Reforming the United Nations Security Council: A Quantitative and Political Analysis

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MATH123: World Politics

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Introduction

In the aftermath of World War II’s atrocities, international leaders convened with the common aim “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.”¹ At the United Nations Conference on International Organization in 1945, representatives of 50 nations devised the structure of the United Nations (UN), an intergovernmental organization dedicated to providing a forum for diplomacy, promoting peace and security, defending values of equal rights and self-determination, and facilitating cooperation to address global issues.² Since its establishment, the UN has expanded to have 193 member states as well as six principal organs focused on carrying out its objectives.³ The UN Security Council (UNSC) serves as the organization’s most powerful body, given its ability to issue sanctions, deploy peacekeepers, and authorize the use of military force in responding to crises.⁴

Despite its aim of “harmonizing the actions of nations,” the UN has been criticized for its inability to take decisive action on a number of international threats and challenges.⁵ The structure of the UNSC, particularly the veto power accorded to five of its members, has been attributed to the organization’s gridlock when responding to the wars in Syria and Ukraine. Developing nations’ and emerging economies’ lack of influence on the council has also led to questions of its legitimacy in the face of shifting global power dynamics.

Over time, various reform measures have been proposed to address the inefficiency and imbalance of power in the UNSC. This paper focuses on the two reform models proposed by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in 2004, which aim to “make [the council] more broadly representative of the international community as a whole and the geopolitical realities of today” by expanding its membership.\(^6\) It also analyzes the “Weak Veto” reform proposal, which would make it necessary for two permanent members to oppose a resolution in order to veto it.

To assess the extent of power imbalances on the UNSC, this paper will quantify the power of its member nations and regional blocs using the Banzhaf and Shapley-Shubik power indices. It will examine the effectiveness of the aforementioned reform proposals in balancing the UNSC’s power distribution by computing and considering these indices.

This paper also seeks to analyze the quantitative and political implications of UNSC reform proposals, while also illuminating additional modifications that could be made to the council’s procedure that would alter power dynamics in non-quantifiable ways, such as making it necessary for permanent members to justify their use of the veto.

**The Structure and Function of the UNSC**

Under the UN Charter, the UNSC was created with the following responsibilities and powers in mind: investigating situations that could escalate into international threats or conflicts, as well as proposing conflict response strategies, calling for economic sanctions, or authorizing the use of military force against an aggressor. The UNSC also has the capacity to deploy peacekeeping forces – made up of personnel from UN member nations – with the mandate to

“protect vulnerable people, enforce cease-fires, and safeguard elections” in conflict zones.\(^7\) As of December 2022, there are 86,863 peacekeepers serving in 12 operations across the world.\(^8\) In order to carry out its functions, the UNSC can issue recommendations or pass resolutions: legally binding documents that contain “formal expressions of opinion or will.”\(^9\) The overarching objective of the UNSC is to “to maintain international peace and security in accordance with the principles and purposes of the United Nations.”\(^10\)

The UNSC is composed of fifteen member states. In order to “reflect the differences in national power that separate large and small states,” Article 23 of the UN Charter established permanent seats for five of the most prominent world powers: China, France, Russia (the USSR when the Charter was written), the United Kingdom, and the United States.\(^11\) These permanent members, known as the P5, serve alongside ten more countries elected by the UN General Assembly for two-year terms. Non-permanent members rotate to ensure an “equitable geographical distribution,” reinforced by a series of electoral norms that have created distinct blocs and fixed regional representation.\(^12\) Traditionally, the African Group has three rotating seats; the Asia-Pacific Group has two; the Latin American and Caribbean Group, two; the Western European and Others Group two; and the Eastern European Group, one.\(^13\) Through an

informal agreement, Arab countries have been represented with seats that alternate between the African and Asian blocs.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & Permanent & Non-Permanent & Total Members \\
\hline
Africa Group* & N/A & Gabon; Ghana; Kenya & 3 \\
\hline
Asia-Pacific* & China & India; United Arab Emirates & 3 \\
\hline
Latin America and the Caribbean & N/A & Brazil; Mexico & 2 \\
\hline
Western Europe and Others & France; the United Kingdom; the United States & Ireland; Norway & 5 \\
\hline
Eastern Europe & Russia & Albania & 2 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Current Membership of the UNSC}
\end{table}

* Traditionally, one of the seats assigned to either the Asia-Pacific Group or the African Group is filled by a nation from the Arab world, alternating between the groups. The United Arab Emirates currently represents the Arab region as part of the Asia-Pacific bloc.

Each member of the Security Council has one vote, and in order to pass resolutions or make decisions on procedural matters, nine affirmative votes are needed. Each of the permanent member nations has the ability to veto any resolution it opposes. As a result, a negative vote from any P5 country prevents the passage of a draft resolution. Veto power is not explicitly

defined in the UN Charter, yet Article 27 requires concurring votes from the permanent members; in other words, they must vote unanimously in order for a resolution to pass. It is also worth noting that permanent members can abstain from voting in order to present their neutrality or displeasure without blocking a resolution’s passage.\textsuperscript{15}

As a consequence of the P5’s veto power, the UNSC is only as influential as it is cooperative. When permanent members prevent the adoption of resolutions that threaten their national interests, they often render the council incapable of responding to international crises or disputes. However, when its permanent members have reached consensus, the UNSC has taken decisive action; notably, it has initiated successful peacekeeping operations in nations including Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mozambique, Namibia, and Tajikistan.\textsuperscript{16}

**The UNSC as a Weighted Voting System**

Although each UNSC member officially has one vote, the permanent members’ ability to veto resolutions gives them more power over voting outcomes than non-permanent members. This makes the UNSC a weighted voting system, as there is a discrepancy between the weights associated with members’ voters.

A weighted voting system with $n$ voters is described by a set of numbers listed in the following format, where the quota is the number of votes necessary to pass a resolution:

\[
V(\text{quota}: \text{weight of voter 1, weight of voter 2, \ldots, weight of voter n})
\]

The UNSC uses the following weighted voting system for its five permanent members and ten non-permanent members:

\[ V(39; 7, 7, 7, 7, 7, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1) \]

Each permanent member has a vote with the weight of 7, while each non-permanent member’s vote has a weight of 1.

We can see that, under this system, five permanent members voting in favor of a resolution only gives \( 7 \times 5 = 35 \) votes. To clear the quota of 39, four additional votes are needed from non-permanent members. This means that at least 9 countries need to vote in favor of a resolution for it to pass, as required by the UN charter.

If any of the permanent members does not vote yes, then the most votes that can be gathered are \( 4 	imes 7 + 10 \times 1 = 38 \) votes, which fall short of the quota of 39 needed for a resolution to pass. This mathematically reflects the fact that permanent members have veto power, which means that resolutions require the support of every permanent member in order to be adopted.

**An Introduction to Power Indices**

The veto power that permanent members wield, which consequently grants their votes more weight, leads to an unequal power distribution on the UNSC that can be quantified using various power indexes.

The Banzhaf power index examines a voter’s probability of changing the outcome of an election in which voters have different weights. In order to calculate the power of a voter using
the Banzhaf index, one must identify all the winning coalitions of voters (in essence, all the combinations of voters whose combined weights would reach the quota needed to win).\textsuperscript{17}

A voter is critical if removing it from a winning coalition means the coalition no longer has enough votes to win. The Banzhaf power index of a voter is equal to the number of winning coalitions in which that voter is critical divided by the number of times all voters were critical. Therefore, this index computes the probability that each will change the outcome of a vote if they join a coalition.\textsuperscript{18}

Another index for quantifying voters’ power is the Shapley-Shubik power index, which examines the order in which voters join coalitions. To compute the Shapley-Shubik power of voters, one must find each of the sequential coalitions of all \(n\) voters by calculating \(n\) factorial. In each coalition, one particular voter will bring the coalition from a losing one to a winning one; this voter is known as a pivotal player in the coalition. Thus, the Shapley-Shubik power index of a voter is the number of times they were pivotal to a coalition divided by the total number of sequential coalitions.\textsuperscript{19}

**Quantifying the Power of UNSC Members**

This paper uses a power index calculator from Temple University to examine the Banzhaf and Shapley-Shubik power of UNSC member nations.\textsuperscript{20}

In the context of the UNSC, the Shapley-Shubik power index is especially relevant given that voters often decide whether or not to join a coalition based on its current members. By

\textsuperscript{17} Steven J. Brams, Game Theory and Politics (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2004).
\textsuperscript{18} Steven J. Brams, Game Theory and Politics (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2004).
\textsuperscript{19} Steven J. Brams, Game Theory and Politics (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2004).
\textsuperscript{20} “Weighted Voting Power Calculator,” Temple University Math Department, 2022, https://math.temple.edu/~conrad/cgi-bin/PowerIndex.py.
looking at which voters are pivotal to coalitions, Shapley-Shubik better captures the nuances in the distribution of power in the UNSC because it considers who influences whom. A voter’s overall power not only should not only include how much of an impact they have over the election outcome, but also how much power they have to affect other voters’ choices. In the UNSC, voting does not happen blindly; member nations have to make their choices public all while expressing their stances on global issues through often highly-publicized negotiations, discussions, and processes.

In the tables throughout this paper, a weight’s multiplicity is the number of voters that have that weight within a weighted voting system. “BPI” signifies the percentage of power each voter with the indicated weight has according to the Banzhaf model. “SSPI” signifies the percentage of coalitions in which a voter with the indicated weight is pivotal according to the Shapley-Shubik power index.

Table 2: Banzhaf and Shapley-Shubik Power Indices for the UNSC

| Quota: 39 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Multiplicity</th>
<th>BPI</th>
<th>SSPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.693%</td>
<td>19.627%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Permanent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.654%</td>
<td>0.186%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 shows that, according to the Banzhaf model, permanent members have about 10 times as much power as non-permanent members. According to the Shapley-Shubik power index, however, permanent members have nearly 100 times as much power as their non-permanent counterparts. These results illuminate the stark discrepancy between the influence of P5 nations and rotating UNSC members; permanent members are significantly more likely to be critical or pivotal to the success of coalitions.

Power indices are also beneficial in understanding the amount of power that different regions have over the resolutions and political outcomes of the UNSC. The member states of the UNSC have the following geographic distribution and corresponding regional weights in the weighted voting system, keeping in mind that a permanent member has a weight of 7 while a non-permanent member has a weight of 1:

**Table 3: Membership and Weight of Regional Blocs in the UNSC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional Bloc</th>
<th>Permanent</th>
<th>Non-Permanent</th>
<th>Total Members</th>
<th>Regional Weight in Voting System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa Group</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Europe and Others</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon examining the regional blocs on the UNSC, we can create a revised weighted voting system that allows us to calculate the power of each region with the Banzhaf and
Shapley-Shubik indices. As shown in Table 3, for example, the Asia-Pacific region has 1 permanent member and 2 non-permanent members on the council, giving it a weight of \((7 + 1 + 1) = 9\) in the UNSC’s weighted voting system.

Taking into consideration the regional blocs above, we can rewrite the UNSC weighted voting system as follows:

\[
V(39; 3, 9, 2, 23, 8)
\]

Table 4: Banzhaf and Shapley-Shubik Power Indices for UNSC Regional Blocs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quota: 39</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Europe and Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Calculating the Banzhaf and Shapley-Shubik power indices for regional blocs illuminates two interesting conclusions about the UNSC.
Firstly, the two regions that lack permanent members – Africa and Latin America – also lack power over voting outcomes, as shown by their BPI and SPI values of 0.000%. Under the Banzhaf model, their combined votes as regional blocs are never critical; removing them from a winning coalition cannot cause it to lose. Nor are they pivotal as per the Shapley-Shubik power index; their regions’ votes never bring a coalition from a losing one to a winning one. For regions that do not have any representation among the P5 member states, their lack of veto power means that they are unable to affect the passage of resolutions even if all of the member states in that region vote in the same manner.

Furthermore, all three regions with permanent members have equal power of 33.333% under both the Banzhaf and the Shapley-Shubik power indices. At first, this may appear unusual given that the Asia-Pacific and Eastern European regions only have one permanent member each, giving them respective weights of 9 and 8, while the Western Europe and Others region has three permanent members and a significantly larger weight of 23 in the voting system. However, this equal power distribution is consistent with the fact that all permanent members must vote in favor of a resolution for it to pass. In other words, any winning coalition must contain all three regions with P5 members. If any of them withdraws or is absent from a coalition, this implies the usage of a veto by a permanent member which automatically causes that coalition to lose. Even though the Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe and Others groups have different weights, the three regions are equally powerful should their member nations all vote in alignment with one another.

It is worth noting that it is not uncommon for UNSC member nations in a regional bloc to vote in different ways. For example, the Eastern European bloc is currently composed of Russia and Albania, which have diverging political agendas and foreign policy stances despite their
geographic proximity. As a post-communist nation, Albania is a NATO member allied with the United States and the European Union.\textsuperscript{21} Albania’s term on the UNSC has been characterized by its leadership in condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine; along with the United States, it sponsored multiple resolutions reaffirming Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, calling upon Russia to cease its military aggression, and facilitating the flow of humanitarian aid and personnel.\textsuperscript{22} These resolutions were all vetoed by Russia’s representative to the UNSC.\textsuperscript{23}

Although UNSC member nations do not always vote along regional lines, this framework of analysis illustrates how the “equitable geographic distribution” intended when the UN Charter was framed does not extend to ensure equitable power dynamics between regions of the world.\textsuperscript{24} It also provides us a basis for understanding how these power dynamics could shift upon the implementation of reforms designed to give more power to developing countries and emerging economies, particularly in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

**Legitimacy and Effectiveness of the UNSC**

As demonstrated by the Banzhaf and Shapley-Shubik power indices, permanent members of the UNSC wield a significant power advantage over their non-permanent counterparts.

Throughout the history of the UN, over three hundred vetoes have been cast by P5 countries, stalling or impeding action to resolve international crises.\textsuperscript{25} However, the permanent members of the UNSC have taken different approaches to using their veto power. Russia


(formerly the Soviet Union) is responsible for nearly half of all vetoes employed since the UN was founded. The United States has cast the second-highest number of vetoes, notably using it to defend its ally Israel on questions of Palestinian sovereignty and to oppose proposals led by the USSR during the Cold War. In fact, two-thirds of all vetoes occurred during the Cold War – a reflection of the geopolitical tension between the United States and the Soviet Union. Although it often abstains from voting, China has begun employing its veto power more and more frequently, acting in alignment with Russia to oppose resolutions regarding the war in Syria. On the other hand, both the United Kingdom and France have refrained from casting vetoes since 1989, and both have expressed a desire to better regulate the use of veto power going forward.

As a consequence of veto power, the majority of UNSC actions have occurred in countries that have no permanent representation and where “no major power has a direct interest.” This is best exemplified by the council’s discourse surrounding Africa. According to the Institute for Security Studies, African peace and security was the focus of 50% of UNSC meetings, 60% of its outcome documents, and 70% of its resolutions regarding breaches of peace

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in 2018 alone. At the same time, African nations lack a permanent seat, giving the region no collective power over voting outcomes as seen in Table 4. As pointed out by Rama Yade, Senior Director of the Atlantic Council’s Africa Center, the framework of the UNSC was established before the majority of African countries had gained independence from their colonizers, making it an outdated system that is inherently flawed. With the example of Africa, we can see the two main problems that inspire ongoing UNSC reform efforts: inequity and a lack of representation, as well as structural barriers to decisive action on global crises and human rights violations. These challenges reflect the importance of improving the council’s legitimacy and effectiveness.

Most calls for reforming the UNSC center around the so-called “inequity argument.” Given that the permanent members and geographic composition of the council were determined in the context of WWII, they do not reflect contemporary geopolitical realities. Since the UN was founded, its membership has grown from 51 to 193 member nations – an enlargement which reflects increasing globalization and multilateralism, as well as a marked shift in global power dynamics over the past decades.

It is worth noting that under the current composition of the UNSC, the P5 countries are all nuclear weapons states under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty; their outsized influence on

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the UN reflects an understanding of power that centers military might. As emphasized by “Elect the Council,” a reform campaign coordinated by the Institute for Security Studies, the UNSC “no longer represents the primacy” of other types of power, such as economic influence, population size, or technological leadership. The narrow scope of the council also overlooks dimensions of power that are harder to quantify yet have significance in global politics: soft power, or the ability to lead through influence rather than coercion. This type of power is often leveraged by nations in the Global South in mobilizing their regional blocs.

From an economic standpoint, the P5 countries include some of the world’s wealthiest nations: the US (ranked 1st in the world by nominal GDP), China (2nd), the UK (5th), France (7th), and Russia (11th). However, non-Western countries such as Japan (ranked 3rd), India (6th), and Brazil (12th) have evolved into major economic powers and regional leaders since the inception of the UNSC, yet they lack influential representation on the council. Major population centers like Nigeria and Indonesia also have increasing geopolitical influence that they cannot leverage in the UNSC due to its structure.

As the UNSC has increasingly shifted away from reflecting the balance of power in the world, it has also lost legitimacy from countries who feel that their political influence is not adequately represented in the UN system. The UN’s High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges

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and Change has also cautioned that “the paucity of representation from the broad membership diminishes support for Security Council decisions.”\textsuperscript{40} This in turn decreases its ability to drive meaningful action, act efficiently, and honor its responsibilities under the UN Charter.

At the same time, with great power comes great responsibility; just as the permanent members of the council were given veto privileges, they were also “expected to shoulder an extra burden in promoting global security.”\textsuperscript{41} However, this has not consistently been the case. Neither the US, Russia, nor China have paid their UN membership dues in full for 2022, while the United Kingdom paid them late; only France submitted its full contribution on time.\textsuperscript{42} The US has also accumulated over $1 billion in peacekeeping-related arrears.\textsuperscript{43} When it comes to contributing personnel to UN peacekeeping operations, the majority of P5 countries fall short; the top 5 contributing countries to UN forces are Bangladesh, India, Rwanda, Nepal, and Pakistan. Where Bangladesh has 7,003 personnel to peacekeeping missions, the US has contributed only 32 officers currently serving.\textsuperscript{44} It is clear that in general, the P5 countries’ disproportionate share of decision-making power at the UN is not matched by their contributions to its initiatives, budget, and missions. It can thus be argued that nations with the most at stake and the most proven investment in the UN system should have a larger influence in its deliberations.

As a result of its structural problems, the UNSC has often been unable to maintain international peace and security. In particular, the council has been heavily scrutinized for its interventions in Bosnia and Rwanda, which failed to stop two genocides. By neglecting to authorize adequate protection for demilitarized UN safe areas in Bosnia, the UNSC is often described as complicit in the mass killing of 8,000 Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica.\textsuperscript{45} The 1994 UN peacekeeping mission stationed in Rwanda was not only was found to have an “insufficient mandate,” but the UNSC also “refus[ed] to strengthen it” once the Rwandan genocide began; the operation was thus unable to prevent the deaths of over 800,000 ethnic minorities.\textsuperscript{46}

The UNSC’s ability to effectively resolve crises is severely hindered by its veto provisions in particular, as exemplified by its inaction on the war in Syria. Now in its eleventh year, the Syrian Civil War has been characterized by its massive number of civilian casualties, the refugee crisis it catalyzed, and its status as a proxy war with involvement from external world powers.\textsuperscript{47} The UNSC’s attempts to mediate a political transition in Syria, provide humanitarian aid, and hold Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s regime accountable for its human rights atrocities have been complicated by its permanent members. As an ally of Assad, Russia has used its veto power nearly twenty times to block resolutions surrounding the crisis in Syria.\textsuperscript{48} China has frequently joined Russia in its vetoes, while the US, UK, and France are aligned against the Assad regime. Even when P5 countries have not exercised their veto power, their

threats to block resolutions have inspired the watering-down of human rights measures to increase their likelihood of passing, “reinforcing a view of the council as toothless.”

This gridlock is especially prominent in light of Russia’s current war in Ukraine. As previously mentioned, Russia has vetoed several resolutions which would have demanded that Moscow withdraw all troops and condemned its unlawful annexations of Ukrainian territory. At the same time, the majority of UN member states have expressed their disapproval of the invasion of Ukraine, with the General Assembly voting to expel Russia from the UN Human Rights Council. In a video message to the UNSC in September 2022, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky urged world leaders to unite against Russia’s war and “remove the right of veto” for the permanent member. The international community’s broad mobilization in support of Ukraine – through sanctions, military and humanitarian aid, boycotting Russian oil, and other measures – has been juxtaposed by the UNSC’s relative inaction given Russia’s veto power. Consequently, the war in Ukraine illuminates the implications of granting countries known for international law violations such great power over UNSC proceedings, as well as the consequences of permitting conflict parties to exercise their veto power on matters concerning their own actions.

In conclusion, the use of veto power frequently undercuts the council’s mission of safeguarding international peace and security, while the structure and regional representation of

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the UNSC has been attributed to a loss of legitimacy. The council’s gridlock when responding to various global crises has inspired calls for reform aimed at addressing these key challenges.

**Power and Politics Under UNSC Reform Proposals**

There are many recommendations for reforming the UNSC to make it more equitable and efficient, many of which alter the distribution of power among the council’s member states and regions. For the purpose of this paper, we will be assessing the impacts of three UNSC reform proposals using the Banzhaf and Shapley-Shubik power indices: the “Weak Veto” reform structure, as well as the two revised UNSC models endorsed by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

The “Weak Veto” reform proposal would require “at least two [permanent members] to vote against a resolution for it to necessarily fail.” According to research conducted by the University of Sheffield, this model’s “success owes to the fact that, by reducing the voting power of the permanent members, it dilutes the distribution of expected voting power away from these countries.”

Approximately 82% of vetoes in the history of the UNSC have been performed by a single member state, and the majority of them were cast by Russia or the US. Therefore, instituting a requirement for a double veto would not only prevent unilateral actions from stalling decisive action, but it would also promote greater engagement in negotiation and compromise.

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The “Weak Veto” reform proposal, in which two countries must veto a resolution for it fail, has the following weighted voting system:

\[ V(58; 10, 10, 10, 10, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2) \]

Each permanent member has a vote with the weight of 10, while each non-permanent member’s vote has a weight of 2.

We can see that, under this system, five permanent members voting in favor of a resolution only gives \(10(5) = 50\) votes. To clear the quota of 58, four additional votes are needed from non-permanent members. This means that at least 9 countries need to vote in favor of a resolution for it to pass, as required by the UN charter.

If any two of the permanent members do not vote yes, then the most votes that can be gathered are \(3(10) + 10(2) = 50\) votes, which fall short of the quota of 58 needed for a resolution to pass. This mathematically reflects the fact that two permanent members in conjunction have veto power. Resolutions require the support of four out of five permanent members in order to be adopted. This is supported by the fact that, if only one permanent member votes against a resolution, the most votes that can be gathered is \(4(10) + 10(2) = 60\). Given that this exceeds the quota of 58, one permanent member alone does not have veto power under the “Weak Veto” Reform proposal.
Table 5: Banzhaf and Shapley-Shubik Power Indices for “Weak Veto” Reform Proposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Multiplicity</th>
<th>BPI</th>
<th>SSPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15.470%</td>
<td>13.034%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.265%</td>
<td>3.483%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results show the significant impact that the “Weak Veto” reform proposal would have on improving the balance of power on the UNSC. Recalling Table 1 with the power indices for the traditional UNSC weighted voting system, we know that permanent members currently have nearly 100 times as much power as their non-permanent counterparts according to the Shapley-Shubik power index. The SSPI in Table 5 shows that permanent members would only have about 4 times as much power as non-permanent members if the “Weak Veto” proposal were implemented.

We also see an increase in non-permanent members’ power according to the Banzhaf model; the P5 would each have about 7 times as much power as non-permanent members with the “Weak Veto” UNSC model as opposed to 10 times as much power on the current council.
Table 6: Membership and Weight of Regional Blocs Under “Weak Veto” Reform Proposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Permanent</th>
<th>Non-Permanent</th>
<th>Total Members</th>
<th>Regional Weight in Voting System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa Group</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Europe and Others</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taking into account the revised weights for permanent and non-permanent members under the “Weak Veto” reform proposal, we can rewrite the UNSC weighted voting system as follows to account for the regional blocs’ weight:

\[ V(58; 6, 14, 4, 34, 12) \]

Table 7: Power Indices for Regional Blocs Under “Weak Veto” Reform Proposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Multiplicity</th>
<th>BPI</th>
<th>SSPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa Group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.667%</td>
<td>5.000%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.333%</td>
<td>38.333%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data in Table 7 further demonstrates the shift in power dynamics brought about by the “Weak Veto” reform proposal. Given that the current UNSC structure means that the Africa and Asia-Pacific groups have no power at all under the Banzhaf and Shapley-Shubik indices, it is worth noting that their BPI increases to 6.667% and their SSPI becomes 5.000% when this reform is implemented. Rather than sharing an even distribution of power as with the current UNSC structure, the Asia-Pacific and Western European regions have more power than Eastern Europe if two negative votes are required for a veto. This is consistent with the increase in non-permanent members’ power; Eastern Europe only has one non-permanent member adding to the weight of its permanent member, while Asia-Pacific and Western Europe both have two non-permanent members.

The Banzhaf and Shapley-Shubik power indices both demonstrate how adopting the “Weak Veto” reform proposal would increase the power of rotating members relative to the P5, giving Africa and Latin America greater influence over the council’s decision-making while encouraging more consensus-building among all of its members.
The second and third reform proposals in this analysis were both endorsed by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. In 2004, he established the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change to devise reform recommendations for UN institutions. In its report titled “A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility,” the panel proposed two alternatives for expanding the UNSC to twenty-four members so it is “not only more representative but also more able and willing to take action when action is needed.”

In order to best assess these reform proposals, we took two key liberties. Annan’s reform models both propose the allocation of UNSC seats to four regional areas – Africa, Asia and Pacific, Europe, and Americas – rather than the five official regional groups seen in Table 1. To best understand the issue of regional representation under these models and better compare them to the current UNSC model, we inferred their seat distributions using the official regional groups so they remain in proportion to the current distribution on the UNSC. This is seen below in Table 9. Given the expansion of the UNSC to twenty-four members, “one must assume that the number of affirmative votes required for a Council decision would also have to be increased, but the panel's report is silent on this point.” Therefore, we determined the number of affirmative votes needed under these models based on the proportion needed under the current UNSC model. We can conclude that it is “reasonable to require fifteen affirmative votes for a Council decision, that is, 62.5 percent of its membership,” given that the UN Charter requires nine out of fifteen votes in favor of a resolution for it to pass, or 60 percent of overall votes.

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58 https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1602295.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Aeae3d60816beb4c0e2ad485c0d2fe85ea&ab_segments=&origin=&acceptTC=1
59 https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1602295.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Aeae3d60816beb4c0e2ad485c0d2fe85ea&ab_segments=&origin=&acceptTC=1
Annan’s Model A calls for creating six new permanent members and three new non-permanent members for a total of twenty-four seats. In his proposal, Annan notes that “no veto [is] being created,” which means that the new permanent members would simply serve for an unlimited time while only wielding the power of non-permanent members as a result of their inability to block resolutions. Quantitatively, this would look the same as Annan’s Model B, which preserves the current P5 countries and expands the council to twenty-four members by adding non-permanent members. For the purpose of this paper, we will assess Annan’s Model A by assuming that it would, in fact, grant veto power to all permanent members; this allows us to examine a more equitable regional distribution of veto privileges using power indices. We will refer to this interpretation of the proposal as the “Revised Model A.”

Below is the weighted voting system for the Revised Model A, assuming that all new permanent members have veto rights:

\[
V(114; 10, 10, 10, 10, 10, 10, 10, 10, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1) = 123
\]

If all eleven permanent members vote in favor of a resolution, it only gives \(11(10) = 110\) votes. To clear the quota of 114, four additional votes are needed from non-permanent members. This means that at least 15 countries need to vote in favor of a resolution for it to pass, which is consistent with the threshold determined earlier.

If any of the permanent members does not vote in favor of a resolution, then the most votes that can be gathered are \(10(10) + 13(1) = 113\) votes, which fall short of the quota of 114 votes.

---

needed for a resolution to pass. This illustrates that permanent members have veto power and every permanent member must support a resolution for it to pass.

Table 8: Banzhaf and Shapley-Shubik Power Indices for Revised Model A Proposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quota: 114</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The power indices for the Model A Reform proposals show that permanent members have about 35 times the power as non-permanent members according to the Banzhaf power index, and nearly 1000 times as much power according to the Shapley-Shubik power index. These results show that giving more countries veto power does not necessarily make the council more equitable when it comes to the balance of power between permanent and non-permanent members. In fact, the Revised Model A makes permanent members even more powerful than they are on the real UNSC when comparing their Banzhaf power.

Table 9: Membership and Regional Blocs Under Revised Model A Reform Proposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional Bloc</th>
<th>Permanent</th>
<th>Non-Permanent</th>
<th>Total Members</th>
<th>Regional Weight in Voting System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa Group</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We can rewrite the Revised Model A weighted voting system as follows to account for the regional blocs’ weight:

\[ V(114; 24, 33, 13, 42, 11) = 123 \]

Table 10: Power Indices for Regional Blocs Under Revised Model A Reform Proposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Multiplicity</th>
<th>BPI</th>
<th>SSPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa Group</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.000%</td>
<td>20.000%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.000%</td>
<td>20.000%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.000%</td>
<td>20.000%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western European and Others</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.000%</td>
<td>20.000%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern European Group</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.000%</td>
<td>20.000%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 shows the true impact of giving at least one permanent member seat with veto power to each region. While the Africa Group and Latin America and the Caribbean have no
Banzhaf or Shapley-Shubik power on the real UNSC, the regions have equal power under the Revised Model A reform proposal, as seen above. Should all members of regional blocs vote in the same manner, each of the five regions would be equally critical and pivotal to voting outcomes because they all have members with veto power.

Annan’s Model B calls for the creation of eight new seats in a new class of “semi-permanent” members, who would serve for four years subject to renewal, plus one new non-permanent seat. Model B also creates a total of 24 members on the UNSC. Despite the distinction between semi and non-permanent members in this proposal, the power of any members without veto power is the same in the UNSC’s weighted voting system and they all have a weight of 1.

Below is the weighted voting system for Model B:

\[
V(60; 10, 10, 10, 10, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1) = 69
\]

If all five permanent members vote in favor of a resolution, it only gives \(5(10) = 50\) votes. To clear the quota of 60, ten additional votes are needed from non-permanent members. This means that at least 15 countries need to vote in favor of a resolution for it to pass, as we determined is necessary under this reform proposal.

Opposition from a single permanent member means the most votes that can be gathered are \(4(10) + 19(1) = 59\) votes, which do not reach the quota of 60 needed for a resolution to pass. This reflects the fact that permanent members have veto power.
Table 11: Banzhaf and Shapley-Shubik Power Indices for “Model B” Reform Proposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Multiplicity</th>
<th>BPI</th>
<th>SSPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.732%</td>
<td>19.058%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.176%</td>
<td>0.248%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we can see in Table 11, permanent members are approximately 5 times as powerful as non-permanent members according to the Banzhaf index and about 77 times as powerful according to the Shapley-Shubik power index. The indices show us that Model B would lessen the power gap between permanent and rotating members in comparison to the current UNSC. Notably, this reform proposal results in the smallest power difference we have seen thus far according to the Banzhaf power index.

Table 12: Membership and Regional Blocs Under “Model B” Reform Proposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional Bloc</th>
<th>Permanent</th>
<th>Non-and/or Semi-Permanent</th>
<th>Total Members</th>
<th>Regional Weight in Voting System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa Group</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Europe and Others</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Below is the weighted voting system Annan’s Model B, rewritten to account for the weight of each region:

\[ V(60; 6, 15, 3, 34, 11) = 69 \]

Table 13: Power Indices for Regional Blocs Under “Model A” Reform Proposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Multiplicity</th>
<th>BPI</th>
<th>SSPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa Group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.000%</td>
<td>0.000%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.333%</td>
<td>33.333%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.000%</td>
<td>0.000%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Europe and Others</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.333%</td>
<td>33.333%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.333%</td>
<td>33.333%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13 shows that, despite the increased power of non-permanent members relative to permanent ones under Model B, the distribution of power between regional blocs is identical to that of the existing UNSC. Given that neither Africa nor Latin America and the Caribbean have any permanent members with veto power, their blocs have no power at all according to both power indices. Once again, we see the even divide of power between all three regions with permanent seats on the council.
Analysis of UNSC Reform Proposals

By quantifying the power of council members and regional blocs on the traditional UNSC and under various reform models, we can assess whether and to what extent reform proposals would alter power dynamics and distribution.

Table 14: Comparison of the Banzhaf and Shapley-Shubik Power Indices for Permanent and Non-Permanent Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UNSC</th>
<th>Weak Veto</th>
<th>Revised Model A</th>
<th>Model B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power Index</strong></td>
<td><strong>BPI</strong></td>
<td><strong>SSPI</strong></td>
<td><strong>BPI</strong></td>
<td><strong>SSPI</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Members</td>
<td>16.693%</td>
<td>19.627%</td>
<td>15.470%</td>
<td>13.034%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.798%</td>
<td>9.090%</td>
<td>11.732%</td>
<td>19.058%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Permanent Members</td>
<td>1.654%</td>
<td>0.186%</td>
<td>2.265%</td>
<td>3.483%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.248%</td>
<td>0.001%</td>
<td>2.176%</td>
<td>0.248%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15: Comparison of Permanent to Non-Permanent Member Power Ratios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UNSC</th>
<th>Weak Veto</th>
<th>Revised Model A</th>
<th>Model B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banzhaf Power Index</td>
<td>10x</td>
<td>7x</td>
<td>35x</td>
<td>5x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shapley-Shubik Power Index</td>
<td>1000x</td>
<td>4x</td>
<td>1000x</td>
<td>77x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 16: Comparison of the Banzhaf and Shapley-Shubik Power Indices for UNSC Regional Blocs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>UNSC</th>
<th>Weak Veto</th>
<th>Revised Model A</th>
<th>Model B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BPI</td>
<td>BP1</td>
<td>SSPI</td>
<td>BP1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa Group</td>
<td>0.000%</td>
<td>6.667%</td>
<td>5.000%</td>
<td>20.000%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific</td>
<td>33.333%</td>
<td>33.333%</td>
<td>33.333%</td>
<td>33.333%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>0.000%</td>
<td>6.667%</td>
<td>5.000%</td>
<td>20.000%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Europe and Others</td>
<td>33.333%</td>
<td>33.333%</td>
<td>33.333%</td>
<td>33.333%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>33.333%</td>
<td>20.000%</td>
<td>13.333%</td>
<td>20.000%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Tables 14 and 15, the different reform proposals analyzed in this paper each have a significant impact on the balance of power between permanent and non-permanent council members. When looking at the Banzhaf power index results, we can conclude that Annan’s Model B is the most effective at narrowing the gap between the council members’ power and influence. Under this model, P5 countries are only 5 times as powerful as rotating countries. The “Weak Veto” Reform proposal is also effective at increasing the power of non-permanent members relative to the P5.
However, the Revised Model A plan – the only one to expand the number of permanent members on the council – leads to a massive increase in the power of permanent members. This raises the question of whether expanding veto power would create more or less equity on the UNSC; the answer depends on whether the priority is increasing the power of regions that currently lack influence, or achieving greater influence for non-permanent members in general. Table 16 shows that the Revised Model A proposal would give all five regional blocs equal influence over UNSC decisions, a notable shift given that Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean both lack any collective power on the council when countries vote along regional lines.

The Shapley-Shubik power index points to the effectiveness of the “Weak Veto” reform proposal. While permanent members are currently 1000 times as powerful as non-permanent members on the council, implementing this proposal would make them only 4 times as powerful. It would give rotating members a larger say in the UNSC’s decision-making process and lead to a more balanced power dynamic. The “Weak Veto” proposal is the only one to give the African and Latin American regions power over voting outcomes according to both indices without giving them veto rights.

In conclusion, a comparative analysis of these reform proposals shows that each has strengths and weaknesses when it comes to addressing the underlying inequities of the UNSC.
Achieving Reform: Key Challenges and Obstacles

Although the topic of UNSC reform has been on the table for decades, from Annan’s Model A and B proposals in 2004 to the UN General Assembly’s 77th session in November 2022 on reshaping the Council, several obstacles have prevented meaningful change.\(^\text{61}\)

First and foremost, any changes to the existing UNSC system require an amendment of the UN Charter. This entails support from two-thirds of the United Nations’ entire membership and approval of all five permanent members.\(^\text{62}\) The reason reform is necessary – the veto – is the very reason it is highly unlikely that significant reform will ever be achieved, as permanent members are hesitant to diminish their own power.

Enlarging the UNSC has its own challenges. Elevating countries with weaker records on human rights or democracy “risks exacerbating issues already seen with China and Russia” and may continue to erode the council’s legitimacy.\(^\text{63}\) Furthermore, identifying which countries to promote to permanent membership requires careful consideration of intraregional dynamics. Certain countries may be dissatisfied if their regional rival becomes a permanent member, which could increase tensions and threaten stability in various parts of the world. If the selection of new permanent members is contingent upon certain transparent criteria such as adherence to human rights and international law standards, it would only call into question the P5 status of existing member nations who cannot and will not meet those standards themselves.

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Non-Quantifiable Power and UNSC Reform

Despite the factors that have prevented meaningful UNSC reform, there are several ways to improve its effectiveness without any substantive changes to its structure.

Our focus thus far has been on quantifiable measures of power, such as the difference between the weight of a permanent and non-permanent member, or the economic power that one nation has relative to another. However, as mentioned earlier, there are non-quantifiable dimensions to power that can influence the proceedings of world politics. Leveraging this soft power, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution by consensus in April 2022 aimed at compelling P5 countries to publicly justify their use of the veto. Resolution 76/262 triggers a General Assembly meeting within ten days of a veto so that member nations can “scrutinize and comment on” it; the permanent member who cast it will be invited to “account for the circumstances behind the use of the veto” before all UN members. This resolution also invites the UNSC to submit a special report on the veto in question before the meeting, explaining its context and purpose.\(^6^4\) Although General Assembly resolutions are nonbinding and P5 countries are not required to participate in these meetings, it remains to be seen how this measure will impact the way permanent members approach and justify their vetoes in ways that cannot easily be quantified.

France has also been leading the charge to create a code of conduct for permanent members on the council, requiring them to “voluntarily regulate their right to exercise their veto” when it comes to mass atrocities and crimes. At the request of 50 or more member states, the UN Secretary General would be called upon to assess the situation in question and officially

determine whether it qualifies as a mass atrocity; should this be the case, the code of conduct would apply to all UNSC deliberations on the subject.\textsuperscript{65} This change would not entail any amendments to the UN charter, but rather a mutual commitment from the permanent members who would then hold one another accountable. The High-Level Panel established by Annan echoes this sentiment, asking that “permanent members, in their individual capacities, pledge themselves to refrain from the use of the veto in cases of genocide and large-scale human rights abuses.”\textsuperscript{66}

On another note, the reform proposals we have examined also fail to address one of the main issues leading to the UNSC’s ineffectiveness: countries’ ability to veto resolutions relative to conflicts they are actively perpetuating. Article 27(3) of the UN Charter states that “a party to a dispute shall abstain from voting” on resolutions relative to the “pacific settlement of disputes.”\textsuperscript{67} However, according to Security Council Report, the UNSC’s adherence to this rule has been “inconsistent since 1946, and basically inexistent since 17 April 2000… Permanent members have never shown an interest in raising the matter, and non-permanent members have only done so sporadically.”\textsuperscript{68} Enforcing the obligatory abstention rule would greatly increase the capacity of the UNSC to act in times of crisis without being hindered by the national interests of a P5 member; for example, this rule would prevent Russia from vetoing resolutions related to its ongoing war in Ukraine.\textsuperscript{69}

Conclusion

The UNSC was established to serve as a guarantor of international peace and security, yet it has often failed to live up to its mandate due to inequities and inefficiencies embedded in its structure. As a result of the permanent members’ veto power, the council is often gridlocked and unable to act when it is needed the most. The lack of power for non-permanent members and the African and Latin American regions in particular have also decreased the council’s legitimacy on the international stage due to a shift in global power dynamics.

Using the Banzhaf and Shapley-Shubik power indices, this paper quantified the power of individual members and regional blocs under the current UNSC model which illuminated the extent of the power imbalance between permanent and rotating members, and between regions of the world. By examining the “Weak Veto” reform proposal along with the two reform models endorsed by Kofi Annan, we were able to assess how changes to the council’s structure would influence its power equilibrium. This analysis suggests that the “Weak Veto” reform proposal is the most effective in giving non-permanent members increased influence over UNSC decision-making, while the “Revised Model A” proposal is the best-suited to achieving equity amongst the regional blocs.

Although there are obstacles to passing UNSC reform, there is increasing momentum to implement structural changes. In his remarks before the 77th Session of the UN General Assembly in November 2022, President Joe Biden declared US support for “increasing the number of both permanent and non-permanent representatives of the Council… to ensure the council remains credible and effective.”

70 Joseph R. Biden, “Remarks by President Biden before the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly,” The White House, September 21, 2022,
the veto regarding mass atrocities. Although Russia opposes such a restriction on its veto power, it has expressed willingness to support expansion of the UNSC, a measure which it considers “long overdue.” China has positioned itself as a champion for increasing the council’s equity, advocating for “democratization” and greater representation for African nations. This gradual shift in the P5’s rhetoric on reform is matched by the General Assembly’s resolution on justifying the veto, and other conversations about informal adjustments to the council’s operations.

As emphasized by the representative of Mexico to the UN, “veto use reveals the weak position of those who failed to persuade others through reason. Those wielding such power do not offer solutions, but simply obstruct action.” Shifting global norms and pressing global challenges have illuminated the need to pursue meaningful reforms that challenge the institution of the veto, amplify the ability of developing countries to influence decision-making, and improve the UNSC’s ability to respond to crises while promoting international peace and security.

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