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Who Represents the Recipient? UNGA Delegation Size, Political Composition, and Foreign Aid

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Who Represents the Recipient? UNGA Delegation Size, Political Composition, and Foreign Aid

Abstract

How do recipients' choices about representation in multilateral forums relate to bilateral aid allocation? This study examines delegation size and political composition at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), linking official rosters for 1993–2016 to subsequent aid commitments from 32 donors to 155 recipients. Poisson pseudo-maximum likelihood models with donor–recipient and donor–year fixed effects distinguish the offices represented from total delegation headcount. Conditional on delegation size, political alignment, and trade, national-leader listing is associated with 18.2 percent higher expected commitments the following year. The positive association persists when exceptionally large commitments are capped, with an estimated magnitude of 8.1 percent. Average dollar contrasts are larger within established aid relationships, consistent with a role for high-level representation in ongoing financing discussions. Delegation size and other personnel measures have less precisely estimated associations with commitment amounts. Turning to donor participation, neither delegation size nor leader listing is clearly associated with more donors making commitments. By distinguishing delegation size from political composition, the study brings recipients' choices about diplomatic representation into explanations of aid allocation alongside recipient needs and donor interests.

Keywords: foreign aid allocation; diplomatic representation; United Nations General Assembly; delegation size; delegation composition

JEL Classification: F35; F53; O19

1 Introduction

Does the way recipients represent themselves in multilateral forums matter for bilateral aid allocation? Governments choose the size of their delegations and the political

rank and expertise of the officials who represent them. These choices shape how recipients present their development priorities in a shared forum, while individual donors decide their bilateral commitments. These bilateral allocation decisions have been studied extensively through recipient need (Alesina and Dollar 2000; Hoeffler and Outram 2011), donors' commercial interests (Berthélemy 2006; Younas 2008), and political affinity (Dreher et al. 2008; Woo and Chung 2018). Examining how recipients organize their representation brings their own diplomatic choices into this account of allocation. This paper studies delegation size and political composition in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), where governments discuss development priorities collectively and can engage individual donors in financing discussions on the sidelines.

Delegation size and political composition capture different aspects of recipients' capacity to participate in this multilateral setting. Vlcek (2023) emphasizes the staffing demands of simultaneous meetings and specialized negotiations, and identifies securing development funding as a motivation for recipient delegations. Larger delegations may allow recipients to cover more UNGA deliberations and related exchanges with donor officials. Political rank may matter through both authority and visibility: officials with executive responsibilities may be able to endorse financing proposals, while holding high-ranking office may draw greater attention to recipient priorities. Officials' substantive responsibilities also matter to this account, as economic, development, and foreign-affairs personnel may contribute expertise to development deliberations and financing discussions. Two delegations of the same size can therefore differ in political standing and substantive expertise. Examining size and composition together distinguishes the number of personnel available to participate from the offices and responsibilities represented.

The UNGA provides a useful setting for examining how delegation size and political composition relate to bilateral aid commitments. As the only principal UN organ in

which all member states are represented, the UNGA brings recipient governments, donor governments, and permanent missions together each year. Its Charter mandate includes initiating studies and making recommendations on international economic and social cooperation, supporting debate over development priorities and negotiation of collective responses (United Nations 1945, arts. 9, 13, and 20). Official and press accounts from the 2000s and 2010s document aid-seeking objectives and recurring aid-related exchanges alongside the UNGA, including discussions of recipients' financing needs, debt relief, infrastructure support, and ongoing assistance packages (White House 2001; Koizumi 2002; Ghana News Agency 2007; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2015; Kitta 2016). The UNGA thus offers recipients a setting in which to articulate development priorities collectively and pursue financing discussions with individual donors.

The study links official UNGA rosters for 1993–2016 to bilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitments for 1994–2017. The baseline sample covers 155 recipients and 32 bilateral donors reporting to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Total headcount measures delegation size, while listed titles identify officials' roles; national-leader representation records a head of state or government listed in the roster. The study uses Poisson pseudo-maximum likelihood (PPML) models to compare commitments within donor–recipient relationships over time, accounting for annual changes common to each donor's recipients, bilateral political alignment, and trade.

Governments choose their delegations as part of broader diplomatic strategies. Anticipated aid agreements or changes in a recipient's international importance may influence both representation and subsequent commitments. The estimates therefore describe conditional associations: distinguishing representation that helps advance financing from representation chosen in anticipation of it remains an identification challenge.

Conditional on delegation size, national-leader listing is associated with 18.2 percent higher expected commitments the following year. This association remains positive when the models account for other-executive representation, broader personnel composition, prior aid, and recipient economic conditions. It persists when exceptionally large commitments are capped, at an estimated 8.1 percent, and also appears in commitments two years later, with weaker precision in the fuller specification. Associations between commitment amounts and delegation size or other personnel measures are not statistically distinguishable from zero after adjustment for multiple testing. Neither delegation size nor national-leader listing is clearly associated with more donors making commitments. The leader association therefore concerns the scale of commitments, with larger average dollar contrasts within established aid relationships.

The paper contributes to research on recipient agency in aid allocation by examining how governments organize their diplomatic representation. Research on aid allocation examines recipient need (Neumayer 2003), governance (Berthélemy and Tichit 2004), and donors' strategic interests (Boutton and Carter 2014). Related work examines how donor domestic politics shape support for aid (Milner and Tingley 2010). This study examines a choice made by recipient governments: the number of officials designated to represent them and the offices and responsibilities those officials hold. Linking these choices to subsequent bilateral commitments shows how recipients' diplomatic representation can inform explanations of aid allocation beyond the number of officials they send.

This focus builds on research connecting recipient diplomatic activity to aid allocation. Studies connect recipient lobbying to US allocations (Montes-Rojas 2013) and high-level diplomatic visits to Japanese allocations (Hoshiro 2020). Using reported contacts with US policymakers, Grotteria et al. (2024) exploit shocks to political connections to estimate their effects on aid and other policy outcomes. On the donor side, related work links travel by US presidents and secretaries of state to aid received by the host country

(Kodila-Tedika and Khalifa 2026). The present study extends this literature to the organization of recipient representation in the UNGA, where a delegation represents its government in a setting shared by multiple donors.

Examining these choices requires information on the delegation beyond its principal speaker. The roster panel combines total headcounts with officials' listed positions for each recipient and UNGA session. It brings together dimensions examined separately in research on delegation size (Vlcek 2023) and on national representatives and their speeches (Baturo and Gray 2024). Observing these dimensions together makes it possible to compare delegations of similar size that differ in the offices and responsibilities represented.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 develops the reasoning linking delegation size and composition to aid commitments. Section 3 describes the data, measures, and sample construction. Section 4 presents the empirical strategy and its identification limits. Section 5 reports the main estimates and robustness checks. Section 6 examines donor participation and differences in commitment amounts across aid relationships. Section 7 concludes.

2 Recipient Representation and Aid Allocation

Governments select representatives to articulate national priorities, negotiate common positions, and participate in discussions with other governments. Collective deliberations and bilateral exchanges offer different possible connections to subsequent aid: the former may draw attention to shared development concerns, while the latter may address particular financing proposals. The analysis examines differences in recipient representation within this institutional setting; it does not estimate the effect of the UNGA itself.

2.1 Delegation size and diplomatic capacity

Delegation headcount captures the personnel available to participate in the UNGA and related diplomatic activities. Larger delegations may allow recipients to cover more simultaneous meetings and sustain a wider range of diplomatic exchanges. Economic, development, and foreign-affairs officials may contribute expertise relevant to financing discussions, while substantive advisers may support the technical work behind proposals. The capacity argument therefore concerns both the number of officials available and the responsibilities they hold. If these activities help communicate national priorities or advance financing proposals, staffing capacity may be associated with subsequent aid commitments. This reasoning is consistent with evidence that small states face capacity constraints in multilateral negotiations and can concentrate limited resources on priority issues (Panke 2012). It is also consistent with studies showing that delegation size varies across countries and sessions rather than being determined entirely by protocol (Onderco 2019; Vlcek 2023).

Official and press accounts link participation in the UNGA to financing objectives and the demands of covering multiple meetings. A Ghana News Agency report of development-financing talks with China in 2007 and Malawi's stated aid-seeking objectives in 2016 illustrate the financing role (Ghana News Agency 2007; Kitta 2016). Delegation members also divide responsibilities: Malawi's president explained in 2012 that other delegates attended meetings she could not cover herself (Face of Malawi 2012), while accounts from Bangladesh and Zambia in 2015 describe participation by finance and foreign-affairs officials and a task-specific role for the mines minister (Daily Star 2015; Kalaba 2015).

Delegation members may contribute not only by covering more meetings but also through the exchanges those meetings enable. Face-to-face interaction may help participants communicate intentions and reduce uncertainty (Holmes 2013). The potential

benefits of personal interaction can apply to both political leaders and professional diplomats. Japan's account of the September 2015 Abe–Hasina meeting in New York records discussion of a yen-loan package within assistance already promised to Bangladesh (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2015). Such discussions also involve officials below the national-leader level: following the September 2014 UN Climate Summit, Benin's environment minister and permanent representative, both listed in its delegation roster, participated in a climate-financing discussion organized by the mission and the UN Capital Development Fund (United Nations Capital Development Fund 2014).

This capacity interpretation produces several empirical predictions. A larger delegation should be associated with higher commitments in the following year if broader participation in development discussions and financing exchanges helps advance recipient priorities. If a larger team extends contact to additional donors, a positive association should also appear on the donor-breadth margin. Permanent-mission personnel may provide continuity between UNGA exchanges and subsequent discussions, remaining in New York after visiting officials depart at the conclusion of the high-level meetings. If their institutional knowledge and continuing presence help advance financing proposals, greater mission representation within a delegation of a given size may also be associated with subsequent commitments.

Delegation headcount alone cannot distinguish staffing capacity from the offices and responsibilities represented. Delegations of similar size may differ in their inclusion of national leaders, other executive officials, diplomats, and advisers. Examining these dimensions separately allows the analysis to distinguish the association with personnel numbers from associations with delegation composition.

2.2 National-leader representation and political rank

Political office may matter for aid commitments through both visibility and authority. A national leader's participation may draw attention to development priorities in collective deliberations and bilateral exchanges. Evidence from UNGA speeches illustrates how office can shape representation: leaders have greater latitude than other representatives to depart from the UNGA's agenda and advance their own priorities (Baturo and Gray 2024). Leaders with executive responsibilities may also endorse financing proposals or convey government support for them, building on the work of diplomats and technical officials.

These functions are not confined to national leaders. Ministers and other executive officials may also endorse proposals and communicate government priorities within their responsibilities. Conversely, ceremonial heads may bring visibility without comparable authority over financing decisions. Comparing national-leader representation with other-executive representation therefore helps assess whether the association with aid extends across executive offices or is more pronounced at the national-leader level.

Established aid relationships provide one setting in which high-level engagement may matter. Where projects and administrative arrangements are already in place, discussions may help advance a financing proposal or alter its scale. Evidence linking high-level diplomatic visits to Japan with larger aid amounts among countries receiving Japanese aid is consistent with this possibility (Hoshiro 2020). High-level representation may therefore be associated with larger commitments from existing donors without a broader set of donors making commitments.

2.3 Political alignment and donor-specific relationships

Political affinity and permanent-mission staffing may condition the opportunities for exchanges with particular donors. Research examines donor efforts to encourage voting support (Dreher et al. 2008), while Woo and Chung (2018) find that the United States directs more aid toward countries with less favorable prior positions in the post-Cold War period. Recipient representatives may draw on close political ties to advance financing discussions or use exchanges with less-aligned donors to seek support for their development priorities. Supplementary comparisons examine whether the associations involving national leaders and recipient mission personnel vary with bilateral political affinity or the donor's listed mission personnel.

3 Data

3.1 UNGA delegation rosters

The delegation data come from official UNGA delegation rosters obtained through the United Nations Digital Library (United Nations 1993).[1] These documents identify the representatives, alternate representatives, advisers, and other officials designated by each country. The analysis uses the assembled 1993–2016 roster panel, which records delegates' names, offices, and affiliations. Rosters are assigned to the year in which the session opened, regardless of publication date. Linking representation to commitments in the following year yields the 1994–2017 outcome period. Missing delegation rosters are treated as missing observations rather than as delegations with zero members.

The roster entries distinguish delegation size from the offices and responsibilities represented. Total headcount includes all official delegates except people explicitly

[1] Online Resource 1 Sections 1.1, 1.3, and 1.5 document extraction, coding rules, and source validation.

identified as civil-society participants or observers. National-leader representation is an indicator equal to one when a head of state or government is listed in the delegation body. General Debate speaker records provide a check on participation by listed national leaders (United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library 2026). Across matched country-years covering both recipients and nonrecipients, and excluding the 2000 and 2005 summit years, a listed leader delivered the country's statement in 79.4 percent of leader-listed cases. These records corroborate participation for those leaders.

Other executive officials, including cabinet ministers, deputy ministers, and comparable senior officials, are recorded both as a count excluding national leaders and as an indicator for whether at least one is listed. Titles and affiliations also identify counts of permanent-mission personnel and substantive advisers or experts, excluding support roles from the adviser count. These roles can overlap: a permanent-mission official may also be listed as an adviser.

A combined personnel measure captures representation in economic/development and foreign-affairs functions. It groups officials with finance, economic, development, or related portfolios together with home foreign-affairs and permanent-mission personnel. Each person is counted once, even if several titles or affiliations qualify. National leaders and explicitly identified support staff are excluded from this combined count but remain in total headcount. This measure captures the delegation's development and diplomatic responsibilities, complementing the measures of political office.

3.2 Aid commitments and sample construction

Bilateral ODA commitments come from the OECD's DAC3A dataset (OECD 2026). A commitment records a written obligation to make funds available, whereas a disbursement records their transfer (OECD 2021; Organisation for Economic Co-operation

and Development n.d.). Commitments therefore match the paper's focus on aid allocation decisions; disbursements additionally reflect project implementation and payment timing. Aid amounts are expressed in millions of constant 2024 US dollars.

The bilateral panel pairs donors in the selected provider list with ODA-eligible recipients in each year from 1994 through 2017. A donor enters the panel in a given year only if it reports at least one commitment cell. The provider list includes donors outside the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and observations before DAC accession, so inclusion depends on reporting activity rather than contemporaneous DAC membership. Reported zeros are retained. Within these donor-year and recipient-eligibility boundaries, unreported total-commitment cells are treated as zero and distinguished from zeros explicitly reported by the OECD.

The baseline estimation sample requires a delegation roster from the year immediately preceding the commitment year and nonmissing values for the model's other predictors. Negative commitments are excluded because PPML requires a nonnegative outcome. Estimation also removes observations that cannot contribute to the fixed-effects estimates, including donor–recipient or donor–year groups with only zero commitments. The resulting sample contains 66,323 donor–recipient–year observations from 32 donors and 155 recipients, covering 3,749 bilateral pairs. Unreported cells assigned zero account for 24.2 percent of this sample. Online Resource 1 Section 1.2 and Table A1 document the sample reductions and eligibility rules.

3.3 Political alignment, trade, and recipient conditions

Bilateral political alignment is measured using the UNGA voting-based ideal points developed by Bailey et al. (2017) and distributed in the updated dataset archived by Voeten (2009).[2] Similarity equals the negative absolute distance between the donor's

[2]The updated file draws on the UNGA-DM roll-call data of Fjelstul et al. (2026) for the study period; the analysis uses Voeten's derived file.

and recipient's ideal points, with values closer to zero indicating greater political alignment. These estimates summarize countries' voting positions while accounting for differences across resolutions. The share of identical votes provides an alternative measure in the sensitivity analysis.

Bilateral trade is measured as the sum of available merchandise export and import flows from the International Monetary Fund, expressed in millions of current US dollars (International Monetary Fund 2026). When only one direction of trade is observed, that value is retained rather than treating the bilateral total as missing.

Extended specifications account for recipient economic conditions and needs. These variables include GDP per capita, population, GDP growth, under-five mortality, refugees by country of origin, natural-disaster incidence, recorded disaster-affected population relative to population, and battle deaths. The data come primarily from the World Bank's World Development Indicators (World Bank 2026), with disaster incidence and impacts obtained from UCLouvain's EM-DAT archive (Delforge et al. 2024). The predetermined measures refer to the year before the delegation, so they precede the representation choice.

3.4 Descriptive statistics

Table 1 describes the main PPML estimation sample. Commitments at the donor–recipient–year level are highly skewed: the median is \$0.59 million, compared with a mean of \$23.57 million. At the recipient-year level, the median delegation contains 16 officials, with the middle half containing between 10 and 26. National leaders are listed in 43 percent of observed delegations.

Table 1: Summary statistics

Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. dev.	25th pct.	Median	75th pct.
Panel A. Donor–recipient–year variables						
ODA commitments	66,323	23.566	134.214	0.007	0.592	8.364
Ideal-point similarity	66,323	-1.561	0.694	-1.933	-1.509	-1.153
Bilateral trade	66,323	1,082.567	11,171.749	4.040	29.796	209.844
Panel B. Recipient–year variables						
Delegation headcount	3,198	20.991	18.266	10	16	26
National leader listed	3,198	0.428	0.495	0	0	1
Other-executive presence	3,198	0.884	0.320	1	1	1
Other executives	3,198	1.743	1.784	1	1	2
Economic/development and foreign-affairs personnel	3,198	13.228	11.176	6	10	16
Permanent mission	3,198	7.591	6.373	4	6	10
Substantive advisers	3,198	10.759	16.347	0	6	14

Notes: The sample is the baseline PPML estimation sample, covering commitment years 1994–2017. ODA commitments are millions of constant 2024 US dollars; bilateral trade is millions of current US dollars. Ideal-point similarity is the negative absolute Bailey–Strezhnev–Voeten ideal-point distance. Panel B removes donor-level duplication and reports one observation per recipient-year. National-leader listing and other-executive presence are binary indicators; the remaining delegation measures are counts. The combined economic/development and foreign-affairs measure counts each qualifying official once. Delegation variables are dated $t-1$.

4 Empirical Strategy

4.1 PPML framework

The unit of analysis is a donor–recipient–year. Delegation characteristics vary across recipients and years, while aid commitments vary across donors, recipients, and years. The timing structure relates representation during the UNGA session that begins in $t-1$ to commitments recorded in t. All lags are exact calendar-year lags. If the $t-1$ value is missing, an older observation is not used in its place. This one-year lag establishes the order of the variables, although it does not by itself eliminate the possibility that governments anticipate future aid.

Let ODA_{ijt} denote commitments from donor j to recipient i in year t. The variable $D^r_{i,t-1}$ denotes a lagged delegation measure of type r, $A_{ij,t-1}$ is lagged ideal-point similarity, defined as $A_{ij,t-1} = -|z_{i,t-1} - z_{j,t-1}|$ for country ideal points z, and $T_{ij,t-1}$

is lagged bilateral trade. Let X_{ijt} collect the included explanatory variables and fixed effects. The baseline conditional mean is

$$\mathbb{E}[ODA_{ijt} \mid X_{ijt}] = \exp\Big[\beta_r g_r\big(D^r_{i,t-1}\big) + \gamma A_{ij,t-1} + \lambda \log(1 + T_{ij,t-1}) + \alpha_{ij} + \delta_{jt}\Big], \tag{1}$$

where $g_r(x) = x$ for national-leader representation and $g_r(x) = \log(1 + x)$ for delegation counts.

The donor–recipient fixed effects, α_{ij}, remove all bilateral characteristics that do not change over time, including distance, colonial history, and persistent political ties. The donor–year fixed effects, δ_{jt}, remove annual changes that affect all recipients of the same donor, including the donor's total aid budget and donor-wide policy shifts. Consequently, the delegation coefficients are estimated from changes in recipient representation within the same bilateral relationship after common donor-year changes have been removed.

PPML models aid commitments in their original monetary units and includes observations with zero commitments. It also accommodates unequal variability in aid amounts across observations without requiring the outcome to follow a Poisson distribution (Santos Silva and Tenreyro 2006). Coefficients are converted into percentage differences in expected commitments associated with delegation characteristics.

For national-leader representation, the reported percentage difference compares delegations with and without a listed leader, holding the other included variables and fixed effects constant. Personnel counts enter in logarithmic form to allow the association of an additional official with commitments to depend on the existing personnel count. One is added before taking logarithms to retain zero counts. When the association is positive, this specification implies that each additional official is associated with a

progressively smaller percentage increase in expected commitments. Online Resource 1 Section 2.5 provides the formulas used to calculate these percentage differences.

4.2 Separating scale from composition

To distinguish delegation size from composition, the analysis examines whether the offices and responsibilities represented are associated with commitments after accounting for total headcount. The specifications include total headcount alongside national-leader representation, other executive officials, permanent-mission personnel, or substantive advisers, each entered separately:

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbb{E}[ODA_{ijt} \mid X_{ijt}] = \exp\Big[&\beta_1 \log(1 + Total_{i,t-1}) + \beta_2 Role^r_{i,t-1} \\ &+ \gamma A_{ij,t-1} + \lambda \log(1 + T_{ij,t-1}) + \alpha_{ij} + \delta_{jt}\Big].\end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

Here, $Role^r$ denotes the national-leader indicator or the logarithm of one plus the count of officials in the specified role. The coefficients distinguish the association with total headcount, β_1, from the association with that role, β_2, holding the other included variables and fixed effects constant.

To compare representation across executive offices, a joint specification includes indicators for national-leader and other-executive presence alongside total headcount and the baseline controls. Using presence indicators for both groups permits a direct comparison of their coefficients, testing whether the association with commitments differs between national leaders and other executive officials.

A further specification examines political office alongside functional responsibilities by including national-leader representation and the combined economic/development–foreign-affairs personnel count, while retaining total headcount. This model also controls for prior bilateral aid and recipient economic conditions. Because these additional variables reduce the available sample, the size-plus-leader model is re-estimated

on the same observations to distinguish changes associated with the additional controls from those arising from sample composition.

4.3 Source of variation and limits to identification

The analysis relies on changes in delegation size and composition within donor–recipient relationships over time, after accounting for annual changes common to each donor's recipients. For national-leader representation, 141 of the 155 recipients in the baseline sample have both leader-listed and nonleader years. Among 2,972 observed consecutive-year pairs, leader status changes 926 times. These changes provide within-recipient variation for estimating the leader association.

Changes in representation may nevertheless coincide with developments that also influence aid commitments. Governments may designate senior representatives in anticipation of aid agreements, or respond to circumstances that also prompt donors to increase commitments. A fiscal emergency or a large program already under negotiation could influence both decisions. A causal interpretation would require that, conditional on the fixed effects and observed controls, no unobserved recipient-year development influences both representation and subsequent commitments. The estimates are therefore interpreted as conditional associations with subsequent aid.[3]

The recipient-condition specifications examine whether observed economic circumstances, needs, and shocks account for these associations. The predetermined controls are measured in $t-2$, before the $t-1$ delegation; separate extensions add commitment-year disasters and conflict or prior aggregate recipient aid. Recipient–year fixed effects would absorb common recipient-year conditions more broadly, but would also absorb

[3] Predictive language refers to these conditional associations; the analysis does not evaluate out-of-sample forecast accuracy. Online Resource 1 Sections 7.5 and 7.8 examine project preparation before the UNGA and the sensitivity of the estimates to hypothetical unobserved confounding.

the delegation measures, which take the same value across donors for a given recipient and year. These fixed effects therefore cannot be used to estimate the overall associations with delegation size or composition.

The supplementary donor-specific comparisons interact recipient representation with bilateral political alignment or donor mission staffing. Because these interactions vary across donors within a recipient-year, the models can include recipient–year fixed effects alongside donor–recipient and donor–year fixed effects; Online Resource 1 Section 6 reports their specification and results.

4.4 Inference

Statistical uncertainty is assessed using standard errors clustered by donor and recipient, allowing errors to be correlated across observations involving the same donor or recipient (Cameron et al. 2011). Supplementary checks examine sensitivity to alternative inference procedures.

Because the analysis tests several related hypotheses, the reported evidence also accounts for multiple testing. Holm-adjusted p-values are reported for the groups of hypotheses identified in each table (Holm 1979). Tables distinguish these adjusted values from the unadjusted significance markers. Online Resource 1 Sections 2.6 and 7.3 document the inference procedures and sensitivity checks.

5 Delegation Size, Composition, and Aid

5.1 Scale and composition

Table 2 examines delegation size and then adds each role separately, holding total headcount constant. Delegation size alone has a positive but statistically imprecise

association with commitments. Controlling for delegation size, national-leader listing is associated with 18.2 percent higher expected commitments, with a 95 percent confidence interval of 6.0–31.8 percent. The national-leader coefficient is statistically significant at the 5 percent level under both donor-and-recipient clustering ($p = 0.003$) and recipient-only clustering ($p = 0.017$). Holm adjustment for the four role tests yields corresponding p-values of 0.010 and 0.069. Online Resource 1 Sections 2.6 and 7.3 report the alternative inference procedures and results.

Table 2: Recipient delegation scale, rank, and composition

	Dependent variable: bilateral ODA commitments				
	Scale only	Leader	Other executives	Permanent mission	Advisers
Log delegation scale, $t-1$	0.090	0.039	0.035	0.122	0.051
	(0.073)	(0.083)	(0.096)	(0.079)	(0.107)
Additional role, $t-1$		0.167***	0.157	-0.060	0.024
		(0.056)	(0.113)	(0.099)	(0.034)
Ideal-point similarity, $t-1$	0.210**	0.194*	0.210**	0.203*	0.206**
	(0.102)	(0.101)	(0.102)	(0.106)	(0.101)
Log bilateral trade, $t-1$	0.060	0.065	0.060	0.059	0.060
	(0.082)	(0.083)	(0.081)	(0.082)	(0.082)
Holm-adjusted p-value for role		0.010	0.501	0.947	0.947
Donor–recipient fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Donor–year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	66,323	66,323	66,323	66,323	66,323

Notes: PPML coefficients for bilateral ODA commitment amounts in 1994–2017. Every role column controls for total delegation scale. "Additional role" refers to the role named at the top of the column. National leader is a dummy; other role counts and total delegation scale enter as $\log(1+x)$. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered two ways by donor and recipient. $^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$ using raw p-values. The Holm family contains the four additional-role coefficients.

The counts of other executive officials, permanent-mission personnel, and substantive advisers do not show statistically clear associations with commitments after adjustment for multiple testing. A statistically significant leader estimate and nonsignificant estimates for other roles do not, by themselves, establish that national-leader listing is more strongly associated with aid commitments than representation by other

officials. The next subsection directly compares national-leader and other-executive representation using presence indicators for both.

5.2 Joint composition specifications

Including both presence indicators in the same model allows each association to be estimated conditional on the other, alongside headcount and the baseline controls. Table 3 reports an estimated association of 18.2 percent for national-leader listing and 1.8 percent for the presence of at least one other executive official. The leader estimate is unchanged at the reported precision from Table 2, indicating that accounting for other-executive presence leaves the baseline association intact.

Table 3: Joint presence specification: national leaders and other executive officials

Panel A. Presence associations			
Representation indicator	Difference (%)	Two-way 95% CI	Recipient 95% CI
National leader listed	18.2	[6.0, 31.8]	[3.1, 35.6]
Other executive listed	1.8	[-9.5, 14.5]	[-9.5, 14.6]
Panel B. Equality of leader and other-executive coefficients			
		Two-way clustering	Recipient clustering
Difference between coefficients		0.149	0.149
Equality-test p-value		0.052	0.088

Notes: PPML; 66,323 donor–recipient–year observations, 32 donors and 155 recipients. Both presence indicators enter together and may both equal one. Controls are log one plus total headcount, alignment and trade, with donor–recipient and donor–year fixed effects. Panel A compares presence with absence, holding the other variables constant. Confidence intervals use donor-and-recipient clustering with a normal distribution, or recipient-only clustering with a t-distribution. Panel B reports the leader coefficient minus the other-executive coefficient on the log scale, not a percentage-point difference. Equality tests use t-distributions with 31 and 154 degrees of freedom for the two clustering approaches, respectively. Intervals and equality tests are unadjusted for multiple testing.

Whether national-leader listing is more strongly associated with commitments than other-executive presence requires a direct comparison of the two coefficients. Panel B reports equality-test p-values of 0.052 under donor-and-recipient clustering and 0.088 under recipient-only clustering. Neither test rejects equal coefficients at the 5 percent level, so the larger leader estimate does not establish a statistically stronger association with aid commitments.

Whereas Table 3 distinguishes representation by political office, Table 4 examines leader representation alongside the delegation's economic/development and foreign-affairs staffing. This separate specification includes total headcount, leader listing, and the combined personnel count, rather than the other-executive presence indicator. It also adds prior bilateral aid, GDP per capita, population, and GDP growth. Table 4 reports the three representation contrasts on a common sample of 63,253 donor–recipient–year observations. Leader listing is associated with 14.9 percent higher expected commitments, with a recipient-clustered 95 percent interval of 3.3 to 27.8 percent.[4] Size and combined personnel have imprecise associations. The leader association therefore extends beyond differences in total staffing and the representation of development and foreign-affairs personnel.

Table 4: Joint specification: delegation size, leader representation, and personnel composition

Contrast	Difference (%)	Two-way 95% CI	Recipient 95% CI
Size: double $(1 + H)$	2.9	[-9.3, 16.8]	[-10.3, 18.1]
Leader: absent to listed	14.9	[5.7, 24.8]	[3.3, 27.8]
Combined personnel: double $(1 + C)$	-4.9	[-19.6, 12.4]	[-21.6, 15.2]

Notes: PPML; 63,253 donor–recipient–year observations, 31 donors and 154 recipients. All three representation measures enter together. Controls are alignment, trade, prior bilateral aid, GDP per capita, population and GDP growth, with donor–recipient and donor–year fixed effects. Confidence intervals use donor-and-recipient clustering with a normal distribution, or recipient-only clustering with a t-distribution, as indicated by the column headings. Intervals are unadjusted for multiple testing. H is total headcount and C counts economic/development and foreign-affairs personnel, counting each person once. Count contrasts double one plus the count.

5.3 Robustness and timing

Beyond personnel composition, the robustness checks examine sensitivity to recipient needs and shocks, influential observations, and the timing of commitments. Figure 1

[4]The change from the full-sample baseline of 18.2 percent reflects both sample and specification changes. On Table 4's 63,253 observations, the baseline estimate is 16.7 percent. Adding prior bilateral aid and economic controls gives 16.3 percent; adding the combined personnel count gives 14.9 percent. Online Resource 1 Sections 7.1 and 7.3 report the combined measure, control-block comparisons, and matched-sample progression.

begins with the recipient-condition checks. Restricting the baseline to observations with complete control data reduces the estimate from 18.2 to 16.4 percent. Adding predetermined measures of income, population, mortality, displacement, disasters, and conflict leaves it at 16.4 percent, with a 95 percent confidence interval of 6.6–27.3 percent. Separate extensions adding commitment-year shocks or prior aggregate recipient aid yield estimates of 16.8–17.1 percent. The initial decline therefore reflects the change in sample rather than the addition of the predetermined controls.

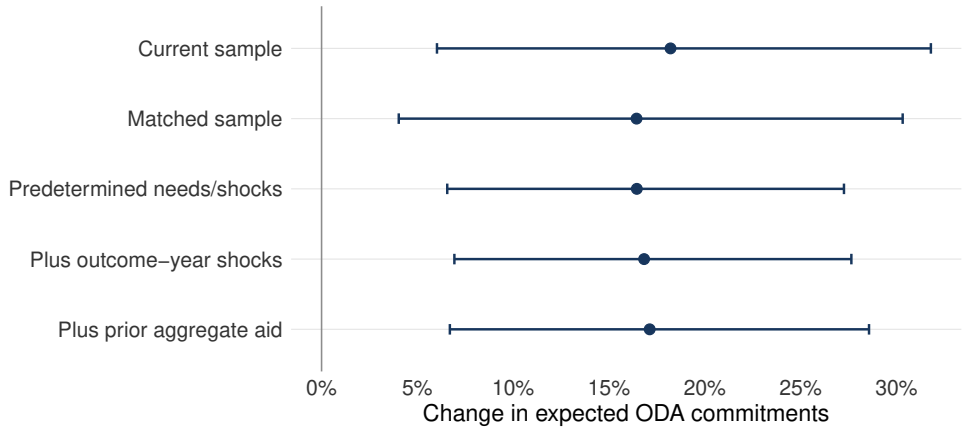


Fig. 1 National-leader representation, recipient needs, and shocks

Notes: Points transform the national-leader coefficient into $100[\exp(\widehat{\beta}) - 1]$. Horizontal bars are 95 percent normal-reference confidence intervals. Every model controls for total delegation scale, lagged bilateral ideal-point similarity, lagged bilateral trade, donor–recipient fixed effects, and donor–year fixed effects. The matched-sample model changes only the sample. Predetermined controls are dated $t - 2$ and include GDP per capita, population, GDP growth, under-five mortality, refugees, disasters, and battle deaths. Standard errors are clustered by donor and recipient. The matched-sample and needs-and-shocks models contain 61,790 observations; the prior-aid extension contains 61,609.

The leader association is robust to alternative treatments of commitment observations. Restricting estimation to donor–recipient–year observations for which the OECD explicitly reports a commitment amount, including reported zeros, yields an estimate of 18.2 percent, unchanged at the reported precision from the baseline. The positive association also persists when commitments are capped at the sample's 99.5th percentile, at an estimated 8.1 percent, with a recipient-clustered 95 percent confidence interval of 0.8–15.9 percent.

The positive association also survives the exclusion of individual donors or recipients. Removing each recipient in turn yields baseline estimates ranging from 11.2 to 21.1 percent; removing each donor in turn yields estimates ranging from 17.2 to 20.3 percent. Allowing the relationship between delegation size and commitments to vary more flexibly across delegation sizes yields a leader estimate of 19.3 percent.[5]

The positive association also appears in commitments two years after the delegation. The two-year estimate is 16.2 percent in the size-plus-leader model, with a recipient-clustered 95 percent confidence interval of 1.2–33.4 percent. With the personnel-composition controls used in Table 4, the two-year estimate is 13.4 percent and is less precisely estimated, with an interval of −2.7–32.2 percent. Each comparison uses the same observations at both horizons and keeps the controls fixed relative to the roster year. Online Resource 1 Table A7 reports these paired one- and two-year estimates.

Taken together, the checks show that the positive leader association persists across alternative specifications, sample restrictions, and treatments of exceptionally large commitments.

6 Allocation Margins

The association with commitment amounts raises two further questions: is national-leader representation also associated with a broader set of donors making commitments, and how does the amount association vary with prior aid relationships?[6] Table 5 examines donor participation and differences by relationship history, with delegation size also included in the participation tests. Panel A examines donor

[5] Online Resource 1 Section 7.3 reports the joint-model counterparts and bootstrap intervals; Sections 2.4 and 7.4 document alternative-sample and political-status checks.

[6] Supplementary comparisons in Online Resource 1 Section 6 and Table A19 examine political alignment and donor mission staffing. Neither clearly differentiates the association between national-leader listing and commitment amounts. Recipient permanent-mission staffing has a more positive association with commitments from politically aligned donors, with inference sensitive to clustering: the Holm-adjusted p-value is 0.043 under donor-and-recipient clustering and 0.122 under recipient-only clustering.

participation at two levels. The first outcome counts the donors making positive commitments to each recipient in a year; the second records whether an individual donor makes a positive commitment to that recipient. The second model follows individual donor–recipient relationships over time, accounting for persistent differences between those relationships and annual changes in each donor's commitments across recipients. Neither approach provides clear evidence that delegation size or national-leader representation is associated with broader donor participation.

Table 5: Delegation size and national-leader representation across allocation margins

	Committing donors	Any positive commitment	Commitment amount	
			No recent commitment	Established relationship
Panel A. Donor breadth and extensive margin				
Log delegation scale, $t-1$	0.002	0.001		
	(0.008)	(0.007)		
National leader, $t-1$	0.009*	0.005		
	(0.005)	(0.004)		
Holm-adjusted p-value	0.166	0.222		
Panel B. Relationship-history amount margin				
National leader, $t-1$			0.917***	0.167***
			(0.310)	(0.046)
Established minus no-recent difference			-0.750**	(0.306)
Holm-adjusted p-value for difference			0.061	
Recipient controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Donor–recipient fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Donor–year fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	2,890	61,790	50,313	50,313

Notes: PPML coefficients; parentheses report standard errors. Column 1 is a recipient-year model of the number of donors making a positive commitment and includes recipient and year fixed effects, with an offset for the number of donors at risk. Column 2 applies PPML to the dyadic positive-commitment indicator (one for a positive commitment, zero otherwise). Panel A covers 1994–2017. Panel B covers 2000–2017 and is a single interacted PPML amount model; "established" means a positive commitment in at least one year from $t-4$ through $t-2$. All models include total delegation scale and predetermined recipient controls. Dyadic models also include ideal-point similarity and trade. Standard errors are clustered by donor and recipient, except the recipient-year model, which is clustered by recipient. Delegation scale is the log of one plus headcount. The Panel A Holm adjustment covers the two leader tests. Panel B treats the between-group difference as an explicit contrast using a t-distribution with 31 degrees of freedom and adjusts across the three leader-by-history interactions for amounts, any positive commitment, and positive amounts only (Online Resource 1 Table A12). Stars use unadjusted tests: $^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

The participation results leave open how the amount association varies with prior aid relationships. Panel B of Table 5 examines this question over 2000–2017.[7] A relationship is classified as established if the donor made a positive commitment in at least one year from $t-4$ through $t-2$, where t is the commitment year. National-leader listing is associated with 18.2 percent higher expected commitments within established relationships and 150 percent higher commitments among dyads without recent aid.[8] These percentages apply to markedly different baseline amounts. With leader listing set to zero, average model-predicted commitments are \$27.66 million in established relationships and \$0.23 million among dyads without recent commitments, measured in constant 2024 US dollars. Thus, the corresponding average dollar differences associated with leader listing are \$5.03 million and \$0.35 million (Online Resource 1 Figure A2). The gap between these contrasts is \$4.68 million, with an approximate, unadjusted 95 percent bootstrap interval of \$0.53–\$10.64 million.[9] When commitments are capped at the 99.5th percentile, the dollar association within established relationships remains larger, at \$2.09 million.[10]

The larger dollar association within established aid relationships places the leader finding in the context of ongoing cooperation, where recipients and donors already have projects and financing arrangements to discuss.

7 Conclusion

Recipient governments choose both how many officials represent them in multilateral forums and which offices those officials hold. This paper brings those choices into

[7] The same outcome period is used for the primary history window, $t-4$ through $t-2$, and a longer sensitivity window, $t-6$ through $t-2$. Starting in 2000 keeps the longer window within the reconstructed donor–recipient sample beginning in 1994; the primary window alone would permit an earlier start.

[8] The established-relationship estimate matches the rounded baseline estimate in Table 2, but comes from a separate specification with additional recipient controls and a shorter sample period. Although the point estimates suggest a stronger proportional association between leader listing and commitments among dyads without recent aid, the test comparing the two leader coefficients does not reject equality at the 5 percent level after Holm adjustment ($p = 0.061$).

[9] Online Resource 1 Section 4.3 describes the calculation of the dollar contrasts and their bootstrap intervals.

[10] Online Resource 1 Section 4.4 reports the relationship-history sensitivity checks.

the study of bilateral aid allocation by linking official UNGA delegation rosters to subsequent commitments. Distinguishing delegation size from political composition reveals an association that a headcount alone would leave unexamined: conditional on delegation size, political alignment, and trade, national-leader listing is associated with 18.2 percent higher expected commitments the following year. The leader association also remains positive when the presence of other executive officials is included.

The evidence concerns the scale of commitments, with larger average dollar contrasts within established aid relationships and no clear accompanying expansion in donor participation. The positive leader association persists when exceptionally large commitments are capped, at an estimated 8.1 percent. Delegation size and other personnel measures have less conclusive associations with commitment amounts. The evidence thus points to the offices represented as a dimension of recipient diplomacy that deserves attention independently of delegation size.

Whether representation advances financing or responds to anticipated agreements remains an open question. Official rosters record whom governments designate to represent them; linking these records to dated financing proposals, bilateral meetings, and subsequent negotiations would help distinguish the two explanations. The findings bring the political composition of recipient representation into the study of aid allocation, showing why the offices represented warrant attention alongside the number of delegates, recipient needs, and donor interests.

AI assistance

OpenAI ChatGPT/Codex and Anthropic Claude were used to assist with cross-checking UNGA rosters, analysis-code development, diagnostic analyses, reference checks, and manuscript drafting and revision. The author reviewed the analyses, sources, and text and takes responsibility for the final manuscript.

Supplementary information

Online Resource 1 provides the supplementary appendix, including data-construction details, measurement checks, additional estimates, and sensitivity analyses.

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