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UN voting patterns reflect the changing geopolitical landscape

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Nations uniting in shifting alliances

[Questions](#) about the [United Nations' role](#) as an [international organisation](#) have [pervaded](#) since its inception. UN reform is a regular agenda item, and meaningful outcomes [occur at a glacial pace](#). Yet the UN endures, with 2025 marking the [80th anniversary](#) of the [UN Charter](#).

The UN Charter is an international treaty that is binding on all [193 member states](#). [Article 1](#) proclaims the UN's purpose is to maintain international peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations and ensure international cooperation and harmonisation.

The [UN Security Council](#) (UNSC) has [primary responsibility](#) for maintaining international peace and security, [including authorising](#) the use of force, imposing sanctions and establishing peace operations. In practice, the veto power of the Permanent 5 (P5) members (China, France, Russia, UK and US) can be an obstacle to ensuring international peace and security. The current geopolitical environment and major power competition is [challenging the UNSC](#) as it [struggles to uphold](#) its obligations under the UN Charter.

UN reform

[Efforts to reform the UNSC](#), including [initiatives to modify](#) the veto power of P5 members, are often stymied. Nonetheless, on [26 April 2022](#) the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution establishing a new mechanism each time a veto is cast (known as the 'veto initiative'). The [president of the UNGA](#) calls a formal meeting of member states to debate and vote on the disputed issue. The other method for debating disputed issues, the [Uniting for Peace resolution](#), was adopted by the UNGA in 1950. Under this resolution, matters deadlocked in the UNSC can be referred to, or invoked by, the UNGA for debate and vote. This occurred when Russia vetoed a draft resolution on Ukraine on 25 February 2022. The [UNSC referred the matter](#) to the UNGA and on [2 March 2022](#) the resolution was adopted with 141 votes in favour, 35 abstentions and 5 against. While UNSC resolutions are legally binding on [all UN member states](#), UNGA resolutions are not.

UN Security Council resolutions

Not all draft resolutions make it to a vote. Political disagreements, lengthy negotiations and a lack of support from P5 members can lead to [some drafts being abandoned](#). The [process involves extensive consultation](#), which aims to produce a draft that will be adopted either unanimously or by a majority (9 votes).

The table below shows an [increase in the number of vetoes](#) and a [decrease in the number of resolutions adopted](#) by the UNSC over the last 5 years.

Table 1 UN Security Council resolutions and vetoes since 2020

Year	Number of resolutions adopted	Number of resolutions vetoed	P5 member veto	Agenda item
2025	24 (to date)	2	2 x US	On 4 June 2025 the US vetoed the draft resolution on the situation in Gaza. On 18 September 2025 the US vetoed the draft resolution on the situation in Gaza.
2024	46	7	3 x US 4 x Russia 1 x China (with Russia)	On 20 November 2024 the US vetoed the draft resolution on the situation in Gaza. On 18 November 2024 Russia vetoed the draft resolution on the conflict in Sudan. On 24 April 2024 Russia vetoed the draft resolution on non-proliferation with regard to outer space activities. On 18 April 2024 the US vetoed the draft resolution on the admission of the State of Palestine as a new member of the UN. On 28 March 2024 Russia vetoed the draft resolution on DPRK proliferation activities. On 22 March 2024 China and Russia vetoed the draft resolution on the Gaza conflict. On 20 February 2024 the US vetoed the draft resolution on the Gaza conflict.
2023	50	5	2 x US 3 x Russia 1 x China (with Russia)	On 8 December 2023 the US vetoed the draft resolution on the Gaza conflict. On 25 October 2023 China and Russia vetoed the draft resolution on the situation in Gaza. On 18 October 2023 the US vetoed the draft resolution on the situation in Gaza. On 30 August 2023 Russia vetoed the draft resolution on the situation in Mali. On 11 July 2023 Russia vetoed the draft resolution on the situation in Syria.
2022	54	4	4 x Russia 1 x China (with Russia)	On 30 September 2022 Russia vetoed a draft resolution on the situation in Ukraine. On 8 July 2022 Russia vetoed the draft resolution on the situation in Syria. On 26 May 2022 China and Russia vetoed the draft resolution on the

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Year	Number of resolutions adopted	Number of resolutions vetoed	P5 member veto	Agenda item
				DPRK’s intercontinental ballistic missile activities. On 25 February 2022 Russia vetoed the draft resolution against its 23 February 2022 ‘special military operation’ in Ukraine.
2021	57	1	1 x Russia	On 13 December 2021 Russia vetoed the draft resolution on peace and security in the context of climate change.
2020	57	3	1 x US 2 x Russia 2 x China (with Russia)	On 31 August 2020 the US vetoed the draft resolution on international threats of terrorism. On 10 July 2020 China and Russia vetoed the draft resolution on Syria. On 7 July 2020 China and Russia vetoed the draft resolution on the situation in Syria.

Sources: Dag Hammarskjöld Library, ‘[UN Security Council Meetings & Outcomes Tables: Vetoes](#)’, UN website; UN Digital Library, ‘[Voting Data](#)’, UN website.

Note: the COVID-19 pandemic [impacted UNSC practices](#) from 2020 to 2022. The number of resolutions adopted by the UNSC in 2020 account for a shorter period of activity (March to December) and adjustment to temporary COVID-19 safety practices.

The [Security Council Report](#) recently highlighted a decline in the number of non-unanimous resolutions adopted, as well as [presidential statements](#). Additionally, the UNSC held fewer meetings in the first half of 2025, particularly on ‘The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question’.

UN challenges

Regardless of minor reforms, the UN system continues to be challenged. So far [this year the UNSC](#) has not adopted any *significant* resolutions on 2 major conflicts: Gaza and Ukraine (the [24 February 2025 resolution on Ukraine](#) contained one sentence urging a swift end to the conflict). The [June 2025 Israeli conflict with Iran](#) and [US strikes](#) against Iranian nuclear facilities [did not illicit a decisive response](#) from the UNSC.

On [4 June 2025](#) the US issued the first veto for 2025 against a [draft resolution on Gaza](#). Since the introduction of the ‘[veto initiative](#)’, the [UNSC submits a special report](#) to the UNGA about each vetoed draft resolution, which is usually debated and [voted on by the UNGA](#), sometimes with additional statements adopted. This was the case when the [US vetoed Gaza resolutions](#) on 20 November 2024 and 4 June 2025.

The [June UNGA vote](#) on a vetoed Gaza resolution was [supported by 149 member states](#), 19 abstentions and 12 against. Of the 12 negative votes, [7 were Pacific Island nations](#).

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Recent changes in negotiating positions and voting patterns within the UN system suggest some major political shifts. For example:

- A [March 2022](#) vote on the ‘[aggression against Ukraine](#)’ resolution was adopted in the [UNGA by 141 votes](#). A similar resolution was adopted in [February 2025 with 93 in favour](#).
- In [May 2025](#), members of the World Health Organization adopted the world’s first [international agreement](#) on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. The US refused to participate, and 11 countries abstained. [China](#) and [Australia](#) voted in favour.
- In [February 2025](#) the [US voted with Russia](#) on Ukraine in the UNGA and the UNSC ([Resolution 2774](#)).
- The US, traditionally the [UN’s biggest financial contributor](#), announced its [withdrawal from certain UN organisations](#) (UNESCO, WHO, UNHRC) and major [multilateral agreements](#), ceased funding specific UN organisations and refused to participate in the [UNHRC Universal Periodic Review](#).

The [Security Council Report](#) notes shifts in UN voting patterns that suggest the ‘Global South countries’ are reluctant to pick a side in the Ukraine conflict, while votes on Gaza show much less support for US and Israeli positions. The [report predicts](#) the ‘shifting global landscape and continuing political polarisation among permanent members are expected to continue to shape’ UNSC dynamics in 2026.

Similarly, recent UNGA voting patterns suggest new alliances are emerging. With significant shifts in [votes on Ukraine](#) and [the Gaza situation](#), the instability of the geopolitical landscape is on display at the UN.

The upcoming [UN General Assembly High-level Week](#) (22–30 September 2025) is likely to reveal further [shifts in political positions](#) and divisions among the broader UN membership, particularly on the [question of Palestinian Statehood](#). [Australia recently shifted](#) its [position on Occupied Palestinian Territory](#) resolutions in the UNGA, from voting against or abstaining to [voting in favour](#), and [announced on 21 September 2025](#) formal recognition of the State of Palestine.

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