ISSUES AND PROSPECTS

VOTING PATTERNS IN THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON USES OF THE SEAS

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INTRODUCTION

The UN General Assembly is an international forum for examination, discussion, and debate about salient regional and global issues. The delegates represent large and small states, rich and poor, those that are superpowers, and those that are not acknowledged as major players in the international arena. The General Assembly, through the vehicle of its annual meetings, is a body that brings into the public light timely and pressing topics that merit international attention and resolution. Debates on self-determination, human rights violations, and regional conflicts illustrate the broad range of topics considered in a given session. Resource and environment issues are also debated, including those that relate to desertification, environmental management, and the uses of seabeds. The purpose of this article is to examine votes in the United Nations on the Law of the Sea and other ocean-related political, military, and ecological issues. Unquestionably, these and related geopolitical issues are becoming increasingly important. Minghi stated as much in his 1981 assessment of political geographic research: "It is likely that with rising concern about possible conflict and coastal states over the last two decades of this century, we will see a sharp increase in research activity among political geographers in maritime problems."1

Minghi's prediction is evident in a recent issue of Political Geography Quarterly devoted to "The New Political Geography of the Sea." In this special issue, articles are presented by Glassner on the importance of this topic for political geography examination, by Nanda on the Exclusive Economic Zone, by Abrahamsson on the Law of the Sea Convention and shipping, by Alexan-


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In the analysis that follows, we investigate recorded roll-call votes taken in the General Assembly on ocean law, politics, resources, and environment to discern the degrees of support. The overriding objective is to illustrate geographic patterns of UN votes on ocean and sea issues and to determine whether there is some consistency in the regional patterns of support, opposition, and abstentions.

First we review recent literature on UN voting and follow with a discussion of the data sources used in our analyses. We then proceed to examine the UN votes taken on ocean and sea issues. Seven votes are selected for detailed geographic analysis. The article concludes with suggestions for future research.

LITERATURE SURVEY

There is a literature, albeit not extensive, on roll-call votes in the General Assembly. A number of social scientists, including geographers and political scientists, have contributed to this emerging field of international interest. The contributions by geographers include those by Abate, and Abate and Brunn, who investigated whether the voting results in the General Assembly of African member states were directly related to the amount of U.S. and Soviet assistance. They concluded that foreign aid levels often were inversely