

Working Paper/Research Article

**Russia and China in UN Security Council Debates on Sanctions, 1992–2023:
Attitudinal Shifts on Multilateral Action and Global Security Order**

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Anton Peez[†]

Johannes Scherzinger[‡]

Abstract

UN sanctions are a central tool for maintaining international peace and security (Art. 24, 41 UN Charter) and have become an important enforcement instrument for upholding the global security order since the end of the Cold War. The authorization of UN sanctions crucially depends on the willingness and working relationship of the UN Security Council's Permanent Five members (P5). However, there is surprisingly little systematic evidence on P5 attitudes on the use of sanctions over the decades. We present a comparative account of how the P5's attitudes on the tool have changed from 1992–2023. We argue that this allows us to draw broader conclusions about the evolution of the P5's working relationships and their approaches to the global security order. Applying a new tool for large language model (LLM) stance detection (GPT-4o mini) and drawing from expert interviews, we trace and characterize each P5 member's attitudinal stance towards UN sanctions over the years. We find that China and Russia have changed their position from relative opposition and begrudging tolerance (China) and careful support of multilateral sanctions (Russia) in the 1990s to very vocal and frequent objection in recent years. We argue that this is also driven by US overreliance on unilateral sanctions. Non-Western Security Council members remain net supporters of UN-mandated sanctions and do not follow Russia and China in their overt criticism. Meanwhile, Western states have consistently favored and set the agenda on UN sanctions. We draw conclusions for the future of UN sanctions, the global security order, and the working relationships of the P5. While common interests such as fighting transnational crime and terrorism persist, the recent history of UN sanctions suggests that the Council will be increasingly hamstrung in addressing global security challenges.

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† Anton Peez is a Postdoctoral Researcher at Goethe University Frankfurt and an Associate Fellow at Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF). He studies economic sanctions, multilateralism, peace and conflict, and public and elite opinion on international affairs. peez@em.uni-frankfurt.de.

‡ Johannes Scherzinger is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Zurich. He studies international organizations—specifically the UN Security Council, rhetoric in international politics, and computational text analysis. johannes.scherzinger@ipz.uzh.ch.

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1 Introduction

On 03 October 2022, North Korea conducted its longest-range missile test to date, launching an intermediate-range ballistic missile over Japan and triggering the country to recommend its citizens seek shelter. As one of dozens of tests in 2022 despite a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) ban on launches and nuclear tests, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres deemed the test a “reckless act,” while US President Joe Biden called Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to express his country’s support for Japan.³

The Council convened the next day against this dramatic backdrop, though Russia and China had lobbied against holding a public meeting. At the outset of the meeting, US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield accused a certain “two members” of the Security Council of “block[ing] every attempt to update the sanctions regime” and thereby “enabl[ing] Kim Jong Un.” Russian representative Anna Evstigneeva countered that the US proposal of ratcheting up UN sanctions on North Korea would be a “dead end” and “threaten[ed] the citizens of North Korea.” Chinese diplomat Geng Shuang concurred that “sanctions cannot solve everything” and “are not the right approach.”⁴

³ Reuters, “North Korea Conducts Longest-Range Missile Test yet over Japan,” October 4, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/nkorea-fires-missile-towards-east-skorea-military-2022-10-03/>; Reuters, “China, Russia at Odds with US over UN Meeting on North Korea,” October 4, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-ask-un-security-council-meet-north-korea-2022-10-04/>; Victor Cha, Ellen Kim, and Andy Lim, “North Korea Tests Missile over Japan” (Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), October 5, 2022), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/north-korea-tests-missile-over-japan-0>.

⁴ 05 October 2022 (S/PV 9146).

This episode highlights an ongoing trend in Security Council working relations. Where there had once been relative consensus on the North Korea sanctions and on UNSC-mandated sanctions in general, open opposition is today far more common. While the US, along with the UK and France, characterize UN sanctions as a consensual and “effective foreign policy tool to constrain bad actors, terrorists and human rights abusers,”⁵ China consistently states that “sanctions are a means, not an end”⁶ and Russia is increasingly openly opposed to using the tool at all. This hard split regularly plays out in Council debates, including others on the Central African Republic (CAR), Sudan, and South Sudan.⁷ Jointly tasked with maintaining international peace alongside the Elected Council members (E10), P5 working relationships are vital for the functioning of the world’s most powerful institution for safeguarding international security.⁸

Since the end of the Cold War, multilateral, UNSC-mandated sanctions have been a key tool in the Council’s enforcement arsenal in times of crisis (Articles 24 and 39–42, UN Charter).⁹ Indeed, we find that roughly every sixth P5 speech in the UNSC mentions the use, renewal, or authorization of UN sanctions (17.8%). However, despite numerous acute crises around the world, new UN sanctions regimes have become

⁵ 09 December 2022 (S/PV 9214 on general issues relating to sanctions).

⁶ E.g., most recently, 08 August 2023 (S/PV 9408 on Mali); 26 May 2023 (S/PV 9048 on DPRK); 07 February 2022 (S/PV 8962 on general issues relating to sanctions).

⁷ Respectively, 31 January 2020 (S/PV 8712 on CAR); 30 May 2019 (S/PV 8536 on Sudan/South Sudan); 13 July 2018 (S/PV 8310 on Sudan/South Sudan).

⁸ Erik Voeten, “The Political Origins of the UN Security Council’s Ability to Legitimize the Use of Force,” *International Organization* 59, no. 3 (2005): 527–57; David Bosco, *Five to Rule Them All: The UN Security Council and the Making of the Modern World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁹ Martin Binder and Monika Heupel, “The Legitimacy of the UN Security Council: Evidence from Recent General Assembly Debates,” *International Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (2015): 241, <https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12134>; Manjiao Chi, “China’s Approach to the Use of Force: A Short Review of China’s Changing Attitudes towards the Justification of Humanitarian Intervention,” in *The Justification of War and International Order*, ed. Lothar Brock and Hendrik Simon (Oxford University Press, 2021), 419–20, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198865308.003.0027>.

rare in the 2010s and 2020s, and experts' outlook on the future of constructive UN sanctions are increasingly pessimistic.¹⁰

Furthermore, beyond multilateral, UNSC-approved sanctions regimes, *unilateral* sanctions are far more controversial and openly criticized in UN fora for violating international law and human rights. For instance, an October 2023 vote on the mandate renewal of a Special Rapporteur on unilateral sanctions and human rights split along similar lines, with states such as China, Cuba, and Eritrea, as well as South Africa and India, voting in favor and the US, UK, and France against.¹¹ Most recently, the outcome document of the September 2024 Summit for the Future featured a commitment to “refrain from economic coercion” within its very first action item.¹²

Despite these trends and their important ramifications for the global security order, we know surprisingly little about the evolution of the P5's individual positions on UN sanctions over the decades. *How have the attitudes of the P5 towards the use of multilateral sanctions changed since the end of the Cold War?* In this article, we present a comprehensive characterization of the P5's views on UN sanctions since 1992. We argue that this lets us draw conclusions about their attitudes towards upholding the UN mandate and the global security order more broadly.

¹⁰ See Colum Lynch, “Sunset for U.N. Sanctions?” (Foreign Policy, October 14, 2021), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/10/14/sanctions-united-nations-expert-panels-russia-china-africa-western-countries/>.

¹¹ The office's full title is “Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights.” United Nations, “Human Rights and Unilateral Coercive Measures. Resolution Adopted by the Human Rights Council on 11 October 2023. A/HRC/RES/54/15,” October 11, 2023, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g23/214/00/pdf/g2321400.pdf>.

¹² United Nations, “Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations. A/RES/79/1.” September 2024, https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/soft-pact_for_the_future_adopted.pdf.

Our theoretical starting point is that the practice of sanctioning represents punishment for specific norm violations in pursuit of foreign policy aims.¹³ In this sense, the use of sanctions is a form of contestation by which state actors – whether multilaterally or otherwise – decide which types of norm violations warrant punishment and why.¹⁴ However, the imposition of sanctions is a coercive practice that requires justification and is itself contested.¹⁵ In this paper, we therefore focus not on which norm violations are punished, but on whether and how actors support or oppose the specific practice of UN sanctions imposition. As one of the main tools for maintaining international peace and security, and thus upholding a peaceful world order through “legitimate coercion,”¹⁶ UN sanctions have been actively developed over the past decades from crude conventional blockades to highly technical and targeted measures.¹⁷ As such, debates on UN sanctions serve not only as an illustration of the decision-making processes of great powers, but also provide a window into the working relationships of the P5.

Our analysis systematically shows that China and Russia have changed their attitude from begrudging tolerance and recurrent acceptance of multilateral sanctions in the 1990s to vocally and frequently opposing them today. We date the start of overt Russian opposition to UN sanctions to around 2011/14, in the wake of the Libya

¹³ Kim Richard Nossal, “International Sanctions as International Punishment,” *International Organization* 43, no. 2 (1989): 301–22.

¹⁴ Antje Wiener, *A Theory of Contestation* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2014).

¹⁵ Antje Wiener, “Contested Compliance: Interventions on the Normative Structure of World Politics,” *European Journal of International Relations* 10, no. 2 (2004): 189–234, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066104042934>; Phil Orchard and Antje Wiener, eds., *Contesting the World: Norm Research in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 14–18.

¹⁶ Christopher Daase and Nicole Deitelhoff, “The Justification and Critique of Coercion as World Order Politics,” in *The Justification of War and International Order*, ed. Lothar Brock and Hendrik Simon (Oxford University Press, 2021), 489–500, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198865308.003.0027>.

¹⁷ Andrea Charron, Francesco Giumelli, and Clara Portela, “Introduction: The United Nations and Targeted Sanctions,” *International Affairs* 91, no. 6 (November 2015): 1335–37, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12457>; Thomas J. Biersteker, Sue E. Eckert, and Marcos Tourinho, eds., *Targeted Sanctions: The Impacts and Effectiveness of United Nations Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316460290>.

resolution (S/RES/1973), the start of the Syrian Civil War, and Russia itself being targeted with unilateral sanctions following its illegal annexation of Crimea. China's position shifted from relative neutrality to more overt opposition around 2021/22, in line with its noted shift to more confrontational "wolf-warrior diplomacy."¹⁸ Meanwhile, the P3 (the UK, US, and France) have been strongly in favor of UN sanctions throughout the entire examined timeframe, even as the US has increasingly relied on its own unilateral sanctions as a self-admitted "tool of first resort"¹⁹ under the Trump and Biden administrations.²⁰ We further show that states beyond the West support UN sanctions, but oppose unilateral ones, taking a distinct position between P3 support and Russian and Chinese opposition. Finally, drawing on expert interviews, we find that the working relationships of the P5 are at a post-Cold War low and that feasible future (short- and medium-term) sanctions regimes are likely limited to the areas of combatting terrorism and fighting transnational organized crime.

Our article makes four contributions. *First*, we provide a systematic, long-term, and empirical examination of UN sanctions, a key tool of upholding a peaceful international order that has been subject to notable policy innovations in the past thirty years. About twenty-five years on from the UN's "sanctions decade,"²¹ policy innovations surrounding "targeted sanctions," and ten years on from key scholarly retrospectives,²²

¹⁸ Peter Martin, *China's Civilian Army: The Making of Wolf Warrior Diplomacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

¹⁹ US Department of the Treasury, "The Treasury – 2021 Sanctions Review," 2021, 1, <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/Treasury-2021-sanctions-review.pdf>; Daniel W. Drezner, "How Not To Sanction," *International Affairs* 98, no. 5 (2022): 1534, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia065>.

²⁰ Daniel W. Drezner, "The United States of Sanctions: The Use and Abuse of Economic Coercion," *Foreign Affairs* 100, no. 5 (2021): 142–54.

²¹ David Cortright and George A. Lopez, *The Sanctions Decade: Assessing UN Strategies in the 1990s* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000).

²² Joanna Weschler, "The Evolution of Security Council Innovations in Sanctions," *International Journal* 65, no. 1 (2010): 31–43, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002070201006500103>; Charron, Giumelli, and Portela, "Introduction"; Biersteker, Eckert, and Tourinho, *Targeted Sanctions*; Enrico Carisch, Loraine Rickard-Martin, and Shawna R. Meister, *The Evolution of UN Sanctions: From a Tool of*

it is again worth asking what the current state and future of UN sanctions might be. We pay particular attention to Russia and China, offering the first systematic analysis of their revealed preferences concerning the tool.²³ *Second*, we argue that attitudes on UN sanctions offer a window into UN working relationships more broadly, offering insights into Council dynamics with a particular focus on the dichotomy of Western and non-Western and elected and permanent Council members. *Third*, we apply Large Language Models (LLMs; GPT-4o mini) for text annotation and classification, measuring and characterizing Council member attitudes in a 6,044-speech corpus on UN sanctions.²⁴ *Fourth* and finally, we pair this approach with expert interviews, offering first-hand assessments on the past and future of UN sanctions regimes and multilateralism more generally.²⁵

We proceed as follows. We begin by introducing multilateral and unilateral sanctions as contested tools in world politics and discussing them as a central means for shaping the global security order. Next, we present our methodological approach for analyzing UNSC speeches and outline the characteristics we are most interested in. We then turn to our results, first describing the P5's support and opposition to UN sanctions since 1992, characterizing the Russian and Chinese positions in greater detail, and examining Western and non-Western elected members' positions. Finally, we provide an outlook on the future of UN sanctions as a tool for shaping the global security order, showing that there is shrinking room for compromise among the P5. If a key tool for

Warfare to a Tool of Peace, Security and Human Rights (Cham: Springer, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-60005-5>.

²³ See also Zheng Chen and Hang Yin, "China and Russia in R2P Debates at the UN Security Council," *International Affairs* 96, no. 3 (May 1, 2020): 787–805, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz229>.

²⁴ 6,044 speeches in total; 3,545 speeches by the E10 (58,7%) and 2,499 speeches by the P5 (41,3%).

²⁵ See Appendix A.

multilateral UN action in the face of crisis remains blocked, this will likely have dire consequences for global peace and security.

2 Sanctions as a contentious issue in global order

According to many observers, Russia and China are increasingly contesting and skeptical of UN action on some of the historically most common primary and secondary objectives of UN sanctions,²⁶ such as non-proliferation and upholding human rights.²⁷ This overt opposition to UN sanctions is a fairly recent development: In the 1990s and 2000s, we show that Russia and China generally accepted or at least begrudgingly tolerated the dominant P3 sanctions policy in the Council. This encompassed both the 1990s “sanctions decade” and the turn towards targeted sanctions in the early 2000s. By the early 2010s, however, Russia and China “increasingly view[ed] the adoption of UN sanctions not as a threshold for further measures, but as a ceiling of what they consider globally legitimate measures.”²⁸ Our analyses show that this “floor-ceiling

²⁶ E.g., Ted Piccione, “China’s Long Game on Human Rights at the United Nations” (Brookings Institution, September 2018), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/chinas-long-game-on-human-rights-at-the-united-nations/>; Lindsay Maizland, “Is China Undermining Human Rights at the United Nations?” (Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), July 9, 2019), <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/china-undermining-human-rights-united-nations/>; Robbie Gramer, “How an Unusual Coalition Outfoxed China and Russia at the UN,” December 23, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/12/23/united-nations-china-russia-treaty-crimes-against-humanity-international-law/>; The Economist, “How China Uses Russia to Chew up the UN,” May 28, 2024, <https://www.economist.com/china/2024/05/28/china-uses-russia-as-a-wrecking-ball>; Human Rights Watch, “Russia, China Unfit for UN’s Top Rights Body,” October 5, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/05/russia-china-unfit-uns-top-rights-body>; see also Andrej Krickovic, “The Symbiotic China-Russia Partnership: Cautious Riser and Desperate Challenger,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 10, no. 3 (September 1, 2017): 299–329, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pox011>.

²⁷ On the most common primary and secondary objectives of UN sanctions, see Thomas J. Biersteker, Sue E. Eckert, and Marcos Tourinho, “Thinking about United Nations Sanctions,” in *Targeted Sanctions: The Impacts and Effectiveness of United Nations Action*, ed. Thomas J. Biersteker, Sue E. Eckert, and Marcos Tourinho (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 25, Table 1.3, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316460290>.

²⁸ Andrea Charron and Clara Portela, “The Relationship between United Nations Sanctions and Regional Sanctions Regimes,” in *Targeted Sanctions: The Impacts and Effectiveness of United Nations Action*, ed. Marcos Tourinho, Sue E. Eckert, and Thomas J. Biersteker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 117–18, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316460290.006>.

debate”²⁹ has since escalated significantly to a point at which UN sanctions are often no longer seen as legitimate or appropriate at all by the two states. UN sanctions have therefore become increasingly rare and controversial, despite numerous acute global crises in which they might successfully be implemented.

2.1 UN sanctions as a tool for maintaining global security

Maintaining a basic level of international peace and security is a central element of a flourishing rules-based global order. Global order is the sum of “settled rules and arrangements between states that define and guide their interaction.”³⁰ Whether the prevailing contemporary global order is empirically taken to be a Liberal International Order (LIO) or simply as global order without the “liberal” descriptor is not central to this article.³¹ Regardless of the order’s specifics, the maintenance of international security is critical, and many IR scholars have argued that we are currently amid a crisis of global order, or at least a crisis of some of its central elements, such as international security.³²

²⁹ Thomas J. Biersteker, Marcos Tourinho, and Sue E. Eckert, “Conclusion,” in *Targeted Sanctions: The Impacts and Effectiveness of United Nations Action*, ed. Marcos Tourinho, Sue E. Eckert, and Thomas J. Biersteker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 272, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316460290.013>; Enrico Carisch and Loraine Rickard-Martin, “Implementation of United Nations Targeted Sanctions,” in *Targeted Sanctions: The Impacts and Effectiveness of United Nations Action*, ed. Marcos Tourinho, Sue E. Eckert, and Thomas J. Biersteker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 169, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316460290.008>.

³⁰ G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton University Press, 2011), 12, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt7rjt2>; Stacie E. Goddard, “Embedded Revisionism: Networks, Institutions, and Challenges to World Order,” *International Organization* 72, no. 4 (2018): 765, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818318000206>.

³¹ David A. Lake, Lisa L. Martin, and Thomas Risse, “Challenges to the Liberal Order: Reflections on International Organization,” *International Organization* 75, no. 2 (2021): 225–57, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000636>; Tanja A. Börzel and Michael Zürn, “Contestations of the Liberal International Order: From Liberal Multilateralism to Postnational Liberalism,” *International Organization* 75, no. 2 (2021): 282–305, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000570>; Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Stephanie C. Hofmann, “Of the Contemporary Global Order, Crisis, and Change,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 27, no. 7 (2020): 1077–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2019.1678665>.

³² G. John Ikenberry, “The End of Liberal International Order?,” *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 7–23, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix241>; Jeff D Colgan and Robert O Keohane, “The Liberal

We focus our argument on the UNSC as the only truly global security arrangement. UNSC attention and action – including peacekeeping and sanctions³³ – are selective. The Council tends to intervene in conflicts biased towards the interests of the P5 but without major P5 confrontation and in cases characterized by severe human suffering, though the preferences of the Elected Ten (E10) also affect Council involvement.³⁴ Nonetheless, UNSC action on peacekeeping and sanctions is a major component of the global security order. The containment of civil conflicts has averted the spread of violence across regions,³⁵ sanctions have slowed the financing of international terrorism,³⁶ and decades of serving on the Council have given P5 diplomats a working method that has helped prevent conflicts between major powers.³⁷ Much of this cooperation and engagement has revolved around UN sanctions regimes as a form of “legitimate coercion.”³⁸ However, with increasingly divergent P5 views and preferences

Order Is Rigged: Fix It Now or Watch It Wither,” *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 3 (2017): 36–44; however, see also Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann, “Of the Contemporary Global Order, Crisis, and Change.”

³³ Mikael Eriksson and Peter Wallensteen, “Targeting Sanctions and Ending Armed Conflicts: First Steps towards a New Research Agenda,” *International Affairs* 91, no. 6 (November 2015): 1392, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12451>.

³⁴ Kyle Beardsley and Holger Schmidt, “Following the Flag or Following the Charter? Examining the Determinants of UN Involvement in International Crises, 1945–20021,” *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2012): 33–49, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2011.00696.x>; Martin Binder and Jonathan Golub, “Civil Conflict and Agenda-Setting Speed in the United Nations Security Council,” *International Studies Quarterly* 64, no. 2 (June 1, 2020): 419–30, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqaa017>; Michael Gilligan and Stephen John Stedman, “Where Do the Peacekeepers Go?,” *International Studies Review* 5, no. 4 (December 2003): 37–54, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1079-1760.2003.00504005.x>; Susan Hannah Allen and Amy T. Yuen, “The Politics of Peacekeeping: UN Security Council Oversight Across Peacekeeping Missions,” *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (2014): 621–32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12086>.

³⁵ Håvard Hegre, Lisa Hultman, and Håvard Møkleiv Nygård, “Evaluating the Conflict-Reducing Effect of UN Peacekeeping Operations,” *The Journal of Politics* 81, no. 1 (January 2019): 215–32, <https://doi.org/10.1086/700203>; Jessica Di Salvatore and Andrea Ruggeri, “Effectiveness of Peacekeeping Operations,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, by Jessica Di Salvatore and Andrea Ruggeri (Oxford University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.586>.

³⁶ Gary Clyde Hufbauer, Jeffrey J. Schott, and Barbara Oegg, “Using Sanctions to Fight Terrorism” (Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2001), <https://ideas.repec.org/p/iie/pbrief/pb01-11.html>.

³⁷ Voeten, “The Political Origins of the UN Security Council’s Ability to Legitimize the Use of Force.”

³⁸ Christopher Daase and Nicole Deitelhoff, “The Justification and Critique of Coercion as World Order Politics,” in *The Justification of War and International Order*, ed. Lothar Brock and Hendrik Simon (Oxford University Press, 2021), 489–500, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198865308.003.0027>.

on multilateralism, this mode of multilateral action is at stake as well, making it important to understand how and why this divergence has unfolded.

2.2 Multilateral and unilateral sanctions

Sanctions aim to *coerce* the targeted entity into changing its course of action, *constrain* the target in its range of options, and to *signal* to other actors – oftentimes governments – that certain types of norm violations are unacceptable and will be punished.³⁹ Therefore, by definition, sanctions have a normative component.⁴⁰ Having introduced the tool of UN sanctions, we contrast them with *unilateral* sanctions.⁴¹ Narrowly understood, *multilateral* sanctions are all sanctions mandated by the UN Security Council on the basis of Articles 24 and 39–41 of the UN Charter,⁴² making them binding by international law for all UN member states. Meanwhile, *unilateral* sanctions are all sanctions that are not UN sanctions, even if they are imposed by regional organizations or coalitions of states (e.g., by the AU, EU, or G7). In UN parlance, these are also called “unilateral coercive measures” (UCMs). Such unilateral sanctions, i.e., all non-UN-mandated sanctions, are considered illegal by many states, but their exact legal status remains contested in international law.⁴³ Several states have been particularly outspoken on this issue, including Russia, Cuba, and Venezuela.⁴⁴ Following this line of critique, the September 2024 UN Pact for the Future “strongly urged” restraint from

³⁹ Francesco Giumelli, *Coercing, Constraining and Signalling: Explaining UN and EU Sanctions after the Cold War* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2011); Francesco Giumelli, “Understanding United Nations Targeted Sanctions: An Empirical Analysis,” *International Affairs* 91, no. 6 (November 2015): 1351–68, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12448>.

⁴⁰ Daase and Deitelhoff, “The Justification and Critique of Coercion as World Order Politics.”

⁴¹ Our corpus also allows us to investigate attitudes towards *unilateral* sanctions within the Council. The analysis for this can be found in the appendix and is summarized in the following.

⁴² See Carisch and Rickard-Martin, “Implementation of United Nations Targeted Sanctions.”

⁴³ See Surya P. Subedi, ed., *Unilateral Sanctions in International Law* (Oxford, UK ; New York, NY: Hart, 2021).

⁴⁴ See, for instance, the voting patterns on A/HRC/RES/27/71, which created the office (03 October 2014), as well as A/HRC/RES/54/15, which renewed its mandate (11 October 2023).

using economic coercion and from “applying unilateral economic measures not in accordance with international law [...]”.⁴⁵

We are mainly interested in multilateral, UNSC-authorized sanctions because they are a common issue debated in the Council and are a prominent tool for enforcing Council decisions, thereby shaping the global security order. In our analysis, debates on UN sanctions regimes therefore serve as an ongoing indicator of broader P5 attitudes towards upholding the UN mandate and the global security order. Russia’s and China’s attitudes towards UN sanctions are understudied relative to their increasing opposition, and we therefore pay particular attention to them.

That said, unilateral sanctions are also a central contentious issue at the UN. In recent years, a coalition of states including Russia, Venezuela, Iran, Cuba, and Belarus – all notable targets of unilateral Western sanctions – have led an effort to contest the legitimacy of unilateral sanctions through avenues such as the “UN Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights” (see Section 1). Nonetheless, Russia and China themselves also resort to economic coercion when it suits their interests. We cover UNSC speeches on unilateral sanctions descriptively in the Appendix.⁴⁶

2.3 Economic statecraft since the end of World War II

Economic statecraft is a millennia-old tool for coercing foreign governments into changing their ways. World Wars I and II in particular shaped what were to become

⁴⁵ United Nations, “Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations. A/RES/79/1.” Action 1 (para. 20d); Action 5 (para. 24).

⁴⁶ See Appendix E.

the full embargoes and blockades that dominated most of 20th century.⁴⁷ Figure 1 illustrates how frequently the UN Security Council and individual states have used economic sanctions since 1950. Panel A covers the annual number of states under UN sanctions, while Panel B shows the number of states under unilateral sanctions by year.⁴⁸ Panel C shows the number of active sanctions regimes from 1950–2022 for selected sanctioning states and organizations. As an initial illustration, this shows several key trends in sanctions policy: the rapid increase in UN sanctions once the Security Council became unblocked following the end of the Cold War (Panel A), the steady rise in states under any type of economic sanctions (Panel B), and that the US in particular has significantly expanded its sanctions policy in the past ten years, both by sanctioning more states and by imposing numerous separate regimes against individual states (Panel C).

In sum, the stagnation and decrease of new UN sanctions and the increasingly poor enforcement of those that remain on the books on the one hand and the major increase of US and G7 sanctions on the other point to a clear trend: The UN’s “sanctions decade,” which empirically extended from the 1990s to the 2010s, has given way to an era of unilateral sanctions.

⁴⁷ Nicholas Mulder, *The Economic Weapon: The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022).

⁴⁸ This figure uses the Global Sanctions Database (GSDB) because of its large temporal coverage; Gabriel Felbermayr et al., “The Global Sanctions Data Base (GSDB),” *European Economic Review* 129 (October 2020): 103561, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euroecorev.2020.103561>. The GSDB seems to code voluntary UN sanctions (as opposed to only UNSC-mandated ones) in its “UN” category, potentially leading to a slightly more inclusive list of sanctioned countries. For instance, the UN’s Rhodesia sanctions were voluntary in 1965 and 1966 and were made mandatory in December 1966; Donald L. Losman, “Rhodesia: A Decade under Sanctions,” *Il Politico*, 1978, 324. The figure excludes sanctions regimes against non-state actors. See, e.g., the EUSANCT or IST datasets for alternative sources, though their coverage begins in 1989/90; Patrick M. Weber and Gerald Schneider, “Post-Cold War Sanctioning by the EU, the UN, and the US: Introducing the EUSANCT Dataset,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 39, no. 1 (2022): 97–114, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894220948729>; Hana Attia and Julia Grauvogel, “International Sanctions Termination, 1990–2018: Introducing the IST Dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research* 60, no. 4 (2023): 709–19, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433221087080>.

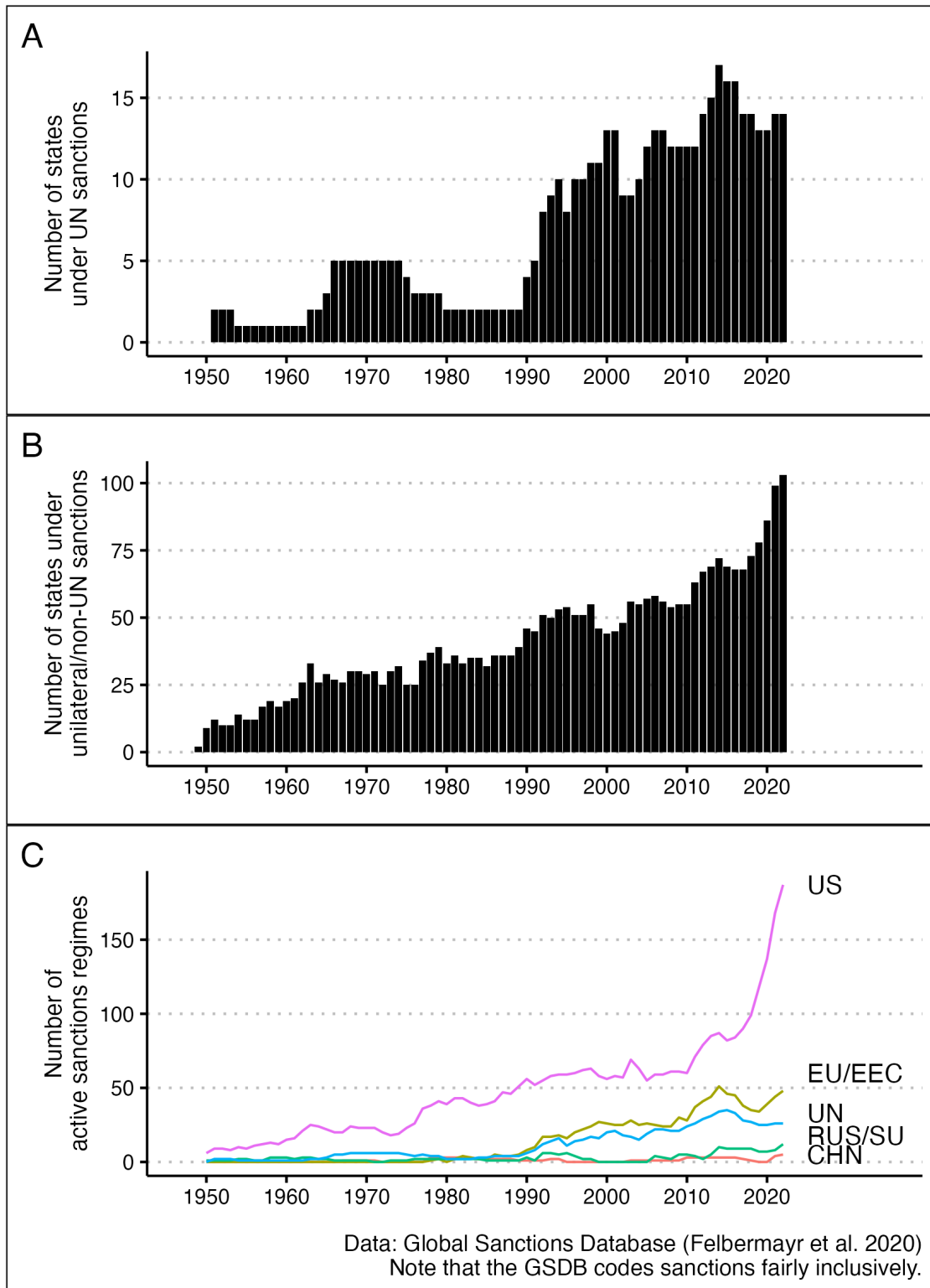


Figure 1: Unilateral and UN sanctions, 1950–2022.

2.4 UN sanctions since the end of the Cold War

As discussed, Figure 1 shows the rapid increase of UN sanctions from the 1990s onwards. Many new sanctions regimes were adopted in the 1990s “sanctions decade”⁴⁹ after the Security Council was no longer blocked.⁵⁰ The US in particular led UN sanctions policy in these years⁵¹ A peak of countries under UN sanctions in the mid-1990s decreased in the late 1990s and early 2000s as reports of massive humanitarian fallout and high child mortality in Iraq highlighted the unintended consequences of economic coercion.⁵² This led to a reconsideration of conventional embargoes and blockades, with new “targeted” or “smart” sanctions such as asset freezes and travel bans. Notably, this reform process had significant scholarly input and coordination.⁵³ It was also largely driven by Western governments beyond the P3, notably Switzerland, Germany, and Sweden.⁵⁴ Our interviewees include two of three coordinators of these processes.⁵⁵ In the wake of these innovations, the popularity of UN sanctions slowly increased once again from the mid-2000s onwards, again passing fifteen active regimes in the mid-2010s.

⁴⁹ Cortright and Lopez, *The Sanctions Decade*.

⁵⁰ A similar trend is evident regarding the deployment of UN peacekeeping missions.

⁵¹ Interview with Thomas Biersteker, see Appendix A.

⁵² Thomas G. Weiss, “Sanctions as a Foreign Policy Tool: Weighing Humanitarian Impulses,” *Journal of Peace Research* 36, no. 5 (1999): 499–509, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343399036005001>; However, see Tim Dyson and Valeria Cetorelli, “Changing Views on Child Mortality and Economic Sanctions in Iraq: A History of Lies, Damned Lies and Statistics,” *BMJ Global Health* 2, no. 2 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2017-000311>.

⁵³ Peter Wallensteen and Carina Staibano, eds., *International Sanctions: Between Words and Wars in the Global System* (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁵⁴ Interviews with Michael Brzoska and Thomas Biersteker, see Appendix A. For instance, within this larger review process, the Swiss government convened the “Interlaken Process” on financial sanctions, the German government the “Bonn–Berlin Process” on arms, aviation, and travel sanctions, and the Swedish government the “Stockholm Process” on sanctions implementation in the early 2000s. Peter Wallensteen, Carina Staibano, and Mikael Eriksson, eds., *Making Targeted Sanctions Effective: Guidelines for the Implementation of UN Policy Options* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2003), iii.

⁵⁵ See Appendix A.

More recently, however, a 2021 dossier in *Foreign Policy* forecast the “sunset for UN sanctions”: The imposition of new UN sanctions regimes has virtually ended and the enforcement of existing ones is increasingly being undermined.⁵⁶ The 2014 Yemen measures (S/RES/2140), the 2017 Mali sanctions (S/RES/2374; which have since been terminated via a draft veto by Russia),⁵⁷ and the 2022 Haiti sanctions (S/RES/2653) are the three most recent new regimes. Driving this trend is the fact that Russia and China have become increasingly unwilling to tolerate, let alone support, the type of UN sanctions that they might have supported in the past. Their motives cover both a general rejection of economic sanctions and hollowing out the tool as a whole, as well as more instrumental aims such as obscuring the activities of the Wagner Group in Africa and Chinese support for North Korean sanctions evasion.⁵⁸ Furthermore, a host of other states are hindering the implementation of UN sanctions by harassing the responsible Panels of Experts, not properly investigating murders of UN experts, and by facilitating sanctions evasion.⁵⁹ Since the closely coordinated and forceful US and EU sanctions against Russia in the wake of the country’s war of aggression against Ukraine, these developments have only accelerated.

3 Data and methods

To offer a comparative perspective on P5 and UNSC attitudes on UN sanctions – collectively, individually, and over time – we apply recent innovations in quantitative

⁵⁶ Lynch, “Sunset for U.N. Sanctions?”

⁵⁷ GA/12528, 11 September 2023.

⁵⁸ Edward Wong et al., “Armored Cars, Robots and Coal: North Korea Defies U.S. by Evading Sanctions,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/09/world/asia/north-korea-sanctions.html>; Lynch, “Sunset for U.N. Sanctions?”

⁵⁹ “DR Congo: Sham Trial for Murders of UN Experts,” *Human Rights Watch*, February 7, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/07/dr-congo-sham-trial-murders-un-experts>; Lynch, “Sunset for U.N. Sanctions?”

text analysis and natural language processing (NLP). A burgeoning literature on diplomatic language uses text-as-data methods to explore stances and attitudes. For instance, scholars have studied shifts in resolution topics⁶⁰ and compliance with peace agreements.⁶¹ Relying on diplomatic speeches and resolutions, others have analyzed how the P5 interpret the mandate of resolving “threats to international peace and security,”⁶² how they view the language around the “responsibility to protect,”⁶³ and how they frame complex humanitarian emergencies.⁶⁴ Importantly for our purposes, scholars have used UN speeches to derive foreign policy preferences, and even preferences on latent concepts such as the ‘liberal international order.’⁶⁵

We follow this line of research by using a Large Language Model (LLM) to derive attitudes towards sanctions from UNSC speeches between 1992 and 2023. Specifically, we use transformer attitude classification via API access to GPT-4o mini. Recent versions of ChatGPT have been shown to not only approximate human intuition

⁶⁰ Richard Hanania, “The Humanitarian Turn at the UNSC: Explaining the Development of International Norms through Machine Learning Algorithms,” *Journal of Peace Research* 58, no. 4 (2021): 655–70, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343320929728>.

⁶¹ Matthew Hauenstein and Madhav Joshi, “Remaining Seized of the Matter: UN Resolutions and Peace Implementation,” *International Studies Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (2020): 834–44, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqaa050>.

⁶² Takuto Sakamoto, “Threat Conceptions in Global Security Discourse: Analyzing the Speech Records of the United Nations Security Council, 1990–2019,” *International Studies Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (2023): sqad067, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqad067>.

⁶³ Felix S Bethke, Felix Haass, and Holger Niemann, “The Language of Responsibility in the United Nations Security Council, 1946–2020,” *International Studies Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2024): sqae025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqae025>; Johannes Scherzinger, “Unbowed, Unbent, Unbroken? Examining the Validity of the Responsibility to Protect,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 58, no. 1 (2022): 81–101, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00108367221093155>.

⁶⁴ Andrea Knapp, “Speaking of Civilians: Automated Text Analysis of the United Nations’ Framing of Complex Humanitarian Emergencies,” *International Interactions*, 2024, 1–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2024.2318559>.

⁶⁵ Alexander Baturo, Niheer Dasandi, and Slava J. Mikhaylov, “Understanding State Preferences with Text as Data: Introducing the UN General Debate Corpus,” *Research & Politics* 4, no. 2 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168017712821>; Alexander Kentikelenis and Erik Voeten, “Legitimacy Challenges to the Liberal World Order: Evidence from United Nations Speeches, 1970–2018,” *The Review of International Organizations* 16, no. 4 (2021): 721–54, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-020-09404-y>.

in their coding decisions, but also to outperform crowd coders on accuracy.⁶⁶ This is important for our purposes, as our corpus of 6.044 speeches mentioning UN sanctions makes reliable hand-coding infeasible.

We use the UNSC speeches dataset by Schönfeld et al. covering the 1992–2023 timeframe,⁶⁷ and process these speeches as natural language. In a first step, we limit our data to those speeches that mention sanctions by performing keyword-in-context matching around the lemmas `sanction*` and `embargo*` and keeping only those with a direct or nearest-neighbor match.⁶⁸ We then add meta-data, e.g., the name and country of the speaker, P5 status, and the agenda item for the speech.⁶⁹ Next, we manually examined whether the speeches indeed mention the use, authorization, or renewal of sanctions, which they do.⁷⁰ Finally, we drop speeches that discuss unilateral sanctions, as classified by GPT-4o mini.⁷¹ Thus, our unit of analysis is the UNSC member-sanctions-speech. In total, we analyze 6.044 such speeches. As part of our robustness strategy, we also use GPT-4o mini to estimate the salience of the topic “sanctions” in each speech and conduct the analysis with a minimum threshold for salience.⁷²

⁶⁶ Fabrizio Gilardi, Meysam Alizadeh, and Maël Kubli, “ChatGPT Outperforms Crowd Workers for Text-Annotation Tasks,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 120, no. 30 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2305016120>.

⁶⁷ Mirco Schoenfeld et al., “The UN Security Council Debates” (Harvard Dataverse, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/KGVSYH>.

⁶⁸ For example, we do this by matching on the lemma `sanct*` and account for any white spaces underscores or line breaks. Thus, the marker would pick up words like “sanctioning”, “sanctions-busting” but also terms such as “sanction regime”, etc. Kenneth Benoit et al., “Quanteda: An R Package for the Quantitative Analysis of Textual Data,” *Journal of Open Source Software* 3, no. 30 (2018): 774, <https://doi.org/10.21105/joss.00774>.

⁶⁹ Stian Rødven-Eide et al., “The UNSC-Graph: An Extensible Knowledge Graph for the UNSC Corpus,” in *Proceedings of the 3rd Workshop on Computational Linguistics for the Political and Social Sciences*, ed. Christopher Klamm et al. (Association for Computational Linguistics, 2023), 69–74, <https://aclanthology.org/2023.cpss-1.7>.

⁷⁰ Although rare in the context of the UNSC, the term “sanction” can linguistically also mean general greenlighting or punishment (as in “state-sanctioned terrorism” and “sanctioned behavior,” respectively).

⁷¹ See Appendix E on our procedure for doing so.

⁷² See Appendix F for these results.

Next, we use a “zero-shot” prompt instructing the LLM to read a given speech and make a coding decision on the speaker’s stance towards sanctions: supportive, neutral, or opposed. A “zero-shot” approach means that we rely on GPT’s general neural network training, rather than providing examples or training data. Recent work on this approach has shown that additional information does not necessarily guarantee better coding decisions.⁷³ Importantly, we directly prompt “stances” rather than “sentiment” to proxy attitudes.⁷⁴ While related, sentiment measures the tone around the item of interest, while stances reflect preferences or attitudes on an item of interest. In our case, this is a subtle but important difference. We not only want to understand how a speaker frames the use of UN sanctions in a particular speech and with respect to a concrete sanctions regime, but also want to understand the speaker's attitude towards sanctions more broadly. Figure 2 shows our prompt for stance detection.

GPT-4o mini prompt/input: stance detection
Please scale a diplomatic speech, provided below. Please decide whether the speaker has a supportive stance towards sanctions (denoted with 1), a negative stance towards sanctions (denoted with -1), or a neutral stance towards sanctions (denoted with 0). Please only reply with a number. Here is the speech:

Figure 2: Prompt for stance detection.

Before running our stance detection procedure on our full sample, we drew a random sample of speeches and let GPT explain its coding decision. We repeated this process and refined the prompt several times. Examples of output and reasonings are listed in Appendix C. One author and one research assistant also closely read and coded the

⁷³ Gilardi, Alizadeh, and Kubli, “ChatGPT Outperforms Crowd Workers for Text-Annotation Tasks.”
⁷⁴ Samuel E. Bestvater and Burt L. Monroe, “Sentiment Is Not Stance: Target-Aware Opinion Classification for Political Text Analysis,” *Political Analysis* 31, no. 2 (2023): 235–56, <https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2022.10>.

same 100 speeches. When comparing GPT’s reasons for its coding decisions to our own, the overlap was high, as was GPT’s nuance in assessing the stance.⁷⁵ We also computed formal benchmarks for validity and reliability (see Appendix G). GPT’s accuracy against a human coder sample of 100 sanctions speeches stood at 76.4% using zero-shot prompting. Its balanced accuracy was 80%. Intercoder reliability with two human coders achieved a Cohen’s Kappa of 0.6, indicating very high intercoder reliability. Keeping in mind that these are lengthy diplomatic speeches with technical vernacular and diplomatic jargon further convinced us of the utility of the method for the task at hand. After these promising manual results, we had GPT-4o mini code the attitudes toward sanctions in all 6,044 substantive UNSC speeches on UN sanctions from 1992–2023. To meet the standards for LLM robustness tests and to test prompt sensitivity,⁷⁶ we also reran the entire analysis with a paraphrased prompt (showing a 92% correlation in results), repeated the analysis using an alternative model (GPT-4.0), and conducted validity checks by examining the salience in agenda items (e.g., the agenda item “sanctions” contains 100% sanctions-related rhetoric). These and additional robustness tests are detailed in Appendices B, C, D, F, and G.

We also used the LLM to extract and judge two further pieces of information from the data: First, we obtained an assessment on the degree to which a speech indeed deals with the broad issue of sanctions, scored as a percentage (i.e., salience). Many speeches only mention sanctions briefly, as one of many topics. We include these less salient speeches in our main analysis, but our results remain the same if we exclude

⁷⁵ GPT could technically fully hallucinate the coding reasons, meaning that its rationale for coding and its final coding decision (–1, 0, 1) could be wholly unrelated. However, in our results, its stated reasons were consistently similar to our own human-coded ones.

⁷⁶ Christopher Barrie, Alexis Palmer, and Arthur Spirling, “Replication for Language Models: Problems, Principles, and Best Practice for Political Science,” 2024, http://arthurspirling.org/documents/BarriePalmerSpirling_TrustMeBro.pdf.

them (see Appendix F). Second, our analyses distinguish between statements on multilateral, UN sanctions and on unilateral sanctions. Given the growing global opposition and outspokenness against unilateral sanctions on the one hand and our primary research interest in UN-mandated sanctions on the other, we asked for an assessment of whether a given speech mainly focused on UN or unilateral sanctions. Based on these results, we only use speeches coded as covering multilateral, UN-mandated sanctions, as discussed and presented above. The prompt and results for this step are listed in Appendix E, as are the results on unilateral sanctions.

4 Results

Having laid out our data and the way we analyze it, we now present our empirical results on P5 and UNSC attitudes towards multilateral sanctions from 1992–2023. We do so by first presenting an overview of collective and individual attitudes, then characterizing Russian, Chinese, and P3 attitudes in greater detail, and finally distinguishing between permanent and elected and Western and non-Western UNSC members.

4.1 UN sanctions over the decades, 1992–2023

Figure 3 provides an initial overview of the universe of Council speeches by the P5 by year (Panel A), the shares of those speeches that concerned UN sanctions (Panel B), and the degree to which individual P5 members focused on UN sanctions in their speeches (Panel C). This shows that the P5 have increased their general Council activities since about 2014, with the annual number of speeches more than doubling

compared to the 1992–2013 timeframe. On the whole, UN sanctions are mentioned in these speeches to varying degrees: in around 23% of speeches from 1995–2000, 16% of speeches from 2001–10, and about 17% of speeches from 2011–23. Therefore, despite the 1990s being the UN’s “sanctions decade,”⁷⁷ sanctions are only somewhat less prominent in today’s Council minutes. When examining these shares by P5 members, we find that France has historically mentioned sanctions most frequently (22.9% of its Council speeches) and China most rarely (14.3%).⁷⁸

Next, Figure 4 zooms in on P5 attitudes towards UN sanctions: It illustrates the number of sanctions-related speeches each P5 Council member held annually from 1992–2023, broken down by whether these speeches were supportive of, neutral, or in opposition to UN sanctions. This shows an increase in the total number of speeches on UN sanctions, running in parallel to the overall increase in UNSC speeches (recall Panel A in Figure 3). It also shows a clear split in opinion between the P3 on the one hand and Russia and China on the other. While the P3 have overwhelmingly spoken about UN sanctions in supportive terms,⁷⁹ Russia and China assess them more neutrally and negatively. However, beyond this surface-level split, Russia and China show different patterns. China has been a consistent critic of sanctions, at about 55%, 30%, 34%, and 42% of its sanctions-related speeches from 1992–1999, 2000–2009, 2010–2019, and 2020 to 2023 respectively. China’s outspokenness in absolute terms, however, is a very recent development: Before 2019, it had never held more than 17 speeches covering UN sanctions within a year, but in 2022 and 2023, it held 46 and

⁷⁷ Cortright and Lopez, *The Sanctions Decade*; Margaret Doxey, “Reflections on the Sanctions Decade and Beyond,” *International Journal* 64, no. 2 (2009): 539–49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002070200906400212>.

⁷⁸ 1992–2023: China 14.3%; France 22.9%, Russia 17.8%, UK 16.4%, USA 18.1%.

⁷⁹ With France being somewhat more neutral than the US and the UK; at 28.2%, 13.9%, and 12.8% of their sanctions-related speeches, respectively, from 1995–2020. This slight difference is consistent through the decades covered by the analysis.

38, respectively. Meanwhile, Russia was once fairly supportive of UN sanctions – with 75% of its UN sanctions-related speeches from 1992–2009 being supportive or neutral – but has turned decisively against the tool since 2011, explicitly opposing them in 54% of its relevant speeches since.⁸⁰ This makes Russia the strongest opponent of UN sanctions among the P5 today (i.e., in the 2020s).

Figure 5 compiles each of the P5’s mean support for sanctions by year, with each supportive speech scored as +1, neutral speeches as 0, and opposed speeches as – 1. The red horizontal line indicates the threshold between net positive and net negative attitudes. This figure again highlights key Council trends on sanctions: The US and UK are the most vocal supporters of the tool, closely followed by the slightly more reserved France. China has consistently leaned towards opposing sanctions – its trendline is reliably at or below zero throughout. Russia, after about a decade of relative support in the 2000s, has become the clearest critic of sanctions on the Council today.

Finally, we widen our focus beyond the P5. Table 1 and Figure 6 aggregate attitudes towards UN sanctions in four ways: by permanent/elected countries and by Western/non-Western countries. “Western” is here defined as all countries who are currently members of NATO, the EU, or the UNSC’s “Western European and Others Group” (WEOG). This takes up the critique that sanctions are mainly used by powerful Western states against all others. The results show high support for UN sanctions by both elected and permanent Western Council members. However, “non-Western” states diverge significantly in their support and opposition to UN sanctions: Russia and

⁸⁰ Shares for Russia in these timeframes:
1992–1999: 43.4% support, 23.9% neutral, 32.6% oppose.
2000–2009: 51.7% support, 28.4% neutral, 19.8% oppose.
2010–2019: 32.1% support, 20.9% neutral, 46.9% oppose.
2020–2023: 16.9% support, 16.9% neutral, 66.1% oppose.

China have opposed UN sanctions in a plurality of their speeches, while elected non-Western states are far more supportive, though not as supportive as Western states. While we find a clear turn towards opposition by Russia and China in recent years, there is no substantial downtick among elected non-Western members (see Figure 6). That said, we do find increasingly strong opposition by these states to *unilateral* sanctions, which we explore further in Appendix E. This suggests that states beyond the West hold differentiated views on sanctions and have not adopted Russia and China’s wholesale opposition to the tool. Overall, elected non-Western states have been – and remain – supporters of multilateral, UN-mandated sanctions.

Table 1: Attitudes on UN sanctions by UNSC member type, 1992–2023.

Type	Supportive			Neutral		Opposed		Mean
	N	N	Share	N	Share	N	Share	
West/Elected	1181	905	76.6%	254	21.5%	22	1.9%	0.75
France, UK, USA	1523	1286	84.4%	211	13.9%	26	1.7%	0.83
Non-West/Elected	2415	1339	55.4%	823	34.1%	253	10.5%	0.45
China, Russia	925	305	33.0%	238	25.7%	382	41.3%	-0.08
All UNSC members	6044	3835	63.5%	1526	25.2%	683	11.3%	0.52

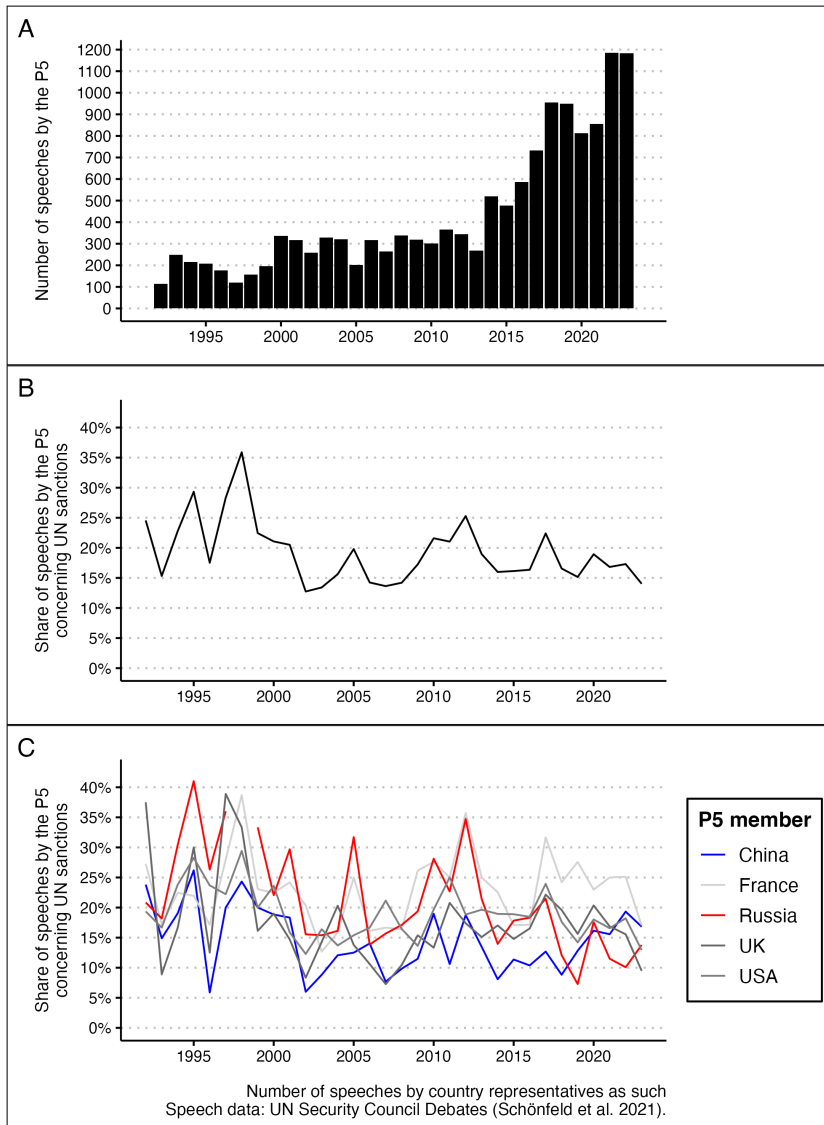


Figure 3: UNSC speeches by the P5 in total and on sanctions, 1992–2023.

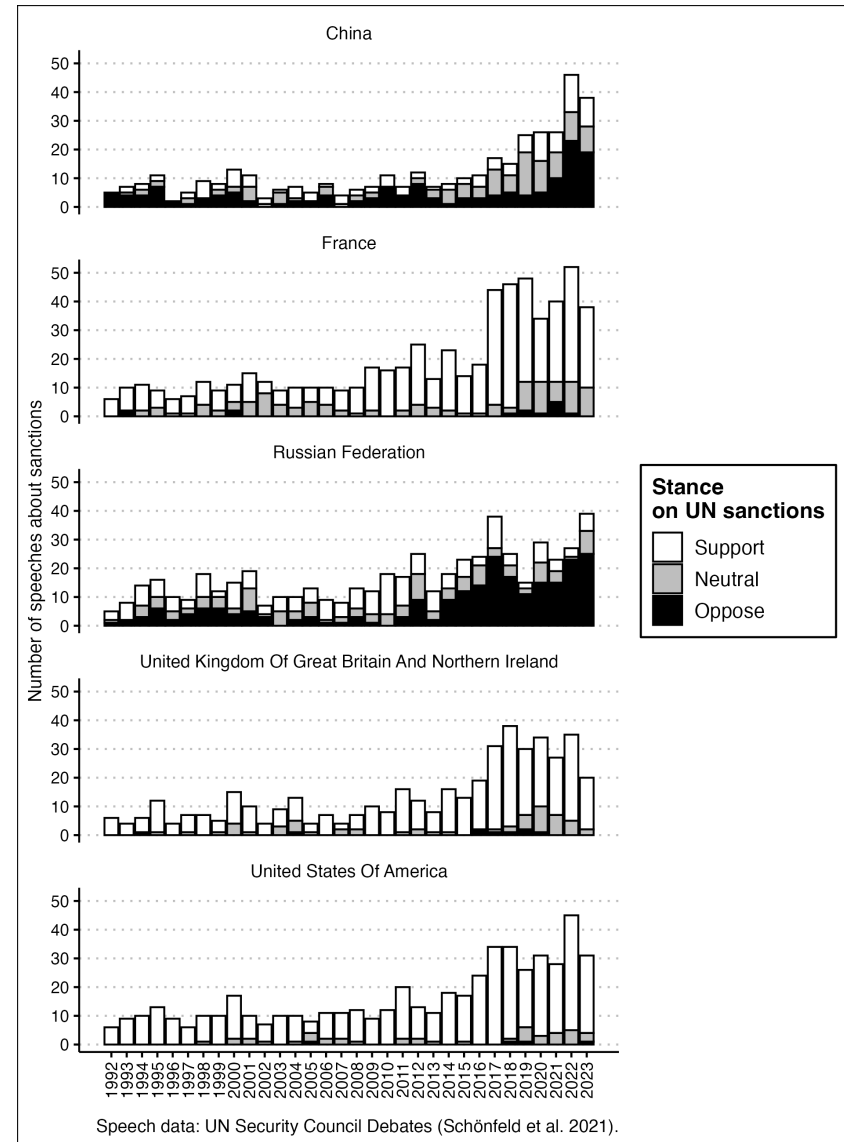


Figure 4: P5 speeches on sanctions in the UN Security Council, 1992–2023.

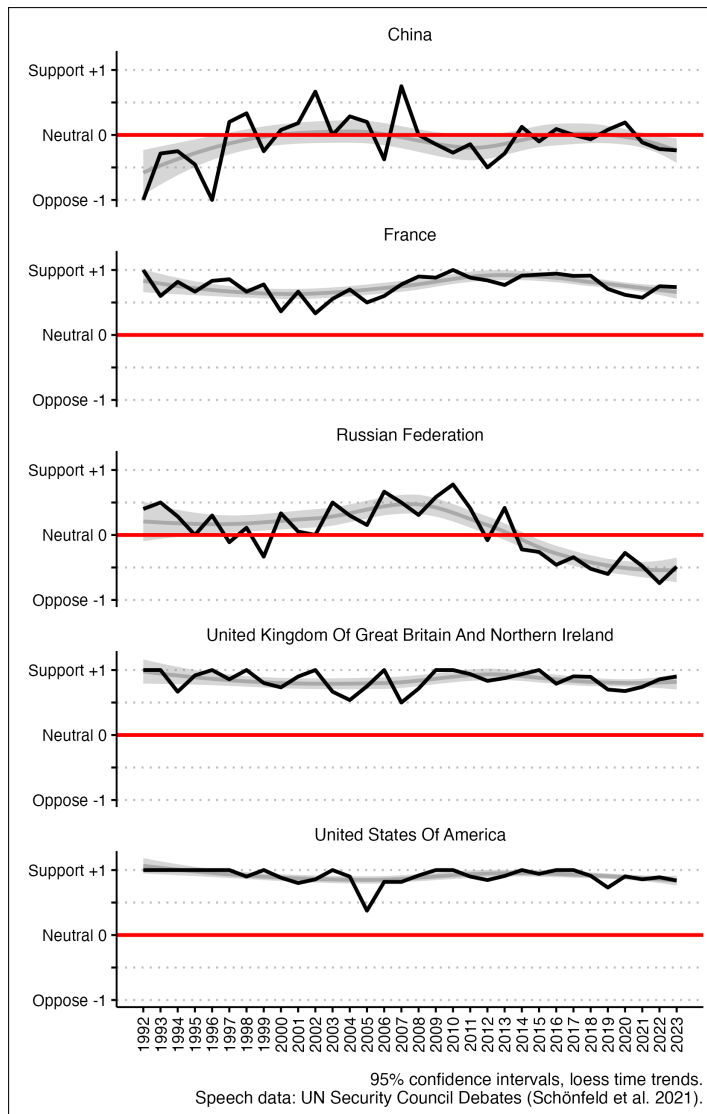


Figure 5: Individual P5 mean attitudes on UN sanctions in the UNSC, 1992–2023.

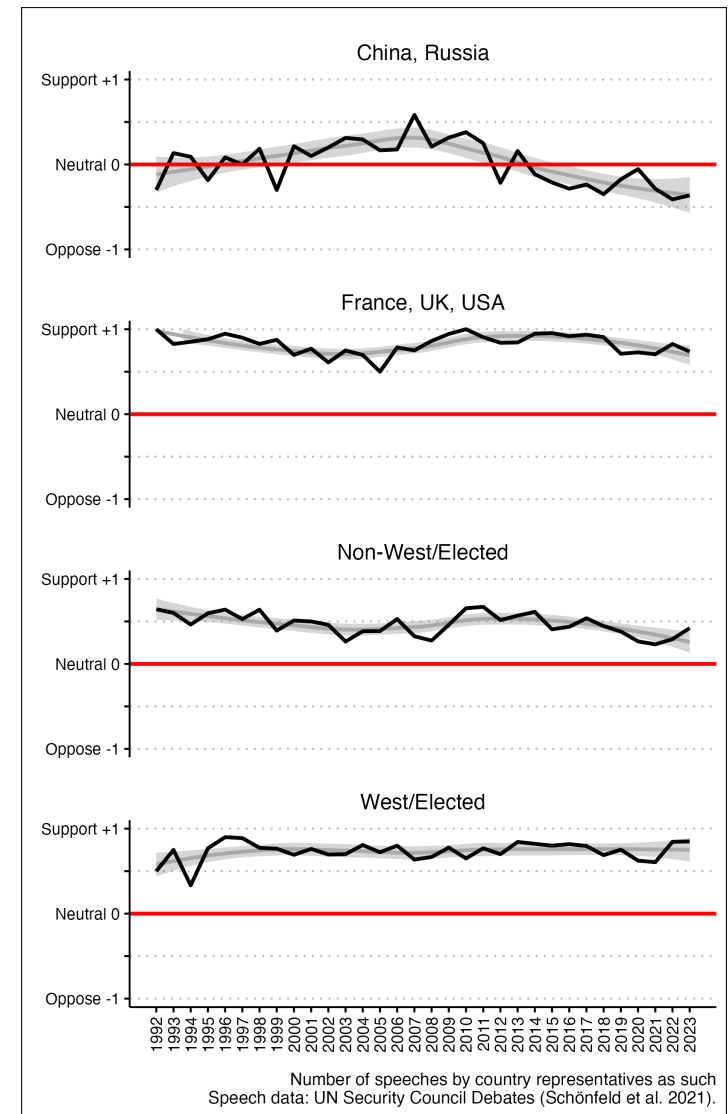


Figure 6: Mean attitudes on UN sanctions by UNSC membership type, 1992–2023.

4.2 Russia: limited support to total opposition

Among the P5, we find that Russia has undergone the greatest shift in its views on UN sanctions over the decades. Among the six thematic UNSC debates on sanctions that have been held since 1995, Russia voiced balanced and neutral views in 2000, 2001, and 2003,⁸¹ and strongly negative ones in 2014, 2016, 2017.⁸² However, these positions and changes have not been examined in greater detail in the canonical works on the subject.⁸³ We therefore characterize Russia's changing attitudes and preferences on the Security Council as it relates to UN sanctions by way of a timeline of key events alongside our measures of attitudes in Council speeches.

Russian opposition in the late 1990s largely concerned disapproval of the Iraq sanctions over humanitarian fallout⁸⁴ as well as a push for easing the Yugoslavia sanctions, while it vocally supported the Angola/UNITA sanctions regime.⁸⁵ Western states led most of the reforms towards targeted sanctions in the 1990s and 2000s (see Section 2.4), a move that was largely tolerated by Russia, though not actively supported. This relative Russian non-engagement can be explained by the country's domestic disarray in the 1990s and by the fact that Russia had little weight as a banking power with respect to some of the targeted reforms being considered, such as individual asset freezes.

⁸¹ UNSC_2000_SPV.4128 (17 April 2000); UNSC_2001_SPV.4394 (25 October 2001); UNSC_2003_SPV.4713 (25 February 2003).

⁸² UNSC_2014_SPV.7323 (25 November 2014); UNSC_2016_SPV.7620 (11 February 2016); UNSC_2017_SPV.8018 (03 August 2017). Meanwhile, the UK and the US voiced support in all six; France in five of six; and China opposed twice, remained neutral three times, and was carefully supportive once.

⁸³ For instance, the important *International Affairs* special issue from 2015 or the foundational collection compiled by Wallensteen and Staibano; see, for instance, the volume's index at "Russia," Wallensteen and Staibano, *International Sanctions*, 250.

⁸⁴ E.g., UNSC_1999_SPV.4070 (19 November 1999).

⁸⁵ E.g., UNSC_1998_SPV.3891 (12 June 1998).

In 2000, Russia brokered the Ethiopia/Eritrea sanctions, a notable exception in that it otherwise had not taken the lead in negotiating such resolutions.⁸⁶ This roughly marked the point at which Russian attitudes on UN sanctions turned net positive for about ten years: Russia had a favorable view on UN sanctions every year from 2000–2011. This support in the 2000s was driven by positive statements on sanctions regimes relating to conflicts in Africa (Angola, Sierra Leone) and on terrorism-related sanctions (Afghanistan, Somalia). For instance, on the latter, Islamic terrorism and WMD proliferation to terrorist groups was a Russian concern.⁸⁷

This net positive attitude took a dramatic downturn starting in 2011 with two major world events: the deterioration of the Libyan civil war and the concurrent UNSC Resolution (S/RES/1973), from which Russia and China abstained, and the ever-escalating Syrian civil war. Furthermore, and importantly, Russia itself became the target of sanctions on the part of Western states from 2014 onwards, following the start of its war on Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea in February and March of that year. It has since driven an effort at the UN to counter “unilateral coercive measures” (UCMs; see Section 2.2).

Today, Russia is the clearest opponent of UN sanctions on the Council (recall footnote 80), surpassing even the longstanding Chinese level of opposition we describe in the following section. These objections support the end or easing of several ongoing UN sanctions regimes, especially in African states and on North Korea.⁸⁸ In sum, we find

⁸⁶ Michael Brzoska, “International Sanctions before and beyond UN Sanctions,” *International Affairs* 91, no. 6 (November 2015): 1342, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12449>.

⁸⁷ UNSC_2006_SPV.5446 (30 May 2006).

⁸⁸ E.g., in Guinea-Bissau, UNSC_2020_SPV.8736 (28 February 2020); and the Central African Republic UNSC_2020_SPV.8750 (28 July 2020).

that Russia has undergone the most dramatic change in attitude to UN sanctions among the P5, turning from careful support in the 2000s to near-total opposition today.

4.3 China: consistent opposition and increasing outspokenness

Similarly to Russia, there is a notable absence of in-depth characterizations of the changes and consistencies of China's position on UN sanctions⁸⁹ – perhaps largely due to its relative inaction or lack of active participation on Council resolution drafting⁹⁰ and broader policymaking on sanctions.

China often sees multilateral and unilateral sanctions as a form of unwarranted intervention in the targeted state's domestic affairs. Given its government's strong sovereigntist attitudes, China has historically been the greatest skeptic of sanctions on the Council, and wary of their imposition and extension. Common arguments against uni- and multilateral sanctions by the Chinese delegation include humanitarian consequences and interference in internal affairs.⁹¹ Furthermore, China stresses the instrumental role of UN sanctions, rather than normative signaling or punishment: "Sanctions are a means, not an end." – Chinese representatives have used this phrase dozens of times in their UNSC speeches, and with increasing regularity in recent years.

⁸⁹ E.g., the *International Affairs* special issue from 2015, or Wallenstein and Staibano; Wallenstein and Staibano, *International Sanctions*, 247.

⁹⁰ Andrea Charron and Clara Portela, "The UN, Regional Sanctions and Africa," *International Affairs* 91, no. 6 (2015): 1372, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12452>; Brzoska, "International Sanctions before and beyond UN Sanctions," 1342.

⁹¹ E.g., UNSC_2008_SPV.5933 (11 July 2008) on Zimbabwe: "More important, the development of the situation in Zimbabwe to date has not gone beyond the realm of internal affairs. It does not constitute a threat to the world's peace and security. [...] By adopting a resolution imposing sanctions on Zimbabwe now, the Security Council would unavoidably be interfering with the negotiating process."

In the 1990s, China was highly critical of UN sanctions regimes (recall Figure 4 and Figure 5), most frequently those on Iraq over its invasion of Kuwait.⁹² Beyond individual cases, China's skepticism was also evident throughout the reforms surrounding 'targeted sanctions.' For instance, in the 2000 general debate on sanctions, the Chinese representative highlighted his government's overriding doubts towards the effectiveness and general utility of UN sanctions.⁹³

Some of these sanctions have managed to have certain effects, while the majority have fallen short of the expected results; in some cases, there have been severe consequences. [...] That is why China has consistently maintained that resort to sanctions should not be made easy.

This general opposition has remained consistent over the decades. However, China has supported several sanctions regimes imposed against non-state actors – as these do not violate China's conception of state sovereignty.⁹⁴ While Wuthnow concludes that China's "rhetorical objections [in remarks on sanctions-related votes] largely disappeared" in the 2000s compared to the 1990s,⁹⁵ this is not a clear trend in our measurement of speech attitudes.⁹⁶ Rather than Chinese attitudes in the 2000s "to a

⁹² E.g., UNSC_1997_SPV.3792 (21 June 1997) and UNSC_2000_SPV.4120 (24 March 2000): "Fifthly, we have always maintained that sanctions against Iraq will not help solve the problem. On the contrary, they will lead to tremendous humanitarian consequences. As a matter of fact, the 10-year sanctions have brought incalculable suffering to innocent Iraqi civilians. This is an objective and incontrovertible fact. This is by no means the original intention and purpose of the Security Council in imposing the sanctions."

⁹³ UNSC_2000_SPV.4128 (17 April 2000).

⁹⁴ E.g., against UNITA in Angola, UNSC_2000_SPV.4178 (27 July 2000); and Al Qaeda and the Taliban, UNSC_2004_SPV.4892 (12 January 2004).

⁹⁵ "At the same time, China's rhetorical objections largely disappeared. To illustrate, in the 1990s China's representative had made comments in 43 of 52 (82.7 per cent) sanctions-related votes, stressing civilian costs, sovereignty and other issues. By contrast, in the 2000s, remarks were issued in only 21 of 99 votes on sanctions (21.2 per cent)." – Joel Wuthnow, *Chinese Diplomacy and the UN Security Council: Beyond the Veto* (London: Routledge, 2015), 29.

⁹⁶ At least for 1995–1999 vs. 2000–2009.

degree, bec[oming] more similar to those of the USA and others,”⁹⁷ we find consistent outright opposition or begrudging tolerance on the part of the Chinese government.⁹⁸ Furthermore, China notably vetoed UNSC resolutions on Myanmar and Zimbabwe sanctions in 2007 and 2008, respectively.⁹⁹ What has changed in recent years is the Chinese delegation’s outspokenness: While consistently critical, it was once the least common P5 speaker on sanctions-related issues. Today, it mentions sanctions frequently. This very recent uptick reflects China’s increasingly assertive foreign policy, at times called “wolf-warrior diplomacy.”¹⁰⁰

Chinese attitudes on sanctions in the 2010s remained neutral or negative. A prominent UN sanctions case around this time North Korea, on which China was somewhat neutral or supportive in the 2000s and 2010s,¹⁰¹ but has since voiced more overt opposition.¹⁰² The late 2010s and early 2020s mark a further downturn in support. Most recently, China’s concerns about sanctions stress humanitarian fallout and interference in internal affairs in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰³ In sum, we find that China has consistently voiced opposition to UN sanctions over the decades, but that it has become significantly more outspoken on sanctions issues in recent years.

⁹⁷ Wuthnow, *Chinese Diplomacy and the UN Security Council*, 29.

⁹⁸ Shares for China in these timeframes:
1992–1999: 29.0% support, 16.3% neutral, 54.5% oppose.
2000–2009: 40.0% support, 30.0% neutral, 30.0% oppose.
2010–2019: 26.0% support, 39.8% neutral, 34.1% oppose.
2020–2023: 29.4% support, 28.6% neutral, 41.9% oppose.

⁹⁹ Andrew Garwood-Gowers, “China and the ‘Responsibility to Protect’: The Implications of the Libyan Intervention,” *Asian Journal of International Law* 2, no. 2 (2012): 389, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S204425131200015X>.

¹⁰⁰ Martin, *China’s Civilian Army*.

¹⁰¹ E.g., UNSC_2009_SPV.6141 (12 June 2009) and UNSC_2016_SPV.7821 (30 November 2016).

¹⁰² E.g., UNSC_2019_SPV.8682 (11 December 2019).

¹⁰³ E.g., UNSC_2020_SPV.2020_635 (29 June 2020) on unilateral sanctions on Syria; or UNSC_2020_SPV.2020_1129 (19 November 2020) on the UN’s Libya sanctions: “At the same time the implementation of sanctions should avoid harming the overall national interests of Libya and the normal livelihoods and humanitarian needs of the people, especially to avoid a negative impact on Libya’s fight against the coronavirus disease pandemic.”

4.4 The P3: consistent support

The P3's positions have received ample attention in the sanctions literature, so we will largely focus on contrasting our empirical results with those for Russia and China. The P3 drove UN sanctions policy in the 1990s, and remain in the lead on many UNSC sanctions resolutions today.¹⁰⁴ Through the 2000s, the US in particular set the agenda on the vast majority of UN sanctions regimes,¹⁰⁵ underscoring their supportive views on the tool over the decades. A main distinction we might make among the P3 is that France had an initial phase of relative neutrality in the late 1990s and early 2000s, before essentially turning fully in favor in the mid-2000s, and remaining in line with the very supportive US and UK positions ever since (recall Figure 4 and Figure 5). Furthermore, our analyses of speeches on unilateral sanctions (see Appendix E) show that while the US regularly speaks out in favor of its own sanctions regimes, France and the UK rarely speak about unilateral sanctions in the Council today.

5 Conclusion

Policymakers and pundits are pessimistic about the future of multilateral, UN-mandated sanctions. We provide evidence that these assessments are warranted and likely not exaggerated: Russia's strong attitudinal shift and China's persistent objections and dwindling tolerance for UN sanctions are indeed longer-term, entrenched trends in their publicly revealed preferences. The room for UN-mandated

¹⁰⁴ Brzoska, "International Sanctions before and beyond UN Sanctions," 1342.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Thomas Biersteker, see Appendix A.

sanctions has therefore significantly narrowed in recent years. Meanwhile, the Western shift towards using unilateral sanctions as a self-admitted “tool of first resort”¹⁰⁶ has been met with strong opposition in the Council not only by China and Russia, but also by many other states beyond the West. While we show that these latter states remain quite supportive of UN sanctions, overreliance on unilateral sanctions by the US in particular likely also complicates the case for coordinated, multilateral approaches in the Council.

We conclude by distilling key findings from the past 30 years of UN sanctions, how these might generalize to broader developments surrounding the global security order and multilateral UN action, and what the future of UN sanctions might be.

First, what have we learned about UN sanctions? Through a novel method for using UN Security Council speeches as data, we show that Russian and Chinese opposition to UN sanctions is not only evident in their maneuvering with respect to the sanctions committees,¹⁰⁷ but can also be clearly measured in their speeches at the Council. Our findings modify the characterization of Russia as a “loud dissenter” and China as a “cautious partner” to Russia when it comes to humanitarian and other issues.¹⁰⁸ Rather, while Russia has always often been somewhat skeptical, the country flipped from support in the 2000s to very vocal opposition from the 2010s onwards. Meanwhile, China has fairly consistently been neutral or opposed to UN sanctions since 1992, largely on state sovereignty, non-interference, and humanitarian grounds.

¹⁰⁶ US Department of the Treasury, “The Treasury – 2021 Sanctions Review,” 1; Drezner, “How Not To Sanction,” 1534.

¹⁰⁷ Lynch, “Sunset for U.N. Sanctions?”

¹⁰⁸ Aglaya Snetkov and Marc Lanteigne, “The Loud Dissenter and Its Cautious Partner’ - Russia, China, Global Governance and Humanitarian Intervention,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 15, no. 1 (2015): 136, <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcu018>.

Though starting at different points in time, the clearest commonality between the two is their strong contemporary opposition. UN sanctions – which had long been a matter of relative agreement in the Council – have today turned into a polarizing issue. These changes in attitude and behavior map onto broader trends for the two countries: a Russian sense of betrayal following the 2011 Libya resolution,¹⁰⁹ support for Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, and post-2014 Western sanctions on Russia; and the roll-out of China’s assertive “wolf-warrior diplomacy.”¹¹⁰ Furthermore, US overreliance on unilateral sanctions under presidents Trump and Biden has sparked vocal opposition on the part of Russia and China, potentially bleeding into debates and views on multilateral sanctions more broadly. While past analyses have downplayed the possibility of a “partnership of spoilers” between Russia and China in global governance,¹¹¹ opposition to unilateral sanctions was a key issue at the October 2023 Xi–Putin summit in Beijing.¹¹² Our analysis shows that their interests in limiting and speaking out against UN sanctions are also closely aligned.

Second, what implications does this carry for the global security order? We have argued that international peace and security are the foundational components of any conception of a desirable global order. In line with the UN Charter, UN sanctions have been a key tool in times of crisis and for the maintenance of peace. However, they

¹⁰⁹ Judy Dempsey, “Russia, Syria and the Arab Spring” (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 6, 2012), <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2012/02/russia-syria-and-the-arab-spring>; Sakari Ishetiar, “Echoes of Abstention: Russian Policy in Libya and Implications for Regional Stability” (Journal of Public & International Affairs, May 21, 2019), <https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/echoes-abstention-russian-policy-libya-and-implications-regional-stability>.

¹¹⁰ Martin, *China’s Civilian Army*.

¹¹¹ Snetkov and Lanteigne, “‘The Loud Dissenter and Its Cautious Partner’ - Russia, China, Global Governance and Humanitarian Intervention,” 136.

¹¹² Xi Jinping: “What we stand against are unilateral sanctions, economic coercion and decoupling and supply chain disruption.” David Pierson, Anatoly Kurmanaev, and Tiffany May, “With Putin by His Side, Xi Outlines His Vision of a New World Order” (New York Times, October 18, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/18/world/asia/putin-xi-china-russia.html>.

have become increasingly rare since the 2010s (i.e., Yemen, Mali, Haiti), and our analyses find that P5 net attitudes are becoming increasingly tepid. This trend is mirrored by the notable increase in overt UNSC vetoes. If a key tool for maintaining global peace and security is essentially no longer at the UNSC's disposal, the Council's ability to respond to crises will be severely hamstrung. In this light, however, the dual finding that non-Western states beyond Russia and China object to unilateral sanctions but remain net supporters of UN sanctions regimes is important. Despite strong opposition to UN sanctions by Russia and China and heavy-handed unilateral sanctions policy by the United States, many states continue to see Council-mandated sanctions as an important tool for maintaining the global security order.

Third and finally, what might the future of UN sanctions be? Once a tool of multilateral action and relative consensus, multilateral UN sanctions have become increasingly rare. Russia and China today vocally oppose them, while the US government under both Donald Trump and Joe Biden has increasingly turned to wide-ranging unilateral sanctions in a manner many deem excessive.¹¹³ That said, our analyses and interviews have also highlighted consistent areas of cooperation on sanctions, namely, sanctions against non-state actors, including on transnational crime and on terrorism. These are two of the very few issue areas on which the P5 continue to have some nominal common interests, each for their own domestic contexts. If UN sanctions are to remain a tool for shaping world order and maintaining international peace and security, these areas of cooperation are vital.

¹¹³ Drezner, "How Not To Sanction."

6 Online appendices

6.1 Appendix A: Interview partners and strategy

Table 2 shows our list of interview partners. They span many areas of expertise, timeframes of activity, and professional backgrounds. We conducted our interviews in three parts and in a semi-structured manner. First, we asked our interviewees several open-ended questions about the evolution of all P5 members' positions on UN sanctions from 1990 to present. We also asked about the roles of the P5 and other states during the 1990s/2000s sanctions reforms, in which several of our interview partners were directly involved. Second, we summarized the main results of our analyses, primarily by presenting the figures contained in the main text, asking our interviewees for their interpretation of these results, and offering our own. We only did this in a second step so as not to prime the interviewees in any particular direction. Third and finally, we asked the experts for their thoughts on situations and issue areas on which there might still be room for compromise between the P5 on UN sanctions today.

Table 2: Interview partners.

Interviewee	Date	Short bio
1 Bryan Early	04.12.2024	Professor, University at Albany, SUNY; Founding Director, PISCES .
2 Michael Brzoska	12.12.2024	Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH); Coordinator/Editor, Bonn-Berlin Process .
3 Thomas Biersteker	16.12.2024	Gasteyger Professor Honoraire, Graduate Institute, Geneva; Coordinator, Interlaken Process .
4 (...)		
5 (...)		

6.2 Appendix B: Coding validity check by agenda item

We conducted several validity checks to probe whether our results line up with expert opinion, conventional wisdom, and our intuitions. In this appendix, we present the coding results broken down by thematic issues and specific country situations, and probe whether the shares of oppose/neutral/support are similar to the conventional wisdom on these.

Table 3 shows all country-specific agenda items in which UN sanctions were discussed. Table 4 shows all thematic agenda items in the same fashion. To keep them concise and useful, both tables only contain those agenda items with minimum of ten sanctions-related speeches held. The tables are sorted in descending order by their share of “opposed” speeches, i.e., from most to least opposed. Finally, Table 5 compares overall stances on country-specific versus thematic agenda items. All three tables indicate that the coding procedure has high face validity.

When sorted by opposition, towards the top, we find important, controversial instances of UN sanctions in Table 3, including the Iraq sanctions that led to the reforms towards “targeted sanctions,” as well as sanctions on Sudan which are deemed to have been almost entirely ineffective.¹¹⁴ Towards the bottom, we find UN sanctions regimes that were generally supported, uncontroversial, and deemed successful, including the South Africa sanctions and several West African programs.

¹¹⁴ Biersteker, Eckert, and Tourinho, *Targeted Sanctions*, 291.

Table 4, which covers thematic debates rather than specific country situations, shows that these types of debates are less controversial – i.e., they have lower rates of opposition to UN sanctions – because they are more general and programmatic, and typically do not lead to immediate UN action. This is in line with our expectations on UNSC debates. Within this less polarizing and more general format, non-proliferation ranks among the more controversial issues, while terrorism is among the least controversial, as we would expect given all P5 members’ individual interests around combatting terrorism.

Table 5 compares the results for these two categories; country-specific and thematic debates. It shows that country-specific debates elicit somewhat more opposition than thematic debates do. If we compare the “distribution” columns in Table 3 and Table 4, we also see that that the variance of opposition and support is higher among country debates: While six country situations receive 20%+ opposition, only a single thematic issue does (and it is one that itself relates to country situations; “West Africa”).

If we include speeches on unilateral sanctions, which we do not in our main analyses, the table is headlined by polarizing (among the P5) situations concerning unilateral measures, such as Zimbabwe in the 2000s, Syria in the 2010s, and Venezuela in the 2020s. This is also firmly in line with our expectations.

Table 3: Aggregated stances on country-specific UNSC agenda items, 1992–2023.

Agenda Item	N	Number			Percentage (%)			Distribution
		Oppose	Neutral	Support	Oppose	Neutral	Support	
Sudan	59	18	10	31	31	17	53	
Bosnia & Herzegovina	163	45	12	106	28	7	65	
Sudan/South Sudan	321	86	61	174	27	19	54	
Iraq/Kuwait	245	58	50	137	24	20	56	
Syria	128	28	22	78	22	17	61	
Kosovo	47	10	20	17	21	43	36	
Former Yugoslavia	28	5	4	19	18	14	68	
Guinea-Bissau	42	7	8	27	17	19	64	
Israel/Palestine	64	10	33	21	16	52	33	
Iraq	30	4	11	15	13	37	50	
CAR	133	17	27	89	13	20	67	
Mali	89	9	27	53	10	30	60	
DRC	121	12	33	76	10	27	63	
Haiti	140	12	10	118	9	7	84	
Libya	481	38	218	225	8	45	47	
Burundi	13	1	1	11	8	8	85	
Yemen	117	9	42	66	8	36	56	
Somalia	284	21	83	180	7	29	63	
Djibouti/Horn Of Africa	15	1	3	11	7	20	73	
DPRK	17	1	2	14	6	12	82	
Ukraine	51	3	8	40	6	16	78	
Afghanistan	194	11	57	126	6	29	65	
Rwanda	49	2	9	38	4	18	78	
Liberia	74	2	18	54	3	24	73	
Angola	174	3	12	159	2	7	91	
Côte D'ivoire	32	0	11	21	0	34	66	
Sierra Leone	65	0	15	50	0	23	77	
South Africa	15	0	2	13	0	13	87	

Table 4: Aggregated stances on thematic UNSC agenda items, 1992–2023.

Agenda Item	N	Number			Percentage (%)			Distribution
		Oppose	Neutral	Support	Oppose	Neutral	Support	
West Africa	28	7	6	15	25	21	54	
Non-Proliferation	712	126	124	462	18	17	65	
An Agenda For Peace	13	2	6	5	15	46	38	
Central African Region	20	3	3	14	15	15	70	
Maintenance Of Int'l Peace & Sec.	193	27	55	111	14	28	58	
Sanctions	118	16	22	80	14	19	68	
Humanitarian Assistance	15	2	4	9	13	27	60	
Regional Organizations	50	5	22	23	10	44	46	
Others	141	14	63	64	10	45	45	
Rule Of Law	42	3	15	24	7	36	57	
Conflict Prevention	15	1	10	4	7	67	27	
Children And Armed Conflict	94	6	26	62	6	28	66	
Threats To Int'l Peace & Sec.	33	2	9	22	6	27	67	
Great Lakes	17	1	8	8	6	47	47	
Protection Of Civilians	110	6	32	72	5	29	65	
Procedure Rules	37	2	25	10	5	68	27	
Small Arms	139	7	33	99	5	24	71	
Security Council Mission	21	1	12	8	5	57	38	
Africa	135	4	45	86	3	33	64	
Terrorism	704	18	143	543	3	20	77	
Peacekeeping	40	1	16	23	2	40	57	
Women And Peace And Security	82	1	11	70	1	13	85	

Table 5: Comparison of stances on country-specific and thematic agenda items, 1992–2023.

Agenda Item Type	N	Number			Percentage (%)		
		Oppose	Neutral	Support	Oppose	Neutral	Support
Country-specific	3252	422	824	2006	13	25	62
Thematic	2783	258	700	1825	9	25	66

6.3 Appendix C: LLM prompts and example output

This appendix presents an exchange with GPT-4o mini to test its coding. We provide the LLM with two speeches quoted in the introduction of our study regarding North Korean missile launches over Japan in 2022. The first is by US ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the second by Russian deputy representative Anna Evstigneeva. As we do throughout, we ask for a decision on whether the speech is opposed to, neutral on, or supportive of UN sanctions (-1/0/+1). We also ask for a short explanation of its coding decision to further examine how the LLM might arrive at its assessment. These two examples illustrate our coding procedure and show that GPT-4o mini offers output similar to what we might expect from a human coder. The results line up with our intuitions, as well as our manual coding of UN speeches.

GPT-4o mini conversation 1

Prompt/input #1
<p>Please scale a diplomatic speech, provided below. Please decide whether the speaker has a supportive stance towards sanctions (denoted with 1), a negative stance towards sanctions (denoted with -1), or a neutral stance towards sanctions (denoted with 0). Please only reply with a number. Here is the speech:</p> <p>I thank Assistant Secretary General Khiari for his briefing, and I welcome the participation of the Permanent Representatives of Japan and the Republic of Korea to our meeting today.</p> <p>In just nine days, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea has launched eight ballistic missiles, all clear violations of multiple Security Council resolutions. Earlier this week, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea launched a dangerous and destabilizing reported long-range ballistic missile over Japan. Pyongyang clearly feels emboldened. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea has launched 39 ballistic missiles this year alone, which far surpasses its previous record of 25. And multiple Member States and the International Atomic Energy Agency have reported that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is reconstituting its nuclear testing site in preparation for a seventh nuclear test. Kim Jong Un has called for – in his words – the highest rapidity in advancing the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programme. And he appears to be getting his way.</p> <p>Since the beginning of this year, 12 Council members have joined us in condemning those unlawful actions and in voting to impose real costs on the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea – real costs that would impede its WMD and ballistic-</p>

missile pursuits. I thank those colleagues who remain committed to upholding the global non-proliferation regime. But as we all know, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has enjoyed blanket protection from two members of the Security Council. Those two members have gone out of their way to justify the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's repeated provocations and block every attempt to update the sanctions regime. In short, two permanent members of the Security Council have enabled Kim Jong Un. And before those two Council members repeat their myth that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's provocations are somehow a consequence of hostile United States policies and actions, let us review the facts.

On 25 September, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea launched two ballistic missiles in violation of multiple Security Council resolutions. The United States, its allies and the Security Council did nothing to provoke that unacceptable behaviour. Following those launches, the United States, its allies and the Council continued to be vigilant, but did not raise the issue immediately. And over the next eight days, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continued its self-initiated escalations. So there is no question that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's hostile launch of unlawful weapons has been unprovoked. We will not tolerate any country blaming our defensive actions to respond to the threats of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as somehow the inherent cause of those threats.

Despite a lack of engagement from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the United States remains committed to dialogue and diplomacy. The United States, however, will not stand by as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea directly threatens the United States, its allies and the entire world. None of us should. Despite the recent divisions, I believe it is still within our power to come together – just as we did in recent years – when we unanimously responded to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's provocation. And we just heard from our briefer about the importance of us remaining unified. We can and must return to a time when we spoke with a united voice against the malign behaviour of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and when we stood together in support of the global non-proliferation regime. That means fully implementing the existing resolutions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It means undertaking sanctions maintenance efforts. And it means pursuing a resolution to address the sanctions evasion activities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea going forward.

The truth is that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is testing capabilities that can threaten every single Member State. That threatens all of our individual and collective security, full stop. And by serving on the Security Council, we have all taken on the weighty responsibility of protecting and defending international peace and security. So let us do our jobs. Let us honour that commitment.

GPT-4o mini output #1

1

Prompt/input #2

Can you explain the reasoning behind your coding decision?

GPT-4o mini output #2

The speech strongly emphasizes the need to impose sanctions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to impede its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and ballistic missile programs. The speaker thanks those who have voted to impose sanctions and insists that sanctions are essential to uphold the global non-proliferation regime and maintain international security. Additionally, the speaker criticizes two permanent members of the Security Council for blocking updates to the sanctions regime, suggesting that more action, including sanctions, is necessary.

The repeated calls for the full implementation of existing resolutions and sanctions maintenance, along with the endorsement of sanctions as a necessary tool to address the DPRK's threats, clearly indicate a supportive stance towards sanctions. Therefore, the speech is coded as 1 for a supportive stance.

GPT-4o mini conversation 2

Prompt/input #1

Please scale a diplomatic speech, provided below. Please decide whether the speaker has a supportive stance towards sanctions (denoted with 1), a negative stance towards sanctions (denoted with -1), or a neutral stance towards sanctions (denoted with 0). Please only reply with a number. Here is the speech:

We would like to thank Mr. Khaled Khiari for his briefing.

Russia objects to any military activity that threatens the security of the Korean peninsula and the countries in North-East Asia. We note with regret that in recent months the situation on the Korean peninsula has shown a tendency to worsen. In August, the United States and its allies in the region resumed a large-scale military-training activity, and at the end of September, for the first time in five years, exercises were held in the Sea of Japan by the United States, the Republic of Korea and Japan, with the participation of a nuclear-missile carrier, with a view to training to hit targets of critical importance in the Democratic People's Republic. The leaders of these countries are talking irresponsibly about deploying American means of deterrence, including nuclear means, on the Korean peninsula and in the region.

We regret that this factual information was not reflected in the briefing provided by the United Nations representative.

It is obvious that the missile launches by Pyongyang are a consequence of a short-sighted, confrontational military activity conducted by the United States of America surrounding this country, which hurts its own partners in the region and also worsens the situation in North-East Asia as a whole. Furthermore, the situation on the Korean peninsula cannot be considered separately from complicated processes that are currently taking place in this part of the world, and we can but note Washington's persistent pushing forward of their unilateral security doctrine in the Asia-Pacific region, which only creates new risks for the countries in the region and is trying to divide them according to the principle of "if you are not with us, you are against us". Part of such activity includes creating new military blocs, such as, for example, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, in the so-called AUKUS, and this gives rise to doubts about the good intentions of these States, in particular for Pyongyang, which is not conducive to dialogue.

In the Security Council, we often hear from its Member States that preventive diplomacy cannot be replaced, that there are no military solutions to conflicts, and that, when trying to settle explosive situations, priority needs to be given to political and diplomatic means. These are very important words – they are the very essence of the United Nations Charter – but when it comes to our Western colleagues, these methods are emphasized only where they have an opportunity to interfere into others' internal affairs. But when we talk about the regions where their geopolitical interests are truly at stake, then condemnation, pressure and sabre-rattling come to the fore.

In the eyes of the United States and other Western countries, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was long ago excluded from the so-called civilized world. Pyongyang, out of all the dishes on the menu, is only offered one, namely, sanctions. Since 2006, on initiatives of the United States, a large number of restrictive measures have been imposed on Pyongyang, 05/10/2022 Non-proliferation/Democratic People's Republic of Korea S/PV.9146 22-61501 11/16 each stronger than its predecessor, but over the course of the years, it has become very clear that the sanctions paradigm cannot ensure security in the region, nor can it bring us closer to the settling of the issues of missile and nuclear proliferation.

We deeply regret that our Western colleagues have consistently ignored the numerous appeals by Pyongyang to the United States to stop its hostile activity, which could open an opportunity for dialogue. But these appeals were not taken seriously, and the accommodating steps undertaken by Pyongyang in 2018 and 2019 and the positive signals that the North Koreans sent at that time were also not heeded. It is because of the United States position that the Council could not find within itself the ability to react to them appropriately and help with the process of easing tensions.

We have stated it many times and are repeating it now: introducing new sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a dead end. It is a measure that, as we just stated, is bringing us zero results when it comes to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

We are convinced that United Nations and Security Council mechanisms need to be used to support the inter-Korean dialogue and multilateral negotiations rather than to become an impediment to them. It is only then that we will be able to talk about effectively resolving outstanding issues in the region, including the nuclear issue, and do it on the basis of mutually acceptable agreements. A further increase in sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is going beyond being just a measure to counter the banned missile and nuclear programmes; it is threatening the citizens of North Korea with unacceptable socioeconomic and humanitarian upheavals.

In conclusion, I would like yet again to underscore that the task before us today is to make sure that all parties show restraint and demonstrate that they are, in practice, ready to resume dialogue within the framework of earlier agreements and commitments undertaken. We still have on the table the political and humanitarian initiatives put forward by Russia and China, which could incentivize the sides to increase their negotiating efforts.

The absence of moving forward on the political track and the refusal of some members, in particular Western members, to make even a single step towards a balanced and comprehensive solution in the Security Council is the main sign showing that the Security Council is unable to act. Such a stance, together with the increase by the United States and its allies of measures of military nature, risks creating further tensions on the peninsula, and this can lead to unpredictable and very dangerous consequences for the whole of North-East Asia.

GPT-4o mini output #1

-1

Prompt/input #2

Can you explain the reasoning behind your coding decision?

GPT-4o mini output #2

The speech expresses a clear negative stance towards sanctions, particularly those imposed on North Korea. The speaker criticizes the imposition of sanctions as ineffective and counterproductive, stating that they do not ensure security or address the issues of missile and nuclear proliferation. The speaker emphasizes that sanctions have brought "zero results" and that they are exacerbating socio-economic and humanitarian problems in North Korea. Furthermore, the speaker calls for dialogue and multilateral negotiations instead of increasing sanctions, which they argue only escalate tensions. This overall message strongly opposes the use of sanctions as a solution.

Hence, the speech is coded as -1, indicating a negative stance towards sanctions.

6.4 Appendix D: “Keyness” of the results

In contrast to other unsupervised methods, LLMs offer few diagnostical tools for checking the robustness of the findings apart from human coder validation. As an additional robustness strategy, we therefore retroactively fit a text ‘keyness’ measure on the sanction speeches.¹¹⁵ This follows a simple logic: We textually compare speeches that are coded by GPT-4o mini as supporting or opposing sanctions by calculating their chi-squared difference and plotting the resulting word differences. Figure 7 shows some selected results. The green bars show terms commonly used in speeches supportive of sanctions, the red bars show the opposite.

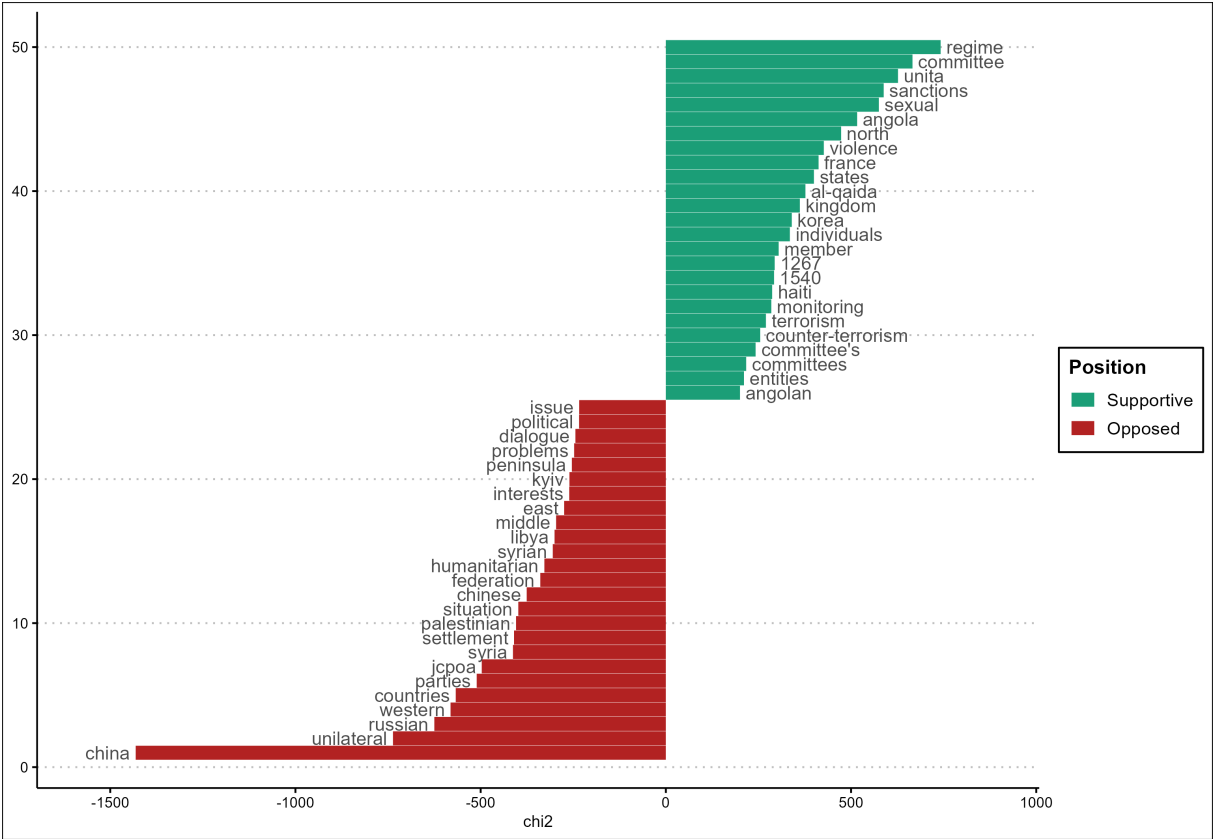


Figure 7: Word keyness for speeches supporting and opposing UN sanctions.

¹¹⁵ Benoit et al., “Quanteda.”

These tests demonstrate the face validity of GPT's coding decisions. The UNITA sanctions in Angola are generally deemed a success in the sanctions literature.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, sanctions against non-state actors such as Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaida have consistently received high support in the Council and among the P5. At the other end of the spectrum, Chinese concerns about the consequences of sanctions in the COVID-19 pandemic were prominent, unilateral sanctions are often strongly opposed by China and Russia, and humanitarian fallout is a common concern.

Thus, these word keyness measures further support the utility of text annotation via GPT-4o mini for our research interests. We supported our large-scale text-as-data approach with detailed background talks with UN sanctions experts (listed in Appendix A). We discussed successful and unsuccessful sanctions regimes with these experts. Notably, the observations in Figure 7 mirror the firsthand experiences of many of these experts as well as the assessments in canonical contemporary sanctions datasets that code the effectiveness of individual UN sanctions regimes.¹¹⁷ The positive connotation of terms surrounding the issue area of combatting terrorism and transnational organized crime also mirrors the insights of our interviewees, many of whom suggested that these will be among the very few issue areas where future sanction regimes could be potentially authorized.

¹¹⁶ Thomas J. Biersteker et al., "UN Targeted Sanctions Datasets (1991–2013)," *Journal of Peace Research* 55, no. 3 (May 2018): 404–12, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343317752539>; Weber and Schneider, "Post-Cold War Sanctioning by the EU, the UN, and the US."

¹¹⁷ Biersteker, Eckert, and Tourinho, *Targeted Sanctions*; Biersteker et al., "UN Targeted Sanctions Datasets (1991–2013)"; Weber and Schneider, "Post-Cold War Sanctioning by the EU, the UN, and the US."

6.5 Appendix E: Stances on unilateral sanctions

As we discuss throughout the paper, unilateral sanctions – i.e., those not authorized by the UNSC – are an increasingly common and controversial tool in international affairs. To examine the growing controversy surrounding this issue, we analyze speeches dealing with unilateral sanction in this appendix, applying the same analytical steps as in the main analysis on multilateral (i.e., UN) sanctions. We used the following prompt to differentiate between multilateral sanctions, unilateral sanctions, and cases in which it was unclear which of the two a speech focused on.

<p>GPT-4o mini prompt/input: uni-/multilateral sanctions</p> <p>Please classify the following speech according to the type of sanctions the speaker is talking about. Use only one word to classify the speech: "multilateral" if the speaker is talking specifically about UN-mandated sanctions, "unilateral" if the speaker is talking about other types of sanctions (such as those imposed by the US, EU, China, or Russia), or "unclear" if it is unclear which of the two the speaker is talking about.</p>

Our main analyses include only those speeches classified as “multilateral.” Among the raw corpus of 7.191 speeches, 6.044 are coded as covering multilateral sanctions, 620 cover unilateral sanctions, and 527 are “unclear.” This appendix analyzes the speeches classified as “unilateral”.

Table 6 shows support for and opposition to unilateral sanctions in the Council. This replicates Table 1 from the main paper, but for unilateral sanctions. Our main group of interest here is elected, non-Western states. Though we found favorable views on UN sanctions, as shown in Section 4.1 of the main paper, they hold quite negative views on unilateral sanctions, with 72% of their speeches on unilateral sanctions voicing opposition. As is evident in the following paragraph and Figure 8, such speeches on unilateral sanctions in the Council are a recent development. Nonetheless, this further

underscores the differentiated views this diverse group of states holds on sanctions in general – supportive of UN sanctions, opposed to unilateral ones. This also stands in contrast to Russia and China, who are today strongly opposed to both types of sanctions.

Table 6: Attitudes on unilateral sanctions by UNSC member type, 1992–2023.

Type	Supportive			Neutral		Opposed		Mean
	N	N	Share	N	Share	N	Share	
West/Elected	44	36	81.8%	2	4.5%	6	13.6%	0.68
France, UK, USA	133	118	88.7%	8	6.0%	7	5.3%	0.83
Non-West/Elected	104	23	22.1%	6	5.8%	75	72.1%	-0.50
China, Russia	339	30	8.8%	2	0.6%	307	90.6%	-0.82
All UNSC members	620	207	33.4%	18	2.9%	395	63.7%	-0.30

Next, Figure 8 visualizes P5 dynamics, showing their stances on unilateral sanctions in UNSC speeches over time from 1992–2023. This shows that unilateral sanctions were very rarely debated in the Council in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s. Strong criticism and major outspokenness by China and Russia in the Council are comparatively recent developments. China suddenly turned unilateral sanctions into a major talking point in 2020, likely to initially highlight their negative humanitarian effects during the Covid-19 pandemic. Russia’s outspokenness on unilateral sanctions was more gradual, beginning around 2011 and reaching the same level as China in the 2020s. Meanwhile, the P3 generally have less to say about unilateral sanctions (many of which are their own regimes), more rarely making them an issue of Council debate.

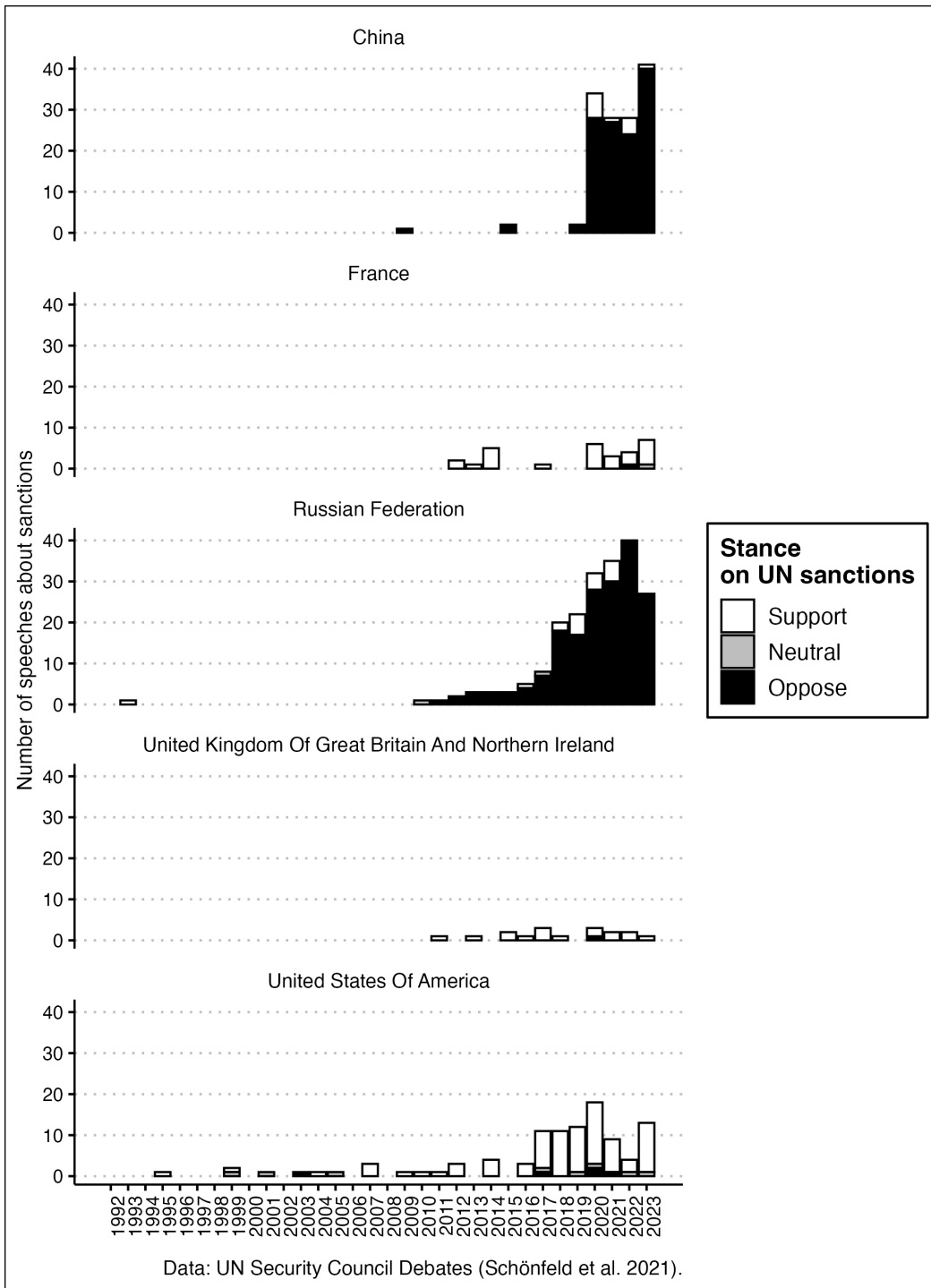


Figure 8: P5 stances on unilateral sanctions in UNSC speeches, 1992–2023.

6.6 Appendix F: Replication with a salience threshold

In the main analysis, we examine all speeches containing specific keywords regarding sanctions (i.e., *sanction** and *embargo**) and covering UNSC-mandated sanctions (see Appendix E). However, at times UN sanctions may only be referenced in passing in a given speech, which may give undue weight to speeches in which diplomats are debating other issues entirely. We opt for an inclusive approach in our main analysis, because a speech being about another main topic (e.g., peacekeeping or non-proliferation) does not preclude the speaker from making important, informed, and substantive points about UN sanctions. As a robustness check, however, we applied a salience threshold to drop speeches that only peripherally cover sanctions.

To do so, we asked GPT-4o mini to estimate the share of each speech devoted to discussing sanctions (whether unilateral or multilateral) using the following prompt.

GPT-4o mini prompt/input: salience
Please classify a diplomatic speech, provided below. Please read the speech carefully and then decide what share of the speech deals with the use of sanctions in the widest sense. This can include related topics such the authorization, renewal, termination, or the intended and unintended consequences of sanctions. To represent the share of the speech that deals with sanctions, please use a number between 0 and 1. Please only reply with that number.

Figure 9 shows the resulting histogram of the salience of sanctions in our sanctions speech corpus. Given this distribution, we replicated our main analyses using only speeches that were more than 30% about sanctions. Figure 10 replicates our main analysis after applying this salience threshold. The results are very similar to our main results and lead to the same conclusions (i.e., compare Figure 4 in the main paper to Figure 10 in this appendix).

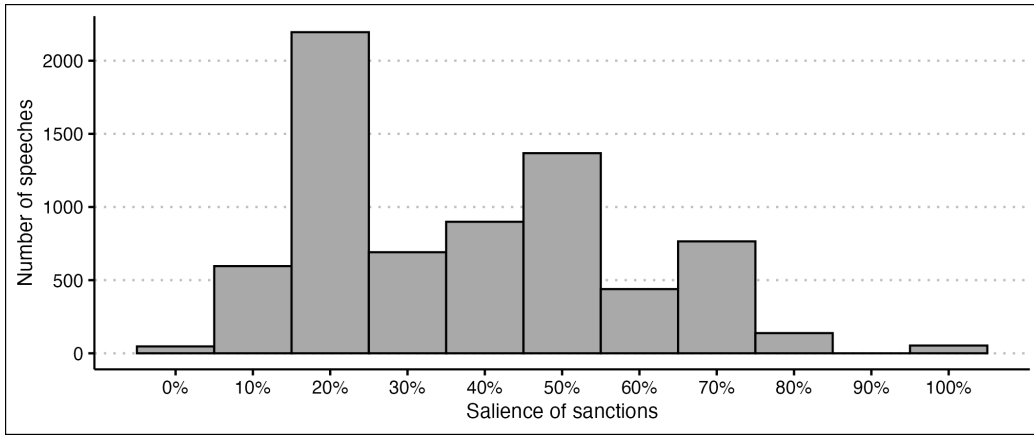


Figure 9: Histogram of sanctions salience within the speech corpus.

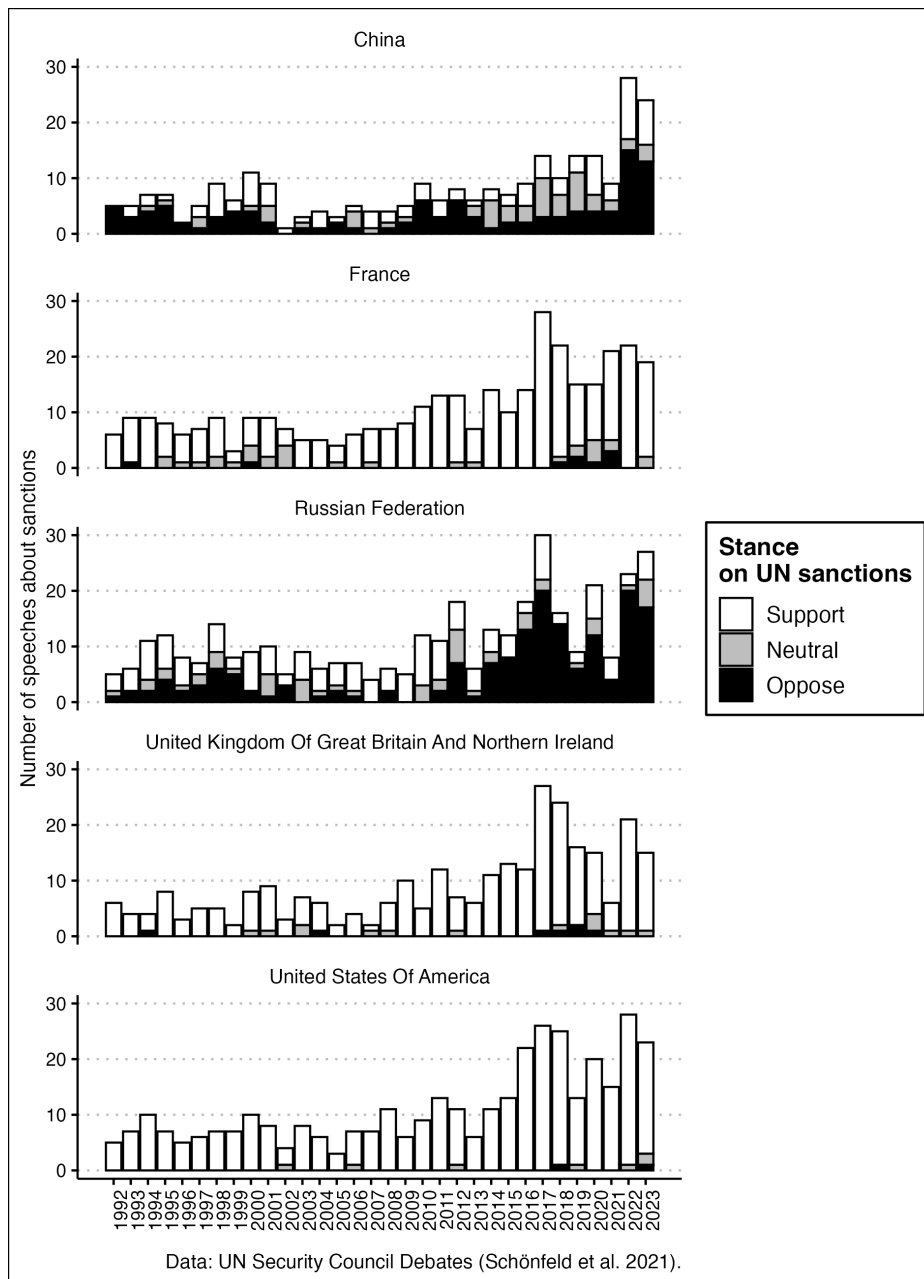


Figure 10: P5 stances on UN sanctions, using a salience threshold (absolute).

6.7 Appendix G: Formal benchmarks for LLM validation

Accuracy	Balanced Accuracy	Precision Supportive	Precision Negative	Precision Neutral	Recall Supportive	Recall Negative	Recall Neutral	Macro F1	Agreement GPT4o mini (Cohen K)	Intercoder Agreement (Cohen K)
0.764	0.8041	0.5454545	0.9310345	0.6	0.5	0.8182	0.9	0.7042	0.6	0.601