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## The politicization of UNESCO World Heritage decision making

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DRAFT - NOT FOR CITATION - COMMENTS ARE WELCOME

**Abstract** The purpose of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention is to protect the global public good of cultural and natural heritage of outstanding value for humanity. Many observers, however, have suggested that this international instrument is subject to politicization as the selection process of heritage sites in the World Heritage List is increasingly driven by countries' political influence and national strategic interests. This article explores this possibility quantitatively by analyzing a unique dataset collecting information from the Summary of Records of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee sessions over the period 2003-2012. Exploiting the difference between technical experts' recommendations, Committee members' verbal interventions and final decisions, our empirical analysis addresses four main theoretical questions: (i) Does the World Heritage Committee follow Advisory Bodies recommendations for the evaluation of heritage sites? ii) Does committee membership or size of national delegations influence the inscription of sites on the List or an upgrade of initial technical evaluations? iii) Is the Committee's decision over the selection of world heritage sites driven by a country's political and economic power? iv) Do close political and economic relationships between countries influence committee members' behavior? The paper contributes to the Public Choice literature on international organizations by providing new evidence on the role of political and economic interests in decision making concerning global public goods.

**Keywords** World heritage · UNESCO · International organization · Voting

**JEL classification:** D71 F53

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## 1 Introduction

The purpose of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention is to protect the global public good of cultural and natural heritage of outstanding value for humanity. Its implementing mechanism is the World Heritage List, which allows State Parties since 1978 to identify heritage sites of global importance for humanity and place them under its protection. Inscriptions of cultural and natural sites on the World Heritage List are the result of a selection process that occurs during the annual World Heritage Committee meetings. Here, experts from UNESCO's official Advisory Bodies (ICOMOS and IUCN) present technical evaluations of nominations proposed by State Parties and the 21 member states elected to the World Heritage Committee formally make the final decision. As of 2015 some 191 countries have ratified the Convention and a total of 1007 properties have been inscribed on the World Heritage List. The List has become very popular and many have regarded it as 'the most effective international legal instrument for the protection of the cultural and natural heritage' (Titchen 1996, Strasser 2002). Yet, observers have also pointed out that this international instrument is subject to politicization as the selection process of heritage sites is increasingly driven by countries' political influence and national strategic interests. For instance, in 2010, *The Economist* reporting on the 34th session of the World Heritage Committee held in Brasilia signaled that the UN agency 'was bending its own rules under pressure from member states'. Further, Jokilehto (2011) reports that since 1993 there have been more than 40 cultural sites inscribed by the World Heritage Committee which have received a negative recommendation from the Advisory Bodies.

But why the selection of World Heritage sites is becoming such a big stake? Being on the List is highly desired by many as it may bring prominence and monetary revenue. Despite the fact that inscription does not guarantee greater protection and access to financial resources from UNESCO is very limited, inscription attracts the attention of donors and for-profit firms or countries may market their world heritage sites as tourism destinations (Johnson & Barry 1995, Frey et al. 2013). Further, in some cases inscription has become a political tool for nations to bolster their sovereign interests, using global heritage as a pawn in international relations (Meskell et al. 2014).

A growing economic literature has started investigating through quantitative methods the determinants of the World Heritage List<sup>1</sup> (Bertacchini & Saccone 2012, Frey et al. 2013, Parenti & De Simone 2015). For example, using both nominations and final inscriptions for the period 1978-2008, Bertacchini & Saccone (2012) find that income level and economic power are relevant for the capacity of countries to propose heritage sites in the List. Further, membership in the World Heritage Committee has a positive and significant effect in both the nomination activity by states and in the likelihood of having a site inscribed. In a similar vein, Frey et al. (2013) show that historical, cultural and natural determinants are positively related to the number of heritage sites a country has in the List. More interestingly, political and economic factors such as a country's income level, economic power and membership in the UN Security Council have an impact on the composition of the World Heritage List.

These papers present evidence that factors unrelated to the value of heritage have affected the composition of the World Heritage List. However, their findings do not clearly answer how political influence or national interests enter into the decision making process nor do their empirical strategies completely rule out potential selection and endogeneity biases which are intrinsic to the nomination and inscription procedures of World Heritage sites. For example, focusing only on the number of inscriptions does not capture the variation in the nomination activity across state parties, which may in turn reflect different capacity or attitudes of a country in having its heritage represented in the List. In a similar vein, membership in the Committee arguably

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<sup>1</sup> In the sociological literature, addressing the concept of cultural and natural wealth, Reyes (2014) analyses the determinants of the World Heritage List applying a similar quantitative approach.

provides the political power to push sites through the decision making process, but countries that are part of the Committee may anticipate membership on the governing board and thus prepare in advance more applications or invest more resources for the preparation of nominations.

In this paper, we provide a more systematic investigation of the UNESCO World Heritage decision making process using new datasets based on information from the Summary of Records (SoR) and other World Heritage Committee official documents over the period 2003-2012. For each nomination of cultural and natural properties, we tracked Advisory Bodies' initial recommendation, the final decision by the World Heritage Committee, the number of delegates of the nominating country present at the Committee session and verbal interventions expressed by State Parties during the sessions. We finally link this information with other country specific variables and dyadic data describing relations between countries proposing sites and intervening Committee members. The data presented here focus on a shorter period of analysis than the whole period of activity of the World Heritage Convention<sup>2</sup>, but they provide more detailed information on the procedural and substantive aspects of the decision making process, namely how Advisory Body recommendations and States Parties' political and economic imperatives interact in the World Heritage Committee to influence the final selection of sites.

If the politicization of the World Heritage decision making process occurs, we expect to find evidence of this phenomenon in two different but related ways. Firstly, a country proposing a site may exert influence on the final decision of the World Heritage Committee. Therefore, in a first set of results we use data on individual nominations and we test how, given the initial technical evaluations by the Advisory Bodies, final decisions are influenced by political and economic characteristics of the countries proposing a site. Secondly, regardless the final decision outcome, the voting behavior of individual Committee members may be influenced by factors unrelated with the value and quality of the nomination. We are not excluding that Committee members may disagree with the initial technical evaluation provided by the Advisory Body. This however shall be based more on a divergence of opinion concerning the quality of the nomination and not to be systematically driven by instrumental considerations. One of the main challenges in analyzing such pattern is that decisions concerning the selection of sites in the World Heritage Committee are mainly taken by consensus through formal discussions and multilateral negotiations among its members, rather than with more structured voting procedures. As a result, in a second set of results we focus on verbal interventions by Committee members at the plenary sessions and we test whether political-economic considerations affect the content of these statements, which express the building of consensus around the final decision outcome. More specifically, the empirical analysis addresses four main questions: (i) Does the World Heritage Committee follow Advisory Bodies' recommendations in its deliberations? ii) Does Committee membership or size of national delegations influence the inscription of sites in the List or an upgrade of the initial technical evaluations? iii) Are Committee's decisions over the inscription of World Heritage sites driven by a country's political and economic power? iv) Do close political and economic relationships between countries influence committee members' behavior?

The paper is related to the Public Choice literature on international organizations, with particular reference to the works addressing how political-economic factors affect their decision making and members' voting behavior. Since the seminal works by Frey (1984) and Vaubel (1986), this literature has emphasized how final decision outcomes may be subject to rent seeking and political pressure by countries or their representatives pursuing their self or national interests. More recent studies have shown that countries represented on governing boards of international organizations can obtain more favorable outcomes than other state parties. In the context of international environmental decision making, Flues et al. (2010) find that decisions

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<sup>2</sup> Inscriptions on the World Heritage List started in 1978. Summary of Records of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee sessions are only available from 2002 onwards.

about methodologies and projects taken by the Executive Board of the Clean Development Mechanisms, along with formal quality criteria, tend to favor projects which are relevant for board members. Similarly, several authors find that the membership of a developing country on the UN security council not only significantly increases the aid flows from the U.S., but also the credits from the IMF and World Bank (Kuziemko & Werker 2006, Dreher et al. 2009a, Dreher et al. 2009b). Looking specifically at how special interests guide voting behavior in international organizations, there is an emerging evidence that countries trade their support in an instrumental way (Eldar 2008). This has been tested particularly in the case of UNGA roll call voting, where studies have highlighted how nations linked to the United States or G7 countries through trade or aid relationships are likely to align in their voting patterns with the dominant states' preference (Dreher et al. 2008, Dreher & Sturm 2012).

The organization of the paper is as follows. Section 2 describes the UNESCO World Heritage decision making process. Section 3 introduces our main hypotheses. Section 4 illustrates the data and methodology. Section 5 presents the empirical results, while section 5 concludes.

## 2 Trends in UNESCO World Heritage Decision Making

The World Heritage List consists of cultural and natural properties of outstanding universal value (OUV), which is defined in the Operational Guidelines of the Convention according to ten criteria detailing the specific requirements properties must meet for inclusion on the List. The composition of the World Heritage List is the outcome of two different phases, nomination and selection, and of the interacting input of three different actors, State Parties, Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Committee (Strasser 2002). The nomination process relies on the initiative of the State Parties, which submit nomination proposals for their sites to be included on the List. Experts from two advisory bodies, the International Council on Museums and Sites (ICOMOS) for cultural properties and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) for natural properties, evaluate the nomination dossiers to ensure it complies with the requirements detailed in the Operational Guidelines. Field missions are also mobilized to assess sites' authenticity, integrity and protection. Once the evaluation is concluded, it is sent to the World Heritage Committee, which is the final decision making body that is comprised of 21 member states serving a 4-year term.

The selection of proposed sites occurs at the annual sessions of the World Heritage Committee. According to the Operational Guidelines, the nominations are presented by the Advisory Bodies, which make their recommendations according to 4 types of evaluation: Inscription, Referral, Deferral and Not Inscription. The same evaluation system is then followed by the World Heritage Committee to take the final decision after a discussion of the nominations. Decisions concerning Not Inscription imply that the State Party may not present the proposed heritage site, whereas Referral and Deferral evaluations allow State Parties to resubmit the nomination at following sessions of the Committee, as long as they provide additional information or substantially revise the nomination dossier. It is relevant to notice that while in the past there was no restriction to the number of sites a country could propose for inscription to the List, new measures to achieve a balanced List have been implemented by limiting both the nomination capacity of states and the number of examined proposals. From 2002 onwards, the World Heritage Committee agreed to examine only one nomination dossier per State per year, exclusive of those referred or deferred at previous sessions, and up to a limit of thirty. This provision has been slightly modified allowing States to submit from 2005 up to two complete nominations, provided that at least one concerns a natural heritage site, and extending to forty-five the amount of nominations that can be reviewed by the Committee.

Table 1 presents descriptive evidence of the final decisions taken by the World Heritage Committee depending on the initial Advisory Bodies' recommendations in the period analyzed (2003-2012).

**Table 1** Nominations according to Advisory Body recommendation and Committee decision, 2003-2012

		Committee decision				Total
		Inscribe	Refer	Defer	Not inscribe	
AB Recommendation	Inscribe	154 (96.8%)	3 (1.9%)	2 (1.3%)	0 (0%)	159
	Refer	25 (80.7%)	5 (16.1%)	1 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	31
	Defer	33 (41.2%)	19 (23.8%)	27 (33.7%)	1 (1.3%)	80
	Not inscribe	1 (5%)	2 (10%)	9 (45%)	8 (40%)	20
	Total	213	29	39	214	290

While in the past the World Heritage Committee used to follow Advisory Bodies' recommendations (Pressouyre 1996), Table 1 confirms that Committee decisions in recent years have increasingly diverged from the scientific opinions of the Advisory Bodies, as reported by several observers (Jokilehto 2011, Meskell et al. 2014). Except for only seven cases where the final decision is lower than initial technical evaluations, the overall trend has been to push all final decisions toward the category of Inscription, so from Referral to Inscription, from Deferral to Referral or even Inscription and so on. The main contention concerns nominations that the Advisory Bodies recommend for Not Inscription, Deferral and Referral. Because the preparation of nominations is a costly process requiring conspicuous financial resources and time, a recommendation to not inscribe the site prevent to resubmit the nomination while Referral and Deferral make inscription uncertain and require additional time and resources to resubmit the nomination at the subsequent Committee sessions. Many countries describe any decision that is not to inscribe as a "poisoned gift", a term that delegates have used repeatedly throughout recent Committee meetings (Meskell 2012). At the same time, in almost every case, there is complete agreement between the Advisory Bodies and the Committee when the recommendation is to Inscribe a property.

A further peculiar characteristic of decision making within the World Heritage Committee is that deliberations are taken through praxis by consensus. Although the World Heritage Convention clearly states that decisions must be taken by the majority of two-thirds of its members present and voting (Art. 13.8), like in many other Intergovernmental Organizations, deliberations are mainly characterized by multilateral negotiations and consensus building following both informal meetings and formal discussions at plenary sessions (Blake & Payton 2014). Decisions are prepared and pre-structured, for instance by means of drafts produced by the World Heritage Center, which act as the Secretariat of the World Heritage Convention, but state parties members of the World Heritage Committee can present amendments to draft decision as results of informal consultation and negotiation taking place outside the plenary sessions.

All amendments as well as draft decisions are then to be formally adopted by the Committee. During the formal discussion at plenary sessions members of the Committee may intervene more

than once for each individual nomination and may even change their position in the course of the discussion. Some nominations receive no formal discussion during the World Heritage Committee sessions and the final decisions swiftly follow the initial Advisory Body recommendation. In other more contested cases, decisions are made at the plenary session following negotiations that have taken place in specifically established working groups or during smaller informal meetings between representatives from national delegations, Advisory Bodies and UNESCO. Explicit vote is very rare and can take place by show of hands or by secret ballot.

To have a clue of this consensus-based decision making process, Table 2 provides evidence of verbal interventions having place at Committee formal sessions whose content expresses a judgment by a committee member over a nomination according to the 4 evaluation categories used in the selection process.<sup>3</sup> The average number of verbal interventions occurred in the discussion of each nomination is considerably lower than the number of seats in the Committee (21), with a minimum of 0 verbal interventions in some cases. More interestingly, the number of statements in formal discussions greatly varies according to the Advisory Bodies' recommendation and the final decision taken by the Committee. The worse the initial technical evaluation, the higher the number of verbal interventions, suggesting that the discussion about a nomination heats up when negative evaluations are proposed by Advisory Bodies. At the same time, on average, the number of verbal interventions is always higher when the final decision ends up with an upgrade of the initial technical recommendation.

**Table 2** Summary statistics on verbal interventions at formal Committee sessions, 2003-2012

AB Recomm.	Final Decision	N	Verbal Interventions				
			Mean	S.D.	Median	Min	Max
Inscription	Inscription	159	4.69	4.87	3	0	22
	Upgraded	-	-	-	-	-	-
Referral	Referral	6	5	7.34	3	0	19
	Upgraded	25	6.80	4.45	5	0	21
	<i>Total</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>6.45</i>	<i>5.03</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>21</i>
Deferral	Deferral	28	6.93	3.65	2.5	0	12
	Upgraded	52	10.90	6.25	11	0	32
	<i>Total</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>8.37</i>	<i>6.46</i>	<i>7.5</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>32</i>
Not Inscription	Not Inscription	8	2.50	1.69	2	0	5
	Upgraded	12	12.83	10.27	8.5	3	34
	<i>Total</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>8.70</i>	<i>9.44</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>34</i>

These patterns clearly highlight that verbal interventions, although they express Committee members' position regarding a specific nomination, may be only partly treated like the observed votes and members' voting behavior occurring with more structured voting procedures in other International Organizations (Boockmann 2003, Voeten 2012, Hug & Lukács 2014). While it is possible to identify the last statement of a Committee member in case of its changing position during the discussion, more difficult problems arise in interpreting those countries which do not express any statement. Not intervening at formal sessions might be considered as an im-

<sup>3</sup> We rule out verbal interventions referring to requests of clarification by committee members to either Advisory Bodies or the Secretariat.

PLICIT agreement either with the Advisory Body recommendation or with the perceived decision outcome that the discussion is leading to.

Further, it might be argued that the impact of verbal interventions by Committee members on final decisions is negligible if multilateral negotiations through informal meetings by delegates play a role in advance. If this is the case, verbal statements can be considered as signals of a predetermined consensus around the final decision outcome or at most they can be regarded as a form of expressive voting, a phenomenon commonly reported for voting behavior in international organizations (Boockmann 2003, Hillman 2010). For example, Bertacchini et al. (2015) reports for the last decade a clear divergence among Committee members in the use of verbal interventions. On the one hand, some non-Western countries have been systematically vocal at formal sessions challenging Advisory Bodies' recommendations and claiming for low criteria for meeting the requirement of outstanding universal value in the case of new inscriptions. On the other hand, countries such as Norway, Switzerland and Estonia, have been particularly vocal in supporting the technical evaluations and emphasizing strict criteria for complying with the same requirements.

Overall, there is reason to believe that both informal consultations by delegates and verbal interventions at formal sessions impact on final decisions, albeit it is difficult to disentangle their intertwined effect. Moreover, participation to the Committee sessions is not restricted only to delegates from Committee members, but open also to delegations of other states parties as observers. Thus, pressure in informal meetings from external parties appears to play a role, especially in the last years when the number of observers from countries not seating in the Committee has constantly outpaced the number of Committee members' delegates (Schmitt 2009).

## 2.1 Hypotheses

Given the initial Advisory Bodies recommendations, does political and economic factors affect the selection of World Heritage Sites and the behavior of Committee members? To answer this question we develop a set of testable hypotheses drawn from the broad literature in international relations and political economy, as well as qualitative accounts of the World Heritage Committee sessions.

The inscription of a site in the List represents the most favorable outcome for a country as it provides several types of benefits, ranging from international prestige to additional financial resources in terms of tourism attractiveness or international aid for conservation. Yet, nominating countries have also a strong interest in having a final evaluation higher than the initial Advisory Body recommendation, even if this is not an inscription. If the decision is for not to inscribe the site, all the costs incurred for the nomination are sunk. Further, getting a final better evaluation (such as a Referral instead of a Deferral) increases the probability of having the site inscribed at the following Committee sessions and reduce the additional cost a country has to incur to comply with operational guidelines requirements to resubmit the nomination. As a result, economic and political considerations behind the nomination of World Heritage sites may induce countries to influence the decisions by the World Heritage Committee and the behavior of its members through several channels.

First, the selection of sites depends on the allocation of decisional power and influence countries have within the World Heritage decision making process. The public choice literature recognizes that membership on governing boards can yield more favorable outcomes for the countries represented as this position provides more decisional power respect to other countries (Flues et al. 2010). As a result, serving on the World Heritage Committee may be considered as a measure of the influence a country is able to exert in the decision making process. This is because



membership provides a country the political power to push sites through the nomination process, or even to bring pressure on other committee members to support the nominations. Bertacchini & Saccone (2012) have shown that for the period 1978-2008 having a seat in the World Heritage Committee had a strong and significant impact on both the nomination activity and on the likelihood of having a site inscribed.

Yet, as discussed previously, membership to the World Heritage Committee does not fully account for the real influence nations may wield in the selection process considering that decisions are taken by consensus and multilateral negotiations and that participation to the Committee sessions is not restricted only to delegates from committee members. Delegation size might thus be considered as a proxy for a State Party's informal influence. As noted by (Pouliot 2011) in the context of the UN, the size of diplomatic missions, together with the presence of experienced diplomats, are necessary conditions to attain status within UN diplomatic negotiations. Moreover, having a larger delegation plays a substantial role in "corridor diplomacy" or in managing negotiations of multiple items in the agenda (McKeown 2009). Hence we expect that nominations by countries seating on the World Heritage Committee and having a larger delegation (even if observer) are more likely to receive greater support by Committee members and a more favorable outcome in the selection process.

A further set of hypotheses deal with political economy considerations. Although the selection of World Heritage sites should be based on scientific quality and technical account, Bertacchini & Saccone (2012) and Frey et al. (2013) have found that measures of economic and political power, such as GDP, GDP per capita and population size, are positively associated with a country's nomination capacity and the number of inscribed sites. Similarly, the economic relevance of the tourist sector in a country is another potential rent-seeking factor to obtain inscription of sites in the List. As a result, we test whether such variables affects the decisions taken by the World Heritage Committee members in respect to initial Advisory Bodies recommendations. Another widely adopted measure to detect political power at the international level is the temporary membership to the UN Security Council. Several authors find that temporary membership on the UN Security Council is linked with larger aid flows from the U.S., or credits from the IMF and World Bank (Kuziemko & Werker 2006, Dreher et al. 2009a, Dreher et al. 2009b). Such indirect benefits seem to be driven by some form of vote trading. If one consider inscription of World Heritage sites as a form of international assistance, temporary membership on the UN Security Council may play a role. For instance, Frey et al. (2013) find that that being a rotating member of the UN Security Council a positive effect on the number of UNESCO sites inscribed per year.

Looking more specifically at the content of verbal interventions at formal sessions, we expect that different types of cultural, political and economic connections between countries may influence Committee members' verbal statements. As the UNESCO World Heritage primarily deals with cultural issues and the recognition of heritage at the global level, committee members may be more likely to support the nominations of countries with which they share similar cultural values to fulfill expressive considerations related to their cultural identity. Hence, we assume that nominations are more likely to receive a greater support by committee members with stronger cultural proximity with the nominating country.

Moreover, political connections between countries in international relations may also affect Committee members' behavior. Several scholars show how voting blocs and persistent lines of conflict have emerged in UN bodies' decision making, such as at the UNGA, the UNSC and UNHRC (O'Neill 1996, Voeten 2000, Hug & Lukács 2014). While the identification of these groups or patterns of political alignment mainly depends on historical phases and type of issues covered in international decision making, voting behavior by states in international assemblies has been generally explained along the western/non western dimension, the tension between

developed and developing countries or the differences between political regimes. Such voting coalitions often express peer group of similar countries and peer group variables have been used in a number of studies on international organizations, such as the IMF (Simmons 2000) or the ILO (Chau et al. 2001). Although the decision making within the World Heritage Committee does not allow a systematic study of voting behavior by States Parties, qualitative evidence suggest that similar diplomatic and peer group considerations may matter in shaping Committee members behavior. For instance, (Schmitt 2009) points out that delegates in the World Heritage Committee may be motivated by foreign relations and geopolitical considerations and feel integrated at least to some extent in a network of mutual loyalties in respect of the interests of other countries in same regional groups. At the same time, support by committee members to nominating countries may reflect more complex political alliances or alignment arising in international arenas. In this case, decision taken in the World Heritage Committee would be the result of a broader game of international relations. As a result, the hypothesis we set is that nominations are more likely to receive a greater support through verbal interventions by committee members with stronger political connections with the nominating country.

Finally, economic ties between countries may be relevant to detect patterns where committee members trade their support to nominating countries in exchange of economic benefits. Vote trading has been analyzed quite extensively focusing on how donors such as United States and other G7 countries have used foreign aid and international cooperation to buy votes of recipient countries in specific international institutions since post WWII (Dreher et al. 2008, Eldar 2008, i.e.). In the context of the World Heritage Committee, such types of financial flows would arguably capture only a part of the potential economic ties and interests between nominating countries and Committee members. This is mainly because focusing only on development aid would account for economic relationships with dominant powers, overlooking more general economic interests arising from bilateral trade between other less influential countries. As noted by Dreher & Sturm (2012), economic ties might increase the probability of voting with a partner country as a greater interdependence might create similar preferences on certain topics or be a signal of potential economic opportunities used to trade political support at the World Heritage Meetings. For example, Meskell (2014) reports that vocal support of Panama was offered in 2013 by Qatar and South Africa; both countries have no obvious regional or cultural connections but have economic ties, and trade agreements with Panama. As a result, we expect that nominations are more likely to receive a supportive verbal statement by committee members with stronger economic ties with the nominating country.

### 3 Data and empirical strategy

We collected and assembled information from the Summary of Records (SoR) and other World Heritage Committee official documents over the period 2003-2012. For each nomination of cultural and natural properties,<sup>4</sup> we tracked the Advisory Bodies' initial recommendation, the final decision by the World Heritage Committee, the number of delegates of the proponent country present at the Committee session and the verbal interventions expressed by State Parties during the sessions. Due to the restrictions approved since 2002 by the World Heritage Committee, there is low variability in the number of nominations proposed by individual countries per year. In general, proposing countries have one or a maximum of two nominations of cultural or natural properties examined at every Committee sessions.

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<sup>4</sup> We excluded from the analysis nominations of mixed properties owing to divergences between Advisory Bodies recommendations or in the final decision of the Committee regarding either the natural or cultural component of the nomination. Nominations of mixed properties account for about 4% of all the nominations submitted to the World Heritage Committee in the period 2003-2012.

In a first set of results we use data on 290 individual nominations of cultural and natural properties, and we test the probability of either having a site inscribed or a final decision resulting in an upgrade of the initial Advisory Body recommendation. In the former case, we use the full dataset, while on the latter we restrict our sample on 131 nominations which had a Referral, Deferral or Not Inscription as initial Advisory Body recommendation.

We start with a set of explanatory variables which refer to characteristics of the individual nominations. To control for the scientific quality of the proposed heritage sites we consider the initial technical evaluation provided by the Advisory Body and we code binary variables for each of the four evaluation criteria (Inscription, Referral, Deferral, Not Inscription). An alternative approach, as adopted by Flues et al. (2010) for initial Meth Panel Recommendations, would have been to have an ordinal variable according to the scale of the evaluation categories. However, the use of dummies for World Heritage sites evaluations seems better suited to capture the individual effect of each evaluation category.<sup>5</sup> Next, as the nominations which are deferred and referred can be resubmitted at subsequent Committee sessions, we code a binary variable which expresses whether the nomination is a revision or not. Finally, we include a dummy variable to consider whether the proposal is of either a cultural or natural heritage site to control whether such difference influence the decision making process. For instance, because of the acknowledged ambiguities in the definition of cultural heritage of world status compared to the criteria defining natural heritage, we expect that more political pressures would be exerted on the selection process of cultural sites.

An additional group of controls considers the main political and economic factors we have highlighted in the hypotheses. To address both informal and formal influence within the decision making process we use the size of the delegations participating at Committee sessions and we control with a binary variable whether a country is serving or not in the World Heritage Committee. International economic and political power of countries proposing sites is measured by the logarithmic transformations of GDP per capita and population size as well as a dummy expressing temporary membership on the United Nations Security Council. To account for the relevance of the tourist sector for a country, we use international tourism receipts as a share of exports, which is commonly used as a proxy for tourism specialization (Arezki et al. 2009).

In a second set of results we investigate the probability that the content of verbal interventions by Committee members be influenced by economic and political factors related with the nominating country. This approach is chosen to overcome the related difficulties in effectively analyzing Committee members behavior in a consensus-based decision making process. We use a unique dataset that combine information on individual verbal statements occurred at Committee sessions over the period 2003-2013 with other relevant variables. In this case, we consider only verbal interventions whose content expresses a judgment by a Committee member over a nomination according to the 4 evaluation categories used in the selection process. This leads to a total of 1790 observations<sup>6</sup>.

We frame our dependent variable as a binary outcome defining whether or not the verbal intervention by a Committee member has expressed support for inscription of the heritage site proposed by another country. In an alternative setting, we also use as dependent variable a

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<sup>5</sup> Arguably, the evaluation categories do not follow a constant ordinal scale in their values. For instance, the difference between a recommendation for not inscription instead of a deferral is allegedly larger than the difference between a deferral and a referral, because with Not inscription a country loose the chance to nominate the site on the next committee sessions.

<sup>6</sup> As described before, some nominations receive no formal discussion. For this reason the information in this dataset refers to a smaller sample of nominations. A deeper inspection of the data shows that out of 47 nominations which have not prompted any verbal statements by Committee members, 35 have been already recommended for inscription by the Advisory Bodies. As we are concerned in detecting instrumental behavior by Committee members, this type of nominations are the ones that leave less room to politicized decisions.

dummy defining whether or not the verbal intervention by a Committee member has expressed support for an upgrade of the initial Advisory Body recommendation for a nomination proposed by another country. In addition to nomination and country-specific variables defined before, we include a set of variables in dyadic form describing cultural, economic and political connections between the intervening Committee members and the proposing country. To account for cultural affinities, we use both language proximity and colonial legacy between countries. Language proximity is measured using the lexical similarity index between two languages developed by Melitz & Toubal (2014)<sup>7</sup>. For colonial legacy we rely on the dataset developed by Head et al. (2010) and we use two different binary variables. The former (Colonizer legacy) takes the value of 1 if the Committee member is current or former hegemony of the nominating country, while the latter (Colony legacy) takes the value of 1 if the intervening Committee member has been a colony the country proposing a site.

To control for political connections between countries at the international level, we use three different measures. The first one is a variable coded 1 if the members of the Committee and the nominating country belong to the same UNESCO Regional group.<sup>8</sup> The second variable captures voting coincidence between the two countries at UN General Assembly roll-call votes at year  $t$  through the distance between the two countries' ideal points as developed by Strezhnev & Voeten (2012). Although patterns of UNGA votes are considered to be correlated with alternative measures of political alignment such as alliances and similarity of interests (Alesina & Weder 2002), Voeten (2012) warns using voting data at UNGA to construct indicators of similarities in states' preferences for world politics mainly due to the risk of ignoring historical changes in the UN's agenda and dimensions of contestation. However, we argue that the time span of our analysis (10 years) makes these concerns potentially less problematic. Third, we account also for similarities in political regimes between two countries using the difference (in absolute value) between the scores of two countries' regime given by the Polity IV Project Marshall & Jaggers (2002) at year  $t$ . While analogous dyadic measures on regimes similarities have been often used as explanatory variables of interstate conflicts and disputes (Russett et al. 1998, Oneal & Russett 1999), the adoption of such a variable here is to test whether this dimension of political proximity is likely to affect World Heritage Committee members' behavior as it has been studied for other UN fora (Voeten 2000, i.e.).

Finally, to measure economic relationships between a Committee member and a country proposing a site nomination, we follow Oneal & Russett (1999) and Mansfield & Pevehouse (2000): we construct an index of the ratio of bilateral trade to GDP where the numerator is the sum of exports to and imports from the nominating country and the denominator is the Committee member's GDP. We rely on bilateral trade data provided by the Correlates of War Project (Barbieri et al. 2009, Barbieri et al. 2012). However, as the time-series for this information is only available up to 2009, we compute the average trade flows at the mid point of our period of interest (2007-2008). As a result, this dyadic variable is time invariant. Table 5 and 6 summarize the variables we use and the summary statistics for both datasets.

The estimation procedure is determined by the type of our dependent variables, which are coded as binary outcomes. For multivariate regressions with the binary variables we use probit regressions. We initially also estimated logit, but tests on the functional form indicated that the

<sup>7</sup> Melitz & Toubal (2014) have constructed two separate measures of language proximity which they label LP1 and LP2. The former calculates linguistic proximities on the basis of the Ethnologue classification of language trees between trees, branches and sub-branches. The latter, more sophisticated according to the authors, is based on analyzing lexical similarities between lists of up to 200 words of two different languages. We adopt this latter measure

<sup>8</sup> UNESCO's Member States are organized in five regional groups - Africa, Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and North America and Latin America and the Caribbean - following definitions which are not only geographical and slightly differ from UNGA regional groups (see <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/worldwide/>).

normal distribution yields a better fit. We expect that observations concerning decisions and Committee members' verbal interventions related to sites of the same nominating country may not be independent. Therefore, we explicitly take into account clusters at the proponent country level by introducing robust standard errors for within-group estimators (Arellano 1987). Another possibility is to use conditional logistic regressions to directly control for country fixed effects. However, the use of this statistical model causes some drawbacks and concerns in our analysis. First, it generates convergence problems with the small dataset of 290 individual nominations. Second, when dealing with the dataset on verbal interventions, taking into account country fixed effects causes the drop of observations in cases of all positive or negative outcomes in the dependent variable. Because the number of verbal interventions received by countries nominating sites is highly unbalanced, the risk is to lose substantial information concerning explanatory variables from observations of specific countries. Further, this approach also rules out time and country invariant factors that can be relevant to keep in the analysis of the World Heritage decision making process.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Determinants of inscription and upgrade of the final decision

We first test whether political and economic factors affect the final decision of the World Heritage Committee on individual nominations. We proceed by testing nomination-specific attributes, then we add political and economic country-specific covariates and finally we present the full set of controls. Table 3 presents the estimates for such specifications of the probability of having a site inscribed (regressions 1-3) and of the probability that the final Committee decision upgrades the initial Advisory Body recommendation (regression 6-8). Additional regressions show results from robustness checks.

Considering the inscription of World Heritage sites over the period 2003-2012, this final decision outcome is largely predicted by the initial Advisory Body recommendation. More in detail, using the proposal for inscription by the Advisory Body as the baseline, the coefficients of the dummies expressing lower evaluations are highly significant and negative. As reported in Regression 3, holding all variables to their mean, the marginal effect of having the heritage sites inscribed at the current session decreases of about 38%, 68% or 90% if the Advisory Body proposes the nomination respectively as Referral, Deferral or Not Inscription. This may be explained observing that the World Heritage Committee tends to inscribe nominations recommended for inscription by the Advisory Bodies and this type of nominations account for about the 50% of the full sample. Conversely, political and economic determinants do not appear to be strong predictors of the inscription of World Heritage sites as a final decision outcome. The coefficient of the size of national delegations is positive and highly significant. However, its effect is rather minimal, considering that an increase of one unit in the delegation is likely to increase the probability of inscription of about 1%. In a similar vein, tourism specialization is only moderately significant with an even lower effect.

It might be argued that these results stem from the fact that also initial Advisory Bodies' recommendations may be potentially affected by political and economic considerations. It is indeed recognized that experts from Advisory Bodies may enjoy some form of discretionary power and asymmetrical information in the evaluation process (Bertacchini & Saccone 2012). To deal with this issue, we regressed the Advisory Bodies recommendation on the different political-economic variables introduced in our model using both ordered logit and generalized ordered logit estimation procedures. While these models show a very low explanatory power, the only

**Table 3** Determinants of Inscription or upgraded final decision, Probit estimation

Variables	Inscription = 1, 0 otherwise					Upgraded decision = 1, 0 otherwise				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
AB Referral	-1.029*** (0.374)	-0.960*** (0.363)	-1.202*** (0.383)	-2.345*** (0.586)	-2.569*** (0.622)					
AB Deferral	-2.071*** (0.332)	-2.088*** (0.324)	-2.321*** (0.320)	-2.483*** (0.406)	-2.701*** (0.432)	-0.272 (0.340)	-0.396 (0.342)	-0.327 (0.355)	0.576 (0.464)	0.705 (0.521)
AB Not inscribe	-3.460*** (0.565)	-3.551*** (0.649)	-3.919*** (0.662)	-3.487*** (0.515)	-3.718*** (0.497)	-0.228 (0.420)	-0.168 (0.433)	0.0375 (0.480)	-0.178 (0.703)	0.186 (0.725)
Revision	0.560** (0.282)	0.586** (0.295)	0.594 (0.364)	0.585 (0.388)	0.573 (0.412)	0.598* (0.361)	0.678* (0.401)	0.834* (0.441)	0.904* (0.491)	0.978* (0.567)
Cultural	-0.060 (0.228)	0.032 (0.226)	0.074 (0.207)	0.125 (0.213)	0.033 (0.206)	0.571** (0.285)	0.774** (0.318)	0.883*** (0.331)	1.067*** (0.329)	0.865*** (0.329)
Committee		-0.138 (0.283)	-0.181 (0.297)	-0.191 (0.305)	-0.197 (0.311)		0.528* (0.295)	0.513* (0.290)	0.479 (0.347)	0.486 (0.373)
Delegates		0.038*** (0.010)	0.052*** (0.012)	0.049* (0.025)	0.038 (0.024)		0.060* (0.035)	0.075* (0.042)	0.303*** (0.105)	0.281** (0.114)
Log(Incomepc)			-0.057 (0.100)	-0.132 (0.108)	-0.146 (0.110)			-0.0406 (0.115)	-0.088 (0.128)	-0.111 (0.131)
Log(Population)			-0.0290 (0.080)	-0.0742 (0.088)	-0.0659 (0.090)			-0.0475 (0.073)	-0.113 (0.073)	-0.097 (0.072)
UNSCTem			0.267 (0.337)	0.198 (0.357)	0.0591 (0.314)			0.864** (0.417)	0.880* (0.481)	0.480 (0.432)
Tourism Sector			0.022** (0.009)	0.020** (0.009)	0.021** (0.009)			0.019** (0.008)	0.017* (0.009)	0.224* (0.010)
Referral*Delegates				0.310*** (0.108)	0.304*** (0.108)					
Deferral*Delegates				0.0170 (0.0301)	0.0178 (0.0281)				-0.237** (0.102)	-0.237** (0.111)
Not Inscr.*Delegates				-0.0375 (0.0276)	-0.0389 (0.0271)				0.136 (0.200)	0.135 (0.179)
Year of Decision					0.0998** (0.044)					0.200*** (0.052)
Constant	1.819*** (0.292)	1.476*** (0.242)	1.368*** (0.328)	1.606*** (0.393)	1.518*** (0.406)	0.149 (0.434)	-0.462 (0.491)	-0.956* (0.559)	-1.760*** (0.536)	-2.456*** (0.609)
Observations	290	290	290	290	290	131	131	131	131	131
Log Pseudo-likelihood	-93.73	-88.48	-83.58	-79.73	-77.23	-77.17	-68.16	-63.42	-58.99	-53.24
Wald $\chi^2$	54.78	81.07	98.55	123	122.6	7.562	18.70	31.21	47.40	52.81
Prob > Wald $\chi^2$	1.45e-10	0	0	0	0	0.109	0.00470	0.000543	0	0
Pseudo R-square	0.442	0.473	0.502	0.525	0.540	0.0610	0.171	0.228	0.282	0.352
Area Under ROC Curve	0.902	0.919	0.926	0.933	0.939	0.659	0.795	0.806	0.831	0.867

Note: Standard errors in parentheses (adjusted for nominating country clusters): \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

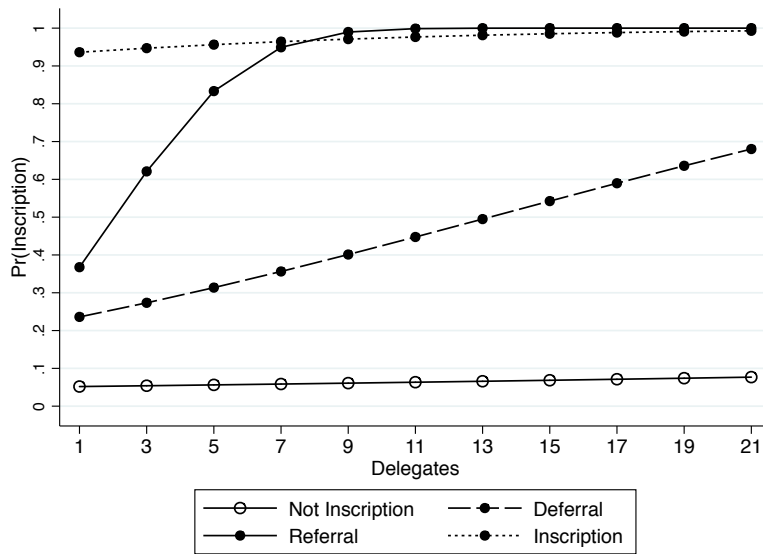
significant predictor turns out be the GDP per capita, with nominations of richer countries being more likely to receive higher technical evaluations from the Advisory Bodies. In this context, the variable is however less likely to capture the power of a country, but rather its capacity to devote more resources to preserving heritage and preparing nominations which better comply with the Operational Guidelines. Hence, we consider that Advisory Bodies' recommendations may be a valid control variable for effective quality of nominations.

Given this initial evidence, we expect that the politicization of World Heritage Committee decision making emerges more clearly if we focus on nominations which received an Advisory Body's recommendation lower than inscription (that is those initially proposed with a Referral, Deferral or Not Inscription) and on the likelihood of having an upgraded decision instead of a definitive inscription. Considering Regression 6-8, the initial Advisory Body recommendation are no longer significant regressors under this specification. This may be interpreted as a potential evidence that in the selection process the pressure to upgrade less favorable evaluations is independent from the initial Advisory Body evaluation. Further, we find that nominating a cultural site relatively to natural properties has a significant and positive impact on the likelihood of having an upgraded final decision (with a marginal effect of about 30%). This result confirms

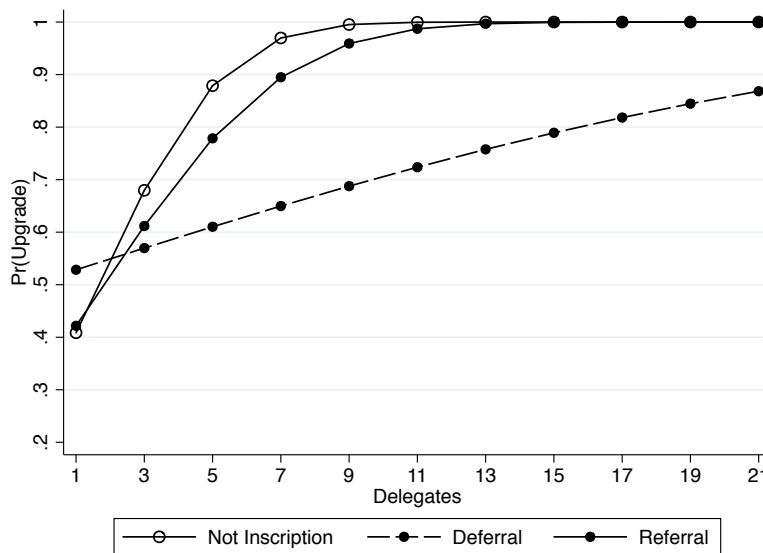
that more political pressures could be exerted on the selection process of cultural sites compared to the natural ones, because of the more subjective definition of the criteria to evaluate cultural heritage. Likewise, at ten percent of significance, the variable Revision positively affects the probability of having an upgraded final decision by the Committee of about 20%. This may be explained considering that even if an Advisory Body judges such nominations still as a Referral or Deferral, political and economic considerations may lead to a less stringent judgment by the Committee. If we consider economic and political determinants, we find that some of the factors identified in the hypotheses do matter in the final decision to upgrade initial recommendations. At the 10% of significance, the size of the delegation and serving the World Heritage Committee positively influences the final decision, with the latter increasing the probability of improving the final evaluation of 15%. As for the previous analysis with inscription as a final decision, in Regression 8 tourism specialization remains significant with a positive but small effect. An increase of 1% of a country's tourism receipts over export increases the probability of having a nomination upgraded of 0.5%. The sign of this effect seems to contradict previous findings by Frey et al. (2013), where the same variable expressed a negative relation with the number of Sites a country obtains in a given year. However, given that our analysis refers to a more recent period where the global competition for international tourists has heightened, our finding supports the interpretation that countries with higher tourism specialization are today more dependent on the World Heritage List as a brand to promote their sites as tourism destinations. Finally, we find that temporary membership in the UN Security Council by the nominating country rises the likelihood of having an upgrade in the final decision, with a marginal effect of 16%. Unexpectedly, the magnitude of this effect is analogous to the membership in the World Heritage Committee.

We test the robustness of our results in several ways. Firstly, we deeply investigate the impact of the size of the delegations as this variable may be endogenously influenced by the type of the Advisory Body evaluation received by the nomination. For instance, countries know in advance the recommendation and may therefore strategically select the size of the delegation to make the lobbying activity more effective. In a similar vein, the number of delegates of a country may also be related with a celebration effect. A country has a larger delegation to celebrate the inscription of a site in the List if the nomination has already received a recommendation for inscription by the Advisory Body. A deeper inspection of the dataset suggests that this can be the case, as the mean size of delegations is significantly higher with nominations evaluated for inscription by the Advisory Bodies compared to more negative recommendations. As a result, we test the interaction between Advisory Body recommendation dummies and the size of the delegations. As shown in Regression 4 and 9, the coefficient of delegation size in case of a referral evaluation is highly significant and positive (0.310 and 0.303 respectively), suggesting that this factor is particularly relevant to push the Committee final decision from a Referral to Inscription. Interestingly, adding the interaction terms makes World Heritage Committee membership a no longer significant determinant of the likelihood of having an upgraded decision (Regression 9). This result may thus add insights into the strategic role of national delegations in exerting informal influence on decision making in multilateral negotiations.

To have a more clear picture of the effect of the size of delegations, Figure 1 and 2 depict the predictive probability of inscription and of an upgraded decision according to the different initial Advisory Bodies' recommendations. As shown in Figure 1, the probability of having a site inscribed is hardly affected by the number of delegates of a country when Advisory Body gives both an Inscription or Not Inscription evaluation. By contrast, extending the size of a national delegation increases the probability of inscription as a final decision outcome when the initial technical evaluation is a Referral and a Deferral. In particular, the marginal effect of adding one delegate when the delegation is between 1 and 9 country representatives is particularly relevant when the initial recommendation is a Referral. Figure 2 presents a similar pattern for



**Fig. 1** Predictive probabilities of Inscription according to delegation size and AB recommendation.



**Fig. 2** Predictive probabilities of upgraded decision according to delegation size and AB recommendation.

the probability of having an upgraded decision for nominations that received both a Referral or Deferral recommendation. However, it highlights also that the number of delegates of a country strongly and positively influence the probability of receiving an upgrade in the final decision when the site is recommended for Not Inscription.

As an additional robustness check, we use a time trend variable (Year of Decision, Regression 5 and 10) to control the impact of change over time in final decisions, due to the allegedly mounting politicization of the World Heritage selection process, as reported by several observers. This variable is positive and highly significant in both the model specifications, albeit it only



marginally improves the predictive power of the regressions. While the time trend does not affect the results concerning the determinants of inscription as final decision outcome, this control has a larger impact when considering the restricted sample and using the upgraded decisions as dependent variable. In particular, adding the year of decision turns the coefficients of temporary membership to UN Security Council statistically not significant (Regression 10). Finally, we ran estimations with different additional controls expressing political power of a country within the World Heritage system, namely the lagged number of World Heritage sites, the length of membership in the World Heritage Convention and the number of years a country has served the World Heritage Committee. These covariates are always not significant under all the specifications, without changing the coefficients of the other variables in any relevant way. As a result, we do not report the regressions here.

In summary, from this first set of results, we find that Committee's final deliberations are more likely to diverge from the Advisory Body recommendations and be influenced by economic and political drivers when nominations receive initial negative evaluations. Such signal of politicization of the decision making process significantly occurs when nominations are revised or they refer to cultural heritage sites. The size of national delegation as a proxy of informal influence in the decision making process appears to significantly impact the probability to obtain an upgraded decision, particularly to secure the World Heritage designation when the nomination is initially recommended for referral or to receive a better final evaluation when the initial Advisory Body recommendation is a Not Inscription. Further, a rent-seeking factor such as the relevance of the tourism sector for a country nominating sites emerges as a robust predictor of both inscription and receiving an upgraded evaluation.

#### 4.2 Verbal interventions by Committee members

We now analyze the content of verbal interventions expressed by Committee members at formal sessions and see how and whether political and economic considerations affect the probability of having a stated support for inscription of a nomination proposed by another country. As previously discussed, a consensus based decision making process makes hard detecting countries' behavior due to the rare use of voting procedures. Thus, focusing on verbal interventions at formal sessions may indirectly add insights into whether Committee members' behavior is influenced by political and economic considerations related with nominating countries. We proceed by testing nomination and country-specific attributes, then we add dyadic variables expressing cultural, political and economic relationship between the nominating country and the intervening Committee member.

The first set of regressions displayed in Table 4 (Eq. 11-14) presents the results for verbal interventions supporting the inscription of the nomination for the full sample of observations. In regressions 15-18 we restrict the sample to verbal interventions directed to nominations which Advisory Bodies recommended only for Referral, Deferral and Not inscription. Such strategy is useful to take into account that States Parties in the Committee may express their support to the inscription of a site even when the nomination has received an initial evaluation for Inscription by the Advisory Body. As a result, in this setting we drop observations that are mainly welcoming addresses and we focus on verbal statements that more directly support either the position of the Advisory Body or claim an upgrade toward inscription respect to the initial technical evaluation. To take into account multiple verbal interventions from the same Committee member to a given nomination, we also restricted our analysis only to the last verbal statements of the intervening committee members. This is to drop out redundant observations from vocal countries if the

content of the verbal intervention has been repeated on the same discussion or to account for a changing position, if occurred, of the Committee member during the formal discussion.

**Table 4** Determinants of verbal interventions supporting the inscription of a site, Probit estimation

	Full Sample				AB Referral, Deferral, Not Inscription			
	All intervention (11)	Members' last interventions (12)	All interventions (13)	Members' last interventions (14)	All intervention (15)	Members' last interventions (16)	All interventions (17)	Members' last interventions (18)
AB Referral	-0.542** (0.232)	-0.410 (0.265)	-0.490* (0.267)	-0.348 (0.309)				
AB Deferral	-1.477*** (0.185)	-1.492*** (0.199)	-1.635*** (0.218)	-1.677*** (0.223)	-0.849*** (0.222)	-1.008*** (0.261)	-1.058*** (0.236)	-1.242*** (0.273)
AB Not inscribe	-3.063*** (0.302)	-3.432*** (0.439)	-3.052*** (0.285)	-3.391*** (0.453)	-2.447*** (0.286)	-2.979*** (0.435)	-2.520*** (0.314)	-3.006*** (0.470)
Revision	0.887*** (0.222)	0.895*** (0.214)	0.772*** (0.202)	0.786*** (0.216)	0.951*** (0.303)	1.003*** (0.291)	0.841*** (0.306)	0.879*** (0.328)
Cultural	-0.0860 (0.184)	-0.148 (0.208)	0.132 (0.206)	0.0332 (0.234)	-0.0203 (0.239)	-0.0984 (0.284)	0.348 (0.309)	0.208 (0.357)
Committee	0.0525 (0.226)	0.0660 (0.242)	0.0864 (0.242)	0.0964 (0.265)	-0.0181 (0.247)	0.00164 (0.267)	0.00671 (0.277)	0.0290 (0.309)
Delegates	0.0159** (0.00687)	0.0197*** (0.00655)	0.0106 (0.00663)	0.0109 (0.00723)	0.0177** (0.00756)	0.0223*** (0.00768)	0.0178** (0.00781)	0.0180** (0.00905)
Log(Incomepc)	0.0292 (0.0741)	0.0159 (0.0850)	0.0951 (0.0930)	0.0856 (0.107)	0.0473 (0.0815)	0.0357 (0.0951)	0.0781 (0.0866)	0.0604 (0.107)
Log(Population)	-0.0221 (0.0508)	-0.0506 (0.0573)	0.0146 (0.0819)	0.00795 (0.0860)	-0.0947* (0.0537)	-0.138** (0.0596)	-0.0993 (0.0890)	-0.118 (0.0960)
UNSCTem	0.00488 (0.177)	-0.0294 (0.179)	-0.0445 (0.214)	-0.129 (0.214)	0.0363 (0.225)	-0.0903 (0.238)	0.0222 (0.275)	-0.156 (0.303)
Tourism	0.00815 (0.00539)	0.00640 (0.00620)	0.0133* (0.00795)	0.00870 (0.00874)	0.00384 (0.00527)	0.00144 (0.00596)	0.0130 (0.00835)	0.00729 (0.00938)
UN Regional group			-0.279* (0.169)	-0.316* (0.185)			-0.212 (0.172)	-0.278 (0.192)
Language proximity			-0.232*** (0.0803)	-0.219*** (0.0781)			-0.358*** (0.0984)	-0.278*** (0.100)
Colonizer legacy			0.872** (0.383)	0.932** (0.412)			0.900** (0.379)	0.959** (0.420)
Colony legacy			-0.261 (0.287)	-0.117 (0.318)			-0.146 (0.479)	0.0911 (0.623)
UNGAvoitingdistance			-0.215** (0.0975)	-0.275*** (0.105)			-0.262** (0.103)	-0.348*** (0.111)
Bilateral Trade			0.0482*** (0.0177)	0.0421** (0.0185)			0.0437** (0.0207)	0.0406* (0.0222)
Regimes distance			0.00421 (0.0121)	0.00543 (0.0127)			0.0235* (0.0139)	0.0263* (0.0143)
Constant	1.180*** (0.326)	1.306*** (0.363)	1.273*** (0.431)	1.526*** (0.478)	0.586 (0.375)	0.883** (0.449)	0.639 (0.478)	1.099* (0.589)
Observations	1,742	1,505	1,371	1,181	996	807	735	583
Log Pseudo-likelihood	-709.4	-567.9	-516.6	-409.6	-529.8	-403	-364.6	-274.8
Wald $\chi^2$	172	121.8	347.7	206.9	122.1	92.97	172.7	123.5
Prob > Wald $\chi^2$	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pseudo R2	0.340	0.361	0.392	0.413	0.232	0.277	0.284	0.320
Area Under ROC Curve	0.864	0.868	0.891	0.899	0.806	0.829	0.835	0.850

Note: Standard errors in parentheses (adjusted for nominating country clusters): \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

In line with the previous results on individual nominations, the coefficients of the dummy variables referring to Advisory Bodies' recommendations are significant in most of the regressions, indicating that the lower the initial technical evaluation the smaller the probability to have an official statement by a Committee member which supports the inscription of the nomination. The *Revision* variable shows also a significant and positive sign confirming the previous interpretation of the results for this regressor. If the nomination is resubmitted Committee members are more likely to support its inscription or a more favorable decision if the Advisory Bodies recommended for a Referral, Deferral or Not Inscription. Holding all variables to their mean, the probability of a supportive verbal statement increases in a range of about 23%-33% if a nomination has to be only revised by the World Heritage Committee.

Among the country-specific regressors, only the size of national delegation turns out to be significant and with a positive coefficient, if one excludes Advisory Bodies' evaluations for inscription. This strengthens the hypothesis that the content of verbal interventions by Committee members at formal sessions may be influenced by multilateral negotiations and corridor diplomacy occurring outside of the formal sessions.

Measures of cultural relationship provide deeper insights on how Committee members behave through their statements during the 2003-2012 period. Language proximity between the Committee member and the nominating country has a significant but negative sign. This unexpected results suggests that the support given through verbal interventions by Committee members has extended beyond the borders defined by shared cultural values. This is confirmed also by the negative but not always significant coefficient of the *UN Regional Group*. We mainly considered this variable as a measure of political proximity, but may also explain cultural linkages between countries. In this case, being part of the same regional group reduces the probability of receiving a supportive statement by the Committee member of about 8%. Alternatively, this finding can be explained by the potential increased competition between countries with similar cultural and natural heritage endowments in obtaining World Heritage recognition for their sites. Because decision over a nomination undergoes a comparative evaluation based on heritage sites included by countries in Tentative Lists, a Committee member might be less likely to support the nomination of another country's site which share similar characteristics with its own heritage.

The other two measures of cultural proximity refer to historical and colonial relationships. In this case, only the *Colonizer legacy* variable turns out to be positively significant, indicating that supportive statements are more likely to occur if the Committee member was a former colonizer of the country proposing a World Heritage nomination. This evidence can be explained considering that several former colonies nominate sites of their colonial past which is also linked with the former hegemonic country.

Further, the support given by Committee members' through their verbal interventions is positively related to the voting alignment with the nominating country occurring at the UN General Assembly. The coefficient of the *UNGA voting distance* variable is always significant and negative, indicating that the larger is the distance between the voting behavior of the two countries at the UN General Assembly, the smaller is the probability that the verbal statement by the Committee member expresses support for the inscription. In a similar vein, the level of bilateral trade relationships significantly affects the content of verbal interventions: a 1 % increase in the bilateral trade-to-GDP ratio rises the probability of having a favorable statement by the Committee member by about 2%. These results hold when subjected to analysis with other control variables under various specifications.

We finally find that the variable accounting for differences in political regimes between countries is moderately significant only in the restricted sample. The positive sign of the coefficient points out a counterintuitive result, whereby support for inscription is less likely the more the Committee member and the nominating country share similarities in their political regimes. The marginal effect of this determinant is however very negligible. Holding all variables to their mean, an increase of one unit in the distance between the two political regimes (on a 20 unit scale) increase the probability of having a supportive verbal statement of 0.1%.

As robustness checks in Table 5 we present alternative specifications of our regressions. Similarly to the previous analysis on individual nominations we do not only consider support for inscription, but also whether the content of a verbal statement supports more generally an upgrade of the initial Advisory Body recommendation. Thus, using the restricted sample of nominations which received an Advisory Body recommendation other than inscription, we use a binary dependent variable coded 1 if a verbal intervention by a Committee member supports for an upgrade of the initial Advisory Body recommendation for a nomination proposed by an-

other country. As shown in Regressions 19 and 20, while the significance of the coefficients of nomination and country-specific variables partly change, the results for the covariates expressing countries' cultural, political and economic relationships are robust to the new specification. In particular, the size of national delegations and discussing a revised nomination are no longer significant predictors of supportive verbal statements. In turn, the relevance of the tourist sector has now a significant and positive impact. Further, because we are dealing with verbal interventions expressed by Committee members, it may be argued that these observations are influenced not by unobserved characteristics of the nominating country, but rather by attributes of the countries serving the World Heritage Committee. To take into account this possibility, we introduce in the Probit estimation robust standard errors for within-group estimators clustering at the Committee member level. As shown in regressions 21-24, our main results hold using either the support for inscription and the support for upgrading decision as dependent variables.

Summing up our analysis for this second set of results, our findings suggest that politicization does occur at Committee's formal session as the content of verbal statement by the members of the World Heritage governing board is influenced by cultural, political and economic relationships with nominating countries. Vocal Committee members tend to support the inscription or claim for an upgrade of the initial evaluation of nominations presented by countries with which share stronger political and economic linkages at the international level. At the same time, cultural affinities and belonging to the same regional group negatively affect the probability of expressive supportive statements at formal sessions.

## 5 Conclusion

The UNESCO World Heritage Committee is the preeminent organ apt to decide the inscription of heritage sites in the World Heritage List. While the purpose of the List is to protect the global public good of cultural and natural heritage of outstanding value, inscription of sites confers today significant international recognition as well as potential economic benefits to countries able to market their world heritage sites as tourism destination. In this paper we have analyzed how decision making within the World Heritage Committee may be subject to political and economic interests which diverge from scientific and quality considerations concerning the heritage nominations. While previous studies have addressed through quantitative methods the determinants of the World Heritage List, we provide a more systematic investigation of the procedural and substantive aspects of the decision-making process. In particular, using new data collected from the Summary of Records and other World Heritage Committee official documents over the period 2003-2012, we exploit the difference between technical experts' recommendations, Committee members' verbal interventions and final decisions to detect whether and how politicization of decision has occurred.

Our findings suggest that in the period of analysis, along with formal quality criteria established by Advisory Bodies, political and economic determinants have influenced the final decisions as well as the behavior of Committee members expressed by their verbal interventions at plenary sessions. While the final decision to inscribe a site in the World Heritage appear to be mainly explained by the initial technical evaluations, final decisions are more likely to diverge and be influenced by economic and political drivers when nominations receive an initial negative evaluation by the Advisory Bodies. Informal influence through larger delegations have a significant impact in the likelihood of having an upgraded final decision relatively to the initial Advisory Body recommendation, in particular when such technical evaluation is a referral or a not inscription. In addition, other unrelated rent seeking factors, such as the tourist specialization of a country, do influence the selection process. These result hold even investigating more in detail

**Table 5** Determinants of verbal intervention supporting the inscription or upgrade decision, Probit estimation

Dep. Var.	Upgraded Decision		Inscription		Upgraded Decision	
	All interventions (19a)	Last country interventions (20a)	All interventions (21b)	Last country interventions (22b)	All interventions (23b)	Last country interventions (24b)
AB Deferral	-0.663*** (0.234)	-0.738*** (0.275)	-1.058*** (0.160)	-1.242*** (0.168)	-0.663*** (0.177)	-0.738*** (0.172)
AB Not inscribe	-0.381 (0.354)	-0.458 (0.397)	-2.520*** (0.246)	-3.006*** (0.325)	-0.381* (0.201)	-0.458** (0.211)
Revision	0.451 (0.313)	0.418 (0.295)	0.841*** (0.212)	0.879*** (0.203)	0.451** (0.191)	0.418** (0.183)
Cultural	0.327 (0.306)	0.436 (0.300)	0.348* (0.187)	0.208 (0.202)	0.327* (0.170)	0.436** (0.180)
Committee	-0.0301 (0.207)	0.0199 (0.228)	0.00671 (0.137)	0.0290 (0.143)	-0.0301 (0.121)	0.0199 (0.129)
Delegates	0.00863 (0.00641)	0.0123 (0.0111)	0.0178** (0.00711)	0.0180** (0.00773)	0.00863 (0.00761)	0.0123* (0.00732)
Log(Incomepc)	-0.0117 (0.0687)	0.00338 (0.0737)	0.0781 (0.0606)	0.0604 (0.0553)	-0.0117 (0.0633)	0.00338 (0.0683)
Log(Population)	0.0588 (0.0585)	0.0477 (0.0621)	-0.0993** (0.0445)	-0.118*** (0.0420)	0.0588 (0.0496)	0.0477 (0.0503)
UNSCTem	-0.101 (0.262)	0.126 (0.263)	0.0222 (0.165)	-0.156 (0.165)	-0.101 (0.188)	0.126 (0.194)
Tourism	0.0267*** (0.00741)	0.0234*** (0.00871)	0.0130** (0.00538)	0.00729 (0.00595)	0.0267*** (0.00578)	0.0234*** (0.00672)
UN Regional group	-0.371** (0.147)	-0.334** (0.136)	-0.212 (0.185)	-0.278 (0.170)	-0.371* (0.216)	-0.334** (0.155)
Language proximity	-0.180* (0.0935)	-0.127 (0.0783)	-0.358*** (0.102)	-0.278*** (0.103)	-0.180** (0.0840)	-0.127 (0.0872)
Colonizer legacy	0.655** (0.329)	0.524* (0.313)	0.900*** (0.270)	0.959*** (0.251)	0.655** (0.296)	0.524* (0.307)
Colony legacy	-0.397 (0.308)	-0.351 (0.357)	-0.146 (0.417)	0.0911 (0.514)	-0.397 (0.339)	-0.351 (0.389)
UNGAvoitingdistance	-0.335*** (0.119)	-0.382*** (0.117)	-0.262*** (0.0953)	-0.348*** (0.0889)	-0.335*** (0.0883)	-0.382*** (0.0779)
Bilateral Trade	0.0689** (0.0268)	0.0369 (0.0253)	0.0437* (0.0242)	0.0406* (0.0225)	0.0689*** (0.0236)	0.0369* (0.0215)
PolityIVdistance	0.0271* (0.0158)	0.0308** (0.0152)	0.0235** (0.00937)	0.0263** (0.0103)	0.0271** (0.0115)	0.0308*** (0.0111)
Constant	0.854** (0.411)	0.827* (0.446)	0.639 (0.406)	1.099*** (0.385)	0.854** (0.371)	0.827** (0.334)
Observations	735	583	735	583	735	583
Log Pseudo-likelihood	-377.3	-279.9	-364.6	-274.8	-377.3	-279.9
Wald $\chi^2$	78.64	98.68	260	193.2	202.5	142.7
Prob > Wald $\chi^2$	6.67e-10	0	0	0	0	0
Pseudo R2	0.108	0.123	0.284	0.320	0.108	0.123
Area Under ROC Curve	0.724	0.736	0.835	0.850	0.724	0.736

Note: The sample refers to nominations which received AB recommendation for Referral, Deferral and Not Inscription.

Standard errors in parentheses: \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ . *a*: Standard errors adjusted for nominating country clusters. *b*: Standard errors adjusted for Committee member clusters

the decision-making process through verbal interventions. In this case, we find that close political and economic relationships between countries affect the content of Committee members' verbal statements.

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## Data Appendix

**Table 6** Description and sources of explanatory variables

Variables	Description	Source
<i>Nomination-specific</i>		
Cultural	1 if the nomination is a cultural heritage site; 0 otherwise	( <a href="http://whc.unesco.org/en/committee/">http://whc.unesco.org/en/committee/</a> )
Revision	1 if the nomination has been previously evaluated; 0 otherwise	( <a href="http://whc.unesco.org/en/committee/">http://whc.unesco.org/en/committee/</a> )
<i>Country-specific</i>		
Committee	1 if member in the World Heritage Committee; 0 otherwise	( <a href="http://whc.unesco.org/en/committee/">http://whc.unesco.org/en/committee/</a> )
Delegates	Number of delegates of a country at Committee session	( <a href="http://whc.unesco.org/en/committee/">http://whc.unesco.org/en/committee/</a> )
Incomepc (1,000 USD)	GDP per capita, PPP (constant 2005 international \$)	( <a href="http://data.worldbank.org">http://data.worldbank.org</a> )
Population (10 million)	Population at mid year	( <a href="http://data.worldbank.org">http://data.worldbank.org</a> )
UNSCTem	1 if Temporary member on the UNSC; 0 otherwise	( <a href="http://www.un.org/en/members/">http://www.un.org/en/members/</a> )
<i>Dyadic</i>		
Language Proximity	Lexical similarity between two countries' languages	Melitz & Toubal (2014)
Colonizer legacy	1 if Committee is former hegemony of nominating country; 0 otherwise	Head et al. (2010)
Colony legacy	1 if Committee member is former colony of nominating country; 0 otherwise	Head et al. (2010)
UN Regional Group	1 if two countries are in the same regional group; 0 otherwise	( <a href="http://www.unesco.org">http://www.unesco.org</a> )
UNGA voting distance	Ideal point distance between countries' votes at UNGA	Strezhnev & Voeten (2013)
Regimes distance	Distance between the two countries' Polity IV political regimes	Marshall & Jaggers (2002)
Bilateral Trade	% value of import and exports with one country over committee member's GDP	Barbieri et al. (2009, 2012)

**Table 7** Description and sources of explanatory variables

Variables	Nominations Dataset				Verbal Interventions Dataset			
	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Dep. var.: Inscription	0.734	0.442	0	1				
Dep. var.: Upgrade	0.306	0.462	0	1				
Dep var.: Verbal Int. Inscription					0.679	0.466	0	1
AB Referral	0.106	0.309	0	1				
AB Deferral	0.275	0.447	0	1				
AB Not inscribe	0.068	0.253	0	1				
Cultural	0.794	0.405	0	1	0.845	0.362	0	1
Revision	0.192	0.395	0	1	0.159	0.365	0	1
Committee	0.306	0.462	0	1	0.338	0.473	0	1
Delegates	9.670	12.50	0	91	10.44	13.58	0	91
Incomepc (1,000 USD)	14.85	12.88	0.481	71.93	14.84	12.99	0.481	71.93
Population (10 million)	15.35	35.19	0.00305	135.1	16.10	36.25	0.00305	135.1
UNSCTem	0.0893	0.286	0	1	0.118	0.323	0	1
Year of Decision	2007 (p50)		2003	2012				
Language Proximity					0.654	0.749	0	5.515
Colonizer legacy					0.0182	0.134	0	1
Colony legacy					0.0301	0.171	0	1
UN Regional Group					0.292	0.455	0	1
UNGA voting distance					1.078	0.869	0.00108	4.062
Regimes distance					6.782	6.545	0	20
Bilateral Trade					1.105	3.211	0	42.42