International Status and Its Impact on Voting Success in the UN General Assembly

A Network Analysis of Diplomatic Representation

SeulAh Choi
Boston University, Political Science

Abstract
How does international status emerge? What are some behavioral implications of international status? Despite growing consensus that state status matters, existing studies on this topic suffer from two shortcomings: most research neglects the social nature of status by regarding it only as a product of exogenous factors such as economic, military, or technological capabilities. Even if they recognize the social nature of international status, there are relatively few studies exploring why it matters. This paper argues that international status is ultimately established by social recognition from other states. States that have more of these network characteristics at great levels can have high status and exert social power. Consistent with previous studies, this paper recognizes international status through diplomatic representation. By utilizing two sets of data—the diplomatic exchange data and the UN General Assembly Roll Call dataset, it shows that three network-based variables—indegree centrality, betweenness centrality, and transitivity—are consistent and substantively strong determinants of diplomatic formation compared to other exogenous variables. It also shows that prestigious states with high network centrality are more likely to achieve voting success in the UN General Assembly. By exploring the determinants of international status and its social influence, this paper illuminates the explanatory value that the social nature of status can contribute to international relations.

Research Questions
1. How does international status emerge? What determinants—such as endogenous or exogenous factors—influence state status in the international system?
2. What are some behavioral implications of international status? How does international status impact a state’s ability to have a peaceful influence on other states?

Theory and Hypotheses

1. Formation of Diplomatic Ties
I argue that while exogenous factors such as geographical proximity and economic power do matter in the decision of a state to open an embassy in another state, endogenous factors embedded in the diplomatic network structure are also important determinants of diplomatic ties. States consider the network itself into which they are entering, and network-based motivations can play a substantial role in the decision to establish diplomatic ties.

2. Betweenness centrality
It captures the number of paths connecting pairs of states that pass through a state. Since the diplomatic network can be understood as a communication network in the sense that information mainly travels along diplomatic ties between states, states with a high level of betweenness centrality can act as information brokers or mediators between states, which incentivizes the formation of diplomatic ties.

3. Trade
As the dependent variable, I replicate datasets from Neumayer (2008) and Kim (2013) as a baseline and incorporate three network-based variables.

4. Betweenness centrality
It is measured by the number of foreign embassies located in a host state. If a state enters an existing diplomatic network it tends to target diplomatic partners with high betweenness centrality because this maximizes the benefits of diplomatic ties: it helps to reduce the cost of communication with third parties and allows access to important and influential actors in international relations.

5. Transitivity
It is measured as the number of triads that states have with other states that already have high indegree centrality.

6. Data and Methodology
In order to test these hypotheses, I mainly utilize two sets of data: the diplomatic exchange data, established by Bayer (2006) and the UN General Assembly Roll Call dataset, constructed by Voten (2004). Given the dichotomous nature of the dependent variables, I ran two logit models to test the determinants of diplomatic ties and state voting success in the UNGA respectively. The time scope of my analysis is limited to the year 2000 due to data constraints.

7. Results
The dependent variable is coded as 1 if a state has diplomatic ties with another state, and 0 otherwise. No resolution has ever failed during the 55th session (2000) success in the UNGA.

Control variables
- Political capabilities: Polity scores
- Economic capabilities: GDP per capita
- Military capabilities: CINC scores
- States’ rate of voting success in 54th session

8. Conclusions
- At the empirical level, the decision of a state to open an embassy in another state is obviously endogenous to the existing structure of diplomatic ties. States prefer to establish diplomatic ties with states where their diplomatic partners also have diplomatic ties.

9. Limitation and Future Research
- This work needs to utilize a network-based model—Exponential Random Graph Model or Stochastic Actor-Oriented Model—to analyze all dyads jointly.
- More control variables would likely lead to a more sophisticated understanding of voting success in the UNGA.
- Looking at the development of ties and seeing how state status has changed over time is necessary to extend the influence of this work.