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Abstract

Why did some countries vote not to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine at the United National General Assembly's first emergency session since 1997? Our study examines different economic, political, geographic and historical reasons behind the voting behaviour of several countries in favour of Russia. Probit regressions show that higher dependence on military exports from Russia, years ruled by leftists, access to Russian markets for exports, being a major recipient of Russian aid, being former members of Soviet Union and sharing borders with Russia are positively associated with the probability of voting in favour of Russia. Factors which reduce the probability of support for Russia over the Ukraine invasion are higher levels of civil and political freedom within a country and percentage of exports from Russia to partners in total Russia exports.

1. Introduction

Russian forces launched a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, in a major escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict that Russia began in 2014[1] (BBC, 2022a).

The United Nations (UN, 2022) General Assembly overwhelmingly adopted a resolution (A/RES/ES-11/1) on 2 March 2022 demanding that Russia "immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders." Out of 193 UN Member states, 141 countries voted in favour of the resolution, which reaffirms Ukrainian independence, sovereignty and territorial

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[1] To see an overview of Ukraine crisis timeline since 1991, see https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26248275

integrity. Belarus, Eritrea, North Korea, Russia and Syria voted against the resolution, while 35 abstained and 12 did not vote (UN, 2022)[2].

Although Russia's attack on Ukraine has led to an almost extraordinary level of international unity, with 73% of countries voting in favour of the UN resolution, why did some countries decide to abstain, not vote or even vote against the condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine? The purpose of this study is to explore the potential determinants of country voting behaviour in favour of Russia during the 11th emergency special session of the UN General Assembly on Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Using data from 85 countries and applying Probit regressions, our results show that voting in favour of Russia is higher among those countries which import more military equipment from Russia, were ruled by leftist leaders for longer periods, have lower levels of political freedom, are former members of the Soviet Union and share geographical borders with Russia.

Our study is closely related to the literature on country voting behaviour in the UN (e.g. Che et al., 2021; Wittkopf, 1973; Bailey et al., 2017; Woo & Chung, 2018; Alexander & Rooney, 2019; Yan & Zhou, 2021; Dreher et al., 2008; Dreher & Jensen, 2013; Dreher et al., 2018a; Dreher et al., 2018b; Keohane, 1967). These studies have mainly focused on countries' political support of China and the US in the UN. They generally show that bilateral trade with and foreign aid from China and the US are important determinants of voting behaviour in the UN. For example, Che et al. (2021) find that an increase in African countries' resource exports to China increases the probability of voting alignment with China in the UN. Alexander and Rooney (2019) show that the US directs aid toward rotating members of the UN Security Council to influence their voting behaviour to be in line with US interests.

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[2] For more details about the resolution, see https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3959039?ln=en

In addition to previous empirical studies, there have been some conceptual articles by observers and the media on why some nations voted in favour of Russia in the resolution (A/RES/ES-11/1). For instance, according to a BBC report on Africa, existing sanctions on Zimbabwe politicians, as well as bilateral and ideological ties between Russia and Zimbabwe, were the key determinants of Zimbabwe's decision to abstain from the vote. Mali abstained from the UN resolution vote because of military support from Russia (BBC, 2022b). Tawat (2022) argues that countries with close military (such as military bases and joint military operations) and ideological ties with Russia either abstained or voted against the resolution. CNN report (Busari, 2022) notes that "*many of the countries that abstained from the UN vote are authoritarian regimes. They see Putin's unilateral decision to invade Ukraine as a show of power and ego that they can appreciate and align with*". In the same report, other factors such as import of military products from Russia and access to Russian markets are identified as key determinants of support of Russia. Loffhagen (2022) argues that sharing a border and strong trade ties with Russia, as well as having an authoritarian leader, can explain Belarus's vote against the resolution. She also notes that India abstained in the voting because of India's reliance on Russia for military equipment.

Although the above-mentioned descriptive reports provide valuable insights, there is a lack of data-driven cross-country investigation in understanding the voting behaviour of countries in support of Russia during the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war. We address this gap using a multivariate regression analysis, which helps to isolate the effect of each potential determinant for voting behaviour of countries after adjusting for other factors.

The rest of the article proceeds as follows: Section 2 describes the data and the estimation method; Section 3 presents and discusses the empirical results; and Section 4 concludes.

2. Data and Estimation Method

Sample

We use data for 85 countries. Our sample covers countries for which data on all variables are obtainable. The sample contains a wide range of countries including major emerging economies (e.g., China and India) and main advanced economies (e.g., the US, Japan and Germany), which account for most of the world's total trade and outputs. Our sample also includes countries from different continents. Table A1 in Appendix shows the sample of 85 countries for our analyses.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable in our study is "*Vote in favour of Russia*" in the resolution of Aggression against Ukraine (No. A/RES/ES-11/1). It is a dummy variable which equals 1 if a country either voted against the resolution, or abstained or did not vote and 0 if a country voted in favour of the resolution against the Russian invasion. Country voting data on 2 March 2022 are collected from the United Nations Digital Library.[3]

Explanatory variables

We included 12 explanatory variables which explain country voting behaviour in the UN General Assembly resolution (No. A/RES/ES-11/1).

Import military equipment from Russia: This is the share of a country's military exports from Russia. We expect that countries with higher levels of dependency on Russian military equipment would have greater support for Russia. To measure this variable, we use the share in military exports from Russia over the period 2000-2021. Data for this variable are obtained from the *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute* (SIPRI, 2022)[4].

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[3] https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3959039
[4] https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/html/export_values.php

Country's freedom: It is expected that the probability of voting against the Russian invasion is higher among those countries with more political rights and civil liberties. In more democratic societies, politicians are (or must be) supportive of democratic values and higher demand for accountability and checks and balances by civil society. Therefore, a democratic government would vote against invasion and aggression in other parts of the world. As a proxy for country democracy and accountability, we use the Freedom House Index (2021) which ranges from 3 = Free, 2 = Partly Free, and 1 = Not Free. A country's freedom score depends on its political rights and civil liberties scores[5].

Government's leftist ideologies in the past: Independent of the type of political regime (democracy vs. autocracy), dominance of a specific political ideology in a country may also influence their international positions. We use the percentage of years ruled by leftists in each country from 1945 to 2020 to capture the historical influence of leftist ideology at the state level. This ideology includes more sympathy toward socialism and communism, emphasises economic equality, and more critically observes the expansion of capitalism institutions worldwide. Data for this variable are obtained from Herre (2021). We expect that countries which were governed by leftist leaders for longer periods, especially in autocratic systems, tend to vote against the US and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) hegemony, *ceteris paribus*.

Trade ties with Russia: Another important factor that may shape voting against or in favour of Russia can be a country's volume of trade with Russia. The probability of voting in favour of Russia would be higher among those countries that have stronger trade relationships with Russia. Reducing or losing access to Russia's large goods and services market might be costly for political leaders when deciding to vote in favour of or against Russia. Many economies

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[5] For more details about the index methodology, see https://freedomhouse.org/reports/freedom-world/freedom-world-research-methodology

import some strategic products such as energy carriers and basic food from Russia. Relying on Russia's supply of these products may discourage political leaders to challenge Russia. The existing literature also shows that international trade patterns are important for the UN General Assembly voting for two reasons: (1) trade interdependence might create similar preferences on certain topics between partner countries (Dreher et al., 2008); (2) strong bilateral trade relationship between countries might create fears of losing access to source and destination markets (Dreher et al., 2008; Keohane, 1967). Data on Russian exports and imports with trading partners from 2019 (the latest data) are collected from the World Integrated Trade Solution of the World Bank (2022). Russian major trading partner countries for exports were China, Netherlands, Germany, Belarus and Turkey and for imports, China, Germany, Belarus, the US and Italy.

In the regressions, we include two variables to capture trade relationships with Russia: *percentage of imports by Russian from partners in total Russian imports* and *percentage of exports from Russian to partners in total Russian exports*. We expect to observe a favourable position toward Russia from countries with a higher share in the Russian economy.

Recipient of Russian aid: As highlighted by Alexander and Rooney (2019), Che et al. (2021), Dreher et al. (2008), global great powers utilize financial aids to induce the recipients to vote in line with their interests in the UN. Given Russian political and economic dominance in the global arena, we expect that recipients of Russian aid would be more likely to vote in favour of Russia in the UN General Assembly resolution (No. A/RES/ES-11/1). As a proxy for this variable, we generate a dummy which takes value of 1 if a country (e.g., Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua) receives at least 5% of total Russian foreign aid (from 2011 to 2015) and 0 otherwise. Data for the allocation of Russian aid (2011-2015) by recipient country are collected from Asmus et al. (2018).

Experience of sanctions in the past: Countries which have been under economic and financial sanctions by the European Union (EU), the UN or the US may have more critical attitudes toward international order and institutions. They may be less likely to follow global powers in the decision to control their challengers, even for legitimate reasons. Some of these countries with a history of sanctions may also require the support of Russia in their negotiations with the imposers of the sanctions. In addition, many sanctioned countries have also low freedom score levels and thus may not worry about losing their international image and reputation if they do not support global community initiatives. We include three dummy variables in the regressions which take value of 1 if a country has been imposed sanctions by the EU, the UN or the US. Data for sanctions are collected from SanctIO (2022).

Former member of the Soviet Union: For this variable, a dummy is created that takes the value of 1 if a country was part of the Soviet Union and 0 otherwise. A positive relationship between this variable and "*Vote in favour of Russia*" is expected.

Land border with Russia: It is also anticipated that countries neighbouring Russia have a greater tendency to vote in favour of and not challenge Russia for their own security and stability reasons. We introduce a dummy that obtains a value of 1 for a country that share a land border with Russia (e.g., Belarus and Mongolia) and 0 otherwise.

War with former Soviet Union: Countries which were previously involved in an armed conflict with the Soviet Union that resulted in destruction and human loss (e.g., Afghanistan, Norway and Poland) tend to vote against the Russian invasion of Ukraine. A dummy is generated for this variable which takes value of 1 if a country was involved in a war with the Soviet Union in the past and 0 otherwise. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of variables.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Vote in favor of Russia	85	0.46	0.50	0	1
Share in military exports from Russia (2000-2021)	85	1.66	4.31	0.02	29.84
Freedom House Index (2021)	85	1.71	0.80	1	3
Percentage of years ruled by leftists (1945-2020)	85	48.68	34.97	0	100
Percentage of imports by Russia from partners in total Russia imports	85	0.71	2.53	0	21.91
Percentage of exports from Russia to partners in total Russia exports	85	0.69	1.76	0	13.43
Recipient of Russian aid (2011-2015)	85	0.08	0.27	0	1
EU Sanctions	85	0.18	0.39	0	1
UN Sanctions	85	0.09	0.29	0	1
US Sanctions	85	0.18	0.39	0	1
Member of former Soviet Union	85	0.10	0.31	0	1
Land border with Russia	85	0.08	0.27	0	1
War with former Soviet Union	85	0.10	0.31	0	1

Estimation method

Since the dependent variable is a binary variable that takes the values of 0 and 1, we apply a Probit regression for our estimation, which assumes that the probability of a positive outcome is determined by the standard normal cumulative distribution function. In other words, we interpret a value of zero as a negative outcome (failure) and treat a value of one as a positive outcome (success).

The Probit model is specified as follows:

$$\text{Prob} (\text{VOTE}_j \neq 0 \mid x_j) = \Phi (x_j \beta) \qquad\qquad (1)$$

where VOTE_j is the dependent variable coded as 1 if a country votes in favour of Russia in the UN General Assembly Resolution ES-11/1 and 0 if otherwise, x_j represents the explanatory variables, Φ is the standard cumulative normal, and β is a vector of parameters to be estimated.

3. Results

Table 2 presents the estimation results. The different specifications (columns 1 to 6) include various determinants of "*Vote in favour of Russia*". In all specifications, we include the same number of countries.

Table 2. Drivers of vote in favor of Russia in the UN General Assembly resolution, Probit regression (marginal effects)

	Dependent variable: Vote in favor of Russia					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share in military exports from Russia (2000-21)	0.050	0.043	0.064**	0.060**	0.058**	0.063**
	(1.524)	(1.467)	(2.270)	(2.447)	(2.355)	(2.213)
Freedom House Index (2021)	-0.170***	-0.139**	-0.144***	-0.113*	-0.121**	-0.148***
	(-3.101)	(-2.326)	(-2.693)	(-1.954)	(-2.175)	(-2.772)
% of years ruled by leftists (1945-2020)	0.003**	0.003**	0.002*	0.002*	0.003**	0.003**
	(2.109)	(2.084)	(1.906)	(1.876)	(1.992)	(2.196)
% of imports by Russia from partners in total Russia imports	0.074	0.052	0.205*	0.123	0.132	0.211*
	(1.027)	(0.779)	(1.832)	(1.288)	(1.377)	(1.803)
% of exports from Russia to partners in total Russia exports	-0.097	-0.083	-0.400***	-0.258*	-0.272*	-0.430***
	(-1.429)	(-1.290)	(-2.709)	(-1.713)	(-1.912)	(-2.831)
Recipient of Russian aid (2011-2015)	0.367**	0.360*	0.249*	0.226	0.232	
	(2.111)	(1.944)	(1.672)	(1.391)	(1.431)	
EU Sanctions		0.047				
		(0.222)				
UN Sanctions		0.052				
		(0.200)				
US Sanctions		0.075				
		(0.320)				
Former members of Soviet Union			0.475***	0.700***	0.672***	0.587***
			(3.124)	(2.864)	(2.885)	(4.038)
Border with Russia			0.459**			0.418*
			(2.208)			(1.831)
Had war with former Soviet Union				-0.147		
				(-0.780)		
Prob > chi2	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Pseudo R2	0.25	0.26	0.34	0.33	0.32	0.32
Countries	85	85	85	85	85	85

Notes: Asterisks indicate significance at the 10% (*), 5% (**), and 1% (***) levels, respectively. *t*-statistics are in parentheses and are based on robust standard errors.

The results indicate that countries with more military equipment imported from Russia tend to vote in favour of Russia over the UN resolution. The coefficient of *share in military exports from Russia (2000-2021)* is positive across all specifications and statistically significant in columns 3 to 6, meaning that an increase in this variable increases the predicted probability of a country voting in favour of Russia. An increase in the share of military exports in total military exports from Russia to a partner country increases the probability of favouring Russia by about 6 percentage points. In our sample, there are 19 countries where the share of total military exports from Russia is more than 1.6% (the mean of this variable). Approximately 70% of them voted in favour of Russia. These are listed in Table A2 in the Appendix. This finding lends empirical support to the argument of Tawat (2022) and Busari (2022) that countries with close military ties with Russia either abstained or voted against the resolution. We also find that democratic countries are less likely to support Russia in the resolution. The coefficient of the Freedom House Index is negative and significant across six specifications (columns 1-6 of Table 2). From the 85 countries in our sample, approximately 50% are classified as not free, 28% as partly free and 21% as politically free countries. A one-unit increase in this index (which is from 1 to 3, higher scores mean more openness) is associated with a decrease of 14 percentage points of support for Russia (average over six models). Table A3 in the Appendix shows that 16 out of the 18 politically free countries (with Freedom House Index of 3) in our estimation sample voted against Russia's invasion.

The coefficient of *percentage of years ruled by leftists (1945-2020)* is positive and statistically significant in all models. This means that a percentage point increase in the share of years governed by leftist leaders is associated with an increase of about 0.3 percentage point in the probability of voting in favour of Russia in the resolution. In our estimation sample, 41 countries have had leftist leaders for more than 50% of the post-WWII years. About 61% of

them did not vote to condemn Russia over the invasion of Ukraine. Table A4 shows the voting behaviour of countries with a majority of post-WWII years ruled by leftist leaders.

Higher share of imports by Russia from a partner country or attractiveness of the Russian market for a partner country positively affects the vote in favour of Russia in the UN General Assembly resolution. This positive association is only statistically significant in Models 3 and 6. A percentage point increase in this variable is associated with a 21-percentage point increase in support for Russia in the UN General Assembly resolution. One significant trading partner is China, which has a share of about 22% and is also one of the key supporters of Russia in the UN General Assembly. Belarus is the second with a share of 5.5%.

Regarding exports, we observe a negative association between the percentage of exports from Russia to a partner country in total exports from Russia in all models which is also statistically significant in Models 3 to 6. The higher this ratio is, the lower the probability is of supporting Russia in the UN General Assembly resolution. Except for China (with ~ 13% share) and Belarus (with 5% share), the main export destinations of Russia are located within OECD countries (e.g., Turkey with ~ 5% share, South Korea with ~ 4% share or UK with more than 3% share) or former eastern Europe countries (e.g., Poland with 3% share) which are more aligned with Western political interests. Therefore, over the invasion of Ukraine, countries importing from Russia may replace Russia with other suppliers, especially for non-strategic products.

Consistent with the findings of Alexander and Rooney (2019), Che et al. (2021), Dreher et al. (2008) which show that financial aids are one of the main reasons for countries voting in alignment with China and the US, we also find that countries that receive significant amount of financial aids from Russia tend to vote in favour of Russia. The coefficient of *Recipient of Russian aid (2011-2015)* is positive and statistically significant in columns 1-3 of Table 2.

Countries which received more than 5% of total Russian aid between 2011-2015 are, on average, 32 percentage point more likely to support Russia in the resolution.

We also show that past experience with sanctions may result in more support for Russia but this effect is not statistically significant. Common border with Russia do matter for voting in favour of or against Russia (columns 3 and 6 of Table 2). Former members of the Soviet Union tend to support Russia in the UN resolution (columns 3 to 6 of Table 2). The level of support is also substantial. Being a member of the former Soviet Union, *ceteris paribus*, increases the probability of support for Russia in the resolution from 47 to 70 percentage points. Among the nine countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union in our estimation sample, only Latvia voted against Russia.

Past war with the Soviet Union, on average, has a negative effect for supporting Russia in the resolution but the effect is not statistically significant (column 4 of Table 2). From the nine countries in our estimation sample which had some form of conflict or war with the former Soviet Union, all except China and Iran voted against Russia in the UN General Assembly resolution.

4. Conclusion

This research empirically investigates the possible economic, political, geographic and historical factors in explaining cross-country variation in the voting behaviour of countries during the UN General Assembly over the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Most of the countries in the UN General Assembly voted against the Russian invasion. However, there were also countries which were against the resolution, abstained from voting or did not in vote. Our findings show that the importance of military and aid dependence on Russia, access to Russian markets, the level of a country's political freedom and historical interactions with Russia in former Soviet Union are main positive or negative determinants of nations' voting in favour of Russia.

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Appendix

Table A1. Sample countries

Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, China, Colombia, Congo, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Djibouti, Ecuador, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Korea, Kuwait, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao PDR, Latvia, Libya, Malaysia, Mali, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Poland, Qatar, Romania, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yemen, Zambia

Table A2. Military dependence on Russia and voting behaviour in the United Nations General Assembly resolution (2 March 2022)

	Country	Vote in favour of Russia (Yes: 1; No: 0)	Share of military exports in total military exports from Russia to partner>1.6% (Average from 2000-2021)
1	Algeria	1	10.06
2	Azerbaijan	1	3.07
3	Belarus	1	1.86
4	China	1	24.66
5	Egypt	0	4.59
6	Ethiopia	1	2.11
7	India	1	29.84
8	Indonesia	0	1.80
9	Iran	1	1.69
10	Iraq	1	3.24
11	Kazakhstan	1	1.93
12	Malaysia	0	2.43
13	Myanmar	0	1.61
14	Syrian Arab Republic	1	2.01
15	Uganda	1	2.20
16	United Arab Emirates	0	1.88
17	Venezuela	1	7.33
18	Vietnam	1	5.10
19	Yemen	0	2.85

Table A3. Politically free countries with Freedom House Index (=3) and their voting behaviour in the United Nations General Assembly resolution (2 March 2022)

	Country	Vote in favour of Russia (Yes:1; No: 0)
1	Argentina	0
2	Brazil	0
3	Croatia	0
4	Cyprus	0
5	Czech Republic	0
6	Ghana	0
7	Greece	0
8	Korea	0
9	Latvia	0
10	Mongolia	1
11	Poland	0
12	Romania	0
13	Slovak Republic	0
14	Slovenia	0
15	South Africa	1
16	United Kingdom	0
17	United States	0
18	Uruguay	0

Table A4. Voting in favour of Russia in the United Nations General Assembly resolution and percentage of years ruled by leftists since 1945

	Country	Vote in favour of Russia (Yes:1; No: 0)	Percentage of years ruled by leftists since 1945>50%
1	Algeria	1	91.53
2	Angola	1	100
3	Belarus	1	90
4	Burkina Faso	1	63.93
5	Cambodia	0	94.12
6	Chad	0	93.44
7	China	1	94.74
8	Congo	1	95.08
9	Croatia	0	51.61
10	Cuba	1	90.79
11	Czech Republic	0	73.68
12	Djibouti	0	100
13	Egypt	0	78.95
14	Ethiopia	1	61.84
15	Ghana	0	63.77
16	Guinea	1	58.73
17	Hungary	0	94.74
18	India	1	70.27
19	Iraq	1	59.21
20	Kazakhstan	1	93.55
21	Lao PDR	1	68.57
22	Libya	0	60
23	Mali	1	60.66
24	Mongolia	1	94.74
25	Mozambique	1	100
26	Myanmar	0	93.15
27	Poland	0	78.95
28	Romania	0	65.79
29	Rwanda	0	100
30	Senegal	1	65.57
31	Serbia	0	80.26
32	Slovenia	0	64.52
33	South Sudan	1	100
34	Sri Lanka	1	58.9
35	Syrian Arab Republic	1	80.26
36	Tajikistan	1	100
37	Turkmenistan	1	100
38	Uzbekistan	1	83.87
39	Venezuela	1	65.79
40	Vietnam	1	100
41	Zambia	0	64.91