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Dynamics of Co-Sponsorship across Member Categories in the United Nations Security Council 2009 to 2023

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Abstract

Coalition formation in international organizations plays a crucial role in global governance. Our article uses new data on the (co-)sponsorship of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, classified into member categories, offering fresh insights into the operations of this core institution in the pursuit of global peace and security. Analyzing draft resolution sponsorship to map behaviors and alignments within the Security Council for 2009 to 2023, our findings show that the P5—and notably the P3—continue to play a prominent role, particularly due to their ability to draft resolutions and lead negotiations, a practice known as 'penholdership'. In contrast, next to

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the P2, the E10 members remain influential within the UNSC especially through their capacity to co-sponsor resolutions and form coalitions with other Security Council members, to influence negotiations and decision-making in this institution.

Keywords

UN Security Council – resolution co-sponsorship – penholdership – negotiations – coalition formation

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) remains a cornerstone of global affairs, tasked with the critical mandate of maintaining international peace and security, as the only United Nations (UN) organ authorized to enforce its decisions through the use of force by sovereign nations[3]. Its authority, however, has come under increased scrutiny in contemporary global governance debates, particularly regarding the capacity to maintain international security and stability. Examining the Council's role, composition, and procedures is thus imperative to understanding the operational dynamics of this central institution, particularly as global power rivalries intensify (Gowan 2021) and consensus becomes increasingly elusive.[4]

At its core, the UNSC reflects the post-World War II balance of power, with its five permanent members (P5) holding veto powers, while ten rotating members (E10) are elected by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) for two-year terms. The divide between permanent and elected members has long been a subject of controversy in international affairs, and recently this divide may even have deepened, in part due to the long-standing institutional leverage that permanent members possess. Moreover, the Security Council's

3 This paper was presented at the 66th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association (ISA) from March 2–5, 2025, in Chicago, and at the 62nd Annual Meetings of the Public Choice Society from March 6–8, 2025, in Louisville, Kentucky. We extend our gratitude to the participants in the panels where our paper was presented, and especially thank Aisha S. Ahmada, Rennan Pastich Loureiro, Annamaria Prati and Julia Raven, along with the two anonymous reviewers of our manuscript, for their valuable feedback and suggestions. Furthermore, we appreciate the helpful research assistance provided by Sahib Rasulov, Umang Sodhi, and Ping-Chen Shih.

4 On political dynamics and processes in the UN, including the Security Council, see Smith (2006). Mahbubani (2013) discussed the increasingly conflictual relations between global powers and the need for increased collaboration among them. Purushothaman and Unnikrishnan (2015), by comparison, explore effects of enhanced China-Russia collaboration on the situation of India.

'penholder system' has likely further enhanced such gaps, while both permanent and non-permanent members seek to contribute to the drafting and sponsorship of resolutions in a variety of thematic areas.[5]

Since 1965, the UNSC has operated based on its current structure, and the authority to draft and submit resolutions remains one of the key mechanisms through which its members can exercise influence. According to Article 27:3 of the UN Charter, a resolution requires the support of nine members, including the P5, to be adopted. While all members can submit drafts, the role of the P5 has remained dominant due to their veto powers and the benefit of access to 'institutional memory.'[6] Resorting to an analysis of sponsorship patterns for UNSC draft resolutions, we map behaviors and alignments within the Council for 2009 to 2023.

Aiming to contribute to earlier literature on the UNSC but filling a gap in terms of an analysis of resolution sponsorship in the UNSC based on novel information and data on alignments amongst both P5 and E10 members,[7] we explore patterns of collaboration and coalition formation in this institution. We find that in terms of member state behavior, there has been a clearly discernible trend in recent years towards more independent authorship on the part of the P3 (France, the UK, and the USA)[8], contrasting with earlier developments. The next section of this paper focuses on negotiation patterns and coalitional behavior in international institutions (and notably the Security Council). Section three discusses the UNSC practice of penholdership and its potential consequences. Thereafter, section four evaluates the relevance of co-sponsorship patterns across Security Council membership groups (the main aspect for which we have assembled empirical data). Section five discusses UNSC resolution authorship while presenting and evaluating our empirical data. Finally, section 6 offers final thoughts and concludes our paper.

5 For an in-depth exploration of selected thematic and country-specific resolutions, see Knapp (2025).

6 For early literature on Security Council procedures and decision-making, see Bailey and Daws (1998), Chan (2003: 339–359) or Prantl (2005).

7 Our analysis is based on Helou et al. (2025). For a new, extensive data collection on UNSC co-sponsorship more generally, see Knapp (2025): The author has collected data on both lead negotiators—derived based on text analysis of UN documents—and of resolution authorship, creating the United Nations Security Council Resolution Authors (UNSCRA) dataset.

8 This is true before and after Brexit (which caused the UK to formally leave the EU in 2020, leading France to become the only EU permanent UNSC member state).

Dynamics of Co-Sponsoring and Cooperation in the Security Council

Since its inception, membership in the UNSC has offered states several power-enhancing benefits, including impacting the decision-making process, expanding networking opportunities, and preserving status (Ekengren, Hjorthen & Möller 2020: 23); It can also enhance their bargaining leverage in other (international) organizations (Mikulaschek 2018). Holding a seat grants access to informal, closed-door consultations, which is a key motivator for membership (Malone 2006). The ability to participate in such discussions provides smaller countries with leverage and influence in shaping resolutions before they are put to a formal vote. Accordingly, for smaller states, participation in the UNSC offers an opportunity to play a role in shaping global governance, notably by engaging in agenda-setting and coalition-building.[9]

There are a series of elements that make the UNSC a complex organ of the United Nations system when it comes to its voting practices. Being a very exclusive league, only fifteen member countries are allowed to vote—a setting that is very different from the more inclusive and representative patterns of 193 individual votes of UN member states in the UNGA. Moreover, the UNSC has a well-known veto mechanism reserved for its only five permanent members, whereas the E10 can only hold their seats for two years at a time (and cannot be immediately re-elected). Several proposals have been made to formally adapt the constellation of the Security Council, but due to the high institutional hurdle for change, none of them have been accepted so far; instead, the UNSC has adapted many of its operating procedures and working methods (Hosli & Dörfler 2019).

Nico Krisch (2008) analyzed the dynamics between the P5 as developments within a "Great Powers club." The author provided insights into why the P5 members tended to agree on resolutions that, in essence, appeared to contradict their national interests. Consensus is reached, for example, due to the presence of side deals between P5 members, or the adoption of vague language in UNSC resolutions (a technique used often in negotiation processes in international institutions). According to Krisch, the P3, however, compared to China and Russia, has generally had a greater influence and more opportunities to leverage their positions within the Council, as the P3, according to the author, were better equipped to act independently from the UNSC in terms of conducting military interventions or forming alliances outside of the Council's framework. Accordingly, at least in the past, China and Russia oftentimes had

9 On factors affecting the potential impact of small states in the Security Council, see Thorhallsson (2012).

to compromise within the Council to accommodate Western interests (Krisch 2008: 141).[10]

This is not to say there is an inherent structural division between the P3 and the P2: Romita (2018) argues, for example, that UNSC permanent members, in fact, have demonstrated greater unity in the post-Cold War era compared to the infighting seen in previous decades (a trend, however, largely reversed in the more recent past). There was a substantial improvement in East-West relations in the years just following the Cold War era (Romita 2018: 123) while simultaneously, the influence of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was declining. The NAM, with support from the Soviet Union at the time, was an important proponent of several drafts focusing on the Israel-Palestine conflicts and on decolonization movements. During that era, France and the UK were arguably quite active employing their vetoes, as they often perceived the UNSC as a threat to their national—or even colonial—interests. However, in the more recent past, in contrast to the other P5 members, they have not applied their veto power at all. Moreover, the late Cold War period already demonstrated a stronger push for compromise and unanimity in decision-making in the Council (Romita 2018: 208).[11]

The literature on the UNSC's dynamics has also focused on the role of smaller states in the Council. Krisch argued, for example, that although the P5 largely determined the functioning of the Council—as notably seen in impasses during the Cold War period—non-permanent members certainly managed to influence its functioning as well (Krisch 2008: 136). The goal to achieve a unanimous vote, after all, implies that all Council members strive to sustain an image as representing the international community collectively (Krisch 2008: 139). Such developments can also be observed in the more recent past, with the Security Council arguably being severely hindered in its operation due to large power rivalries and geopolitical competition, while all UNSC member states—including the P5—still try to picture themselves as powers preserving the interests of the global community.

The goal to achieve unanimity in the Security Council provides an opportunity for smaller states, as the P5 will try to get as many votes as possible within the UNSC's voting procedures to demonstrate unity. The same dynamics apply for consensus decisions (without a vote). However, the process of getting support from non-permanent members can be fairly complex for the P5, as it will largely be dependent on the topic addressed and notably, bilateral rela-

10 On the role of China and Russia in multilateral institutions and global governance, see Grant (2012).

11 On veto use in the Security Council, also see Chan (2003).

tions between a veto-wielding power and the respective non-permanent UNSC member state (Hosli & Dörfler 2019: 46).

We will now turn to another practice crucial to processes of UNSC coalition-formation and notably, the balance of influence between the Security Council's permanent as compared to its non-permanent member states.

Effects of the Penholder System

As of the past decade, the practice of coalition-building has arguably been influenced by the practice of 'penholding,' or the 'penholder system,' which is a relatively recent UNSC procedure. Gradually taking shape in the late 2000s, under this system, most UNSC resolutions are drafted by one of the P3 countries. In essence, a penholder is the member state responsible for drafting texts that concern certain situation-specific agenda items, such as those focused on a given geographical location or theme (Romita 2018). For instance, France commonly sponsors drafts related to situations in Francophone African countries, such as Mali or the Central African Republic. Likewise, the UK usually sponsors resolutions focused on UN member states with which it traditionally had close ties, such as Cyprus, or other countries for which a renewal of resolutions is frequently upheld (including Somalia and Yemen). Penholdership can also be extended to elected UNSC members, sometimes independently, but often in partnership with a permanent member.

This system, however, is somewhat controversial. As Loiselle (2020) notes, the influence of E10 members in the UNSC may lately have been limited by the dominance of permanent members in the context of the penholdership practice, primarily held by P3 countries. According to the author, penholding reduces transparency and respective participation opportunities for elected members, despite recent instances of non-permanent members taking on more assertive roles, also in terms of penholding. While allowing elected members more agency can lead to greater adherence to rule of law principles more generally, more inclusivity, and increased transparency in the UNSC, the asymmetry between permanent and non-permanent members remains a challenge (Loiselle 2020). Monteleone and Oksamytna (2020) posit that, in recent years, informal groupings within the UNSC have been partly replaced by the penholding practice, with the majority of conflict-specific issues falling under the domain of the P3. Some have argued, however, that P3 countries are more actively engaged in international security matters, with the penholder system constituting a pragmatic way to address them (Ralph et al. 2020).

Next to an asymmetry in terms of geopolitical capabilities, the penholdership practice can reflect distance among members based on procedural aspects: According to Keating (2015), the practice can negatively affect the variety of perspectives within the Council and with this, the potential role elected members can play. In correspondence with UNSC rules of procedure, the monthly program of work is led by the (rotating) Council presidency, effectively granting a degree of procedural control to elected members for ten out of a total of fifteen months. This is an important aspect for E10 agency within the UNSC. However, by the mid-2000s, some practices within the Council started to shift. While the monthly work program requires approval from all Council members, P5 states can threaten to use their veto should a given program be viewed as too inconvenient, given their own positions. In turn, such practice arguably downplays the power of the presidency, instead allowing the P5 to exert control on what will be discussed in the UNSC and when (Keating 2015: 146).[12]

Additionally, Keating (2015) notes another, potentially even more important procedural development: For much of the Council's history, drafts and statements would be introduced for discussion in informal consultations at the ambassadorial level, for several rounds of negotiations. At most, some particular paragraphs would be referred to junior-level diplomats if these needed more technical drafting. For the most part, the negotiations were collectively carried out by all fifteen representatives. In the recent past, however, the trend appears to have been reversed: It is commonplace for the P5 penholder to assign drafts to junior and mid-level diplomats and only after a text has been drafted for informal consultations, negotiations at the senior level begin. While it could be argued that such practice ensures more efficiency, not all E10 members have the capacity to cover all consultations. Previously, smaller delegations could compensate for this by bringing in their more experienced ambassadors. According to the author, this resource asymmetry has given the P5, with their permanently-staffed core of UNSC delegations, a decisive advantage over elected members (Keating 2015: 148).

The penholder system may hence have widened the gap between the P5 and the E10 in terms of negotiating potential and capacities. Langmore and Thakur (2016) even posit that it has become usual for a draft to first be agreed upon by the P3 and then to be negotiated with China and Russia before being circulated to elected members. While the E10 might still be able to play active roles in drafting or revising resolutions, that is not always the case. Moreover, the P5

12 For the example of the Security Council and sanctions, see Dörfler (2019).

tend to assert that the E10 lack institutional memory, given their rotative mandates, which prohibit them from engaging in long-term agendas effectively (Langmore & Thakur 2016). With this, the penholdership practice likely affects coalition dynamics in the Council and while allowing for some efficiency in terms of the drafting of resolutions, also risks further tilting the power balance between permanent and non-permanent members in the direction of the P5.

In a way, penholding has become an important tool in preserving the status quo of the UNSC, notably in cases such as France and the UK: with their relatively smaller military capabilities compared to other P5 members, having very active roles as penholders for various themes is key to legitimizing their permanent Security Council seats (Tardy & Zaum 2016; Ralph et al. 2020). If anything, maintaining the penholder system has enabled several diplomatic dividends for the UK, especially related to its strategy of "Global Britain": being able to set the tone for so many UNSC themes not only enhances reputation, but allows the UK to be a facilitator of collective responses from the EU, as well as other international actors (Hadfield & Whitman 2023).

Resolution (Co-)Sponsorship

In terms of assessing actorness in the UNSC, an issue complicating analysis is how inconclusive voting data alone can be, as already pointed out by Monteleone (2015). The Security Council indeed has a rather exclusive membership structure, and texts are not voted on as inclusively as, for example, in the framework of the UNGA. Throughout the years, it has become commonplace for the majority of draft resolutions to be approved by unanimity of votes in the UNSC (Vreeland & Dreher 2014; Monteleone 2015).[13] A large share of Security Council decisions, in practice, is taken without a formal vote (resolutions are then "approved by consensus").

Informal closed-door consultations were routinely held among UNSC members in the past (Feurle 1985). Perhaps one of the reasons that drove countries to vie for a seat at the Council was access to exactly such informal consultations (Prantl 2005: 56; Malone 2006)—a mechanism still largely valid today, despite the incorporation of penholding into UNSC working methods. Additionally, consultations between the P5 members and, more focused yet, between the P3 have arguably been in effect for several decades. As is true for decision-making

13 This is also true for the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). An important and frequently used dataset on UNGA voting is Bailey et al. (2017). On advantages and limitations of using (UNGA) voting records, see Voeten (2025).

in several international institutions, generally, draft resolutions in the UNSC are only put to a vote after already having been extensively discussed before.

In contrast to voting data, sponsorship of UNSC draft resolutions can provide information on their authors' intentions with more clarity. There are several reasons why a UNSC member would want to sponsor a draft resolution. Firstly, taking the initiative may encompass a series of policy payoffs for the sponsor: Bringing an issue to the table under a certain framing is quite propitious in setting the conditions within which the theme is discussed and addressed.[14] Furthermore, as Chapter VII of the UN Charter prescribes, Security Council decisions are binding to all countries of the UN system and tend to focus on recent and pressing issues on the international stage. Accordingly, its resolutions carry more weight on the level of global negotiations than, for example, those of the UNGA, which are not binding and often concern matters of somewhat less urgency (Monteleone 2015). Having control over the language in the context of the UNSC is a form of power, and one that tends to sustain a hierarchical international order (Xavier do Monte 2016). By co-sponsoring a UNSC draft resolution, authors may display a clear stance on the situations at hand and what measures they deem fit to address these. Through that logic, it comes as no surprise that countries strongly advocating certain norms or principles would start striving to address threats to international stability through resolution co-sponsorship. Accordingly, sponsorship data from draft resolutions presented to the Security Council can be of much interest to the analysis of processes of coalition formation in the UNSC (Monteleone 2015; Knapp 2025) and add to earlier analyses of decision-making in this institution.

Academic work on co-sponsoring resolutions in the UNSC is still relatively scarce. Recently, work has focused on the speed with which intrastate conflicts get onto the Security Council agenda, accounting for various factors, including ties between UNSC members and target states in political, economic, or geographical terms (Binder & Golub 2020). Allen and Yuen (2022) provide an extensive analysis of Security Council work, with a particular focus on the dynamics of agenda-setting and the importance of procedures for member state agency. Such studies extend earlier work exploring reasons why certain conflicts are formally dealt with by the Security Council while others are not (Wilkenfeld & Brecher 1984; Iwanami 2011). As permanent UNSC members possess veto power and can influence decisions not least by the threat of casting a veto (Nahory 2004), it can be assumed that non-permanent members

14 This point was already pointed out by Todd (1969).

may actively use the opportunity to present resolutions and with this, influence the UNSC agenda.

Recent work also explores how E10 countries can affect the Security Council agenda, and how they are voicing their concerns on resolutions that affect their (geographical) surroundings (Souaré 2023). However, we assume there will be variation across the P5 and E10 member states in terms of diplomatic capabilities and their activity levels as co-sponsors of UNSC resolutions. The penholder practice clearly does play a role in influencing such dynamics, notably by shifting action related to resolution drafting and the chairing of negotiations towards the P5 member states. Moreover, for cases in which penholdership concerns recurrent situations—focused on conflicts or sanctions—the practice will directly affect the number of resolution sponsors.

Perhaps one of the earliest studies on this topic is an analysis of the voting and sponsorship behavior of the UNSC by Todd (1969). Back then, at the height of the Cold War, bilateralism tended to constitute the norm and patterns of multilateral governance were rather minimal (Malone 2006). After the end of the Cold War and a broader demand for democratization and transparency in the United Nations at large—as well as demands for formal UNSC reform—the UNSC had to gradually adapt its working methods. This increased transparency also rendered the UNSC obliged to demonstrate more clearly to the international community the reasons for its agenda-setting.[15] The times when draft resolutions would be discussed behind the curtains by the P5 only to then be voted unanimously into effect afterwards seemed to have been left behind. Hence, co-sponsorship, preferably together with non-permanent UNSC member states, became the standard of choice to legitimize decisions prescribed by the Council.

Monteleone (2015) employed global leadership theory to better understand UNSC dynamics. Focusing on resolution sponsorship in the UNSC, the author assessed coalition formation for the period 1993 to 2012. With this, instead of placing the focus on the decision-making and politicking around the member-states, the author argued that coalition formation had become an essential engine of procedures in the UNSC (notably since the end of the Cold War). The author differentiated between the years 1993 to 2000 (a time of 'agenda setting') and 2001 to 2012 (a 'coalition building' phase). Monteleone also centered the discussion around the concept of a 'dominating coalition' led by the P3, supported by a mix of non-permanent seats from EU member states and from the

15 The 2022 UNGA resolution holding the five permanent Council members accountable for their use of veto can be seen as a related trend; on this, see, for example, https://press.un.org/en/2022/ga12417.doc.htm.

global South (whose motives could range from simple sympathy to complex exchanges of favors and package deals). Overall, the author found that the dominant coalition was changing, with potential new coalitions being 'in the making' and an increase in participation and competition based on modifications in organizational forms prevalent in the global system at large. Offering a new dataset on co-sponsorship and lead negotiators for 1990 to 2023, Knapp (2025) has created the foundation for a range of potential further analyses. Among the (descriptive) insights offered by the author are that thematic resolutions tend to have more sponsors than country-specific ones and that a higher number of sponsors is not necessarily correlated with a higher adoption probability for resolutions (Knapp 2025: 6). The author also finds that a large share of UNSC resolutions are not co-sponsored at all (more than half since about 2016, as the author states), Moreover, E10 members mainly co-sponsor during their two-year tenure and P2 co-sponsorship tends to be associated with a lower probability of draft resolutions getting adopted (Knapp 2025: 7–8). The author also confirms earlier findings by Allen and Yuen (2020) that P5 members possess extensive agenda-setting powers (often focusing on areas with historical ties in drafting processes) and that almost all P3 member-initiated drafts are adopted when reaching the actual voting stage (Knapp 2025: 8–9).

Authorship of Security Council Resolutions

We will now examine relations between the practice of penholding and the distribution of authorship in the UNSC, with a particular focus on its effects on draft resolution sponsorship, exploring whether penholding has contributed to a greater concentration of power within the permanent membership (notably the P3). Our first hypothesis is that the increased prevalence of penholding has led to a greater propensity for P5 members to independently sponsor draft resolutions, reflecting a potential shift away from collaborative drafting practices. This can be done by tracking how often Council members have authored drafts alone or co-sponsored them with others.

Secondly, we posit that the rise of penholding has resulted in a concentration of draft resolution authorship within the P5, as evidenced by a disproportionately larger share of P5-sponsored drafts relative to total submissions. This concentration is expected to diminish the influence of elected members in the resolution drafting process.

Accordingly, for the empirical analysis of our study, we used information on 875 draft resolutions submitted to the UNSC for the 15-year period ranging from 2009 to 2023, based on Helou et al. (2025), with the data having been obtained

from the online archives of the United Nations Digital Library. Besides the text itself, all drafts submitted contain other useful information, such as who the sponsors are, the themes, target regions, missions and outcomes.[16] However, we do not consider drafts submitted to the Council without any sponsors.[17] By comparison, drafts that did not pass and hence did not turn into resolutions—whether due to an insufficient number of votes or to a veto having been cast—are accounted for in our analysis.

In the dataset, draft resolutions are organized by year according to their symbol ("S/RES" followed by the number and year of the resolution), category, target country, and outcome (that is, accepted resolution or veto cast) as well as the resolution sponsor(s). The sponsors are categorized by their status as UNSC permanent or elected members, respectively. Given the rotative function of elected members, they will subsequently be subsumed under the category 'E10 members.' The data compiled in this way is shown in Table 1, where the total for each UNSC member indicates the number of times it has sponsored or co-sponsored a draft resolution. To explore dynamics based on sponsorship data, we partially build on previous approaches used.[18]

For the observed 2009 to 2023 phase, a total of 875 draft resolutions were presented to the UNSC for approval. The number of drafts submitted each year varies, but was usually around 60, with the highest number having occurred in 2016 (78 drafts) and the lowest in 2009 (42 drafts). For each UN member or category of states, the number of drafts sponsored or co-sponsored is displayed for each year for the period assessed. Individual P5 member entries, such as 'China' or 'France,' reflect the total number of sponsorships that country had in a given year, regardless of whether this was independently from others or based on co-sponsoring with *at least* one other country. Where 'only' is indicated, it implies drafts were authored by that UNSC member (or group of members) exclusively. For example, 'UK only' is the number of drafts authored exclusively by the UK for a given year, without any co-sponsorship by another UNSC member.

16 The library search engine used can be found at https://digitallibrary.un.org/. Researchers interested in more detailed meeting outcomes as well as voting data may want to resort to https://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick/meetings/.

17 Some drafts might be submitted, for example, by another UN organ (usually the office of the Secretary-General) for approval within the UNSC. Some resolutions are also quite procedural in nature but require UNSC approval. An example being resolutions S/2021/606 and S/2022/495, both announcing elections to fill vacancies caused by the departure of ICC judges.

18 The methodology we apply was developed by Monteleone (2015), with a similar application later used by Helou (2019).

TABLE 1 Authorship of United Nations Security Council Resolutions by P5 Members and Categories, 2009–2023. Adapted from Helou et al. (2025).

	Year														
Members	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**
China	2	6	5	1	0	2	1	2	1	0	1	2	6	0	1
France	24	25	42	32	30	49	37	31	26	16	15	12	19	12	9
Russia	6	9	14	5	5	8	5	7	4	7	5	8	8	4	11
UK	22	21	30	31	31	46	41	35	30	23	18	22	24	17	20
USA	22	25	41	34	35	54	44	45	32	26	22	19	26	15	15
Individual P5 Sponsorships															
China only	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
France only	8	7	5	1	1	1	7	8	8	8	9	8	9	8	6
Russia only	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	4	2	3	0	2	6
UK only	4	5	2	5	1	0	6	12	13	14	12	14	16	15	18
USA only	3	4	7	7	3	6	10	19	14	17	16	14	14	8	9

TABLE 1 Authorship of United Nations Security Council Resolutions by P5 Members and Categories, 2009–2023. Adapted from Helou et al. (2025). (*cont.*)

	Year														
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Groupings															
P3 only	15	16	14	13	5	7	23	39	35	39	37	36	39	31	33
P5 only	19	23	20	20	8	15	27	44	38	47	42	41	43	35	42
P5 co-sponsor	4	6	6	7	3	0	3	3	3	4	3	2	4	2	3
E10 only	8	7	11	8	4	7	2	9	10	6	8	10	3	7	10
Both P5 & E10	15	16	34	26	33	44	34	25	17	7	8	13	12	8	9
E10 total	23	23	45	34	37	51	36	34	27	13	16	23	15	15	19
Total Drafts	42	46	65	54	45	66	63	78	65	60	58	64	58	50	61

Likewise, 'P3 only' are drafts submitted independently by one P3 member without any co-sponsorship by a non-P3 member state—in essence, a sum of 'France only,' 'UK only,' and 'USA only.' The category 'P5 exclusively' also includes China and Russia and includes any draft submitted by at least one P5 member without any co-sponsorship by a non-P5 member state. We use the term 'exclusively' instead of 'only' to avoid confusion, as 'P3 only' considers just drafts submitted independently, whereas 'P5 exclusively' considers both independently submitted drafts as well as co-sponsorships, as long as they are exclusively sponsored by P5 countries. However, this classification creates a major overlap with 'P3 only.' Hence, we also include the category 'P5 co-sponsor,' which considers drafts submitted by at least two P5 members together, without any non-P5 state, enabling us to detect how many times some P5 countries co-sponsored a draft resolution together without formal input by an E10 member state.

In turn, 'E10 exclusively' accounts for drafts submitted by *at least* one E10 member state *without* any co-sponsorship by a P5 member, that is, either submitted by a single E10 state or co-sponsored with other E10 members exclusively. The composite category 'both P5 & E10' refers to drafts *simultaneously* co-authored by *at least* one P5 member and *at least* one member of the E10. Finally, 'E10 total' is the total number of drafts authored or co-authored by an E10 member, regardless of whether it was submitted on its own, together with another E10 member or alongside a P5 state.

Finally, the *total* categories may include overlaps, these being 'China,' 'France,' 'Russia,' 'UK,' 'USA' totals, 'P5 only,' and 'E10 total.' Such overlaps can occur because these categories might register the same resolution twice. For instance, draft resolution S/2010/454, about Peacekeeping in Lebanon, was sponsored by both France and the USA, making it accounted for in 'France,' 'USA,' and 'P3 only.' This helps see the activity of different member categories. However, to avoid distortions in our analysis, we made sure not to mix categories that encompass overlapping drafts.

Using this methodological approach, Table 1 demonstrates, in accordance with our earlier reasoning, an overall increasing level of P5 activity within the Council over time. Even when they are not actively contributing to the formulation of a given draft, their agreement is necessary to ensure it passes the UNSC without a veto being cast. This ability arguably provides the P5 with extensive powers, formally and informally, in negotiations on UNSC draft resolutions. By comparison, draft resolutions sponsored by non-permanent members, either in conjunction with other E10 states or with members of the P5, have tended to decrease in recent years (notably from about 2018 onwards).

Still, when comparing P5 member state engagement, France, the UK, and the USA were authors of most of the submitted drafts, each being involved in the initiation of about half of the total of draft resolutions, either as authors by themselves or in cooperation with E10 member states. One of the factors contributing to this outcome could be the penholdership practice. One might assume that authorship of UNSC resolutions would be an opportunity for China and Russia to shape the Council agenda and respective discussions. But, as Table 1 demonstrates, they were much less active in this sense than their P3 Western counterparts.

Based on the data utilized, it is also possible to derive the proportion of submissions drafted independently per UNSC member state compared to those co-sponsored with other membership categories. Table 2, accordingly, provides the proportions of sponsorships per member state(s) as sponsor(s) of draft resolutions compared to the total of draft resolutions submitted to the UNSC, for each year, with a special focus on the P5. Table 3 displays the distribution of sponsorships per individual P5 member compared to its own total sponsorships.

These proportions make it easier to discern the extent of cooperation—or the absence thereof—of Security Council member states and respective UNSC member categories. For the P3, Table 2 displays a clear trend: While their total share in sponsorships has always been relatively high, their proportion of draft resolutions submitted independently has risen over time.

Table 2 reveals that shares of the P3 and the P5 in sponsorship totals, with some fluctuations over the years, have tended to increase: With 38 percent in 2009 in terms of the P3 sponsorship total and 45 percent of P5 sponsorships in the same year, the shares were still well below one-half of the total of UNSC resolution sponsorships. By comparison, in 2023, these shares were 55 percent (P3) and 69 percent (P5), respectively. The relatively high shares for the P5, given the serious geopolitical frictions amongst them, are somewhat surprising and may testify to the ability of the current Security Council to occasionally overcome power rivalries by co-sponsored resolution drafting, albeit arguably to the detriment of non-permanent UNSC member states.

By 2009, about 19 percent of all drafts were submitted to the UNSC by France exclusively, 10 percent by the UK and seven percent by the USA. However, France was only independently responsible for about two percent of all drafts submitted in 2014, while this share was three percent for the UK and seven percent for the USA. By the early 2020s, the proportion returned to levels comparable to those in 2009: France had a share of about 10 percent, the USA 15 percent and the UK even 30 percent of individually submitted resolutions in 2023.

TABLE 2 Share of UNSC (Co-)Sponsorships in Total Submissions (2009–2023, in Percent). Calculations based on Helou et al. (2025).

	Year														
Member	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**
China only	19%	15%	8%	2%	2%	2%	11%	10%	12%	13%	16%	13%	16%	16%	10%
France only	10%	11%	3%	9%	2%	0%	10%	15%	20%	23%	21%	22%	28%	30%	30%
Russia only	7%	9%	11%	13%	7%	9%	16%	24%	22%	28%	28%	22%	24%	16%	15%
UK only	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
USA only	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	3%	0%	7%	3%	5%	0%	4%	10%
Groupings															
P3 only	38%	41%	25%	31%	16%	18%	40%	50%	55%	67%	64%	56%	69%	62%	54%
P5 only	45%	50%	31%	37%	18%	23%	43%	56%	58%	78%	72%	64%	74%	70%	69%
P5 co-sponsor	10%	13%	9%	13%	7%	18%	5%	4%	5%	7%	5%	3%	7%	4%	5%
E10 only	19%	15%	17%	15%	9%	11%	3%	12%	15%	10%	14%	16%	5%	14%	16%
Both P5 & E10	36%	35%	52%	48%	73%	67%	54%	32%	26%	12%	14%	20%	21%	16%	15%
E10 total	55%	50%	69%	63%	82%	77%	57%	44%	42%	22%	28%	36%	26%	30%	31%

Beyond the recent rise in independently submitted drafts by P3 member states, there is a notable concentration of resolution sponsorships by the P3, and to a lesser extent, the P5.

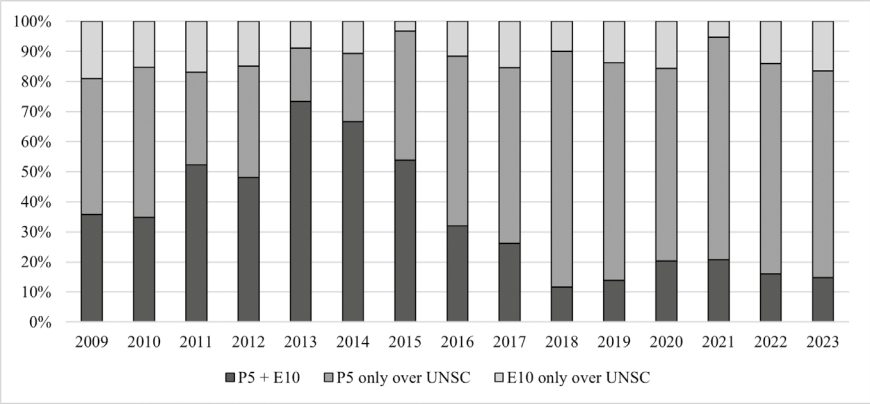

FIGURE 1 Distribution of Total *UNSC* Draft Resolution Sponsorship per Member Category (in Percent, 2009–2023). Calculations based on Helou et al. (2025).

Figure 1 graphically illustrates the share of total drafts sponsored by respective groups of UNSC member states in the UNSC total, between 2009 and 2023 (in percent). In Figure 1, 'P5 + E10' is the percentage of drafts submitted by at least one P5 and one E10 member state, whereas 'P5 only over UNSC' reflects the percentage of the draft total submitted exclusively by P5 members, either individually or by co-sponsoring within the P5. By comparison, 'E10 only over UNSC' is the proportion of total UNSC resolution drafts submitted by E10 members exclusively. As Figure 1 reveals, the period from 2009 to 2015 had relatively high proportions of drafts submitted by P5 and E10 members in conjunction, which testifies to the fact that E10 member states may have been important in terms of agenda-setting. Most notable in this respect is the year 2013, where only 18 percent of the draft resolution total was put forward exclusively by the P5, with all others having had at least some degree of authorship by an E10 member state. Similar trends, however, are absent from 2016 onwards, with the P5 being independently responsible for between about 55 and 69 percent of all drafts discussed and voted on in the Security Council.

Table 3, in turn, demonstrates another trend: That of P5 countries submitting drafts individually and independently. In this table, the proportions are for each individual country over its respective total of draft submissions in a given year. In addition, Figure 2 provides a graphical representation of trends reflected in Table 3.

TABLE 3 Proportion of Independently Drafted Resolutions in the Respective Country Total (P5 Members, 2009–2023). Calculations based on Helou et al. (2025).

	Year														
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Share of Sponsorship per P5 Member in its Total Sponsorships															
France only	33%	28%	12%	3%	3%	2%	19%	26%	31%	50%	60%	67%	47%	67%	67%
UK only	18%	24%	7%	16%	3%	0%	15%	34%	43%	61%	67%	64%	67%	88%	90%
USA only	14%	16%	17%	21%	9%	11%	23%	42%	44%	65%	73%	74%	54%	53%	60%
China only	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Russia only	0%	11%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	29%	0%	57%	40%	38%	0%	50%	55%

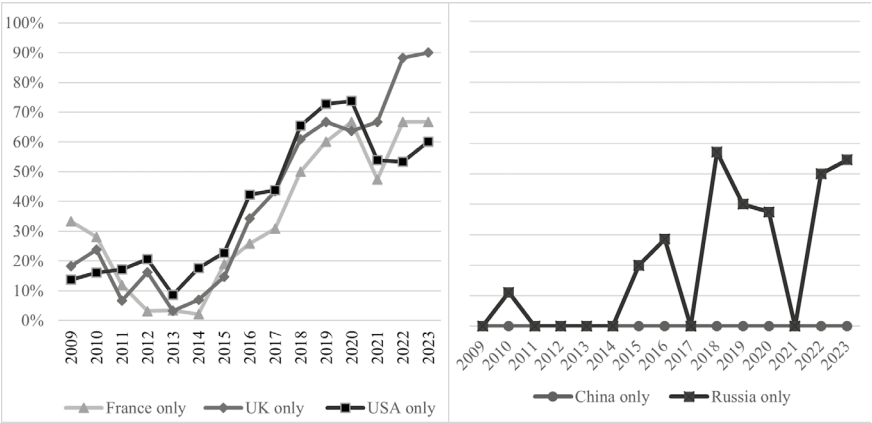

FIGURE 2 Share of independently drafted submissions in member state sponsorship total, P5 member states, 2009–2023 (in percent). Note: Trends for P3 Members are displayed on the left-hand side of Figure 2, trends for P2 members on the right-hand side. Calculations based on Helou et al. (2025).

Figure 2 reveals a clear trend. For the period assessed (2009–2023), each P3 increasingly submitted drafts individually, without any other co-sponsors. For instance, in 2014, France submitted only two percent of its total drafts by itself. In 2023, however, about 67 percent of its drafts were submitted independently. Similarly, the UK used to submit no more than about 20 percent of its drafts independently before 2015. After that, however, this proportion climbed rapidly, and in 2023 about 90 percent of resolutions submitted by the UK were without any other co-authors.

In contrast, China never submitted a draft independently, and Russia seems to have been reluctant in this regard (with an exception being when it focused on aiming to set the tone for its specific geopolitical interests). The few drafts Moscow authored alone between 2015–2020 were aimed at shaping monitoring or human rights actions in Syria, and to a lesser degree, in Venezuela. After 2022, however, Russia also tried to author drafts regarding Palestine and Ukraine. However, every single draft Russia submitted individually failed to become a resolution, be it because of an American veto or a failure to achieve the nine votes necessary from UNSC members in total to pass. Nevertheless, while there is no discernible trend for China or Russia, there is a notable shift across P3 countries, who now prefer to sponsor their drafts alone.

The data also demonstrate that China and Russia have their parts to play in the Council, although these two members seem less interested in actively sponsoring drafts as they are in partaking in actual negotiations. Being permanent veto-holders (and to some extent prominent actors in several geograph-

ical regions), their participation in the Council nonetheless seems less overt. While Russia's output of sponsorships is not on a comparable level to that of P3 members, Moscow was nonetheless relatively active in terms of drafting resolutions. By comparison, China rarely co-sponsored drafts in the period assessed. However, this does not necessarily reflect a disinterest in the UNSC as an institution: Not actively sponsoring a resolution does not imply the actor did not support its contents. Moreover, given their veto power, it is (or at least was) very common for drafts elaborated by the P3 to be negotiated with China and Russia before even being circulated to other members (Keating 2015; Langmore & Thakur 2016).

In terms of sponsorship patterns, the E10 may arguably have lost agency in the Council—notably from about 2018 onwards. In fact, since then, only about a third of drafted resolutions have at least some degree of authorship by an elected UNSC member. Such figures reflect a clear disparity, however, from the higher levels of participation observable in years prior (with at least half of UNSC resolutions having had some sponsorship by E10 members). If anything, the penholder system seems to have led to less active co-sponsorship involvement by elected members (with this probably notably applying for resolutions focused on recurring situations). E10 countries, however, are not unable to engage in penholding: For example, Austria was the penholder for drafts concerning International Criminal Court (ICC) appointments during its 2010–2011 term. Elected members can also penhold together, such as Brazil and Switzerland having held the pen for humanitarian issues in Syria for the year 2023.[19] Nonetheless, the tendency seems to be to rather attribute this function to P5—and notably P3—member states. Accordingly, both geopolitical trends and procedural facts could have caused the relatively lower share of E10 involvement in co-sponsorships in recent years. Moreover, E10 limited diplomatic resources—and access to 'institutional memory'—compounded by the temporary nature of their two-year terms, place them at a disadvantage compared to the permanent members.

While our study is inspired by the methodological approaches adopted by Monteleone (2015), our findings might display a break from the apparent "coalition building" phase observed for the years 2001 to 2012; while signs of a coalition-building phase went on as late as 2016, this trend seems to have reversed from about 2017 onwards. For this, penholdership may have been important in several cases, as P3 members seem to have increasingly taken on a dominant role in terms of leading negotiations and drafting resolutions on

19 On agency of E10 BRICS members Brazil, India, and South Africa, see for example Aguilar (2024).

more routine security issues within the Council. However, permanent members gradually seem to have preferred acting alone when drafting resolutions on their assigned topics more generally, with little inclination to co-sponsor with other UNSC members, be they permanent or elected ones. These findings are consistent with results presented by Loiselle (2020) and by Monteleone and Oksamytna (2020).

The importance of the Security Council as an institution with the responsibility to maintain and protect global peace and security is still core to patterns of global governance. Resorting to an outside option may potentially yield a desired outcome for a P5 member but in the long run, can create negative public perceptions in terms of the Security Council's legitimacy. Approval by the Council implies that the international community will not be antagonistic to the use of force by a UNSC member (Allen & Yuen 2022: 104). Hence, generally, a P3 dominating the Council since the end of the Cold War had incentives to act within the UNSC framework, while the P2 remained less active in this regard.

Figures revealed by our study demonstrate that while the P3 have increasingly acted individually in terms of co-sponsoring UNSC resolutions—not least due to the penholdership practice—the share of P5 members in overall draft resolutions dealt with by the Security Council has increased rather than decreased in the recent past. While potentially detrimental to an agenda-setting role of the E10, this pattern testifies to the fact that high geopolitical tensions within the P5 still lead to a reasonable pattern of collaboration amongst them in terms of initiating draft resolutions to later be voted on in the Council.

Conclusions

How has co-sponsorship on draft resolutions developed over time and influenced patterns of collaboration and coalition formation in the Security Council? How has the practice of penholdership affected these processes? Based on an analysis of co-sponsorship data for 2009 to 2023 (Helou et al. 2025), we reveal patterns of cooperation on draft resolutions amongst UNSC members and member categories. Our figures indicate that individual sponsoring by P3 member states has become more frequent over time. However, the share of draft resolutions sponsored by the P3 and the P5 in the total of draft resolutions discussed by the UNSC has been extensive in the phase assessed and even increased in recent years. This may be due to attempts to avoid regionally based resolution sponsoring on the one hand, but also the very practice of penholdership.

While penholdership implies drafts initiated by an (experienced) P5 member may increase efficiency and decrease the need to involve resources for draft preparations for other members (not least in the framework of resolutions focused on recurring situations), it also means elected UNSC members likely became less influential in agenda-setting as reflected by draft resolution sponsorship. Moreover, our analysis shows that even though there are serious rifts in the UNSC among P5 members, the share of P5-sponsored resolutions has nonetheless been high and even tended to increase in the phase analyzed in our study. Moreover, our data show that China and Russia, as P5 members, have been much less active in terms of resolution sponsoring than their Western counterparts; this somewhat contrasts with their use of veto power which has arguably still been extensive in the recent past.

In general terms, we find that coalitions in the UNSC form based on patterns in which veto-wielding powers are clearly dominant (probably due to the effect of the 'hidden veto'), while E10 members have less influence, at least as assessed based on co-sponsorship patterns. This implies that an asymmetry exists not only in terms of voting power, based on either holding veto power or not, but also in view of the actual involvement in the crafting of resolutions discussed or voted on in the Council. The penholdership practice has arguably further accentuated such divisions.

We also find evidence for changing power dynamics and alliances as reflected by UNSC activity. While the Western alliance is characterized by increased individual penholding activity, Russia and China may often align, despite being less active agenda-setters within the UNSC.

It is also worth noting that the methodology applied here might have its limitations. As with any quantification of political processes, nuance is often lost; impact-wise, for example, some resolutions have more weight than others. A relatively prosaic resolution renewing a monitoring mission's longstanding mandate, in this way, has the same value as a much more divisive resolution on a controversial ceasefire that took months of negotiations. Nonetheless, tracking sponsorships remains a suitable method when evaluating the concentration of authority in the UNSC—even on procedural decisions.

Future research could expand our analysis by focusing more explicitly on the role of the P2 and their tendencies within the UNSC in terms of (co-)sponsoring draft resolutions. Moreover, it could be worthwhile to use statistical analyses aiming to confirm trends assessed here over time. Finally, it would be of interest to see what general patterns of coalition formation on draft resolutions can be found, notably in an extended analysis including more years than the ones focused on in our analysis. For this, resort to the UNSCRA dataset (Knapp 2025) might be particularly fruitful.

Nonetheless, we hope our study fills a given gap in terms of research insights available, with our emphasis on resolution co-sponsorship in one of the most important global institutions formally tasked with the maintenance of international peace and security, distinguishing between engagement and activities across member categories. We believe our analysis of recent trends helps understand the dynamics underpinning alignments and with this, decisions made on resolutions discussed in the Security Council. While UNSC outcomes are still very much determined by the current constellation of Security Council membership, the way the Council operates and prepares its resolutions are important aspects of decision making in this institution. New insights in this regard help understand the dynamics of Security Council working methods, processes and procedures, assessed in terms of patterns of collaboration and resolution co-sponsorship over time.

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