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Resolution sponsorship by non-permanent members in the United Nations Security Council 1999–2024

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ABSTRACT

Despite structural dominance by the five permanent members (P5), non-permanent members (E10) of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) employ strategic tools to shape multilateral outcomes. Analyzing E10 resolution sponsorship from 1999 to 2024, extending an earlier dataset and presenting six comparative case studies, we find that E10 co-sponsorship has declined relative to the P5 since 2016. Yet E10 members retain meaningful influence, particularly in thematic resolutions, employing mechanisms such as “passing the baton”, “low-hanging fruit” initiatives, and cross-regional coalition-building. Rather than bypassing formal structures, E10 members practice “soft balancing”, as norm carriers and institutional innovators in a veto-constrained environment.

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1. Introduction

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is the central organ of the United Nations (UN) for the maintenance of international peace and security, consisting of 15 members, 5 permanent (P5), and 10 elected (E10) for two-year terms. The UNSC strives to resolve conflicts peacefully through the imposition of sanctions (Dorfler 2023), the deployment of peace missions, and the negotiation of settlement agreements, making it arguably the most critical UN organ (Pires Lopes et al. 2025, 4). Yet, a profound asymmetry exists in terms of Council governance.

One of the primary factors supporting power asymmetry in the UNSC is the right to veto, held by only the P5 members. Not least because of this asymmetry, there have been multiple calls for UN reform that would better reflect the global balance of power. Urquhart and Childers (1990) had already foreseen in the previous century that “the old pattern of East-West tension [that underlies the UN structures] is likely to be less important than the basic North-South differences” (Urquhart and Childers 1990, 7). Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had also highlighted and supported a reform agenda in 2005 that considered UNSC adaptation and enlargement. However, these proposals have not materialized (Archibugi, Cellini, and Malgieri 2025), maintaining the inequalities that continue to govern the UNSC.

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Hence, a study of the nature of inequalities within the UNSC and its institutional foundations, drawing on recent literature and resorting to new data, is not only timely but also relevant for future developments within the institution. Accordingly, our article focuses on the mechanisms and tools that may enable E10 members to gather and increasingly exert meaningful influence through diplomatic entrepreneurship, the creation of regional legitimacy, and procedural innovation within the Security Council.

With this, our article makes several contributions to the literature on UNSC dynamics and E10 agency. Empirically, it extends the United Nations Security Council Resolution Authors (UNSCRA) dataset (Knapp 2025) through 2024, providing an updated foundation for analyzing co-sponsorship trends across a quarter century. Conceptually, it introduces and applies three analytical mechanisms, “passing the baton”, “low-hanging fruit” initiatives, and cross-regional coordination, to explain how E10 members navigate structural constraints. Theoretically, it advances the concept of “soft-balancing” in multilateral settings, showing that elected members can function as norm carriers and institutional innovators despite veto-constrained conditions. By bridging quantitative and qualitative approaches, the paper offers insights particularly relevant to ongoing UNSC reform debates, illuminating how lesser powers can exercise influence within existing structures.

Accordingly, the article argues that the E10, as a group, albeit in different compositions after each rotation, can act as norm carriers and institutional innovators within a Security Council that is frequently immobilized by great power rivalries. It is mainly in this sense that they practice “soft balancing”. Particular attention will be directed to their role in drafting or co-sponsoring resolutions, a function historically reserved for the P5, in particular the P3 – the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), and France – not least due to the penholdership practice (Helou, Hosli, and Loureiro 2025, 56). Penholdership, while not a practice that confers ownership of a resolution, implies that a delegation prepares a draft and usually submits it for a vote (Knapp 2025, 2; Ralph and Gifkins 2017). Although E10-led initiatives remain relatively rare and often encounter informal resistance, their visibility has grown in areas such as peacebuilding, counterterrorism, and disarmament, as well as on regionally significant country-specific matters. The move from symbolic support to (meaningful) authorship reflects a broader reconfiguration of E10 legitimacy in Council procedures and working methods. In an era marked by dysfunctions in the Council, such as fragmentation, procedural deadlock, and relatively frequent use of the veto, the growing capacity of E10 actors to shape UNSC outcomes (Farrall et al. 2020) support a shifting agency landscape within multilateral institutions.

Among the guiding questions for our analysis are the conditions under which E10 co-sponsored resolutions succeed or fail, differences of E10 supported initiatives in terms of thematic compared to country-specific settings and finally, how patterns of language, sponsorship, and negotiation dynamics have varied across successful and unsuccessful E10-supported initiatives. Based on exploratory case studies, we aim to explain behavioural choices and their consistency over time, with a notable focus on strategies such as “passing the baton” and “low-hanging fruit” initiatives.

The paper is structured as follows: First, we discuss theoretical approaches and literature on the Security Council and the E10’s coalition-building abilities and influence. The section also offers conceptualizations of some E10 strategies and their interactions.

Then, we explore E10 activity in recent years based on quantitative information on UNSC (draft) resolution sponsorship, before offering case studies to further illustrate relevant dynamics. With this, we trace E10 authorship and co-sponsorship not only in terms of outcomes but also as a function of strategic agency under structural limitations. Finally, we summarise the main findings of our analysis and present avenues for further research.

2. Theoretical approaches

Non-permanent member agency and influence in the Security Council

As regards *E10 agency in the Security Council* it firstly is essential to exemplify how the P5 members hold structural power, which serves as an important context in understanding how the E10 may reclaim agency in the Security Council. For example, Moeckli and Fasel (2017) show how closed-door consultations reinforce the P5's hierarchical power, almost invariably predetermining outcomes that are favourable to them. Hosli and Dörfler (2019) demonstrate the important role of the P5 and Helou, Hosli, and Loureiro (2025) show how the penholder system still largely remains in the hands of the P3, with China and Russia being more active in terms of veto usage than agenda-setting. This implies that the concentration of drafting authority sidelines the E10 as they are unable to propose substantive language changes or to decide on the framing of key issues discussed in the UNSC. Dharmani (2021) and Recchia (2020) note modest shifts in penholdership for procedural items, being attributed more often to the E10, while this has not been extended to high-stakes resolutions. In short, whether through vetoes or other factors, the P5 retain privileged access to agenda-setting, leaving non-permanent members to seek influence through different channels.

Against this backdrop of structural constraints, Boutellis (2022) highlights how elected members increasingly organize themselves to counterbalance P5 privileges. The author traces these counterbalancing methods through the emergence of the “Ten Elements for Enhanced E10 Coordination,” a framework launched in 2018 that codified E-10 practices such as regular information sharing, collective issue monitoring, and joint representation in subsidiary bodies, including standing and *ad hoc* committees, groups, and panels. Monteleone's (2015) work demonstrated that by the mid-2010s, non-permanent members began forming more systematic coalitions around regional or thematic priorities, in stark contrast to previous interventions, which tended to be more *ad hoc*. Patterns of coalition-formation were exemplified by the US-France deadlock over a Middle East peacekeeping mandate, when a coordinated group of E10 states, known as “The Hague Group” presented a unified text that ultimately shaped the resolution's language (The Hague Group 2025). Postolski and Nick Pay (2022) built on similar findings and described how Poland (2018–2019) and South Africa (2019–2020) leveraged their UNSC non-permanent tenure to produce informal briefings, co-sponsored politically charged texts, and framed emerging crises, effectively inserting their priorities into debates that might otherwise have bypassed them. Thus, these analyses underscore that collective E10 strategies can, at times, recalibrate Council dynamics.

Monteleone (2015) argued more generally that co-sponsorship and voting data could be used in tandem to better understand UNSC dynamics. Co-sponsorship has emerged as

a particularly revealing indicator of non-permanent members' changing role. Helou, Hosli, and Loureiro (2025) show that although the E10 rarely serve as a resolution's lead authors, their participation as co-sponsors has been substantial, especially on thematic issues such as humanitarian action, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, and counterterrorism. Nonetheless, their co-sponsorship of resolutions, largely due to the penholdership practice, has decreased in relative terms in the recent past.

The role of the E10 as co-sponsors aligns with findings by Monteleone (2015) that "dominating coalitions" are likely led by P5 members, but they still need E10 co-sponsorship to achieve broader legitimacy. Hence, resolution co-sponsorship both signals alignment with the dominant bloc and creates bargaining possibilities for elected members. Postolski and Nick Pay (2022) reinforce this argument in their analysis of South Africa's E10 term in 2019–2020, where co-sponsorship of a resolution on the conflict in Darfur elicited African Union (AU) support, and pressured the P3 to incorporate language on civilian protection that had initially been met with resistance. In her extensive data collection and analysis, Knapp (2025) provides detailed insights into UNSC co-sponsorship patterns and the role member states have played in terms of being lead negotiators or just member states joining an already existing coalition, exemplifying how co-sponsorship can evolve from a symbolic gesture to a concrete step for agenda-setting.

Other analyses of the E10 explore the role of alliances and coalitions related to Security Council membership. Sponsorship metrics in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), as used by Finke (2021) and speech frames in the UNSC between 1990 and 2019 underlying the analysis of Sakamoto (2023), reveal how E10 members frequently calibrate their co-sponsorship and voting to align with related regime types and emergent threat discourses, thereby enhancing the resonance of their positions among potential allies. In other words, early-stage behaviours (sponsorship and framing) and ideational alignment (speech narratives) together shape eventual UNSC voting coalitions.

Furthermore, group politics, especially by regional or informal blocs, serve as another crucial mediator of E10 alignment. Smith and Laatikainen (2020) compile several case studies showing how, for example, during their tenures, many African states closely coordinated the design and execution of peacekeeping missions, drawing on shared principles while emphasizing respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs. However, the level of unity within this group is not always consistent, as differences in approach and priorities can emerge. Similarly, member states of the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC) display both unity and division. While some members collaborate on initiatives addressing challenges such as migration, others choose to abstain on such matters, revealing underlying political and ideological differences within the bloc that can affect their alignment according to topics and themes. This also applies to the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) group, where Laatikainen (2020, 143) finds broad agreement on climate-security language, though states more dependent on Chinese investment tend to adopt softer co-sponsorship positions. Together, these studies suggest that, even though group identity fosters coalition-building, bilateral interests and domestic pressures can weaken cohesion on specific issues.

Despite the power asymmetry with the P5 members, the E10 still have a lot to gain by being elected to the Security Council and trying to assert influence within its structures, which can in turn also affect their own actions and ambitions, while reviving the capacity

to act of the institution. Financial benefits, as some authors claim, may be primary driving force for states seeking membership in the UNSC. For instance, Berlin, Desai, and Olofsgård (2023) use World Bank data to demonstrate the economic benefits that UNSC membership can generate: According to the authors, E10 states receive larger financial sums, particularly in subnational areas where the ruling party's co-ethnic population gets disproportionately more projects and funding, demonstrating how domestic political considerations can intersect with Council-related benefits. Dreher et al. (2014) applied this argument in a similar way to bilateral aid, showing that the USA rewards cooperative E10 members with increased assistance, whereas non-aligned states often attract more favourable International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans. Similarly, Ekengren, Hjorthen, and Möller (2020, 23) and Von Einsiedel, Malone, and Ugarte Stagno (2016), find that governments often view Security Council membership as a source of economic advantage. Their survey of diplomats of former E10 states reveals that many states know a seat can catalyze increased foreign investment (Ekengren, Hjorthen, and Möller 2020, 36–37). These studies reveal that external incentives can temporarily shape E10 voting patterns and co-sponsorship choices, while such effects often dissipate once Security Council terms conclude.

Besides potential financial incentives, countries are also enticed by other motivations for UNSC bids. Ekengren, Hjorthen, and Möller (2020, 23), similar to Von Einsiedel, Malone, and Ugarte Stagno (2016), found that governments not only view Security Council membership in terms of financial advantage but international prestige, and domestic legitimacy. In a survey, diplomats of former E10 states acknowledge that many states begin campaigns based on reputational goals, knowing that a seat can earn them elevated standing in global governance forums (Ekengren, Hjorthen, and Möller 2020, 36–37). Postolski and Nick Pay (2022) also note that not all elected members pursue material gains or prestige. Some, such as South Africa and India, according to the authors, have used their terms to advance broader normative agendas on topics such as human rights and counterterrorism. Taken together, these studies suggest that, while prestige and material benefits often drive UNSC bids, normative leadership and strategic agenda-setting can be equally important motivations for states with wider diplomatic aspirations.

In terms of *E10 influence in the Security Council*, E10 members can affect UNSC dynamics through norm-setting endeavors. By aligning their sponsorship with established norms and leveraging cross-group coalitions, E10 members may enhance their soft power, making their positions more attractive and gaining the support of other countries to achieve the required number of UNSC votes, based on enhanced networking activities and status benefits (Ekengren, Hjorthen, and Möller 2020, 23, 36).

According to True-Frost (2007, 138), the Security Council also engages in “norm consumption”, meaning it adopts resolutions concerning comprehensive thematic issues of peace and security (TIPS) such as Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and children's rights in armed conflict. E10 sponsorship of such TIPS resolutions may be especially relevant, as demonstrated by the penholdership of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) for S/RES/2558, which discussed and reviewed UN peacebuilding trajectories and the sustainability of peace. The example demonstrates how seemingly “soft law”¹ initiatives can alter Security Council discourse and work programmes, providing a “discursive framework for the development and implementation of relevant norms” (True-Frost

2007, 121). This process is deeply intertwined with rhetorical strategies, as highlighted by Zaczyńska and Stede (2024), who examine how diplomats employ discursive strategies to address situations of conflict, and by Senn, who defines rhetorical strategy as the “purposeful assemblage of persuasive arguments for a particular situation by means of available discursive resources” (Senn 2017, 606).

Despite these adaptive strategies and motivations to be elected into the UNSC, persistent barriers continue to limit E10 influence. Moeckli and Fasel (2017) highlight the lack of transparency in Security Council decision-making processes, as key deliberations often remain undocumented, rendering it difficult for elected members to anticipate P5 priorities or leverage procedural rules (Moeckli and Fasel 2017, 18). Furthermore, Dharmani (2021, 12) observes that, despite elected penholders occasionally drafting meeting agendas or procedural notes, they rarely gain control over resolution mandates. Recchia (2020) and Levy (2022, 172) add that concrete reform efforts, such as proposals to expand the penholder pool or enhance transparency, have repeatedly faltered due to P5 resistance. Thus, even as E10 members innovate through coordination, co-sponsorship, and framing, fundamental power asymmetries endure.

In sum, the literature suggests that E10 influence depends on context, but still remains an important factor in diplomatic decision-making. The patterns of co-sponsorship and coalition-building reveal not only institutional adaptation but also how states may adjust their strategies in response to changing political interests, benefits or alliances. The relatively underexplored dynamics of E10 co-sponsorship and cross-agenda alignment provide valuable insight into how power operates beyond formal vetoes, through relational positioning, procedural leverage, and strategies of symbolic diplomacy.

3. Methodology

To explore E10 agency, in this study, we resort to quantitative and qualitative insights on UNSC resolution (co-)sponsorship patterns. We aim to see which mechanisms may intervene and condition the ability of non-permanent members, despite institutional asymmetries, to gather and exert influence in the Security Council. Hence, we aim to explore when and how E10 members can exert agency, and influence. We focus on how outgoing E10 delegations transfer knowledge and practices to their successors, to uphold continuity in strategies, a tactic that has proven successful to counter-balance P5 dominance and avoid fragmentation with the end of the term of E10 cohorts. By sharing institutional memory and building coalitions, E10 members may manage to somewhat counteract P5 domination. To guide the analysis, we will introduce concepts such as “passing the baton”, thematic “low-hanging fruit”, and cross-regional coordination, aiming to clarify how E10 states advance policy agendas within P5 institutional dominance dynamics.

The concept “passing the baton” means having successive non-permanent UNSC members work collaboratively on the same projects, ensuring continuity and momentum on key issues and with this, enhancing their collective diplomatic capacity (Boutellis 2022; Roele 2020, 121). “Passing the baton” among E10 members is not procedural but an effort to share institutional memory and strengthen collective capacity. E10 members, however, must operate under formal Security Council rules, which require a minimum of nine affirmative votes to pass a resolution. They may tend to prioritize regional issues

aligned with their national interests and diplomatic expertise: Given the structural dominance of the P5, E10 members often coordinate with elected members from other regions to secure broader support for their initiatives.

Such dynamics establish two important patterns. First, they reinforce the historical trend that E10 members may often focus on thematic issues to become “norm carriers and institutional innovators”, on topics that are generally more palatable to the P5, less politically sensitive, and offer a safer diplomatic space for norm entrepreneurship (Issa et al. 2024, 188). Second, they open a pathway for cross-regional capacity sharing: E10 members may gain from mutually exchanged regional knowledge, contacts, and even soft alignment with different P5 spheres of influence. The latter is seen in the example of France, which often dominates the authorship of resolutions concerning francophone countries (Helou, Hosli, and Loureiro 2025, 58).

In diplomatic institutional practice, the strategic choice of sponsorship on “low-hanging fruit” refers to resolutions that are politically non-contentious and normatively consolidated, making them easier to table, pass, or co-sponsor, especially by the E10. These items often benefit from established language, precedents, and broad cross-regional support, which reduces the risk of confrontation and lowers the need for intensive back-channel negotiation. The utility of such initiatives lies in their capacity to advance normative agendas without provoking obstruction from major powers (Monteleone 2015, 51).

To offer a general quantitative overview of E10 agency over time, we will first draw on Knapp’s UNSCRA dataset, which documents authorship and sponsorship of UNSC draft resolutions from 1990 to 2023 (Knapp 2025). This dataset is selected because it arguably represents the most systematic and comprehensive existing record of UNSC draft resolution authorship and sponsorship, offering standardised coding that enables longitudinal comparison. The dataset, however, is extended to include resolutions adopted in 2024, with additional entries manually coded in accordance with the original framework to ensure methodological coherence. Each new entry was verified against official UN Digital Library records and reviewed for coding consistency and accuracy.²

The timeframe of 1999 to 2024 is chosen as 1999 represented the start of post-Cold War consolidation of UNSC working methods and preceded the institutionalization of key E10 coordination frameworks, allowing the analysis to capture the full era of elected member engagement before and after these structural shifts. Extending the dataset through 2024 ensures that recent developments, including the growing use of veto and intensified great power rivalry, are captured, lending the findings direct relevance to contemporary reform debates.

Accordingly, the updated data collection included in this analysis contains 1575 Security Council draft resolutions (and amendments), which, following Knapp (2025, 4), incorporates information on aspects such as document title, member state sponsorship and resolution types. Our focus is on examining patterns of co-sponsorship, defined by Knapp (2025) as formal expressions of support for draft resolutions, reflecting both diplomatic alignment and coalition-building behaviour within the Security Council. We do not, however, replicate the author’s document analysis that identified lead negotiators (authors) of respective resolutions. A co-sponsoring member of the UNSC may be invited by a lead negotiator to serve as a draft sponsor, allowing for greater participation in decision-making and signalling political support going beyond a simple

affirmative vote (Knapp 2025, 2; Monteleone 2015). With this, co-sponsorship can be a strong reflection of ideational alignment and shape eventual voting coalitions.

We supplement this approach with comparative case studies. For this, we selected six resolutions drafted between 1999 and 2024, constituting E10-led resolutions (or resolution attempts). The six cases were selected to reflect a) variation in terms of outcomes (adopted vs. failed); b) issue type (thematic vs. country-specific); and c) the regional identity of the sponsoring E10 state. While this selection is not exhaustive, the case descriptions will provide additional insights into E10 dynamics and agenda-setting, aiming to uncover for each case dynamics that affected E10 agency and influence. Concepts such as “passing the baton” and “low-hanging fruit” initiatives will be focused on as intervening mechanisms that lead from E10 institutional disadvantages to (successful) UNSC resolution support and adoption.

The first resolutions selected concern an initiative in which SVG played an important initiating role, S/RES/2558 (2020) on peacebuilding during the COVID-19 pandemic, and Indonesia’s vetoed draft S/2020/852 that addressed the return and prosecution of foreign terrorist fighters. We then turn to country-specific cases, beginning with Côte d’Ivoire and Niger’s linked resolutions on Guinea-Bissau (S/RES/2458 and S/RES/2512). Thereafter, the (blocked) 2024 draft concerning Western Sahara (MINURSO), led by Algeria, will be described, illustrating the vulnerability of E10-led initiatives in politically sensitive contexts.

Drawing on United Nations documents, delegate statements, and scholarly sources, each case will be analyzed based on its drafting history, negotiation dynamics, and institutional context where applicable. The analysis also tracks the resolution’s influence on subsequent Council practices and thematic developments. The comparative case study approach aims to uncover both the structural constraints and strategic openings available to E10 members, underscoring that institutional innovation in the UNSC may emerge not through top-down reform but incremental, context-driven initiatives by lesser powers navigating a veto-constrained environment.

4. Analysis and results

4.1. Co-sponsorship trends 1999 to 2024

To establish a baseline for evaluating E10 engagement in the draft resolution process, the analysis first offers insights for 1999 to 2024 in terms of the overall number of sponsorships involving P5 and E10 members. It hence provides a (simple) quantitative assessment of co-sponsorship trends.

Focusing on developments between 1999 and 2024, Figure 1 shows that P5 and E10 members exhibited similar levels of (co-)sponsorship activity in the early 2000s. However, from about 2016 onwards, E10 sponsorship has declined relative to that of the P5. This shift likely reflects the consolidation of the penholdership practice in the hands of permanent UNSC members, as they retain primary responsibility for initiating draft resolutions in their areas of strategic interest (Boutellis 2022; Knapp 2025, 2). At the same time, there appears to be a move away from an earlier endorsed inclusive approach and standard practice to pair a P3 penholder with an E10 delegation, usually combining the P3’s UNSC experience with E10 regional expertise (Gregory 2023; Knapp 2025, 2).

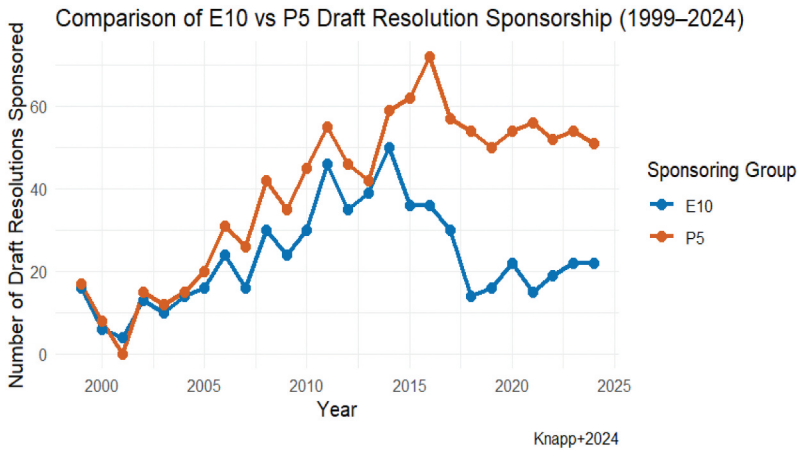


Figure 1. E10 and P5 involvement in resolution co-sponsorship, United Nations Security Council (1999–2024). Source: Own analysis based on co-sponsorship information using and extending the Knapp (2025) dataset.

Moreover, while in the early 2000s many resolutions had no sponsors (but were based on UNSC discussions), about 90% of sponsored resolutions concerned country-specific issues, while only about 10% were thematic. A full overview of the breakdown of sponsor (regional) group affiliations and resolution types for the 2020 to 2024 era, based on the updated dataset, is available in Table A1 in the appendix of this paper. It shows how specific regional or formal groups were more (or less) likely to align with the P3, the P2 or other UNSC compositions in terms of resolution co-sponsorship.

4.2. Agency and influence of non-permanent members: selected case studies

Moving to insights generated by our selected case studies, we first focus on thematic resolutions. Our first case, *UNSC Resolution 2558 (2020) (S/RES/2558)*, adopted unanimously on the 21st of December 2020, is a thematic and non-coercive resolution issuing general recommendations and political commitments related to peacekeeping, peacebuilding and sustainable peace rather than requiring binding obligations under Article 25 of the UN Charter³ (UNSC 2020f). It was introduced as a twin resolution alongside General Assembly Resolution 75/201, concluding the 2020 review of the UN’s peacebuilding architecture (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation 2021). SVG, serving as penholder, led the drafting process in the Security Council, while New Zealand co-facilitated parallel negotiations in the General Assembly. The resolution text is relatively short and procedural, primarily reaffirming prior peacekeeping and peacebuilding commitments, initiating a comprehensive review for 2025, and serving to “close out” the 2020 Peacebuilding Architecture Review (Monnier 2021).

While S/RES/2558 reaffirmed broad international support for the sustainable peace agenda, its final form emerged from negotiated trade-offs that channelled into areas of functional consensus. Proposals to expand references to conflict prevention were curtailed after several states, particularly those wary of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) precedents, argued that such language might legitimize external interventions. The

final text, instead, reiterated the principle of “national ownership” established in earlier resolutions, notably in S/RES/2282 (2016), maintaining that governments bear primary responsibility for peacebuilding endeavours. Terms such as “joint analysis”, flagged during negotiations as a possible stretch of UN powers, were retained but explicitly presented as coordination mechanisms rather than mandates (Monnier 2021). Meanwhile, proposals referencing UNSC Resolution 2171 (S/RES/2171), which asserts states’ responsibilities to protect their populations from “genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity”, or criticizing unilateral sanctions, were excluded due to opposition from members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).⁴ These choices allowed the resolution to preserve common ground through six operative paragraphs focused on implementation coherence: Peacebuilding Commission reform, sustainable financing, and forward-looking procedural accountability (McGowan and Kotini 2025). In its design, S/RES/2558 demonstrated how contentious norm interpretations could be put aside and even barely acknowledged, to enable institutional progress.

A similar pattern characterized debates around human rights and development: While Western delegations pushed for stronger rights-based language, NAM states and China questioned the neutrality of such formulations, leading to a mere mentioning of human rights in a preambular clause. This symbolic inclusion mirrored the treatment of the Secretary-General’s 2020 peacebuilding report, which was “welcomed” but not endorsed (UNSC 2020f): the same approach governed how the resolution addressed the relationship between peace and development. China and several developing countries grounded their position in the 2030 Agenda, emphasizing structural inequality and economic exclusion as root causes of instability (UNSC 2020f). Western states, while not disputing this, emphasized that development could not replace legal guarantees or inclusive governance.

To reconcile such views, the Council drew again on S/RES/2282, affirming that peace, development, and human rights are “interlinked and mutually reinforcing” (UNSC 2020f), but placed the formulation in the preamble, thereby avoiding operational commitments (UNSC 2020f). The only exception was financing, as the resolution marked a clear procedural advance by endorsing a General Assembly initiative to convene a high-level meeting on peacebuilding finances. Unlike earlier resolutions on the same topic, which urged funding increases, without follow-up, S/RES/2558 created an intergovernmental track for sustained engagement, addressing one of peacebuilding’s most persistent gaps (UNSC 2020f).

In contrast to considerations related to sovereignty and normative language, the issue of participation generated a broader consensus within the Council and produced more substantive gains. Although some delegations reiterated the importance of maintaining a state-led process, most endorsed a more inclusive approach that emphasized local agency and societal engagement (IISD 2021). The resolution identified inclusivity as “key to advancing national peacebuilding processes” and referenced the WPS and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agendas (UNSC 2020f; United Nations 2020), helping to secure support from both the EU and NAM delegations. By integrating a focus on participation, the resolution not only preserved thematic continuity with its predecessors but also responded to evolving global dynamics: It referred to key anniversaries, including that of UNSC (2000) and the 2030 Agenda, and explicitly highlighted the COVID-19 pandemic as a destabilising force (IISD 2021; Security Council Report 2020). Even though S/

RES/2558 avoided newer and politically sensitive topics, such as climate-security linkages, its inclusion of concepts of resilience, inequality, and structural vulnerability signalled a widening of the peacebuilding agenda's conceptual scope. Thus, it combined political caution with some institutional flexibility, reinforcing the idea that sustainable peace may best be advanced not by expanding mandates, but by negotiating their terms to reflect the political and material realities of UN member states.

The procedure and related outcomes were very different for another resolution: *Indonesia and Foreign Terrorist Fighters (S/2020/852)*. In August 2020, Indonesia, serving as UNSC President, introduced draft resolution S/2020/852. The draft sought to strengthen efforts to prosecute, rehabilitate, and reintegrate foreign terrorist fighters and their families, especially those detained overseas after the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria's (ISIS) territorial defeat (UNSC 2020e). On the 31st of August, the draft was brought to a vote and obtained 14 affirmative votes, while the USA vetoed it (UNSC 2020d).

Indonesia's leadership on the draft stemmed from its domestic experience with terrorism, as well as its recognition of the unresolved issue of thousands of ISIS affiliates detained in Syria and Iraq (UNSC 2020e). During Indonesia's presidency of the Council, Ambassador Dian Triansyah Djani placed the resolution on the agenda under "threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts" and circulated a final draft by late August 2020 (UNSC 2020e). This draft aimed at issuing a comprehensive blueprint for UN member states on the international threats of terrorism, encouraging robust prosecution efforts, context-specific rehabilitation and reintegration programs, and holistic approaches involving civil society, religious leaders, and family structures (UNSC 2020e; Aoláin 2020).

However, the drafting process was constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic, relying on written exchanges and virtual consultations instead of in-person negotiations. As successive drafts were circulated, the text expanded substantially, reflecting inclusiveness and compromise across diverging viewpoints (UNSC 2020e). Indonesia's diplomatic efforts to reach a consensus were widely acknowledged by other Council members (UNSC 2020e). The initiative was built upon an earlier Arria-formula meeting co-hosted by Indonesia and Belgium in 2019, which addressed radicalisation risks, particularly in prison settings (Security Council Report 2019a). The final draft incorporated various elements of detention-based recruitment prevention, child return mechanisms, and broader reintegration strategies, all framed as essential to addressing the long-term threat of terrorist recidivism.

Nonetheless, the primary obstacle to UNSC consensus was the question of repatriation. The USA pressed for explicit language obligating states to repatriate their nationals detained abroad for terrorist involvement, a position opposed by several European members, including the UK and France, who preferred trials in the region where detainees had been captured. Indonesia attempted to strike a compromise, encouraging states to facilitate the return of children "as appropriate and on a case-by-case basis" and to cooperate in bringing terrorists to justice, but stopped short of mandating adult repatriation (UNSC 2020e).

Substantively, S/2020/852 consolidated and elaborated upon existing Council frameworks, notably S/RES/2178 (2014) and S/RES/2396 (2017), which had already established norms on Foreign Terrorist Fighter (FTF) criminalization and return management

(UNSC 2020e). Rather than creating new legal obligations, the draft reinforced implementation and introduced vital interpretive clarifications, including the explicit recognition of the varied roles of women associated with FTFs (such as supporters, perpetrators, and victims), and the corresponding need for tailored Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (PRR) programs. It also underscored that children associated with terrorist groups should be treated as victims, requiring juvenile justice protections (UNSC 2020e). Belgium, however, criticized the draft for failing to codify these protections under international law (UNSC 2020e). The text's emphasis on countering prison radicalisation, the use of holistic approaches, and the inclusion of risk assessment mechanisms reflected a significant operational shift, even if the legal foundations remained unchanged.

As mentioned above, repatriation remained the most divisive topic. In this sense, the draft avoided any binding provision on the return of adult fighters, focusing instead on prosecutorial cooperation and child-specific return frameworks. While the USA and Russia viewed this omission as a critical shortcoming, European states regarded the final language as sufficiently balanced, emphasizing accountability and preserving national discretion over return policies (UNSC 2020e). France and Belgium praised the text's attention to victims, context-specific reintegration, and prosecution, while Indonesia promoted the draft as a strategic contribution toward breaking cycles of radicalisation and building a long-term counterterrorism architecture (UNSC 2020e).

Nevertheless, the vote exposed stark divisions between the Security Council members. USA's Ambassador Kelly Craft issued a critique of the draft resolution, considering it "worse than no resolution at all" and "a cynical and wilfully oblivious farce" (Lederer 2020). Ambassador Craft insisted that repatriation was a non-negotiable issue, emphasizing the security threat posed by thousands of detainees in Middle Eastern camps and prisons, as well as accusing some Council members of obstructing consensus, implicitly targeting European allies, due to an unwillingness to include firm repatriation language (Lederer 2020).

Russia, even though voting in favour of the draft resolution, had also expressed reservations, criticizing the absence of mandatory repatriation and urging states to return their nationals home and prosecute them, including women and children, when applicable (UNSC 2020e). Furthermore, Moscow emphasized the primacy of incarceration over non-custodial alternatives and warned against the collection of external evidence without the host state's consent (UNSC 2020e). Similarly, although European UNSC members backed the draft resolution, they offered post-vote criticism. For instance, France considered the text was "balanced" yet lamented the breakdown of counterterrorism unity; Belgium, as an elected member, supported the resolution, but warned that it insufficiently addressed the legal distinction between adult and child recruits and lacked robust human rights mechanisms (UNSC 2020e). These concerns echoed critiques by UN experts and NGOs, particularly regarding the need to treat child fighters as victims and to uphold humanitarian repatriation standards (Tayler 2020). Still, with 14 affirmative votes, the draft represented a broad Council consensus, overturned solely by Washington's dissent.

Following the USA's veto, expressions of frustration rapidly emerged. France warned against the normalization of fractured counterterrorism consensus, while Belgium emphasized that, despite its flaws, the resolution had value and criticized its rejection

as a squandered opportunity (UNSC 2020e). Indonesia's Ambassador Djani described the veto as "incomprehensible" and warned that the Council had "lost a valuable opportunity" to strengthen global security (UNSC 2020e). In response, Ambassador Craft reaffirmed that the USA refused to support a "façade", reiterating that repatriation is the only solution to the long-term FTF threat. It is worth pinpointing that no subsequent draft revisited the FTF reintegration issue, and Council attention in 2021–2022 shifted to less divisive topics such as terror financing and tech misuse. Although S/RES/2560, adopted in December 2020, addressed ISIS and Al-Qaida sanctions, it steered clear of FTF rehabilitation, opting instead for technical updates on sanctions listings (UNSC 2020h). This can be considered as a retreat to lower-stakes actions following the August veto; as France had feared, the longstanding counterterrorism consensus appeared fractured (UNSC 2020e).

The rejection of S/2020/852 followed a small number of E10-led initiatives vetoed by permanent members, in contrast to the usual pattern of P5-sponsored or adversarial drafts failing. Other examples include draft resolutions S/2020/667 and S/2020/654 put forward by Belgium and Germany on the issue of "principled, sustained and improved humanitarian assistance to Syria" (UNSC 2020a, 2020b), vetoed by Russia and China, despite 13 favourable votes (UNSC 2020c); and draft resolution S/2021/990 on the security ramifications of climate change, where Ireland and Nigeria were co-penholders, while it failed to be approved due to Russia's veto (UNSC 2021).

In terms of country-specific resolutions, we will start with an analysis of S/RES/2458 and S/RES/2515: *Côte d'Ivoire and Niger on Guinea-Bissau*. Amid a fragile peace agreement following the 1998–1999 civil war in Guinea-Bissau, Resolution S/RES/1233, adopted on 6 April 1999, established the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau, UNOGBIS (UNSC 1999). The resolution delineated the UN's political presence in the country and initiated a framework for coordinating peacebuilding and humanitarian efforts (UNSC 1999). Though it had no formal co-sponsors, the resolution's content was driven by states aligned with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and enjoyed unanimous support (UNSC 1999). Importantly, the resolution did not present Guinea-Bissau's instability as a global security concern, instead framing it in terms of subregional consensus and appeals from ECOWAS and from the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) (UNSC 1999). The involvement of African E10 members in pre-negotiation consultations, particularly Gabon and Gambia, underscored the deference to regional actors in initiating peacebuilding mandates in Africa during the post-Cold War period.

By 2009, the situation in Guinea-Bissau had not improved, forcing the UNSC to respond to deteriorating political conditions and recurring assassinations by transforming UNOGBIS into an integrated peacebuilding mission: the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) through S/RES/1876 (UNSC 2009). While not a resolution authored by an E10 member, this change of policy was reinforced by advocacy from Burkina Faso, an E10 Council member in 2008–2009, which chaired the Peacebuilding Commission at the time (United Nations Peacebuilding 2009). This move reflected a broader institutional realignment and integration across UN missions, as outlined in the Secretary-General's reports on post-conflict strategies. The language of the resolution placed greater emphasis on Security Sector Reform (SSR), the rule of law, and governance, echoing the priorities of the AU and ECOWAS (UNSC 2009). The

transition to UNIOGBIS, therefore, was consistent with an African consensus on strengthening state institutions and enhancing civilian oversight.

Ten years later, S/RES/2458, adopted unanimously on the 28th of February 2019, marked the beginning of a new phase of UN engagement in Guinea-Bissau with the extension of UNIOGBIS's mandate for the last time (UNSC 2019b). Côte d'Ivoire, serving on the Security Council from 2018 to 2019, assumed the penholder role. Côte d'Ivoire's delegate in 2019, before the vote, emphasized the importance of a nationally led transition and regional cooperation, particularly the coordination between UNIOGBIS, ECOWAS, and the AU (UNSC 2019a). The resolution maintained operative support for electoral assistance, security sector reform, and institutional capacity-building, while also setting the timeline for a phased withdrawal of the mission (UNSC 2019b).

The fact that Côte d'Ivoire was simultaneously the penholder and Guinea-Bissau's immediate regional neighbour shaped both the tone and content of the resolution. The draft drew extensively from language used in other resolutions, but it also incorporated elements from ECOWAS and AU reports in establishing transition benchmarks. This regionalization of authorship stands in contrast to most Security Council practices, where P5 – notably P3 – members assume the penholdership. In this case, Security Council members welcomed Côte d'Ivoire's leadership, and no P5 member contested its initiative (Security Council Report 2019b), illustrating the informal space available to E10 members when issues are considered non-contentious and when P5 interests are not directly implicated.

Following the aforementioned power transition from the UNIOGBIS to national authorities, S/RES/2512, approved on the 28th of February 2020, reaffirmed the final withdrawal plan and endorsed a handover to the UN Country Team and ECOWAS (UNSC 2020e). Niger, which had joined the Council as an E10 member in 2020, succeeded Côte d'Ivoire in the A3 configuration and assumed penholdership for the follow-up resolution, according to the “passing the baton” approach (Table 1). Niger's draft maintained the structure of S/RES/2458 but reinforced political benchmarks for the transfer of responsibilities, underscoring the primacy of national ownership and emphasizing regional partnerships (UNSC 2020e). Statements by Niger's delegation highlighted the resolution's consultative drafting process with both the government of Guinea-Bissau and ECOWAS as mediators (UNSC 2020g). Council members adopted the resolution unanimously and also praised the smooth coordination between Niger and the UN Secretariat (UNSC 2020g).

The procedures and outcomes were very different in the case of *S/2024/797 and S/2024/798: Algeria and Western Sahara (MINURSO)*. Serving as an E10 member in the 2024–2025 period (UN News 2023), Algeria proposed two amendments (S/2024/797 and

Table 1. “Low-hanging fruit” resolutions: criteria for E10 agency.

High normative consensus	Broad support in principle (e.g. WPS, children and armed conflict, climate security)
Limited strategic risk	Unlikely to provoke P5 veto or backlash
Thematic abstraction	Framed around universal values, not direct conflict with the party to blame
Procedural predictability	Has precedents, agreed language, or open debates to engage through
Potential for leadership	Offers space for thematic leadership, chairing subsidiary bodies, or authorship

Source: Own compilation based on E10-related literature and insights derived from our case studies.

S/2024/798) to the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), framing them around the principles of self-determination, African-led legitimacy, and human rights in peacekeeping (UNSC 2024a, 2024b). Both amendments, however, were rejected by the UNSC (United Nations 2024).

The Algerian delegate asserted that “the right to the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara belongs only to the Sahrawi people,” warning that the Council risked losing legitimacy: “By denying the people of Western Sahara the legal protection . . . under international law, we will have lost a great deal of [the] Council’s legitimacy” (United Nations 2024). The amendments aimed to reinsert human rights monitoring and realign MINURSO with its original purpose of Sahrawi independence, citing the nine-year absence of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) from the territory (UNSC 2024a, 2024b). The approach echoed Algeria’s use of universal norms in S/RES/2728 on Gaza, where E10 members leveraged humanitarian law and the principle of self-determination to reshape Council debates (UNSC 2024c). However, in the discussion on MINURSO renewal, Algeria’s normative framework encountered stronger resistance, as its support for the Polisario Front was perceived as partisan rather than impartial, weakening its universal appeal. This perception curtailed cross-regional support, even from states generally sympathetic to human rights-related language.

Following the amendments’ rejection, Algeria declined to participate in the final vote on Resolution 2756, in which the USA assumed the penholdership role, withdrawing its support for MINURSO’s renewal and presenting both procedural and substantive objections for its refusal (Security Council Report 2024). Algeria’s Ambassador Bendjama argued that the country’s “well-founded concerns” were ignored, emphasizing that the penholder circulated the draft only the night before the vote, denied real negotiation, omitted previously agreed language, and failed to act impartially (Security Council Report 2024). Moreover, he criticized the resolution’s silence on Sahrawi self-determination and the lack of a human rights monitoring mandate (Security Council Report 2024). Algeria’s non-participation in the final vote, a rare move for a resolution sponsor, signalled the depth of its opposition, considering it a protest against procedural exclusion and thematic erosion (Lederer 2024).

Russia abstained from both the vote on amendments and on the final resolution, claiming that the draft failed to “reflect the real situation on the ground” and ignored amendments proposed by other Security Council members (United Nations 2024). It also objected to the omission of Morocco and the Polisario Front as named parties, insisting that its request to clearly delineate the two sides of the conflict in the document text had not been given the right attention (United Nations 2024). Russia also questioned USA impartiality as penholder (United Nations 2024). Nonetheless, it abstained from supporting Algeria’s amendments, showing that the cautious posture might have deepened Algeria’s isolation, even among typical sceptics of USA-led drafts.

In voting on both the amendments and S/RES/2756, the E10 were evenly split: Guyana, Mozambique, Slovenia, Switzerland, and Algeria supported at least one of the amendments, joined by P5 member China. Switzerland’s vote on the first draft amendment (S/2024/797), introducing a preambular reference to human rights, brought the total of positive votes to six. Supporters justified their votes on normative grounds: Mozambique considered that Algeria’s amendments would help the parties in terms of

achieving a just, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution, and warned that not including them would gradually change MINURSO's original mandate (United Nations 2024). Simultaneously, Slovenia noted that integrating human rights considerations strengthened trust and mission sustainability, while Switzerland reaffirmed its strong commitment to the protection of human rights in Western Sahara and other contexts (United Nations 2024). Yet, Switzerland abstained on the suggested second amendment (S/2024/798), citing the need to preserve operational continuity (United Nations 2024). By comparison, the other five E10 members at the time – Ecuador, Japan, Malta, South Korea, and Sierra Leone – abstained on both amendments (United Nations 2024). While some abstained for procedural reasons or to avoid disrupting the mandate, others offered indirect rationales: Sierra Leone's reference to "international momentum for the Moroccan Autonomy Initiative" (United Nations 2024) signalled alignment with Rabat (Morocco) and exposed divisions within the African bloc. Although the AU officially supported Sahrawi self-determination, its members in the Council remained divided. The even E10 split, with no votes against, reflected a reluctance to openly reject human rights language, even if political caution prevailed.

The P3 abstained from both amendments, supporting the final resolution and opposing revisiting the draft. France stated the current mandate was adequate, while the UK emphasized the need for a "mutually acceptable political solution," implicitly opposing any reference to a referendum (United Nations 2024). The USA, as penholder, led the rejection of changes, and Deputy Ambassador Robert Wood reaffirmed that Morocco's autonomy plan was "serious, credible, and realistic," echoing Secretary of State Anthony Blinken's earlier endorsement (United States Mission to the United Nations 2024). Opposition by the USA to including human rights and self-determination language reflected Morocco's red lines and the broader P3 preference for ambiguity over explicit sovereignty concerns. To them, Algeria's proposals appeared not as principled refinements, but as efforts to disrupt a sensitive consensus (United States Mission to the United Nations 2024).

4.3. Conditions enabling E10 influence

The case studies presented above, assessed alongside the quantitative trends, reveal a set of consistent conditions under which E10 members are most likely to exercise meaningful influence in the Security Council. Three enabling factors emerge across the successful cases.

First, institutionally based legitimacy and perceived neutrality are critical preconditions for E10 penholdership: SVG's success on S/RES/2558 was enabled in large part by its dual role as UNSC member and GA co-facilitator of the parallel peacebuilding review, which allowed it to carry already negotiated consensus language into the Council chamber. This institutional positioning gave SVG an authority that transcended its small state status, signalling to other members that its penholdership was earned rather than opportunistic. Similarly, Côte d'Ivoire's regional proximity and perceived impartiality on Guinea-Bissau legitimized its penholdership in a country-specific context, and no P5 member contested its initiative precisely because it was seen as a knowledgeable and credible facilitator rather than a strategic actor with competing interests.

Second, “low-hanging fruit” resolution drafts, those characterised by high normative consensus, limited strategic risk, thematic abstraction, and procedural predictability (Table 1), consistently offer the most accessible entry points for E10 agency. Both S/RES/2558 and the Guinea-Bissau resolutions benefited from established precedents, agreed language and broad cross-regional support, reducing the risk of confrontation and the need for intensive back-channel negotiations. E10 involvement was also relatively large in the framework of thematic resolutions, as the compilation of data shown in Table A1 (Appendix) shows suggesting that this pattern extends beyond the selected cases. However, as the peacekeeping mandate renewals discussed in relation to Table 1 illustrate, substantive importance alone does not determine whether an issue qualifies as “low-hanging fruit”: even procedural mandates can become politically contested when embedded in geopolitical rivalries, exposing the limits of this strategy.

Third, the “passing the baton” mechanism between successive E10 cohorts enables institutional continuity that amplifies individual members’ influence beyond their two-year terms. The transition between Côte d’Ivoire and Niger on Guinea-Bissau exemplifies this dynamic: Niger inherited both regional knowledge and drafting authority from its predecessor, maintaining momentum and coherence without disruption. This continuity not only preserved the resolution’s substance but also signalled to P5 members and the broader Council that the African E10 configuration could sustain a coordinated and predictable diplomatic presence across rotations. Cross-regional coalition-building, particularly securing early support from both WEOG and Global South states, further amplifies E10 legitimacy and reduces the risk of P5 obstruction, as SVG’s careful navigation between NAM, EU and P5 positions on S/RES/2558 demonstrates.

Moreover, resolutions on peacekeeping operations, for example, illustrate that substantive importance alone may not determine whether an issue qualifies as “low-hanging”. For example, on the subject of WPS, resolution S/RES/1325, which “urges all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts” (UNSC 2000), laid the groundwork for the renewal of the mandate of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia for another year (S/RES/2754). While mandate renewals may appear routine, they often involve questions of sovereignty, the necessity of host state consent, and geopolitical rivalries. Such factors can expose agenda items to politicized bargaining and competing interests among major powers (Bueno et al. 2025). As a result, even procedural mandates may remain inaccessible to elected members when they are embedded in contested political terrain, challenging the efficacy of E10 sponsorship.

4.4. Constraints on E10 influence

Despite several enabling conditions, persistent structural and political constraints continue to limit E10 influence, as the failed cases and the quantitative trends demonstrate.

The penholdership power gap, where the P5 (notably the P3) informally dominate the drafting process of country-specific resolutions largely through closed-door discussions, constrains the E10’s ability to exert substantial influence, even with significant sponsorship efforts. In this vein, Wu and Zhang (2025, 15) argue that this informal penholdership approach has led to limited Chinese input and reduces the manoeuvrability of the “African Three” (A3), i.e. the African non-permanent UNSC members, often forcing

them to “adopt a pragmatic position and tacit acceptance of the status quo.” The quantitative data in [Figure 1](#) demonstrate such dynamics at a macro level: the decline in E10 co-sponsorship relative to the P5 from approximately 2016 onwards reflects not a withdrawal of E10 ambition, but a structural consolidation of drafting authority among permanent members that has progressively narrowed the space available to elected members.

Indonesia’s experience with S/2020/852 illustrates the most fundamental constraint on E10 influence: veto power. Despite receiving 14 affirmative votes, representing near-universal Council support, the draft was blocked by a single P5 member whose strategic redlines on repatriation language could not be accommodated without gutting the resolutions’ substance. This case demonstrates that even the most carefully constructed E10-led initiatives, built on established normative frameworks and broad coalition support, remain structurally vulnerable to P5 dissent. The aftermath is equally instructive: no subsequent draft revisited FTF reintegration, and Council attention retreated to lower-stakes technical updates, suggesting that vetoed E10 initiatives can produce not only immediate failure but a chilling effect on subsequent ambition in the same thematic area.

Algeria’s MINURSO case reveals a distinct but related set of constraints, centred on the challenge of credibility and perceived neutrality. Three structural limitations undermined Algeria’s campaign. First, its longstanding rivalry with Morocco over Western Sahara meant that even normatively defensible arguments, on human rights monitoring and self-determination, were perceived as partisan advocacy rather than principled diplomacy, curtailing cross-regional support even from states generally sympathetic to such language. Second, regional and alliance divisions diluted Algeria’s position: while Mozambique aligned with Algeria, Sierra Leone leaned toward Morocco’s autonomy plan, exposing fault lines within the African bloc that prevented a unified E10 front. Third, Algeria’s credibility as a normative actor was questioned given its own human rights record, weakening the universal framing of the amendments it suggested. Together, these factors illustrate that E10 influence is not only constrained by P5 veto power but also by the reputational and relational conditions under which normative arguments are received.

4.5. Conditional and incremental pathways of E10 agency

Taken together, the quantitative trends and case study evidence suggest that E10 agency in the Security Council is neither marginal nor transformative, but conditional and incremental. Influence is most likely when elected members combine institutional legitimacy, regional expertise, and normative framing with careful avoidance of P5 redlines – and when the issue at hand meets the criteria for “low-hanging fruit” outlined in [Table 1](#). Conversely, E10 initiatives falter when they are perceived as partisan, when regional blocs are divided, or when they encroach on issues where permanent members hold strong strategic interests.

Based on this compilation of insights generated by our analysis, [Table 2](#) captures the strategic implications of these findings, outlining the approaches through which E10 members may most effectively advance their agendas within structural constraints. Framing initiatives as thematic rather than country-specific, piggybacking

Table 2. E10 strategies for Security Council (thematic) draft resolutions.

Criterion	Explanation
Framing as thematic	Frame the agenda around established norms (e.g. WPS, R2P, climate-security), not specific state behaviour
Piggybacking	Attach initiatives to existing debates, working groups, or mandates
Building cross-group coalitions	Garner early support from both WEOG and Global South states (especially A3, GRULAC) to signal legitimacy
Avoiding direct P5 confrontation	Draft language that de-escalates sovereignty concerns or contentious labels (e.g. avoid naming perpetrators)

Source: Own compilation based on E10-related literature and insights derived from our case studies .

on existing mandates and working groups, building early cross-group coalitions, and avoiding direct P5 confrontation together constitute a repertoire of “soft balancing” strategies that elected members seem to have increasingly refined over the study period.

Moreover, our case studies demonstrate some of the behavioural choices of E10 states and their consistency over time, providing insights into the conditions under which “passing the baton” between current and new E10 members may be effective (and reflect a motivation for new members to follow through). Moreover, as our case studies demonstrate, “low-hanging fruit” may, depending on context, be interpreted in rather subjective or objective ways.

What appears on the surface to be a strategy of prioritizing low-stakes resolutions may in fact constitute a more deliberate pathway for building the reputational capital, coalition networks, and discursive frameworks needed to pursue more ambitious E10 initiatives over time. Hence, while the gap has recently widened in terms of P5 sponsorship compared to that of the E10, as our quantitative exploration demonstrated, the six selected short case studies demonstrate potential for E10 agency (and related limitations), based on the applicability of techniques and approaches such as those specified in [Tables 1 and 2](#). The shift has been particularly visible in the thematic domain, where E10 actors seem to have increasingly taken initiative in drafting and sponsorship. Although the resolution sponsorship gap between permanent and elected UNSC members has widened in recent years, the mechanisms identified here, such as “passing the baton”, “low-hanging fruit”, and cross-regional coordination, suggest that elected members continue to find ways to shape UNSC outcomes that extend beyond what formal voting structures alone would indicate. As our study has demonstrated, E10 agency matters, but is shaped by contingent factors alongside inherent inequalities of institutional provisions.

5. Conclusions

This paper set out to examine how elected members (E10) of the Security Council can meaningfully influence multilateral outcomes despite operating within an institutionally asymmetric structure dominated by the P5. Three primary objectives guided the analysis: to identify the conditions under which E10 engagement can be effective; to explore differences between E10 engagement in thematic versus country-specific settings and over time; and to trace how patterns of language, sponsorship, negotiation techniques and diplomacy have varied across successful and unsuccessful E10-supported initiatives.

Regarding the first objective, our analysis demonstrates that E10 success is most likely when elected members combine institutional legitimacy, perceived neutrality and normative framing with careful avoidance of P5 redlines. SVG's penholdership on S/RES/2558 and the Côte d'Ivoire – Niger transition on Guinea-Bissau both illustrate how these conditions, when present together, can open genuine space for E10 agenda-setting even within a veto-constrained environment. Conversely, Indonesia's vetoed draft and Algeria's blocked MINURSO amendments show that broad normative support and near-unanimous Council backing are insufficient when a single P5 member holds firm strategic objections, or when an E10 sponsor is perceived as a partisan rather than a neutral actor.

Regarding the second objective, the study confirms that thematic resolutions consistently offer more accessible entry points for E10 agency than country-specific ones. Thematic issues, characterized by high normative consensus, procedural predictability, and limited strategic risk, which this paper refers to as “low-hanging fruit”, allow elected members to exercise leadership, build reputational capital and establish discursive frameworks without provoking P5 obstruction. Country-specific resolutions, by contrast, are more frequently embedded in contested geopolitical terrain, where penholdership remains informally reserved for the P5 (notably the P3) and where E10 initiatives are more vulnerable to political resistance. The Guinea-Bissau cases represent a partial exception, illustrating that country-specific penholdership is achievable when the issue is politically neutral and regional E10 expertise is recognized as legitimate.

Regarding the third objective, the paper identifies three mechanisms – “passing the baton”, “low-hanging fruit” initiatives and cross-region coalition-building, that together explain how E10 members have navigated structural constraints over time. These are not isolated tactics but interconnected strategies that, when combined, allow elected members to practice a form of “soft balancing” within formal UNSC structures rather than against them. The shift from symbolic co-sponsorship to meaningful authorship, however incremental, reflects a broader reconfiguration of E10 legitimacy in Council procedures that carries implications for how power operates in multilateral institutions beyond formal voting rules.

Notwithstanding its contributions, our study has some limitations. The selection of six case studies, while designed to ensure analytical variation, cannot represent the full range of E10 engagement across all issue areas and Council sessions. Moreover, the extension of the Knapp (2025) dataset through manual coding, though conducted with care for methodological consistency, may not capture all subtleties of, for example, closed-door UNSC negotiation, where much of the most consequential diplomatic activity takes place. Furthermore, the quantitative component illuminates broad sponsorship patterns but is not designed to establish relationships between E10 strategies and resolution outcomes.

These limitations point toward productive avenues for further research. Future studies might, for example, apply network analysis techniques to map coalition dynamics across the full population of UNSC resolutions, moving beyond the descriptive patterns identified here toward a more systematic account of how co-sponsorship coalitions form and evolve. Extending the temporal scope beyond 2024 would allow researchers to evaluate whether the trends identified, particularly the relative decline in E10 co-sponsorship and the growing visibility of thematic

initiatives, continue or reverse in response to shifting geopolitical conditions. Access to confidential UNSC meeting records, where available, could shed further light on the informal negotiation stages that remain largely unexplored in the existing literature. Finally, comparative studies of other multilateral bodies without embedded veto powers, such as the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), the World Health Organization (WHO) or the World Trade Organization (WTO), could reveal whether the soft balancing strategies identified here are specific to the UNSC's institutional context or represent a broader pattern of how middle and smaller powers navigate asymmetric multilateral settings.

In sum, this paper demonstrates that E10 influence in the Security Council, while structurally constrained, is neither negligible nor static. Elected members have developed an increasingly sophisticated repertoire of diplomatic strategies that allow them to shape UNSC deliberation and outcomes in ways that extend beyond formal voting records. At a moment when UNSC reform debates are intensifying and great power rivalry is deepening, understanding how middle and smaller powers already exercise agency within existing structures is not only a scholarly contribution but also a matter of practical relevance for the future of multilateral governance.

Notes

1. Soft law can, *inter alia*, encompass guidelines, recommendations, codes of conduct, standards, policy guidance or technical notices (see Eliantonio et al. 2023).
2. To enhance inter-coder reliability, the coding was conducted by two graduate-level students. The updated dataset is available from the authors upon request.
3. As Article 25 of the UN Charter specifies, "The Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council in accordance with the present Charter" (United Nations n.d.).
4. NAM consists of a group of 121 countries within the UN that are not formally aligned with any power bloc; e.g. see Munro (2025).

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Appendix

Table A1. Sponsorship patterns according to resolution type (country-specific or thematic) and regional group affiliations, United Nations Security Council 2000 to 2024.

Sponsors (P3, P2 or non-P5 Group Affiliation)	Document Type	
	Country-specific	Thematic
APG	20	1
APG + EEG + GAFS + GRULAC	2	
APG + EEG + GAFS + GRULAC + WEOG	3	2
APG + GAFS	6	
APG + GAFS + GRULAC	2	1
APG + GAFS + GRULAC + WEOG	1	1
APG + GAFS + WEOG	1	
APG + GRULAC		1
APG + WEOG	6	
EEG		1
EEG + GAFS	1	
EEG + WEOG	1	
GAFS	18	5
GAFS + GRULAC + WEOG	1	
GAFS + WEOG	3	2
GRULAC	14	4
GRULAC + WEOG	3	
No sponsor	413	45
P2	23	2
P2 + APG + EEG	2	
P2 + EEG + GRULAC + APG		1
P2 + APG + GAFS + GRULAC + WEOG		1
P2 + APG + EEG + GAFS + GRULAC	1	1
P2 + APG + EEG + GAFS + GRULAC + WEOG	3	2
P2 + GAFS + GRULAC	1	
P2 + WEOG	1	
P3	500	6
P3 + APG	11	2
P3 + APG + EEG + GAFS	1	
P3 + APG + EEG + GAFS + GRULAC + WEOG	30	40
P3 + APG + EEG + GAFS + WEOG	16	3
P3 + APG + EEG + GRULAC	1	
P3 + APG + EEG + GRULAC + WEOG	7	3
P3 + APG + EEG + WEOG	30	
P3 + APG + GAFS	4	
P3 + APG + GAFS + GRULAC + WEOG	7	
P3 + APG + GAFS + WEOG	13	2
P3 + APG + GRULAC	1	
P3 + APG + GRULAC + WEOG	2	
P3 + APG + WEOG	8	
P3 + EEG	10	
P3 + EEG + GAFS + GRULAC	1	
P3 + EEG + GAFS + GRULAC + WEOG	8	1
P3 + EEG + GAFS + WEOG	7	1
P3 + EEG + GRULAC + WEOG	8	
P3 + EEG + WEOG	17	1
P3 + GAFS	19	2
P3 + GAFS + GRULAC	1	
P3 + GAFS + GRULAC + WEOG	5	
P3 + GAFS + WEOG	17	2
P3 + GRULAC	13	
P3 + GRULAC + WEOG	7	
P3 + P2	37	

(Continued)

Table A1. (Continued).

Sponsors (P3, P2 or non-P5 Group Affiliation)	Document Type	
	Country-specific	Thematic
P3 + P2 + APG	1	
P3 + P2 + APG + EEG + GAFS + GRULAC + WEOG	14	16
P3 + P2 + APG + EEG + GAFS + WEOG	6	1
P3 + P2 + APG + EEG + GRULAC + WEOG		1
P3 + P2 + APG + EEG + WEOG	2	1
P3 + P2 + APG + GAFS + WEOG	1	
P3 + P2 + APG + GAFS + GRULAC + WEOG	3	5
P3 + P2 + APG + WEOG	2	
P3 + P2 + EEG + GAFS + GRULAC + WEOG	1	2
P3 + P2 + EEG + GAFS + WEOG	2	
P3 + P2 + EEG + WEOG	19	2
P3 + P2 + GAFS + WEOG	3	
P3 + P2 + WEOG	27	
P3 + WEOG	43	1
P3+P2+APG+GAFS+GRULAC+WEOG	3	5
WEOG	47	2
Total	1483	169

List of Abbreviations for [Table A1](#).

P3: France, United Kingdom, United States; P2: China, Russian Federation; APG: Asia and Pacific Group; EEG: Eastern European Group; GAFS: Group of African States; GRULAC: Group of Latin American and Caribbean States; WEOG: Western Europe and Others Group.