

Reforming the United Nations Security Council

Proposals, strategies and preferences

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The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is the only global institution with the right to legally adopt binding resolutions for the maintenance of international peace and security, and to authorize the use of force to that end. Since the creation of the United Nations (UN) in 1945, there have been debates about who should be represented in this institution. Adapting the institutional structure and decision-making procedures of the UNSC appears to be one of the most difficult challenges of the last decades. Several attempts have been unsuccessful, in spite of a range of major and well-prepared proposals. A large majority of UN members prefers reform, but deciding on an option to carry this out is intricate, mainly due to concerns about regional equality, efficiency and representation by individual member-states.

This chapter aims to explain the difficulties of UNSC reform, basing the analysis on path dependency approaches and insights from veto player analysis. This empirically oriented analysis shows two aspects: 1) possible compositions of the UNSC if current power indicators guided representation in this institution, and 2) preferences of UN member-states, as expressed by their governments, on UNSC reform. The analysis shows reasons for 'institutional stickiness' and highlights possible avenues for change. We first review selected work on institutional change and UNSC reform and provide an introduction to our theoretical framework. We then apply this to the UNSC and assess the need for reform on the basis of power change indicators between 1945 and the present. Finally, we analyse preferences of pivotal actors and assess whether potentially, a winning coalition supporting one of the reform proposals exists.

The challenge of Security Council reform

United Nations reform constitutes a complex challenge and has sparked intensive academic debate. Beigbender (2011) shows how UN member-states perceived UN effectiveness over time and provides an overview of UN reform proposals in recent decades. While these proposals have prompted deliberation and some reform decisions, a lack of consensus has inhibited substantial, generally acceptable change on issues such as adapting the UNSC institutional structure. International law scholars have discussed the legal basis of UNSC authority and reform (Fassbender 2003; Blum 2005). Other authors focus on the UNSC reform process from a historical perspective (Morris 2000; Franda 2006; Volger 2008; Kugel 2009),

highlighting important developments such as the 2005 World Summit (e.g. Zifcak 2009: 14–37). An alternative approach focuses on actor perspectives and preferences, especially for those interested in gaining permanent representation (such as Japan, see Akiyama 2009), members of the permanent five (P-5) (Bourantonis 1998; on the Chinese perspective see Malik 2005), or the Non-Aligned Movement and the South (Bourantonis 1998; Zifcak 2009: 163–87).

United Nations Security Council reform has especially stimulated work from a political science perspective, such as on the legitimacy and legitimation of the UNSC in view of possible changes in its composition (Hurd 2002, 2008). Similarly, Voeten (2008) focuses on the role of the UNSC and implications of current arguments for its institutional design. Alexopoulos and Bourantonis (2008) apply veto player analysis to assess possible effects of changed UNSC compositions, suggesting that increased representation does not necessarily imply decreased efficiency. More empirically informed work on UNSC reform focusing on feasibility encompasses work such as Weiss (2005) and Weiss and Young (2005), who based their analysis on expert surveys of diplomats involved in the reform process.

Explaining institutional inertia: path dependency and veto players

The concept of path dependency is often attributed to the economists Arthur (1994) and David (1985), who challenged the proposition of neoclassical market efficiency (Beyer 2006: 14–15), and to North (1990), who essentially introduced a path dependency argument into the social sciences. Early discussions on path dependency mostly centred on the argument that chosen equilibria do not necessarily constitute the most efficient solutions to a given problem (North 1990). However, for political actors, efficiency may be of secondary importance, due to the impact of power, norms, values, traditions and bounded rationality (Beyer 2006: 21). Pierson (2000a: 252–3; 2004: 54–78) further adapted the path dependency approach to a social science framework by emphasizing the importance of ‘sequencing’: events at the beginning of the sequence of institutional development are more important than developments later in the chain. Different sequences produce different outcomes and the history of events crucially matters.

Compared to economics, on the ‘market of political institutions’, corrective mechanisms such as price are less effective (Pierson 2000b: 489–90). Even when actors identify an inefficient political institution, adapting it requires overcoming several obstacles. Two such obstacles are actors’ short time horizons and the status quo bias of institutions. Because of re-election constraints, political actors may have short time horizons and are more interested in short-term than long-term benefits. Actors thus stay on the same path, because changing it is expensive in the short run and may only create pay-offs in the long run.

In addition, political institutions are generally hard to adapt or even resist change. Two possible factors determine this status quo bias (Pierson 2000a: 261–2). First, to bind successors, designers aim to establish stable institutions. In the political world, actors are uncertain about future developments and must reasonably assume that political opponents may gain control over governmental responsibility in the future. As a safeguard, actors equip institutional arrangements with high thresholds for change to prevent the institution from being used against the preferences of its creators. In barring political opponents from the power to change the institution, however, they also forgo this option for themselves (Moe 1990: 125). Second, political actors are often required to bind themselves. A key finding of the literature on credible commitments is that actors have an interest in removing given options from their

menu (Pierson 2000b). Once excluded from political choice, they are unlikely to be part of the menu of options in the future.

Designers purposely agree on these high thresholds for change to create stable institutions. Many constitutions forgo certain adaptations completely as they grant veto rights to actors in need of special protection or privileges. This 'institutional stickiness' has profound implications for institutional change. 'Confronting the twin problems of time inconsistency and political uncertainty, designers may reasonably decide to make political institutions change-resistant' (Pierson 2000b: 491). If there is a need for institutional change, the threshold might be too high to implement it. Conversely, an institution may be less functional than intended due to underlying path dependency (Mahoney 2000: 519).

In terms of a concrete 'stability mechanism' (Beyer 2006), however, Pierson does not specifically establish a link between status quo biases and the prospect for institutional change, besides advising to focus on the decision-making threshold. Accordingly, insights from veto player analysis offer a way to extend Pierson's concept. According to Tsebelis (2002: 2), decision-making procedures empower certain actors to become 'veto players', namely those required to alter the status quo. Without their consent, institutional change is not possible. The constitutional provisions determining an institution's structure define the configuration of veto players. The prospect of successfully changing the status quo depends on the number of veto players and their preferences (i.e. their position towards the new policy). Thus, when analyzing the stability of institutional arrangements, the first step should focus on the decision-making procedure, and the second on actors empowered as veto players by the decision rule.

United Nations Security Council reform requires a two-thirds majority of UN states, plus consent of the P-5. A large majority of UN members rejects the current UNSC set-up, but a group of states does not necessarily benefit from reform and holds a privileged position in the decision process on such reform. In principle, every additional seat in a reformed UNSC implies a loss of power for the P-5: more non-permanent members increases the number of affirmative votes needed to adopt a resolution and new permanent members would weaken the power position of the P-5. A similar mechanism exists for other possible veto players: nearly all regional UN groupings (almost) constitute a blocking minority. A veto player will not support solutions that are suboptimal to the status quo.

Security Council reform: power, preferences and obstacles

The Allies and victors of the Second World War created and shaped the UN. The seat allocation in the UNSC reflected the global power distribution of 1945 (Morris 2000: 266–8). The applied criteria of population and territory, economic and military power, and intellectual resources, decreased the number of potential candidates for permanent membership to just a few Great Powers, which are the current P-5 (Fassbender 1998: 164; Klabbers 2010: 80–81). Provisions of the UN Charter detail the UNSC seat distribution, constituting the status quo after the 1966 enlargement (e.g. Weiss and Young 2005: 140). There are 15 members, of which five are permanent: the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), France, China and the Russian Federation (as the successor of the Soviet Union). The UN General Assembly (UNGA) elects the non-permanent UNSC members for two-year terms; immediate re-election is prohibited (UN Charter, Article 23). By adopting Resolution 1991A of 17 December 1963, the UNGA introduced an official regional distribution for non-permanent UNSC positions: three seats for Africa, two for Latin America, two for Asia, two for Western Europe and one for Eastern Europe. The general threshold for UNSC decisions is nine affirmative votes (UN Charter, Article 27).

Compared to the 1945 situation, the prevailing argument holds that the UNSC set-up no longer reflects a global power distribution (Zifcak 2009: 14). However, it is probably more difficult today to provide reasons for countries to become new permanent or non-permanent UNSC members. As we intend to show, if the power distribution has profoundly changed, we have to ask on what objective basis countries should be allocated seats in a potentially reformed UNSC. To assess this, we use **Dahl's concept of power (cited in O'Neill 1997: 60): '[P]ower is the probability that one party can change another's behavior; that is, the probability it can get the other to do what it might not have done otherwise.'** We use three indicators to **operationalize this concept of power: population size, economic power expressed by gross domestic product (GDP), and the number of UN Conventions to which member-states are party as a measure reflecting adherence to international rules.** All three indicators we employ arguably constitute sources of power on a global scale and are quantifiable in fairly straightforward ways.

To obtain insights into changed power distributions over time, we measure the indicators as follows. All three indicators are transformed into an ordinal ranking (for all UN states). To determine an aggregate value for a country's power position, we take the average position of the three rankings. However, as we are interested in a more qualitative assessment of the world's power distribution than an exact quantitative measurement, we regard the loss of information due to ordinal ranking as acceptable for the needs of this analysis. Moreover, we assume that all three indicators carry similar importance, and we therefore weigh them equally. Through this methodology, as the results in Annex 28.1 show, we can observe that only three of the P-5 are still among the five most powerful countries of the world. If the UNSC were created today, other countries, such as Germany, Italy or India would possibly be considered as permanent members.

If the UN Security Council were created today

On the basis of Annex 28.1, we create a model of the UNSC that would reflect the new power distributions. For this purpose, the first 25 countries in Annex 28.1 are included, as this approximately corresponds to the size of the UNSC that most of the recent reform proposals suggest. If the UNSC were created today, in terms of regional affiliations, it would possibly look as shown in Table 28.1.

In this assessment, Africa would only be allocated one seat (for Nigeria) and thus be represented less than it is currently. However, if other indicators were chosen for the ranking, like 'territory', 'cultural and intellectual resources' or 'raw materials', this pattern might obviously change. Populous states (e.g. China, India) and economically significant states (e.g. Australia, Japan and Korea) in Asia, as well as the Americas and Western Europe, would gain seats. Eastern Europe would slightly increase its representation as well. Moreover, the Middle East (currently only represented with one seat alternating between the Asian and the African group based on informal practice) would obtain two seats. If we consider only the first 15 countries in Annex 28.1 (indicated in bold in Table 28.1), Africa would receive no seat at all, and the general pattern of representation would shift towards Western Europe. Interestingly, all candidates mentioned in the major proposals for UNSC reform are indeed included in this list.

Based on our three indicators, after observing that the power distribution in the world has changed rather profoundly, we now assess whether our argument of path dependence may support this finding. First, we can observe that there is a difference between the UNSC status quo and the seat distribution of a hypothetical UNSC: from the five most powerful countries in 1945, only three are still in this position now. Europe and Asia have significantly gained

Table 28.1 A hypothetical set-up for the United Nations Security Council

	Africa	Asia incl. Oceania	America	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	Middle East
UNSC seats according to hypothetical model	1	6	5	8	3	2
UN member-states	Nigeria	China India Japan Australia Philippines Korea (Rep.)	Mexico Brazil USA Canada Argentina	Germany France Italy UK Spain Netherlands Belgium Sweden	Russian Federation Poland Romania	Turkey Egypt
UNSC seats according to the status quo	3	3	3	4	2	–

Note: For results based on earlier indicators, see Dörfler (2009). Countries indicated in **bold** are among the first 15 countries in a 'global power ranking' based on three indicators (given in Annex 28.1).

importance according to our three indicators. America has also become more powerful in general terms, whereas Africa seems to have lost power. All three of the former 'enemy states' (Germany, Italy and Japan) are now, in fact, among the 15 most powerful countries in the world, but are not permanently represented in the UNSC. Therefore, the institution has not adapted to the shift in the global power distribution. The persistence of the 1945/1966 UNSC set-up seems to show the importance of status quo bias.

Closing the power gap?

There is a significant gap between the UN Charter's institutional arrangement designed to reflect the power distribution of 1945 and the current situation. Both the present regional seat distribution and the veto privilege would probably have no chance for success if the institution were established now. Can the 'power gap' be closed with specific proposals for reform? Since the creation of the UN there have been a number of reform efforts, among them proposals on how to adapt the composition of the UNSC (Hosli et al. 2011). Among the most prominent are former president of the UNSC, Ismail Razali's proposal (A/S1/47/Annex 11, 20 March 1997), the two proposals by the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (A/59/565, 2 December 2004: 66–9), and elaborating on these the proposals by the Group of Four (G4) (A/59/L.64, 6 July 2005), Uniting for Consensus (UfC) (A/59/L.68, 21 July 2005) and the African Union (AU) (A/59/L.67, 14 July 2005).

The major reform proposals, in terms of the total number of seats and type of UNSC membership (permanent or non-permanent), are shown in Table 28.2. First, concerning the size of a potentially reformed UNSC, enlargement proposals range from 24 to 26 states. A decisive (and divisive) issue is the category of these new seats. Some reform proposals suggest new permanent seats (up to six in practice), whereas others seek to increase the number of non-permanent seats exclusively. The AU proposal suggests extending veto rights to new permanent members, whereas other proposals do not touch upon this politically delicate theme. In addition

Table 28.2 Overview of reform proposals (by region)

	<i>Africa</i>	<i>Asia</i>	<i>America</i>	<i>Western Europe</i>	<i>Eastern Europe</i>	<i>Total</i>
Status quo	0 / 3	1 / 2	1 / 2	2 / 2	1 / 1	15
Hypothetical Set-up (15)	0	4	3	6	2	15
Hypothetical Set-up (25)	1	8	5	8	3	25
Razali Plan	1 / 4	3 / 3	2 / 3	3 / 2	1 / 2	24
High-level Panel						
Model A	2 / 4	3 / 3	2 / 4	4 / 2		24
Group of Four	2 / 4	3 / 3	2 / 3	3 / 2	1 / 2	25
High-level Panel						
Model B	0 / 4 / 2	1 / 3 / 2	1 / 3 / 2	3 / 1 / 2		24
Uniting for Consensus	0 / 6	1 / 5	1 / 4	2 / 3	1 / 2	25
African Union	2 / 5	3 / 3	2 / 3	3 / 2	1 / 2	26

Source: Adapted from Dörfler (2009). Note: The first figure in each cell represents permanent seats; the second shows non-permanent (in Model B, the four-year non-permanent seats), and the third figure the two-year non-permanent seats. The AU proposal includes the veto for new permanent members. Model B and the UFC proposals abolish the prohibition of immediate re-election.

to this, the UFC as well as the Model B reform proposal suggest abolishing the prohibition of immediate re-election for non-permanent members. With this possibility for re-election, a country could belong to the UNSC for a longer time span, creating quasi-permanent seats.

The introduction of ‘rotating’ or ‘regional’ seats such as one for the EU is not part of any of the major reform proposals. Likewise, no proposal contains the limitation or abolition of the veto privilege of the P-5, possibly due to pragmatic reasoning expecting P-5 resistance. Finally, the future majority threshold is to be determined. The proposals reflected in Table 28.2 aim for a qualified majority of about 60 per cent of UNSC membership, i.e. a threshold comparable to the current arrangement (on effects of the threshold, see O’Neill 1997; Hosli et al. 2011).

Do the reform proposals ‘fill the gap’ due to the shifting global power distribution? Or do they lie somewhere between the status quo and today’s global power balance? If the reform proposals reflect the current global power distribution, the institution can be expected to adapt to changes in its environment. If they are found to be between the status quo and the current power distribution, however (and hence some ‘gap’ still exists), the institutional development appears to be path-dependent.

The discrepancy between the reform proposals and the current power distribution, as assessed on the basis of our three indicators, is shown in Table 28.2. Africa, in all reform proposals, is rather over-represented compared to the actual global power distribution. This may partially be due to the indicators we use, which may not focus as much on other factors defining the relative strength of some African countries. In comparison, this assessment shows that both Asia and Europe are under-represented. America, however, would maintain about the same number of seats. As noted, none of the reform proposals touches upon the veto privilege or the position of the P-5. As shown earlier, two of the P-5 would not receive a veto right if the institution were created today. Altogether, the gap between the status quo and today’s power distribution does not appear to be closed; at least not on the basis of the indicators used in our analysis.

Why is UNSC reform so difficult to achieve? An important issue seems to be the level of the decision-making threshold for institutional change. The threshold defines which actors are necessary to change the institution and conversely, who can block the decision to reform. Finally, we examine if a winning coalition could exist favouring a specific path for reform, given the current distribution of preferences of UN states. In order to change the size, composition, veto privileges and majority threshold applicable to the UNSC, the UN Charter text of Articles 23 and 27 has to be amended. To achieve this, the UN Charter could be altered in two ways. First, through the main provisions of Article 108, which require a two-thirds majority in the General Assembly and ratification (Putnam 1988) by two-thirds of the UNGA, including the P-5. To date, however, the UN Charter has been amended only three times according to Article 108 (Simma 2002). The second possibility is prescribed in Article 109 of the UN Charter, stipulating that in addition to nine of the 15 UNSC members, two-thirds of the UNGA membership can convene a conference of UN member-states. All amendments adopted at such a conference can enter into force when two-thirds of the UNGA, as well as the P-5, have ratified the amendment. However, so far, Article 109 of the UN Charter has never been applied in practice (*ibid.*).

In short, a Charter amendment requires a two-thirds majority in the UNGA, as well as the approval of the P-5, which hold a veto on any amendment. As there is a general tendency in the UN to work within the framework of regional groupings, it is important to focus on these entities to assess the decisive actors needed for a reform proposal to succeed. With 193 states, the two-thirds majority threshold in the UNGA amounts to 129 votes; accordingly, 65 UN member-states can form a blocking minority.

The distribution of shares in total UNGA votes for the five official UN regional groups is important for assessing the likelihood that specific proposals can be adopted (assuming the regional groups vote fairly cohesively in the UNGA). The African group currently constitutes about 28.2 per cent of total UNGA membership. Similarly, the Asian group holds about 27.6 per cent. Accordingly, both of these regional groupings are almost able to form a blocking minority by themselves within the UNGA. The other three regional groupings – Latin America and the Caribbean (17.2 per cent), Western Europe and Others (15.1 per cent), and Eastern Europe (12.0 per cent) – have a combined share of about 44 per cent of UNGA membership. Likewise, a coalition of the ‘Latin American and Caribbean’ and the ‘Western Europe and Others’ group has a combined share of almost 33 per cent in the UNGA. Even in the case that all other regional groupings in the UNGA are united in support of a proposal, however, the Asian group, the Western European and Others Group, and the Eastern European Group each have at least one of the P-5 members with veto power in their group.¹

The analysis of potential obstacles to reform necessitates a focus on all potential veto players according to the provisions of the UN Charter. Clearly, the potential veto players are all of the P-5 and the large UN regional groups, but there are also informal groups spanning several regions. In practice, the sponsors of each of the reform proposals aim to gather a large number of supporting nations – partially across the boundaries of the existing regional groupings. For example, the supporters of the major reform proposals, the G4 and UFC respectively, encompass several countries from different continents. The contents of these proposals, and respective support in terms of shares in UN membership, are discussed in the following sections.

Preferences and prospects for reform

To systematically assess UN member-state preferences on UNSC reform, we first employ a data collection issued by the Center for UN Reform Education.² This document, from

8 December 2008, contains structured information on member-state preferences for UNSC reform, but data are missing for a large number of UNGA members. In order to get a more complete assessment of member-states' positions on UNSC reform, we studied a compilation of statements from member-state representatives in a UN context, as provided on the Reform the UN website (<http://www.reformtheun.org>). In addition, to obtain information on the preferences of particularly important states for the reform process on the three major dimensions of contestation concerning UNSC reform (e.g. the P-5), we have analysed the websites of their Permanent Missions to the UN. For countries for which data were still lacking, we substituted missing information with the preferences of closely affiliated groups. Accordingly, in the case of African countries for which we lacked information, for example, we substituted their preference profile with that of the official AU position (i.e. the AU proposal). The same procedure was used to substitute missing country preferences for the G4 and UFC supporters, as well as for smaller groups of states, such as those belonging to the Caribbean Community.

Generally, however, it was quite difficult to update and complete the information in the spreadsheet provided by the Center for UN Reform Education, partly due to the use of diplomatic language in official statements. Many UN members do not openly state which solution they actually prefer, partly due to negotiation dynamics, especially those attempts to prevent negotiations from turning away from their own preferred positions. In official statements, UN member-states often hide behind general claims, such as the need for a 'more equal geographical representation' or the demand for a 'consensus decision' instead of 'hasty majority decisions'. Finally, some UN states do not necessarily benefit from a reformed UNSC – e.g. because they are too small to be considered potentially legitimate members of the UNSC or do not participate in the discourse on UNSC reform at all – and it therefore remains unclear what coalition they would support if a vote on UNSC reform were to be taken.

Nonetheless, after a search for respective information (notably on the basis of official statements), a majority of positions was assembled for the three dimensions that we consider as major areas of contestation and on which major reform proposals vary (see also Dörfler 2009). These dimensions are: 1) the size of the enlarged UNSC, 2) the categories of (new) seats and 3) the veto issue. The actual data coverage for the different dimensions analysed here, with the second dimension split into two subcategories, is as follows: 55 per cent coverage in terms of UN member-state preferences for the future size of the UNSC, 79 per cent for the aspect of permanent seats and 77 per cent for non-permanent seats, and 56 per cent as regards UN member-state positions on veto power. In order to assess prospects for UNSC reform, it is important to evaluate this information in terms of the contents of member-state preferences. Subsequently, on the basis of our data set on UNSC reform, we will show the aggregate values in terms of membership support for specific UNSC reform proposals.

The size of a reformed UN Security Council

Regarding the size of the enlarged UNSC (see Figure 28.1), we can observe two major groups of countries supporting the option of either 25 or 26 seats. Interestingly, in between these two groups are other states that would accept either 25 or 26 seats. Clearly, a solution for a UNSC consisting of 25 or 26 members has strong global support. In fact, in our analysis, we find only three UN member-states that prefer the considerably smaller size of the current 15, or the option of 21 members. Similarly, we only have two countries in our data collection that publicly support the option of a UNSC consisting of more than 26 members. Hence, 26 is likely to constitute a *de facto* maximum for a reformed UNSC.

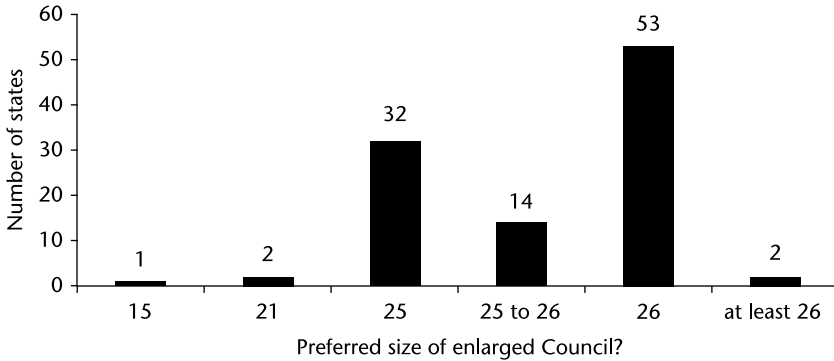


Figure 28.1 Preferred size of an enlarged UN Security Council

According to our data, in contrast to the majority of UN member-states, the P-5 tend to favour (if at all) an increase by only a few seats based on arguments related to UNSC efficiency. In general, from the perspective of the P-5, the UNSC works well and every reform would weaken their power position as enshrined in the UN Charter (Zifcak 2009: 25–6). Although the difference in terms of the number of seats compared to today's constellation might only be about five, such a change is quite important for the P-5; in the current system, they only need four more votes by non-permanent UNSC members to adopt a resolution. With a more significant UNSC enlargement to 25 members, an additional ten votes would be needed. Whether this is easy or more difficult to achieve, however, also depends on the preference constellation of (future) members of the UNSC (Alexopoulos and Bourantonis 2008).

New permanent and new non-permanent seats

As regards the categories of potential new UNSC seats, it is important to distinguish between support for new *permanent* and new *non-permanent* seats. Figure 28.2 shows the distribution of UN member-state preferences on this issue, in terms of cumulative figures.

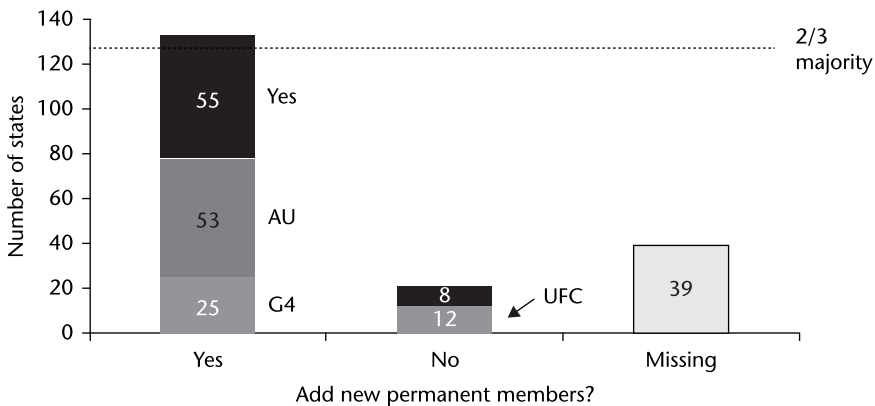


Figure 28.2 Introduction of new permanent seats (cumulative values)

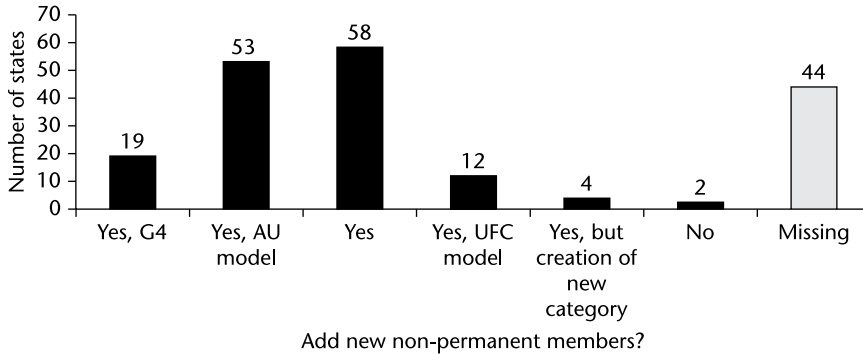


Figure 28.3 Introduction of new non-permanent seats

Our data show a collection of 133 states generally supporting the creation of new permanent seats, with the AU as the largest unified group demonstrating a clear preference on this issue. The second largest support group with a similar position to the AU is the G4. Together these groups combine a vote share of about 40 per cent of UNGA membership. Another, less unified group supporting the introduction of new permanent seats consists of states not affiliated with one of these two groups. If we provide a cumulative value for all states generally preferring the creation of new permanent seats in the UNSC (Figure 28.2), we see that a two-thirds majority is already in place. By comparison, the group of states rejecting the introduction of new permanent seats is quite small, encompassing only 20 states. Opposition to the introduction of new permanent seats stems largely from countries supporting the UFC proposal.

Concerning the introduction of new non-permanent seats, as Figure 28.3 demonstrates, there is clear support for UNSC enlargement. This result is unsurprising, as most states generally agree on the idea of a larger UNSC, and even states opposing new permanent seats tend to favour enlargement within the non-permanent category.

Nonetheless, we have to distinguish between states preferring a smaller increase in non-permanent seats (such as the proposals of the G4 or the AU) and those favouring a larger increase in the non-permanent membership category but no increase in permanent membership (this notably applies to the UFC group). On this dimension, we also find a small number of UN states favouring the creation of a new category of seats (either as ‘semi-permanent’ members for larger states, or another, special category for smaller UN members).

The veto privilege

Finally, in terms of the veto privilege, we find more variation in member-state preferences, as Figure 28.4 demonstrates. This is due to the many options for the role of a veto within a reformed UNSC, including limitation, abolition, or expansion of, veto privileges.

As Figure 28.4 shows, three groups can be discerned in terms of divisions on this issue. The supporters of the G4 propose no expansion of the veto privilege to new permanent members and do not challenge the privileged position of the P-5, probably to avoid P-5 opposition. In contrast, the African Union group aims to implement an extension of the veto right to new permanent members (which would, according to their own proposal, be countries

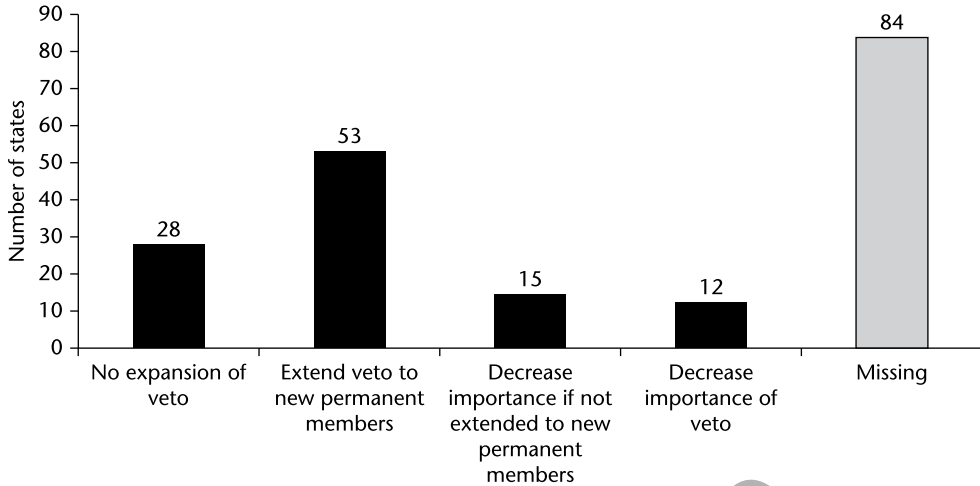


Figure 28.4 The veto issue

from the African continent). A third group, as Figure 28.4 shows, generally prefers to decrease the importance of the veto privilege, which, according to members of this group, constitutes an unjustified and anachronistic phenomenon. Members in this category propose to either limit the veto privilege to certain issues, such as Chapter VII resolutions, or abolish it entirely. Overall, rational motivations seem to drive UN member-states' positions, as many generally seek to marginalize the issue of the veto privilege, knowing that the P-5 would block suggestions to abolish the veto. Therefore, these states either scale down their position (as within the proposal of the G4), or argue, for example, that if the veto is not to be abolished or limited, it should at least not be extended to new permanent members. Overall, however, none of the groups is getting close to achieving a significant majority position on this dimension. Accordingly, this is the most divisive issue for UNSC reform.

Clearly, reform proposals for the UNSC face steep hurdles to acceptance. But on some dimensions of contestation, a necessary majority may already be in place. Notably, the murky issue of veto rights and their potential application in the future as well as the question of which countries should qualify to become new (permanent) UNSC members seem to divide UN membership. For various reasons, shown here and elsewhere, reform of the UNSC is very difficult to achieve, but by focusing attention on specific aspects of preference heterogeneity within the UNGA, a compromise solution could still be in reach.

Conclusion

This chapter aims to explain the difficulty of UNSC reform, by drawing on insights from path dependency approaches, complemented by veto player theory. The UNSC in its current composition is not based on power positions in the international system. However, institutional provisions for UN Charter reform specify a high hurdle for UN Charter amendments (O'Neill 1997; Sutterlin 1997: 163) and grant a veto player position to the P-5 and two of the largest UN regional groupings. Accordingly, the decision-making procedure for UN Charter amendment and the empowerment of veto players greatly influences prospects for UNSC reform, and poses a major obstacle to possible change.

In analyzing potential support for the size of an enlarged UNSC, we observe a large number of states preferring enlargement of the UNSC to 25 or 26 states. Concerning the seat categories, a majority of states supports the creation of new permanent seats, and a large majority an increase in non-permanent seats. Regarding the veto privilege, however, member-state preferences are more heterogeneous: some states favour an extension of the veto; some propose no change; and finally, some demand abolishing or at least limiting the veto privilege. Accordingly, this may be the most contentious and divisive issue that needs to be settled.

Altogether, UNSC reform still requires a draft text that would combine the preferences and positions mentioned here. The chair of the ‘intergovernmental negotiations’ on UNSC reform, Zahir Tanin, issued a basis for this on 10 May 2010. Since then, several text-based negotiations have taken place. The major challenge is to include the preferences of different majorities into one single draft text that meets the two-thirds majority requirement and has the support of the P-5, which excludes finding a compromise in a step-by-step fashion. It remains to be seen whether UN member-states will be able to consolidate their diverging preferences in favour of a compromise solution that would overcome the many obstacles for reform.

Recommended for further reading

Hurd (1997), O’Neill (1997) and Weiss and Young (2005).

Annex 28.1 The global distribution of power: ranking on the basis of three indicators

Rank	Member-state	Population	GDP	UN Conventions member-state is party to	Mean value of ranks	Years served on UNSC (in % of total eligibility)
1	Germany	15	4	14	11,00	25.0
2	France	21	5	10	12,00	PM
3	Russian Fed.	9	11	26	15,33	PM
4	Italy	23	8	16	15,67	20.7
5	UK	22	6	19	15,67	PM
6	China	1	2	49	17,33	PM
7	India	2	9	41	17,33	20.6
8	Spain	28	12	13	17,67	13.8
9	Mexico	11	14	32	19,00	10.3
10	Brazil	5	7	56	22,67	29.4
11	US	3	1	69	24,33	PM
12	Poland	34	20	20	24,67	13.2
13	Turkey	18	17	43	26,00	10.3
14	Japan	10	3	65	26,00	35.1
15	Netherlands	60	16	2	26,00	13.2
16	Canada	37	10	37	28,00	17.6
17	Australia	51	13	29	31,00	11.8
18	Nigeria	7	43	49	33,00	15.1
19	Argentina	33	27	42	34,00	23.5
20	Philippines	12	44	47	34,33	8.8
21	Belgium	75	21	8	34,67	14.7
22	Egypt	16	38	56	36,67	10.3