

Spotlight on AI

In March 2024, the U.S. spearheaded the historic passage of the General Assembly resolution setting standards for safe use of AI – a growing concern for policymakers in Washington and worldwide.

The resolution was based on a framework adopted by UNESCO Member States in 2021, recommending ways to ensure that the increasing deployment of AI does not deepen societal inequalities, threaten fundamental human rights and freedoms or fuel division and violence.

A majority of countries vote with the U.S. roughly 80% of the time.

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Unlike the Security Council, the UN General Assembly (GA) has universal membership. All 193 UN Member States have a vote, and no country possesses veto power. Every year, Member States elect a president to govern the body for a one-year term.

While decisions are generally non-binding, GA resolutions carry important political and moral clout due to its unique universal membership, serving as a transparent and public marker of the views of the international community. Since 2022, for example, Member States have voted repeatedly to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine and called for withdrawal of Russian troops. The body has also suspended Russia from the UN Human Rights Council and requested the creation of an international claims register to lay the groundwork for Russian reparations.

Voting Behavior and the U.S.

UN critics often cite frustrations with recipients of U.S. aid who vote against U.S. interests in forums like the GA. They argue that punishing the UN – by withholding institutional funding to the organization, for example – holds Member States accountable. A recent Heritage Foundation report, however, refutes this claim, stating that it is more effective for the U.S. to address such countries bilaterally rather than imperil the dominant position of the U.S. and cede ground at the UN to adversaries like China or Russia.

Other Responsibilities of the General Assembly

- Develop and approve UN regular and peacekeeping budgets
- Establish assessment rates for Member States
- Elect non-permanent members of the Security Council and other UN bodies
- Appoint the Secretary-General

