Original Research Article

Foreign aid provision and election to the United Nations Security Council

Gary Uzonyi [iD]

Department of Government and Public Policy, University of Strathclyde, UK; Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University, Lithuania

Abstract

Why are some countries elected to the United Nations Security Council, while others are not? This study highlights the role of money in elections to demonstrate that states that provide more foreign aid are more likely to be elected to the Security Council. The provision of foreign aid increases a state's electoral chances through two mechanisms: (1) perceptions of good international citizenship, and (2) soft power influence. Econometric analysis of OECD official development assistance provision and all Security Council elections since 1960 provides strong support for the argument. The case of Turkey helps illustrate the mechanisms.

Keywords

United Nations, international organization, foreign aid, elections, soft power

Introduction

Why are some countries elected to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), while others are not? For those non-permanent members of the Security Council, seats on the UNSC are highly valuable. Like the permanent five (P5) members of the Security Council—Britian, China, France, Russia, and the United States—the non-permanent members get a vote on issues related to international peace and security. They get to craft resolutions on what to do about international crises and how to handle rouge states and threatening situations. Yet, because these non-permanent members are not the world's major powers, scholars tend to highlight the real value of their seat in monetary terms. Those states elected to the Security Council see a windfall in increased aid and loans, as the P5 attempt to buy their votes on those important issues related to international peace and security on which the major powers may be divided (e.g., Berlin et al., 2023; Dreher et al., 2009; Reynolds and Winters, 2016). Previous scholars have thus argued that these dynamics suggest that those small states and minor powers already receiving more aid from the P5 should be more likely to be elected to the UNSC as their preferred candidate because such states should be easier to control

Corresponding author:
Gary Uzonyi, Department of Government and Public Policy, University of Strathclyde, 141 St James Road, Glasgow, G4 0LT, UK.
Email: gary.uzonyi@strath.ac.uk

once on the council. Yet, they have found little empirical support for this view of the Security Council election process (see Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, 2010; Dreher et al., 2014).

I posit that while the P5 may prefer such candidates for UNSC membership, this view misses the broader point that there is an election for these positions. Hopeful candidates must not only please the P5, who are important, but also constitute only five votes. Instead, they must appeal broadly to those other UN member states who must vote them into office—just like any other candidate seeking elected office. In this view of the Security Council election process, foreign aid is still important. However, rather than focus on states that receive aid from the P5, I highlight that states that *provide* more foreign aid are more likely to be elected to the Security Council. The provision of foreign aid increases a state's electoral chances through two mechanisms. First, as a state provides more foreign aid, other states will come to view it as a 'good international citizen' (e.g., Teo, 2022; Youde and Slagter, 2013), a quality valued among Security Council members (e.g., Malone, 2000; Rüland, 2019). Second, foreign aid is a soft power tool to buy friends and influence (e.g., Dietrich et al., 2017; Nye, 2004). States that provide more foreign aid come to collect more friends, and thus potential votes for a Security Council seat.

Using OECD official development assistance (ODA) provision, I tested this argument on all Security Council elections since 1960 and found strong support for my argument. The findings buttress the broader claim that UNSC elections are not simply about turn-taking but are a competitive process in which members compete for these coveted seats. Furthermore, those states that get elected are the ones that are better able to wield their own influence abroad, rather than those that are most easily controlled by the P5. This paper thus contributes to the literature on cooperation and power, as well as international organization and the United Nations. It contributes to the discussion of soft power by providing illustrative cases in which soft power is a specific tool employed by states, and then demonstrates across time and space that this is a common strategy that works for election onto a prestigious international body. Whether aid is given for humanitarian or strategic purposes (e.g., Lumsdaine, 1993; Morgenthau, 1962), its memory can be called upon when a favor is needed. Importantly, this paper contributes to our understanding of power within international organizations. Typically, scholars focus on military power or networks to explain how states control these organizations (e.g., Clark, 2021; Thompson, 2015). Here, power comes from previous relations states that have formed in donor-recipient ties outside the specific organization. However, these relationships provide more than soft power within the organization. They also allow for the role of the power of perception to inform the process of bringing states to prominence within the organization. Specific to the UN, this paper demonstrates the role of money in its elections, thus highlighting a similarity between this preeminent global organization and other forms of domestic and regional elections (e.g., Papp, 2019; Thomsen, 2023).

Foreign aid, influence, and election

While previous scholars have shown that some attributes of states are associated with a higher likelihood of election to the UNSC (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, 2010) and that the institution prefers turn-taking among its members (e.g., Dreher et al., 2014), there is no automatic pathway to a non-permanent seat on the Security Council. To be one of the elected 10 (E10), a state must be *elected*. To be elected, the state must campaign (e.g., Thorhallsson et al., 2022). While a state may campaign on the fact that it has not had a turn on the UNSC in a while, as Greece tried in 1998 (see Malone, 2000), such a campaign strategy rarely succeeds. To explain why foreign aid helps a state's electoral prospects, I will first establish the electoral environment in which the E10 are competing.

Before 1965, there were only six elected seats on the Security Council. With the process of decolonization and expanding United Nations membership, the Security Council was enlarged in an effort to map a growing demand for a say on issues related to international peace and security.[1] Today, we have the E10. The 10 non-permanent seats that are up for election are not equally distributed between the non-P5 states. Instead, they are divided by regional group. UN members elect three seats from Africa, two from the Asia-Pacific Group, one from Eastern Europe, two from the Latin American and Caribbean States Group, and two from the Western European and Others Group. The seats are held for two-years on a staggard basis so that not all seats are up for election at the same time. Formally, a state must secure election from the entire United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). However, informally, the UNGA allows each region to put forth their candidate to run for any open seat(s) it has in a given year.[2] The assembly only exercises its authority to choose the candidate if the regional group cannot decide (puts forward a 'contested' slate instead of a 'clean' slate), which occurs in roughly 24% of elections (see Security Council Report, 2019).[3] This means that whether a candidate is chosen directly within its regional group—and thus runs unopposed—or by the UNGA in a contested election, it must appeal to enough of the entire UN body to secure their votes to be elected because the entire UNGA casts votes for all states that are running for a seat, unopposed or not.[4]

Foreign aid provision helps a candidate appeal both to the states within its region and to the UN membership more broadly. Foreign aid helps boost a state's electoral prospects within and outside the region through two mechanisms. Mechanism 1 is about the perception of *good international citizenship*. The primary job of the Security Council is to maintain international peace and security. This requires attentiveness to growing crises and the needs of states that give rise to these emergencies in the first place. It requires the ability and willingness to bargain and cooperate with the other members of the UNSC and help implement resolutions, as needed. In bridging what the in-crisis members need with what the council members want, the job often requires the use of both the carrot and the stick. To do the job well, a Security Council member thus must be able to mobilize its national resources, leadership, and bureaucracy to listen, communicate, bargain, and implement at a global level (e.g., Engelbrekt, 2023). Such a good international citizen is particularly desired in the Security Council for two reasons. First, the interests of the P5 are often seen as dominating those of the international community, such that their veto power limits the Security Council from being effective when these interests conflict with international peace and security (see Trahan, 2020). Second, the E10 are likely to be overrun by the P5 unless they can work together (e.g., Farrall et al., 2020; Nick Pay and Postolski, 2022). Being a good international citizen is, in part, helpful in finding a diplomatic strategy of finding a pathway to navigate the contentious middle between major powers (e.g., Teo, 2022).

Providing foreign aid helps to cultivate an image of being a good international citizen. For some, this is because they see the motivations of the donor state as tied to the broad humanitarian ideals the Security Council is supposed to represent (see Lumsdaine, 1993). For wealthy states, there is a norm that providing aid is what they are supposed to do to be a good international citizen (e.g., Lancaster, 2007). For others, though, it is more practical. Donor states are ones that are seeing other UN members in need and are taking actions to help remedy these situations (e.g., Bearce and Tirone, 2010; Girod, 2012). In either case, donor states are building a reputation as those members who practice good international citizenship. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that, in this context, these states are building their good reputation through the dispersal of foreign aid, which requires both the disposable financial means to provide monies to other members and the strength of bureaucratic institutions to be attentive, listen, and communicate with others in need, before helping to transfer these funds or implement the specific projects (e.g., Findley, 2018). Thus, this type of good international citizen may be just the type of E10 state that other UN members are

seeking. This mechanism is relevant for affecting voting decisions by all states because the aid provision is visible to others and helps inform states of the donor's character, whether the observer is the recipient of aid or not.

Mechanism 2 is about foreign aid as *soft power* to help buy votes through cultivating friends and influence. Security Council elections are just that—elections. A piece of a voter's calculus is about the vision the potential E10 state is selling, which is captured, in part by their perception of how the state would work as a good international citizen toward global peace and security. Another piece of this calculus is which state provides the largest direct benefit to the voter. In this context, foreign aid is a quid pro quo. As the state's aid to a member increases, so should the probability that the member votes for the state. This may be a blatant transaction. However, it is often more subtle through the soft power that providing aid cultivates for the donor (e.g., Alrababa'h et al., 2020; Findley et al., 2017). Over time, aid helps build favorable public opinion within recipient nations (e.g., Kim, 2019), which can reinforce the 'good citizen' mechanism. This also helps the donor secure diplomatic and foreign policy support on issues they deem important from the recipient government—such as being elected to the UNSC (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, 2009; Dreher et al., 2009). When the time comes to seek support, the donor makes sure to highlight the development assistance they have provided so that the recipient knows that this is now the time to repay the act—even if that assistance is not directly asked for (e.g., Dietrich et al., 2017). For example, during the 1998 campaign for its UNSC seat, the Netherlands handed out laminated cards to other countries flaunting its global ODA numbers and spent time courting members to which it contributed heavily before it comfortably secured a victory in that election (see Malone, 2000). Thus, Mechanism 2 is relevant for affecting the voting decisions of aid recipient states, rather than all states.

Together, these two mechanisms suggest:

> **Hypothesis:** *a state's probability of being elected to the United Nations Security Council increases as its foreign aid provision increases.*

Research design

The unit of analysis is all state-years from 1960 to 2022. The temporal range of this analysis is set by data on foreign aid (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2024). However, restricting the analysis to the E10 era (1965 onwards) does not alter these results (see Supplemental Materials A1, p.2).

The dependent variable is *Elected* coded 1 in the year in which a state is elected to the UNSC and 0 otherwise (United Nations [UN], 2024). Each state is dropped from the sample for the years in which it is on the council and the three years following the end of its term to capture the next election cycle, since it is not eligible for immediate re-election. The P5 states (Britian, China, France, Russia, and the United States) are also dropped from the sample because they are not elected to their seats on the council. Given the dichotomous nature of this dependent variable, I estimate a series of probit models to test my hypothesis. I also include a time polynomial of *Years since Elected* to control for temporal dependence in the data.

I use data from the OECD (2024) to measure the key independent variable of interest in this study as the amount of bilateral ODA a candidate for the UNSC provides, globally, to other UN members states each year. This includes aid provided during election years, as well as non-election years. Focusing on ODA helps limit threats to inference and make more meaningful comparisons between donors. This focus helps limit issues related to missing data, extremes in giving, and the

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and variance inflation factors.

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	VIF
Elected	1,258	0.054	0.226	0.000	1.000	#
Log(Aid)	1,291	9.371	2.228	1.337	13.569	1.580
Log(GDPpc)	1,186	10.147	0.636	0.000	11.345	1.380
Log(Population)	1,186	8.982	1.361	4.978	11.759	1.510
Democracy	1,291	0.723	0.280	0.012	0.926	1.110
Years Since Elected	1,258	18.786	17.643	0.000	74.000	1.230

[#]dependent variable.

ability to give. Given the high rightward skew of aid flows, I use its log in the models that follow, *Log(Aid)*.[5] As I discuss later, in subsequent models, I consider a state's history of aid provision, multilateral aid giving, and other sources of aid data. However, all additional considerations produce substantively similar results.
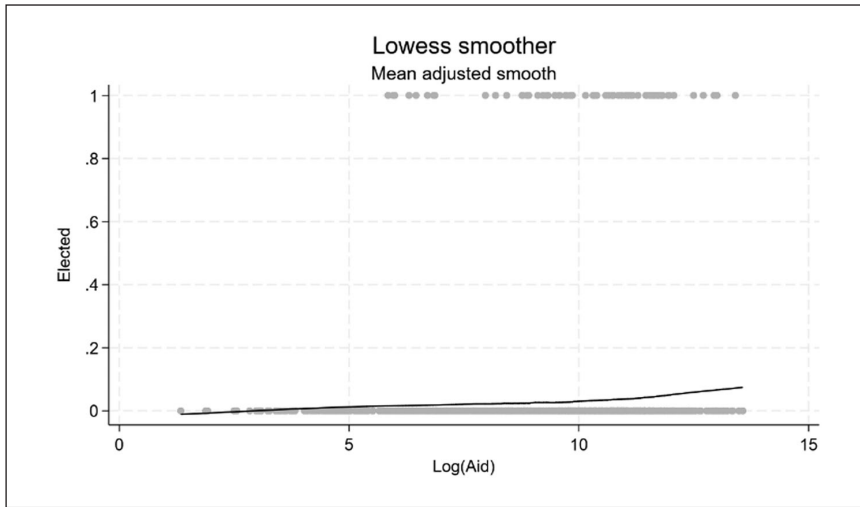
I begin with a parsimonious model that includes only my variable of interest and the time polynomial. I then estimate a series of models that include additional independent variables to control for alternative explanations and possible confounding factors. First, since wealthier states are more likely to provide more foreign aid and be elected to the Security Council (e.g., Dreher et al., 2014), I include each state's *Log(GDPpc)* from Bolt and Van Zanden (2025). I include the size of each state's *Log(Population)* for the same reason (Bolt and Van Zanden, 2025). Using V-DEM's scale of electoral democracy (Coppedge et al., 2024), I also include a measure of *Democracy* because more democratic states have been shown to provide more development aid (e.g., Faust, 2008) and are more likely to be elected to the Security Council in some regions of the world (e.g., Uzonyi, 2025).

All time-varying independent variables are lagged one year to capture the sequence of events in the data. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics and variance inflation factors (VIFs) for all variables in the models. All VIFs are below 1.60, indicating that multicollinearity is not a significant concern for this analysis.

Main analysis

Before turning to the large-N statistical analysis, I begin by taking a non-parametric look at the raw data. Using lowess estimation, I consider the relationship between *Log(Aid)* and the probability of a state being *Elected* to the UN Security Council. As Figure 1 illustrates, as a state's *Log(Aid)* increases, so does its probability of being *Elected* to the UNSC. Thus, there is support for my hypothesis in the raw data.

Table 2 displays the results of my main analysis. Model 1 is the baseline parsimonious model that only includes my variable of interest, *Log(Aid)*, and the time polynomial. Model 2 introduces the additional control variables. Model 3 re-estimates the fully specified model and uses a jack-knife technique to systematically drop each state from the analysis to determine if any one state is driving the results. No state is. Model 4 includes group fixed effects since the selection of UNSC members is primarily done within the group and then confirmed in the General Assembly. Model 5 includes election fixed effects to see if any given election is having specific unaccounted for effects on the results. Finally, since elected states count for roughly 3% of observations, Model 6 re-estimates the fully specified model as a rare-events logistic regression to determine if attenuation bias is altering the robustness of the results. Across all these models, I find strong and

Figure 1. Foreign aid dispersal and UNSC election in the raw data.

Table 2. Probit analysis of Aid and UNSC election.

	Model 1: Base	Model 2: Controls	Model 3: Jackknife	Model 4: Group FE	Model 5: Election FE	Model 6: RE Logit
	β (s.e.)	β (s.e.)	β (s.e.)	β (s.e.)	β (s.e.)	β (s.e.)
Log(Aid)_{t-1}	0.136* (0.037)	0.114* (0.038)	0.114* (0.050)	0.120* (0.057)	0.113* (0.036)	0.114* (0.038)
Log(GDPpc)_{t-1}		−0.179* (0.085)	−0.179 (0.185)	−0.196* (0.082)	−0.096 (0.128)	−0.179* (0.085)
$\text{Log(Population)}_{t-1}$		0.243* (0.087)	0.243* (0.102)	0.229* (0.084)	0.295* (0.090)	0.243* (0.087)
Democacy_{t-1}		0.984* (0.410)	0.984 (0.579)	1.339* (0.506)	1.054* (0.377)	0.984* (0.410)
Years Since Elected	0.150* (0.031)	0.202* (0.035)	0.202* (0.041)	0.208* (0.039)	0.226* (0.038)	0.202* (0.035)
Years Since Elected^2	−0.005* (0.001)	−0.006* (0.001)	−0.006* (0.001)	−0.006* (0.001)	−0.007* (0.001)	−0.006* (0.001)
Years Since Elected^3	0.000* (9.99e-06)	0.000* (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)
Constant	−3.966* (0.377)	−5.447* (1.056)	−5.447* (1.569)	−5.240* (0.997)	−7.276* (1.981)	−5.447* (1.056)
N	1,156	1,121	1,121	1,121	795	1,121
Log pseudolikelihood	−231.721	−212.494	−212.494	−211.708	−183.444	−212.494

Errors clustered by state.
$p < 0.05$*.

consistent support for my hypothesis: a state that provides more foreign aid globally is more likely to be elected to the UNSC.[6]

The additional independent variables generally display consistent results that conform to expectations. Across each of the fully specified models, states with larger populations are more likely to be elected to the Security Council, as expected (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, 2010). In all models, except Model 3, *Democracy* was associated with a higher likelihood of UNSC election, as well. Model 3 was the jackknife model that systematically excluded each state from the estimations. This finding suggests that the robustness of democracy's relationship with UNSC election likely hinges on some key states or regions, as others have previously found (e.g., Dreher et al., 2014). The relationship between *Log(GDPpc)* and *Elected* was both the most surprising and the least robust. Previous scholars have found that richer states were more likely to be elected to the Security Council (e.g., Dreher et al., 2014). This relationship may have held because richer states were seen as stronger states that could better shape international relations, had more to gain from sitting on the council, or had more money with which to buy their way onto the UNSC. In this analysis, however, I find that once each state's *Log(Aid)* is directly included in the model alongside its *Log(GDPpc)*, its *Log(GDPpc)* now has a negative relationship with the probability of being *Elected*. This suggests that earlier studies were picking up a proxy relationship for aid when only including a measure of state wealth. Once measuring aid directly, the remaining effect of wealth deters other UN members for voting for the state. This may be because such states are seen as already benefiting from the international status quo. However, it is also important to note that this result is not statistically significant in Model 3 (using the jackknife technique) or Model 5 (including election fixed effects). This suggests that the negative relationship between *Log(GDPpc)* and *Elected* is likely driven by the experience of a few candidates in a few key elections.

Probing the mechanisms

I posit that aid helps a state's electoral chances through two mechanisms: (1) increasing other members' perceptions of the state as an international good citizen, which is a quality valued in Security Council members, and (2) a soft power way to buy votes. The first mechanism may be confounded by other strategies scholars highlight as ways state's attempt to improve their image in the UN—namely by increasing their peacekeeper provision (e.g., Yadav, 2014). In Table 3, I compare the aid and peacekeeper tactics using Kathman's (2013) data on post-Cold War state contributions to all UN peacekeeping missions. Controlling for *Log(Troops)*, specifically in Model 7, and *Log(Total Personnel)* in Model 8, I find that neither type of contribution increases the likelihood of being *Elected* to the Security Council. However, the relationship between *Log(Aid)* and being *Elected* remains robust. Second, being an international good citizen suggests that the state should not be engaged in interstate or intrastate violence that can threaten international peace and security. Indeed, previous research has shown that states interested in UNSC seats are prone to halt such violence (Caro-Burnett and Weese, 2023). Since being peaceful may be a confounder on the good citizen mechanism of aid, I control for a state's logged count of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs—Palmer et al., 2022) and civil war dyads each year in Model 9. While neither conflict variable is statistically significant, *Log(Aid)* remains robust.

Robustness checks, scope conditions, and selection processes

To consider the robustness of these findings, I begin by considering temporal effects. Here, I restrict the sample to start in 1965 when the UNSC expanded to the 15 members it has today and then I restrict the sample to start in 1992 to see if the results are robust to only the post-Cold War era. The results are robust in each case (see Supplemental Materials A1, p.2).

Table 3. Additional analysis.

	Model 7: Peacekeeping Troops	Model 8: Peacekeeping Personnel	Model 9: Conflict
	β (s.e.)	β (s.e.)	β (s.e.)
Log(Aid)$_{t-1}$	0.144* (0.060)	0.152* (0.062)	0.106* (0.039)
Log(GDPpc)$_{t-1}$	−0.135 (0.121)	−0.144 (0.105)	−0.236* (0.106)
Log(Population)$_{t-1}$	0.230* (0.096)	0.262* (0.111)	0.312* (0.092)
Democracy$_{t-1}$	1.329* (0.572)	1.470* (0.670)	0.971* (0.444)
Log(Peacekeepers)$_{t-1}$	0.033 (0.035)		
Log (Personnel)$_{t-1}$		0.002 (0.051)	
Log(MIDs)$_{t-1}$			0.021 (0.160)
Log(Civil Wars)$_{t-1}$			−0.676 (0.488)
Years Since Elected	0.145* (0.038)	0.143* (0.036)	0.245* (0.041)
Years Since Elected^2	−0.003* (0.001)	−0.003* (0.001)	−0.008* (0.001)
Years Since Elected^3	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)
Constant	−6.393* (1.512)	−6.566* (1.515)	−5.707* (0.981)
N	628	634	991
Log pseudolikelihood	−108.929	−111.640	−181.511

Errors clustered by state.
$p < 0.05$*

Then, to gauge the possibility of scope conditions on the role of aid in UNSC elections, I consider several interactive effects. I find that *Log(GDP)* does not modify the relationship between *Log(Aid)* and the probability of a state being *Elected*. However, the effect of *Log(Aid)* increases with the size of a state's *Log(Population)*. This suggests that the smallest of states may not be able to buy their way out of the perception that they are too weak to influence international peace and security in a meaningful way. The effect of *Log(Aid)* also increases along with *Democracy*. However, this effect is only statistically significant for a small range of democracies. Increasing *Log(Aid)* has only become an effective campaign tool in the post-Cold War era. This may mean that Cold War politics largely determined voting patterns and limited how influential donors could be beyond East–West competition. *Log(Aid)* is most useful for mid-range contributors of peacekeeping troops. While troops on their own do not increase the likelihood of being elected, a state seems to be able to pair this strategy with aid to improve its chances. The same is true for the overall number of peacekeeping personnel contributed. Finally, there is a slightly curvilinear effect of

Log(Aid) with itself in which the effect of aid increases the probability of a state being *Elected* more strongly for the top funders (each of these effects is presented in Supplemental Materials A2, pp. 3–4).

Another scope condition may follow from the theory of the mechanisms provided. States may still have to provide aid to secure a favorable UNGA vote for a seat in the UNSC (Mechanism 1), even if they have already been nominated by the states in their region (Mechanism 2). This is because the nomination by a group of states from a region is non-binding. Hence, states outside the regional group may decide not to elect the nominated state. For example, Sudan lost the UNGA vote for the African Group seat in 2000 despite having the Organization of African Unity endorsement. This was because UNGA members outside the African Group did not view Sudan as a 'good international citizen.' However, Mechanism 2 (soft power) may play less of a role in-region because the candidate will not need to call in favors in such situations in which the election is uncontested. Conversely, when the election is contested, Mechanism 2 suggests that a candidate who *outspends* its competitors within-group will have a greater probability of victory. I test these implications as follows: first, for all contested elections, I examine a state's within-group foreign aid provision relative to that of all other candidates running; and second, I compare this ratio against each state's simple within-group log aid outflows, as before, for those unopposed elections. As expected, I find that in contested elections, the state with higher in-group aid provision has a higher likelihood of being elected to the UNSC. However, while the coefficient on within-group *Log(Aid)* remains positive for unopposed elections, it is no longer statistically significant (see Supplemental Materials A3, p.5).

Alternative aid considerations

The raw data, main analysis, and robustness checks all provide strong support for my expectation that states who provide more foreign aid are more likely to be elected to the Security Council. In this section, I consider my measure of foreign aid. First, I note that while states may increase their aid around UNSC election time, their history of aid provision likely also matters—they may not be able to change perceptions or buy friends quickly. Therefore, in Model 10 of Table 4, I consider the three-year moving average of a state's aid contributions. Again, I find that as aid increases over this period since the last UNSC election, the state is more likely to be elected to the council. In Model 11, I consider a state's bilateral aid plus its multilateral aid contributions. While multilateral aid may not help it directly buy votes, such assistance helps with Mechanism 1 of increasing perceptions of being a good international citizen. This is borne out by the results of Model 11. Lastly, in Model 12, I explore whether these results are robust by using other data on aid flows. Instead of using OECD data, I use Tierney et al.'s (2011) AidData Version 3.1 to measure *Log(Aid)*, which includes a wider range of donors and aid types than the OECD data. Again, I find that as a state's *Log(Aid)* increases to other UN members, so does its likelihood of being elected to the UN Security Council. Thus, my results are robust.

Illustrative case

Both patterns in the raw data and the large-N econometric analysis strongly support my hypothesis that a state's probability of being elected to the UNSC increases as its foreign aid provision increases. These results appear robust, and analysis probing the mechanisms suggest that both the good citizen and soft power mechanism are likely part of this dynamic. In this section, I provide a brief example to help illustrate the relationship between foreign aid provision and election to the

Table 4. Alternative aid considerations.

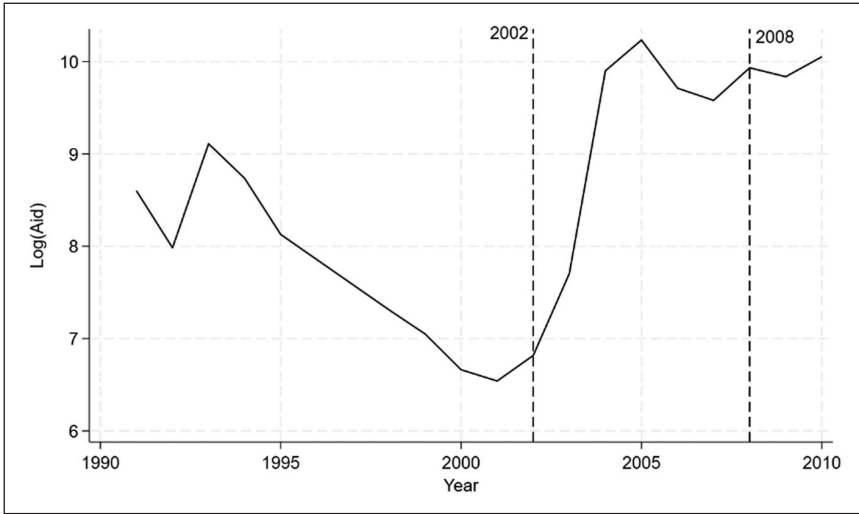|	Model 10: Moving Average	Model 11: All Aid	Model 12: AIDDATA
	β (s.e.)	β (s.e.)	β (s.e.)
Log(Aid)$_{t-1}$	0.108* (0.042)	0.125* (0.036)	0.174* (0.069)
Log(GDPpc)$_{t-1}$	−0.218* (0.100)	−0.185* (0.086)	−0.460 (0.254)
Log(Population)$_{t-1}$	0.237* (0.086)	0.235* (0.086)	0.163 (0.092)
Democracy$_{t-1}$	0.017* (0.413)	1.029* (0.419)	0.724 (0.467)
Years Since Elected	0.186* (0.035)	0.204* (0.036)	0.230* (0.053)
Years Since Elected^2	−0.005* (0.001)	−0.006* (0.001)	−0.008* (0.002)
Years Since Elected^3	0.000* (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)
Constant	−4.716* (1.141)	−5.477* (1.045)	−4.140 (2.502)
N	992	1,182	674
Log pseudolikelihood	−205.597	−213.491	−125.297

Errors clustered by state.
$p < 0.05$*.

UN Security Council. Here, I focus on Turkey's campaign for the 2008 Western European and Others Group (WEOG) seat, which it ran alongside Austria and Iceland.

Turkey began planning for its 2008 campaign shortly after the Justice and Development Party (AKP, Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi) took office in 2002. The campaign was multipronged to highlight Turkey's important role in the international system. Among other tactics, it involved diplomatic meetings around the world and attempts to end long-running rivalries with its neighbors, Greece and Armenia (e.g., Ilgit and Ozkececi-Taner, 2014). Key to this plan, though, was Ankara's increased foreign aid program. As Figure 2 shows, using data from the OECD (2024), Turkey's foreign aid rose rapidly once the AKP took office in 2002 and began its campaign in 2003 until the time of the election in 2008. Aral (2009) notes that, to Ankara, part of this spending was to change perceptions of how people thought of Turkey. It was not a bellicose state with a violent past—it was a key international figure that could use its national resources to implement policy at a global level. Thus, Mechanism 1, good international citizenship, was key to Turkey's foreign aid strategy in its UNSC campaign.

Mechanism 2—soft power—was also felt. Thorhallsson et al. (2022) conducted interviews with high-ranking Icelandic officials who were involved with their failed 2008 campaign against Turkey for the WEOG seat. These officials recalled that several recipient countries named specifically what Ankara had given them and asked if Reykjavík could match this. In the officials' view, the reason that Iceland lost to Turkey was in large part because recipient states cared only about what an E10 state could deliver to them, and Turkey could simply provide more. Even when other Nordic states stepped in to remind these recipients of what they had been given in the past by the

Figure 2. Turkey's foreign aid in lead up to UNSC election.

Nordic region, this was not enough to ease their fears that Iceland, specifically, could not out-deliver Turkey in the present. Adding to the officials' frustrations with their peers' emphasis on Reykjavík's generally small foreign aid outflows was that Iceland had recently experienced bank failures. Many ambassadors confided that there was widespread disbelief that Iceland would be able to increase its foreign aid outflows in the future (see McFarquhar, 2008) and thus preferred Turkey.

When voting concluded, Turkey triumphed. It secured 151 out of 192 UNGA votes and won a WEOG seat on the first ballot. While Turkey did not rely on aid alone in its campaign for a UNSC seat, observers note that increasing foreign aid was crucial to the plan. In announcing its victory to the public, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that while Turkey had not been on the Security Council since 1961, Ankara had already been active in, among other activities, providing humanitarian and technical assistance to countries abroad (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008). It thanked those countries that recognized this and voted for it. This case thus provides further support for my hypothesis, helps illustrate the role of both mechanisms in this process, and the broader point that UNSC elections are strategic contests.

Discussion and conclusion

To explain which states are elected to the UNSC, previous scholars tend to focus on structural features of states like their population size or wealth (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, 2010; Dreher et al., 2014). However, few consistent patterns have emerged to explain which states are more likely to be elected to the UNSC across regions. My paper contributes to this foundational scholarship by highlighting that states which want to be elected to the UN Security Council must campaign for these coveted seats. While there are various ways that states may campaign for the E10 seats (e.g., Malone, 2000), I return to the role of money in politics. Treating UNSC elections as elections inverts previous views of the role of foreign aid in this process and treats it as a campaign tool that, on average, helps a member increase its odds of getting elected by (1) improving perceptions of its good international citizenship, and (2) influencing other members through soft

power channels. Thus, as in domestic elections, appealing to voters' visions of what type of candidate should hold the office and what type of direct benefits they can provide is crucial to electoral success.

This papers thus contributes to our understanding of international cooperation, while also raising new questions and suggesting additional avenues of future research. Here, I focus on three. First, seats on the UN Security Council are diplomatically and economically valuable (e.g., Berlin et al., 2023; Dreher et al., 2009; Reynolds and Winters, 2016). States within regions thus face a distribution problem in deciding which member is elected to the E10 and will enjoy the spoils of the council. Previous views of the UNSC largely see this problem solved through either strong institutional norms of turn-taking or through pressure from the P5 (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, 2010; Caro-Burnett and Weese, 2023; Dreher et al., 2014). This paper suggests that selective benefits are also an important mechanism through which this distribution problem is solved. Importantly, though, the results highlight that a state must ensure success both within and outside its region. This suggests that some of these mechanisms—such as selective benefits and winning favor with regional powers and pressure points—may be linked issues. Future scholars will likely find it fruitful to more fully unpack whether soft power or reputational power is more influential in building a winning coalition and whether these coalitions become sticky across time or form new across elections and regions. This question is of rising importance as elections are becoming more competitive.

Second, this paper also speaks to the debate on whether foreign aid is given for humanitarian or strategic reasons (e.g., Lumsdaine, 1993; Morgenthau, 1962). From the Turkish case, we see that aid is given, at least in part, for strategic reasons. However, from the case of the Netherlands, we also see that even if aid is given, in part, for humanitarian reasons, strings may still be attached—even if not directly or blatantly. Regardless of the initial reason for giving, it appears that donors do see a place for calling on favors and reminding recipients of aid given when such a reminder helps advance the donor's foreign policy goals (see also Dietrich et al., 2017). This strategy raises two questions about the dynamics of UNSC bargaining once the E10 are elected. First, if many of the E10 are buying their way onto the Security Council, how well can such members advance their causes once taking their seats? Do the P5 see them as good international citizens who will be helpful in mobilizing national resources, leadership, and bureaucracy to listen, communicate, bargain, and implement UN resolutions at the global level? Or will the P5 see such a member as having preyed on the weak to have secured a seat and then isolate them? Does the mechanism through which the aid is provided influence these dynamics? Second, if membership on the UNSC is a way to profit from P5 attention and resources (e.g., Berlin et al., 2023; Reynolds and Winters, 2016), but wealthy donor states are the ones making it onto the Council, what does this mean for the P5's ability to control such states monetarily? Do we need to rethink the value of a Security Council seat?

Lastly, this paper highlights one way in which states campaign for seats on the UN Security Council. However, there are likely others. Why do states choose the campaign strategies that they do? Which ones are most successful? Not all states can give significant sums of foreign aid. How do these states make it onto the council? Does the council's approach to maintaining international peace and security change depending on which states—or which campaign strategies—make it into the E10?

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ORCID iD

Gary Uzonyi [iD] https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6006-993X

Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. The election of 1965 saw the non-permanent members expand to 10 but also had voting on how to stagger the seats and the ordering of this new rotation. The election of 1966 was the first with the normalized E10 that the UNSC has today.
2. Each group has its own norms on whether the region prefers turn-taking or an open election for its allocated seat(s). However, these norms have been upheld to varying degrees across time (see Vreeland and Dreher, 2014).
3. Though, in the post-Cold War era, competitive elections are increasingly common (see Security Council Report 2019).
4. Strictly speaking, the UNGA is not bound by the regional group's selection and members may vote for states that were not selected by the group—and sometimes do, even in uncontested races. States not running for election may still receive votes.
5. Calculated as log(aid + 1).
6. The Supplemental Materials (A3, p.5) present additional analysis revealing that the results hold when not lagging the aid variable, when using a linear function of Years Since Elected and after dropping the time polynomial completely, using Log(GDP) instead of Log(GDPpc), and when removing Germany and Japan from the sample.

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Author biography

Gary Uzonyi (PhD, University of Michigan, 2013) is a senior lecturer/associate professor in the University of Strathclyde's Department of Government & Public Policy and a research associate at Vilnius University's Institute of International Relations and Political Science. His research focuses on political violence and how the international community responds to such threats to peace and security.