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States living in glasshouses ...: Why fighting domestic insurgency changes how countries vote in the UN human rights council

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Abstract

How do conflicts within a country's borders affect its behavior beyond them? We argue that fighting insurgencies at home shapes a country's human rights posture at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). States often suppress insurgencies using methods that violate their international human rights commitments. They are therefore hesitant to condemn other countries' alleged violations for fear of reciprocal condemnation of their own actions. This is especially true in countries with greater media freedom where the media is more likely to hold the state accountable for human rights violations, and to highlight its apparent hypocrisy internationally. Such states, we argue, are more likely to vote against or abstain from resolutions that target individual states for human rights transgressions. We test this claim with a global statistical analysis of country voting patterns at the UNHRC from 1973 to 2017. Our results yield new insights into the determinants of countries' voting behavior in multilateral human rights fora.

Keywords

domestic accountability, human rights, insurgency, multilateral institutions

Introduction

Nigeria voted 'yes' 65.17% of the time on targeted resolutions at the United National Human Rights Council (UNHRC) between 2006 and 2017.[1] However, a closer look reveals a puzzling pattern. During years that it was dealing with domestic insurgency, Nigeria's affirmative votes drop to 61.94%, yet, when it is not dealing with insurgency violence, this percentage shoots up to 77.27%. Similarly, Kenya has voted 'yes' on targeted resolutions around 40.35% of the time in

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the same time period but with a similar divergence: its yes vote percentage is 45.83% in years when it did not face an active internal conflict and only 36.36% during periods of insurgency. Is this apparent voting discrepancy at the UNHRC in response to domestic insurgency part of a broader pattern?

It appears so: comparing across all countries that have been members of the UNHRC, those without insurgencies have a yes percentage of 72.29% for targeted resolutions. For countries dealing with domestic insurgencies, this percentage drops to 58.42%. This clear difference is made more intriguing when compared with general resolutions that affirm support for broad principles but do not target specific countries' transgressions at the UNHRC. For such 'principled' general resolutions, the reluctance to vote 'yes' seems to be alleviated for states with insurgencies. States with insurgencies have a 'yes' vote percentage of 81.81% and states without insurgencies have a 'yes' vote percentage of 67.31%. This empirical observation motivates our investigation into why states with insurgencies are more reluctant to vote in favor of targeted resolutions at the UNHRC.

The focus of the extensive current literature on insurgencies has been an evaluation of the strategies and tactics that governments use to fight them (Butt, 2017), the determinants of their duration (Caverley and Sechser, 2017), and the reasons behind their outbreak and escalation (Staniland, 2010), with secondary attention given to the relationship between insurgencies and state capacity and governance (Koren and Sarbahi, 2018). In contrast, the effect of the experience of internal conflict on a country's foreign policies is yet to be examined thoroughly. In this article, we show that states engaged in internal conflict vote differently in multilateral human rights fora than those that do not face domestic challenges to their legitimacy and territorial integrity. Specifically, states dealing with insurgencies are less likely to vote in favor of resolutions that target individual countries for their human rights violations. Our findings open new avenues for understanding the impact of domestic insurgency on a country's foreign policy behavior.

Why are states with insurgencies less likely to vote yes on targeted resolutions at the UNHRC (and at its predecessor, the UN Commission on Human Rights)? The reluctance to support resolutions targeting specific countries, we contend, arises from the state's sensitivity to being criticized for human rights violations that are carried out during counter-insurgencies. States seek to minimize opportunities for other states to criticize their tactics, both for the sake of their international reputation and to manage domestic audiences. Thus, states need to be wary of casting stones at others' glasshouses lest their targets return the favor. This effect is accentuated in countries with high levels of media freedom, where investigative journalists expose violations of human rights during counterinsurgency and the press can highlight government hypocrisy when international proclamations and actions are at odds with domestic practice. Domestic civil society organizations and political oppositions can seize on such reportage to put the government on the defensive about its counter-insurgency tactics and international positions.

In the next two sections, we develop our theoretical framework to explain how states with insurgencies have to contend with both international and domestic audiences (Putnam, 1988). We argue that they are less likely to vote in favor of targeting other states individually for their human rights violations at the UNHRC for fear of repercussions from international and domestic audiences. However, revealingly, they are no less likely to support general resolutions that express support for broad principles about the importance of human rights. Using an data set of country voting behavior at the UNHRC, we test our hypotheses statistically and confirm the negative correlation between insurgencies and targeted voting at the UNHRC across countries. We show that this negative relationship is enhanced as media freedom in the voting state increases. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our study for foreign policy analysis.

Theoretical argument: audience costs of UNHRC votes

Why do states condemn (or ignore) other states for their human rights violations? And, more narrowly, why do states who are members of the UNHRC vote affirmatively on resolutions in that forum? Existing research suggests three broad answers. First, states "name and shame" other states for their human rights transgressions to force violators to comply with international human rights laws (DeMeritt, 2012; DeMeritt and Conrad, 2019; Risse et al., 1999). The core intuition behind this body of work is that international condemnation of states' transgressions of core international commitments carries a moral-suasion power that can sometimes be backed by material consequences.[2] Of course, states also weigh strategic considerations in deciding how to vote. For instance, a second body of research tells us that states align with their allies or blocs to fulfill their role as a member of that grouping of states, for example, the European Union (EU) or Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (Boockmann and Dreher, 2011; Hug and Lukács, 2014; Smith, 2006; Wouters et al., 2008). Thus, they may choose to support or oppose targeting specific states based on the interests of the entire collective. This is an important insight because it indicates that states perceive international audiences for their voting decisions. The vote they cast is not determined solely by their evaluation of the resolution in question, but also informed by how their counterparts will vote and how their international partners would prefer they vote. Third, in another confirmation that international audiences matter for voting states, researchers argue that the decision to condemn or ignore another state for its human rights record can serve as a signaling mechanism. States seeking to burnish their credentials as credible and responsible international actors could do so by supporting resolutions condemning human rights abuses in an international forum (Conrad, 2014; Lebovic and Voeten, 2006; Vreeland, 2008).

We contribute to this literature by asking: how does the experience of countering insurgencies shape member states' voting at the UNHRC? Consistent with prior research, summarized albeit all too briefly above, our theoretical framework is centered on the role of different audiences considered by the voting state. Of course, states might decide how to vote first and foremost based on their evaluations of the merits of the particular resolution being tabled, but they are also savvy that the vote they cast will be recorded and scrutinized by other actors. The obvious audience at the international level comprises other states in the global system. As others have argued, states use their UNHRC votes to signal their adherence to international human rights norms and to make their case as worthy members of the UNHRC. However, not all attention is good attention. Specifically, we argue that since states are aware of the negative repercussions of being targeted for their own human rights records (Peterson et al., 2016; Vadlamannati et al., 2018), they prefer to avoid drawing attention to any violations they have committed. This consideration is especially pertinent for states fighting counter-insurgency battles at home. We posit that countries desire to have all options on the table when dealing with insurgencies. Any threat to the state's sovereignty is considered an existential security threat to the state. Very often, therefore, the branches of government handling insurgencies demand greater leeway in suppressing insurgencies. Regardless of whether or not a state is democratic, it will look to quell insurgent opposition using the most efficient means available. These often involve violating human rights (Akanni, 2019; Cornell and Roberts, 1990; Dickson, 2012; Lyall, 2010). Keeping this in mind, states dealing with insurgencies prefer not to point fingers in a public forum at other countries for their human rights transgressions since their own transgressions could potentially be brought up in the same forum.

We focus on insurgencies for three reasons.[3] First, insurgencies have a clear political goal to challenge the state's sovereignty, and so pose a direct, even existential, threat to the state. Second, because insurgent movements use violence, states normally actively counter them with

violence. Two-sided violence allows us to select cases where states are clearly resorting to violent tactics of suppression, which might violate human rights. Third, while other forms of civil society protest against the state might also escalate to violence, the goals of such protests are varied and do not necessarily pose an existential threat to state control.[4] We keep our theoretical focus narrow in order to evaluate more precisely how states handling violent political opposition to their existence deliberate on their human rights posture.

Sadly, evidence abounds that countries often use repression to counter insurgencies. Repression means the violation of the human right to personal integrity, which "is the right not to be imprisoned, tortured, killed, or made to disappear either arbitrarily or because of political affiliations or convictions" (Keith and Poe, 2004: 1082). Thus, when states indulge in practices of extra-judicial killings,[5] rape,[6] forced disappearances and illegal incarceration of insurgents and their supporters[7], they violate international human rights laws and norms. For example, forced disappearances, torture, arbitrary detention and killing of civilians were some of the tactics that the Sri Lankan state used to suppress the separatist movement for an independent Tamil state (Amnesty International USA, 2020). In Nigeria, the military arbitrarily arrests citizens, including children, for suspected involvement in Boko Haram, a religious insurgent group seeking to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Furthermore, since the armed forces execute these policies of suppression, they demand protection from charges of human rights violation while countering insurgencies (Chadha, 2012). To protect their armed forces, states rarely prosecute human rights violations committed in insurgency areas.[8] Thus, a country dealing with an insurgency is cautious of singling out and condemning other countries' treatment of their own citizens for fear of reciprocal international condemnation of its own actions.

This fear of being shamed at the UNHRC turns out to be quite reasonable. Using data generated by DeMeritt and Conrad (2019), we check whether countries fighting insurgencies are more likely to have resolutions raised against them. The difference between the mean for countries with insurgencies and that for countries without for being shamed for physical integrity violations is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. This gives us confidence in our assumption that states with insurgencies are wary of being targeted in the UNHRC for their human rights record.

Other states are not the only actors observing how UNHRC members vote on resolutions. States must balance their international objectives and their domestic political constraints. We argue that governments do not wish to be embarrassed at home by media and political opponents who would eagerly highlight the hypocrisy of an international pro-human rights posture at the same time that government forces are using extra-constitutional means to suppress domestic insurgencies (Gohdes and Carey, 2017). Indeed, Adhikari (2021) provides evidence that media coverage of countries being named and shamed abroad for their human rights issues can have political consequences at home.

The risk of media exposure is directly correlated with the freedom the press enjoys to speak truth to power. This is especially true in the context of insurgencies which are typically fought in areas cut off from mainstream media coverage and often with limited access for journalists. The fear of a free press might not be able to deter a government from acting badly or violating the law (Whitten-Woodring, 2009, p. 160), but it raises the *ex post* risk of such actions being exposed. This concern about negative media reports of their actions exists in democracies and autocracies (Carey and Gohdes, 2021).

The role of the media is additionally significant because it has the power to rally civil society actors, especially given evidence that, when the media is weak, so is public responsiveness to policy (Hiaeshutter-Rice et al., 2021). Even democracies perceive civil society actors as threats

and find legal mechanisms to repress non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or cut off their international funding (Buyse, 2018; Chaudhry and Heiss, 2022; Dupuy and Prakash, 2022). Civil society actors are often active interlocutors in insurgency areas and have the potential to transform state behavior locally (Ikelegbe, 2001; Marchetti and Tocci, 2020). Human rights organizations like Amnesty International rely on news coverage when they cannot retrieve information on their own (Meernik et al., 2012). Thus, if media reports on a state's human rights records and voting patterns at the UNHRC can provider fodder for civil society organizations' efforts to hold the state accountable, the state will be wary of how it votes to target other countries for their human rights violations.

In addition, the media not only informs the public about human rights issues, but civil society actors also use the media to shed light on the state's transgressions (Chaudhry, 2019; McLagan, 2003). The internet has further expanded the media's reach in this regard. The ability to access non-state-controlled information online allows the public the ability to deliberate independently on issues. The internet has increasingly been used not just by international NGOs but also by local human rights activists as well to draw attention to human rights violations (Gauthier, 2016; Pacheco, 2016). Aware of the media's ability to mobilize the public, states have learned to control internet access, especially in conflict areas (Gohdes, 2020; Gohdes, 2018; Yangyue, 2014). The greater the media freedom within a country, the more likely it is that independent reports on human rights violations get published.

States fighting insurgencies are in a tricky situation when it comes to their international responsibilities at the UNHRC. Knowing that they face considerable scrutiny and criticism of their prosecution of their counter-insurgency tactics at home, they are wary of being caught in an apparently hypocritical situation of voting to condemn other states for the same sins of which they are guilty. This is the second level of the two-level game states must play when they act in international fora. The recognition of the domestic constraints posed by media freedom on states' international postures suggests a second testable implication: countries with higher levels of domestic media freedom will be more cautious while voting at the UNHRC.[9] Greater media freedom should increase public awareness of the state's counterinsurgency policies and its international human rights policies, which in turn makes it more likely that the public will pressure the government to amend its behavior.

Our argument thus yields two testable hypotheses:

> **Hypothesis 1:** Countering domestic insurgencies decreases the likelihood of voting in favor of resolutions that condemn individual countries for human rights violations.
>
> **Hypothesis 2:** When media freedom is high, countries countering domestic insurgencies are even less likely to vote in favor of resolutions that condemn individual countries for human rights violations.

In sum, we expect that states with insurgencies are constrained when considering to vote to target other states for human rights issues because of the fear of reciprocal condemnation by the international audience. The constraint on their voting is further conditioned on the level of media freedom in countries with insurgencies. With greater media freedom, the likelihood is higher that states with insurgencies are reticent to target other states because the media can criticize the state's hypocrisy in its human rights policies. In the next section, we describe a statistical research design to test our hypotheses.

A statistical assessment of insurgencies, media freedom, and UNHRC voting

Data

To test our hypotheses, we examine voting patterns at the UNHRC on targeted resolutions. Since the UNHRC is one of the few fora in which single-country resolutions are repeatedly raised, it is an ideal setting for testing our argument.[10] Founded in 2006, the UNHRC has 47 members that are elected to represent their region for a term of three years. Its predecessor, the UNCHR, was founded in 1946 and was replaced by the UNHRC in 2006.[11] Its mission is “the promotion and protection of all human rights around the globe” (UNHRC, 2020). Since both entities served the same purpose in the UN system and one replaced the other in order to improve effectiveness and credibility (Hug and Lukács, 2014), our argument should apply to both.[12]

The data for our paper span both the Commission (UNCHR) and the Council (UNHRC) from 1973 to 2017. Resolutions passed in the UNHRC can be broadly categorized as thematic, procedural and country-related. In this article, we focus on country-specific (targeted) resolutions. Our dependent variable is the vote cast by members of these fora on country-specific resolutions in a given year (Vote). It takes on a value of 1 if the votes are in favor of the resolution (a “yes” vote) and a value of 0 if the votes are against the resolution (a “no” vote) or if members chose to abstain from voting on the resolution.[13] We group abstentions and “no” votes together because we believe that they signal the same intention vis-à-vis targeted resolutions as compared to affirmative votes, i.e. both indicate a lack of willingness to support a targeted resolution.[14] For the given time span, there are 47 target countries for such resolutions.[15]

Our main explanatory variable indicates whether or not a member of the UNCHR/UNHRC is dealing with an insurgency in a given year (*Insurgency*). The data are drawn from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict dataset (version 4-2016).[16] UCDP/PRIO’s conflict measure entails “a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year” (Pettersson, 2020: 4). This definition aligns with our understanding that the state is an active party to a conflict wherein the non-state actor uses violence to contest state sovereignty.[17] The variable *Insurgency* is coded as 1 for those years in which battle deaths are greater than or equal to 25 and 0 for years that fall below this threshold for sub-state violence in which at least one of the actors is the government (Harbom et al., 2008).

Both the UNCHR and the UNHRC are notorious for the disproportionate number of resolutions that are raised against Israel.[18] In our data, Israel is the target for 31.11% of the resolutions, which is 23.43 percentage points higher than the next most targeted county (Iran). In order to account for this, we have included a dummy variable for those resolutions that target Israel specifically (*Israel resolutions*).

UNHRC votes are also shaped by other considerations. For instance, some of the factors that need to be controlled while ascertaining voting behavior are alliances or alignments with great powers. Great powers can use incentives to make countries vote against their preferences. We create a binary variable for members who have defense pacts with the USA (*US security alliance*) since the USA might put more pressure on such countries to vote in favor of targeted resolutions against countries that the USA wants to shame internationally (Gibler, 2009). During the Cold War, each bloc may have influenced its allies to vote in specific ways, which may have aligned with their own interests and been at the expense of human rights. We employ a control (*Cold War*), which is a binary variable coded ‘1’ for the Cold War and ‘0’ otherwise.

Voting behavior may also be a factor of how states position themselves within a US-led liberal international order. States that favor the *status quo* may be more likely to condemn other states for their human rights violations while states that are dissatisfied with the contemporary international order may be less inclined to condemn other states for their transgressions. To capture a state's orientation toward the US-led international order, we use Bailey et al.'s (2017) ideal point data (*US affinity*).

Bloc voting is often cited as explaining vote patterns at the UNCHR/UNHRC. Bloc memberships can exert pressure on countries to stick to a specific agenda. Some regional groups are more concerned about issues of human rights than others. For instance, the EU has stringent rules of membership that include certain human rights standards. Thus, being a member of the EU might influence voting strongly in favor of human rights. In contrast, certain other groups might shield some states from accusations of human rights violations while targeting other states. For instance, members of the OIC often sponsor resolutions that favor Palestine and condemn Israel.[19] Another grouping that often raises agenda items together in the UN is the Group of 77 (G77).[20] Indicator variables for EU (*EU member*), OIC (*OIC member*) and G77 (*G77 countries*) membership are used to control for these effects.

Russia and China are significant examples of states that are known for their human rights violations but have never had a resolution sponsored against them. Since the five permanent members of the UN Security Council have disproportionate influence in the UN system, these countries know that they can vote on other countries with impunity. Thus, their voting behavior is not constrained by their own human rights violations. We therefore consider a P5 indicator control for these countries useful (*P5*).

Whether or not a country strongly condemns another country for its actions may also depend on how closely linked the two countries are, especially in terms of trade.[21] The greater the volume of trade between a member country and a target country, the less likely it is that a member country will vote in favor of a public resolution against the target country. Accounting for such a strong relationships between states is a measure of annual bilateral trade volume (*Bilateral trade flow*) from the Correlates of War Project Trade Data Set (Barbieri and Keshk, 2016). The data span the years 1973–2014.[22]

The democratic or autocratic nature of a government should also determine how countries vote on resolutions. Democratic countries that uphold transparency and greater accountability (Davenport and Armstrong, 2004) may be more inclined to condemn other countries for human rights violations in comparison with autocratic states that are more supportive of obfuscating domestic politics. Our *Authoritarian* variable categorizes countries as democracies (0), anocracies (1) and autocracies (2) as per the Polity IV guidelines (Marshall and Jaggers, 2000). We expect a negative relationship between our dependent variable and being authoritarian.[23] A dramatic change in a country's regime type may also impact voting behavior (Meyerrose and Nooruddin, forthcoming). We believe that a swing toward becoming more authoritarian can result in more repressive state measures. Therefore, we coded a binary variable called *Autocratic regime change*, which takes on a value of 1, for a drop in a country's polity score from one year to the next that is greater than 3.

Targets of resolutions may themselves be members of the UNCHR/UNHRC. In such instances, the dynamic between voting states and the target state might be different than those cases in which the target state is absent from the resolution's proceedings. Members might be reluctant to vote in favor of targeting another member state. We control for such circumstances by adding a binary variable that identifies target states as member states as well (*Target is HRC member*). To capture the

unusual dynamics that do occur when a member state is the target of a UNHRC resolution while they are on the Council, we include an indicator for *Voting State is also a target*.

We include a linear *time trend* to control for whether states are increasingly more inclined to condemn other states for human rights violations as the years pass and norms on human rights evolve.

Finally, note that we do not include controls for a country's own human rights record as proxied by existing cross-national measures of state repression or violations of physical integrity for two reasons. First, prior studies warn against including both civil war and measures of repression in a single model. Battle death indicators of sub-state conflict "overlap empirically with the most widely available measures of repression"—CIRI and the Political Terror Scale (Hill and Jones, 2014: 677). Second, when states are fighting insurgencies, our argument is that they are more likely to violate human rights. Hill and Jones (2014) show that civil war is one of the most powerful predictors of state repression. The proposition is borne out by a simple *t*-test that shows that human rights scores are worse in these countries than in their peaceful counterparts. We use the physical integrity (PHYSINT) measure from Cingranelli et al. (2014), which ranges from 0 ("no respect for physical integrity") to 8 ("full respect"). In our sample, the average for peaceful countries is 5.20, while the average for countries facing domestic insurgency is 1.78. This difference is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. Given the findings in Hill and Jones (2014) and the confirmation of their results in our own data, a model that included a state's repression scores would be incorrectly specified since it would be controlling for a causal posterior; we prefer not to make that error. However, to allay concerns about potential omitted variable bias, we present our models with four different human rights measures in Online Appendix Table A9.1. Our results do not change.

Analysis

The data reveal a strong norm for voting in favor of targeted resolutions. Some 62.23% of the 14,498 votes cast on targeted resolutions across time are "yes" votes. When we further disaggregate this data by our independent variable of interest—*Insurgency*—we find that countries without insurgencies have a "yes" vote percentage of 64.56%. However, countries with insurgencies only vote "yes" in 52.77% of all resolutions. This bivariate difference is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. The considerable difference in voting "yes" based on the presence of an insurgency is *prima facie* evidence in favor of our argument, and what we seek to confirm in our multivariate analysis.

The principal test of our hypothesis that countering domestic insurgencies decreases the likelihood of voting in favor of resolutions that condemn specific countries for human rights violations is shown in the three logit models in Table 1. The unit of analysis for all our model specifications is a directed dyad from the member of the UNCHR/UNHRC toward the target country of a resolution. The standard errors for our models are clustered by the member states that vote at the UNCHR/UNHRC.

Table 1 presents our findings with our measure of insurgency defined in terms of the presence or absence of sub-state conflict. Our first model estimates the relationship between domestic insurgencies and voting behavior in the baseline case that controls only for whether the resolution targeted Israel and the time trend. Our argument predicts a statistically significant negative relationship between insurgencies and voting in favor of a resolution that specifically targets another country. This seems to be the case with the effect of insurgencies on voting being negative and highly statistically significant.

Table 1. Relationship between insurgencies and voting behavior.

Vote (1 = yes 0 = no/abstain)	(1) Basic	(2) Full	(3) No Israel resolutions
Insurgency	−0.472***	−0.294**	−0.464***
	(−5.48)	(−3.21)	(−3.59)
Israel resolutions	0.541*	0.225	
	(2.44)	(1.02)	
US affinity		0.0379	0.473***
		(0.42)	(4.70)
US security alliance		−0.0460	0.139
		(−0.43)	(0.94)
P5 state		−0.310*	−0.820***
		(−2.50)	(−4.32)
EU member		−0.0501	0.297
		(−0.33)	(1.30)
OIC member		−0.173	−0.274
		(−1.46)	(−1.77)
G77 countries		0.0408	−0.208
		(0.26)	(−1.18)
Authoritarian		−0.179*	−0.184*
		(−2.55)	(−2.32)
Autocratic regime change		−0.120	−0.180
		(−0.63)	(−0.70)
HRC member		−0.558***	−0.636***
		(−6.68)	(−8.02)
Cold war		0.736***	0.649**
		(4.32)	(2.88)
Bilateral trade flow		−0.0000154	−0.0000114
		(−1.57)	(−1.73)
Voting state is also a target		−0.0849	−0.198
		(−0.75)	(−1.34)
Time trend	0.00248	0.0304***	0.0274**
	(0.62)	(4.63)	(3.11)
Constant	0.368***	−0.140	0.269
	(3.75)	(−0.48)	(0.70)
Observations	14491	11378	7802

The *t*-statistics are in parentheses.
$^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

The second model adds the full set of controls described above. After controlling for other explanations, we find that insurgencies are still negatively correlated with voting in favor of targeted resolutions and statistically significant at the 0.01 level. As for the alternative explanations, the authoritarian nature of a government and whether the target state is also a member of the UNHRC in a given year are both statistically significant with negative relationships with voting 'yes', as expected. Bilateral trade, changes in democratic scores, defense alliances with the US and bloc memberships do not appear to have a significant impact on voting behavior.

The third model is a replication of the second after excluding the resolutions that target Israel in order to see whether the disproportionate number of Israel-targeted resolutions in the sample are affecting the results. We expect that without Israel resolutions, our claim should be strengthened since voting patterns on Israel are often based on a long history of anti-colonial rhetoric or bloc-voting agendas. We observe that this is indeed the case with the relationship between insurgencies and voting remaining negative and statistically significant. It is interesting to note that after dropping resolutions on Israel, a voting state's *US affinity* ideal point estimate becomes statistically significant with a positive relationship with voting. Such a relationship is consistent with the expectation that countries that are more aligned with the US-led liberal world order will be more likely to vote in favor of targeted resolutions concerning human rights.

A first placebo test comparing the voting patterns of targeted resolutions with general resolutions confirms that insurgencies do not impact voting patterns for UNHRC *general* resolutions. Results can be found in Table A8.1 in the Online Appendix. A second placebo test concerns voting on general human rights issues at the UN General Assembly (UNGA). As expected, insurgency is not a significant predictor since the UNGA resolutions involve many general declarations (see Appendix Table A8.2).[24]

Table 2 reports the models that test our second, interactive hypothesis that media freedom should amplify the dynamic just uncovered. If a country is criticized internationally for its human rights record, it will be reported in the media in its country if there's a high degree of media freedom. To prevent such negative coverage being broadcast to their domestic constituencies, countries with greater media freedom that have insurgencies should see a greater drop in the probability of voting "yes" as compared with countries with more media censorship and insurgencies. The models in Table 2 test this interactive hypothesis that insurgencies in countries with more freedom of the press will result in a greater drop in the likelihood of voting in favor of a targeted resolution as compared with countries without such media freedom. We include an interaction term between *Insurgency* and *Media Freedom* in our three baseline models and replace *Authoritarian* with *Media Freedom*, a binary variable wherein "0" indicates regular government censorship of media while "1" indicates rare media censorship (Coppedge et al., 2018).[25] As the models in

Table 2. Interaction between insurgency and media censorship.

Vote (1 = yes 0 = no/abstain)	(1) Basic	(2) Full	(3) No Israel resolutions
Insurgency	−0.346***	−0.174†	−0.326*
	(−3.41)	(−1.79)	(−2.37)
Insurgency = 1 × Media freedom = 1	−0.490*	−0.583*	−0.709†
	(−2.05)	(−2.38)	(−1.93)
Media freedom	0.345**	0.341*	0.492*
	(3.24)	(2.01)	(2.55)
Constant	0.230	−0.512	−0.167
	(1.95)	(−1.69)	(−0.42)
Controls	No	Yes	Yes
Israel resolutions	Yes	Yes	No
Time trend	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	14399	11378	7802

The *t*-statistics are in parentheses; standard errors clustered by voting state.
†$p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2 show, the interaction term is negative and statistically significant, meaning that states with insurgencies and high media freedom are less likely to vote in favor of targeted resolutions. Figure 1 displays the predicted effects of insurgency on the probability of voting "yes" for targeted resolutions based on media freedom using the coefficient estimates from model 2 in Table 2. In the absence of insurgency, states with high media freedom are more likely to vote in favor of targeted resolutions at the UNHRC than states with low media freedom, which is consistent with the expectation that these are states that take human rights more seriously. However, in the presence of insurgency, states with high media freedom are statistically indistinguishable (i.e. their confidence intervals overlap) from their low-media-freedom counterparts. Thus, our expectation that the voting behavior of countries with greater media freedom will be more negatively affected by insurgencies is upheld.

The quantitative analyses reported in this section provide strong and robust evidence supporting our theoretical argument that countries with insurgencies are less likely to vote in favor of targeted resolutions at the UNHRC. In the final section we consider the implications of our findings for our understanding of how states vote in the UNHRC and identify opportunities for future research in this area.

Conclusion

Our research illuminates an hitherto under-explored dimension of how the experience of fighting insurgencies affects governments by exploring its effects on how countries participate in international human rights fora. We show that insurgencies, a major concern especially for many

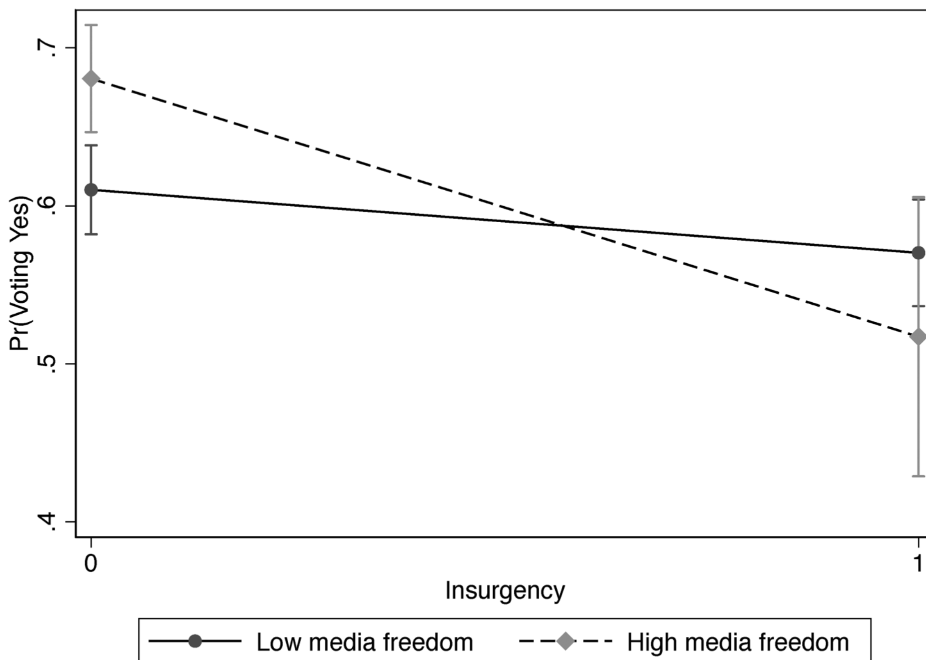

Figure 1. Predictive margins of insurgency with 95% confidence intervals.

developing countries, affect how states conduct themselves in international institutions. In this paper we have shown that voting behavior at the UNHRC (previously UNCHR) is influenced by whether or not a member state is countering an insurgency domestically. Countering insurgencies often involves employing measures that violate a state's international human rights commitments. In order to prevent being criticized for such violations at the UNHRC, states experiencing domestic conflict are less willing to vote in favor of resolutions that target specific countries.

We demonstrate that this effect is especially pronounced in countries with relatively strong media freedom. When there is freedom of the press, states with insurgencies are wary of condemning other states for their human rights violations because the media can report on this hypocritical behavior, thus fueling domestic criticism against the state. Civil society actors often rely on the media to convey the state's postures and actions on human rights. When there is reported evidence of the state pointing fingers at others while itself violating human rights during counterinsurgencies, the hypocrisy helps civil society actors build a case to hold the state accountable. Thus, while one would expect freedom of the press to associated with a commitment to the rule of law that would lead that to states adopt a pro-human rights posture internationally, the presence of an insurgency undermines this assumption. Our data make clear that states with insurgencies that have a relatively free media are less likely to vote in favor of targeted resolutions and in fact are indistinguishable from their counterparts that repress the press in their voting behavior.

The quantitative analyses based on cross-national time-series data that form the core of the paper provide strong support for our hypotheses that countering domestic insurgencies decreases the likelihood of voting in favor of resolutions that condemn individual countries for human rights violations. Even when controlling for a variety of other explanations for voting behavior based on prior research such as bloc voting, strategic signaling, or desire to shame targets, the presence of an insurgency in a country is negatively correlated with the likelihood of voting affirmatively on targeted resolutions at the UNHRC. States that are countering insurgencies are reluctant to target other states publicly because they fear being criticized for their human rights violations. We also show that this concern is warranted since countries with insurgencies are far more likely to be shamed at the UNHRC than countries that do not have to deal with insurgencies.

Additionally, the data support our second hypothesis that countries with greater media freedom and the presence of insurgencies are less likely to vote in favor of targeted resolutions. Our interaction model conveys how in the absence of insurgency, countries with greater media freedom are more likely to vote in favor of targeted resolutions. However, in the presence of insurgencies, the difference between countries with and without media freedom is insignificant. Our results point to the reluctance to vote affirmatively on targeted resolutions for states with insurgencies and high media freedom. These results imply that international considerations of reciprocity in voting at the UNHRC are further constrained by domestic factors like media freedom when states are dealing with insurgencies. Thus, media freedom at home can actually result in states being more circumspect in their voting behavior abroad.

Our analysis makes three important contributions for future research. First, we provide evidence that states worry about the repercussions of having a spotlight focused on their human rights violations during counterinsurgency operations, which in turns affects their foreign policy. We offer a new explanation of voting behavior at the UNHRC regarding the role of substate violence that supplements the existing literature on the subject. Alongside other explanations like the tendency of a state to vote with its bloc, strategic posturing to signal responsible behavior, alignment with US-led liberal international order or punishment for human rights violations, countering insurgencies offers another compelling explanation of countries' voting behavior at the UNCHR/UNHRC. The impact

of insurgencies on voting behavior can, therefore, also be tested at other international organizations like the UNGA where targeted and general resolutions can be differentiated.

Second, our research paves the way for further unpacking the different dimensions of anti-state political activity. While recent scholarship has shown how UNHRC shaming increases the likelihood of women participating in protests, but that this effect is more muted when there is state repression (Adhikari et al., 2023), our results should encourage future researchers to expand our argument to understanding the impact of violent civil society protest on state voting behavior in international fora. An extension of our argument would be to test whether violent protests against the government elicit repressive measures from the state, which in turn affect voting decisions on international human rights issues. Additionally, this can be compared with state responses to non-violent protests to see whether all types of protest contribute to constraining a state's voting behavior on human rights issues.

Third, the subsequent step from our research would be to explore how insurgencies can affect foreign policy outcomes beyond voting behavior in international organizations. Given that many states contend with insurgencies for substantial periods of time, it is reasonable to expect that insurgencies are a part of a state's strategic calculations when it comes to foreign policy-making. Furthermore, insurgencies along international borders can involve neighboring states, which further nuances foreign policy calculations. This can range from issues of bilateral economic policy to multilateral international institutional participation. For instance, external state support for insurgents could make states wary of deepening ties with states that seek to undermine its sovereign authority. This could result in limited bilateral trade relations or subpar regional integration arrangements that would otherwise benefit the state. Thus, our results should motivate further investigation of the impact of insurgencies on a variety of foreign policy issues.

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Supplemental material

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Notes

1. *Targeted* resolutions name specific countries as the subject of scrutiny for human rights issues, and are to be distinguished from *general* resolutions which focus on broader issues (e.g. physical integrity rights) but that do not name specific countries as the target of the resolution.
2. The effectiveness of targeting is debated. Detractors argue that effects—if any—last only for a limited duration (Franklin, 2008). Others go further and argue the effect of targeting is non-existent (Hafner-Burton,

2008). The politicization of targeting often renders resolutions ineffectual (Hug and Lukács, 2014). However, there is evidence that countries that are criticized for their human rights violations by international organizations and non-governmental organizations suffer negative economic consequences like reduced levels of foreign aid and loans, foreign direct investment flows and exports in the case of repressive regimes (Esarey and DeMeritt, 2017; Lebovic and Voeten, 2009; Barry et al., 2013; Woo and Murdie, 2017).

3. We understand insurgency as a strategy that comprises "organized, protracted politico-military struggles" aiming either to overthrow the current social order or government in order to replace it or to secede from the state to establish a separate political entity (US Army and Marine Corps, 2007: 2–3). Insurgents use a variety of tactics alongside violence including recruitment, political party formation and propaganda.
4. An implication of our argument is that, if the intensity of the insurgency increases, we would expect its impact on voting behavior in international fora to be greater. This is because more intense insurgencies make it more likely that states will resort to more extreme measures to put down rebels, and because states are more vulnerable to opposition criticism when violence intensifies. We provide evidence for this proposition in the Online Appendix (Table A2.2). While outside the scope of this study, future research could evaluate whether state suppression of all types of dissent—violent and non-violent—leads to similar voting outcomes.
5. A clear violation of the UDHR and the ICCPR.
6. A violation of customary International Humanitarian Law as noted in Volume II, Chapter 32, Section G in Henckaerts and Doswald-Beck (2005).
7. A violation of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (2010).
8. At the international level, the USA infamously demanded that states sign bilateral immunity agreements to protect its service members fighting abroad from prosecution by the International Criminal Court (Nooruddin and Payton, 2010).
9. A less precise version of this hypothesis is that more democratic countries should also be more sensitive to domestic insurgency in deciding how strenuously to prosecute human rights violations by other states. We provide evidence for this in the Online Appendix (Table A6.1) but privilege the media freedom argument in the main text since it is a more precise mechanism.
10. There is an important distinction between voting on resolutions at the UNHRC and the UNHRC's Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Targeted resolutions are aimed at specific countries in order to shame them in a public forum. The UPR, in contrast, is not a process that specifically targets any one country—rather, it allows all countries to comment on human rights issues of all other countries. Our argument does not apply in the case of the UPR because states need not fear being shamed individually to defend themselves in a public forum for their transgressions.
11. There were 53 members when it was still the UN Commission on Human Rights but it switched to 47 members after becoming the Council in 2006.
12. Online Appendix Table A7.1 reports a robustness test by estimating our models on resolutions in just the Commission and the Council separately. Nothing changes.
13. For the UNCHR, our data are drawn from Lebovic and Voeten (2006) for the years 1973–2001 and our own coding for the years of 2002–2005. For the UNHRC, we utilize M. Joel Voss' data (2016) for 2006–2013 and code our own data for 2014–2017.
14. We provide estimates from multinomial logit models in Online Appendix Table A1.1 with 'yes', 'no', and 'abstain' votes as three separate categories. These reveal no significant difference between abstentions and no votes while there is a significant difference between abstentions and yes votes. Our overall hypothesis that countries countering insurgencies are less likely to vote in favor of targeted resolutions is still upheld.
15. We analyze only those resolutions that were contested and put to a vote and not those that were passed with a consensus because consensus resolutions evenly distribute the collective burden of decision-making. Countries do not need to individually explain their position. If responsibility is diffused, then states do not need to deliberate as much on the potential repercussion that they might face individually. Resolutions that are put to a roll-call vote are better tools for parsing out variation in voting preferences.

16. The data of concern for us are based on Conflict Type 3 and 4 from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset.
17. Online Appendix Tables A2.1–A2.5 report a series of robustness checks with other measures of insurgency and conflict intensity. We test a narrow measure of separatist movements and self-determination movements, anti-system opposition movements, the number of insurgencies and increased thresholds of battle deaths. Our results do not change.
18. For more information on this trend across both bodies, see Hug (2016).
19. For instance, in the June 2015 session, Pakistan, on behalf of the OIC, sponsored a resolution on "Ensuring accountability and justice for all violations of international law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem".
20. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.
21. States might also be concerned about voting on a resolution targeting a foreign aid donor. However, only 58 out of 14,498 dyads qualify as being aid donor–recipient dyads where the donor was the targeted country of a UNHCR resolution, leading to too few observations in our models. We report the models that include foreign aid as a control in Online Appendix Table 10.1.
22. We conduct a robustness check by substituting COW bilateral trade data with UN Comtrade data; see Online Appendix Table A4.1).
23. As a robustness check, we use various other democratic measures from the V-Dem (Coppedge et al., 2018) dataset (see Online Appendix Table A3.1). Our findings do not change.
24. We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting the use of the UNGA voting records as an additional placebo test.
25. As a robustness check, we estimate the same models with a continuous measure of media censorship and find the same outcome, see Online Appendix Table A5.1. We also estimate a model with an interaction term between *Insurgency* and *Authoritarian* (Online Appendix Table A6.1). The results hold.

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