - Countries' respect for human rights at home explains voting behavior on human rights
 - China is the (large) state with the most human-rights unfriendly voting behavior in the UN HRC
 - China uses aid to influence voting of other countries
 - China is successful in shaping the content of UN HRC resolutions

Thank you

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