

**Better a big fish in a small pond:
The Interaction Between *Local* and *Global* International Status**

Abstract

While the international status literature sees status as club membership or a ranking, it has mostly explored the role of status in higher-end hierarchies: great powers and Western Middle-Powers. Most recently, there has been an effort to explore these dynamics in lower-status countries. However, the interplay between locally and globally constructed status beliefs remains unexplored. In this article, I use information from in-depth interviews with diplomats at the UN Headquarters in New York and co-sponsorship data to analyze how local status creates path-dependent patterns that, in turn, shape global status, and vice versa. Specifically, I argue that interactions between geographically and culturally contiguous countries are more likely; therefore, their available heuristic for who is high-status is likely to be within their main reference group. At the same time, regional high-status countries act as representatives in larger groups of shared interests, such as the EU or the G77. This helps them gain recognition from other high-status states and reinforces their standing both locally and globally. I also explore apparent anomalous cases in which low-status countries, despite being underrecognized within their main reference groups, can accrue global status recognition by connecting with otherwise disconnected groups, providing a structural explanation for this phenomenon.

Word count 8172

Introduction

Is a country like Norway as prestigious among Scandinavian countries as it is in the rest of the world? How about Nigeria in Africa, or West Africa? Status has been conceived as a widespread belief about others' standing in a hierarchy—a “second-order” belief: not what I believe or what you believe, but what many others believe (Renshon 2016). Although countries may shape what others believe about them by joining clubs such as the permanent members of the UN Security Council, the BRICS, or the OECD, it is less clear how status operates in less salient groups, and whether lower-status group membership and within-group status are related to *global* status.

In this article, I explore how status beliefs are embedded and recognized in communities, and how local status beliefs affect *global* status beliefs through recognition and vice versa. Status beliefs, although subjective, are socially constructed within a community of states. Countries tend to have more continuous interactions with those they perceive as proximate on the basis of geography, affinities, and colonial past, leading to a localized set of beliefs about status. These interactions produce local hierarchies that are only partially comparable. Southeast Asian countries likely view Singapore's status differently from that of the United Arab Emirates, even though the two countries are comparable in economic size and development. Some Southeast Asians may perceive Singapore as more prestigious than the UAE, while others may consider Singapore low-status because they do not see much difference between Singapore and themselves.

Communities are not restricted to geographical or cultural contiguity; countries form groups with others that share similar interests, even outside their immediate neighborhood. This means that small groups like subregional communities of states are sometimes nested in larger groups like coalitions of like-minded states that further enhance a state's position in both the *local* and *global* hierarchies. A group's leading state is more likely than its fellow members to be recognized by the leading states of other groups. This cross-group recognition likely translates into social power and *global* status because these states are now recognized beyond their own group. *Global* recognition, in turn, reinforces the belief among the leader's own group members that their leader deserves its *local* status. The result is a self-reinforcing loop: local status opens the door to *global* recognition, and *global* recognition shores up local status. Take Brazil as an example. As a high-status member of the Latin American community, it could gain membership

in the BRICS group and spearhead multiple causes beyond its immediate region (Mesquita and Seabra 2020).

Seeing how local hierarchies are embedded in global status makes it easier to examine why some countries “punch above their weight” (i.e., states widely known for their performance despite their small size). These states often operate as brokers, linking otherwise disconnected groups by securing recognition from other countries that are also prominent in those groups. For example, South Africa is a major leader in Africa, and it is connected to Middle Eastern countries through its support for Palestine. The most likely path to prestige for South Africa is gaining recognition first from other Sub-Saharan African states, then as a leader of that group, from high-status Arab states, such as Egypt, Qatar, or Algeria, then the Group of 77 where Brazil and China sit, and then from other heavyweights like India and Russia. Nevertheless, other paths to prestige exist for lower-status members who may seek recognition from groups that are not adjacent. For example, Costa Rica has obtained recognition from European countries by advancing UN Climate and Ocean protection regulations and aligning with the positions of small island nations, which have reciprocated with regional support.

To test how *local status* is reflected in *global status*, I will study group dynamics in the UN General Assembly. Because states at the UN interact daily through planning, drafting, and debating soft law, they form coalition groups with internal hierarchies in which some states are more prominent than others. Therefore, UN politics offers a rigorous test of group and status interaction. I use in-depth interviews with diplomats stationed at UN Headquarters to assess how decision-makers perceive the *local* and *global status* of countries in their neighborhood and out-groups, and also use data on co-sponsors of draft resolutions to calculate various

measures of centrality by groups and topics. With the data, I further identify patterns of group embeddedness, group leadership, brokerage, and *global* status.

This article is divided as follows. First, I discuss the theories that analyze local and group dynamics in the construction of status beliefs. Then I present my argument about the mechanisms by which group status translates into *global* status and brokerage. Next, I present the UN case and the analysis based on interviews and co-sponsorship data; last, I discuss my findings and conclude.

Groups and Status

As previously stated, international status is a collective belief about the standing of a state in a hierarchy. To operationalize it, IR scholars use, mainly, three epistemologies: using ranks based on collectively valued markers (GDP, military spending, human development) and network statistics of diplomatic recognition, and qualitative case studies and assessment of policymakers' attitudes and symbols (MacDonald and Parent 2021). On the quantitative side, most studies use the number of diplomats a state sends and receives to indicate how well a state is recognized internationally. On the qualitative side, most cases draw from case studies and social identity theory (SIT) to analyze how states derive a sense of pride from their affiliation, or lack thereof, with groups (Larson and Shevchenko 2003, 2010, 2019; Larson 2017).

IR scholars have also theorized status as a relational process that extends beyond two states in a deferential relationship. It is not about what attributes states possess but about whether they are socially recognized. In this view, recognition is explained by self-reinforcing dynamics: popular states attract more recognition, states reciprocate recognition, and states recognize the partners of their partners. The third tendency, social closure, is where this work comes closest

to addressing groups, since it shows how closure produces exclusion. But it treats groups only tangentially (Kinne 2014; Duque 2018, 2025; Naylor 2018).

Other works have also addressed groups and international status, but not directly. For example, Renshon (2016) and Cline et al. (2011) use cluster detection algorithms to define communities of countries based on their diplomatic interactions and each country's rank within its community. Thompson (2014) argues that states have varying capabilities for power projection. Consequently, some have *global* reach, while others are intended to project regional power, creating *local* hierarchies within the *global* structure. Similarly, some works drawing on SIT have focused on status competition within communities. For example, Pedersen (2018) argues that Nordic states bandwagon with great powers to boost their *local* status. Wohlforth et al. (2018) claim that small powers' preferred strategy of status seeking *within* their ranks is being perceived as good powers, and Zarakol (2010) explains how the West's civilizing process shapes the emotions elicited by ingroups and outgroups.

Most recently, there has been an effort to understand the ontology of international status not only as a social phenomenon but also as one that is *local*. Røren (2024) introduced a theory of status attribution in communities, arguing that one state's status-seeking activities may be perceived differently across groups. Communities produce rules and norms that condition membership and the markers needed to ascend in the *local* hierarchy. Related to this argument, Pouliot (2016) has argued that practice produces hierarchical orders and that those who learn and apply the procedures most effectively advance up the *local* ladder. Therefore, the specifics of status markers in each *local* microcosm yield different outcomes for *global* status. States seek and get recognition in specific contexts rather than pursuing a one-size-fits-all formula. They

have different audiences, domestic groups, peers, and outgroups, depending on their motivations and status-seeking purposes.

The Interaction of *Local* and *Global* Status

The sheer number of states in the international system makes it almost impossible for states to reach a collective agreement on each member's standing. Decisionmakers likely rely on recognizable group identities as a heuristic to assess countries' relative standing based on the status attributes of the groups to which they belong. For example, politicians often refer to Scandinavian countries as symbols of progressiveness, and to the BRICS group as a symbol of economic emergence. In this sense, group affiliations may be both a curse and a blessing, since individuals may derive higher status from group membership and/or be constrained by their affiliations when their group is held in low esteem. For example, India's former Prime Minister complained about criticism of India's space program: "Questions are sometimes asked about whether a poor country like India can afford a space program and whether the funds spent on space exploration, albeit modest, could be better utilized elsewhere..." (Singh 2012).

The literature on policy diffusion finds that, even when countries observe multiple successful applications of policy innovations globally, they tend to emulate those they consider proximate. For example, Latin American countries have often mimicked many of Chile's social policies, even though Scandinavian countries are better known for successfully implementing social reforms, suggesting bounded decision-maker rationality. Even when more successful cases exist outside a region, states tend to imitate the policies of proximate (ingroup) states because proximate states provide a cognitive anchor for what is valuable and achievable under their specific conditions (Weyland 2006; Meseguer 2006).

Similarly, social psychology studies (in addition to the IR translation of SIT) have found that high-status individuals are less likely to identify with numerous groups because they see themselves as having exceptional qualities. In contrast, low-ranked individuals tend to favor collectivism; members define themselves and are defined by others in terms of the group identity they belong to (Lorenzi-Cioldi 2017). This theory is evident in large groups of low-status states such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which emphasize collectivism and solidarity over individualism. Research in this tradition also shows that members of low-status groups tend to defer to individuals who possess expertise (Durantini et al. 2006), which is often attributable to high-status individuals (Fiske et al. 2002, 2007, 2018) and states (Duque 2025).

Therefore, although status is a second-order belief (i.e., what many others believe is status), it often depends on a country's standing within its main reference groups and beyond. For example, Barack Obama once praised the Danish saying that “Denmark is not a large country, but proportional to its population, it's made as significant an effort and made as many sacrifices as anybody” (Obama 2011). Such expressions imply that states occupy a place in a *local* hierarchy (i.e., Denmark as a high-standing member in Northern Europe) and a different place in a *global* hierarchy (i.e., Denmark as a small state compared to the US and other Western European countries).

States assess who they consider in-groupers and out-groupers along an imagined gradient of proximity, defined by idiosyncratic similarities and geographical contiguity. Through practice, these groups become stable; membership often becomes formalized through written procedures and binding clauses, and they form hierarchies of status (Pouliot 2016). These

hierarchies within groups (and elsewhere) tend to become self-reinforcing because status is a sticky belief (Røren and Wivel 2023; Naylor 2018; Larson et al. 2014). Once a belief settles in the human mind, its cognitive networks become resistant to contradictory evidence (Gallarotti 2022). Therefore, *local* high-status states are more likely to preserve their standing.

Once groups are somewhat consolidated and their internal hierarchies are evident, they coalesce into larger coalitions of groups with similar interests, such as the group of Less Developed Countries or Small Island Developing States, even if they are thousands of kilometers apart. Countries already highly esteemed in their reference groups will likely occupy privileged positions in newly formed, massive coalitions. Moreover, high status transfers into agenda-setting power to define membership, operating rules, and incentives, further solidifying the structural positions of those at the top.

At the same time, *local* high-status members of large groups tend to become brokers, meaning that when they need support, they can leverage their social power to invite other influential states to mobilize large numbers of members from their main reference groups. As one diplomat cited in Pouliot's (Pouliot 2016, 144) book said, "Egypt is a very influential player in the African Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the NAM, which allows it to be one day an African country, the other Arab, and then developing... You have to get Egypt inside; otherwise, they become spoilers."

Nevertheless, not only high-status members of large groups may enjoy brokerage power. Countries that can creatively establish shared agendas with otherwise disconnected groups, serving as bridges between them. These countries can accrue status by becoming indispensable links and information holders, even outside large umbrella groups such as the G77 or the EU.

Cuba, for example, is very active at the UN through AOSIS (the Alliance of Small Island States) and the Arab world, and it has gained recognition as “the only living guerrillero in New York” (Mesquita 2024).

In sum, status beliefs are embedded in communities. *Global* and *local* status are mutually reinforcing. *Local* status often translates into *global* status recognition when high-status locals connect with other high-status members of other groups, thereby becoming globally recognized. *Global* recognition, in turn, further reinforces *local* status beliefs. These states become easily connected to other prestigious states from other groups, which may form coalitions to build larger groups around common causes.

Case: the UN General Assembly

The UN provides a robust test of my assumptions about how groups mediate status attribution. First, countries interact regularly, producing status dynamics that shape knowledge of the standing of different groups and their *within-group* status. Second, multilateralism produces shared interests and beliefs that translate into coalition politics that transcend geography and constitute multiple layers of group membership and identity. There are several overlapping memberships, including the main regional groups established formally and informally from the beginning of the UN (GRULAC, AU, and ASEAN), and theme-oriented membership (the group of friends of the responsibility to protect R2P, the group of family, the Group of Friends of the Family, the Nordic countries), in which states occupy different positions that are mutually reinforcing (e.g., a prominent role in the AU enhances the country’s standing in NAM). Third, the UN produces documented information about states interactions out of which it is possible to infer states’ beliefs.

Method

To examine patterns of group membership, I rely on the interview data I gathered from diplomats. I anonymized quotes from these interviewers¹. Using this information, I conducted an interpretive exercise and identified three main behaviors: countries cluster around their neighbors to form groups, and regional groups join to form larger groups. Those who enjoy high status in their local groups tend to be globally recognized, and leaders in large groups set the agenda to gatekeep potential reformers.

I also use co-sponsorship data that I collected from metadata of UN General Assembly draft resolutions (“L documents”) obtained from the UN Digital Library that spans from 1979 to 2023 (over 20,000 documents), and Mesquita and Seabra’s (2022) dataset on co-sponsorship from 2000 to 2020 (over 5,500 documents). With this information, I assembled matrices that counted the number of times country i sponsored a draft resolution authored by country j .

Using co-sponsorship data, I used a probabilistic AME model to estimate countries’ positions in a latent space to identify clusters that operate together (see Appendix). Given the density of this network, I chose this visual approach over clustering algorithms because they fail to successfully identify meaningful communities of states and obscure the inside nuances of groups within the Global North and the Global South.

To examine within-group status, I use some of the main reference groups recognized at the UN General Assembly² to disaggregate co-sponsorship within the group in five-year periods. With the co-sponsorship counts, I calculate different metrics commonly used in network

¹In one case, I decided to disclose the interviewee’s country for clarity. There are no official records of the name of the diplomat, and he agreed to be on the record.

² <https://www.un.org/en/model-united-nations/groups-member-states>

science, such as the number of sponsors that country i gets inside its reference group, countries that obtain high betweenness centrality scores (those that sponsor with otherwise isolated countries), and eigenvector centrality scores (those that sponsor with other well-sponsored countries). I also calculate the sponsorship that countries receive from and outside their main reference groups to further identify which countries are more likely to act as brokers and the main source of their support.

Finally, I hand-coded the main topics of the 20,565 draft resolution sequences into 20 broad topics and produced counts of sponsorships for each topic to understand how countries cluster around topics and whether there are status dynamics within groups formed around topics rather than regions or income levels.

Sponsorship is an act of voluntary deference that symbolizes public recognition of others' standing. When a country produces a draft resolution, it needs the manpower, procedural knowledge, and willingness to publicly legitimize its claim. Authors of draft resolutions also need to build partnerships and persuade their peers, both within and outside their groups, to increase the likelihood that the draft resolution gains recognition and is officially formalized.

Figure 1 illustrates this process:

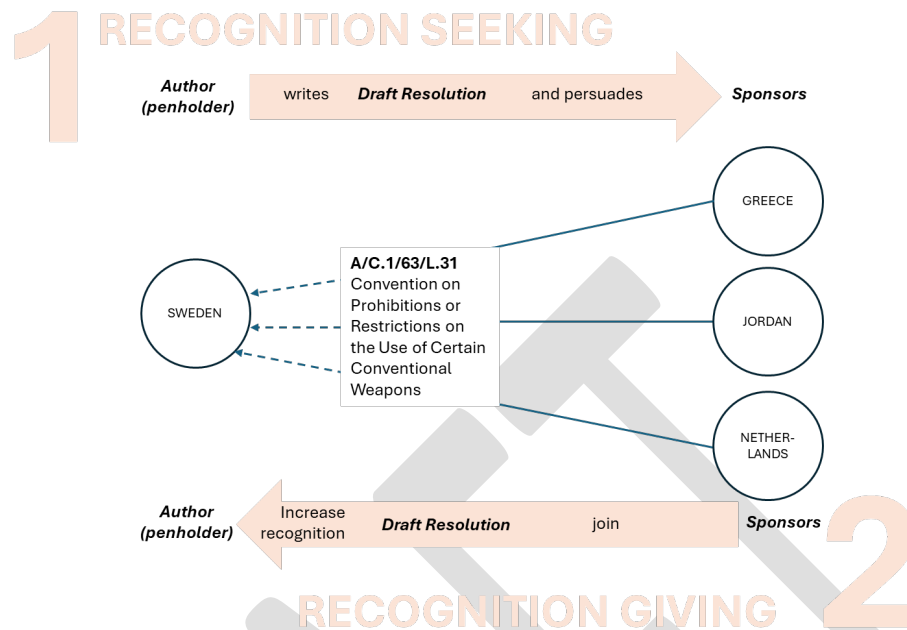


Figure 1. Relationship between co-sponsorship at the UNGA and recognition

While sponsorship could be conflated with influence rather than status, I argue that both status and influence, in the case of co-sponsorship, are self-reinforcing. A state capable of producing groundbreaking resolutions that bring about reforms in the UN system will immediately gain widespread recognition, and its status will follow. Likewise, a state that already enjoys high status and recognition will be more likely to secure sponsors for its proposed resolutions (including the sponsorship of other prestigious states). In fact, the states mentioned in interviews as highly prestigious are the same as those that attract many sponsors, and those mentioned in previous literature on hierarchies in international organizations (Pouliot 2016; S. B. Arias 2026; Mesquita et al. 2022).

Results

Evidence From Interviews

Co-sponsorship data (in the next section) indicate that co-sponsorship activities at the UN General Assembly fall into two large clusters: Global South and Global North countries. At the same time, these two large groups have members within each subgroup who often cooperate across issue areas. In this regard, most diplomats expressed that their reference groups begin with those in their geographical regions, which are nested in other groups such as the African Union or the Group of Latin American Countries (GRULAC). The sequence goes up until it reaches a larger group, such as the NAM, the G77, or the EU.

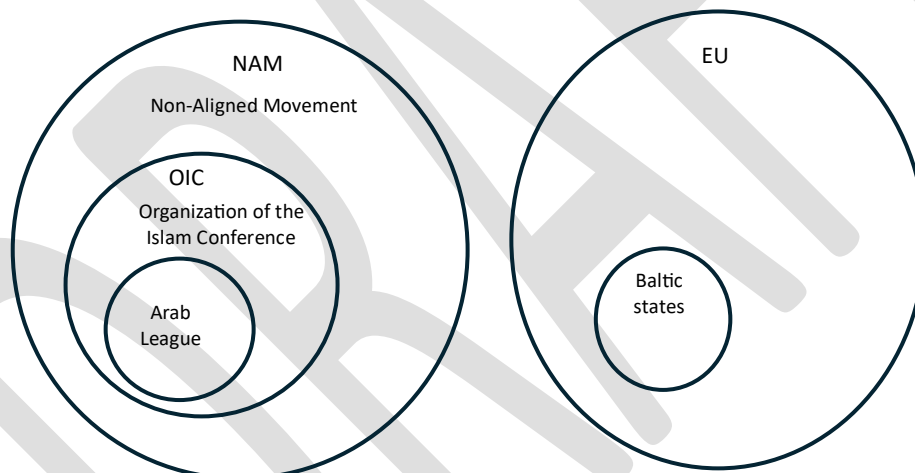


Figure 2. Illustration of group nesting at the UN General Assembly

Within-group status beliefs matter in UN politics because countries are more likely to find like-minded partners nearby. This type of recognition may be less frequent when countries do not share formal or informal membership. A Latin American diplomat mentioned, “When we are working on an initiative, we first work with our like-minded partners in the region. For example, on the issue of Palestine, our core group is other Latin American countries” (D04).

“[Our country] first coordinates positions with CARICOM. CARICOM is a very strong bloc. Once we consolidate, we take our position with the chair of the G77,” (D08) said a diplomat from Central America. “[My country] belongs to the Eastern European Group (EEG), an informal bloc of countries within the United Nations. There are, however, some other regional and political groups,” said a diplomat from Eastern Europe. “[It varies] depending on the topic, but the five Nordic countries are the closest partners. Then the Baltic and the EU,” said a diplomat of a Scandinavian country (D23).

The snowball-like strategy of coalition-making reflects a general pattern of inter- and intra-group status, as actors who can obtain support from other in-group members can expand their support within the nested network of alliances, acting as representative members of their community. For example, an African diplomat said, “During our candidacy for a seat in the Security Council, we did diplomacy with the region, then the continent, then the NAM and G77” (D24). A diplomat from Eastern Europe mentioned that “[they] first coordinate positions with the EU, and in other issues, we’re closely linked to Baltic countries” (D19).

Smaller countries are even more reliant on groups. They are resource-limited and cannot assign personnel to the six UNGA committees. They rely on what they call “burden-sharing” to have their positions expressed elsewhere: “we’re not interested in sponsoring or producing draft resolutions... we delegate most of the topics to large groups; the Arab League, the OIC, G77, etc.,” said a diplomat from a country in the Middle East (D10). “Regional groups... work as a shield for small countries.” (D07). Four CARICOM countries refer to this as ‘burden sharing,’ in which each country represents the group's interests in specific commissions (D08, D13, D21, D22). This further enhances the nested dynamics of status between groups, as those

spearheading their group's interests in different commissions must perform accordingly to gain recognition from their local peers and from those in larger groups. Simultaneously, these representatives become the “go-to” permanent mission to persuade because they are likely to bring other members of their group on board and gain influence (S. Arias et al. 2025).

In large groups such as the NAM, the EU, and the G77, status dynamics differ somewhat from those in regional groups, as regional communities tend to have visible leaders who steer the agenda. As two diplomats said: “Algeria, Egypt, and Cuba want to perpetuate chaos to keep dominating the group and an outdated agenda” (D11). “[The G77 is] captured by Muslim countries, Pakistan, Egypt, Iran. Cuba is also there now” (D04). The highest status members coincide with those countries that actively participated during the consolidation of the Non-Aligned Movement at the UN, including Egypt, Cuba, Algeria, and Morocco, which, since the 1970s, have condemned Israel’s and South Africa’s discriminatory and colonial practices.

Most of these large political groups (such as the NAM and G77) rely on pre-existing agendas that are circulated annually. Countries that try to introduce new items or reforms face the group's structural weight, which opposes them and maintains the status quo by keeping the existing text of resolutions. This happens because most of these groups operate by consensus, and a member who tries to break it is seen as a traitor. For example, a Latin American diplomat said, “It is extremely violent [to break consensus at the G77]. It goes against the kind of solidarity that the group created” (D04). Additionally, a diplomat from an African country said, “When you oppose the group, they call you aside and tell you that you’re breaking the whole group” (D02).

Group membership and solidarity are also called into question when states act in ways that do not conform to the status other group members attribute to them. A diplomat from Latin America said Costa Rica is a “fuzzy” country: “Why are they concerned about global issues when they’re such a small country? Why are they so involved with Europeans when they don’t have that identity?” Nevertheless, he also implied that Argentina’s activity with European countries is acceptable (D20). A Costa Rican diplomat (without being asked) confirmed this perception: “We’ve been called traitors, sellouts, spies of the EU” (D11).

Despite the apparent hierarchical structure of regional and thematic groups, status differentials within the same group often trigger rivalries and status dissatisfaction. In particular, countries that enjoy widespread recognition within their groups under another country's leadership tend to overemphasize their achievements and undermine others' achievements, as Mercer (2017) argues. For example, a diplomat from a Southern African country said, “South Africa is like our big brother, but they always want to hear from us” (D24). Similarly, a diplomat from a country in this region said, “We can’t match South Africa, but we enjoy a relatively high standing in the region” (D12). This pattern is also evident in other regions. A diplomat from Latin America said, “In Latin America, Colombia and Brazil are leaders, but that’s because they talk a lot” (D20).

In sum, countries' missions to the UN constitute a microcosm that, to a certain extent, reflects the status dynamics of the international system. Countries tend to cluster around their main reference identitarian groups (Latin Americans, Africans, Southeast Asians), which form larger groups around similar interests and problems (the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Countries, the Non-Aligned Movement). Within these layers of groups, some countries

rank higher than others. Countries that manage to reach a leadership position in large groups tend to remain there because of the agenda-setting power they have wielded in shaping the group and its key historical moments. This is particularly clear in the NAM and the G77, whose leaders have steered the groups' agendas. Within-group status gaps are also a driver of resentment. Some members begrudge their group leaders' hierarchical position, minimize their achievements, and highlight their own. I turn now to how co-sponsorship reflects *global-local* status dynamics.

Evidence From Co-sponsorship

The co-sponsorship network is bimodal. When the number of sponsored resolutions is counted, a clear demarcation between Global North and Global South countries is evident, a pattern that intensified after the Cold War. The two large sets of countries in this network have also produced embedded patterns of status, with webs of cooperation among European countries under the umbrella of the European Union and some satellites, including the Nordic countries and former Soviet Republics. In the Global South, groups gravitate around the G77 and the NAM. As countries gain leadership positions within their main reference groups, they gain status across the whole system.

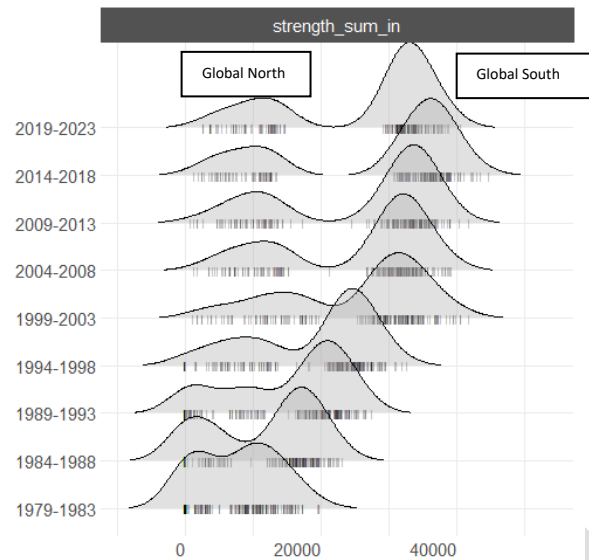
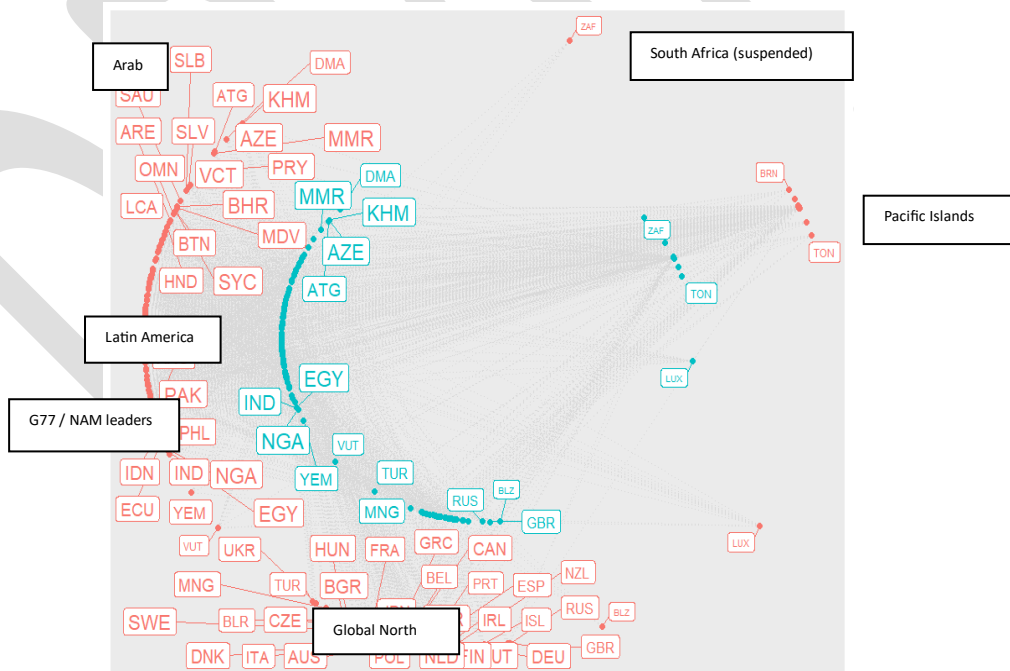


Figure 3. Distribution of incoming sponsorship at the UNGA

In addition to the Global South/North division, it is possible to visualize different clusters based on regional and thematic affinities by estimating countries' latent positions. These positions have been relatively stable since the 1980s; however, there have been a few changes that reflect the UN's agenda-setting (Bailey et al. 2017): the end of the Cold War, the unipolar moment, and the War on Terror. Figure 4 shows countries' latent positions based on the intensity of their sponsorship relations with other countries. The proximity of the country labels indicates how similar countries are as recipients or senders of sponsorship. The red circle shows sponsors, and the blue one shows recipients. For example, the red circle between 1979 and 1983 shows that Egypt (EGY), Pakistan (PAK), Nigeria (NGA), India (IND), and Indonesia (IDN) received sponsorship from a similar set of countries that led the G77/NAM. The bottom-center cluster shows a group of Western countries sponsored by a similar set of actors (more likely other European countries).

1994-1998



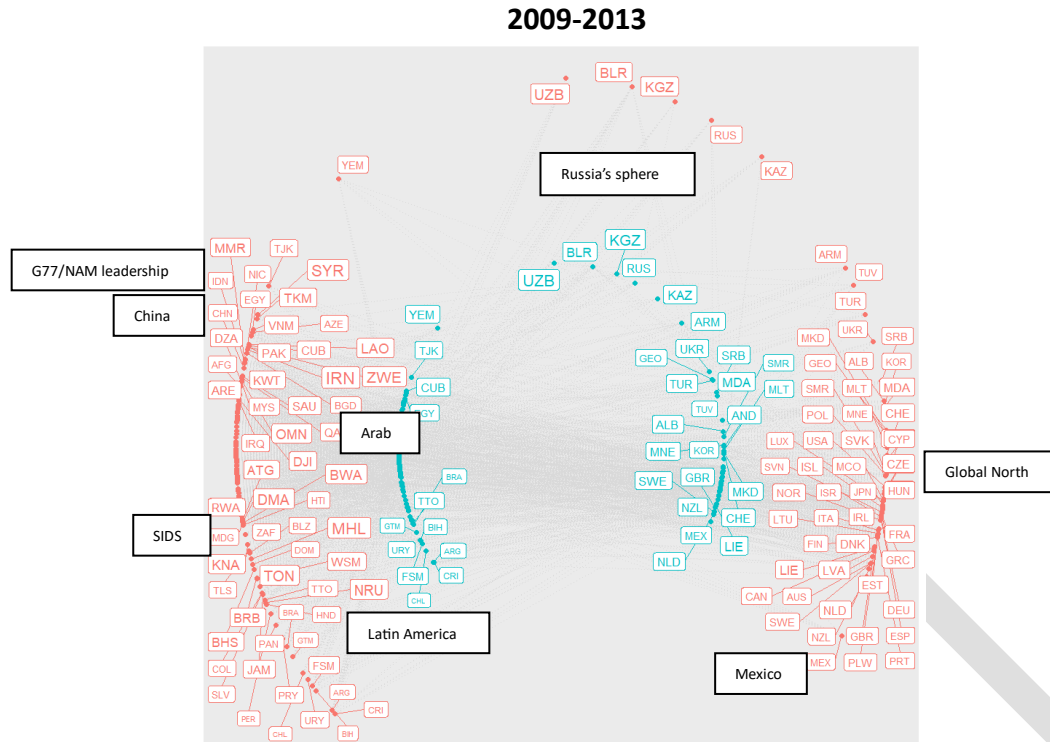


Figure 4. Circle plot of latent sender and receiver effects

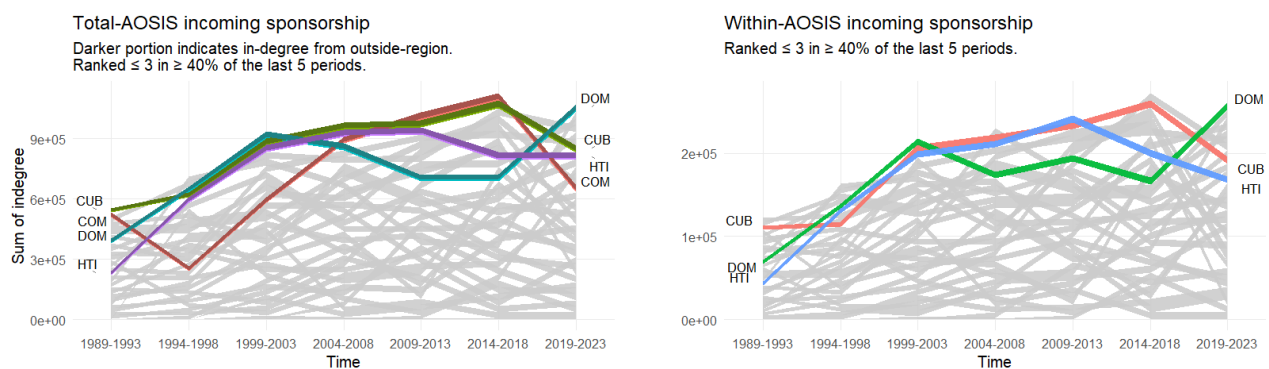
Notes: Red labels indicate senders and blue labels indicate receivers. The size of the nodes indicates how “unique” the position of a country is in the latent space

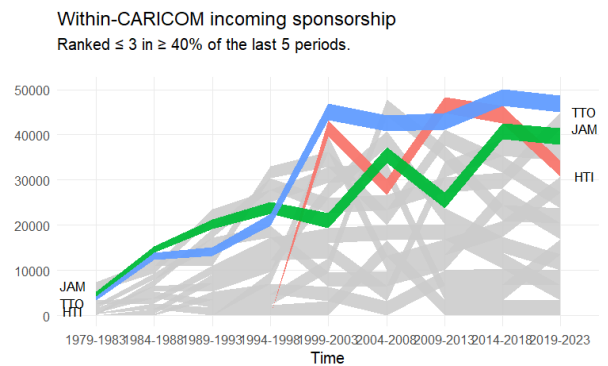
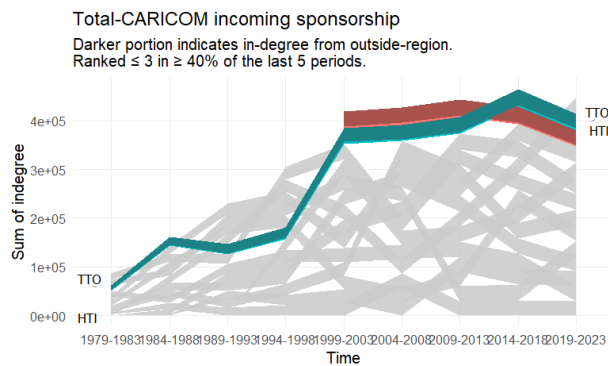
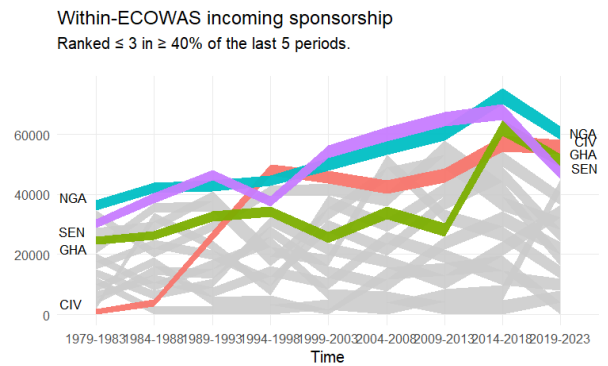
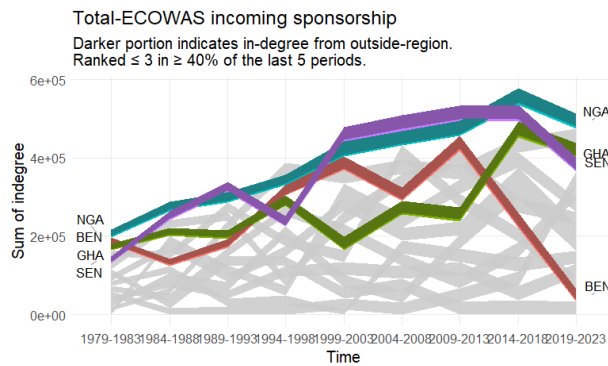
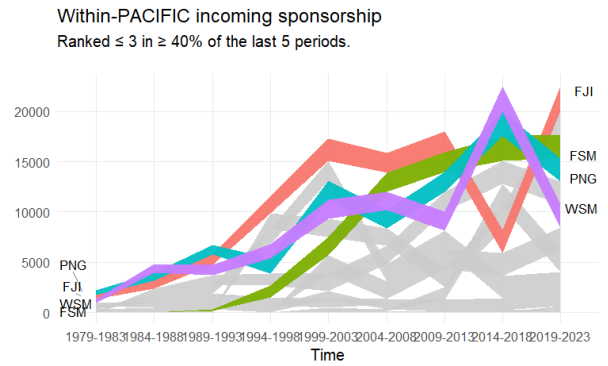
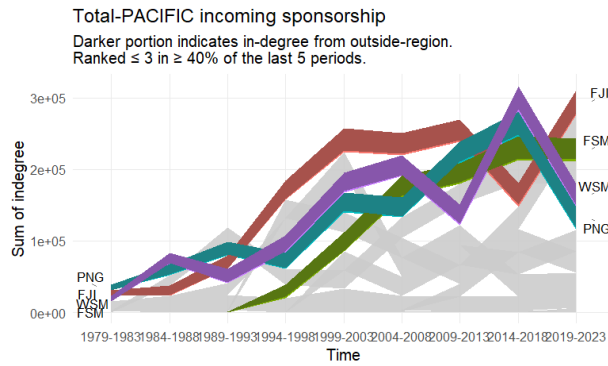
In the 1980s (uppermost plot), the NAM/G77 cluster was prominent, with countries such as Nigeria, Egypt, Indonesia, and Pakistan clustered closely together, and the Arab countries clustered at the top left of the plot. Countries in the Global North are shown below the plot, and South Africa is nowhere near any other group (it was suspended from the UNGA from 1974 to 1994). By the 1990s (second plot), South Africa appeared near the leadership of the G77 and NAM, while Latin American countries became more prominent, albeit in somewhat different positions than the G77. As shown below, Argentina and Costa Rica obtained support from a diverse range of countries across different regions during this period. Moreover, a group of former Soviet republics emerged, aligning closely with the Global North. By the late 2000s (2009-2013, third plot), regional clusters became more apparent. In addition to the G77

leadership, Latin American countries, and the Global North, a Russian sphere emerges, comprising Central Asian countries, as do a group of Balkan countries and SIDS (Small Island Developing States) closer to the G77/NAM. Additionally, China appears close to the G77/NAM leadership, and Mexico is aligned with the Global North.

Within-group Sponsorship and Status Recognition

The plots in Figure 4 and interviews with diplomats at the UNGA confirmed that states cluster around regional groups rather than randomly. Co-sponsorship also shows that, within geographical groups, status hierarchies exist. Below, I present a series of plots showing how countries rank by the number of resolutions sponsored by others within their reference group each year (Figures 5-7). For example, for the African Union, I counted how many countries co-sponsored resolutions authored by Nigeria across all 193 UN member states (left) and only other African Union members (e.g., Egypt, Algeria, South Africa) (right). This yields bump charts showing the evolution of incoming sponsorship across regions: the left side shows the total sponsorship a group receives from all UN members, and the right side plots the sponsorship it receives within that group (Figure 5).





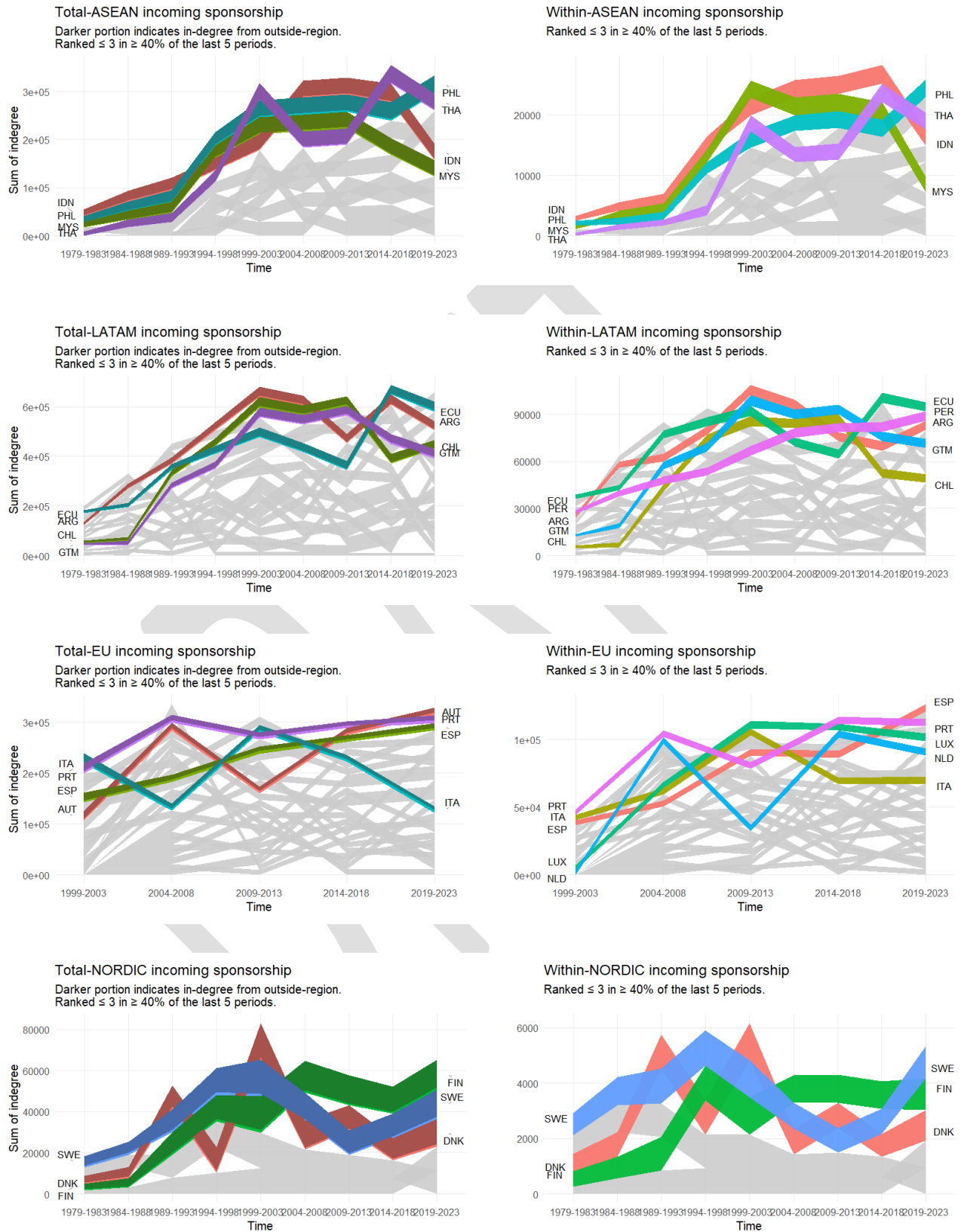


Figure 5. Incoming sponsorship from countries of relevant UN political groups

Notes: The left-side plot shows incoming sponsorship from 193 countries; the right-side plot shows only sponsorship from ingroup members. The positions of countries at the top reflect their in-degree rankings.

These plots confirm that *local* sponsorship accounts for a sizeable share of the total sponsorship countries receive. Likewise, as expected, leadership in the first observed years (1979-1983) tends to persist, indicating that once countries reach a high status within the group, they tend to maintain it even after many years. There are a few exceptions to this pattern: The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). In these groups, recognition (expressed as sponsorship) ranks countries differently across periods that do not necessarily correspond to the group's early years. These groups tend to emphasize the group's identity over that of individual countries, as theorized in social psychology literature (Lorenzi-Cioldi 2017; Fiske 2010).

Small Groups Nested in Large Groups

The sponsorship patterns of large groups show how regional leadership translates into influence within larger political bodies, particularly the Arab League, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and the Group of 77 (G77). These numerous groups rely on the broad support of subgroups whose leaders also hold important positions within them. As mentioned, high-status members in large groups set the agenda by spreading the belief that breaking consensus is violent, further strengthening the positions of those who have always steered the agenda since the group's early years. In the Arab League, Algeria (DZA), Egypt (EGY), and Morocco (MAR) have consistently received widespread support since the 1970s and have remained at the top to this day (Figure 6).

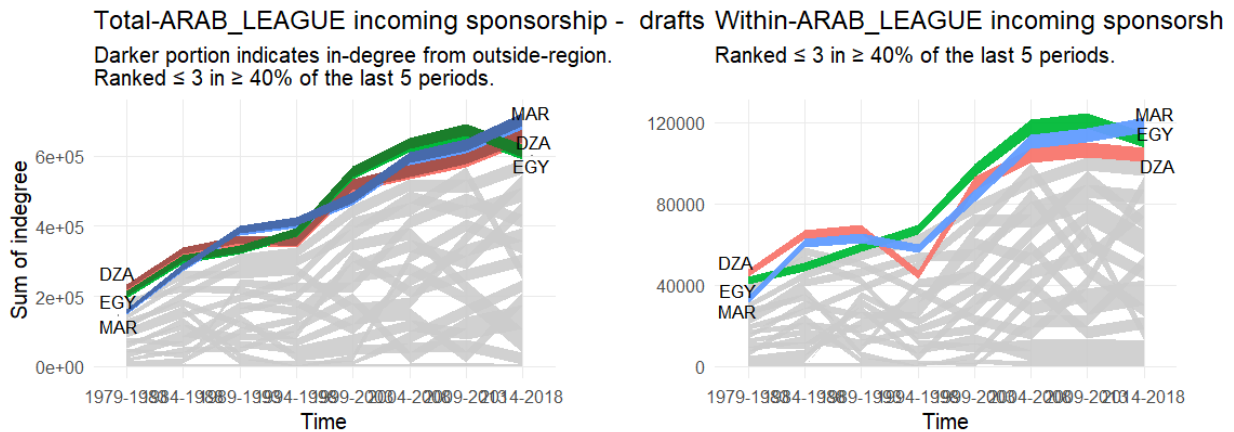
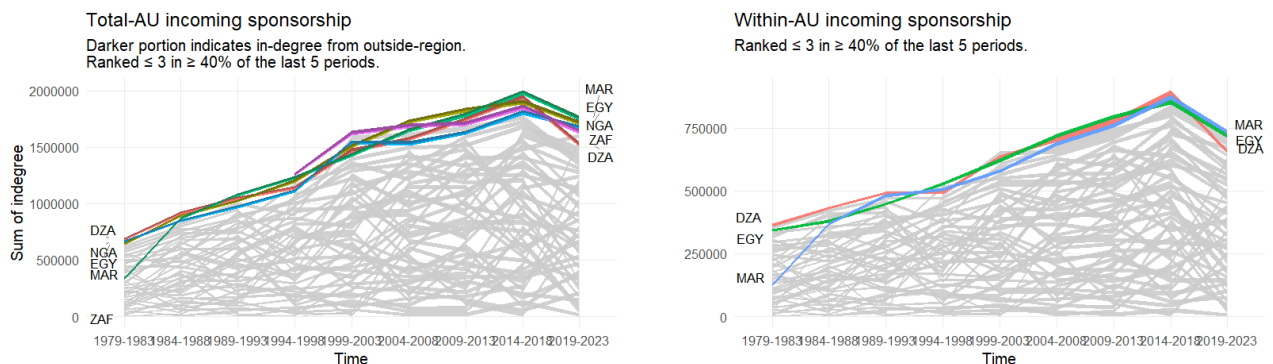


Figure 6. Incoming sponsorship from countries of the Arab League

Notes: The left-side plot shows incoming sponsorship from 193 countries; the right-side plot shows only sponsorship from ingroup members. The positions of countries at the top reflect their in-degree rankings.

At the same time, support within the Arab League translates into leadership within the African Union (AU), where Egypt (EGY) and Algeria (DZA) also hold top positions. The same applies to the Group of 77 (G77), where leaders from the NAM and the Arab League, plus Nigeria (NGA), tend to get the most support and have consistently done so since the 1980s (Figure 7).



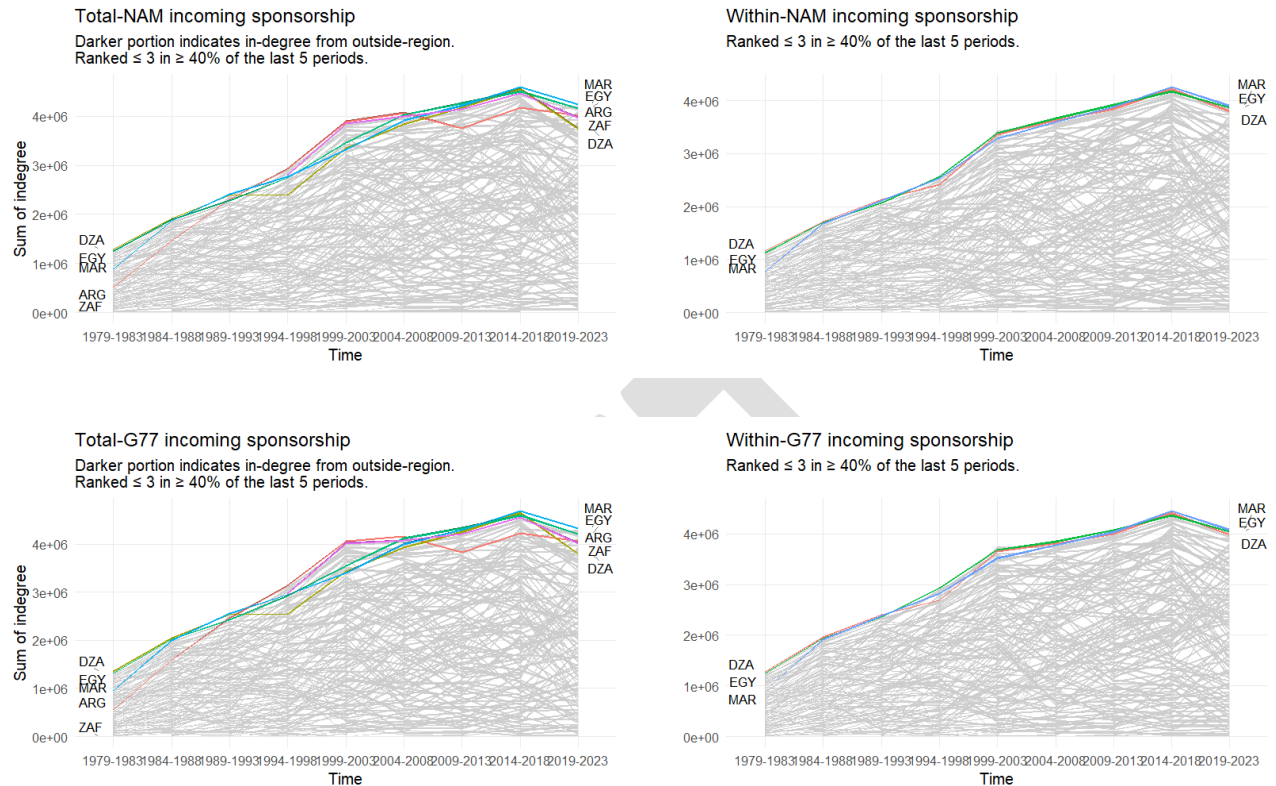


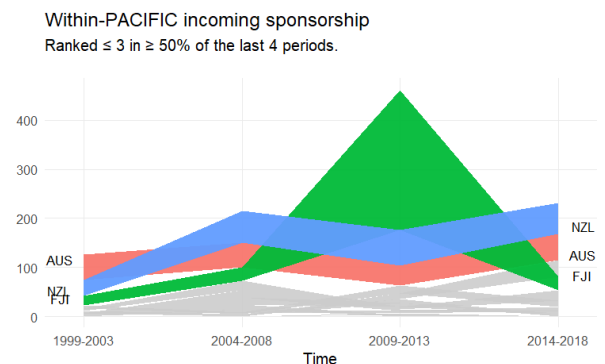
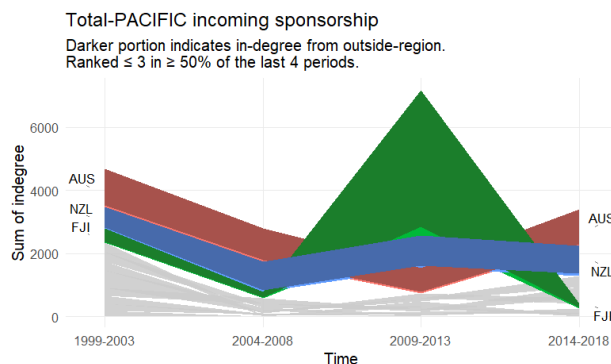
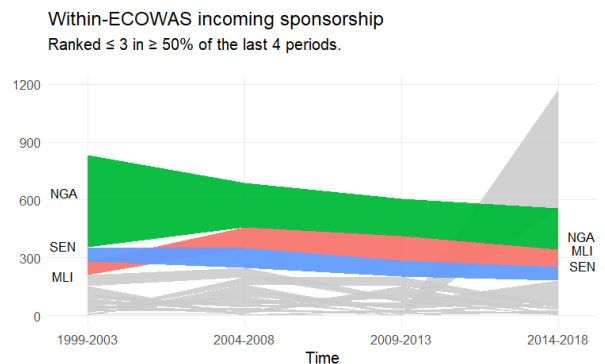
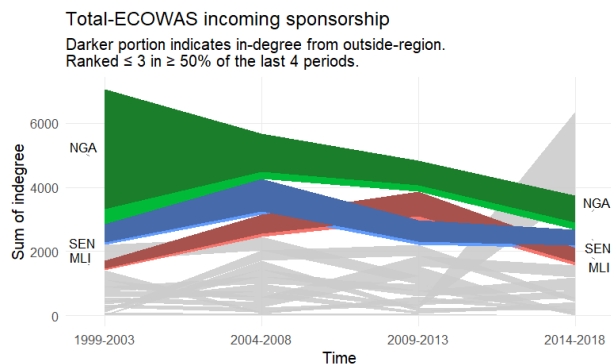
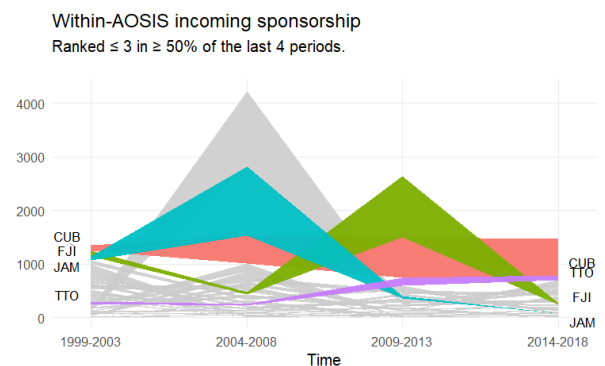
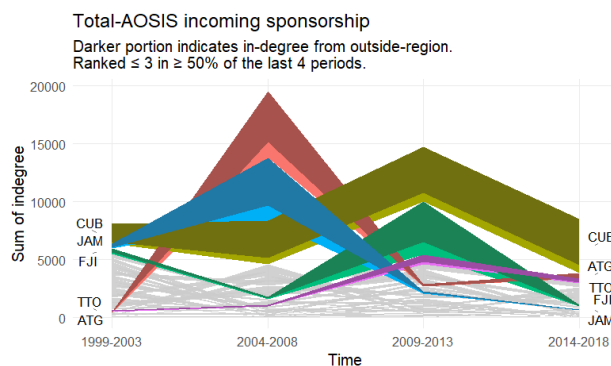
Figure 7. Incoming sponsorship from countries of the African Union, NAM, and G77.

Note: The left-side plot shows incoming sponsorship from 193 countries; the right-side plot shows only sponsorship from in-group members. The top positions reflect their in-degree rankings.

Further Examination of Within-group Status Recognition

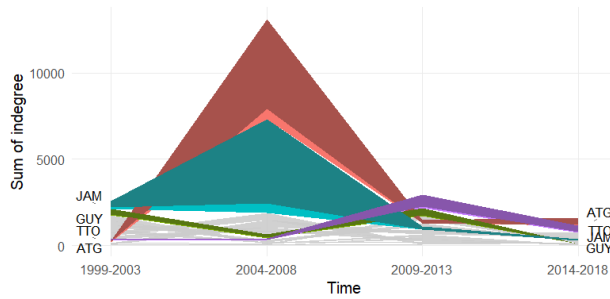
Although the figures above indicate that countries tend to support those who have held traditional positions of leadership within their regions, such as Egypt, Algeria, Cuba, Indonesia, and Ecuador, these numbers do not indicate which countries are the first authors of these draft resolutions (it is assumed that all countries listed as penholders are the authors). By examining the authors (sponsors zero) of draft resolutions, it is possible to further identify which countries are more active in drafting resolutions and in obtaining support from different reference groups. For this aim, I rely on Mesquita and Seabra's (Seabra and Mesquita 2022) dataset in which, through triangulation with public documents and verbatim records, they identified the first authors (sponsor zero) of draft resolutions covering the period 2000 to 2020. In other words,

while the sponsorship dataset obtained from the UN Digital Library lists countries that sponsored together, Mesquita and Seabra's dataset details those countries. For example, the official penholders of draft resolution A/C.1/66/L.23 are Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Comoros, Congo DRC, Republic of Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Chad. Nevertheless, the Republic of Congo initially drafted the resolution and convened the penholders, and it is designated as such in the dataset.



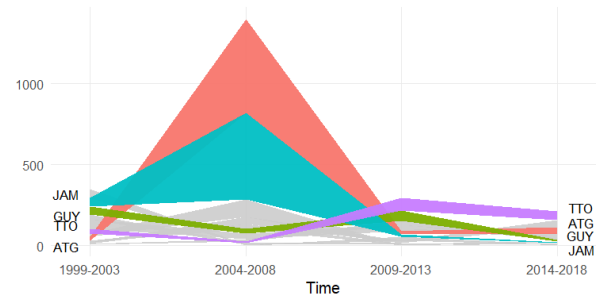
Total-CARICOM incoming sponsorship

Darker portion indicates in-degree from outside-region.
Ranked ≤ 3 in $\geq 50\%$ of the last 4 periods.



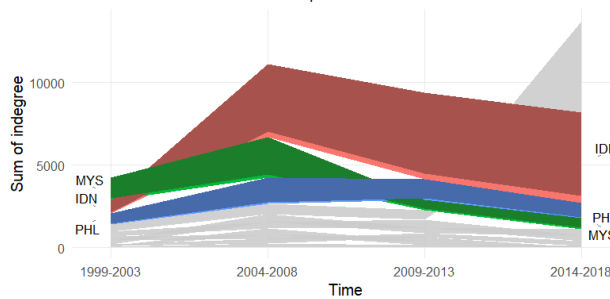
Within-CARICOM incoming sponsorship

Ranked ≤ 3 in $\geq 50\%$ of the last 4 periods.



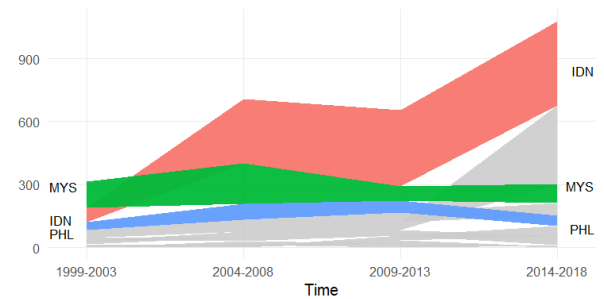
Total-ASEAN incoming sponsorship

Darker portion indicates in-degree from outside-region.
Ranked ≤ 3 in $\geq 50\%$ of the last 4 periods.



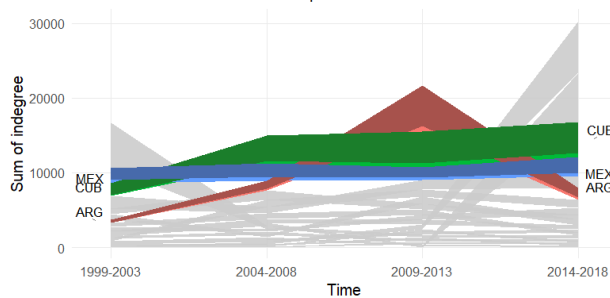
Within-ASEAN incoming sponsorship

Ranked ≤ 3 in $\geq 50\%$ of the last 4 periods.



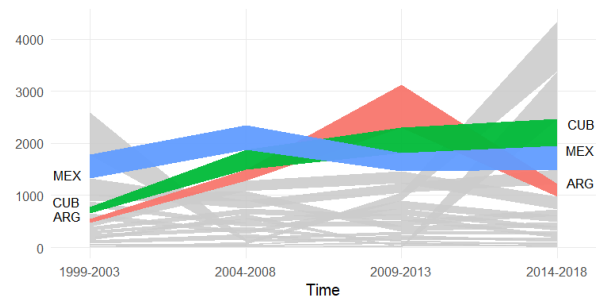
Total-LATAM incoming sponsorship

Darker portion indicates in-degree from outside-region.
Ranked ≤ 3 in $\geq 50\%$ of the last 4 periods.



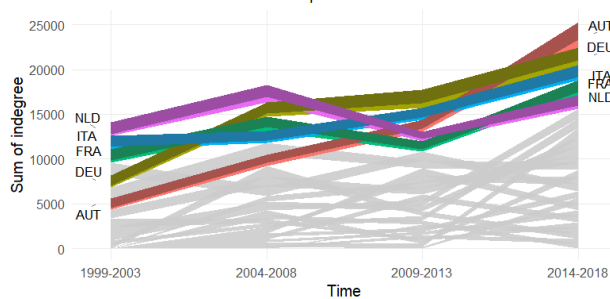
Within-LATAM incoming sponsorship

Ranked ≤ 3 in $\geq 50\%$ of the last 4 periods.



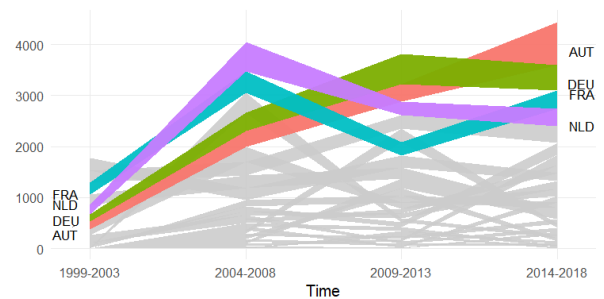
Total-EU incoming sponsorship

Darker portion indicates in-degree from outside-region.
Ranked ≤ 3 in $\geq 50\%$ of the last 4 periods.



Within-EU incoming sponsorship

Ranked ≤ 3 in $\geq 50\%$ of the last 4 periods.



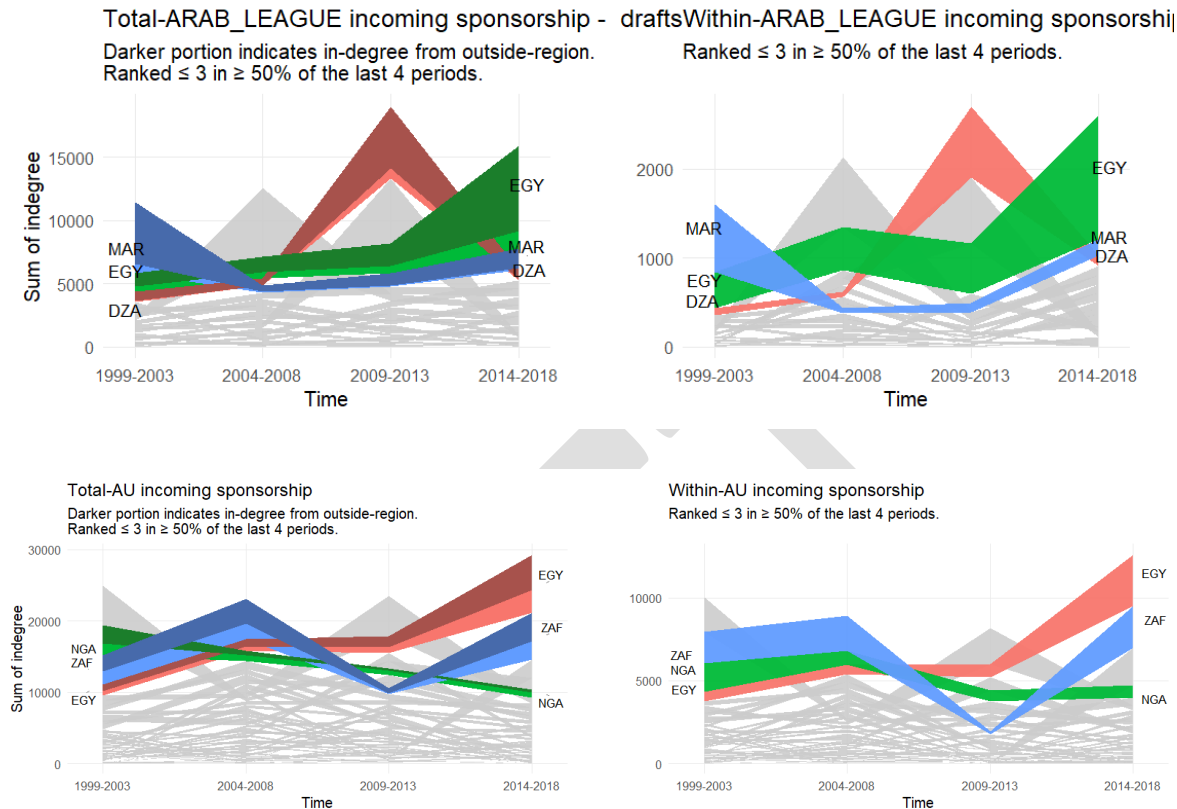


Figure 8. Incoming sponsorship from relevant UN groups using Mesquita and Seabra (2021) data.

The left-side plot shows incoming sponsorship from 193 countries, with the darker portions of the lines representing out-group sponsorship; the right-side plot shows only sponsorship from ingroup members. The positions of countries at the top reflect their in-degree rankings.

Even after accounting for the primary authorship of draft resolutions, the plots above show consistent leadership within each country's group. They indicate whether a country has ranked among the top 3 countries with the highest number of incoming sponsors more than 50% of the time since 2000. While some countries have outstanding performance in some periods (e.g., Antigua (ATG) in AOSIS from 2004-2008, or Sierra Leone (SLE) in 2015-2019 within ECOWAS), not all are able to author and secure broad support for their draft resolutions. Apart from the Nordic group, all relevant groups exhibit consistent leadership across 2000 and 2020. The width of the lines indicates that some countries enjoy overwhelming support from their peers within

their regions (Egypt in the Arab group, Indonesia in ASEAN, Cuba in AOSIS, and Nigeria in ECOWAS).

Outside Group Status

Besides in-group leaders, countries that gain widespread recognition outside their main regions are likely to act as brokers, connecting groups in ways they otherwise wouldn't. For these countries to garner support from a group outside their region, they need to first secure recognition from their most prestigious members, which requires being noticed, being persuasive, and having a cause (draft resolution) that is important enough for high-status countries to support. Being recognized by influential members of other groups boosts their status, as they not only gain immediate support from these leaders but also from those who respect and admire them. This unique form of connection gives small and middle powers leverage to influence communications and steer the agenda in ways that suit them (Manulak 2024).

In network science, brokers, bridges, or gatekeepers are usually identified by calculating their betweenness centrality, which, for the sponsorship network, means those that receive and send sponsorship more intensively through the shortest paths (e.g., Costa Rica has strong sponsorship ties with influential members of the EU and Latin America, therefore, they EU and Latin America may connect through Costa Rica). Figure 9 shows the authority (left) and betweenness centrality (right) of countries, highlighting the brokers.

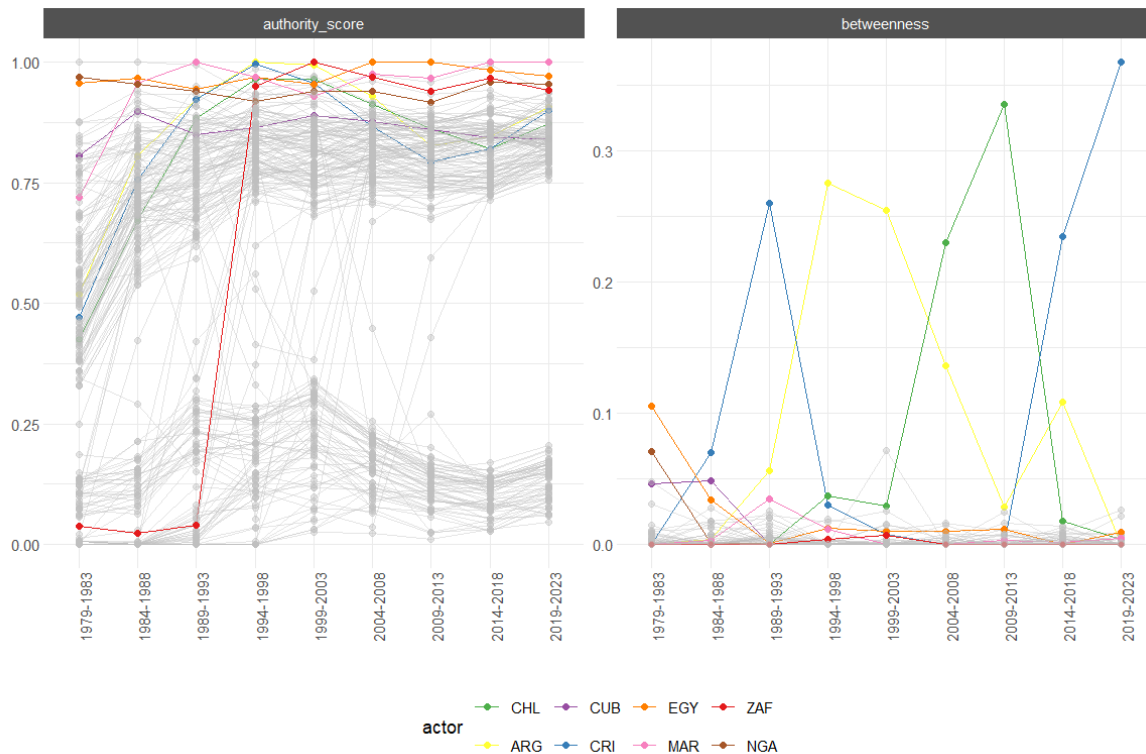


Figure 9. Betweenness and eigenvector centrality scores based on UNGA co-sponsorship.

Most of these countries are highly influential within their main reference groups (Egypt, South Africa, Argentina, Morocco, and Nigeria). However, some of these countries rank highly in global betweenness centrality, even though they are not the most influential members of their regions (Chile, Costa Rica, and Cuba). While each of these cases warrants deeper analysis of their widespread support at the UN, it is reasonable to say that they have ideological and economic ties across many regions. Mesquita (2024), who uses sponsorship data to analyze Cuba, argues that the country has been a consistent ideological beacon, connecting Venezuelans with Caribbean countries. It has also actively helped connect Arab countries with the rest of Latin America and the Soviet Union with most of the Global South.

Authority scores (similar to eigenvector centrality) are another measure of centrality from network science. It measures the extent to which countries are well-connected to key hubs.

Authority is also a measure of prestige (See Figure 10, left panel). As previously mentioned, brokers rely on their ability to garner the support of other high-status members, which translates into widespread support. In the co-sponsorship network, countries with high authority scores tend to have high betweenness centrality. This further confirms that the co-sponsorship network operates under visible group leadership that supports one another. Nevertheless, high authority (being well-connected to other well-connected countries) does not guarantee brokerage. Figure 10 shows a scatterplot of betweenness centrality and authority score, indicating that countries with high betweenness centrality tend to also have high authority scores (Costa Rica-CRI, Chile-CHL, Argentina-ARG, Egypt-EGY). In contrast, many high-authority-score states, such as Algeria (DZA) and Morocco (MAR), do not necessarily rank high in betweenness.

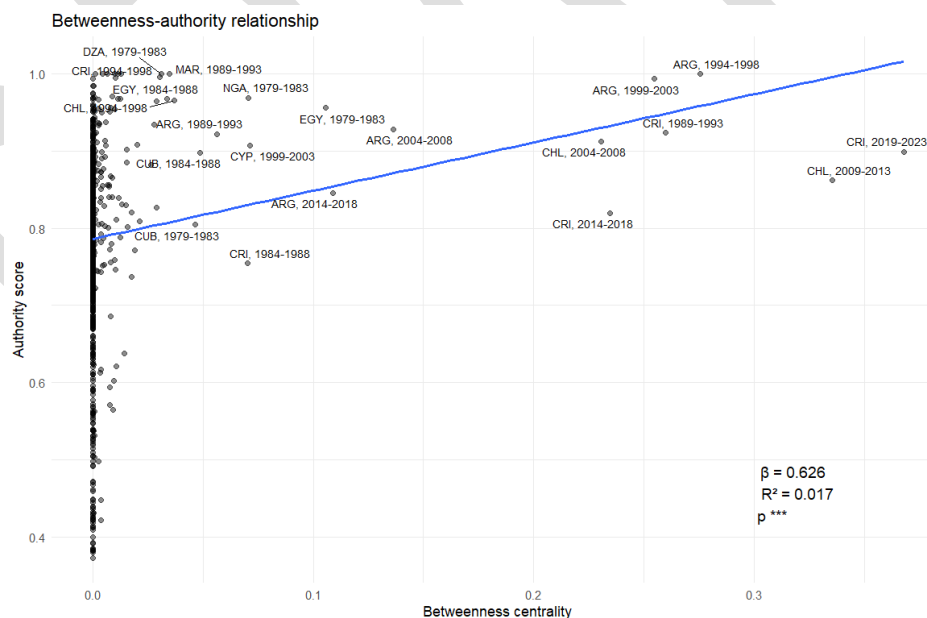


Figure 10. Scatterplot betweenness and eigenvector centralities UNGA co-sponsorship network

It is also worth noting that the convergence of Global South countries toward the NAM and the G77 makes it easier for well-established countries such as Egypt, South Africa, Morocco, and

Algeria to garner support from other Global South countries through the UNGA's second committee. In other words, these countries are bridges within the broader Global South, but not necessarily outside it. To further identify countries that operate across otherwise poorly connected groups, I calculated incoming sponsorship outside the NAM and G77 (excluding within-group sponsorship). These countries coincide with their betweenness centralities. The same logic applies to EU countries (see Appendix).

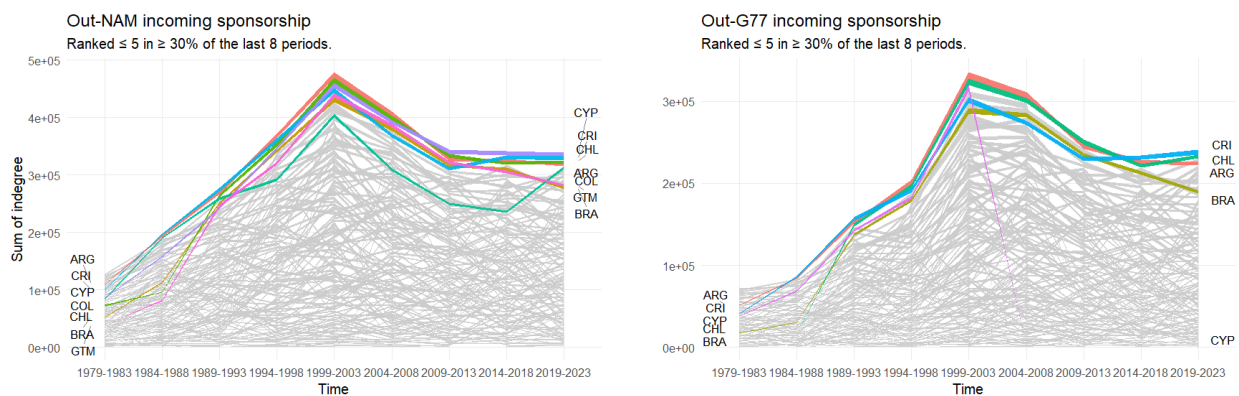


Figure 11. Incoming sponsorship from outsiders to NAM and G77 members.

To further visualize the support countries receive from different regions, I plotted a heatmap of the top 10 countries by average sponsorship (Figure 12). The plot shows only the sponsorship each group sent to non-member countries. Most highly ranked countries by betweenness centrality are also strongly supported by members outside their reference region (within the squares).

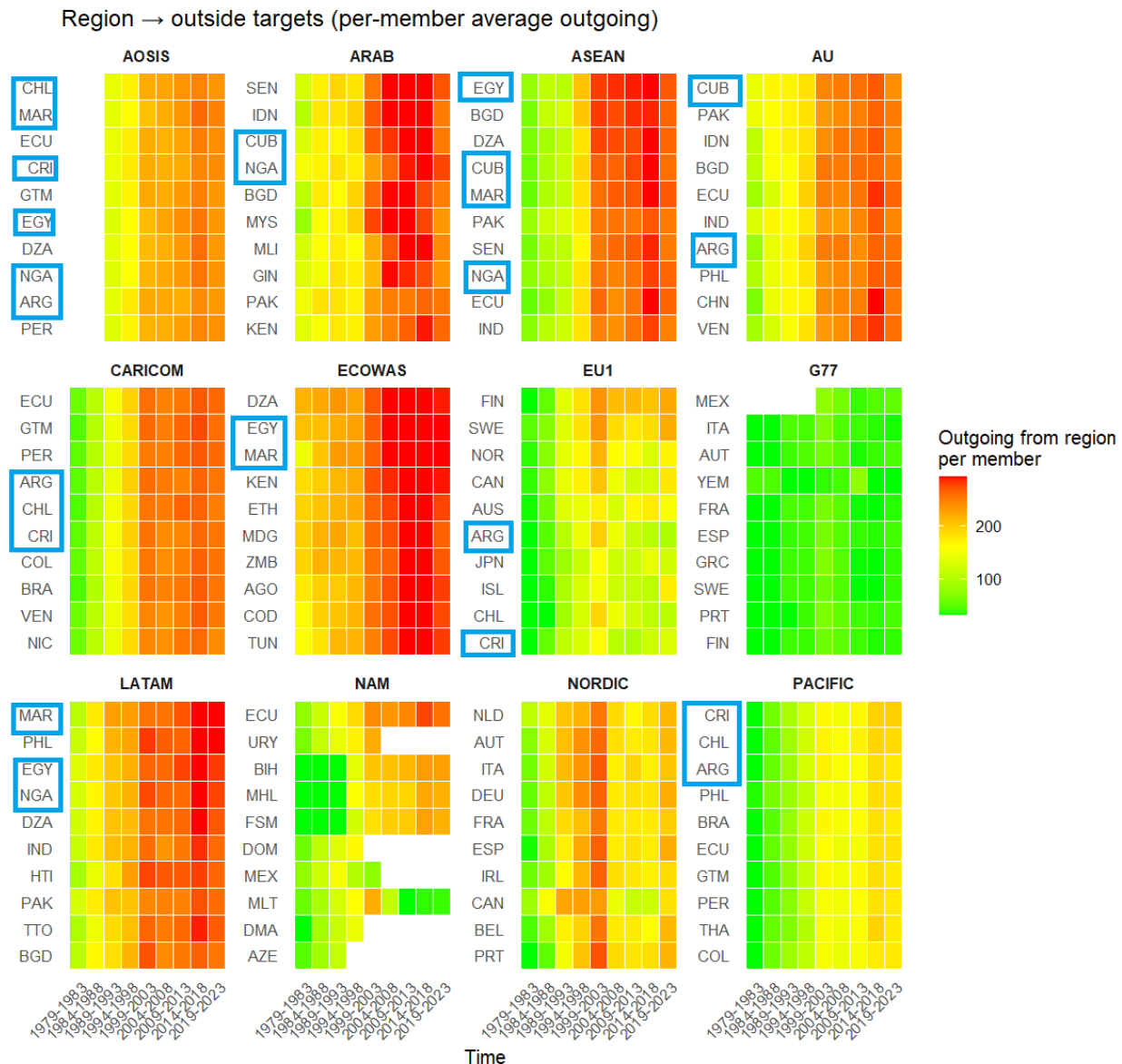


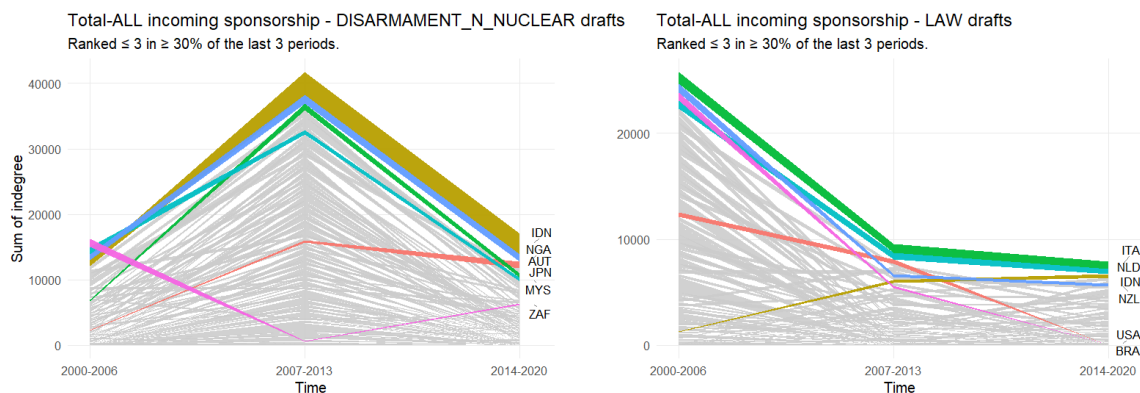
Figure 12. Top 10 heatmap of sponsorship sent by groups to outsiders.

As mentioned, countries recognized by peers in other groups can garner widespread attention and recognition. For example, Cuba receives strong support from the African Union (AU) and the Arab League, which benefits Cuba as a broker by strengthening its connections with the Arab world and the rest of Africa. Similarly, Chile gets strong support from AOSIS. Chile often sides with AOSIS on climate-related resolutions. In particular, Chile has led the Climate Ambition Alliance and was strongly supported by the AOSIS group as the host of COP25 in the

2020s³. Egypt, as expected, enjoys widespread support not only in the African continent through ECOWAS but also from ASEAN countries, where Indonesia is a leader and a heavyweight of the G77 and NAM.

Issue Area Alignment and Status Recognition

Status recognition is also cultivated through expertise in issues. Countries that champion different norms not only develop procedural expertise in successfully legitimizing their claims through UN resolutions but also enjoy the moral authority to do so. Below, I show the countries that receive the most support as authors of resolutions on various topics using Mesquita and Seabra's (2022) dataset. I first identified the countries that receive the most support as first authors across different topics, and then calculated their top supporters. Below the plots showing the rank of incoming sponsorship by topic, I included tables showing where these “theme-leaders” get their support. If the supporters are from the author's main reference group, the co-sponsor is marked in light blue. If the author and the supporter are from a larger group, such as the NAM or the G77, it is highlighted in darker blue (Figure 12).

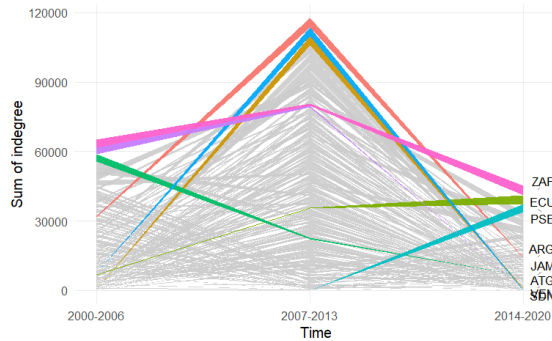


³ <https://www.aosis.org/aosis-remarks-climate-dialogues-opening-2020/#:~:text=Above%20all%2C%20we%20expect%20that,I%20thank%20you.>

Top sponsors of top authors disarmament_n_nuclear

Author	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
IDN	PHL	CHL	MYS	THA	EGY	BGD	SGP	PER	PAK	IND
NGA	ZAF	SWZ	SEN	DZA	GHA	UGA	TZA	TGO	SLE	GIN
AUT	IRL	MLT	GTM	PER	NZL	LIE	CHL	THA	SMR	KAZ
JPN	AUS	NLD	ITA	BEL	NOR	LUX	FIN	ESP	DEU	UKR

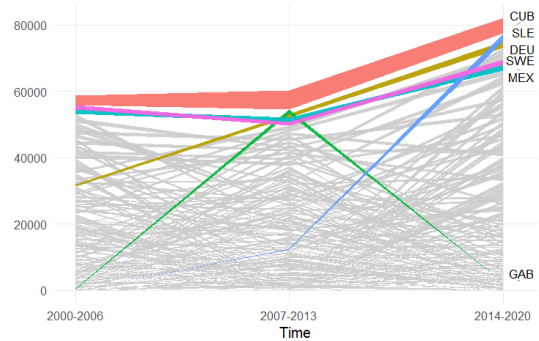
Total-ALL incoming sponsorship - DEVELOP drafts
Ranked ≤ 3 in $\geq 30\%$ of the last 3 periods.



Top sponsors of top authors for law

Author	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
ITA	PRT	NLD	MLT	IRL	FIN	BEL	AUT	SWE	LUX	ISL
NLD	NZL	SWE	PRT	DNK	CAN	AUS	WSM	NOR	ISL	GRC
NZL	MCO	PRT	AUS	CAN	NOR	ISL	GRC	WSM	SWE	FIN
JPN	PRT	NZL	MCO	ISL	CAN	AUS	NOR	BEL	GRC	MLT

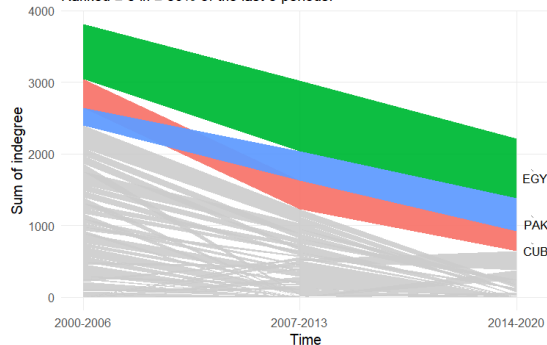
Total-ALL incoming sponsorship - HUMAN_RIGHTS drafts
Ranked ≤ 3 in $\geq 30\%$ of the last 3 periods.



Top sponsors for development

Author	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
ZAF	ETH	NAM	MAR	GAB	EGY	BEN	TZA	TGO	SEN	NGA
ECU	COL	GTM	CHL	BRA	VEN	PRY	PAN	NIC	CRI	BOL
PSE	YEM	TUN	SYR	SOM	SDN	SAU	QAT	OMN	MRT	MAR
ARG	CHL	BRA	URY	CRI	GTM	SLV	PER	PAN	MAR	IND

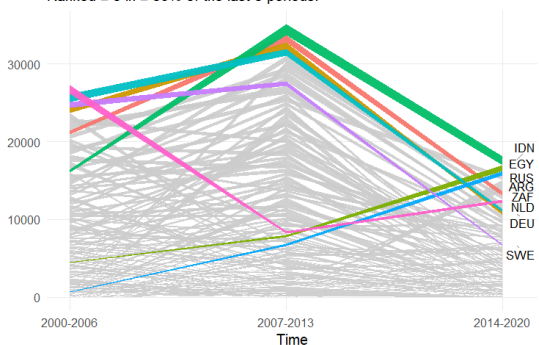
Total-ALL incoming sponsorship - DECOL drafts
Ranked ≤ 3 in $\geq 30\%$ of the last 3 periods.



Top sponsors for human rights

Author	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
CUB	SDN	DZA	EGY	IDN	BGD	VEN	SYR	NGA	NAM	MRT
SLE	ZMB	TZA	TUN	TGO	TCO	SOM	SEN	SDN	NGA	NAM
DEU	SVN	PRT	LUX	HRV	ESP	BEL	AUT	NLD	ITA	IRL
SWE	NLD	ITA	IRL	GRC	FIN	ROU	POL	DEU	AUT	SVN

Total-ALL incoming sponsorship - SECURITY drafts
Ranked ≤ 3 in $\geq 30\%$ of the last 3 periods.



Top sponsors for decolonization

Author	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
EGY	DZA	CUB	CHN	TZA	NGA	IND	GHA	SLE	IDN	ZWE
PAK	SGP	SAU	QAT	MYS	LBY	KWT	IRN	ERI	EGY	BRN
CUB	DZA	CHN	EGY	TZA	NGA	IRN	IND	SYR	VEN	GHA
USA	COM									

Top sponsors for security

Author	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
IDN	UGA	TTO	THA	SEN	PER	PAN	NIC	NGA	MYS	JAM
EGY	PAK	MYS	IND	IDN	DZA	CUB	CHN	MNG	MMR	LKA
RUS	CHN	BLR	KGZ	UZB	TJK	MMR	KAZ	NIC	CUB	ARM
ARG	PER	SWE	SVN	PRT	NLD	MKD	LUX	ITA	IRL	HUN

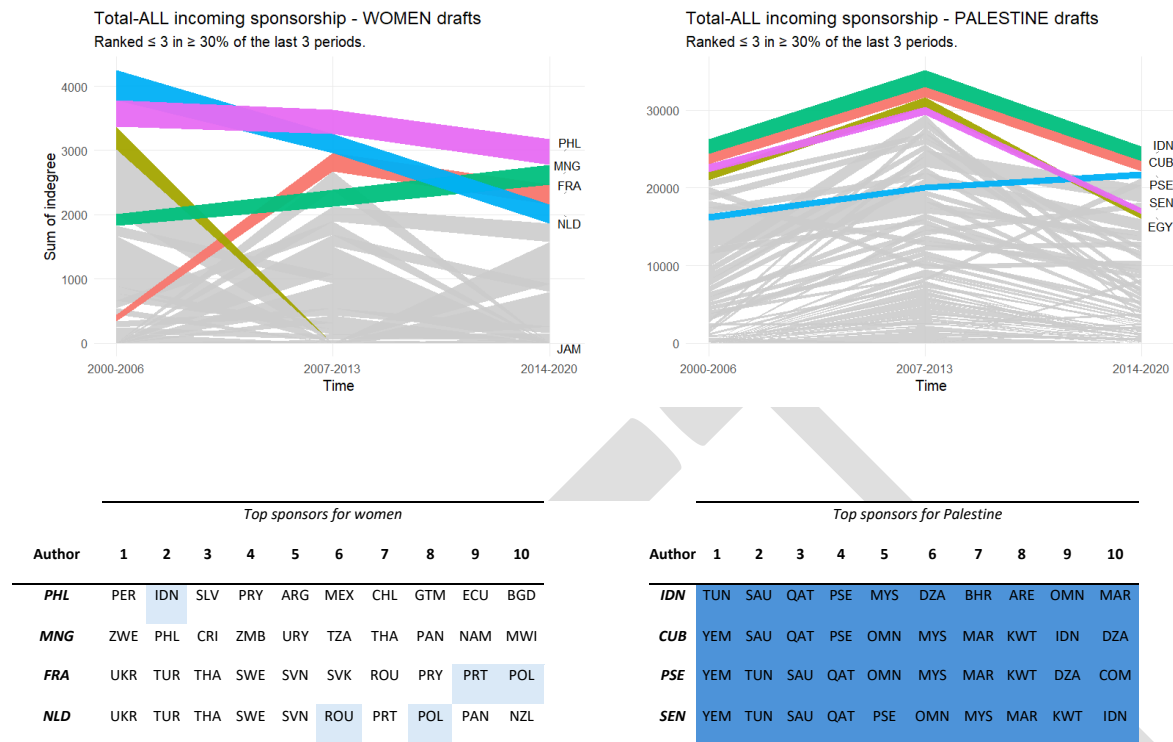


Figure 12. Incoming sponsors by draft resolution theme.

Note: The plots reflect the ranking of the most supported countries by theme. The tables below show the main supporters of the top countries.

Different topics attract different types of sponsors. It is not surprising that Arab League countries, or, more broadly, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), widely support authorship of resolutions on Palestine. Likewise, resolutions on decolonization (DECOL), nuclear disarmament, and security are largely spearheaded by leaders within the G77/NAM groups, with support from other prominent G77/NAM members, except for Russia, which, in the top 3, is supported by China, Belarus, and other Central Asian countries. In international law, a cluster of mostly European countries and some non-European members in the Pacific, such as Japan, Australia, and New Zealand, dominate. However, for draft resolutions on women, a broad issue of interest, authors have a wide range of supporters beyond their region. For example, Latin

American countries widely support the Philippines rather than other ASEAN peers, and different African countries support Mongolia.

Discussion and conclusion

The literature on international status has characterized it as a “club good” or as a continuous hierarchical ranking. While some authors have incorporated the dynamics of groups into international status, to date, there is no broad theorization and further application of how *local* status is built within *global* status recognition. In this article, I made an attempt to answer how countries derive from their *local* status to obtain widespread recognition by first demonstrating the co-existence of *local* and *global* status, second, demonstrating that *local* status is embedded in *global* status, and third, how countries sway from group to group as brokers linking otherwise disconnected groups and gaining recognition outside of their main (*local*) reference group.

Using interviews with diplomats at the UN Headquarters in New York and data from co-sponsors of draft resolutions, I showed that, in daily practice, UN member states operate in two large groups: the Global North and the Global South. While this is not surprising, the stark division in the distribution of co-sponsors explains why some members of Global South countries that are not necessarily prominent in international politics hold prestigious positions at the UN.

First, the main reference groups coincide with geographical and cultural contiguities. Its members tend to recognize those in their immediate vicinity. Their immediate reference points for status, whom they aspire to be, and whom they feel affiliated with are often ingroups. In these groups, the most widely recognized countries have enjoyed a high status for many years. In other words, their status is path dependent, and others tend to loop back to them. At the

same time, some second-tier members of these groups are not entirely satisfied with the position of high-status members and downplay their role while emphasizing their own.

Second, regional groups are contained in larger groups, whose membership and affinities often overlap. For instance, ECOWAS is part of the African Union, and the African Union is part of the Group of 77. Because groups are embedded, leadership inside a group translates into recognition in a larger group. Countries like Egypt, Nigeria, and South Africa are recognized both within their regional group and the NAM and G77. Their widespread recognition and their linkages to other widely recognized countries allow them to set the agenda, further solidifying their standing at the UN.

Third, some of these widely recognized countries act as brokers due to their multiple affiliations with different groups. As such, they can act as an African country one day, an Arab the next, and a Non-Aligned after that. This helps them mobilize coalitions easily, act as gatekeepers for other members who aspire to higher status, and, as mentioned, set the agenda. Nevertheless, some countries can strategically avoid the hierarchies of their regional groups and large political coalitions in both the Global South and the Global North by collaborating with previously disconnected actors. For example, Chile and Costa Rica have collaborated extensively with Small Island Developing States, gaining recognition and leverage.

Although the UN is, in itself, a microcosm, as I argue elsewhere, this behavior is likely a general pattern in the international system. States are more likely to engage in trade, defense, and migration with their neighbors and culturally similar countries than with those that are physically and psychologically distant. In fact, previous works, such as Renshon's (2017), have identified several clusters of countries that coincide with geographical contiguities using data on

diplomatic recognition. Because, for any country, the neighborhood tends to be more salient than distant regions, decision-makers and individuals will more easily form perceptions of the hierarchy of those in their vicinity because they are more comparable. They also tend to care more about their countries' status relative to other countries around them than about how they look vis-à-vis a culturally and geographically distant country.

Group identity is not binary; it works more like a gradient than a clear-cut border. A country may feel identified with its immediate regions (e.g., Colombia in the Andean Community), with culturally similar peers (e.g., Andean countries in Latin America), and with those that share a similar past (e.g., Latin American countries in the Global South). Each layer of identity functions as a smaller matryoshka doll within a larger one, building a global hierarchy of standing. When countries outside this identity continuum observe a salient country's *local* standing, they are likely to recognize its status as well.

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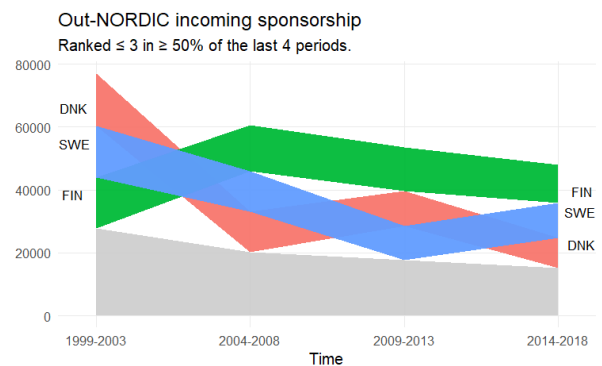
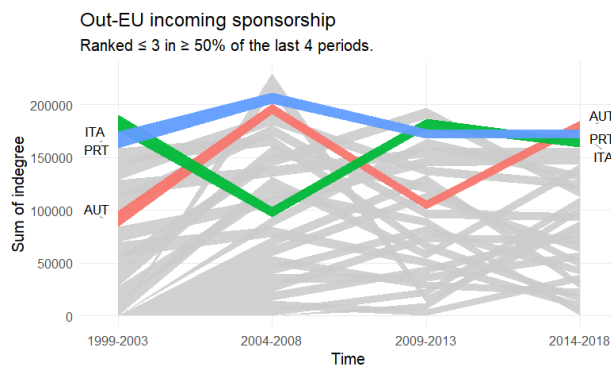
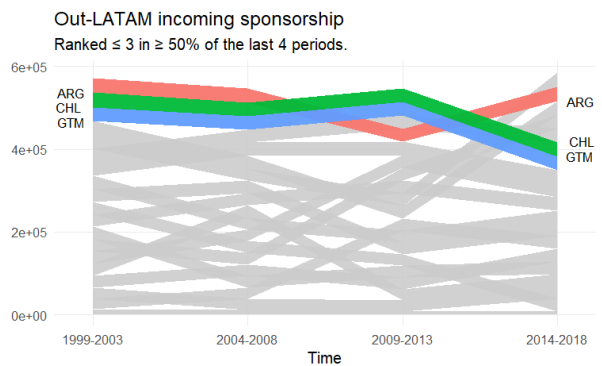
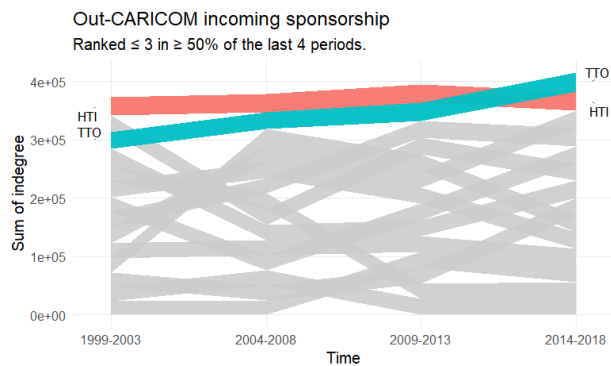
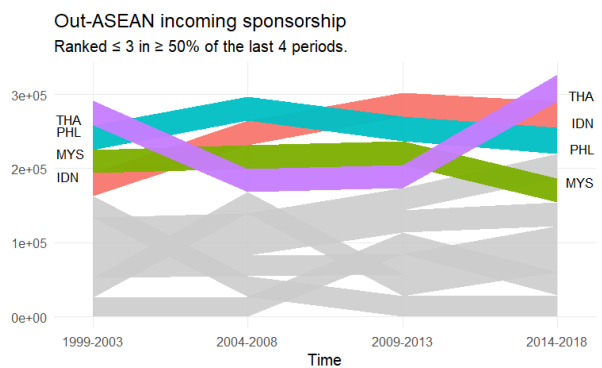
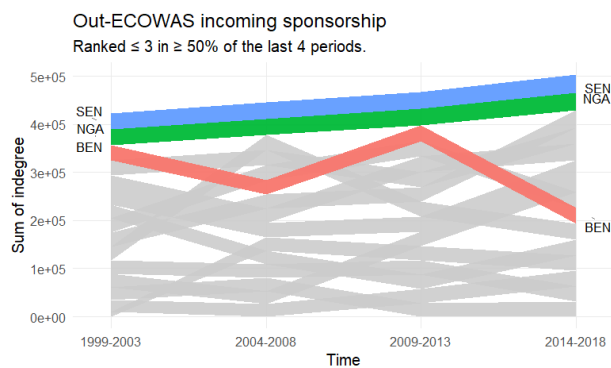
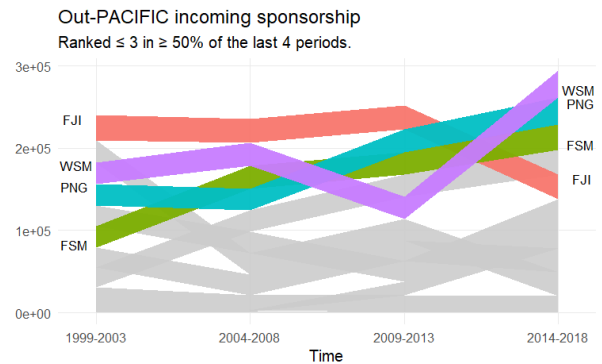
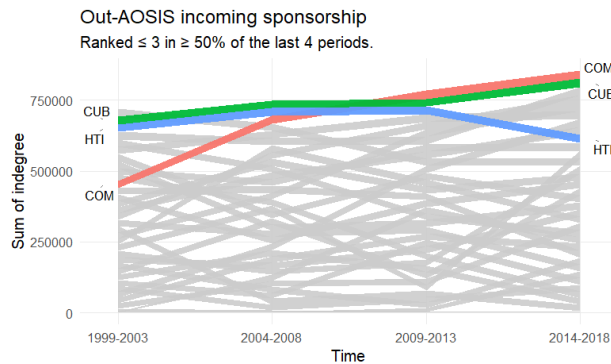
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Appendix

Semi-structured interview questionnaire

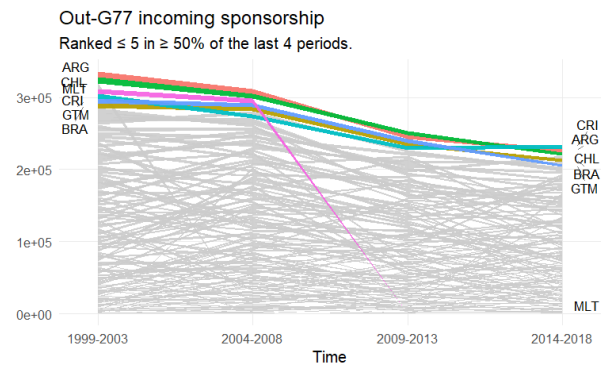
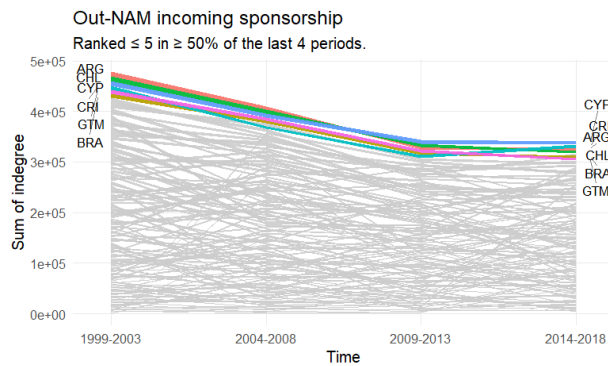
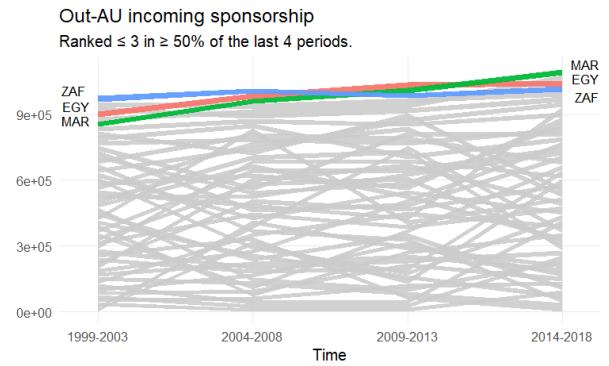
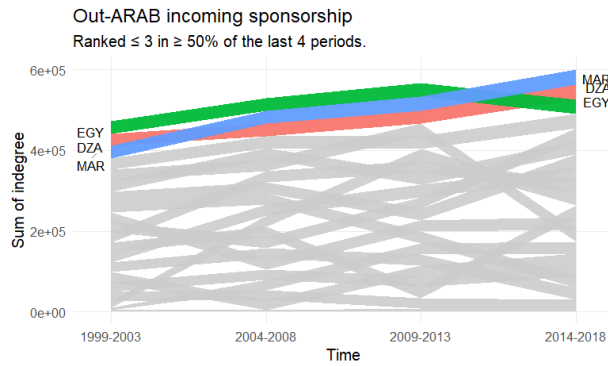
1. Personal details: For how long have you worked with the mission? What were your previous posts? Are you a career diplomat?
2. What is your country currently working on at the UN? What are your flagship initiatives?
3. Why and how does your country partner with other countries?
4. What makes your country prestigious? What is your recipe?
5. In which country groups does your country participate more actively? (AU, SADC, Lusophone, EU, ASEAN, GRULAC), why?
6. In terms of size and scope, how would you describe your country in the region? A leader, a bridge, just another member?
7. Which are the countries that your mission calls first when you have an initiative?
8. In your experience, what is it like to work with other [region] countries? Is it similar to working with the US, Japan, Latin American, or Nordic countries?
9. Under what circumstances does your country collaborate with countries from other regions, such as [region] countries? Under what circumstances does it not?
10. Is there a particular country or group of countries with which you feel comfortable working? Why?
12. Which country or group of countries would you say is very prestigious inside the UN?
13. Would you agree with the statement that "the UN is an arena for great powers"?

Incoming sponsorship by region using Mesquita and Seabra's (2020)



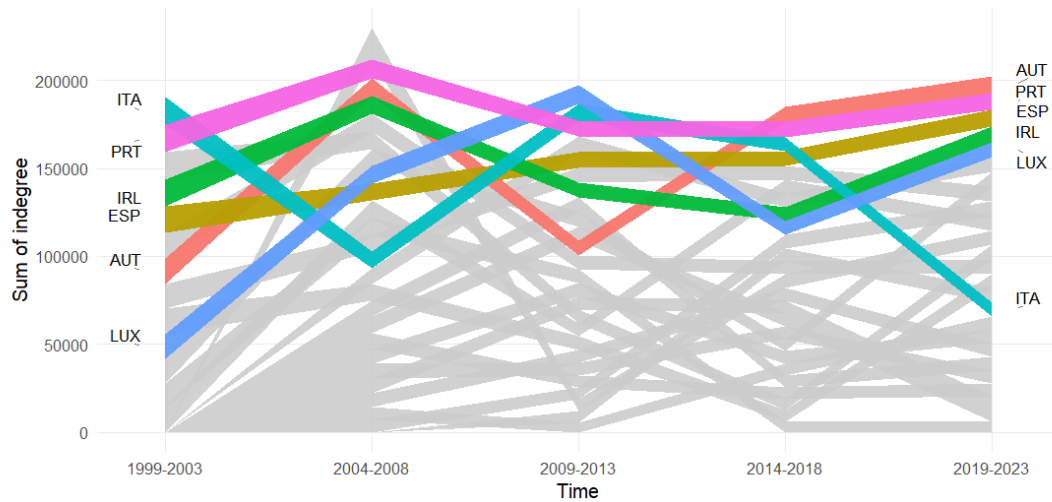
Better a big fish

Draft – please do not cite!



Outside support to EU countries

Out-EU incoming sponsorship
Ranked ≤ 5 in $\geq 30\%$ of the last 8 periods.



Details on the AME model

I use the Additive and Multiplicative Effects (AME) model because the sponsorship network is a longitudinal time series network with count ties. The AME model can handle country attributes (e.g., GDP, number of diplomats), dyadic attributes (e.g., bilateral trade, regime similarity), and network dynamics (e.g., clustering and popularity: the rich get richer effect), allowing me to test this Article's hypotheses. Moreover, unlike other models for social network analysis, such as TERGM and SAOM, the AME model can incorporate non-binary ties and longitudinal networks (Minhas et al. 2019; Hoff 2021).

Using the data generation process explained above, the AME model can explore factors that increase the likelihood that two states sponsor a resolution from both the sender's and receiver's perspectives (e.g., whether richer countries are more likely to send or receive sponsorship). In networks, dyadic variables tend to be correlated with one another. In other words, a state may be more likely to send sponsorship to certain other states but not necessarily to all states. This heterogeneous behavior contributes to the variance across all states. Because these effects share a common node (state), they are likely to be correlated. The AME model includes the Social Relations Regression Model by introducing a row (sender) effect a_i and a receiver (column) effect b_j , known as additive effects.

Likewise, the co-sponsorship network may exhibit patterns of *triadic closure* (the friend of my friend is my friend), and clustering; it is expected that the relationship between two nodes (states) $i \leftrightarrow k$ is higher than expected if the relationship between $i \leftrightarrow j$ and $j \leftrightarrow k$ is also more substantial than expected. Therefore, the model can also model $y_{i,j}$ as a function of unobserved latent features $\mathbf{u}_i^T \mathbf{v}_j$, where $\mathbf{u}_i$ represents the latent aspects of i as a sender and $\mathbf{v}_j$

represents the latent aspects of i as a receiver, known as the multiplicative effects. Therefore, the *additive and multiplicative effects* (AME) can be expressed as:

1

$$y_{i,j} = \beta^\top x_{i,j} + \mathbf{u}_i^\top \mathbf{v}_j + a_i + b_j + \epsilon_{i,j}$$

$$\{(\epsilon_{i,j}, \epsilon_{i,j}): i < j\} \sim i.i.d N_2 \left(0, \sigma^2 \begin{pmatrix} 1 & \rho \\ \rho & 1 \end{pmatrix} \right)$$

I will use an extension of the “amen” R package that can include repeated measurements of the longitudinal data, which expresses $z_{i,j,t}$, the (i, j) th element of the matrix, or the number of times that country i sent sponsorship to the country j in year t as:

2

$$z_{i,j,t} = \beta_d^\top x_{d,i,j,t} + \beta_r^\top x_{r,i,j,t} + \beta_c^\top x_{c,i,j,t} + a_i + b_j + \mathbf{u}_i^\top \mathbf{v}_j + \epsilon_{i,j,t}$$

Where $\beta_d^\top x_{d,i,j,t} + \beta_r^\top x_{r,i,j,t} + \beta_c^\top x_{c,i,j,t}$ represent the explanatory variables at the node and dyadic levels while $\mathbf{u}_i^\top \mathbf{v}_j$ captures the non-observable third-order dependencies. $a_i + b_j$ represent the sender and receiver’s random effects as:

3

$$\{(a_1, b_1), \dots, (a_n, b_n)\} \sim i.i.d N(0, \Sigma_{ab})$$

$$\{(\epsilon_{i,j}, \epsilon_{i,j}): i \neq j\} \sim i.i.d N(0, \Sigma_\epsilon)$$

$$\Sigma_{ab} = \begin{pmatrix} \sigma_a^2 & \sigma_{ab} \\ \sigma_{ab} & \sigma_b^2 \end{pmatrix}$$

$$\Sigma_\epsilon = \sigma_\epsilon^2 \begin{pmatrix} 1 & \rho \\ \rho & 1 \end{pmatrix}$$

Here, σ_a^2 (sender variance) and σ_b^2 (receiver variance) capture the heterogeneity of states when they send sponsorship and when they receive it, and σ_{ab} , the sender-receiver covariance represents whether countries that sponsor more also attract more sponsorship and vice versa.

Reciprocity of sponsorship is captured by ρ (rho). The AME model also probabilistically calculates the positions of nodes (states) in the latent space, which is more precise than the deterministic clustering algorithms commonly used in SNA⁴.

The AME model is based on Monte Carlo Markov Chain (MCMC) simulations in Bayesian statistics. I used 20,000 initialization samples (burn-in) that were discarded to improve model convergence, and a burn-in of 30,000 samples to ensure that all covariates reach a stable posterior distribution.

⁴ Although the dependent variable is a count of sponsorship, I use a Gaussian specification in the AME model as an alternative to other alternatives for counted data, such as the Poisson specification. When count values are large enough, log-transformed counts closely resemble a normal distribution. This happens because, as counts grow, the discrete aspect becomes less significant, and the log transformation stabilizes variance while making the distribution more normal. This method is well-known in the econometrics literature (Cameron and Trivedi 1998; Wooldridge 2010). Additionally, there are multiple computational advantages to this approach. AME models face severe convergence issues requiring millions of iterations. The Gaussian specification typically converges in 10,000-50,000 iterations, making it practically viable. Moreover, the Log transformation naturally addresses overdispersion by compressing the scale of large values. Unlike Poisson models that assume mean=variance, the Gaussian model allows flexible variance estimation. Finally, Log-linear models provide percentage change interpretations that are often more meaningful than multiplicative effects from Poisson models.