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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Regional Powers at the UN Security Council: More Mainstream than Upstream?

Malte Brosig and Markus Lecki

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

ABSTRACT

The literature on regional powers and the UN Security Council (UNSC) has focused mainly on Council reform. Little research has been conducted on exploring the influence of regional powers at the Council. Have regional powers been able to extend their influence in ‘upstream’ processes like resolution drafting and narrowing the gap to the P5? Or do they operate like any other elected member? By applying a comprehensive taxonomy to measure influence we compare regional powers with permanent and elected members. A mixed picture emerges. While regional powers are identifiable as a distinct group of actors, their impact on Council operations is limited. We find that membership has an equalising effect, locking countries into existing institutional practices. The consequence of this is that they cannot easily convert their position as regional powers into institutional influence.

KEYWORDS

UN Security Council; regional powers; P5; E10; influence

A rich literature exists exploring the role of regional powers in international relations, including within global governance institutions (Kahler 2013). Surprisingly the role regional powers assume within the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is mostly explored in the context of UNSC reform, especially the G4 (Brazil, Germany, India and Japan) initiative from 2004. Either research has focussed on individual regional powers and their quest for Council reform (Dabhade 2017) or it has focussed on why previous attempts to introduce reforms have failed (Binder and Heupel 2020; Hosli and Dörfler 2015). What is absent is a systematic analysis, encompassing a range of regional powers, which focuses on their activities whilst at the Council. This study aims at filling this gap by exploring the role and influence of ten regional powers. The article explores their influence along six measurable indicators mostly covering the last two decades, concentrating on election frequency, resolution authorship, voting patterns and their coherency, as well as contributions to UNSC debates and Arria Formula meetings. In order to assess the role regional powers play at the UNSC, we are comparing them to E10 (elected) and P5 (permanent) members.

Two streams of literature are relevant in this context, research on regional powers and scholarship on the UNSC and in particular its elected members. We are making a

contribution to both sets of research by clarifying the role regional powers play in the UNSC. The article proceeds as follows. The next section roots the article in the literature on regional powers and E10 members. The following section introduces our taxonomy for measuring regional power behaviour and explains each indicator. The main text applies and explores the six indicators across our ten countries and in comparison to the E10 and P5. The concluding section offers a summary analysis of our research and discusses our main findings. Overall, regional powers display rather conformist behaviour and do not act substantially differently from other elected members.

Regional powers and the E10

The vital role regional powers play in global politics is commonly accepted. A vast body of literature has categorised regional power influence and, later, explored its effects and limitations (Cooper and Flemes 2013; Destradi 2010; Nolte 2010; Prys 2010). Regional powers are commonly identified by way of classical power parameters such as size (population, economy, military capability), political ambition, peer recognition and external international expectations. It is assumed that a regional power can outperform its neighbours and occupies a leadership role (Schenoni 2017). There is, however, no fixed list of regional powers and their leadership role often remains inadequately defined and sometimes diffuse. The literature tends to explore the role great powers play within their particular region (Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll 2010). Less is known about their operations at a global level. Although some scholars have investigated the issue of rising powers in international institutions (Ferdinand 2014; Kruck and Zangl 2020; Lesage and van de Graaf 2015), they are mostly explored with regard to Council reform, as opposed to how these countries operate whilst maintaining a seat at the Council.

While no fixed list of regional powers exists, the exploration of regional power influence at the UNSC requires a specific selection of countries. We maintain that the following ten countries are regularly perceived as part of a group of regional powers and satisfy the above indicators mentioned above, such as relative size of population, economy, leadership ambition, military power and a degree of regional dominance. Accordingly, we concentrate on Brazil, Egypt, Germany, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, Japan, South Africa and Turkey. Except for Nigeria and Egypt, all of these countries are part of the G20. We include Nigeria because it is Africa's largest economy and most populous country. Likewise, Egypt is included because it is the most populous Arab country and one of the largest economies in the region. While countries like South Korea, Argentina, Italy, Iran or Saudi Arabia are certainly recognisable powers displaying considerable power credentials, they are not able to play a regionally dominant role. Either they are involved in regional competition with unclear results (that is, Iran, Saudi Arabia) or they are outperformed by regional neighbours as in the cases of Argentina, South Korea or Italy. We therefore have not included them. The group of permanent members are excluded because they occupy a privileged position, which is significantly different from the elected members.

In recent years, the literature on regional powers has consolidated. Some authors have even suggested that this avenue of research has been exhausted (Zarakol 2019; Garzon 2022). Depending on the perspective and possibly inflated expectations, a more reflective tone has emerged exploring why seemingly powerful actors do not always assume a

visible leadership role. Reluctant behaviour has been identified as one characteristic of regional powers (Destradi 2017). It results from the absence of clear domestic preference building, weak government structures (administrations) and competing international expectations (Destradi 2018). Similarly, Detlef Nolte and Luis Schenoni (2021) argue that regional leadership is often an auxiliary goal in the context of increasing polarity in the global system, as well as the absence of a state's capacity to mobilise resources. This explains why regional powers tend to perform below expectations. Empirically, a number of studies have explored the presumed gap between leadership aspirations and actual performance. Research has covered rising powers such as Brazil, India and South Africa, but also traditional powers such as Germany and Japan (Alden and Schoeman 2015; Bullmer and Paterson 2013; Destradi 2018; Koga 2018; Malamud 2017). The picture that emerges is unavoidably a diverse one as each country operates in a different regional context with different historical legacies and national path dependencies which shape the course of their foreign policies.

As will be explicated below, regional powers are frequently elected to the UNSC and thus make a contribution as part of the group of E10 members which are equally diverse as regional powers. Despite their regular membership, the literature on the UNSC has not explored this group systematically. Scholarly attention has traditionally concentrated on veto-holding members (Langmore and Thakur 2016). In fact, since 1945, the P5 remain the main decision-makers as they draft most resolutions and are able to veto unwelcome ones. Thus the P5 possess strategic advantages over elected members.

Recently, however, scholars have paid greater attention to the role of the E10 within the Council's decision-making machinery (Farrall *et al.* 2020; Freedman and Lemay-Hebert 2020; Schrijver and Blokker 2020; Vahid and Postolski 2022). The literature focusing on the E10 as a group highlights its collective importance. Not only do the P5 need E10 votes to pass resolutions, the E10 also represent the diversity of the UN better than the P5 and, therefore, provides formal legal authority and political legitimacy (Gifkins 2021). Although the recent literature takes a more positive position in assessing the role and relevance of E10 members, their limited influence and how it can be overcome remains a recurring theme (Martin 2020; Roele 2020; Thorhallsson 2012). In addition to scholarship which explores the E10 as a group, several publications, both academic and policy-oriented, have analysed the activities and achievements of individual countries, although often from a narrow national perspective (Graham 2022; Langmore and Farrall 2016; Stuenkel 2010; Uziel 2015).

Against this backdrop, our study contributes to research on regional powers in the context of the E10. The term E10 is a self-selected one which highlights the difference between the group of permanent but non-elected members and the elected but non-permanent members. The E10 changes its composition every year and consists of a diverse set of countries which are likely to have not served together at the Council before. This complicates strong and coherent group formation and makes identifying a distinctive group identity difficult. Instead, various sub-groups exist within the E10. The most common dividing lines might be cultural or political and based on regional affiliations. This also results from Article 23 para. one of the UN Charter that requires "equitable geographical distribution" as a condition for election to the Council (UN 1945). In practice, this has been the only qualifying condition for Council membership which has been systematically applied. The General Assembly (GA) usually elects candidates that have been

nominated by the five regional electoral groups, namely Africa, Asia-Pacific countries, Eastern Europe, South America and Caribbean countries, Western European and other countries. While countries are principally serving in their individual capacity, the election format forces applicants to intensively lobby their regional electoral group in order to achieve nomination and election. A nomination without clear regional backing is far less likely to succeed in attaining support from other members during the election process in the GA. Thus, a regional dimension is undeniable.

Assessing regional powers and their influence at the UNSC

Formally speaking, the category of a regional power does not exist at the UNSC. Each elected country has the same rights and obligations independent of its real-world power status. The one country-one vote principle is applied. Together with the absence of veto powers, the prohibition on serving consecutive terms constitutes a real limitation on power and influence.

However, within the system of the UNSC, there are various opportunities through which regional powers can increase their influence. First, we can assume that in most areas, a dual dependency exists between traditional powers seeking constructive cooperation for global projects and regional powers partnering with global powers in furthering their own interests. Despite increasing geopolitical tensions (Syria, Ukraine, US-China rivalry etc.), diplomats at the UNSC are still working together pragmatically on a wide variety of topics. While veto use has increased in recent times, it has not fully incapacitated the Council, as happened during the Cold War, since the number of adopted resolutions remained fairly stable at around 50 to 60 resolutions per annum. Given the term limitations imposed on elected members, their limited time on the Council ensures that they are naturally more short-term oriented (Chin 2015, 137). While regional powers are equal to ordinary E10 members in a formal sense, they are likely to differ in two categories.

First, their advanced material power often translates into a larger diplomatic apparatus which could potentially be translated into greater influence at the Council. Indeed, regional powers, on average, send larger delegations to New York than smaller countries (Prantl 2005, 569). Given that an average year at the Council consists of around 450 to 500 official meetings, staffing and capacity levels certainly play a role. Larger endowments of human resources can lead to more initiatives emanating from a country, resulting in a higher number of drafted resolutions, greater contributions to debates, as well as increased occupation of procedural management roles such as the chairing of committees.

Second, regional powers are better equipped to promote regional interests as they are chiefly involved in formulating regional preferences. They may work either as a regional ambassador promoting interests of importance to the region or they can be expected to leverage their Council membership in order to promote their leadership position. Status-seeking and self-interest are likely to be the main motivational drivers for regional powers (Dal 2018). However, despite existing as preeminent powers within their regions, they often also face stiff regional competition and, therefore, can often be found lacking in terms of regional support (Schirm 2010). Thus, they find it hard to outperform global powers.

In sum, what can be expected from regional powers as they serve as elected members? Rather than assuming that they will either seek to reform or align with veto powers, as discussed at length within the literature (Hurrell 2006; Lipton 2017; Nel 2010), we assume that regional powers at the UNSC are mostly defined by pragmatic diplomacy. The fact that the majority of regional powers frequently join the Council indicates a level of commitment to this institution despite the absence of reform. However, because the UNSC remains unreformed, elected members cannot ignore procedural limitations. Even if some regional powers were to outperform some P5 members in terms of classical power credentials, this does not ensure that they are able to easily convert GDP, population size or military capabilities into influence at the Council. Thus, we assume that regional powers occupy a position at the UNSC which falls short of rivalling the P5 directly but display more activism with reference to our indicators for influence (introduced in the section below) than the average E10 country.

Naturally, this group of countries is diverse and does not form a coherent voting or political bloc, with clearly formulated common policy interests, perhaps aside from wanting to reform the UNSC. These countries occupy different positions within their regions, as well as globally. Some constitute the largest source of power in their immediate regional community, while the leadership credentials of others in their immediate regional communities are frequently contested. Some are traditional powers and developed countries, like Germany and Japan, while others are considered middle or even low-income countries. With a population of around 60 million people, South Africa is the smallest regional power in terms of population size, while India's population is soon expected to become the largest in the world. Although one could argue that this diversity complicates, if not inhibits, coalition building through which countries could increase and leverage their influence, it nevertheless accounts for geographical equity, which the UN Charter demands and the P5 are criticised for not reflecting. In this context, how can the influence of regional powers be measured in a meaningful way?

Measuring influence at the UNSC: a taxonomy

In order to measure influence at the UNSC, we use a variety of performance statistics. We are guided by six indicators: term frequency, resolution authorship, voting patterns, group coherency, contributions to debates and organisation of Arria Formula meetings. Our analysis is based on publicly available sources. The UN's Dag Hammarsköld Library (2023) provides extensive data on Council membership, voting records and resolution authorship. We draw on the work by Mirco Schoenfeld *et al.* (2019) for an overview on Security Council debates. Records on Arria-Formula meetings are available on the Security Council Report (2020) website.

First, the frequency of Council membership. As regional powers have to be elected to the Council, the time gap between re-election to the Council can be seen as an indicator of influence. We assume that regional powers are characterised by their ambition and ability to mobilise their regional electoral group at the UN more frequently than regular E10 members. Only once given a seat at the Council can a country play an active role. Thus, frequent membership can be treated as a marker of influence.

Second, we refer to resolution authorship. Records pertaining to resolution authorship are available for the last 15 to 18 years. This allows for a comprehensive analysis of the

number of resolutions a Council member has drafted over a significant time period. Resolution authorship is the most important indicator as it directly indicates which countries drafted Council resolutions. Delivering resolutions remains the Council's most relevant output and measure of authority, especially since Council resolutions are binding for all UN member countries, as well as the fact that the UNSC is the highest decision-making body of the UN. We can distinguish between three types of resolution authorship, namely sole authorship, co-authorship and multiple authorship. The first category implies the greatest influence, while the last category (multiple authorship by three or more actors) implies the least influence. Resolutions are also divided between country-focused and thematic issues. Country-focused resolutions are often considered of greater geopolitical relevance, while thematic-issue-focused resolutions tend to be more abstract.

Third, the most comprehensive and accessible set of UNSC data are voting records which are available from 1945. Here, we are interested in identifying to what extent regional powers vote along majority lines in terms of affirmative voting, negative voting or abstentions from voting. Are regional powers more adventurous and challenge unanimity, or do they follow the majority trend? Even if regional powers might not be in a strong enough position to challenge the P5 and the group of E10 members is heterogeneous, the analysis of voting patterns is important because it can reveal if regional powers deviate from E10 voting and thus can be identified as a distinct group which veto-holding countries need to consider in order to pass a resolution. Thus analysing voting patterns can be treated as a potential power indicator.

Fourth, how coherent are regional powers as a group in terms of their voting in comparison to the P5 and E10? A greater relative coherence is indicative of influence as it implies policy coordination. This is necessary in order to pass resolutions or demand changes to draft resolution documents. In the light of greater P5 divisions it is important to explore what degree of group coherence regional powers display, especially in comparison to the E10. A low degree of coherence is indicative of weak political influence while a high degree signals a level of political influence P5 members cannot ignore if they want to pass resolutions.

Fifth, the UNSC is also a forum for debate. Because a comprehensive dataset cataloguing country contributions to UNSC debates exists (Schoenfeld *et al.* 2019), we can identify the frequency of regional power engagement in debates and their corresponding interest in certain issues or topics. We would assume that regional powers display a higher-than-average rate of engagement than other E10 members as contributions to debates are not impacted by the penholder system¹ or veto rights.

Sixth, as regional powers are some of the most prominent and active countries in terms of demanding Council reform, we also investigate alternative forums for dialogue. Arria Formula meetings are not formally integrated into the UNSC discussion and decision-making apparatus, they are nevertheless organised by Council members and used for discussing agenda items that go beyond the official Council agenda or complement it. Thus, we are interested in determining the extent to which regional powers

¹The drafting of resolutions is organised by an informally agreed mechanism, the penholding system. It allocates country and thematic resolutions to one or several members of the Council. Traditionally, the P3 remain the key penholders for the majority of portfolios.

Table 1 Indicators for measuring influence at the UNSC.

1. Frequency of UNSC membership (timeframe between re-election to the Council)
2. Authored resolutions (sole author, co-author, multiple authors; country vs. thematic issue focused)
3. Voting patterns (yes, no or abstained votes)
4. Voting coherence (among regional powers when at the Council; with P5 and E10)
5. Contribution to UNSC debates (frequency of contributions relative to E10 and P5; topics relative to E10 and P5)
6. Regional Power contributions to Arria Formula meetings in comparison to E10 and P5

use Arria Formula meetings to promote discussions, which could not be organised within the formal UNSC framework.

Many of the above indicators are relative and only makes sense in relation to other groups. Therefore, our main reference groups are the E10 and P5. We assume that regional powers are more active than the E10 given their elevated status, material resources and disappointment over failed Council reform, but less active and prominent than the P5 given their privileges as permanent Council members and veto power.

Taken together, these six indicators allow us to map the performance of regional powers at the UNSC and explore to what extent they have been able to increase their influence at the Council (Table 1). In this regard the following section, which goes through each indicator individually, is explorative in nature, as no such analysis has been conducted before.

Term frequency

Although regional powers do not form a coherent voting bloc, they play a pivotal role in terms of the operations of the UNSC. This is most visible when analysing their term frequencies in comparison to E10 members. The group of ten countries we refer to as regional powers are regularly re-elected to the UNSC. Since the establishment of the Council, Japan served 11 terms, Brazil ten, India eight and Germany (which only joined the UN in the 1970s) six. In other words, regional powers appear frequently at the Council. There are very few years in which no regional power was elected. However, their appearances at the Council are not evenly distributed. While between 2000-04 only Mexico and Germany were elected, eight regional powers were serving on the Council (Brazil, Germany, India, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa and Turkey) between 2009-12 (Figure 1). During 2009-11, eight regional powers served concurrently, constituting one-third of Council members and half of E10 members. Some countries, like Brazil, India, Japan, Germany and South Africa, are re-elected relatively frequently, with short waiting periods of between six and ten years on average. However, others like Egypt, Mexico and Turkey, experience waiting periods of between 18 and 19 years. This rather large disparity makes it unlikely that the same set of countries will be re-elected at the same time. Between 1990-2022, only Germany and South Africa happened to serve two terms concurrently.

Nevertheless, as a group, regional powers exhibit a much shorter waiting period for re-election compared to other E10 countries. On average, our selected group of regional powers are re-elected after 12 years, while other E10 members must wait almost 21 years (Appendix 1 and 2). This means regional powers are elected to the Council almost twice as often as other smaller E10 countries. Additionally, there are a significant number of countries which have never joined the Council. Between the Council's

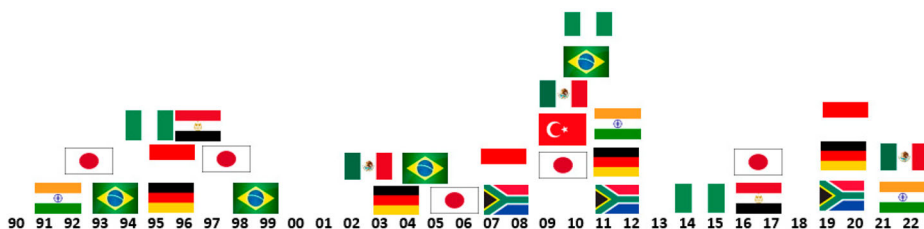


Figure 1. Regional power terms at the UNSC, 1990-2022.

Source: Own calculation.

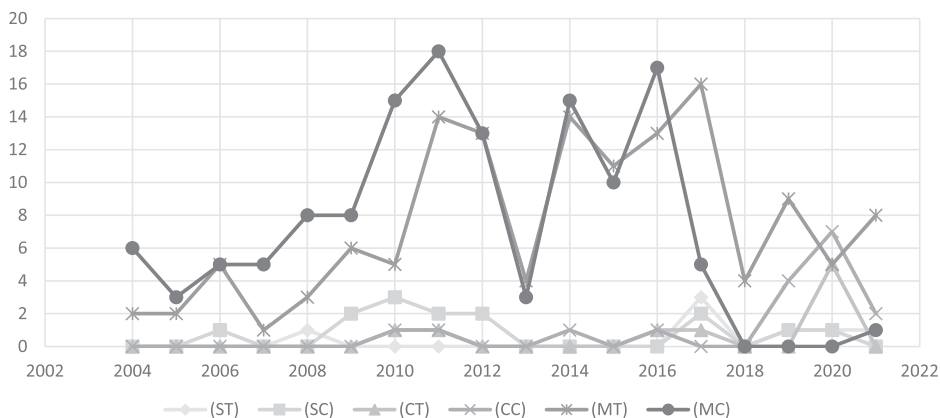


Figure 2. Regional powers and authorship of UNSC resolutions, 2004-21.

Source: Own calculation.

establishment and the present day, 128 countries have been elected to the UNSC out of a pool of 188 UN members. This means that nearly one-third of all UN members have never been to the Council. Ultimately, the relatively high frequency of re-election of regional powers affords them greater influence compared to other smaller elected members simply because of their extended time on the UNSC. Given the frequent appearance of regional powers at the Council, how effectively is this time used?

Resolution authorship

The established penholder system concentrates power for drafting resolutions in the hands of only three members, namely the US, the UK and France (known as the P3) (Loi-selle 2020). However, the P3 can share the pen with other countries and elected members can group together or join larger initiatives of like-minded countries and thereby become involved in drafting resolutions. In principle, there are various opportunities for larger and more diplomatically capable countries to become actively involved in resolution drafting. The question then is, how active are regional powers in this regard?

Figure 2 provides an overview of regional powers and their involvement as authors of resolutions in three categories, namely single authorship (S), co-authorship (C) and multiple authorship (M). Each of these can be divided into country (C) and thematic-issue-

focused resolutions (T) creating six categories overall. These are single-authored country or thematic resolution (SC or ST), co-authored country or thematic resolution (CC or CT) and finally multiple-authored country or thematic resolutions (MC or MT). Over the period 2004-21, a number of interesting trends can be observed. First, regional powers were unable to increase their number of single- and co-authored resolutions. In any given year, their numbers remain below 5 with very few fluctuations, even in years where a number of regional powers were represented at the Council concurrently. Only Germany managed to cooperate with the P3, particularly with the UK and, therefore, was able to co-author a larger number of resolutions. This explains the spike in CC resolutions between 2018-20 and CT resolutions between 2019-20. However, over a period of 17 years, where the UNSC adopted 1,095 resolutions in total, only 20 single-authored resolutions came from our group of ten regional powers. In other words, regional powers failed to broaden their influence in the core category of institutional power, namely single authorship.

A different picture emerges when exploring the number of adopted resolutions authored by multiple authors. Here, we can observe a visible increase in both MC and MT resolutions. Between 2007-12, the number of MC resolutions authored by regional powers increased from five to 18. However, the number of MC resolutions authored by regional powers also declined sharply from 2016 onwards. Multiple-author resolutions focused on specific country-related issues even reached zero between 2018-20. Multiple-author resolutions focused on thematic issues were consolidated to a range of between five and ten resolutions a year. However, in terms of multiple author resolutions, the individual influence of single countries is at its weakest. In many cases, a country's participation as an author represents merely a token contribution. Despite this, many countries authoring a resolution can also be a sign of strength in that it better expresses the collective will of a group of like-minded countries, which do not need to be confined to the Council. In this sense, it represents an alternative to the standard of single-author resolutions authored by the P3. In sum, however, only in the supposedly weakest form of resolution authorship can one observe a moderate increase in regional powers' contributions to resolution authorship. Regional powers are not capable of breaking into the ranks of the P3 or even remotely altering the penholder system.

Voting patterns

When a resolution is tabled for voting at the UNSC, member countries have three options. They can either vote affirmative ('Yes'), negative ('No') or abstain from voting. The vast majority of UNSC resolutions are adopted by consensus, but countries increasingly deviate from unanimity. This section explores and compares the voting behaviours of the P5, E10 and regional powers over a period of two decades between 2002-21. The aim is to determine if the voting pattern of regional powers deviates significantly from those of the E10 and P5 or if they conform with existing voting patterns. Are larger and more powerful countries rejecting or abstaining more often to express their dissatisfaction with the P5 or are they choosing to swim with the stream and behave like any other E10 member?

When exploring long-term voting patterns relevant to our group, it is evident that all of our regional powers tend to vote 'Yes' most of the time. Only in a fraction of instances

Table 2. Security Council voting patterns of regional powers, 2002-21 (annualised).

	BRA	EYP	GER	IND	INDO	MEX	NIG	JAP	RSA	TUR	AV
Yes	65.75	68.5	60.83	57.33	57.75	49.66	62.75	68	59	50.5	60
No	0.25	0	0.33	0.33	0	0	0	0.16	0.5	2.5	0.41
Abstain	1	5.5	1.66	1.33	2.5	0.33	0.5	0.5	1.83	0	1.52

Source: Own calculation.

Table 3. Comparison of Security Council voting patterns, 2002-21.

Vote	*E10 (-RP)		RP		P5	
	total	annual – country	total	annual – country**	total	annual – country
Yes	9,813	491–62	2,590	60	6,028	301–60
No	54	2.7–0.34	13	0.41	79	3.95–0.79
Abstain	170	8.5–1.08	57	1.52	140	7–1.4

Source: Own calculation.

*E10 is calculated without regional powers **Column only displays country per annum numbers.

do regional powers vote ‘No’ or abstain from voting. Regional power negative voting occurs less than once, while abstentions occur around one-and-a-half times in an average year of 62 UNSC resolutions put to a vote (Table 2). Although there are differences between individual countries, these are not significant. Most regional powers, if they do not vote ‘Yes’, choose to abstain from voting rather than reject a draft resolution.

Are these described voting patterns different from those of the P5 and E10? Table 3 compares voting patterns among three groups, namely the E10 without regional powers, regional powers and the P5. When analysing annual and per-country averages, the three groups are directly comparable. Unsurprisingly, countries vote ‘Yes’ most of the time in all groups. P5 members are most likely to vote ‘No’ (0.79 times per annum and country). P5 members are nearly twice as likely to vote ‘No’ than regional powers, while the E10 are least likely to reject a draft resolution. Our group of regional powers are the most frequent abstainers (1.51 times per annum and country).

Although differences are observable between the three groups, they are not substantial. Arguably, the most interesting finding revolves around the homogenising effect which countries experience when at the Council. Independent of a country’s real-world power capabilities, its voting behaviour does not show great variation. Regional powers do not act substantially different compared to E10 members or the P5.

Voting coherence

As resolutions require the approval of at least nine Council members, internal group coherence constitutes a source of power. The more coherent a group, the more likely it is to influence the agenda. We measure coherence in terms of percentage of same voting in relation to failed resolutions and resolutions adopted without consensus. Since the majority of resolutions are adopted with consensus, we concentrate on those that are contested. This is warranted as most resolutions are technical (rollover) in nature and do not require the mobilisation of much political capital in order to be adopted. However, when consensus is absent, the ability to organise votes becomes more important and, as such, voting coherence is a valuable marker for influence.

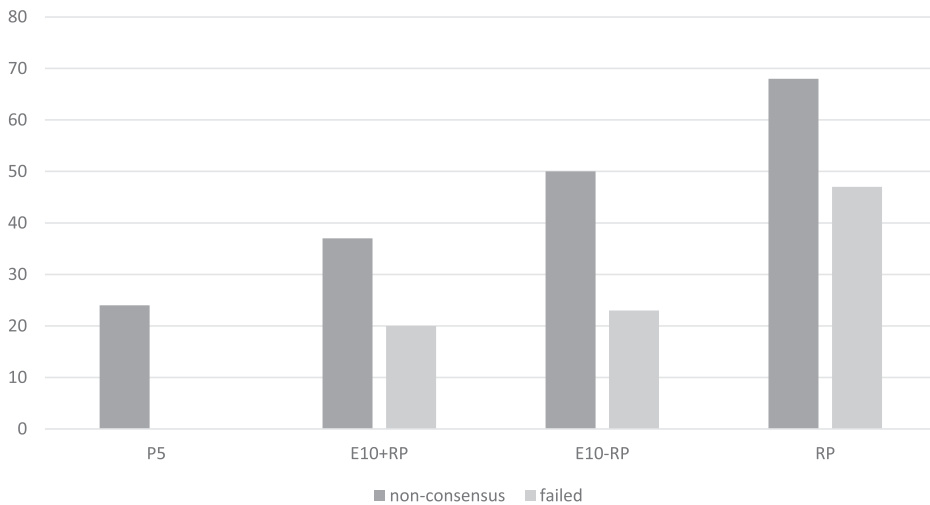


Figure 3. Failed and non-consensual resolutions voting coherence, 2004-21 (%).

Source: Own calculation.

With regard to regional powers, it is only possible to measure voting coherence when at least two are elected to the Council concurrently. As we have observed in [Figure 1](#), this is not always the case. However, in most years there are two or more represented at the Council. In comparison to the E10 and P5, what realistic expectations can be formulated? Given the diversity of interests and the limited amount of time spent at the Council, voting coherence is likely to be similar between the E10 and regional powers. For both groups, it is reasonable to assume that they will display a higher group coherence compared to the P5, which have widespread geopolitical interests and the ability to veto resolutions (which they do frequently).

[Figure 3](#) displays some interesting findings. First, regional powers exhibit significantly higher voting coherence compared to the E10 and P5, both in terms of non-consensual adopted resolutions (68 percent) and failed resolutions (47 percent). Unsurprisingly, the P5 constitute a source of division, which is reflected in their low group coherence of just 24 percent in the case of non-consensual adopted resolutions and zero percent in the case of failed resolutions. Interestingly, relatively high voting coherence on behalf of regional powers does not correspond with high voting coherence on behalf of the E10. On the contrary, regional powers impact negatively on E10 (+RP) voting coherence, whereas their absence improves or impacts positively on E10 (-RP) voting coherence. Thus, higher voting coherence among regional powers leads to lower voting coherence among the E10 (+RP). Overall, while this might curtail the influence of the E10 as a group, it nevertheless illustrates that regional powers do not shy away from voting differently on contested issues.

When comparing voting coherence with individual P5 members, differences between the voting coherences of regional powers and the E10 are less pronounced ([Figure 4](#)). Both regional powers and the E10 exhibit equally high levels of voting coherence (in excess of 90 percent) with the UK and France, as well as declining levels of voting coherence in relation to the US, China and Russia. Much more pronounced differences emerge between regional powers and the E10 (-RP) in relation to voting coherence with China and Russia. While regional powers vote with China 59 percent of the time, the E10 (-RP) vote with China 71

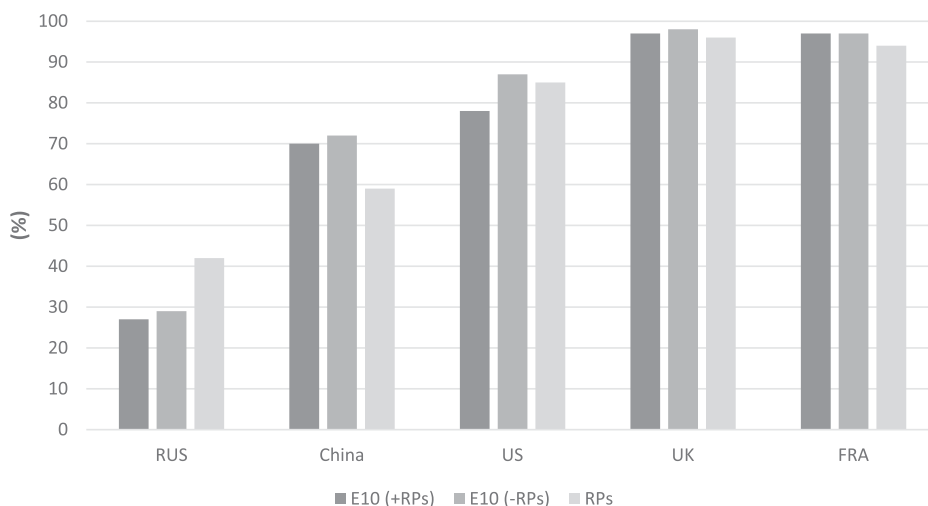


Figure 4. Regional powers and voting coherence with individual P5 members, 2004-21.

Source: Own calculation.

percent of the time. The opposite can be observed in relation to voting coherence with Russia. Here, regional powers vote with Russia 42 percent of the time, whereas the E10 (-RP) only vote with Russia 29 percent of the time. Ultimately, regional powers are oriented towards those countries drafting the majority of resolutions, the P3.

Arria Formula meetings

Arria Formula meetings are a relatively new forum in relation to the UNSC. This forum was first established in 1992 by the Venezuelan ambassador to the UN, Diego Arria. Arria Formula meetings are treated as unofficial meetings. Despite their unofficial nature, the meetings were included in Note 507 para. 98, which concerns the working procedures of the UNSC (UN Security Council 2017). Arria meetings serve as an additional tool for public debate in which issues that are not formally on the Council's agenda can be discussed. The meetings also serve as extended expert briefing instruments in relation to topics which are relevant to the Council.

Arria Formula meetings have grown in popularity, especially over the last decade. While only one meeting was convened in 2011, the number of meetings peaked at 31 in 2021. It has taken several decades to fully establish this forum, with initially very few countries actively participating in this forum. Even at present, participation in this forum is extremely unequally distributed among regional powers (Table 4). While Germany is an avid organiser of Arria Formula meetings (38 meetings organised, 4.75 per year on the Council), India has not organised one single meeting. Even within particular regions, strong differences can be observed. While Mexico has been an organiser of 12 Arria Formula meetings, Brazil has only been an organiser of one despite serving more years at the Council. While South Africa and Egypt have organised ten Arria Formula meetings each, Nigeria has only organised one. Interestingly, Japan, the country which has been elected to the Council most frequently, hardly organises Arria Formula meetings (only 0.3 per year on the Council).

Table 4. Regional powers and Arria Formula meetings, 1992-2021.

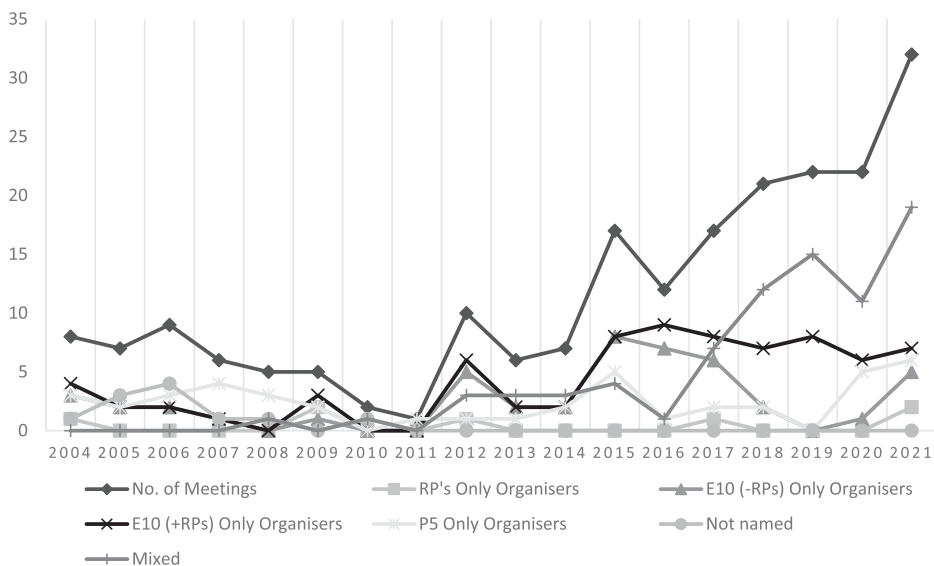
Country	No. of meetings	Years on the Council	No. of meetings per year
Germany	38	8	4.75
Mexico	12	6	2
South Africa	10	6	1.66
Egypt	10	4	2.5
Indonesia	6	6	1
Japan	3	10	0.3
Turkey	2	2	1
Nigeria	1	6	0.17
Brazil	1	8	0.13
India	0	5	0
Total	83		

Source: Own calculation based on https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/working_methods_arria_formula_meetings.pdf.

Extremely unequal participation in Arria Formula meetings on behalf of regional powers ensures that the group's overall share of meetings organised is relatively small in comparison to other groups, like the E10 and P5. Between 1992-2021, when 287 Arria Formula meetings took place, regional powers organised only 73 or roughly a quarter of these. Regional powers do not use this particular forum more than other groups, like the E10 or P5. What can be observed is a trend in which larger and mixed groups of countries, including regional powers, regularly organised Arria Formula meetings (Figure 5). This makes it difficult to clearly ascertain particular group interests.

Contributions to debates

Lastly, how much are regional powers contributing to UNSC debates? Verbal contributions to thematic and country issues are not filtered through a penholding system as in the case

**Figure 5.** Arria Formula meetings organised, 2004-21 (No.).

Source: Own calculation based on https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/working_methods_arria_formula_meetings.pdf.

of drafting resolutions. One may thus assume that regional powers might use other avenues in order to at least contribute to ongoing issues discussed at the Council. A systematic dataset exists which explores the number of speeches and their topics since 1995 (Schoenfeld *et al.* 2019). Figure 6 displays the total number of speeches in comparison to those of regional powers per annum. The Council experienced a sharp increase in debate which over 26 years increased by almost six-fold from around 1,000 to nearly 6,000 speeches a year. This general increase should at least be followed by an increase in regional powers' contributions. Although they increased at a similar rate from around 250 speeches in the mid-1990s to just over 900 in 2011 and 1,283 in 2019, the overall share of all contributions remains fairly stable but low. Naturally regional power contributions are more volatile because of the changing memberships of the UNSC.

Unsurprisingly, the degree to which regional powers contribute to speeches varies significantly among the ten countries. Figure S1 (online Supplemental Material) disaggregates the number of speeches per country between 1995 and 2020. Accordingly, countries like Germany and Japan are the most active contributors over the years. Other countries like Egypt, Indonesia, Nigeria, Mexico, South Africa and Turkey show a stronger performance on select occasions usually when they serve their term. Finally, Brazil and India, given the size and regional relevance of their countries, make small contributions. In the case of India this can be explained by the country only serving one term between 1995 and 2020. However, Brazil served three terms during that period.

Lastly, what topics did regional powers make contributions to and prioritise? There are few topics in which all ten countries share an equal interest (Figure S2, online Supplemental Material). Apart from the Middle East and the more generic issue of maintaining international peace, the group of regional powers focuses on various topics. For example, Germany, India, Nigeria and South Africa contribute to the Women Peace and Security Agenda (WPS). The issue of terrorism is most relevant to Egypt, while Mexico has made the most contributions on children and armed conflict. Indonesia has concentrated on protection of civilians. Given these different preferences, one can

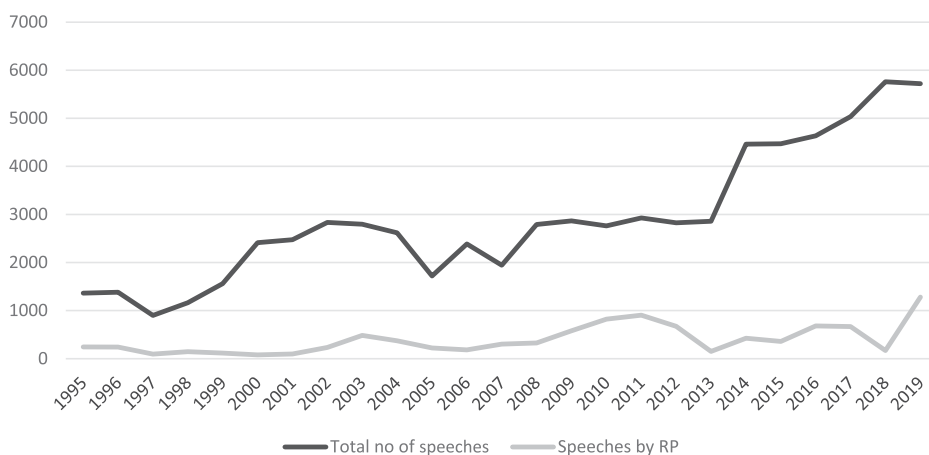


Figure 6. Number of speeches in the UNSC, 1995–2019.

Source: Own compilation with data drawn from: <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/KGVSyh>.

either argue that regional powers do not share a specific common agenda, which is most likely the case, or that they operate with a degree of division of labour under the umbrella of advancing international liberal norms on a variety of thematic issues. Interestingly regional powers do not focus much on regional organisations.

Regional powers: more mainstream than upstream

The data above highlight at least three interesting trends which are not fully compatible with one another. First, UNSC membership has an equalising effect on elected members. Regional powers become integrated into pre-existing structures and procedures, with limited steering capabilities for change. They are often indistinguishable from E10 members and mostly replicate existing practices. Second, regional powers differ from both the P5 and E10 in some respects and form a group in their own right that moderately influences Council operations. Third, regional powers are an artificial group as they are too diverse to have a coherent and meaningful impact on the Council's agenda and operations.

The equaliser

Several of our indicators point to a fairly strong equalising effect emanating from Council membership. In the core categories for measuring influence – resolution authorship and voting behaviour – regional powers are not capable of making a strong impression. The number of authored resolutions attributed to our group remains low. Over a period of 17 years, only 20 resolutions were single-authored by this group of countries ([Figure 2](#)). This is a fraction of the total number of resolutions adopted. Their voting behaviour also differs marginally from that of the E10 ([Table 3](#)). Additionally, the number of speeches at the UNSC by regional powers only makes up a fraction of all contributions with no increasing share visible. All this indicates an equalising effect emanating from Council membership. Although, on average, regional powers outperform the other E10 members in terms of classical power characteristics, this does not translate into greater abilities or propensities to author Council resolutions and, therefore, influence at the UNSC. By contrast, Council membership also seems to have an equalising effect. Elected Council members tend to adapt to pre-existing and common Council practices, rather than introducing new ones. In this regard, regional powers are not significantly different from E10 members despite their regional power credentials.

This phenomenon substantiates findings articulated in sociological and historical institutionalism (Bearce and Bondella 2007; Checkel 2005; Pierson 1996). Given the relatively short period of time elected members have at the Council, the large number of official and unofficial Council meetings, as well as P5 dominance, elected members are locked-in pre-existing structures continuing an institutional pathway which replicates for example voting patterns and procedures such as the penholding system. Historical institutionalism has labelled such incidences as institutional stickiness (Pierson 1996). In fact, despite the commonly agreed need for Council reform, existing practices are continuing without substantial changes. Existing norms, rules and procedures are often replicated by regional powers following the existing mainstream. The often-proclaimed status or prestige-seeking behaviour of emerging powers is difficult to realise in such a context (Dal 2019).

Making a difference

Although an equalising effect is observable and regional powers are forced to adjust to the institutional realities surrounding them, they are not merely followers, but can also be identified as a distinct group of countries with a certain degree of influence. This is most evident in terms of their frequent re-election to the Council. On average, regional powers wait 12 years before being re-elected, whereas other E10 members wait 21 years. Thus, even if regional powers have come to accept the procedural boundaries of Council membership, their frequent appearance at the Council affords them moderately greater influence compared to the average E10 member. It is also worth noting that regional powers maintain higher levels of voting coherence compared to the E10 (Figure 3). They differ from the E10 in terms of voting together with China and Russia more frequently and are slightly more likely to abstain. Individual regional powers are also quite active in organising Arria Formula meetings (Germany) or in the high number of contributions to debates (Germany and Japan). Different countries concentrated on different thematic topics when contributing to debates. Together they contribute visibly to the further development of thematic topics mostly within the framework of what can be called liberal international norms.

No effective group of regional powers

The group of regional powers does not form a coherent political bloc with an agreed agenda. A number of indicators illustrate a significant variation among our ten selected countries. This is unsurprising considering the diversity of actors and interests involved, considering the short time periods when regional powers have a seat at the Council, the constant change of composition of the E10 and the limited number of overlapping terms among regional powers. Performance differences occur across many indicators. Some countries achieve re-election quickly (Brazil, Germany, India, Japan and South Africa), while others are forced to wait considerably longer. A fast succession of membership potentially allows for generating institutional memory which countries (E10) with a gap of more than 20 years do not enjoy. Similarly, contributions to Arria Formula meetings are extremely uneven. Some are among the most active organisers of Arria Formula meetings (Germany), while others have not contributed much at all (India and Japan). The same is true for contributions to UNSC debates. They vary significantly among countries both in terms of quantity as well as content. Due to low levels of resolution authorship, in combination with the equalising effect emanating from Council membership, regional powers only form a loose group at the UNSC.

Conclusion

Much of the literature concerning regional powers and the UNSC focuses on Council reform or individual countries and their performance. This is the first study, which systematically explores regional powers and their behaviour while serving as elected members at the Council. We developed a comprehensive taxonomy comprising of six indicators that allowed us to map the performance of regional powers, as well as compare their performance with that of the E10 and P5 (our key reference groups). The results of our study indicate that regional powers have only a moderate effect on

Council operations. Although, by some indicators, regional powers are identifiable as a distinct group of actors, UNSC membership has an equalising and lock-in effect in that regional powers become integrated into existing Council structures and procedures. In the end, the majority of regional powers operate very much like E10 members. The diversity of the group is also reflected in terms of starkly different contributions to the operation of the Council and, as such, a particular group effect is difficult to identify.

What do these findings add to the existing body of literature on regional powers? Most recent research has taken a rather critical position in relation to their effect on global and regional politics. Regional powers are viewed less as singular reasons or contributors to particular outcomes but more as an intervening variable in the context of a variety of impact conditions (Garzon 2022). Other authors have explored the reasons for their reluctant behaviour emphasising their weak domestic institutional backgrounds for foreign policy-making as a possible explanation (Destradi 2018; Nolte and Schenoni 2021). The case of regional powers at the UNSC corroborates this explanation. Regional powers on average are not significantly more active than other E10 members. Our study also adds a new perspective on reluctant behaviour. While regional powers do command over more power resources relative to other E10 members, particularly in terms of diplomatic capacity and regional relevance, their individual power capacities are mostly not translated into more influence at the UNSC. Thus, reluctant behaviour is not necessarily always linked to domestic weaknesses but in the case of the UNSC is shaped by an equalising and lock-in effect. Research on regional powers has tended to explore their effect from the perspective of national foreign policy-making, but has underappreciated institutional stickiness, which global governance institutions can have. In the absence of UNSC institutional reform, the Council simply replicates its prevailing *modus operandi*.

Regional powers largely seem to have accepted their role at the Council as they repeat the behaviour of other E10 members. This is most certainly because of the prevailing institutional structure and operational procedures in place. The penholder system concentrates much power in the hands of the P3, while the division between permanent members with veto power and non-permanent elected members without veto power ensures similar voting patterns among regional powers and the E10. In the end, the difference between P5 and E10 members is larger than differences between regional powers and the E10. This results from non-reform and the tendency to replicate existing formal and informal practices. Given the current geopolitical tensions among great powers as well as divisions among regional ones, the chances for substantial reform are minimal. Thus, the *status quo* is likely to prevail for the foreseeable future. This means that the influence of regional powers in the UNSC will likely remain relatively limited in comparison to their political relevance and ambition outside of the Council.

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Notes on contributors

Malte Brosig is Professor of International Relations at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Markus Lecki is a Master of Arts in International Relations graduate from the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. Email: 684162@students.wits.ac.za

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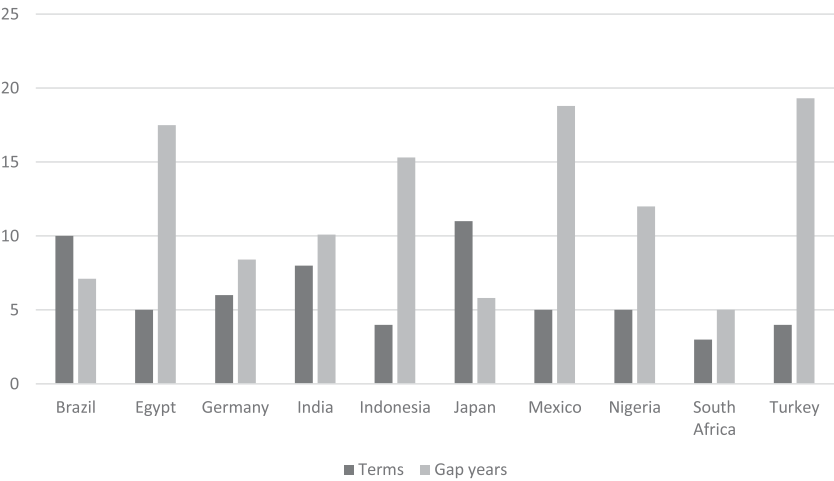
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Appendixes

Appendix 1. Regional power Security Council terms, 1946-2022.

Country	Number of terms	Frequency between terms (years)
Brazil	10	7.1
Germany	6.0	8.4
India	8.0	10.1
Japan	11	5.8
Mexico	5.0	10.8
Nigeria	5.0	12
South Africa	3.0	5.0
Turkey	4.0	19.3
Egypt	5.0	17.5
Indonesia	4.0	15.3
Average	6.1	12.2
E10 + RP Average	2.7	19.7
E10-RP Average	2.4	20.7



Appendix 2. Regional power Security Council terms and term frequencies, 1946-2021.

Source: Own compilation.