Assessing political alignment: UNGA voting patterns of Western Balkan and Visegrad countries

*Marija Mirchevska**

Abstract

This research aims to measure political proximity and compare policy preferences between Western Balkan and Visegrad countries by examining their UNGA voting records in the period between 2013 and 2023. It seeks to better understand the factors driving these voting preferences by testing three variables as predictors of voting outcomes: the year of resolution adoption, the resolution's subject, and the liberal democracy score of the countries at the time of adoption of the resolutions. The analysis reveals that Western Balkan and Visegrad countries exhibit a high percentage of voting coincidence, with more than 80% alignment on bilateral level, indicating highly similar foreign policy preferences and aligned positions. However, at the group level, there is a general trend toward decreasing consensus, with the odds of the group voting the same on UNGA resolutions decreasing by about 7.8% each year. As the level of liberal democracy increases in Western Balkan countries, they become less likely to vote uniformly. In contrast, for Hungary and Slovakia, higher levels of democracy are associated with more uniform voting patterns. These findings confirm the similarity and alignment in foreign policy between Western Balkans and Visegrad countries, while also highlighting an increasing divergence over time and the complex role of liberal democracy on influencing voting outcomes.

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Introduction

Different schools of thought see international institutions through their own distinct lenses. One can argue, at its core realists believe that international institutions are essentially a reflection of the distribution of power in the world. These institutions, according to realists, are based on the self-interested calculations of great powers and have no independent effect on state behaviour[1]. By extension, it can be argued that states see UN resolutions as means of signalling their foreign policy preferences and alignments, which are reflective of their national interest and power dynamic, rather than global ideals or international norms. For most liberals, multilateral institutions create patterns of behaviour through "a whole regime of rules, norms, networks, and expectations that create social roles, which entail moral obligations"[2]. In this context, UN resolutions can simultaneously reflect shared foreign policy preferences, and state's internal values and interests that drive foreign policy. Both constructivists and liberals explore the role of norms, identities, and practices in explaining the behaviour of states, rather than attributing decision-making solely to power dynamic.

Although constructivists and neoliberals agree that anarchy does not preclude cooperation among states, their understandings of how such cooperation emerges and is maintained differ significantly, leading to distinct research agendas.[3] Constructivists add layer to the discussion with the concept of socialization, whereby states adapt their foreign policy preferences based on interactions with other states, international organizations or global norms and discourses. In summary, a country's foreign policy, as communicated in international institutions, can be seen as a reflection of the state's preferences and interests. However, different schools of thought disagree on what shapes those preferences—whether it is power dynamics or shared norms and values.

Given these divergent views, in the view of the author, United Nations General Assembly's (hereinafter UNGA) resolutions offer an effective instrument for analysing state preferences, as they reflect national priorities, values and policy positions. While UNGA's resolutions are non-binding, they are still considered a reliable proxy[4] for assessing

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[1] John J Mearsheimer, 'The False Promise of International Institutions' (1994) 19 *International Security* 5. Available from: https://www.mearsheimer.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/A0021.pdf)

[2] Joseph S Nye, 'International Institutions Are Crucial for US Power' (Project Syndicate, 10 November 2020). Available from: https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/international-institutions-crucial-for-us-global-power-by-joseph-s-nye-2020-11; Andrew Moravcsik, 'Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics' (1997) 51(4) *International Organization* 513. Available from: https://www.princeton.edu/~amoravcs/library/preferences.pdf

[3] Ted Hopf, 'The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory' (1998) 23(1) *International Security* 171. Available from: http://ereserve.library.utah.edu/Annual/POLS/5690/Castle/hopf.pdf, p.19; Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics' (1992) 46(2) *International Organization* 391. Available from: https://pmachala.people.amherst.edu/Current%20Politics/PS-50%20IR%20&%20Foreign%20Policy%20Theory-THE%20READINGS/Archive/Wendt,%20Anarchy%20is%20what%20states%20make%20of%20it%20(1992).pdf

[4] Mohammad Zahidul Islam Khan, 'Is Voting Patterns at the United Nations General Assembly a Useful Way to Understand a Country's Policy Inclinations: Bangladesh's Voting Records at the United Nations General Assembly' (2020). Available from: *SAGE Open* https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020961117

common or divergent state interests[5]. Unlike the United Nations Security Council, where voting is strategic due to its binding nature, "the voting patterns seen in the UNGA can be expected to be fairly representative of a country's 'true' policy preference"[6]. The UNGA's rollcall voting system, the equal status for all member states, the non-binding nature of its resolutions, and the wide range of issues addressed make it a suitable venue for exploring political proximity and policy preferences.

Furthermore, UNGA is "the only universally representative body where all member states enjoy equal status and openly exercise their voting preferences as a sovereign entity"[7]. This allows for comparative analysis on policy preferences between the Western Balkan (WB) and the Visegrad countries (V4) in a setting where power and structural asymmetry are less prominent than in contexts like the EU. Given the limited research on UN voting patterns that focuses on developing countries like those in the WB[8] or on regional blocs such as the V4[9], this research aims to contribute to filling that scholarly gap.

Research design and methodology

This research focuses on the four Visegrad countries Czechia, Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland and five Western Balkan countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Kosovo, as a country in the Western Balkans, is not included because it does not vote at the UNGA.
Political proximity and the degree of alignment are measured by calculating voting coincidence at the UNGA, which is essentially a form of descriptive and similarity analysis. Additionally, descriptive, inferential, and predictive statistics are employed to better understand voting patterns.

Using publicly available voting data from the UN Digital Library a data set is created, which includes 967 resolutions subject to UNGA rollcall voting, in a decade long period, between 2013 and 2023 (excluding procedural motions, preliminary votes, etc.)[10]. The number of resolutions adopted each year varies, with 2018 being the most prolific year, while the least activity occurred in 2013.

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[5] Erik Voeten, 'Data and Analyses of Voting in the UN General Assembly' (2013). Available from: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2111149
[6] Aparajita Das, 'A Fine Balance: India's Voting Record at the UNGA' (Observer Research Foundation, 2017). Available from: https://www.orfonline.org/research/fine-balance-india-voting-record-unga
[7] n5
[8] For a more critical discussion on the terminology see, Pål Kolstø, 'Western Balkans as the New Balkans: Regional Names as Tools for Stigmatisation and Exclusion' (2016) 68 (7) *Europe-Asia Studies* 1245.
[9] The Visegrad Group is often described as a non-institutionalized platform of regional cooperation, functioning on an ad hoc basis. In Jana Juzová, Anna Orosz, Andrzej Sadecki, and Tomáš Strážay, *Visegrad Group's Cooperation with Western Balkans: Achievements and the Way Forward* (IDCSC, 2019). Available from: https://idscs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/a5_V4.pdf
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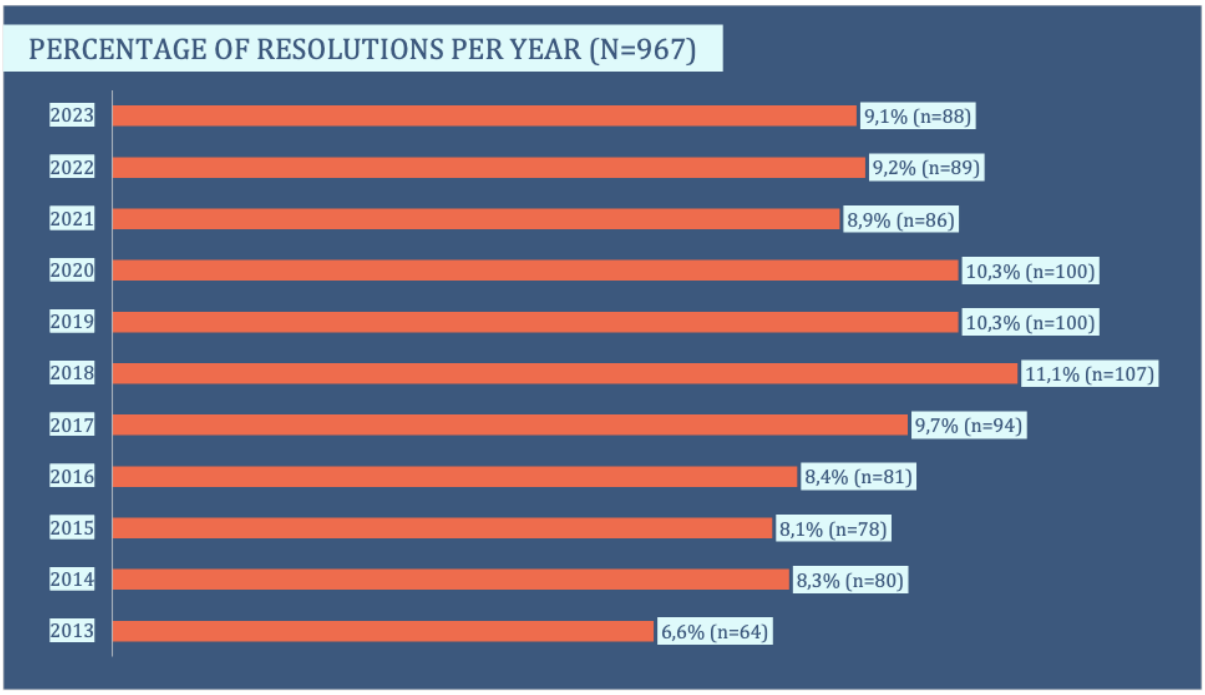
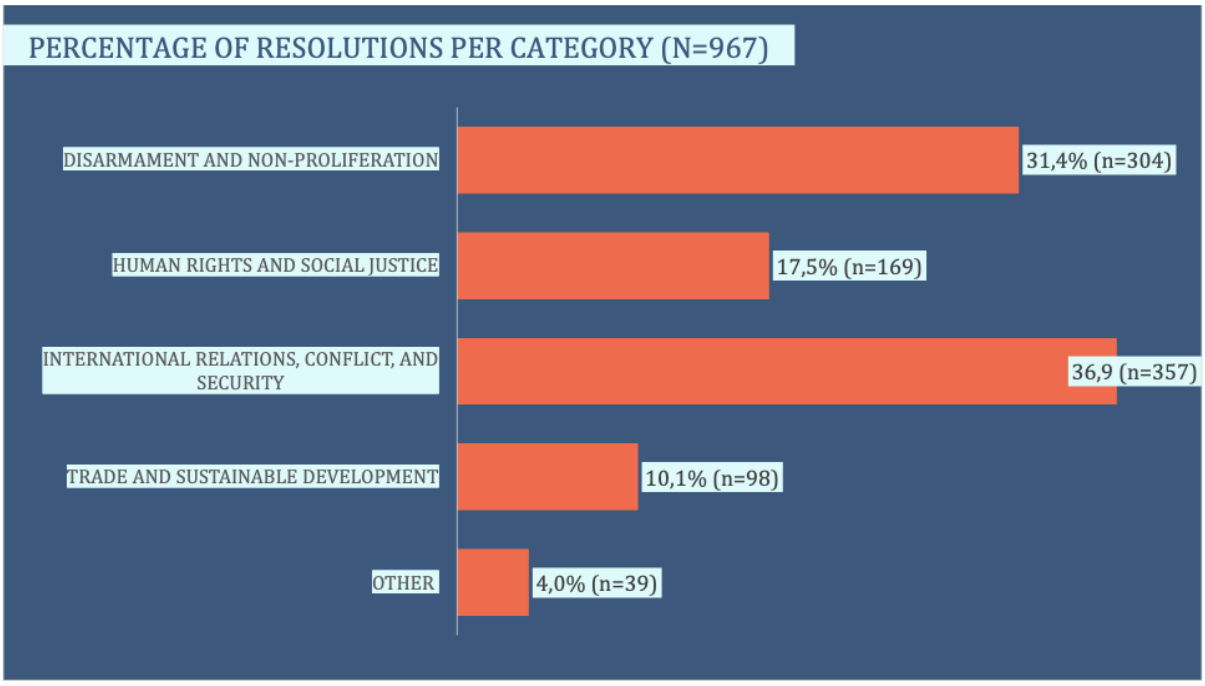


According to UN, the 967 resolutions were initially classified in 165 subcategories. However, to increase reliability of the data and to reduce multicollinearity or overfitting, the 165 subcategories were re-grouped by the author into 5 larger categories: disarmament and non-proliferation; human rights and social justice; international relations, conflict and security; trade and sustainable development; and other topics. The data shows that most resolutions (2/3) fall under the categories of disarmament and non-proliferation, as well as international relations, conflict, and security.



All pairs have voting coincidence higher than 80%

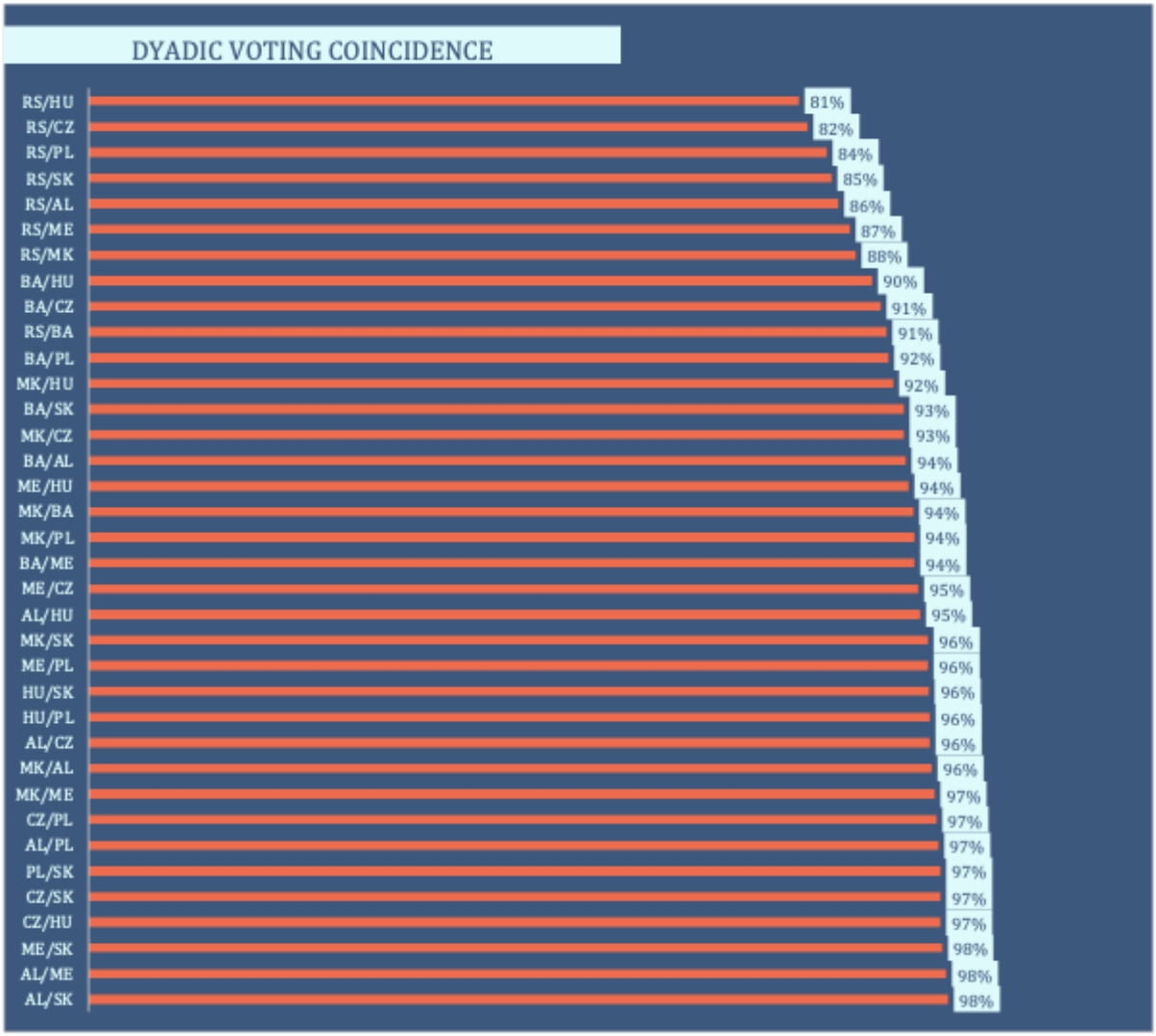
Dyadic voting coincidence is the frequency with which two states vote the same way. In our analysis, we examine 36 pairs of countries based on their voting preferences for the 967 resolutions. Many authors have contributed to conceptualizing and developing the voting coincidence method[11]. In this case, I use the same methodology as the U.S. Department of State's Voting Practices in the UN report.[12]

The "voting coincidence" is calculated by categorizing votes into four groups: same, opposite, partial, and absent. "Same" refers to the number of times the two countries voted identically (both voting Yes, No, or Abstain), while "Opposite" counts how often they voted contrary to each other (one Yes, the other No). "Partial" represents instances where the two countries were partially aligned (one country abstained while the other did not), and "Did not vote" records cases where one or both countries were absent from voting. To calculate the voting coincidence, one point is assigned for each same vote, zero points for opposite votes, and half a point for partial votes. The total points are then divided by the total number of votes, excluding any absences, to determine the overall voting coincidence score.

First thing we can observe is that all 36 pairs have voting coincidence higher than 80%. We have highest voting coincidence, more than 98%, between: Albania and Slovakia; Albania and Montenegro; Montenegro and Slovakia. We have least voting coincidence, but still very high between Serbia and the Visegrad countries: Serbia and Hungary (81%); Serbia and Czechia (82%); Serbia and Poland (84%); and Serbia and Slovakia (85%). Overall, it seems that Serbia and Bosnia are among the least aligned, North Macedonia is somewhere in the middle, and Albania and Montenegro have the most alignment with the Visegrad group.

[11] Arend Lijphart, 'The Analysis of Bloc Voting in the General Assembly: A Critique and a Proposal' (1963) 57 *American Political Science Review* 902; David L. Richardson, 'The Measurement of Voting Similarity in International Organizations' (1967) 61(3) International Organization 400; James A. Caporaso and Donald Puchala, 'International Relations Theory and Multilateralism: The Search for Foundations' (1984) 42 *International Organization* 599; Erik Voeten, 'Clashes in the Assembly' (2000) 54(2) *International Organization* 185; Michael A. Bailey, Anton Strezhnev, and Erik Voeten, 'Estimating Dynamic State Preferences from United Nations Voting Data' (2017) *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 112.

[12] United States Department of State, *Report to Congress on Voting Practices of UN Members for 2022* (31 March 2023). Available from: https://www.state.gov/reports/voting-practices-in-the-united-nations/



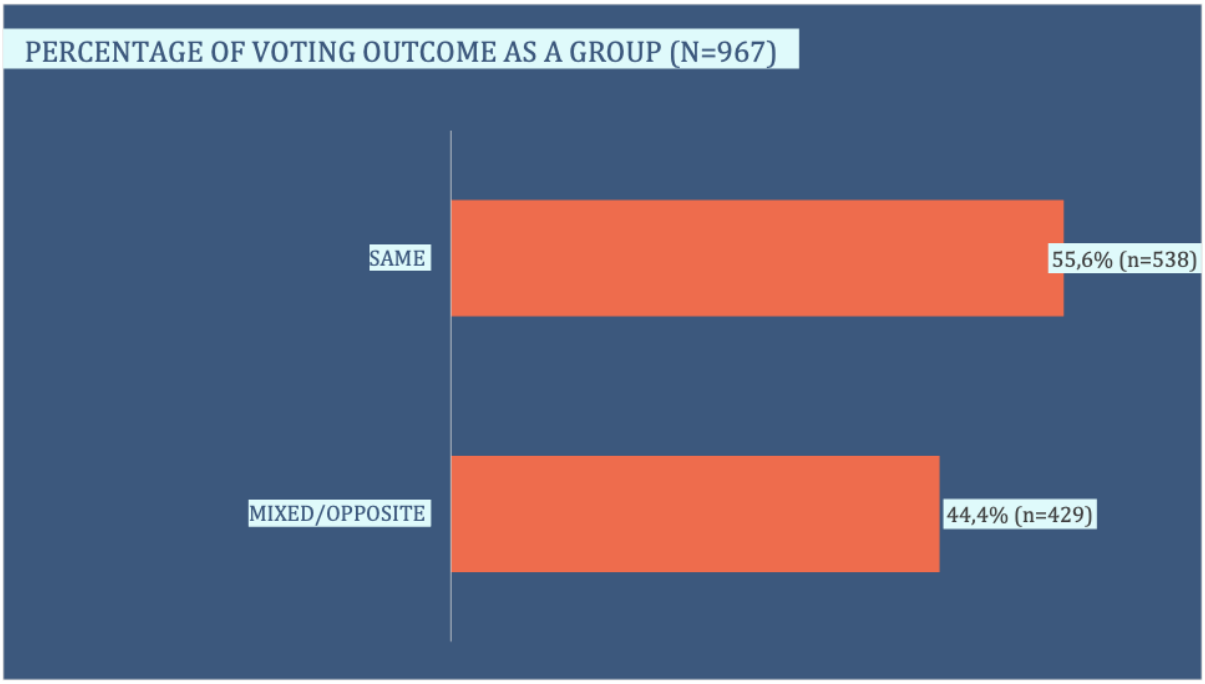
Here's an overview of Poland's voting coincidence scores. Poland is most aligned with Slovakia and Albania, followed by Czechia and Hungary.

	Same	Opposite	Partial	NV	Total	POINTS	% OF VOTING COINCINDENCE
PL/SR	675	50	183	59	967	0,844163	84,42%
PL/BH	799	14	132	22	967	0,91534392	91,53%
PL/MK	781	13	70	103	967	0,94444444	94,44%
PL/MNE	887	5	67	8	967	0,95985401	95,99%
PL/HU	903	13	47	4	967	0,96209761	96,21%
PL/CZ	906	4	50	7	967	0,96979167	96,98%
PL/AL	906	3	48	10	967	0,97178683	97,18%
PL/SKO	910	0	49	8	967	0,97445255	97,45%

Factors driving voting preferences

We now move to the second part of the analysis, where we apply a different methodology than in the dyadic analysis. In this section, we treat all nine countries as a single group and use a different standard for determining whether the votes are considered the “same” or “mixed/opposing”. For a vote to be classified as "same," all nine countries must have voted Yes, No, or Abstain, which sets a relatively high bar for consensus. Any other combination of votes is categorized as “mixed or opposing”. As mentioned earlier, it is beneficial for the analysis to have fewer categories with a larger number of data points, as this improves the robustness and reliability of the results. Choosing to use binary voting outcomes meant that logistic regression was more suitable than multinomial regression. This analysis also employs decision tree analysis to capture the non-linear relationships and interactions between the variables.

From the frequency analysis, we can conclude that the group tends to agree more often than disagree. During the period of the analysis, for 55.6% of the adopted resolutions, all nine countries voted in the same manner.

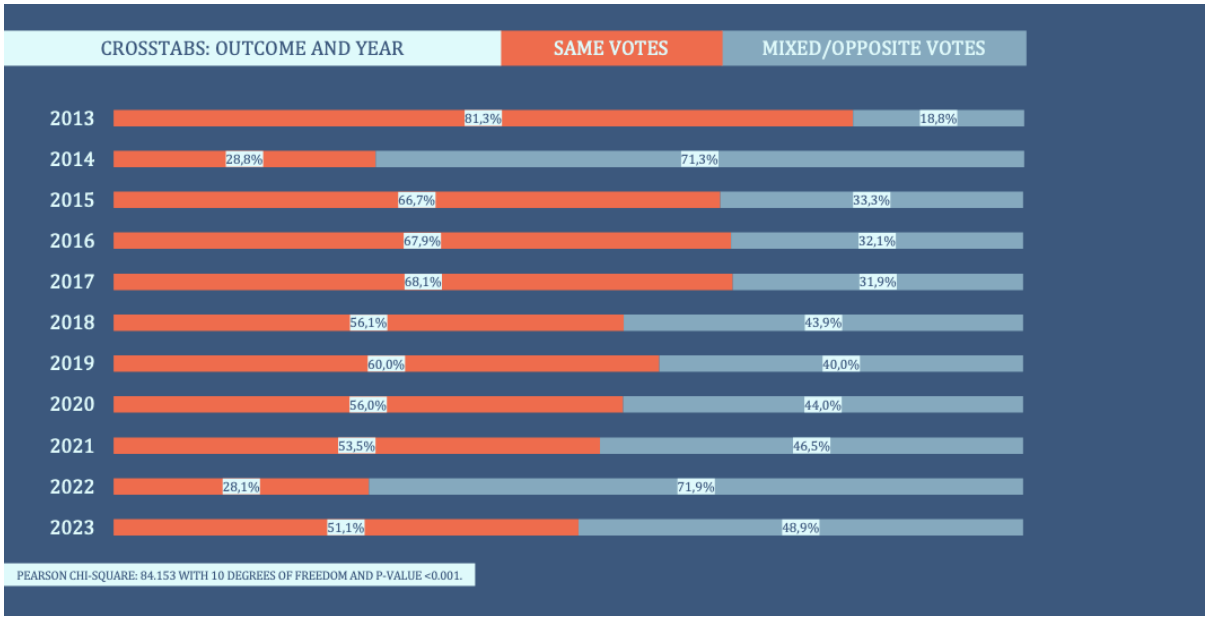


Next, we examine three factors to see how much they can help us better understand the voting behaviour of these countries: the year of adoption, the subject of the resolution, and the liberal democracy score of the country at the time of adoption of the resolution. The main reasons for choosing these three variables were the availability of data, as well as the assumption that voting patterns change over time, depending on who is in power and the subject of the resolution.

Over time the consensus in the group decreased

We already know how many resolutions are adopted per year and that the group tends to agree more often than disagree. However, from the crosstabulation analysis, we can observe that while there was generally more consensus than not, this was not the case in 2014 and 2022. During these two years, there was a significant change in voting patterns, with countries being considerably less likely to vote the same way. This suggests that something notable happened in those years that impacted the countries, making them less likely to have aligned positions.

The Pearson Chi-Square test confirms that the year is indeed a statistically significant factor, indicating that the distribution of resolution outcomes varies significantly across different years.



The logistic regression reveals a negative relationship between the year and the likelihood of all countries voting the same on a resolution, indicating that consensus among the group tends to decrease over time. For each additional year, the odds of the countries voting in alignment decrease by approximately 7.8%.

It's important to recognize the limitations of this model. With only two variables—year and category—the model explains only a small portion of the variability. This suggests that other factors must be considered to better understand why consensus is achieved in some years but not in others. However, even with low explanatory power, the regression analysis is still useful for understanding the relationships between the predictors and the outcome.

LOGISTIC REGRESSION: YEAR AND CATEGORY

R_Outcome[a]		B	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B) Bound	Bound
1	Intercept	164,202	44,609	13,549	1	<,001			
	Year	-0,081	0,022	13,525	1	<,001	0,922	0,883	0,963
	[Category= Disarmament and Non-Proliferation]	-0,446	0,344	1,689	1	0,194	0,640	0,326	1,255
	[Category= Human Rights and Social Justice]	-0,022	0,359	0,004	1	0,950	0,978	0,484	1,975
	[Category= International Relations, Conflict, and Security]	0,286	0,341	0,701	1	0,403	1,331	0,682	2,598
	[Category= Trade, Economic, Sustainable and Green Development]	0,533	0,389	1,878	1	0,171	1,703	0,795	3,649
	[Category= Other]	0[b]			0				

a. The reference category is: 2.
b. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

Goodness-of-Fit			
	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Pearson	169,025	47	<,001
Deviance	185,589	47	<,001

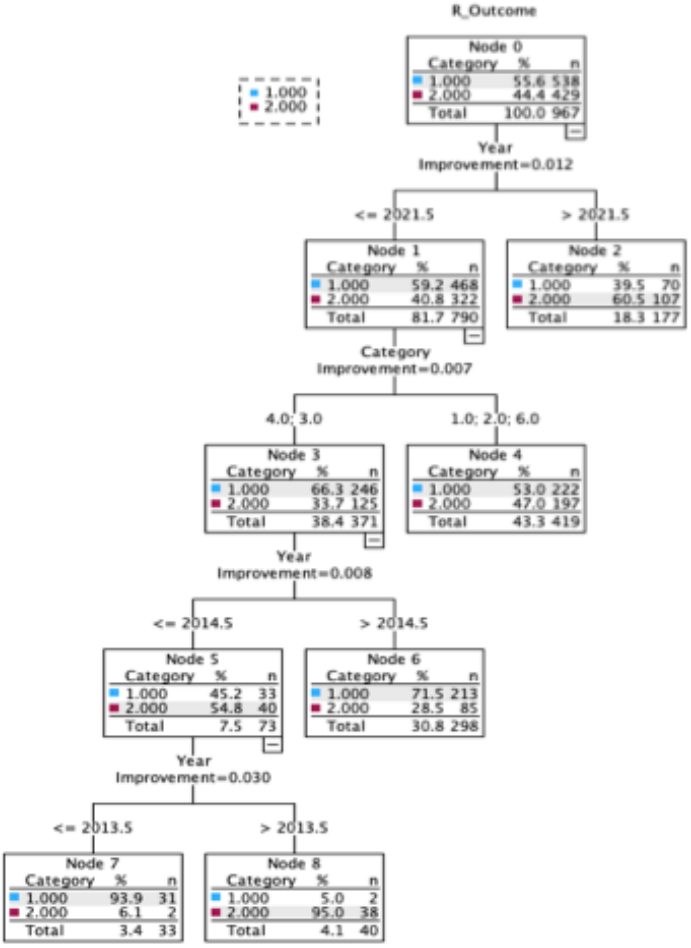
Pseudo R-Square	
Cox and Snell	0,042
Nagelkerke	0,056
McFadden	0,031

We use an additional method to identify the factors most important in predicting voting outcomes. The decision tree analysis reinforces our earlier observations and detects significant shifts in voting patterns around 2014 and 2022.

Before mid-2021, 59.2% of the resolutions were adopted with all nine countries voting the same way. However, after the second half of 2021, we observe a reverse trend, with 60.5% of the resolutions adopted with the group voting differently. The other nodes highlight the interplay between years and categories. While references to 2013 and 2021 may seem contradictory, this type of analysis suggests that the change began around those years, while the crosstab analysis shows that the impact was most evident in 2014 and 2022.

For the decision tree analysis, we achieved 63% accuracy, indicating moderate predictability of the model. This means it performs better than random guessing and can correctly predict 63.2% of resolution outcomes based on the factors included. Specifically, the model successfully predicts 86.6% of cases where there is consensus, but it struggles with instances of mixed voting, correctly predicting only 33.8% of those cases.

CLASSIFICATION: DECISION TREE ANALYSIS FOR YEAR AND CATEGORY



Classification

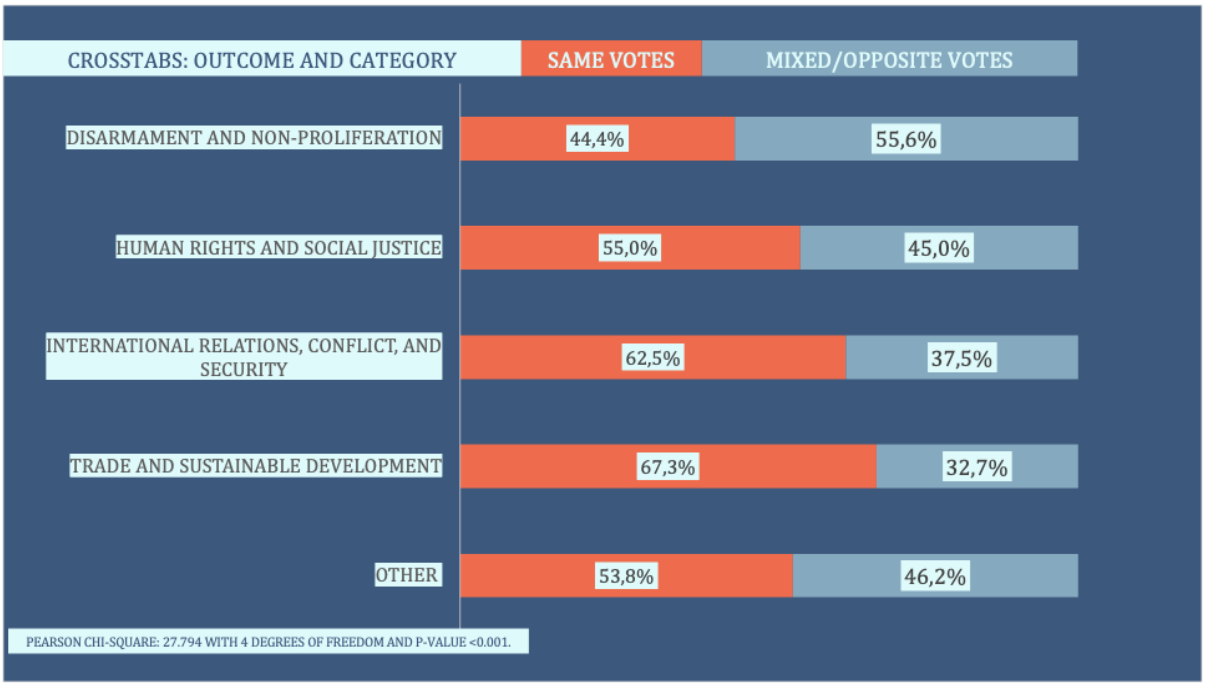
Observed	Predicted 1	Predicted 2	Percent Correct
1	466	72	86,6%
2	284	145	33,8%
Overall Percentage	77,6%	22,4%	63,2%

Growing Method: CRT
Dependent Variable: R_Outcome

The group had least alignment on disarmament and non-proliferation, and most on trade and sustainable development

Looking at the resolutions' categories, we observe the least consensus on issues related to disarmament and non-proliferation, while there was most agreement on trade and sustainable development. The Pearsons Chi-Square test confirms that the type of category has a significant impact on resolution outcomes.

This indicates that the differences observed in the data are unlikely due to chance, but rather because this factor exerted some influence on the voting behaviour.



A closer look at the data reveals some notable patterns. In the category of disarmament, 2022 saw a complete lack of alignment with a 0% vs 100% ratio, although significant disagreement had already been present in 2021. Similarly, in the category of international relations, there was a dramatic drop in alignment in 2014, with consensus falling to 6.3% vs 93.8%, compared to a 96.6% level of agreement the previous year. In the trade category, 2014 also showed a complete lack of consensus with a 0% vs 100% ratio, though this category had relatively few resolutions. These shifts highlight key moments where voting behaviour among the countries significantly diverged.

CROSSTABS: OUTCOME, CATEGORY & YEAR

		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Disarmament and Non-Proliferation	Same	63,2%	60,0%	44,4%	54,8%	42,3%	53,3%	46,4%	56,7%	32,1%	0,0%	43,3%
	Mixed/opposite	36,8%	40,0%	55,6%	45,2%	57,7%	46,7%	53,6%	43,3%	67,9%	100,0%	56,7%
Human Rights and Social Justice	Same	75,0%	36,4%	75,0%	46,2%	68,2%	50,0%	56,3%	47,1%	53,3%	46,7%	42,9%
	Mixed/opposite	25,0%	63,6%	25,0%	53,8%	31,8%	50,0%	43,8%	52,9%	46,7%	53,3%	57,1%
International Relations, Conflict, and Security	Same	96,6%	6,3%	85,7%	84,4%	75,8%	65,0%	71,4%	54,8%	62,1%	33,3%	59,4%
	Mixed/opposite	3,4%	93,8%	14,3%	15,6%	24,2%	35,0%	28,6%	45,2%	37,9%	66,7%	40,6%
Trade and Sustainable Development	Same	75,0%	0,0%	66,7%	100,0%	100,0%	50,0%	68,8%	54,5%	88,9%	85,7%	66,7%
	Mixed/opposite	25,0%	100,0%	33,3%	0,0%	0,0%	50,0%	31,3%	45,5%	11,1%	14,3%	33,3%
Other	Same	0%	50,0%	0,0%	0%	100,0%	42,9%	40,0%	72,7%	60,0%	0,0%	33,3%
	Mixed/opposite	0%	50,0%	100,0%	0%	0,0%	57,1%	60,0%	27,3%	40,0%	100,0%	66,7%

The logistic regression tells us that the impact of individual subcategories within the broader category variable is not significant. While the overall category variable was found to be statistically significant, the specific subcategories do not show the same level of influence. We mentioned the model limitations earlier.

LOGISTIC REGRESSION: YEAR AND CATEGORY

R_Outcome[a]		B	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B) Bound	Bound
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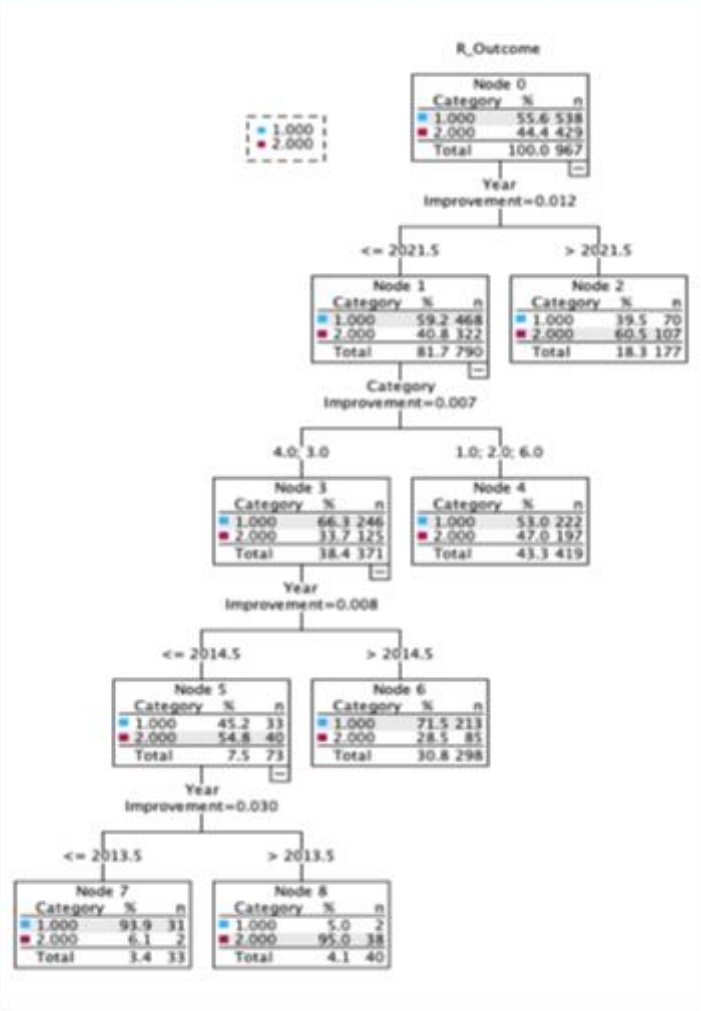
Pseudo R-Square	
Cox and Snell	0,042
Nagelkerke	0,056
McFadden	0,031

The decision tree analysis shows the interplay between year and category. We can observe that the category variable contributes to some key splits in the decision tree. For example, the 73 resolutions in Node 5 represent resolutions from before mid-2014, falling within the categories of international relations, conflict and security, and human rights and social justice. During this time, countries were more likely to vote differently (54.8%). Node 6 includes resolutions adopted after mid-2014, spread across multiple years, and shows that around this period, for these two categories, the voting pattern changed, with countries now more likely to vote in alignment (71.5%). For the categories non-proliferation, human rights, and other we can see that prior to 2021, they had a more balanced split between same votes (53.0%) and mixed votes (47.0%), compared to the categories of international relations, conflict and security, and human rights and social justice (66.3% vs 33.7%)

However, overall, the year remains the dominant factor the decision tree uses to predict the outcome, indicating that temporal trends have a stronger influence on voting behaviour than the specific resolution categories. The model limitations were mentioned earlier.

CLASSIFICATION: DECISION TREE ANALYSIS FOR YEAR AND CATEGORY



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	Predicted		
Observed	1	2	Percent Correct
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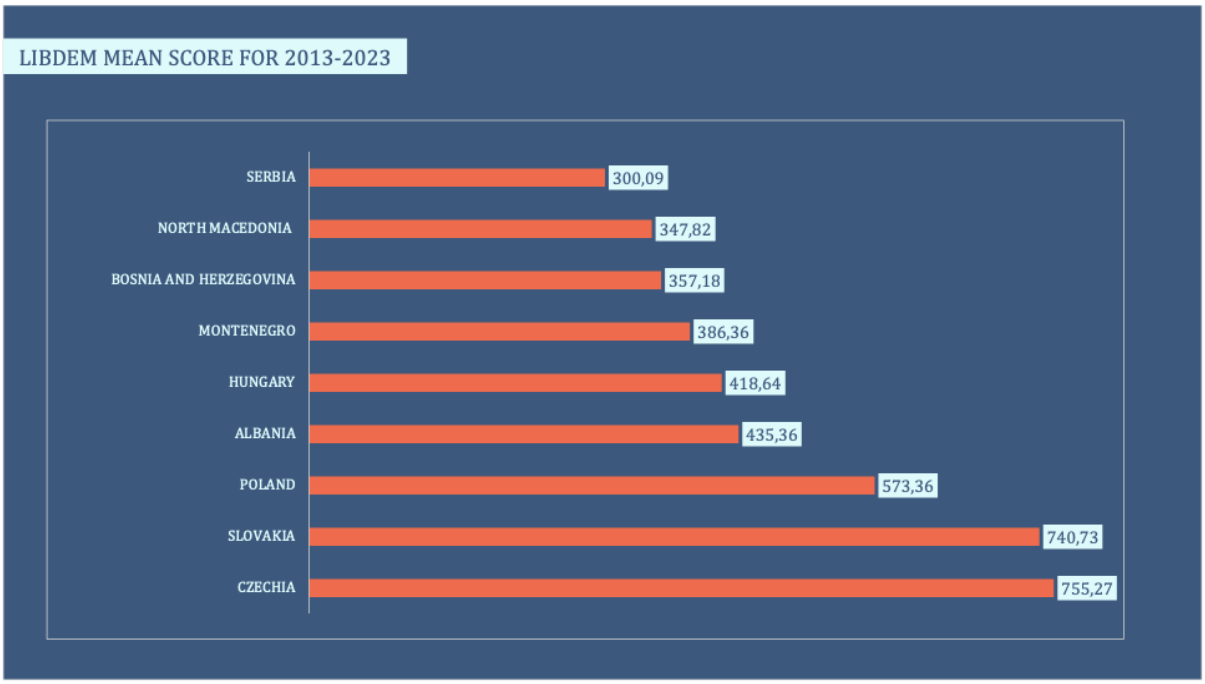
2	284	145	33.8%
Overall Percentage	77.6%	22.4%	63.2%

Growing Method: CRT
Dependent Variable: R_Outcome

More democracy in WB doesn't mean more alignment

The effect of the level of liberal democracy on alignment is also examined, using the liberal democracy (hereinafter libdem) index from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset. This index accounts for "constitutionally protected civil liberties, strong rule of law, and effective checks and balances that limit the use of executive power"[13]. For context, you can see the mean score per country, which provides insight into where each country stands in terms of liberal democracy.

[13] Michael Coppedge et al, *V-Dem Methodology v14* (V-Dem Institute, March 2024). Available from: https://v-dem.net/documents/39/v-dem_methodology_v14.pdf



The logistic regression provides several insights. First, the liberal democracy (libdem) score is statistically significant for all countries except for Czechia. This suggests that whether the score is high or low, it doesn't significantly influence how Czechia votes. However, it's worth noting that Czechia consistently has the highest and most stable democracy score, so even when it fluctuates, it remains relatively high.

For the Western Balkan countries, the analysis shows negative coefficients, indicating that the higher the libdem score, the less likely they are to vote in consensus. In other words, more liberal democracy in the WB countries increases the likelihood of mixed votes on resolutions. For each unit increase in the libdem score for an individual country, the chances that the entire group votes the same decrease by the following amounts: 17.5% when Albania's score increases, 15.1% when Bosnia's score increases, 7.7% when Montenegro's score increases, 1.1% when North Macedonia's score increases, 0.5% when Poland's score increases, and 8.1% when Serbia's score increases.

The opposite trend is observed for Slovakia and Hungary, where greater democracy increases the likelihood of consensus. For each unit increase in the libdem score for an individual country, the chances that the entire group votes the same increase by the following amounts: 1.9% when Czechia's score increases, 8.3% when Hungary's score increases, and 3% when Slovakia's score increases.

Interestingly, while the regression analysis suggests that democracy has an inverse relationship for Poland—where a higher libdem score reduces the likelihood of consensus—this contrasts with the findings from the decision tree analysis.

LOGISTIC REGRESSION: LIBDEM

R_Outcome[a]		B	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% Confidence Lower Bound	95% Confidence Upper Bound
1	Intercept	136,843	30,276	20,428	1	< ,001			
	ALBANIA	-0,192	0,045	18,588	1	< ,001	0,825	0,756	0,900
	BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	-0,164	0,042	15,376	1	< ,001	0,849	0,782	0,921
	CZECHIA	0,019	0,010	3,489	1	0,062	1,019	0,999	1,039
	HUNGARY	0,079	0,017	21,388	1	< ,001	1,083	1,047	1,120
	MONTENEGRO	-0,080	0,021	14,341	1	< ,001	0,923	0,885	0,962
	NORTH MACEDONIA	-0,011	0,005	5,710	1	0,017	0,989	0,980	0,998
	POLAND	-0,005	0,002	6,860	1	0,009	0,995	0,991	0,999
	SERBIA	-0,085	0,026	11,033	1	< ,001	0,919	0,874	0,966
	SLOVAKIA	0,029	0,010	9,014	1	0,003	1,030	1,010	1,049

a. The reference category is: 2.

Goodness-of-Fit	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Pearson	27,233	1	<,001
Deviance	27,850	1	<,001

Pseudo R-Square	
Cox and Snell	0,059
Nagelkerke	0,079
McFadden	0,044

For Poland, the decision tree identifies a specific threshold at a liberal democracy (libdem) score of 423, where voting behaviour shifts. Below a score of 423, mixed voting patterns are more common, while above 423, uniform voting patterns become more likely. This suggests that beyond a certain level of democracy, Poland tends to adopt more cohesive voting behaviour. The regression analysis provides the overall trend, but the decision tree reveals critical points where specific behaviours change.

For Bosnia and Herzegovina, the negative coefficient in the regression indicates that higher levels of liberal democracy are associated with a decrease in the likelihood of voting uniformly. The decision tree analysis identifies a key split at a libdem score of 371.5. When Bosnia's democracy score is 371.5 or lower, uniformly voting patterns are more likely for the group, but when Bosnia's score exceeds 371.5, the group is less likely to have aligned positions.

For Hungary, the regression analysis shows that the group is generally more likely to vote uniformly as Hungary's liberal democracy increases. The decision tree analysis pinpoints a threshold at a libdem score of 547.5, where voting behaviour changes. Below this score for Hungary, the group tends to vote in a more mixed fashion, but once the score surpasses 547.5, the group becomes more likely to vote in alignment.

Discussion

In the discussion section, we raise few questions that derive from the research findings. First, examining what occurred in 2014 and 2022 that may have significantly impacted voting outcomes at the UN. Second, analysing the decreasing consensus in multilateral fora. Third, exploring the inverse relationship observed in the Western Balkans, where higher levels of liberal democracy correspond to a decreased likelihood of voting alignment. Lastly, discussing some of the methodological limitations of the research.

As previously mentioned, the data confirms a decline in consensus during 2014 and 2022 in the two relevant categories of resolutions—disarmament and proliferation, and international relations, peace, and security—with 96.6% and 100% of the resolutions being

passed by mixed votes, respectively. What 2014 and 2022 have in common is that both years saw Russian aggression against Ukraine, marked by the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014[14] and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022[15]. However, only six resolutions in the two categories related to this conflict were passed, with the group voting differently on two and aligning on four. Perhaps more important in this context might be the twenty-six resolutions passed on the Israel-Palestine conflict during the same period, corresponding with escalations in the long-standing conflict. In 2014, Operation Protective Edge[16] was carried out by the Israeli military in Gaza, while 2022 saw expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, that prompt increased pressure for international legal accountability[17]. Although a significant number of these resolutions are categorized as receiving mixed votes, it is notable that this outcome is often due to the absence of one country, while the remaining countries voted in alignment. However, there may be other factors that explain the decline in alignment during these two particular years, and those factors do not necessarily have to be the same for both years.

Secondly, the trend of decreasing alignment might reflect a diminishing capacity of multilateralism to forge consensus. The 2024 Multilateralism Index Report found that the multilateral system experienced a clear decline in performance across most domains between 2013 and 2023[18]. The 2023/24 Human Development Report offers a diagnostic for the current global gridlock anchored in shifting power dynamics among states, growing polarization, insecurities and inequalities[19]. Even within UN, there is a growing concern

[14] For example, United Nations General Assembly, *Territorial Integrity of Ukraine* A/RES/68/262 (27 March 2014)

[15] For example, United Nations General Assembly, *Aggression Against Ukraine* A/RES/ES-11/1 (2 March 2022); United Nations General Assembly, *Suspension of the Rights of Membership of the Russian Federation in the Human Rights Council* A/RES/ES-11/3 (7 April 2022); United Nations General Assembly, *Territorial Integrity of Ukraine: Defending the Principles of the Charter of the United Nations* A/RES/ES-11/4 (12 October 2022)

[16] International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Israel/Palestine, Operation Protective Edge (Gaza, 13 June - 26 August 2014*. Available from: https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/israelpalestine-operation-protective-edge-gaza-13-june-26-august-2014; United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict* (OHCHR, 2015) https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/co-i-gaza-conflict/report-co-i-gaza

[17] For example, United Nations General Assembly, *Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem, and the Occupied Syrian Golan* A/RES/77/126 (14 December 2022); United Nations General Assembly, *Permanent Sovereignty of the Palestinian People in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab Population in the Occupied Syrian Golan Over Their Natural Resources* A/RES/77/187 (14 December 2022); United Nations General Assembly, *Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem* A/RES/77/247 (22 December 2022). Also European External Action Service (EEAS), *2022 Report on Israeli Settlements in the Occupied West Bank, Including East Jerusalem* (January-December 2022). Availbale from: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/palestine-occupied-palestinian-territory-west-bank-and-gaza-strip/2022-report-israeli-settlements-occupied-west-bank-including-east-jerusalem-january-december-2022_en

[18] International Peace Institute and Institute for Economics & Peace, *Multilateralism Index 2024* (October 2024). Available from: https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Multilateralism-index-web-111024.pdf

[19] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *The Reasons Behind the Current Gridlock* https://report.hdr.undp.org/the-reasons-behind-the-current-gridlock

over the inability of the Security Council to collectively address critical peace and security situations, effectively paralyzing the whole system with unrestrained use of the veto[20].

Thirdly, one way to explain the inverse relationship in the Western Balkans between liberal democracy and the likelihood of alignment is through liberal and constructivist IR lens. These theories encourage us to look beyond just power distribution, when trying to understand how countries shape their foreign policy. For some authors, countries with better-performing democracies often experience public scepticism of authority and greater openness, which can make it more difficult to achieve alignment on foreign policy[21]. In well-functioning democracies, interest groups may push governments to adopt favourable policies, and political elites are more willing to compromise in order to form coalitions and maintain support. In the international context, "national governments seek to maximize their ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments." [22] For others, even if you have equally powerful liberal democratic countries, the "differences in political institutions, policy networks, and societal structures accounts for different foreign policy outcomes"[23].

Finally, this research has several methodological limitations. The model explains only a small portion of the variability, suggesting that other factors could be added to improve its predictive power, such as voting alignment with key anchoring countries (e.g., the U.S., China, Russia), security perceptions, and economic interdependence. Another important limitation is the stringent criteria used to define what constitutes a "same" or "mixed" voting outcome for the entire group. Conceptually, the issue is that we treat abstentions or non-votes in the same way as opposing votes. For illustration, Serbia abstained the most, with 235 abstentions, while Czechia abstained the least, with 173. North Macedonia did not vote 99 times, while Hungary was the only country present for all 967 resolution adoptions. An alternative approach, such as considering a 2/3 majority within the group or disregarding abstentions and non-votes, could provide a more nuanced reflection of the alignment.

[20] United Nations, 'General Assembly Debates Security Council's Rising Veto Use' (UN News, 13 April 2024) https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/04/1148896. Available from:
[21] Joseph S Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (PublicAffairs 2004), p. 68
[22] Robert D Putnam, 'Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games' (1988) 42(3) *International Organization* 427, p. 434.
[23] Thomas Risse-Kappen, 'Public Opinion, Domestic Structure, and Foreign Policy in Liberal Democracies' (1991) 43(4) *World Politics,* p. 480.

Conclusion

The analysis reveals that Western Balkan and Visegrad countries exhibit a high percentage of voting coincidence, with more than 80% alignment on bilateral level, indicating highly similar foreign policy preferences and aligned positions. Serbia stands out as a common denominator in the lowest-ranked dyads, while Albania, on the other hand, shows the highest level of alignment with the Visegrad countries. This confirms that Western Balkan countries, even prior to their eventual accession to the EU, have aligned their foreign policy positions with EU member states, in this case the V4. Moreover, they do so not only in cases where the EU has the power to discipline misalignment (such as the CFSP), but they also consistently align in multilateral fora, like the UN, where there is no threat of sanctions, which speaks to the internalization of EU norms and values.

However, when we look beyond bilateral relations, at the group level, there is a general trend toward decreasing consensus, with the odds of the group voting the same on UNGA resolutions decreasing by about 7.8% each year. This may reflect growing global polarization, a decline in the overall performance of the multilateral system, or the UN's inability to respond with urgent and decisive action to ongoing and emerging crises. In terms of resolution categories, the least consensus was observed on resolutions related to non-proliferation, while the most agreement occurred on trade and sustainable development issues. Notably, 2014 and 2022 saw significant shifts in voting patterns, with a sharp decline in consensus. One possible explanation is the escalation of two major conflicts in those years: Russia's annexation and full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and Israel's military campaign in Gaza, "Protective Edge," along with the intensification of illegal settlements.

As the level of liberal democracy increases in Western Balkan countries, they become less likely to vote uniformly. In contrast, for Hungary and Slovakia, higher levels of democracy are associated with more uniform voting patterns. Poland exhibits a threshold level of democracy beyond which it shifts toward more cohesive voting behaviour, while Czechia's high and stable liberal democracy score means it is not statistically significant in predicting voting patterns. Two potential arguments can be considered here. First, unlike in authoritarian contexts, the public in democracies has more agency and power to influence foreign policy, and in some instances, advocates for adherence to values rather than following the logic of power dynamics. Second, even well-developed liberal democratic countries can have different foreign policy preferences based on differences in domestic institutions, policy networks, and societal structures.

In this analysis, the year of adoption, resolution category, and the liberal democracy score are statistically significant factors in influencing voting outcomes. However, the model still

requires improvement due to limitations in its goodness-of-fit, suggesting that additional factors may need to be included for a more accurate prediction.